Marketing suggestions for multi-religious tourism development: The case of Thessaloniki

Zouni, Georgia and Digkas, Dimitrios

University of Piraeus, Alexander Technological Institute of Thessaloniki

30 November 2019

Marketing suggestions for multi-religious tourism development: The case of Thessaloniki

Georgia Zouni
University of Piraeus, Greece

Dimitrios Digkas
Alexander Technological Institute of Thessaloniki, Greece

Abstract: *Today, the desire of honoring God has been transformed into one of the most interesting tourism sectors, the religious one. Religious tourism, undeniably, is a special form of tourism, which presents great potential for the future tourism in general and especially in Thessaloniki, Greece. This study examines the potential development of a multi-religious tourism product, by focusing on monuments from these three monotheistic religions in Thessaloniki. Finally, through the analysis and listing of monuments, which are associated with Muslims, Jewish and Christians, some recommendations are given about a sustainable strategic marketing plan development and religious tourism product renewal.*

Biographical note: Georgia Zouni is a Lecturer of Tourism Marketing at the University of Piraeus. Her academic interests focus on destination marketing, experience, tourism satisfaction, digital marketing. Dimitrios Digkas began his academic studies in Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and recently he completed his Master's Degree in Tourism Administration at Alexander Technological Institute. Corresponding author: Georgia Zouni (gzouni@unipi.gr).

1   INTRODUCTION

Religious Tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism which is motivated by both memory and religious reasons. Religious tourism as a part of cultural tourism has been triggering a chain of changes in tourist behavior. Notably, it also became clear that religion can be a lever for economic growth. These opportunities of growing become more significant, especially, when a destination holds a diversity of sacred places and well-preserved monuments. For this reason, Thessaloniki is the ideal destination for religious tourism development because of its multicultural history. This city was the place where Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities lived together and each of these religions left its own mark on the city. This study examines the potential development of a multi-religious tourism product, by focusing on monuments from these three monotheistic religions in Thessaloniki. Finally, through the analysis and listing of monuments, which are associated with Muslims, Jewish and Christians, some recommendations are given about a sustainable   strategic marketing plan development and religious tourism product renewal.

2   RELIGIOUS TOURISM

The history of religious tourism is undoubtedly connected with the existence of the human being on earth. Moira (2003) uses the term homo religious to indicate that humans, from their first steps, are strongly connected with religion. By observing the sky, humans had managed to deal with their fears and to continue their life stronger than ever with the help of a superior being. This need of humans to move between reality and supernatural, and especially, to interpret the world around them, led to the emergence of different religions (Moira 2003; Lyons & Branston, 2006; Balomenou et al., 2015; Chantziantoniou & Dionysopoulou, 2017). Firstly, humans started to adore things and animals and then they tried to personalize this situation, by honoring their ancestors. Finally, the form of monotheistic religion and the worship of God were created, through cultural osmosis and historical circumstances.

It is an undeniable fact that defining religion is a difficult procedure. This difficulty is based on the meaning of religion

itself, which changes from place to place and from one person to another. Moira, 2009 argues that religion is a cluster of beliefs. These beliefs exist as a result of history and tradition, which has the power to determine human's behavior. This behavior led people to express their loyalty to God by constructing temples and creating sacred places. Not only is architecture a way to honor God, but pray and rituals are insights of faith. In this way, it becomes clear that religion is a main human right and at the same time, it contributes to the flourishing of cultural heritage (Revilla Hernández et al., 2016; Gilli & Ferrari, 2017).

Travels in sacred places and pilgrimages are not a contemporary feature. Religious tourism is probably as old as human history. The ancient Greek historian, Herodotus, is considered one of the oldest literature masterpieces, which is recorded. When Herodotus described the customs of Egyptians, he underscored the way that Egyptian believers crossed the Neil to approach the temple in Memphis by boat. Many decades after Herodotus, another great Greek sightseer, Pausanias, visited and listed the majority of sanctuaries in Greece. Besides the description of temples, Pausanias also described Greek religious customs. For example, when he visited the temple of Zeus in Olympia, he highlighted the way that olive wreaths were made (Lagos & Chistrogianni, 2006; Moira, 2009; Kartal et al., 2015). Through the analysis of these literature sources of antiquity, it becomes clearer the fact that the roots of religious tourism are long. It has to be highlighted that in ancient Greece, the Olympic, Pythian, Nemean and Isthmian Games were taking place as a part of honoring God. These religious events were attracting millions of believers from the whole country. Thus, it is evident that travel and religion are closely tied.

