

# MANAGING THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE ON ROMANIAN RELIGIOUS SITES: MONASTERIES ABBOTS' PERCEPTIONS

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## *Abstract:*

*For thousands of years, people have been travelling to places considered sacred to meet or to worship Divinity. Religion-motivated tourism is extremely important in many parts of the world. The aim of this paper is to investigate the issue of the religious tourism experience for a religion considered to be conservative and traditionalist in relation to other denominations. In order to achieve this end we distinguish the behavioural characteristics and motivations of the religious sites' visitors through the abbots' gaze. The research method of this study is a questionnaire based survey among more than one hundred monasteries' superiors from different regions of Romania, places known as "holy or sacred" destinations for the Romanian religious people.*

*Keywords: visitor experience, religious tourism, religious site management, Romanian monasteries*

## **Introduction**

More than any other factor, religion conveys to culture, life and society a perception of reality in the broadest meaning of the term and provides with a deeper explanation of historical events as well as the place of humanity in history. Moreover, *religion played a key role in the development and the way to use spare time during centuries* (Kelly, 1982) therefore, *modern patterns of consumption, journeys included, cannot be fully understood without considering Religion* (Mattila et. al, 2001).

*Religion-motivated tourism is extremely important in many parts of the world.* In Romania, the only Latin country in East-Central Europe and the only Latin country whose main religion

is Orthodox Christian, religious ceremonies to celebrate Saints' days as well as all the related places and relics represent places for prayer and meeting with God for millions of people. The perceptions of Romanian monastery's representatives on the evolution of visitors' number certify the trends and forecasts recorded on international market outlining **its increase from one year to another for more than 70% of religious settlements** (Stănciulescu and Țîrca, 2010).

Religious pilgrimages have a real history as economic generators for the visited areas as services developed to meet the needs involved by these journeys. This is also valid nowadays where numerous religious sites are the

main tourist attraction supporting sometimes the whole economy. Such examples would be places such as Santiago de Compostela, Medjugorje, Lourdes or Mecca. Therefore is very important to investigate the perceptions of the representatives of religious attractions or of pilgrimage places regarding their visitors and their participation in the phenomenon of religious tourism.

Based on these premises, we stated **the purpose** of these research namely, **the study of the particularities of visitors' experience nature and expectations** within the main sites of pilgrimage for the Romanian Orthodox spirituality in the light of the people in charge with these religious settlements.

### **Linkages between religion, pilgrimage and tourism**

Many research studies (Fleischer 2000; Weidenfeld 2005) have investigated the distinctions and similarities between tourists and pilgrims. Therefore, there are **two distinct approaches** in the specialized literature concerning the relations between tourists and pilgrims:

a) One, the most frequent, in which *tourists and pilgrims are considered as similar*, if not identical, because "even when the role of tourist and pilgrim are combined [...], they make a continuum of some inseparable elements" (Graburn, 1983 p.17)

b) The other approach *considers that pilgrims are not tourists and the two categories are two opposite identities.*

Tourists are *not by their nature just pleasure "seekers" or simple hedonists*; this stereotype is an erroneous vision of tourist as also underlined by Digance and Cusack (2002). Gupta (1999 p.31) notes that „except for the aspects of veneration and faith, regarded in a broader sense, pilgrimage involves trips in nature, trips, visiting various places [...] and purchasing some souvenirs.”

This is also noticed by Eade (1992), who as a result of examining tourism and pilgrimage in Lourdes (France), observed that pilgrims participate in a number of tourist activities, they dress like tourists, buy the same things and there's no difference between them and tourists in the way they spend their nights. Gatrell and Collins-Kreiner (2006 p. 2) also argued that it is almost impossible to distinguish between "religious travellers" and ordinary "vacationers", since both are often linked to one another in a shared space.

The second category comprises, for instance, Smith (1992) who identifies *tourism and pilgrimage as opposite end points on a continuum of travel*. The polarities on the pilgrimage-tourism axis are labelled as sacred vs. secular and between the extremities lie almost infinite possible sacred-secular combinations, with the central area now generally termed "*religious tourism*".

