

Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on religious and green tourism

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused quite painful damage to the entire world tourism industry, including religious tourism. Under its influence, the country banned religious travel, including pilgrimage, because many infections occurred. Holy places and pilgrimage routes have been closed around the world. What will be next? Is there a radical transformation of the religious life of humankind, including religious tourism? What measures are being taken by international tourism organizations to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on religious tourism, and how do they see its future? What should be the journey of the future to prevent such global transmission of viruses as happened during this pandemic? This article is dedicated to finding answers to these and other questions that are no less difficult. The authors of the article set themselves essentials to identify and present the critical points that are already relevant for religious tourism and those just beginning to appear and will be important in the post-pandemic era. The study is based on an analysis of recent studies of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious tourism and travel greening. The conclusions and recommendations are given at the end of the paper. The authors concluded that religious tourism and pilgrimage would recover quickly; however, the post-pandemic tourists will attend to epidemiological safety, so the demand for ecotours and tours with high environmental friendliness will only increase. Religious tourism will also change, involving digital and other technologies.

Keywords: pilgrimage, COVID-19 pandemic, religious studies, religious tourism.

Introduction

At present, religions with their practices – worship, Sunday schools, various mass religious events (ceremonies, festivals), and religious travel, particularly pilgrimage, face a real risk: the COVID-19 pandemic forces religious leaders to spend a considerable amount of energy. Crises often abandoned religious practices and, above all, religious travel, which has been identified as the main spreader of the virus. The bans imposed in 2020 by governments worldwide have severely limited the ability of religious communities to gather and travel. Furthermore, although most religious leaders and communities agreed to these measures, they were expected to be temporary and freedom of religious practice not so severely restricted. However, it did not happen. The virus continues its devastating course on the planet, and it is unknown how long it will continue and whether humanity will be able to defeat this insidious internal enemy. Therefore, the question arose: what is next? What were the reasons that the pandemic actually "turned the world upside down"? What does this mean for the future of religious gatherings, rituals, and travel, given the transmission of viruses globally? What measures are being taken by international tourism organizations to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on religious tourism, and how do they view its future? What should be the journey of the future to prevent such global transmission of viruses as happened during this pandemic? The information base of the article was the work of leading scholars in the field of religious tourism and pilgrimage, as well as ecological tourism, expert interviews, information resources of the world computer network, Internet, in particular, the publication Guardian; the official Internet portal of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), United Nations. Unfortunately, today, almost all modern scientific discourse focuses mainly on the pandemic's monetary and other material effects; almost all modern scientific discourse focuses mainly on the pandemic's monetary and other material effects. Research focuses primarily on what measures should be taken to overcome the economic downturn and help the global and regional economy. Nevertheless, while essential considerations, these should play a secondary role in analyzing the spiritual, social, and psychological consequences of the pandemic's impact on humanity, given its scale, duration, and number of human casualties. The pandemic lessons of religious practices, including pilgrimage and scientific religious tourism, are still being understood by scientists, so there is almost no significant research; in our article, we have analyzed the main ones. We partially touched upon this issue concerning Ukraine (Borisova, 2020) and

Ukraine's opportunities in the digitalization process (Borysova et al., 2021), which will naturally affect religious travel. In addition, we analyzed all publications on the impact of the pandemic on religion and religious travel from the Special Issue of the American Journal of the International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage (November 2020), devoted to this issue several deep cases (Borisova, 2020). As for the environmental friendliness of travel, the situation is better here. At the beginning of the pandemic and containment measures, scientists responded to the tourism industry's problems with increased attention. Thus, researchers have analyzed the transformation of the world market under the pandemic's influence and how it adjusts trends in tourism and found that this primarily concerns the improvement of travel environmental friendliness (Lypchuk, 2020; Mykhailychenko, 2020).

Rutynsky and Kushniruk (2020) wrote about the pandemic's impact on such an essential Ukrainian destination as Lviv. Furdak (2020) analyzed the ways of tourism industry development in Ukraine in the face of challenges in 2020, concluding that Ukraine should insist on the development of domestic green and wine tourism (Belyaeva et al., 2020) insist on the increased attention to environmental friendliness and safety in the organization of hotel services and accommodation. The experts' first experience and conclusions on the state of the tourism industry in general. Various types of tourism, including, in particular, ecological, are generalized (Borisova, 2020).

The researchers have admitted that the most sustainable and the first to recover and help the entire tourism industry are religious, ecological, and rural green types of specialized tourism.

Thus, our article aimed to summarize the experts' conclusions and identify the underdeveloped aspects of ecotourism transformation under the influence of the pandemic. We also elaborated specific recommendations for enhancing the environmental friendliness of tourist travel during the pandemic and post-pandemic periods.