Throughout centuries, religion beliefs have changed, but religious practices are conducted in the same way. In monotheistic religions, the notion of sacredness of a place became more crucial. A sacred place was connected with events associated with the life of holy faces, like Jesus Christ and Muhammad. In many cases, a location can serve for different religions. Jerusalem, for instance, is one of the most famous paradigms of a holy city, which is the cradle of three monotheistic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. For Christians, Jerusalem is the city where Jesus Christ lived and was crucified. For Jewish, Jerusalem was the capital of their Kingdom, where the main Jewish temple is located, the Solomon's one. This temple was destroyed by roman conquerors (70 A.D) and the only preserved part was a part of the west run, the Wailing Wall (Egresi, 2012; Kurar, Akbaba&Inal, 2015). This monument today is the main Jewish pilgrimage. However, Jerusalem is a holy city for Muslims too, because Muhammad lived and came in touch with God in this city (Moira, 2009).

Especially in orthodox religion, a visit in the Holy Land is an issue of high importance. This desire was born when Saint Helena (5th A.D) revealed part of the Holy Cross and built some churches in a place that today is the center of Christianity. In the past, transportation did not exist and this type of travels was a dangerous procedure. People were traveling without food and water for months and sometimes thieves or pirates were threatening their lives (Moira, 2009). Nevertheless, this difficult and dangerous journey was a part of the purification procedure. The lack of supplies made

believers stronger to continue and to save their souls from the evil. There are literature sources which indicate that, from the Byzantine era, there were hotels in the Holy Land. This data shows that religious tourism for monotheistic religions has started early (Christou & Nella, 2010; Christou, 2003, 2010; Kartal et al., 2015; Selebou, 2016; Chami, & Kaminyoge, 2019). On the other hand, for Muslims the journey in Mecca has the form of obligation. In Islamic belief, this journey is a kind of obligation for believers and it is referred in Quran as Hajj. Religious Islamic texts indicate that Muslims, besides Mecca, need to visit Medina and other sacred places, where Muhammad had lived (Balomenou et al., 2015; Turker, 2016).

All this information reveals the real meaning and motivations of religious tourism. First of all, religious tourism is a special form of cultural tourism. Skoultos and Vagionis (2015) point that religious tourism was motivated by human's deep desire to honor God. However, they state that religious tourism includes knowledge of religious, heritage and customs as forms of culture. Through a religion-motivated journey, tourists have the opportunity to study architecture and religious art, in order to reinforce faith to God. Religious Tourism experience becomes more intense because tourists take part in religious events and are active in a religious environment. Mont Athos is a perfect example because tourists engage in rituals, pray and taste the unique monastic cuisine (Ron & Timothy, 2013; Kartal et al., 2015; Shinde, 2015; Balomenou et al., 2015; Tsarouchis, 2016; Almeyda-Ibáñez & Babu, 2017; Chenini & Touaiti, 2018). Religious tourists, through the travel, get in touch with other people and share their beliefs.

Notably, it is difficult to identify the characteristics of a religious tourist, since literature lacks this information. This difficulty arises as a result of the interaction between religious tourism and other forms of tourism. Rinshede (1992) supports that every journey is motivated by different reasons, some of which are clear and other hidden. Additionally, he underscores that religious tourism connects and interacts, to a great extent, with cultural tourism. This happens because religious tourists every time they go to a sacred place they act like common tourists, who eat in restaurants, buy souvenirs, stay in hotels and visit monuments. Furthermore, religious tourism has political and social expressions. There is no doubt that some nations are linked with an activity of a Saint or characterized by a monument that led tourists to consider this nation blessed. Virgin of Guadalupe is an example, which characterizes the Mexican nation, and catholic tourists assume Guadalupe as a top destination connected with their religion (Moira, 2009). These situations illustrate that it is very difficult to clarify religious tourists' characteristics. Notwithstanding, some studies create a religious tourist profile and indicate that religious tourists are approximately forty years old. They are of high education and have a significant level of cultural background (Tsarouchis, 2016; Shinde, 2017; Pirnar et al., 2019).

