

The impact of religious tourism on the economy and tourism industry

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Today, tourism, with its distinct and unique features, has become one of the largest and most profitable industries in the world economy and has provided a platform for changes in geographical spaces. This study was conducted with the aim of investigating the effects of religious tourism on the economic development of traditional settlements. The research method is descriptive and analytical. The independent variable is 'religious tourism', which is quantified by 10 components, and the dependent variables are 'income' and 'employment' in tourist areas, which are studied with 10 components in Russia, respectively. Data analysis was carried out in SPSS software, then a Pearson's correlation test and simple linear regression were used. Moreover, Geographic Information System (GIS) software was used to show the traditional spatial weighting of the study. The regression results show that religious tourism has been effective by 0.77 on income, 0.66 on employment, and 0.72 on the economy of traditional settlements. In fact, the development of religious tourism in areas with religious and traditional rituals has had a positive effect on creating employment, increasing income and economic prosperity. In general, religious tourism, with its structural and functional features, is considered an important factor in revitalising the economy of regions with this privilege.

Contribution: This article has proven the strong role of religious tourism on the economy and tourism industry in Russia with a quantitative analysis, which deserves the attention of cultural and tourism policymakers. In addition, the results of this research can be considered by other countries with different religions.

Keywords: religion; religious tourism; economy; social effect; tourism industry.

Introduction

Travel has been with humankind since the beginning of creation and different methods have been recommended and mentioned in different religions (Ariyono et al. 2023; Vijayanand 2012). One of the aspects of travel are religious excursions and tourists, which can have a significant impact on the development and economic prosperity of different areas. Today, the tourism industry has an important place in the economy of countries. Religious tourism, including wide diversity in religious minorities, ritual and traditional ceremonies, touristic religious sites and religious tourism, has a high capacity to attract cultural and economic tourists. These capacities need to be recognised and turned into religious tourism products.

In recent years, the importance of tourism for the local economy in terms of job creation, economic stimulation and wealth generation has been considered more than ever: in such a way, that tourism is considered not only as a development catalyst but also as a factor for political and economic changes. By implementing innovative strategies in the city, the tourism sector provides the basis for attracting more tourists and generating income and added value in the city. For this reason, in most countries, the use of tourism capabilities in urban development has already been considered. The economic development of local communities is one of the most important goals of the tourism industry (Pourtaheri, Rahmani & Ahmadi 2012), and this industry is one of the most important factors in the economic development of urban and rural communities (Mandych, Bykova & Gaiman 2022; Mróz 2021; Rad et al. 2017). Tourists and its consumers are involved in the economic development of the host society (Jamalpour & Yaghoobi-Derabi, 2022), and attractions related to cultural heritage along with natural attractions create this situation in the best way (Patwardhan et al. 2020). Handicrafts have a special place in the classification of cultural heritage attractions (Collins-Kreiner 2020) and are the essence of the traditional and ancient life of the people (Ozturk, Aslan & Altinoz 2022), and it is an industry whose products in the past were a suitable response to the natural conditions of the living environment.

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Humans life and contact with the surrounding environment have caused them to create handicrafts and religion, which in a way are symbols of human culture and identity (Afzalzadeh et al. 2014; Baek et al. 2022). Although the natural environment gave humans the three main pillars of the production of ritual crafts, including the need to produce handicrafts, materials for the production of handicrafts, and the forms necessary for the production of handicrafts, these pillars needed the fourth pillar of the power of human thinking, which is a divine trust in existence. Based on the mentioned four pillars and with a lot of trial and error, humans found the best answer to meet their needs, which included the most suitable materials and the best forms. The experience of different countries such as China (Wang, Chen & Huang 2016), Tanzania (Mu et al. 2007) and South American countries (Vijayanand 2012) shows that the boom in production and sales of traditional handcrafted items in tourist destinations is one of the best ways to earn foreign currency and attract dollars from foreign tourists. Therefore, nowadays handicraft production is considered one of the special and main activities in the field of tourism and plays an important role in small-scale and private entrepreneurship.

