The influence of **hospitality** and service offerings in **religious tourism**

A influência da **hospitalidade** e da oferta de serviços no **turismo religioso**

ANA ANTUNES *   [ana.c.g.antunes@gmail.com.br]

BEATRIZ CHUECO **   [bia.ch.perez@gmail.com]

JULIANA OTERRO ***   [juliana.oterro@yahoo.com.br]

VANUZA RODRIGUES ****   [vanuzabastosrodrigues@gmail.com]

ELIZABETH WADA *****   [ewada@uol.com.br]

Abstract | Religious tourism is the pioneer form of tourism that has begun almost with the dawn of humanity. Assumed the growing and significant influx of religious tourism and the assumption of the importance of relations of hospitality and religion, it is justified the present study that seeks to investigate the competitive strategy of religious tourist destinations and the need to broaden the discussions on religious tourism, understood as a promising segment in the tourism sector. The research question is: Do hospitality actions and service offerings in religious destinations encourage the visitors to return to the location? Therefore, this paper aims to analyze if the hospitality and service provision contribute to the competitiveness of the religious destination, the satisfaction of the believers and their return. Data for this study were collected from Brazilian travelers by means of a questionnaire based on the Likert scale and proposed hypotheses were tested. Findings indicated that the feeling of being welcomed in religious destinations positively affects the return of visitors to the destination. Findings also suggested that religion is not the only attraction of religious destinations.

Keywords |Hospitality, services, religious tourism, Brazil

Resumo | Turismo religioso é a forma pioneira do turismo que começou quase com o alvorecer da humanidade. Diante do crescente e significativo afluxo do turismo religioso e o pressuposto da importância das relações de hospitalidade e religião, justifica-se o presente estudo que busca investigar a estratégia competitiva de destinos turísticos religiosos e pela necessidade de ampliar as discussões sobre o turismo religioso, entendido como um segmento promissor na área de turismo. A questão de pesquisa é: ações

* **Mestranda** em Hospitalidade pela Universadade Anhembi Morumbi.
** **Mestranda** em Hospitalidade pela Universadade Anhembi Morumbi.
*** **Mestranda** em Hospitalidade pela Universadade Anhembi Morumbi.
**** **Doutoranda** em Hospitalidade pela Universadade Anhembi Morumbi. Mestre em Administração pela Faculdade Novos Horizontes. Biblioteconomia pela Escola de Ciências da Informação UFMG.
***** **Pós-doutora** em Turismo pela UFPR. **Coordenadora** do PPG em Hospitalidade da Universidade Anhembi Morumbi.

de hospitalidade e ofertas de serviços em destinos religiosos incentivam os visitantes a retornarem ao local? Portanto, este trabalho visa analisar se a prestação de serviços e a hospitalidade contribuem para a competitividade do destino religioso, a satisfação dos crentes e seu retorno. Dados deste estudo foram coletados de viajantes brasileiros por meio de questionário baseado na escala Likert e hipóteses propostas foram testadas. Os resultados indicaram que o sentimento de ser bem acolhido em destinos religiosos afeta positivamente o retorno dos visitantes para o destino e também sugerem que a religião não é a única atração dos destinos religiosos.

Palavras-chave | Hospitalidade, serviços, turismo religioso, Brasil

1. Introduction

Religious tourism has significantly increased in recent years in places associated to nearly all religions (Hughes, Bond & Ballantyne, 2013; Reader, 2007). The World Religious Travel Association (2014) estimates that every year between 300 and 330 million people travel for religious purposes.

Since primordial times, travel for reasons of religious fervor and devotion are existent in society regardless of gender, creed or social status. Nowadays, every year, millions of pilgrims make these sort of trips to several and different sanctuaries. The reasons are different, from fulfilling a vow, ask for a blessing or just to accomplishing a tradition (Salgado, 2003). Therefore, religious tourism would be the movement of pilgrims seeking religious centers motivated by faith in different beliefs, and who assume a tourist consumption behavior. Thus, in this context, a pilgrim can be considered a religious tourist, in the sense that he appraises the tradition of pilgrimage adjusting your journey to the features of touristic practices (Schneider & Santos, 2013b).

In this sense, religious tourism can be a significant opportunity for the development of tourism, since travelers with religious reasons are more devoted to the tourist destinations that they visit rather than those with other motivations, once the reason to travel it is too strong and it plays a hole too important in their lives (Salgado, 2003).

Therefore, religious tourism stands out in the economy, since pilgrims are consumers of goods and services that are established in a nearly uninterrupted flow. In turn, we can consider the largest pilgrimage centers and sanctuaries as companies operating in the tourism sector within the religious tourism segment and for that reason they should make use of competitive strategies for their development in the market.