Cohen (1992) distinguishes between the pilgrims travelling to "the centre of their world" and the tourists travelling far from the centre, to the outskirts of pleasure. They are seen as having various virtues, as pilgrims are pious, humble and sensitive to the culture of host communities, while tourists are hedonists, with many expectations and requirements regarding their destination in terms of services, needs and desires (de Sousa, 1993)

**Religious tourism** *may be identified as a specific type of tourism "whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons"* (Rinschede, 1992). But religious trips are frequently *multifunctional journeys* which involve religious dominant factors along with other tourist motivations (Weidenfeld 2005 p.147). Therefore, many people travel to sacred destinations, urged not only by religious, spiritual motivations or for experiencing the sacred in a

traditional manner but also by the fact that *these are promoted as cultural attractions* (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Tourists, who sometimes belong to other religions or denominations, visit rather often a religious objective for *nostalgic reasons, with an educational purpose or out of mere curiosity*. Others are connected with holiday making or with journeys undertaken *for social and cultural reasons* (Nolan and Nolan 1992). Moreover, tourists visiting sacred places are *looking for genuine experiences* either regarding the religious representatives or the pilgrims participating in various rites, either experiencing “a sense of the place” or a sacred environment (Shackley, 2002).

### **Essence of pilgrimage in Orthodox tradition and its connection with hospitality**

In ecclesial tradition, **pilgrimage** is understood as a particular journey with the destination of a sacred place and worshipping of the spiritual centre of the place: tomb, relics, icon etc. *No pilgrimage is possible without a prior journey, trip (either by car or by bus etc.), in short, changing the space to somewhere else*. Nevertheless, this place is always established: it is the destination itself. Therefore pilgrimage, a complex reality consists of three successive stages: departure, the journey itself and arrival, associated with worshipping the place chosen (Stavrou, 2000).

*Among Eastern cultures and religions*, the dictionary **defines pilgrimage** by the rite accomplished at the end of journey, more often, to go around the sacred place (Dupront, 1987). Another aspect to be underlined refers to the fact that the West designates by the term *peregrination* the search for a sacred place while the East conveys by the word *proskynima* and *proskinitis* of a Greek origin, the sacred place itself and the worship attitude it inspires to the worshipper –

two sides of the same realities. The same Greek terms refer more generally to worship and devotions at a church (Dubisch 1995; Gothoni 1993, 1994), while physical endurance is not required.

The **main reasons of pilgrimage** in Orthodox tradition refer to (Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, 2000):

- To live a visual memorial of the places where God showed his love and work;
- To intensify the prayer and the spiritual life in general;
- Spiritual act of thanksgiving;
- Act of repentance;
- Strong desire to receive God’s help.

From the point of view of pilgrimage places, starting from historical data and the life of the Church, one can distinguish from the very half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century **three fundamental types of pilgrimage places for Orthodox spirituality** (Stavrou, 1999):

- Biblical sites in the Old and the New Testament;
- Tombs or relics of the martyrs or of the saints;
- Places where famous monks spent their lives.

To all these we should also *add the icons or other elements considered as carriers of some miraculous powers or “miracle-working”* (e.g. healing sources or waters such as the Miracle-Working Water Source of St. Calinic at the Frasinei Monastery) but these entered more recently in the tradition of Orthodox pilgrimage in Romania.

More often, *researchers having examined the relation tourism – pilgrimages have tried to prove that pilgrimage is a form of tourism*. We will find a different kind of approach in a work entitled “Travelling with God” (Daniel, the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church 2000, p. 32), in which it is specified the way a journey

becomes pilgrimage, therefore “a tourist journey turns into a pilgrimage only if accompanied by a mystical journey, by an inner pilgrimage, of getting close to God through prayer and reconciliation”.

Precisely because “the lack of religious and spiritual side, out of the tourist products existing on the Romanian market”, the Romanian Patriarchy as well as other metropolitan churches have created their own places of pilgrimage organizing both internal and external pilgrimages undertaking simultaneously a missionary activity, the promotion of the genuine sense of pilgrimage, worship activity, educational and social mission as common faces of religious experience, considering the fact that economic profit is the only aim of travel agencies providing such packages and they neglect the real meaning of pilgrimage.

According to Orthodox Christian learning, the physical dimension of human being, namely the body is the work of the hands of God, the unity between body and soul being indestructible. Moreover, the opposition between matter and spirit is false and sterile, and the Christian is not called to choose between “spiritualism” against “materialism”. Body is the house of soul and man must take care of it, therefore no one should neglect his / her material needs.

This incursion in Orthodox learning helps us **understand hospitality which is specific to Orthodox religion as it can be experienced within pilgrimage places**. The study carried out in this paper is significant in this respect.