This study seeks to explain the role of religious tourism in creating convergence, connection and promotion of cultural relations and economic growth by planning, based on various advanced and modern methods of tourism for the development of convergence and cultural promotion of countries. The main contribution of this article is to provide solutions for the development of religious tourism and its effects on the convergence, connection and promotion of cultural relations of countries and economic development, and how and in what way tourism achieves this important goal.

Religious tourism

Religious tourism is among the oldest and most prosperous of the past and present worldwide, which cannot be hindered by climatic difficulties, and its history is as old as the history of religious tourism. In the definition of religious tourism, it is stated: religious tourism is the visit of tourists to cultural, religious, and ritual tourist places who visit religious places as cultural, ideological and recreational tourists. One of the characteristics of the religious tourist is that it is a group (large number of passengers) and does not depend on a specific time, which increases the prosperity group tourism and generally does not end at one time. Religious tourists can be divided into two groups: firstly, those whose purpose of travelling is to do religious things based on religious beliefs, and the time and duration of their stay is not dependent on an era or a historical person. Secondly, those who, in addition to religious visits, visit other recreational facilities and spend their free time; in other words, their travel goals are multi-purpose with religious priority (Partono Prasetyo et al. 2022).

What is referred to as religious tourism today has a history as extensive as the history of divine religions. From the Christian

and Jewish believers who travelled long distances to visit their religious places, to the Muslims of the early days of Islam who travelled to Mecca every year, on horseback or on foot, all were among the first religious tourists in the world without realising it. Religious tourism is one of the major forms of tourism that is formed in order to visit religious places and perform religious duties. Religious tourism includes all those who travel to religious destinations for religious purposes. In other words, religious tourists are people whose main purpose of travel is to visit religious and holy places. Religious tourists are cultural tourists who travel to religious places for work, visiting religious monuments, performing religious activities, promotion and education and spending free time. The main motivation of religious tourists is to visit religious holy places. Religious tourists who travel to urban destinations are responsible for improving urban infrastructure, creating employment, increasing incomes, and improving the economy of tourist cities (Aghajani & Farahani Fard 2015).

Nevertheless, today, religious tourism with all its different components and types has been able to place itself in the context of global tourism because of its specific structural and functional characteristics, so that its sphere of influence has covered the entire world. According to estimates, it accounts for 26% of the total tourism flow in the world. With a brief overview of history, we can boldly admit that all the countries of the world, especially the religious countries, with the help of divine verses and the lives of the prophets, to know the world and the conditions of the nations. Travelling and establishing cultural relations through tourism causes human cultural evolution to develop from material and spiritual dimensions. In conclusion, in all the rituals and books of divine religions, one of the important ways of cultural development and guidance and salvation of humans, travel and learning is through God. The great divine religions, especially Islam and Christianity, which originate from a single root, have always helped each other throughout their history through tourism and have provided favourable grounds for innovation and cultural flourishing for progress and expansion. One of the most important factors of these convergences and cultural links can be found in proper tourism policy and planning (Nyaupane, Timothy & Poudel 2015).

There are various types of religious tourism, including pilgrimage tourism, religious architectural tourism, food and religious medicine tourism, and religious tourism. In different religions, religious tourism has been recommended. For example, in the holy Qur'an, its goals and benefits are mentioned, which include: seeing the works of the past for learning lessons and understanding, giving thanks and knowing God, to know creation and its history, awareness of present and past traditions, which leads to a dynamic economy through commercial prosperity of travel and tourism industry and cultural and scientific exchange of ideas across different civilisations. In this article, the factors affecting the religious tourism were introduced, and then its consequences for the economy and industry development were discussed (Almuhri & Alsawafi 2017).

