

Religious Tourism as a Tool for Sustainability: The Case of Cyprus

Andreas P. Varnavas*

Department of Tourism and Hotel Management, Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus

Nicos Rodosthenous

C.D.A. College Cyprus

Paris Vogazianos

Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, European University, Cyprus

Abstract

The sustainable development of tourism is still a huge challenge. In this paper, we regard Cyprus's religious tourism as a special form of tourism that can enrich Cyprus' tourism products while providing a way to alleviate the adverse effects of mass tourism and support sustainability. Although evidence is provided in the literature about the role of religious tourism as an alternative form of tourism, no formal method has been incorporated into this role. The study investigated the determinants and prospects of religious tourism in Cyprus and how it is supported by local residents' understanding of the concept and prospects of religious tourism and its links to local traditions and culture. This is the first step in making relevant bodies and institutions aware of the integration of religious tourism into their overall strategic plan for sustainable tourism development. It also introduces future research directions.

Keywords: Religious tourism; Sustainability; Seasonality; Byzantine music.



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1. Introduction

Sustainable development of tourism is one of the most important challenges faced by national planners, such as public and private tourism organizations and institutions, in today's competitive environment (Du Cros and Mc Kercher, 2015). Most strategic plans reflect the pursuit of sustainable development (Griffiths and Sutton, 2000).

The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as a tourism industry that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. It is not a product, but a spirit that supports all tourism activities and meets the needs of tourists and host regions (UNWTO, 2005). In addition, maintaining the economic and social advantages of tourism development while reducing or mitigating any adverse effects on the natural, historical, cultural or social environment remains the focus of sustainable tourism development (Brutland, 1987).

Special forms of tourism provide a challenge for tourism destinations, rationalize their plans, reduce the negative impact of mass tourism, and attract quality tourists.

In this article, we consider Cyprus's religious tourism as a special form of tourism that enriches Cyprus' tourism products while providing alternatives that mitigate the adverse effects of mass tourism. Pilgrimage and religious tourism are often considered to be the oldest forms of non-economic tourism and one of the least adequate areas of tourism research (Vukonic, 1998).

The increase in spiritually motivated travel in the modern era coincided with the growth of tourism in all times, especially after the 19th century, the development of tourism was generally based on people's leisure time and their movement to various places within the country or other countries. This study shows that residents of Cyprus have a strong understanding of the concept and prospects of religious tourism and their support and connections to local traditions and culture.

Today, pilgrimages are considered "popular as they have been in the past and have experienced global market recovery in the past few decades" (Digance, 2003). This development has been observed in cultural and religious traditions (Reader, 2007). In addition, the widespread use of pilgrimages in the media has led travelers to tend to classify some of their travels as "pilgrimages", which helps to blur the line between "religion" and "secular" or "traditional" and "alternative" pilgrimages (Margry, 2008).

Although pilgrimage seems to be a prototypical medieval phenomenon from a European-Christian perspective, many of Europe's largest pilgrimage sites are truly modern developments. Far from being relics of pre-modern religious history, they are important, but too often overlooked elements of modern religion. Modern means of transportation and other factors are relevant to the development of modern tourism (Stausberg, 2011).

1.1. Cyprus as a Pilgrimage Through the Centuries

According to mythological traditions, Cyprus is where Aphrodite arrived after appearing in the sea. Paphos is a special place of worship. In the 2nd millennium BC the goddess was worshipped in the most distinctive form.

Her honor ceremony remained popular until the 5th century AD, proving the religious traditions of ancient Cypriots. Since Aphrodite is from Cyprus (Peristianis, 1910; Voscov, 2008), she is the first in the Pantheon of Cyprus, including multimodal and long-term worship (Ioannou, 2005). The island has many holy places and cities, as well as a large number of archaeological discoveries related to its worship (Bolger and Serwint, 2002).

This great religious activity led to the movement of many people, locals, and foreigners (Clerides, 2005), thus creating the first worship expulsions, followed by the large tourism and religious flows to Cyprus (Karageorghis, 2005).

But in all post-Christian eras in the history of Cyprus, there are still eternal, and the undisputed facts about the overwhelming presence of Theomitor on this island and the establishment of Christian churches on the ruins of the ancient sanctuaries.