Many sanctuaries, especially in Europe, have been adding a number of different services, such as museums, special tours, unusual activities, restaurants and hotels of their own, in order to simplify the reception of their visitors and satisfy them. This originates from meeting the principles of hospitality proposed by Camargo (2004): welcome, host, feed and entertain (Fernandez, De La Torre & Naranjo, 2010).

Hospitality's concept can be understood through two methods: as a social phenomenon that evokes the most diverse feelings and human expressions, as well as rites and symbols of warmth toward others; and as an activity that has a real potential market which supplies a current shortage of the consumer public in relation to the provision of tourist services.

Religion has always been related to hospitality (Fedrizzi, 2009). Camargo (2004) cites biblical passages in which the hospitality was present even in times when people did not have much to offer besides their belongings. Grinover (2007) states that hospitality was the right of every Christian, as was the Christian duty to exercise it.

This search is about devotee's perception on the service offerings in religious tourism in order to improve the management of a religious tourism destination, therefore, hospitality as human exchange based on certain goods and services (Brotherton & Wood, 2004), will be the guiding aspect for understanding the dimensions of hospitality in the outline of this study.

In line with this rationale, the research question is: Do hospitality actions and services offerings in religious destinations encourage the visitors to return to the location? Therefore, this paper aims to analyze if the hospitality and service provision contribute to the competitiveness of the religious destination, the satisfaction of the believers and their return.

2. Theoretical Contextualization

From the ancient times, religious destinations were not only a part of the cultural landscape but they also had become a vital factor in local marketing and prime parts of the economy of hosted destinations. Some of the religious places such as Mecca in Saudi Arabia, Fatima in Portugal and Lourdes in France attract millions of religious tourists, charity workers, missionaries and humanitarians creating a huge financial transaction in the destination (TN Global Travel Industry News, 2014).

Several authors have defined religion in various ways. In general, it is a system of beliefs that directs people to live in discipline and carry on their daily lives in a spiritual way. The religions have their own histories and the concept refers to concrete cultural manifestations of different generations.

Religious tourism, in the literature of tourism studies is often described interchangeably as a cultural heritage tourism, cultural tourism and spiritual tourism by different authors. It is difficult to give a specific definition of religious tourism because millions of people travel every year for various reasons that, essentially, summarize to spiritual foundations, adhering or not an official religion.

Griffin (2007) states that religious tourism, although widely recognized, has not received much attention in the literature. Perhaps the reason for this negligence is the difficulty of categorizing this aspect of the tourism sector in a nonspiritual world, where the spiritual denotation is often seen as old-fashioned and perhaps even a little overdue. Both of them agree that religious travel is not a new phenomenon. Religion has long been an important source of journeys, which is generally considered the oldest form of travel.

Beni (2007) portrays that religious tourism would be the dislocation of pilgrims seeking religious centers motivated by faith in different beliefs, and that accept a tourist consumption behavior. Therefore, with this understanding, a pilgrim can be considered a religious tourist, to the extent that he renovates the practice of wandering adapting his travel (fully or partially) to the characteristics of the touristic process (Oliveira, 2004).

Over the years, many different interests have converged, which allowed the creation of tourist facilities to receive tourists and pilgrims, either in sanctuaries, historic churches or popular festivals. Initially this phenomenon was closely linked with sporadic and independent episodes, meaning short trips, usually organized by lay people in their communities and parishes, which would not explore services or receptive structures, such as hotels (Dora, 2012).

The travel industry with religious motivations in Brazil is driven primarily by three fronts: the private sector, represented by agencies and tour

operators; governments from the secretariats investment flows and Brazilian Ministry of Tourism; and finally, by the church through the action of the Pastoral do Turismo of Conferência Nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB). CNBB has undertaken a number of initiatives in partnership with the public sector and other organizations seeking the development and management of religious sanctuaries, thereby contributing to the growth of this segment in Brazil.

The numbers are encouraging and help to boost the actions in the sector, this scenario can be illustrated with statistics on the tourist movement with faith purposes in 2014, accounted by the department of studies and research of the Ministry of Tourism, achieving 17.7 million trips, which about 10 million made trips without staying overnight in the destination and other 7.7 million stayed at least one night on site. For comparison purposes in 2010 'the faith' moved 6.6 million Brazilians to other states, 3.6% of the 186 million domestic trips recorded by the Ministry of Tourism; and brought to Brazil 250,000 believers from other countries, 0.5% of the 5.1 million foreign tourists registered for the year (Brazsl, 2011). Around the world, this segment attracts more than 300 million tourists globally (World Religious Travel Association, 2011).