With the establishment of religious tourism destinations in cities, this type of tourism is proposed as a type of urban tourism. The addition of the urban extension has given tourism a spatial concept and urban tourism occurs in order to visit and access attractions located in urban spaces. In other words, urban tourism includes all types of tourism that occur in urban destinations. Recently, a significant investment has been made in the field of tourism welfare facilities in urban areas. Adu-Ampong (2018) considers tourism as one of the main pillars and economic drivers of tourist cities, which, in addition to creating employment and income, plays an important role in maintaining urban infrastructure and developing public services. He considers tourism as one of the most important economic activities in the world, which can bring significant economic benefits to cities. This researcher sees cities as large multi-purpose institutions that provide various functions and spaces to tourists, and it is in this way that the attraction of tourists to cities is facilitated, and in turn, the economic, social and physical dimensions of the city and the urban structure undergo transformation and create employment. In addition, skills, higher wages and better access to basic services of the city are among the direct economic effects of tourism on the city structure, which indirectly affects the demand of other economic sectors. Furthermore, tourism is introduced as a factor in the formation and development of tourism services.

Tourism as a generator of employment creates a wide range of services needed by tourists in the form of new urban activities. In this regard, retail centres and chain stores, catering restaurants, and hotels are among the most important urban tourism services. In addition to constructive effects, urban tourism imposes a variety of negative effects on the economic, social, political and environmental dimensions of the city. By evaluating the economic costs, this researcher measures the effects of urban tourism on public capital. In addition to increasing job opportunities and improving living standards, tourism development can lead to an increase in the cost of living for local residents. Savings because of the accumulation adjacent to tourist attractions can increase prices, create inflation and ultimately lead to unequal economic development among different areas of tourist cities. The studies conducted on religious tourism confirm that, considering the role of religious meccas in attracting tourists and its effect on growth and development, more attention is needed through planning along with appropriate and targeted management. Moreover, strengthening secondary attractions as a complement to religious tourism and equipping infrastructures, increasing advertisements and strengthening mass communication tools have been considered in most of the studies (Durán-Sánchez et al. 2018).

Russia, as a vast and historical country in the world, is rather attractive in terms of religious tourism. Most of the Russian churches and monasteries are in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage List. They are the true masterpieces of

ancient architecture, which have reached us from time immemorial and are now the most remarkable Russian landmarks.

Effects of religious tourism on socio-cultural issues

The two dominant views in cultural interaction and international tourism are: firstly, a group believes that the growth and development of tourism and turning it into an organised industry will develop human culture from the spiritual and material aspects. For example, the development of industries and service activities, such as specialised marketing techniques, flight and transportation services, will especially lead to the growth and development of small industries. In addition, the growth and development of tourism leads to the reduction of conflicts and the increase of innovation and prosperity of societies. Tourism helps to better understand the world's diverse cultures and cultural development. Based on this point of view, tourism development is a way towards cultural exchange and interaction and communication between different ethnic groups and nations, which provides the possibility of cultural development and economic and social prosperity (Altman & Finlayson 1993; Shirzadeh, Shomoossi & Abdolahzadeh 2016).

Secondly there is a belief that the tourist expects more comfort from the host society while travelling and spending on their vacation. As a result, they leave destructive social and cultural consequences on the host society; among other things, it becomes a factor of homogenisation and sanctities and values. In addition, it destroys the beliefs of societies.

Effect of religious tourism on economy

Tourism, as a cross-sectoral activity, has a great impact on the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of countries. In terms of economic importance, tourism is considered as a smoke-free industry that has the greatest ability to replace other income-generating industries. This industry works especially for countries that have a single product economy. Religious tourism, as an economic, social and cultural reality has the following tasks and functions in the society: mental recovery, peace of mind, enjoying the spiritual atmosphere, observing different manifestations of pilgrimage customs and traditions, spiritual products, fertility, the occupation of knowing spiritual culture, reviving national pride, having cultural heritage, knowing life and how to build self-confidence. Cultural practices including, preservation of cultural resources, cultural convergence, cultural exchanges, cultural capital growth are among the most important functions and effects of religious tourism in society. Religious tourism can be a source of economic and spiritual value for any country (Vukonic 2002). In fact, tourism can affect economic growth and development by contributing to income, improving the local economy, increasing job opportunities, improving investment, developing infrastructure and increasing tax revenue and attracting capital. A summary of the categories is presented in Figure 1.