3   RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN THESSALONIKI

Thessaloniki undoubtedly has a long history. The city wasestablished by the Macedonian King, Cassander of Macedon, in 315 BC. The turbulent history of the city became more intense in the Byzantine era, when Thessaloniki was besieged by Arabs in 904 AD and Normans in 1185 AD. Finally, the most painful attack was from Ottomans in 1423 and especially in 1430, when Thessaloniki was definitely conquered by Murad II (Karagiannopoulos, 2001).

Approximately for five centuries Thessaloniki was under the Ottoman regime. The Greek stigma was strongly remaining until 15th century and especially 16th century when a huge influx of Hebrews arrived and were established in Thessaloniki. Hebrew migrants mainly came from Spain because of Ferdinand and Isabella's persecution against Jews in 1492. This pogrom was conducted by the Catholic Church with the excuse that Hebrews' beliefs were posing a threat to the catholic religion. This idea led to a hostile attitude against Hebrews from all Europe and only the Ottoman Empire opened its hugs to these refugees. One may say that Jews were living in Thessaloniki from its foundation. It is known that when Apostle Paul visited Thessaloniki in 52 AD with the aim of teaching Christianity, he first came to the synagogue where he taught for three days. So, it became understandable that Jews existed, but they became a dominant cultural group after 1492. In 1913, the population census showed that, from a total of 157.889 residents, the 38.91% were Hebrews, 29.05% Muslims and 25.30% were Greeks (Drakoulis, 2015).

Until 1912, Thessaloniki was under the Ottoman regime, when Greece, Bulgaria, Montenegro and Serbia rebelled against Turkish conquerors and First Balkan War became reality. First plans declare that Thessaloniki would be a Bulgarian place, with the aim that Bulgaria could get an exit to the Aegean Sea. Unfortunately for Bulgaria, these plans never came true, because of London's Treaty (1913), which gave an end to the First Balkan War. According to this Treaty, each winner can get territories that his army occupied first. Thus, Greece became the owner of Thessaloniki,but Bulgarian disappointment led to the Second Balkan War. This war ended with the Bulgarian defeat and had as a result the Bucharest's Treaty, which recognized the Greek paternity of Thessaloniki (Vakalopoulos, 2005).

In this research, the interest focuses on Christianity, Judaism and Islam, which are three monotheistic religions in Thessaloniki. These three religions show different devotional practices, but they have one common base and the interaction among them is a reality. Middle East has been the action field for these three monotheistic creeds and Abraham was the common base. History indicates that Abraham was considered the patron of Judean Kingdom and at the same time he was ancestor of Jesus. However, Abraham's son, Ismail, was the patron of Arab people and therefore he was ancestor of Muhammad. In short, Abraham and Middle East were the common bases for monotheism (Moira, 2009). Brown (2000) talks about three different religions, which worship the same God. He indicates that Judaism was the first monotheistic religion and then Christianity was established as a heresy against Judaism. After decades Islam was born as a mixture of Christian and Judean faith. There is no other city in Europe, except Thessaloniki, that was the center of coexistence of these three monotheistic religions in one common urban environment.

Throughout the parallel study of different resources, it becomes clear that the special character of Thessaloniki attracts tourists from different countries. Research shows that the personality of the city is the main feature which makes tourists choose Thessaloniki as a destination for their vacation. Gastronomy and archaeological sites follow . These data in combination with the multicultural character of this city could create new development opportunities through the growth of strengths and restriction of weaknesses. To understand the strengths of Thessaloniki, an analysis of benefits and drawbacks could provide a clearer insight. Through this scrutiny, the way to boost strengths and to vanish weaknesses will be discovered. Contemporaneously, this procedure will identify the chances and threatens that Thessaloniki may have as regards the religious tourism promotion.