Methods

The methodological basis of the article is a dialectical method and a systematic approach to the analysis of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious practices, in particular, on religious tourism, and a systematic approach to the analysis of tourism as a phenomenon of organizing not only the 'travelers' recreation but also as the one that promotes meaningful, more environmentally friendly tourism, ecologization of hospitality, and awakes in "Homo Viator" respect for the environment. The leading method used was the Desk Research method. It allows to quickly get information that is essential to achieve the goal of this article; comparing many sources of information allows to look at the object from different angles and draw more meaningful and sound conclusions. An abstract logical method was used to summarize and formulate conclusions.

Results

Until recently, experts outlined religious tourism as one of the most promising types of tourist travels in the XXI century because about 3 – 3.5 billion trips were made with a pilgrimage or religious aim. Religious tourism performs many functions that help to reveal the meanings and forms of sacred objects of historical and cultural heritage (Borisova, 2020a). The COVID-19 pandemic has caused pretty painful damage to the entire tourism industry of the world economy. Z. Pololikashvili, Secretary-General UNWTO, and A. Gurria, Secretary-general OECD, noted: 'The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, has destroyed the economy of the tourism sector with unprecedented consequences for jobs and businesses. Tourism is one of the sectors which was most affected by COVID-19, and given the current travel restrictions and the impending global recession, it may be one of the last to be 'recovered' (Pololykashvili, 2020). By the middle of 2020, almost 200 million workplaces had been lost (Olsen, 2020). Tourism has suffered the most, mainly because travel has been a significant factor in the virus spread. This has affected 90% of the ' world's population because most of the ' world's regions have experienced a dramatic decline in international and domestic tourism (Gössling et al., 2021). There has been a temporary transition to "'deglobalization' or to "anthropopause', from excessive tourism to lower tourism or even 'lack of 'tourism' (Milano et al., 2019). These problems cause many conflicting opinions among scientists. The discussions have just begun.

UNWTO, in response to the pandemic (UNWTO, 2020), has proposed that the tourism industry adopt six courses of action to form a new paradigm for the development of renewed tourism. These areas include health, social integration, biodiversity conservation, climate action, economics, governance, and finance, and it is noted that tourism must be revived with a focus on a person. However, the discussions surrounding the document did not include any discussion of religious tourism issues. Furthermore, this is strange at least because:

- 1) almost 75% of the ' world's inhabitants belong to religious, spiritual, or indigenous groups that are more or less connected with religion;
- 2) religion has long influenced human migration and travel, so it, combined with related travel, has been shown and are 'human-'oriented' and, consequently, should be included in this paradigm of 'human-'oriented' tourism;
- 3) religion is the main power of demand in the tourism industry because up to 600 million people travel worldwide for religious purposes. Tourism is instilled in many faiths. Both tourism and related practices interact with religious life and religious institutions in all parts of the world, so mitigation of the negative impact of mass tourism on religious communities and religious practices must be included in this paradigm;
- 4) in 2019–2020, religious gatherings were identified as 'hot 'spots' or 'super-'distributors' of the virus, which led to governments' decision to decide to close their countries. Consequently, health and travel concerns should be addressed in this "new paradigm" paradigm of UNWTO related to mass religious events and pilgrimages (Olsen, 2020).

The connection between mass gatherings and the spread of infections is not a new one. Not only tourism and pilgrimage, but also the Olympic Games, other mass sports events, music concerts, and so on has been the subject of research on the spread of the disease for a long time. Thus, the Hajj has been performed under the medical supervision of European governments and health workers since 1865. Then there was an outbreak of cholera in Europe, spread by pilgrims returning from the Hajj. Since

then, the Hajj has attracted the health 'professionals' attention. Local, national, and international governmental and medical organizations are coordinating to ensure the health of pilgrims and minimize the risk of outbreaks of infectious diseases during the Hajj and coming back (Olsen, 2020a). However, the pandemic frightened everyone, and there were cases when pilgrims transmitted the virus (in South Korea, Iran, the United States, Malaysia). Then religious festivals and celebrations such as Pesach, Easter, Waisahi, Ramadan, and Purnima were canceled; many pilgrimage routes were closed; and churches, mosques, and temples were closed voluntarily or at the request of the government (Rodríguez-Morales et al., 2020).

For this reason, religious leaders hastily looked for other means of communication with the faithful and pilgrims, including innovative means. They had to practice techno-religious practices, including online worship via Skype or Zoom (Dein et al., 2020). Thus, Pope Francis held a daily live Mass (Sherwood, 2020). Some sites and entrepreneurs have offered to use the capabilities of IT technology to attract pilgrims and tourists to observe or participate in rituals. However, religious communities ignored government directives on physical distancing, calling them "defiant" 'defiant' and "disobedient" 'disobedient' and ruining their relationship with the authorities. One such religious organization was the Serbian Orthodox Church. However, its priest, Fr. Daniel Pavlovich states that the official decisions of his church should not be concerned as an opposition to anti-pandemic measures but as a religious strength of the resilience of a religious community that is always ready for trial (Pavlović, 2020).