Method

This research is based on descriptive and the analytical research method. In order to compile the theoretical framework, background and research variables, document and library studies were used. The information extracted from the questionnaire was analysed using statistical analysis methods in the SPSS software in Russia. Furthermore, Excel and GIS software have been used in different parts of the research.

Besides the positive benefits, religious tourism brings negative effects, the high costs of the pilgrimage for tourists and the cultural effects in the host region can be one of these cases. Of course, it should be observed that religious tourism has less negative environmental, cultural and social effects than other types of tourism, which may be part of this feature because of the teachings of schools, religions and religions of tourists. Considering the importance of tourism in the economic sector, it is necessary to identify the attractions in the first stage, and plan for their development in the next stages. Therefore, in order to achieve the best strategy in the field of tourism, necessary cooperation in research, information, product development, human resources, marketing and law enforcement departments is always necessary.

Results

Studies show that tourism has led to positive effects in the economic field, such as creating job opportunities, selling agricultural products, increasing income, increasing purchasing power, and so on. It creates chains of diverse economic activities and prevents economic stagnation. Of course, the increase in the price of goods and services in the tourism season, the increase in the price of land and the increase in the living expenses of the residents, the creation of a large profit for a small group of them and the excessive dependence of the economy on tourism are some of the negative effects of tourism on the economy, the reduction of which requires recognition. Tourism structure and planning is suitable for religious tourism destinations. However, the positive effects of tourism on the economy are much more significant than its negative effects.

In this research, the independent variable is religious tourism, which was measured using 11 components (Table 1). As a

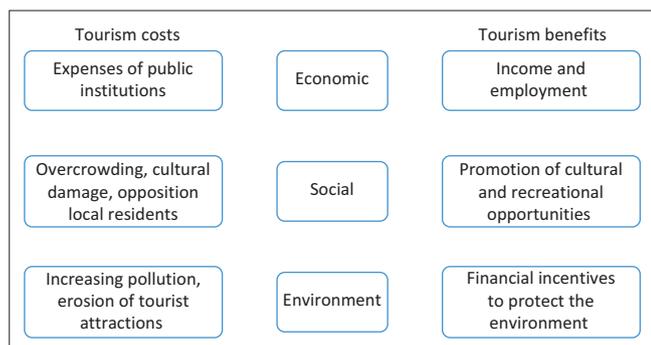


FIGURE 1: Advantages and disadvantages of tourism.

result of the different weights of each indicator, the indicators were weighted using the point allocation method.

In order to investigate the effect of ‘religious tourism on the economy’, linear regression has been used (see Figure 2). Therefore, the regression model (see Figure 3), the independent variable is religious tourism and the dependent variable is rural economy. As it is clear in Table 2, the adjusted coefficient of determination is equal to 0.77, which indicates the high ability of the independent variable in explaining the variance of the dependent variable. That is, the independent variable explains 77% of the changes in the dependent variable and the rest of these changes (23%), which is known as forced error. They are influenced by variables outside the model. In addition, the value of the Durbin–Watson test is equal to 1.26, which indicates that the rest are independent.

As shown in Table 3, the regression value for this model is equal to 3.24 and the residual value is equal to 0.83 and

TABLE 1: Independent research variable and scale of each component.

Variable	Component	Index	Ratio	Weight
Independent variable (religious tourism)	The quantity and quality of religious tourism attraction facilities (commercial facilities 0.31, welfare 0.41, transportation 0.18, cultural and artistic facilities 0.08)	8	Relative	0.197
	The length of stay of tourists (hours)	1	Relative	0.15
	Number of tourists	1	Quantitative	0.229
	Quality and quantity of business units involved in tourism	2	Quantitative	0.122
	Quality and quantity of tourism accommodation	6	Quantitative	0.100
	Beautifying the tourism space	5	Nominal	0.020
	Tourists per capita	1	Relative	0.002
	Artistic and cultural activities	1	Quantitative	0.031
	The number of employees	1	Quantitative	0.069
	Type of tourists (local, urban, provincial, international)	1	Nominal	0.009
	The tourist area	1	Relative	0.05
Total		28	-	1