In the religious practices, the principle of good host, the welfare of those involved, highlighted by religiosity, participate in order to produce symbolic exchanges, negotiations and hospitality ties (Schneider & Santos, 2013a). Camargo (2004, p. 52) points out that "[...] hospitality can be defined as the human act, practiced in the domestic, public and professional context, to welcome, host, feed and entertain people temporarily displaced from their natural habitat".

It is also possible to realize the strength of the link between hospitality and religion in another passage of Camargo (2002), where the author states that the hospitality was and still is the basic principle of a large number of Catholic religious or-

ders, "from the first Benedictines and Cistercians, whose monasteries to this day worship the original hospitality rules [...] until the latest orders and religious congregations"(p.5-6). And this principle is the basis of all religions. In fact, hospitality was considered among the early Christians, as a duty, an expression of charity, a human and Christian virtue, a right of the foreign, a way to reach God, a gift and an opportunity to do good and repair the sins (CNBB, 2009). Thus hospitality is one of the main centers of the Tourism Ministry and it also symbolizes one of the fundamental positions of the Christian community (CNBB, 2009).

These considerations lead to the understanding that, increasingly, the infrastructure of spaces for religious visitation (facilities, diversity of elements and equipment, conditions of social care, etc.) appears as one of the factors that contributes to the achievement of tourism religious, making religiosity interspersed by tourist aspects, and the tourist aspects scattered by religiosity. Based on the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are developed for the proposed model:

> Hypothesis 1a: The feeling of being welcomed in religious destinations will positively affect the return of visitors to the destination.

> Hypothesis 1b: Religion is not the only attraction of religious destinations.

The essence of the consumer experience, as recalled Knutson, Beck, Kim and Cha (2009) is related to the necessary participation of those involved and the essence of hospitality can be found in Camargo (2004) for whom hospitality relationships occur between people, not things. Based on these theories it can be said that consumer experience converges to the essence of hospitality.

Showing an alignment with the perspective of the consumer experience, especially in services, Lashley, Lynch and Morrison (2007) presented two

lists, one for the culture of hospitality, meaning the qualities necessary for a host to behave according to the norms of hospitality and, the other one for what he denominated as hospitality, meaning, how the front office should behave to offer a welcoming culture.

Brotherton and Wood (2004) state that the hospitality industry is composed by organizations that specialize in providing accommodation, food and beverages through voluntary exchange, but does not mention the delivery of entertainment and social relations. Telfer (2004) wonders if this entertainment can whether be attributed to hospitality or if they are distinctive things. She states that "hospitality is associated with satisfaction of needs, entertaining and giving pleasure"and reaffirms that it is "only a matter of nuance"and used the word entertain interchangeably as providing hospitality.

The quality of services is a competitive advantage that differentiates companies in the competition, thus ensuring customer loyalty and consequently greater financial profitability for the enterprise. However, to develop a strategic role, its understanding is essential. Several authors define quality as "suitable for use", "according to the requirements", "uniform", and so on (Kotler, 2006). Meredith and Shafer (2002) understand quality as an effective way to produce with good price and lower costs, meeting and satisfying the needs of customers, making the company competitive in the market.

Religious sites are not only visited by the pilgrims but also visited by non-religious tourists since they have cultural, historical and religious significance. Most niche of tourism industry is directly affected by economic instability but religious tourism is less affected by these economic issues (Destination World, 2010).

Religious tourism has become an integral part of mainstream tourism as people seek to enjoy their travel even though their main travel intention is spirituality (Kasim, 2011). Kamil (2000) argues that the people who make their way to a religious tourism destination want to share a religious experience. The point of their visit is not to view, but to participate. In other words, tourists experiencing religious tourism should not have to have a less touristic experience simply because they are fulfilling their spiritual beliefs. For this reason, this study also seeks to understand if the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida do allow the coexistence of both elements and if the tourist attractions and the infrastructure of the Sanctuary are good leisure alternatives.

Hypothesis 2a: The services offered by Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida assist the visitor's stay and are considered an advantage.

Hypothesis 2b: The wide range of services offered by Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida influences positively the return of visitors to the destination.

Hypothesis 2c: Tourist attractions in religious destinations positively influence the return of visitors to the destination.

Hypothesis 2d: Religious sights are an entertainment option and not only because of religion.