At the same time, it should be noted that the actions of government officials were sometimes close to inadequate. In particular, the governor of California banned singing at worship services because they believed that the virus was spreading in the air, and in Greece, government officials fined churchgoers (Olsen, 2020). As a result, some religious communities have stated that such governmental and medical initiatives on religious practices are directly contrary to religious freedom, and they (religious communities) feel that they are being persecuted, but not the virus itself.

Although the pandemic has temporarily halted and probably has radically changed the ways of religious travel and rituals, there are at least three reasons why pilgrimage and religious tourism will not experience any long-term adverse effects as soon as travel bans are canceled (Olsen, 2020; Borisova, 2020).

I. In some religious traditions, pilgrimage is mandatory because it is considered a means of salvation. Yes, in the case of the Hajj, it is necessary because it affects the physical, emotional, and spiritual condition of believers in this life and their future in the afterlife. Therefore, the demand for pilgrimages will always exist.

II. As one of the oldest forms of mobility, pilgrimage and religious tourism have long been the main power for traveling and tourism. This is because the assembly is the core of religion, and the journey to the sacred space is a significant action of a believer. It looks that the demand for travels to local objects and houses of worship appears to be growing, strengthening local religious communities. Therefore, to take advantage of this, tourism, marketers and promoters should not avoid religious tourism and pilgrimage but, on the contrary, focus on them as one of the most essential and first niche markets when restarting domestic and regional tourism.

III. Pilgrimage and religious tourism are too crucial from an economic perspective for humanity to afford to restrain religious travel for too long. Many religious sites bring significant material dividends to their communities through tourism. Pilgrimages are one of the world's most significant events and gatherings that bring billions of dollars per year to local, regional, and national economies. Their ban is a loss of billions of dollars for the world economy. Religious tourism is one of the sustainable types of tourism, so it will never disappear. There will appear (already are appearing) more varieties of its forms.

It should be noted that the UNWTO in its documents paid great attention to the environmental friendliness of tourism and greening of travel, which, of course, also applies to religious travel. UNWTO, in collaboration with some other international organizations, has developed recommendations to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on tourism. The recommendations are divided into three interrelated blocks: measures during a pandemic (crisis management, mitigation of the consequences, and stimulation of the accelerated recovery of the tourism industry). The third block is the preparation for tomorrow, in which we are interested. It provides the diversification of markets, products, and services; investments in both market research and digital transformation, and human capital; improvement of tourism management efficiency at all levels; ensuring preparedness for crises; transition to a zero-waste economy and the adoption of sustainable market goals (UNWTO 2020a).

"The Concept Note: Covid-19 and Transforming Tourism" is also essential; international tourism organizations developed it under the United Nations auspices. This document provides a Roadmap for the tourism sector transformation. It identifies five priority areas, the fourth of which is entitled "Foster sustainability and inclusive green growth". It provides for the investment of green investments, including protected natural objects (Concept 2020). After all, the document especially emphasizes the vast potential of tourism in preserving biodiversity (Concept 2020). A roadmap towards a «more sustainable and inclusive tourism sector» is in Part 2 of this document (Concept 2020). Both the title and the content of this part of the Concept Note show that international tourism organizations' efforts will improve tourist travel's environmental friendliness and safety.

Thus, we can say that tourism, which the world has known for more than 200 years, is over. A pandemic will only speed up this process. The more active introduction of virtual and augmented reality technologies and the experience economy will become more relevant. The tools to meet the tourists' needs will also change, facilitated by the online society that has long been formed (Onlajn, 2020).

Conclusions

Thus, we concluded that:

- 1) most religious organizations have adequately met the pandemic damage, have adapted to online work and the requirements of security measures;
- 2) religious trips because of the closing of the main pilgrimage sites were refocused on visiting the local and regional places of worship, which only positively affected the cohesion of local religious communities;

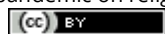
- 3) a necessary consequence was the further strengthening of the long-standing trend towards tourism digitalization, including religion;
- 4) the pilgrimage will never disappear. The only thing is that just by far the most convinced of the faith and resistant to danger, which is associated with the risk to life, will have the journey in the future. As it was in the ancient times, the pilgrimage just emerged and spread;
- 5) tourists' more careful attention to travel safety, sanitary and epidemiological situation, and more environmentally friendly tours in tourism is another expected consequence of the crisis. A necessary consequence will be an even more significant strengthening of the long-standing trend towards digitalization of tourism, including the religious one.
- To paraphrase the famous saying, we assume that if the coronavirus pandemic did not kill the tourism industry, it made it more robust and certainly different. Tourism will no longer be the same as before, and it is being transformed today. The industry's digitalization will facilitate this: a wide variety of routes, means of transportation, and types of accommodation will be available online, and cashless payments from anywhere in the world will make it easy and convenient to create an individual tour.

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