As a general presentation on the extent of pilgrimages in Romania in the course of 2009, a number of about 120 000 of pilgrims have been recorded to have come during the 7 days of religious processions in honour of Saint Dimitrie Basarabov, the patron saint of the capital. On the occasion, the relics of other saints – Basil the Great, Constantine and Helena, Gregory the

Theologian, Gregory of Nyssa were placed in a canopy next to St. Dimitrie Basarabov's relics which increased the interest of pilgrims. Every hour, about 1000 and 1500 individuals came to pray at the holy relics.

As compared to the previous years, the Patriarchy provided the pilgrims arrived at Dealul Mitropoliei [the Hill of the Metropolitan Church] with a hot meal, medical care, accommodation in gyms and within church premises in the proximity of the place of pilgrimage, while the area was divided into three: access, evacuation and commercial area. 100,000 packages with food were prepared for the pilgrims waiting for hours to worship at the saint relics. During the year 2008, two million of Christians were estimated to have come and worshiped at the relics on Dealul Mitropoliei. Equally suggestive is the fact that about 50 000 persons worship at the relics of the Pious Saint Parascheva during 24 hours. It is estimated that the number of participants reached almost one million.

The same situation is also in the case of Nicula monastery. This is a place where pilgrims worship for centuries and the “miracle-working” Icon of the Mother of God. The situation of this monastic complex is a little bit different from the examples above: the monastery is not located within an urban centre, but at about 10 km from the nearest town. Here, in 2009, almost 200 000 pilgrims participated in the service occasioned by the celebration of the Monastery's day, the Assumption of the Mother of God.

In another connection, at a general view, one can also notice the fact that Romanian traditional civilization adapted to church year and climate conditions, with four seasons. Thus the period with the most numerous and important pilgrimages aiming at the celebration of some saints range between the middle of spring and the first half of autumn, more precisely

between the day of the Holy Great Martyr George (April 23<sup>rd</sup>) and the Day of the Holy Great Martyr Demetrius, the Outpourer of Myrrh (October 26<sup>th</sup>).

Pilgrimage places are visited by *different people coming from different regions*. Their reasons and desires are as different as their features or their spiritual sensitivity. But according to pilgrim's spiritual experience, *participants influence each other, mostly in the sense of increasing spiritual experiences and the feeling of religiosity* (Chiş and Țirca, 2009).

### **Study of religious tourism experience in the specialized literature: visitors related aspects**

Considering the **tourism experience**, Cohen (1979) identified **five modes of tourism experience**, namely *recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential*. Hayllar and Griffin (2005) investigated the nature of the tourist experience in the Rocks historic area of Sydney, Australia. On another note, Noy (2008), inspired by the concept of phenomenology pursued various sensitivities and sensibilities emerging from the evocation of the experience of a tourist excursion.

Belhassen, Caton and Stewart assert related to the context of *authenticity in the pilgrim experience* that: "the study of any sacred site is the study of objective authenticity from the believer's point of view" (2008 p. 686). Formulated from the analysis of fieldwork conducted with American evangelical pilgrims to the Holy Land, their study reveals that, at least in the context of pilgrimage, notions of the **spatial and the social** are both highly relevant in mediating tourists' internal experiences, but those who visit sacred sites may experience deeply personal and emotional experiences.

The evolution of a site as pilgrimage centre is view "as a process that is based on human authentication

of the site as sacred. In other words, sacred sites are socially constructed as sacred, like any other human phenomenon, and so, for non-believers, they do not necessarily contain any intrinsic holiness" (Belhassen et al., 2008 p. 686).

Either way the issue of *religious tourism experience within religious settlements* was little debated and studied as there is no best model for its analysis. This is valid for the analysis of religious experience of all categories of visitors, either we refer to pilgrims, tourists or religious tourists (for some researchers, they represent a single category, as we have already seen).

In a different connection, *studies concerning pilgrims' or tourists' experience within religious settlements important for Orthodox spirituality are a rarity* except for notable studies carried out by Dubisch (1995) and Shackley (1998), focusing mainly on very well-known and crowded places which many visitors experience as „commodities” .

Despite the ever higher interest in the Athos Mountain (Sarris, 2004; Smith, 2004), representing the largest and maybe the most important community of Orthodox monks in the world, symbolizing the Byzantine monachism (Andriotis, 2009), one can find only occasional and most of the times brief references to visitor's experience in these places.

A recent and complex study, putting forward a **phenomenological approach of the experience** lived in this sacred place was carried out by Andriotis (2009). He identified **five dimensions of visitors' experience**, both religious and non-religious, determined by place attractiveness and interconnected: *spirituality, culture* (architecture, rites, patrimony, etc.), *secularity* (people's presence, material manifestation of orthodox religiosity, way of living), *natural environment* (its beauty and complexity), *knowledge* (or

education by means of sermon, preaches, etc.).