In Athens, the Parthenon became the Temple of the Virgin, and the temple of Tihis in Antioch became the Temple of St. Ignatius. In Constantinople, the Temple of Poseidon became the Temple of Agios Minas. The same occurs in Cyprus, where on the ruins of Kouklia's famous Temple of Aphrodite (Pavlidis, 1993) a majestic temple of the Catholic Virgin Mary was built, while in the Temple of Aphrodite in Golygous there is a temple of Saint Photios. The Athena sanctuary in Idalion was also replaced by a magnificent church of St. George. The visitor of Cyprus can find numerous place names of the Virgin Mary and many traditions associated with countless miracles, which together constitute an indelible evidence of this overwhelming existence.

These ancient worship centers, temples, and sanctuaries then formed the basis for the establishment of the first Christian church in Cyprus, thus forming the continuation and development of religious tourism flows of pilgrims, tourists, and travelers', thereby promoting the development of Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism (Nilsson, 1979).

With the arrival of Christ's first apostles in Cyprus (Oikonomou, 1996), this former idolatrous "island of Aphrodite" leaves the darkness of such lack of knowledge and comes to the light of theology, and over the centuries has gradually become a theological area. Finally, Cyprus became the island of the Virgin Mary and the saints, becoming a place of pilgrimage and a missionary and tourist island (Angelopoulos, 1998).

It can be said that since ancient times, Cyprus has been a diversified island. Since then, it has developed tourism and now has an enviable position on the world map, making it one of the best tourist destinations in the Mediterranean. For nine thousand years, the island has a rich history, traditions, and civilizations, archaeological sites, cultural and religious monuments, churches and monasteries.

However, 44 years later, after the Turkish invasion of 1974, the Turkish army trampled on the north part of Cyprus, sacked and destroyed 580 churches and archaeological sites in the occupied area of the island. (Papageorgiou, 2010). Today, people are painfully mourning the spiritual culture and an unmistakable destruction of the ecclesiastical and Christian heritage of the island is occurring today (Demosthenous, 2005).

Several ecclesiastical treasures, which form part of the island's Christian heritage, are preserved in museums and collections in Cyprus, especially in the "Archbishop Makarios III" Foundation, the Holy Archdiocese of Nicosia, as well as the Museum of the Holy Monastery of Kykkos and other Metropolises.

For all the above reasons, UNESCO has declared that some of the representative treasures of Cyprus are the cultural heritage of the entire human race.

1.2. Current Situation of Cypriot Tourism

One of the most serious problems facing the Cyprus tourism industry is seasonality. The congestion of foreign tourists during the summer season not only means that the production capacity of tourism enterprises is low in one year, but also means that efforts to further develop the tourism industry in Cyprus are not effective. Therefore, it is very necessary to extend this period.

Today's global trends are based on the efforts of sustainable tourism development, which is now seen as human and natural environmentally friendly (William, 2005). Forms of tourism, such as agricultural tourism, special tourism, cultural tourism, conference tourism, religion, and urban tourism, are the alternative forms of tourism that should prevail, making tourism sustainable and solving seasonal problems.

Alternative tourism is part of a specific form of tourism characterized by the existence of special incentives for demand and the development of specific infrastructure (supply). Through alternative tourism, people are looking for a different holiday model that protects religious and cultural heritage, local culture and traditions, protect the natural and man-made environment and avoids the use of organized mass tourism (Tsartas, 1996). Good cultural practices and the emergence of cultural heritage as an added value to tourism have now become the target of many European initiatives, including Cyprus through various tourism development companies and the promotion of Cyprus as a tourist destination.

1.3. Incentives and Factors Contributing To the Development of Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism

Religious tourism can be described as the human movement for the search of the sanctuary or the divine, due to important psychological and spiritual individual needs of pilgrims regardless of race, ethnicity or religion, which can cause multiple economic, cultural and social consequences in certain places of pilgrimage or religious destination (Moir, 2009).

Some religious resources, such as churches, monasteries, icons, sacred objects, attract pilgrims to certain destinations because they meet their internal incentives, either participating in religious tours and ceremonies or fulfilling a person's vows. In some cases, the simple incentive is the visitor's devoted mood.