3. Methodology

In accordance with the established objectives, it was decided to conduct an empirical study of exploratory and descriptive character. Exploratory studies are "all those who seek to discover ideas and solutions in an attempt to gain greater familiarity with the study of phenomena"(Selltiz, Jahoda & Deutsch, 1974). The descriptive research "shows characteristics of a given population

or particular fact. You can also establish correlations between variables and define its nature. There is no commitment to explain the phenomena described, although constitutes the basis for such an explanation"(Vergara, 2004, p.47), therefore this type of research has practical concern, as it occurs with exploratory research (Gil, 2010).

3.1. The Case Study: Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida

The case study method has two main functions in the construction of theories. The first is to verify the congruence with concepts and hypotheses in advance that originate from existing theory. The second consists in generating new hypotheses or models. It comes to the construction of inductive theory, and there is always the possibility of learning something completely new, especially in fields such as religious tourism where theoretical research is very scarce (De La Torre, Pérez & Cárdenas, 2016).

For this research, the single case study method was adopted, as recommended by Yin (2015), which will cover research planning logic with specific approaches for future data collection.

According to Yin (2015, p. 20) "[...] the case study can be utilized in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual phenomena, organizational, social, political and group, and other related phenomena. In all these situations, the clear need for case studies arises from the desire to understand complex social phenomena".

The exponent region of religious tourism development in Brazil is the Paraiba Valley, which embraces one of the largest clusters of points and religious interest attractions in the country: the most significant is the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida, located in the city of Aparecida in the state of Sao Paulo. This sanctuary receives 12 million pilgrims annually and it is considered the Brazilian capital of faith, with a reception and accessibility structure that includes: food services, hotels, sightseeing, shopping malls, candle factory, etc.

For this reason, in this research the chosen sample were people who had visited the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida in the past five years, they answered an online questionnaire based on the Likert scale with 25 questions and 5 categories, as will be presented in the next section. The questionnaire was sent by email to a mailing provided by the Santuário.

3.2. Questionnaire Items

The instruments constitute a list of questions formulated by the researcher to survey the desired information. The most used are interviews, questionnaires and forms (Dencker, 2001). The questionnaire can be defined as a set of well-ordered and well-presented items. It is intended to obtain, in a systematic and orderly manner, information on the variables involved in an investigation in relation to a population or a particular sample. Questions can be closed, fixed options or in scale (Dencker, 2001).

For this research an online questionnaire based on the Likert scale, with twenty-five closed questions and five categories, was applied to the visitors of the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida. The categories were based on dimensions of hospitality set by Camargo (2004) such as receiving, host, feed and entertain. The fifth category was defined as services since one of the objectives of the study is to analyze whether the services offered by religious destinations make a difference during the visit of the faithful. The questions were designed in order to confirm or refute the hypothesis.

Rensis Likert created the Likert scale in 1932 with the objective of quantifying the attitudes of individuals based on a qualitative order of numerical importance. This scale manifests the agree-

ment or disagreement regarding the variables and attitudes related to the object of study (Dencker, 2001).

The questionnaire also had three open questions:

Q1. In addition to the Faith, what motivates you to attend the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida?

Q2. What limits you to attend the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida?

Q3. The sights and the infrastructure of the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida are a good alternative of leisure?

These questions were created from categories and subcategories developed from Bardin's method, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 | Open question's categories by Bardin's method

CATEGORIES			
	MOTIVATION	LIMITATION	LEISURE
	Welcome	Nothing	Yes
	Only Faith	Distance	No
SUBCATEGORIES	Tourist attractions	Price of services	Indifferent
	Structure	Crowded	
	Leisure	Lack of time	

Source: Self-elaboration.

The content analysis has as main reference a set of communication techniques that you can use systematic procedures and objectives of the content displayed by the description messages parsed (Bardin, 1977).

3.3. Data Analysis

Regarding the nature of the data, the survey is denoted as qualitative and quantitative or quali-quantitative. A qualitative research is not concerned with the numerical representation, but with the deepening of understanding of a social group, an organization, etc. Results from the impossibility of investigating and understanding through statistical data some phenomena determined by perception, intuition and subjectivity. It is concentrated on the investigation of the meaning of human relations, and it is basically carried out through direct observation of the activities of the considered group and interviews with informers to capture the explanations and interpretations of what occurs in that reality (Gil, 2010). On the other hand, quanti-

tative research statistically analyzes the data, consisting in the direct questioning of people whose behavior wants to be known. A request for information to a large group of people is carried out about the studied issue for, then by quantitative analysis, obtaining the conclusions corresponding to the collected data (Gil, 2010).