4 SUSTAINABILITY IN ASSOCIATION WITH RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Keitumetse (2014) states that cultural heritage is a combination of "tangible and intangible remains" of past human activities. The re-examination of cultural heritage can be analyzed into different forms of heritage (Keitumetse, 2014). As it is mentioned above, one of these cultural heritage forms is the religious one. In modern societies, people have understood the value of culture and they try to preserve their heritage and to fix damages caused by social distortion and environmental pollution. The only type of tourism associated with environment is sustainable tourism. In tourism theory, it is illustrated that sustainable tourism depends on economic, social and environmental balance (Ahmad et al., 2014; Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2019). This balance can preserve the cultural heritage and therefore religious tourism. In many religions balance among society and environment is of high importance and, in some cases, respecting nature is an obligation. We need to take into consideration monastic centers in Greece such as Meteora and The Holy Mountain or temples dedicated to Buddha in other countries (Gilli & Ferrary, 2017) to understand the balance between nature and structured environment, which is promoted by religions. So, this balance in a destination is required by religious tourists and especially pilgrims as a form of religious respect.

Muresan et al., (2016) and Pilving, Kull et al., (2019) strongly believe that the local community is the core element which brings balance between economy, society and environment in a tourism destination and thusit reaches sustainability. Religious tourism has an effect on local community in those three components (economy, society and environment). Firstly, the great number of monotheistic monuments that exist in Thessaloniki and their spatial expansion benefits this city in its all districts. Except positive economic impacts for local community, religious tourism shows up socio-cultural problems and offers a second chance to jobs and traditions that they are in danger of extinction.Religious tourists are transformed into pilgrims and they take part in traditional rituals. However, the environment is a core element for religious tourism and at the same time religious tourism

depends on the environment. It is not random that in Christianity and in monasticism theory everyonewho wants to be monk must find balance among environment and himself. So, this theory shows the importance that environment has in religion and therefore religious tourism (Τσίγκος, 2009). All these data indicate that sustainable and religious tourism have a common social,economicand environmental base, clarifying that sustainability is a matter of need in a marketing plan focused on religious tourism.

5 METHODOLOGY

Data collection: this study was conducted in Thessaloniki. Information was collected both through parallel study of literature review and "in situ" observation. Literature research was based in studies that were conducted by Thessaloniki Hotels Association (THA). THA since 2011 is publishing studies that measure the profile and satisfaction of tourists in Thessaloniki's hotels and what they prefer to do when they visit the city . In these studies, the target groups of Thessaloniki are determined and how much and where they spend their money. In the same time INSETE (a non-profit organization, that was founded by Greek Tourism Confederation) structured a general marketing plan for tourism development in Central Macedonia in a five years period, from 2015 to 2020. This study determined potential opportunities for the city of Thessaloniki to develop religious tourism . Both THA and INSETE conducted general marketing plans making clear that Thessaloniki offers a fertile ground for religious tourism growth. Contemporaneously, we took advantage of information gathered by Greek Ministries (Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of Environment and Energy),Greek Government, Municipality of Thessaloniki and European Associations and other electronic tools like the Google Trends website. Electronic information came to verify the literature reviews and to add new elements on tourist's profile and preferences. After gathering information, researchers conducted an "in situ" observation to ensure that all monuments can be utilized by principles for the creation of a dynamic religious tourism product in Thessaloniki. Following routes that are recommended by Thessaloniki's official, tour guide researchers visited almost all of the mentioned monuments. This specific project clarified that some of these attractions were well preserved and they attract tourists; other attractions were closed for the public or they were open for special events like painting exhibition (for instance Alatza Imaret in Sant Demetrios district and Yeni Cami in Delfon district). Additionally, other monuments in past decades became private properties and now some of them are transformed into cafés or culture centers (for example Kpantzi house and Center of Byzantine Research). Following all these routes and taking into consideration the dynamic presence of academic society, it became clear that Thessaloniki has all requirements for a stable religious tourism product. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, University of Macedonia, International Hellenic University and Open Hellenic University have the power to fill the Market of Thessaloniki, with specialized scientists in the field of tourism industry that could develop tourism services and the image of this city.