At the international level, religious tourism is well developed. Travel organizers work with international public agencies, airlines and the tourism sector to contribute to the strategic development of religious and pilgrimage tourism. Based on the participants' religious beliefs, they organize travel packages for pilgrimage travel from origin to destination, for example, Catholic Britain travels to the Vatican and Russian Orthodox Christians to Greece, Cyprus and Holy Land (Lagos, 2011).

Many people go to a variety of holy sites not only for religious or spiritual purposes, but also have sacred experiences in the traditional sense, and because they are marked and sold as heritage or cultural attractions (Timothy and Boyd, 2003). Based on this, it can be concluded that religious tourism refers not only to tourism forms with strong or single-minded pilgrimage motives, but also to non-pilgrimage tourism activities, such as sightseeing and farming in religious places (Mu *et al.*, 2007).

Cyprus can make use of religious tourism and other forms of tourism. The development of tourism in Cyprus should be promoted through the establishment of integrated products. To this end, the Cyprus Tourism Organization (CTO) is required to work with the Cyprus Church and tourism partners in the private and public sectors to provide alternative activities and tourism to meet the needs and aspirations of religious visitors (Rodosthenous, 2012).

For example, traveling to Cyprus can combine alternative forms of tourism such as religion and pilgrimage, ecotourism with various paths and nature trails, cultural tourism, and the "sun-sea" model. This is easy to achieve due to the short distance within the island, soil morphology, and good weather conditions.

1.4. The contribution of Byzantine Music to the development of Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism in Cyprus

The cultivation of Byzantine music is one of the most important means of artistic expression of the Byzantine culture; it is inextricably linked to architecture, painting, sculpture, and poetry and has a purely functional character to satisfy the worship needs of the Orthodox Church of Cyprus through the centuries.

The musical tradition of Cyprus, in general, is a separate chapter in the wider Greek area, as the expression and temperament of the people, directly connected to the customs and traditions of the place. The fact that Cyprus is located at the eastern end of the eastern Mediterranean, far from the main musical centers of orthodoxy and especially from Constantinople, has led to the development of a special local and mixed musical culture on the island, with western and eastern multicultural data.

Ecclesiastical Byzantine music is cultivated in a special way in Cyprus. During the first Christian centuries, spiritual and ecclesiastical life on the island refers to more spiritual people, writers and poets (Papathanassiou and Boucas, 2003), as St. Trifilios, Bishop Ledras, Saint Philon of Karpasia, Epifanios of Salamis (Papadopoulos, 1890) and later the important writer, Saint Neophytos, Egleistos) (Meraclis, 1976), of which, however, we did not immediately deliver the musical evidence of the ecclesiastical musical tradition of Cyprus.

The first musical evidence dates to the fourteenth century and is associated with members of the Asan family, Nicola, the priest Manuel and Constantine. It is very likely that these three Cypriot songwriters lived and acted outside the island (Hatjiyakoumis, 1980). Examples of the ecclesiastical musical tradition cultivated in the new regional music centers were found first around the middle of the fifteenth century. Protosaltis Andreas Stellon and Pavlos Kassas Cypriots are mentioned in this century for their contribution.

A bloom of Byzantine music on the island is observed during the Venetian period, mainly by copying manuscripts of the oldest musical collections of the great Byzantine tradition. In the 15th and 16th centuries, Nikolaos Petropoulos, Ioannis Kordokotos and pastor Thomas Kordokotou, as well as Konstantinos Flaggi (Hadjisolomos, 2008) and musicians Emmanouil and Paul Episkopos were prominent. The latter associates its name with local compositions in honor of the Epiphany bishop and Panagia of Kykkos. The most important personality of the 16th century is the Tragoudistis Ieronymos, who composed the unique polyphonic composition of the Cypriot ecclesiastical musical tradition (Strunk, 1962) during the Venetian domination.