Chiş and Țîrca (2009), as a result of interviews with abbots of several pilgrimage places highly important for Romanian Orthodoxy identified **that a monastery's fame can be due to 4 essential elements**, which are present in all settlements of this type, but which differ according to the subjective perception and experience of each visitor:

- exquisite beauty of the place where the monastery is located;
- relics of saints;
- icons or "miracle-working" objects;
- spiritual fathers with special skills.

### **Research methodology related aspects**

*Many studies on tourism and religious experience have adopted a quantitative methodology approach (e.g. Cohen 2003; Fleischer 2000). Although methodologies that quantify experiences are intuitively attractive, and the studies carried may be considered as representative, some authors (e.g. Riley and Love 2000) have critiqued them for reducing and not revealing the complexities of human experiences, because people have feelings, values, judgments and mentality as MacDermott (2002) argued which cannot be properly measured through statistical data.*

**The methodology** applied in this study **combines the aspects of quantitative research as well as qualitative research**. Thus quantitative research was preceded by free interviews which lasted between 40 and 60 minutes with the representatives of several pilgrimage places that are illustrative for Orthodox spirituality. Their nature was exploratory, aiming at identifying aspects related to journeys, behaviours, activities and reasons of the

visitors who chose these sacred places for their destination.

**Sample size** comprised 151 monasteries. We came to the conclusion that the study should take into consideration only monasteries as religious tourist destinations or attractions, as for Romanian Orthodox believers they represent almost exclusively the pilgrimage places or the places to which they make a journey. We excluded the monasteries in large cities in order to be able to identify with precision the locations where demand is exclusively or mainly oriented to religious tourist attraction and we also excluded the churches - they don't have permanent inhabitants.

*The choice of the units* within the sample was made, in the first stage, according to a **probabilistic method**: the areal method. Thus, we divided the territory into 6 areas corresponding to the 6 Metropolitan Community Churches, and from these we counted out 3 areas from where we were to inquire all the units. It was impossible to inquire all the units in every area due to high expenses for travelling, so we applied convenience sampling.

**Sample structure** outlined almost the same number of monasteries inhabited by nuns and by monks. Our research covers 24 counties and comprises both small monasteries (34.71% of the monasteries subject to our investigation have no more than 5 inhabitants), and large monasteries (16.53% of monasteries in the sample have more than 25 inhabitants) in terms of inhabitants number.

*The objective of the research was accomplished through a several-step process*. Firstly, it was intended to identify monastery's mission, the motivation of its emergence, its role, and then the main attraction points, by resorting to a number of open questions and multiple-choice questions.

At a first stage, we proceeded to *an unvaried analysis of variables*,

analyzing the relative frequency and the parameters of central trend for numerical variables. At the second stage, we aimed at identifying some relations between variables, using, in this respect, a number of *tests and correlation coefficients according to the nature of the examined variables.*

We should also remind that the questionnaire *included a number of terms specific to the language used inside monasteries;* these terms were identified during the interviews we specified. A few examples in this respect are „better father confessor“: a term used for special qualities with respect to Confession Sacrament or „inhabitant“: usual term for those living inside monasteries.

### Research Results

In the first stage we aimed at identifying *the vision of the representatives of religious settlements concerning the relation between the monastery and the surrounding world starting from monastery’s mission and role as related to those visiting it* (Table 1). We found that this issue is essential as it provides with a general perspective on the position hold by religious site and it perceives its future relations with those who would like to come here from various motives. The answers concerning monastery’s mission obtained by means of open questions have been grouped according to the target and its related action:

- *answers which have the man in the centre of their mission, his redemption, guidance and getting closer to God* (reunited in the expression “people’s getting closer to God”);
- *answers oriented to social mission, to helping people* (“helping people with problems”);
- *answers aiming at man, yet without involving his active participation* (“monks’ prayer for the world”);
- *answers centred on the role of spiritual parenthood, prayer and “serving God” accomplished by the monastery;*
- *answers defining the mission of the monastery centred on its members and isolation form the world* (“place of prayer and monks’ isolation from world”);
- *answers comprising monastery’s role to preserve, strengthen and promote faith; and*
- *answers aiming at monastery’s cultural, educational and training role* (“monastery’s cultural and educational mission”).