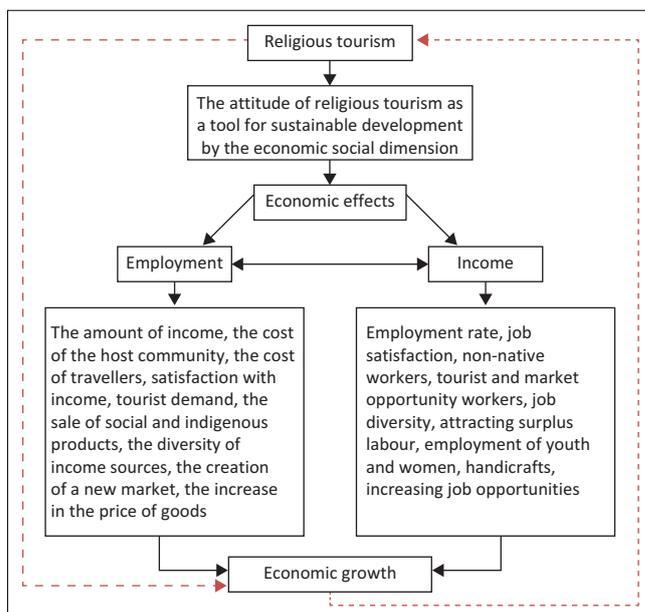


FIGURE 2: Effects of religious tourism on economic development.

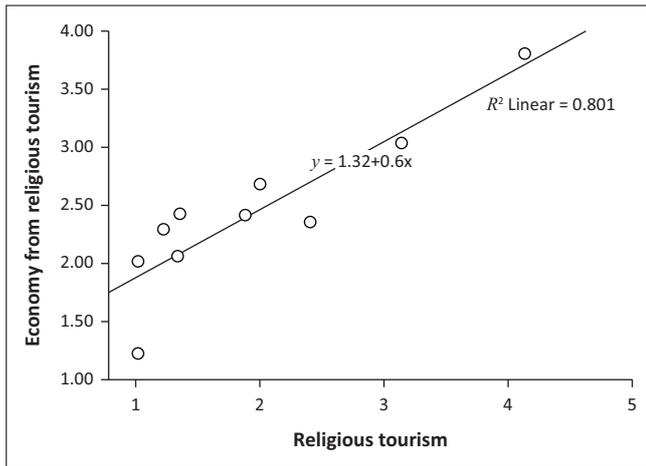


FIGURE 3: Regression model.

TABLE 2: Correlation value, adjusted coefficient of determination and standard error of estimation.

Correlation value	Standard error of estimate	Adjusted conversion rate	Durbin-Watson test
0.894	0.77	0.311	1.26

TABLE 3: Sum of squares, degree of freedom, mean square and significance level of regression.

Variables	Sum of squares	Degree of freedom	Mean square	F	Significance level
Regression	3.22	1	3.22	31.22	0.005
Residual	0.85	9	0.11	-	-
Total	4.05	8	-	-	-

because the residual square value is smaller than the sum of the regression squares, it indicates the high explanatory power of the model in explaining the changes of the dependent variable. In this model, the value of F is equal to 31.21 and its significance level is equal to 0.001, which is smaller than 0.05 and significant, and the independent variable is able to explain the changes of the dependent variable well. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the test based on the non-significance of the regression model is rejected with 99% confidence; therefore, the regression model is statistically significant and the research hypothesis that cultured tourism has caused the economic prosperity of the studied traditional areas is confirmed.

Discussion

Since several 1000 years ago, travel is an integral part of human entertainment. In the past, the concept of travel only meant going somewhere else for fun, but with the development of societies and the transformation of travel and tourism into a 'tourism industry', general concepts have given way to different categories, each of which provides a specific definition of travel. Travel is something that introduces people to different cultures and religions and connects them to each other despite their differences. Religious tourism has been around the world for centuries and it is as old as the religious culture of all religions. In general, religious tourism refers to trips whose main purpose is religious experience. 'Religious tourism' is one of the

sub-branches of the tourism industry and is of special importance. These trips are not exclusive to Muslims and the followers of other religions go on religious trips according to their religious beliefs and relics. Today, religious tourism has entered the world trade and is progressing day by day.