In the seventeenth century, the main lover, without any poetic talent, is the archimandrite Kyprianos, a poet of six troparia and an apolytikion in the services of Agios Neophytos Egleistos. In the eighteenth century, we meet Parthenios and Silvestro, priests of the Kykkos Monastery, who, besides the musicians, are also coders and interpreters (Hadjisolomos, 1990). An important contribution is a contribution to the musical events on the island of Sofronios Kykkotis (Hadjisolomos, 1990) and Protosaltis Cyprian Chrysanthos (Meraclis, 1976), a student of Ioannis Protosaltis in Constantinople, and personalities of the Kykkos monastery, Oikonomos Parthenios, Hieromonk Silvestro and Hieromonk Sophronios Kykkotis.

A very important personality of Cyprus in the 19th century, who refers to the ecclesiastical musical tradition, is the Cyprian Ethnorrhythian (Agathonos, 1998). In a musical manuscript of the Vatopedi Monastery, he is mentioned as composer and proceeds to the foundation of Byzantine Music Schools in Cyprus, with the aim of cultivating this art on the island.

In the twentieth century, the tradition of Byzantine music was preserved and developed by several Protosalties, such as Stylianos Hourmousios, Theodoulos Kallinikos, Abbot Mahaira Dionysios, and Solon Hadjisolomos. The last one produces still today valuable musical and musicological works. Nowadays, several Byzantine choirs have been found so that the religious tourist can enjoy the Byzantine music as part of the tourist experience.

The Byzantine music, been preserved on the island for 1,500 years, along with other famous and important Byzantine monuments, monasteries and holy pilgrimages is a rich resource for the history and ecclesiastical art of the Church of Cyprus. The spread and salvation of Byzantine music in Cyprus contributed to the longevity of monasticism, to the preservation and growth of monasteries on the island, to the preservation of the Greek Orthodox tradition to this day (Stathis, 1972).

Many foreign tourists and pilgrims come to the island to visit a monastery or a holy pilgrimage, to learn about Byzantine art and to listen to real Byzantine music, which truly creates that mental and spiritual devotion of a feast or sequel, evening or prayer vigil, and a feast of a saint's holy celebration (Name day) (Rodosthenous, 2012). Therefore, the ultimate benefits are multifaceted because they contribute to the development of religious tourism (Vassiliades, 2010) while providing spiritual and mental excitement to participants of the pilgrimage.

1.5. Recent Developments and Prospects of Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism

"International travel continues to grow strongly, consolidating tourism as a major driver of economic development. As the world's third largest export sector, tourism is vital to job creation and the prosperity of communities around the world," said Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization. Polika Vashvili said. "However, as we continue to evolve, we must work closely together to ensure that this growth benefits every member of every host community and is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals". (<http://w.w.w.unwto.org>)

This social phenomenon of religion and pilgrimage can also be found in many other countries, such as Saudi Arabia. During the Hajj, all Muslim pilgrims must do at least a journey to Mecca in their lifetime, representing \$16.5 billion, or about 3% of the Saudi GDP; the one of Kumbha Mela in India, held every two years in India for about two months, with about 75 million people. The pilgrims in Lourdes, France, reach 6 million a year, while the pilgrims in Tibet and Santiago de Compostela in Spain are also millions and will not stop increasing (Yunis, 2006). There are many other places of worship around the world, including Mount Athos, Tinos, Corfu, and Patmos in Greece, the Holy land in Israel, Kykkos, Stavrovouni, Saint Lazarus in Cyprus, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Egypt, and Turkey, having millions of pilgrims every year, while others receive different numbers. According to experts, pilgrimage is no longer the only driving force for religious tourism. In spiritual individuals, the desire to experience and learn during travel are increasing. They are also seeking higher quality travel experiences in various sub-sectors of special interest tourism to drive industry growth. Hosting countries need to meet these requirements. Therefore, religious tourism, especially religious tourism in the Middle East, has become one of the most flexible and profitable commercial markets in the tourism industry, and every country in the region should hope to gain a larger share. Therefore, the prospects for Cyprus are expected to be very important and optimistic, as the number of international visitors to Cyprus reached a record of 3.6 million in 2017, an increase of 14%. Optimistic prospects are reenforced by the relevant data of the World Tourism Organization that suggest annual revenue of 18 billion Euros for religious and pilgrimage tourism. In addition, about 400 million people travel to religious sites each year, and in the global market, nearly 3 billion people seem to have religious and pilgrimage references. At the same time, religious and pilgrimage tourism is the only "robust" type of tourism, especially during the difficult times of the economic crisis, where travel agencies are eager to add more information to religious and pilgrimage material advertisements. (UNWTO, 2005).