Therefore, *the experiences within the religious settlement* are meant to have, first of all, a **spiritual coordinate**, followed by a **social-humanitarian one and a cultural-educational one**. Besides these experiences involving the participation and getting in touch with those arriving here, monasteries represent an important place of prayer and spiritual communion of monks with God.

**Table 1**

**Monastery’s mission in the conception of the people in charge with it**

<b>Monastery’s mission</b>	<b>Percents</b>
Helping people to get close to God	42.28%
Role of spiritual parenthood, prayer and “serving” God	21.95%
Preservation, strengthening and promotion of faith	17.07%
Helping people with problems	15.48%
Prayer for the world	11.38%
Place of isolation and prayer for monks	7.31%
Cultural and educational role	6.50%

As for the **position held by monastery in people's view**, we noticed a strong correlation between the first variants of answers of both questions (Table 2). Results outlined the fact that about 91% of abbots think that "getting closer to God" is also the role of the monastery as most often perceived by people, followed by considering the monastic settlement as a "sacred place" (76.42% of respondents), sanctity which could be determined by religious activities and ceremonies conducted here, religious objects and buildings related hereto as well as inhabitants.

The last 2 variants of answers could be correlated to the "traditional"

motivations of tourism, that is escape from routine and visits to some unknown places. A relation of a low intensity - determined by means of *Person's correlation factor* ( $c=0.212$ ;  $df.=2$ ;  $p=0.015<0.05$ ) was identified between the *type of monastery* (inhabited by nuns or monks) and the consideration of the monastery as a place to be visited; monks find this reason more likely than nuns.

Monastery's training side is recalled also by more than 60% of respondents but the term of "guidance" comprises also the help or the solutions for various problems provided by the monastery.

**Table 2**  
**What does a monastery represent for people?**

<b>Monastery represents for people:</b>	<b>Percents</b>
A place where people feel they are closer to God	91.05%
A sacred place	76.42%
A place for guidance	61.78%
A place of escape	34.14%
A place to be visited	31.71%

A synthesis of these answers allows us to state that the encounter between religious attraction and those visiting it is characterized by:

(a) **Existential-religious elements** (closeness to God, revelation, strength of faith, meaning of life, etc.);

(b) **Social-helpful elements** (mutual aid requests addressed to God or people charity, social interactions, affiliation, etc.);

(c) **Cultural-formative elements** (unique heritage, authenticity, acquiring knowledge, etc.);

(d) **Emotional elements** (happiness, escaping from daily routine, peace, aesthetic seeking, etc.).

These elements should not be examined separately, but they *could be found simultaneously within the experiences at the religious sites, but their share in total experience is different.*

Therefore, we tried to identify the **factors contributing to monastery's fame** (Table 3) in *close connection to monastery's mission and role*. Results outlined a surprising situation we could say, the fact that almost *80% of the examined monasteries owe their fame exclusively or partially to the special beauty of the place where they are located*, the following factor being represented by the special beauty and architecture of the monastery.

"Monks' life", the third factor as importance in building the renown of the religious settlement brings about motivations related to authenticity or maybe curiosity. Therefore **all 3 factors can be easily comprised in the category of attractions for tourists who are nature seeking or have cultural motivations**. We could state that though the *elements related to monasteries' religious side represent a*

motivation for almost all those coming here, other elements than the religious ones bring about the fame of most monastic settlements. Consequently, we could state that the **emotional side of journeys** with religious motivation is

highly significant, the beauty of everything what a sacred place means and the joy which can be seen on pilgrims' face after these experiences are always recalled by monastery's abbots.

**Table 3**

**Factors determining monasteries' fame**

<b>Factors to which monastery's fame is owed</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Beauty of the place/natural landscape where the monastery is built	<b>78.04%</b>
Special beauty/architecture of the monastic settlement	<b>43.08%</b>
Life of monks	37.40%
Miracle-working icons or objects	30.89%
Better father confessors	29.27%
Relics of saints	24.39%

Subsequently we identified the most important spiritual **pull motives** (Table 4) that makes people travel to monasteries. Respondents were asked to choose the main 3 spiritual motives which make people come to the monastery. We opted for this limitation

as during the interviews carried out, abbots underlined the fact that people coming to monasteries have numerous religious motives which most of the times are complementary and not exclusive.