Knowing and recognising what was said will bring spiritual and cultural pleasure for non-native and foreign tourists, and this is one of the missions of the tourism industry in the direction of economic and social development, which is known as cultural heritage tourism in the world. Religious tourism is one of the areas that can attract domestic and foreign capital and, following it, economic development. Religious tourism, like other subsets of the tourism industry, has special features, some of which include the following: Religious tourism can provide the opportunity for travellers and tourists to get to know different religions in religious places. In general, pilgrimage trips cause less damage to the environment than recreational trips. Usually, people who seek pilgrimages are law-abiding people. In religious trips, it is possible for all sections of the society to be together. In fact, it can be said that religious trips are the only trips that even the lower classes of a society can take. People who are looking for religious trips prefer simplicity so they can reduce many of the side expenses in their trips. Usually, religious trips are carried out in groups, so organising this type of trip is much easier than leisure trips. There are often markets in or near religious places where travellers can do their shopping. Some religious trips are performed at a specific time. For this reason, a complete and detailed planning can be carried out for it. Religious trips can bring economic prosperity in some countries. Some religions may have certain practices, that is why some trips are obligatory for followers of different religions. This event can increase the income of a country through religious tourism.

In addition to affecting the macroeconomic variables of the province, the tourism industry affects various sectors of the province's economy. The service sector is closely related to the development of tourism and it strongly affects it and includes the following sub-sets: commerce, restaurant and hotel management, transportation, public services, warehousing and communication.

Conclusion

Considering the increasing importance of religious tourism in the economic and social development of human societies, and the existence of a special religious attraction can draw tourists to the region and be effective in the development of that place. Effective solutions to improve and give direction to religious tourism are:

- Establishing economic, social, religious and cultural stability in the region and raising the level of life and

financial security of tourists. In addition, internal conflicts between political parties should be avoided so that internal security is not endangered in the eyes of tourists.

- Sufficient attention should be paid to the budget of the religious tourism and cultural heritage organisation as well as to its allocation and to avoid neglecting the budget allocation necessary for organisation. Because despite the increase in the budget of this organisation, the allocation of this budget has not been done in an optimal and appropriate manner and has not increased the quality of related departments, and this itself is considered a negative factor.
- Paying more attention to providing suitable accommodation, good roads, suitable air, sea, and land terminals, creating service, welfare, hospitality, health facilities, means of transportation, and proper treatment of tourists. Through training, control, and supervision all services are provided for tourists, as well as training of expert tour guides in religious promoting tourism.
- Introducing religious festivals and rituals to tourists.
- Using religious, cultural and social advertisements to promote customs and traditions, pilgrimage culture, honouring pilgrims and tourism.
- Providing cultural and training systems for tourists in dealing with local culture and local residents of the pilgrim city, as well as preparing rural communities with religious places to accept tourists and informing the community about the benefits of religious tourism.
- Accurate identification of tourist attraction places and holy places and introduction of religious touristic areas and creation of religious places (creation of green space and favourable environment) and their preservation and maintenance.
- Examining the customs and traditions of the religious groups of each region (in order to attract tourists and to preserve the customs and traditions of the region).
- Preparation of pamphlets, CDs and advertising brochures in different languages to familiarise foreign visitors with different rituals.
- Giving attention to ease and speed in issuing visas for foreign tourists and providing banking (currency) and insurance facilities for tourists.
- Setting up 24 hour chain stores in cities to supply needed materials, handicrafts, cultural and religious goods.
- Economic support for local people to use tourism facilities.

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The author declares that no financial or personal relationships inappropriately influenced the writing of this article.

Author's contributions

L.S.B., is the sole author of this research article.

Ethical considerations

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The author confirms that all data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article.

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