The Christian worship and traditional monuments of Cyprus are an integral part of the national heritage and a valuable tourist attraction on the island. Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches with important iconography, mosaics, murals, and rare icons, chapels and shrines, especially the UNESCO-protected monasteries of the Troodos region (CTO, 2008), revealing lasting adherence to the close and long-term relationship between tradition and art and religious worship.

2. Methodology

The methodology followed for the design and development of an original questionnaire, based on the above-mentioned international literature and recent developments in the field, as well as on sample selection, testing, and correction, was one of the pillars of the indicators and the factors that have been established in this study.

In addition to demographics and travel preferences, the questionnaire examines the knowledge, interest, and contribution of local population and communities to the development of religious tourism in Cyprus, as well as the associated social and economic interactions and benefits.

Primary data were collected over a four-month period in 2017 using the initial questionnaire and analyzed in the SPSS software.

A collection of 150 out of 200 questionnaires distributed to Cypriot residents, with a response rate of 75%, provided a solid sample of data, defined in the 5-point Likert scale, with the addition of an option of no-response. Through 36 categorical questions about the benefits and determinants of religious tourism, social awareness, evaluation and support were captured in detail. The data were thoroughly examined using descriptive statistics, frequency tables, and graphs, and the results were inferred by comparison with secondary data.

Additional data, ideas, and suggestions were collected through open-ended questions included in the initial questionnaire.

In addition, over the same period, qualitative data were collected through lengthy interviews with 20 tourism and/or culture professionals. The interviews were conducted based on a structured questionnaire as a separate guiding instrument. The long interview is one of the most powerful methods for qualitative research (Mc Cracken, 1988). It is a revealing instrument. This gives you the opportunity to penetrate another person's mind, to see and experience the world as they do themselves. It helps to get the "why" of actions, behaviors, attitudes, understandings and existing situations.

The use of a questionnaire as a tool to conduct lengthy interviews ensures that all terrain is covered, provides a schedule of prompts necessary to define the distance, establishes channels for the direction and scope of the speech

and allows the investigator to focus on the informant's testimony. At the same time, the use of a questionnaire as a guide for a long interview does not prejudice the "open" nature of qualitative interviewing (Brenner, 1985).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. The Questionnaire

The descriptive statistics of the data collected through the questionnaire distributed to the local population reveal that there is still much to be done to improve most aspects of religious tourism in Cyprus.

For example, one of the questions assessed coordination among stakeholders to develop religious tourism. The average was 1.509 with 55%, giving a score of less than three out of five. Thus, a deviation from the maximum level of the scale used may indicate a margin of potential improvement.

Other deviations concern the contribution of the public sector to the development of religious tourism, the level of evaluation of impressions and experiences of visitors, the existence of special packages for religious tourism, travel expenses for religious destinations compared to other destinations, and the role of the Church in training for religious / Byzantine art and music.

Such gaps in themselves, however, are not sufficient to identify priorities for improvement. Weights of importance must be placed on each of the aspects evaluated. To avoid long questionnaires and tedious procedures, we have indirectly established this importance (Rust *et al.*, 1994). To this end, we have established Spearman's correlation coefficients, between each question and the single question assessing the existence of preconditions and opportunities for the development of religious tourism in Cyprus. The higher the correlation coefficient, the greater the perceived importance of the specific aspect of religious tourism.

The strongest correlation was between visitor benefits from participation in worship events and the general perception of prerequisites and opportunities for religious tourism development ($r = 0.555$).

Other aspects closely related to the perception of prerequisites and opportunities for the development of religious tourism appeared to be the following in an orderly form.

- The contribution of Byzantine music to the development of religious tourism ($r = 0.525$).
- The contribution of holy places and monasteries to the development of religious tourism ($r = 0.484$).
- The contribution of religious tourism in alleviating the problem of the seasonality of tourism on the island ($r = 0.396$).
- The contribution of tourism enterprises in the development of religious tourism ($r = 0.318$).
- Importance of ease of access and services provided for the visit of the sanctuary ($r = 0.314$).
- The contribution of the media to the development of religious tourism ($r = 0.307$).
- The contribution of religious tourism in alleviating the problem of unemployment ($r = 0.264$).
- Sufficiency of the level of hospitality and communication in the holy places ($r = 0.259$).
- The contribution of information from friends and acquaintances to visiting sacred places ($r = 0.248$).