**Table 4**

**People's spiritual motives to travel to religious settlements**

<b>People coming to monastery</b>	<b>Percent</b>
...to pray for various needs	65.85%
...for silence and peace	39.02%
...for guidance	39.02%
...to consolidate their faith in God	34.77%
...to thank for benefaction	32.33%
...to find God	26.64%
...for repentance	22.20%
...for monastery	20.95%
...for here they find a different world	20.14%

(obtained as a result of choosing 3 variants at the most by a respondent)

Moreover, 73.2% of the respondents think that other motives of people travelling to monasteries, other than religious, can be encountered. The most frequent examples were, in the following order: "beauty of places and of monasteries" (44.44%), „curiosity" (35.55%), „relaxation" (12.22%), „cultural motivation" (18.89%), „visiting the place" (16.67%), material motives and problems of a various nature (8.88%), motives which can be found in more than 90% in the general motives of tourism.

Then we try to identify *abbots' expectations concerning the activities to be carried out by those visiting the monastery* (Table 5). The main task of those coming to the monastery would be prayer, followed by the participation in religious services. On the next positions, holding almost the same position rank the following: getting in touch with monastery inhabitants in order to get advice and enjoying monasteries' silence.

Table 5

**Abbots' expectations concerning the behaviour of those travelling to monastic settlements**

<b>„Tasks” of the people travelling to monasteries</b>	<b>Percent</b>
To pray	94.80%
To participate in religious services	89.70%
To ask for advice from those living in the monastery	56.00%
To enjoy the silence of the monastery	55.20%
To visit the whole monastery	24.10%
To increase their knowledge	37.10%

The last aspect of the research was assessing **the interaction degree between the two parties**, on an asymmetrical scale, starting from a “very low” level (-2) and up to a „very high” level (+2). Results indicated the fact that the degree of interaction between monastery members and visitors is assessed as “very high” for 13.20% of monasteries, “high” for 41.30% of them, „average” for 35.80% of them and „low” for 8.30% of them and „very low” for 1.7% of them. *Assessment average* was 0.56 (0.08) and the interaction degree, according to *Pearson’s coefficient* varies significantly according to **monastery type** ( $c=0.382$ ;  $df.=4$ ;  $p=0.000<0.05$ ).

### Conclusions

This paper explores the features of religious tourism experience within Romanian monastic settlements, the main places of pilgrimage for Orthodox spirituality here. It involves a brief incursion into Orthodox pilgrimage tradition and significance, followed by the questionnaire - based interviewing of abbots in 151 monasteries. We were able to identify **4 basic dimensions of experience within religious settlements starting from their mission and the destination of the journeys** made by pilgrims:

- (a) *Existential-religious elements*;
- (b) *Social-helpful elements*;
- (c) *Cultural- formative elements*;
- (d) *Emotional elements*.

Even if some dimensions are more visible as part of experience, visitors seek to connect to each of these as *their presence is simultaneous and increases at the same time place attractiveness*.

Moreover, **the fame of monastic complexes** was determined by their beauty and uniqueness, beauty of natural scenery where they are located and due to monks’ way of life. It demonstrates that *pilgrims and tourists seek, at a quite large extent, an authentic experience and profound experience*.

*Aesthetics, beauty and harmony of the natural landscape* (place where several monasteries are located is considered “a place of heaven”) are essential characteristics of every pilgrimage place. Concerns for details, perfection of monastic complex and natural environment where monasteries are located are common features of all pilgrimage places of this type, the unique beauty of all elements “should reflect God’s gift” according to abbots’ statements.

The **most important spiritual pull motives** of those visiting monasteries from abbots’ point of view are: *prayer for various needs, quiet and peace, guidance, faith strengthening*. Among **other motives than religious**, they listed the following: “the beauty of places and of the monastery”, “curiosity”, “relaxation”, “cultural motivation”, “place visit”, material

motives and problems of a different nature.

**Abbots' expectations** of visitors' behaviour when they enter the monastery *focus mainly on religious concerns*, such as prayer, visitors' attending the service and contact with monastery's members for guidance. As for the way in which relations are established between monastery's inhabitants and visitors, **the degree of interaction between the two parties ranges from high to very high**, which demonstrates an intense participation and the important role which monastery's members play in visitors' experience. *A difference in the way of approaching the visitors was identified*

*according to monastery type, as synergy with visitors is stronger within monk monasteries.*

To conclude, for visitors, either pilgrims or tourists, **experience within monastic complexes is extremely complex, profound and multidimensional**. According to abbots, there are no significant difficulties to manage these experiences appropriately, they admit that for a complete experience of the travellers driven by religious motives to sacred places it is necessary to have a religious constituent (a prevailing one) and a secular one, mediating the accomplishment of the first.

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