Statistical analysis was employed for descriptive and inferential analyses to provide respondent's profiles and correlations. The Survey monkey computer program was used to make the survey and the software SPSS Statistics to test the proposed hypotheses.

4. Results and discussion

For the Catholic Church, the tourism time is a time of contemplation, solidarity, sharing and meeting. If well used, it is a way to unify men; renovation and personal elevation; development of the spirit of hospitality; restoration of the human being; promote interpersonal relationships, sense

of autonomy, self-education, respect and new experiences (Schneider & Santos, 2013b). Thus, "tourism can become a genuine pleasure, sharing free time with nature, experience and practice of a reputable hospitality to create a culture of acceptance, it seeks the magnificence and wisdom, of which is rich the biblical and Christian tradition" (CNBB, 2009, p. 197). Those theories are connected with the results shown in Table 2.

The open questions have revealed that most of the respondents (24.19%) has as its main motivation for attending the Santuário Nacional de Nossa Senhora Aparecida the tourist attractions offered by the destination; 74.24% consider the Santuário a good alternative for leisure; and the main factors that limit the frequency to the Santuário are the distance (30%) and lack of time (24.28%) (Table 2).

Table 2 | Distribution of answers from the interviews by Bardin's categories

MOTIVATION	%	LIMITATION	%	LEISURE	%
Welcome	19,35	Nothing	20	Yes	74,24
Only Faith	20,96	Distance	30	No	18,18
Tourist attractions	24,19	Price of services	14,29	Indifferent	7,58
Structure	17,75	Crowded	11,43		
Leisure	17,75	Lack of time	24,28		
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

Source: Search data.

The qualitative analysis of the answers given in the open questions complements the Table 2 results, there are some below:

Q1. *Entertainment options.*

Q1. *I like to spend the day visiting all the sights and the city.*

Q2. *Time and distance.*

Q3. *Yes, very good.*

Looking at the results of Table 2 and the qualitative analysis we can say that hypothesis 1b - religion is not the only attraction of religious destinations - and 2d - religious sights are an entertainment option and not only because of religion - were supported.

Over the past decade, it has been establishing

in Brazil the process of rationalization of religious tourism management. In other words, the gradual abandonment of an unplanned and isolated logic of groups dedicated to conducting religious festivals and pilgrimages, heading to a moment of producing a specialized market for the sector. In this religious tourism management effort, pilgrims and tourists came to rely on receptivity and consumption structures maintained by professionals, who have comprehended the capability of attraction and financial feedback of the sector, either nationally or internationally (Moreno, 2015).

The Table 3 brings the main statistics of the Likert questionnaire related with the other hypothesis and looking at the results we can see that all the other hypothesis (1a, 2a, 2b, 2c) were also supported what confirms the Moreno's (2015) theories.

Table 3 | Relation between hypothesis and closed questions

Hypothesis	Question related	% of Agree/ Strongly agree	Hypothesis result
1a. The feeling of being welcomed in religious destinations will positively affect the return of visitors to the destination.	2. The feeling of being welcomed makes you want to visit more often the Sanctuary.	82	Supported
2a: The services offered by religious destinations assist the visitor's stay and are considered an advantage.	17. The services offered by the Sanctuary facilitate your visit and can be considered an advantage.	78	Supported
2b: The wide range of services offered by religious destinations influences positively the return of visitors to the destination.	18. The wide range of services offered by the Sanctuary encourages you to return for another visit.	68	Supported
2c: Tourist attractions in religious destinations positively influence the return of visitors to the destination.	13. The tourist attractions of the Sanctuary make you want to return again and again.	70	Supported

Source: Self-elaboration.

5. Conclusion

The intersections between religion and tourism have become of great interest to tourism scholars, promoters, and the media in recent. This interest has been spurred in part because of both the significant economic impacts of the religious tourism market sector - an estimated 300-600 million people a year visit religious sites as part of an $18 billion dollar industry - and the realization that the religious tourism market is no longer a niche market just for low-budget travelers (Olsen, 2014).

Within limited number of studies exploring tourism by religious people, their travel motivation has been so far the most studied issue (Mansfeld, Jonas & Cahaner,2014). Religion and tourism share a close relationship in which the former motivates travel and is a source of assorted visitor attractions. As expected, the data findings show that religious tourist also are interest in entertainment a part from religion even when visiting a religious destination. Understanding a religious event from the perspective of devotees can help tourism planners and decision makers to keep it real, to nurture what is important and not be tempted to over commercialize the products and services associated with religious tourism.

In conclusion, this study provides important theoretical contributions to the current literature on religious tourism development.

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