Some other factors examined that contribute to the development of religious tourism, but with lower correlations are:

- The contribution of information from the Internet and the media to visiting sacred places.
- The contribution of religious tourism in solving the problem of Urbanism.
- Consideration of religious tourism as a factor in formulating general tourism policy.
- The contribution of the Church to the development of religious tourism.

We also examined the impact of the level of education and the age of participants on how they responded to the questionnaire.

Some interesting results have emerged regarding the level of education. Participants graduated from higher education (university and postgraduate degrees) gave higher scores to the following aspects, compared to those graduated from secondary education:

- The existence of preconditions and opportunities for the development of religious tourism in Cyprus.
- Interrelation of sanctuary attendance with ease of access and service provided.
- Dependence of traffic to the sacred area on the comparability of cost for travelling to other destinations.
- The contribution of the development of religious tourism to the protection and preservation of sacred sites and monuments.

With regard to age, the results show that older people have a more positive perception of the following aspects compared to younger ages:

The existence of preconditions and possibilities for the development of religious tourism, the role of media and tourism enterprises, the contribution of worship events and religious tradition, the information provided to visitors and the benefits derived from the development of religious tourism, such as the increase in the number of tourist's flow, attenuation of seasonality and preservation of cultural and religious traditions. Older ages also give higher scores to the role of education for the development of religious tourism and the capitalization of the know-how of Cypriot universities.

From the foregoing, it is clear that in Cyprus there are preconditions and possibilities for the development of religious tourism. Planners can count on good resources and take them into account when planning tourism. These resources include cultural and religious heritage, Byzantine art and music, hagiography, religious traditions, holy places, and monasteries.

The island can benefit from the development of religious tourism, as it contributes to the rationalization of mass tourism, the alleviation of the seasonal problems of tourism and unemployment, the preservation of cultural and

religious traditions, the preservation and protection of sacred sites and monuments and the alleviation of the problem of Urbanism.

However, there are certain factors related to the nature of religious tourism as a form of alternative tourism, which needs to be improved for religious tourism to develop and flourish as follows:

1. Religious tourism must be a factor in the development of the island's overall tourism policy.
2. The coordination of all stakeholders in the private and public sectors must be upgraded to promote the development of religious tourism.
3. The role of the Church as a stakeholder in the development of religious tourism policies must be upgraded.
4. Emphasis must be placed on the quality of information, services and communications provided by the mass media, the Internet, and the convenience and travel costs of entering the sacred area.
5. Travel planners must make full use of the expertise of the Universities in Cyprus and professional managers.

Other recommendations on the development of religious tourism in Cyprus were collected from the qualitative part of the questionnaire, including open-ended questions. A brief introduction to the suggestions and ideas presented is as follows:

3.2. An Institution That Should Have a Voice and Role in Formulating a Policy for the Development of Religious Tourism in Cyprus

When asked which institutions should have a say in the policy development of religious tourism development in Cyprus, it was argued that mainly the Cyprus Church and State and local institutions should contribute to policy development. Most participants also pointed out that the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Department of Antiquities, the Cyprus Tourism Organization, the scientific community, professional tourism associations, and professional consultants, as well as the simple world community, can also participate. It is also recommended that the Cyprus Tourism Organization, the Cyprus Church Religious Tourism Office, the Tourism Development and Promotion Corporations, the Sustainable Tourism Association, the Cyprus Agricultural Tourism Company, the Urban Development Corporations, and the Mass Transit Corporation also contributes to these efforts.

3.3. Material and Non-Material Resources for the Development of Religious Tourism

On the question of what material and intangible resources should be used to develop religious tourism, the answers focus on material resources related to the relics of the holy monks and sacred ecclesiastical monuments, such as the holy vessels and other objects of the ecclesiastical tradition. In terms of intangible resources, participants proposed cultural heritage, Byzantine music traditions, Hagiography, and other religious traditions or legends related to cultural events such as local traditions, history, religion, environment, mixed natural environment, and structured environments. It has been argued that the synergy of the Archdiocese, the State, the local government, the media, and other relevant actors can enhance the use of physical and intangible resources.

3.4. Areas and Factors of Improvement for Religious Tourism Development

Regarding the issues that need to be improved in order to further develop religious tourism, the answers are given focus on improving the role of the mass media, thereby facilitating access to monasteries and sanctuaries, fostering interest and respecting materials and the heritage of the sacred destination. In addition, it is also recommended to train tourism partners to promote cultural heritage, especially religious sites, at home and abroad as well as at tourist fairs.

The writing and translation of the holy books on pilgrimage will contribute to the development of religious tourism. Others believe that visibility, correct and effective information and specialized programs will help to transcend the narrow scope of dogmatism, but provide information on the cultural richness of religious heritage based on knowledge and spiritual advancement. Therefore, other cultural and religious visitors can also be interested in the cooperation and synergy between the local church and other churches and religious destinations, creating "religious streets" and religious activities, further developing European plans, developing tourism and cultural cross-border cooperation.

3.5. Promoting the Contribution of Cypriot Cultural and Religious Heritage to the Development of Religious Tourism

When asked about the extent to which the cultural and religious heritage of Cyprus contributes to the development of religious tourism, most respondents believe that this happens, and in a few cases, the need for creative and developmental actions and new and upgraded methods was emphasized. Some people believe that religious heritage is a privilege of Cyprus and must be promoted abroad to find a new tourism market.

3.6. Views on Religious Tourism Through Long Interviews

3.6.1. The Contribution of Religious Tourism to the General Development of Tourism in Cyprus

All participants interviewed agreed that religious tourism is a broad and important aspect of Cyprus tourism and, in all cases, is in line with the main objectives of the further development of the Cyprus tourism industry. Its main purpose and objective is to extend the tourist season and effectively resolve Cyprus seasonality issues in tourism. A

large part points out that this particularly interesting tourism industry will lead to the flow of tourism and the deepening of the tourism experience.

Everyone believes that Cyprus is one of the oldest islands of the saints because it has always been a destination for religion and pilgrimage, with many centuries of important history that should be used and displayed properly. They pointed out that the collection of data and evidence on this issue, such as this ongoing effort that has not yet been tried, should be studied more extensively to find out the overall picture of the problem and the details of the number of visitors. Who came to Cyprus for religious tourism, the country of origin and the time of visit during the year.

This will help travel agencies and the Cyprus Tourism Organization (CTO) to better cope with the seasonality problems of the island's tourism industry, while also attracting older tourists and visitors of special interest during off-peak hours. Religious tourism helps to alleviate the negative effects of mass tourism.

3.6.2. Resources for the Development of Religious Tourism in Cyprus

What is needed to develop religious tourism in Cyprus is to promote the enormous religious and cultural wealth of the island's relevant tourism market. This action helps to increase sensitivity and attract segments of visitors to religious and other organized travel.

Most of the respondents pointed out that intangible and material religious and cultural heritage is a strong reserve that highlights temples, churches, monasteries, holy pilgrimages, holy relics, religions, and beliefs around customs, and even related religious traditions. The most attractive tourists and pilgrims are mainly foreigners and Cypriots. In general, the coordination of all stakeholders and administrative agencies, especially the Church, the Government, and tourism industry, must take advantage of all aspects of religious and cultural heritage.

3.6.3. Byzantine Art as a Tool for the Development of Religious Tourism

All participants believe that Byzantine art (hagiography, Byzantine music and religious traditions) is an important pillar of the development of religious tourism because it has a strong tradition of centuries in Cyprus and is a powerful tool for developing such tourism. It has been emphasized that the use of this data will give experienced visitors, pilgrims, and researchers an opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the art and thus constitute a reason for meetings, exhibitions, and organized travel.

Many believe that it is up to the church and state organizations to teach local and foreign students' courses on hagiography and Byzantine music. This will encourage people to participate in these arts and raise awareness of the value of religious wealth in religious destinations. In addition, it can foster a trend of awareness, respect, and visitations.

3.6.4. The Use of Byzantine Art to Develop Religious Tourism

According to reports, all forms of Byzantine art are important tools. The way in which religious tourism is proposed to be developed needs to be utilized. Everyone reports that Cyprus' wealth can be understood and appreciated through the presence of its online travel operators, professional online platforms and websites visited by tourists and pilgrims. In addition, well-known Destination Management Systems (DMS) and various applications in mobile and Geographic Positioning Systems (GPS) can be developed by means of technology. Guests can also use the portable device to participate in a unique and personalized travel experience to invigorate the island's cultural and religious heritage. CHESS technology (through social-personal interaction and storytelling, cultural experience) is already available in Europe and can be used for smartphones and tablets to load, turning the past into reality by pressing a few buttons to make the island's religious culture and ecclesiastical history of the island accessible and available to everyone.

Ordinary guided tours are a linear experience and visitors are still relatively passive. Through CHESS, this visit looks like a gaming experience that helps visitors actively participate in religious traditions and heritage. Guests will be informed and invited and entertained. This is critical to maintaining the interest of visitors, especially the younger generations who are addicted to their online gaming machines, smartphones, and tablets. The implementation of this smart technology will help make the pilgrimages of museums, churches, monasteries and Cypriot holy sites more attractive and interactive. Unlike traditional guides and tour guides, the CHESS app tells each visitor a specific story that focuses on topics that are more relevant to his interests, with fewer or more details depending on his wishes. Visitors can also register their interests, likes, and dislikes. The tool allows CTO (Cyprus Tourism Organization) churches and municipalities to create surveys with simple or multiple responses and to link responses to specific roles that represent visitor profiles.

In addition, it should be noted that the CTO and the Church DVD should be prepared and distributed electronically by the CTO and the Church, and provided to tourist accommodation and airports, and provide maps, routes and other useful information. In addition, the participation of CTOs and churches in various overseas travel exhibitions and conferences will also help promote Cyprus as a religious destination.

Some interviewees also stressed that the popularity of the Cyprus identity should also reach the internal market of the island's residents. It is mainly pointed out that the whole work should be concentrated on young people and students in the school, so it is recommended to set up special courses and university courses in the school, which will make students sensitive to the important wealth of the island.

3.6.5. Organizations with a Role in the Development of Religious Tourism in Cyprus. Synergies to Be Developed

All participants emphasized that the Church, the CTO (Cyprus Tourism Organization), the Antiquities Department, the parish, the metropolises, cultural services, and travel agencies are important institutions. They pointed out that each institution has its own role, but there must be coordinated to determine action and synergy for the development of religious tourism.

All organizations should aim to attract traffic from tourists who are mainly from Christian countries such as Russia. They suggested that closer cooperation and synergy should be established between the Church, the State, and the tourism industry, and collective efforts should be made to establish a coordinating body with the task of developing a short-term and long-term strategic development plan for religious tourism on the island.

In a modern, globalized world, the national economy does not only survive in the supply of services. New applications in mobile phones, as well as the creation of a tourist information website by the Church, the Holy Metropolises and the various municipalities and local authorities, will strengthen existing tourism information systems. Such a system facilitates the use of modern technological tools characterized by an effort to increase extroversion, thereby enhancing the existence and participation of Cyprus as a religious and pilgrimage destination for the development of international tourism in the Mediterranean. This new smartphone app will enable each visitor (not just in Cyprus) to receive direct and complete information directly from his mobile device to access a range of religious travel themes. Through this app, each user can find useful information about churches, monasteries, holy pilgrimages, monuments, archaeological sites and various activities, celebrations and religious folklore in Cyprus.

4. Concluding Remarks

In this article, we show how Cyprus uses religious tourism as a tool for sustainable tourism development. Although evidence is provided in the literature about the role of religious tourism as an alternative form of tourism, no formal method has been incorporated into this role.

The study provides the first steps and ideas for integrating religious tourism into a strategic plan for sustainable tourism development. At the same time, it raises several questions and identifies different research approaches. These include not only expanding the scope of the study to cover visitors and sacred sites, but also incorporating these feedbacks into a comprehensive plan for the development of tourism strategy. The authors are currently focusing on efforts in this direction, including raising awareness of relevant bodies and institutions.

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