So, using data derived from both principles and monument's observation and at the same time estimating data from electronic tools, we will try to structure a marketing plan that shows Thessaloniki's dynamic momentum in the field of religious tourism. All this information led to a strategic marketing plan based on models of marketing theory. We based on Ansoff's model. This model helped us to determine what kind of marketing, we should apply. The combination of these tools offered a wealth of knowledge about potentials that Thessaloniki can use for a better future in special interest tourism and especially in religious tourism.

6 STRATEGIC PLANNING OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THESALONIKI

6.1 Objective
Strategy for religious tourism development in Greece can emerge from the marketing objectives analysis (Gkougkoulitsas, 2016).

In Thessaloniki we have to manage a new multi-religious product. We consider that all monuments of Thessaloniki have been promoted as a part of different cultures in different projects and, rarely, they have the opportunity to be promoted in one common multi-religious project. This is the factor, which can determine the objectives for religious tourism development in this city. The main religious tourism product in Thessaloniki will be a multi-religious or a multicultural guided tour. This tour will not attract only believers but it will be a product for all tourists who want to acquire knowledge about the history and the coexistence of three different religions and three different cultures in the city of Thessaloniki. It is not necessary for someone to be Muslim, if s/he wants to visit a mosque and at the same time it is not forbidden to visit a church if s/heis not Christian. The only thing needed is love and interest about knowledge and cultures (Sigala & Christou, 2006; Duff, 2009).

6.2 Market Segmentation
Taking into account the geographical, behavioral, psychographic and demographic characteristics of Thessaloniki's main tourism market, we can easily separate this market into two categories:
A) Explorer of religious history – religious tourist: It has to be mentioned that the cultural character of Thessaloniki becomes the main motivation for someone to choose this city as a destination. When we talk about religious tourism, we should not forget that this type of tourism is recognized by the Greek regiment as a part of cultural tourism. This cultural "umbrella" includes also other special interest tourism forms such as gastrotourism, athletic tourism (Chadha & Onkar, 2016; Gavriil, 2017). So, it is obvious that religious tourism is indeed a form of cultural tourism. This perception is so impressive if we consider that cultural tourism represents approximately 40% of the tourism sector . Thus, it is understandable that religious tourism as a part of culture, has the power to attract tourists from a wide group of people.
B) Pilgrim: This type of tourist organizes a travel in a destination, for the purpose of visiting a sacred place. The pilgrim is not interested in acquiring knowledge, but s/he only wants to get in touch with the God through pray. This is

the issue which distinguishes the religious tourist from the pilgrim (Moira, 2009; Banica, 2016; Egresi& Kara, 2018).

6.3 Targeting

Based on the results of market segmentation for religious tourism development, the model of diverse marketing should be applied. It is obvious that religions are clusters of different perceptions that make people act in a determined way. So, different perceptions require different ways of approach. The religious tourist product must be formed in a totally different way for each of the three monotheistic religions. Christians have different perceptions from both Muslims and Jews and, therefore, the promotion to them must have a different character than the promotion in the Muslim market. Cultural tourism, which includes religious tourism, has a big percent of the tourism market. These tourists are ready to spend their money in tours to sacred places. Researches reveal that religious tourists in Thessaloniki, spend their money in archaeological sites and cultural institutions.

7. MARKETING SUGGESTIONS AND CONLUSION

While searching for different aspects of religious tourism development in Thessaloniki, the strengths of the city tourist product are illustrated and contemporaneously its weaknesses, which can be transformed into benefits. This procedure is of high importance since it can improve the level of the tourism product. This product could be based on a combination of history and modern lifestyle. In the case of religious tourism, culture and knowledge prevail over religious devotion. Byzantine murals, excellent floral motives which decorate walls and roofs in mosques, unique architecture and history of Jews' villas, the beauty of sculpture decoration in Muslim sacred places like "muqarnases" and finally the mesmerizing construction of byzantine churches, all these elements combine a unique product that every religious tourist would desire to experience. It is an undeniable fact that Thessaloniki has a clear religious-culture tourism content. For this reason, Thessaloniki has the power to attract not only religious tourist and pilgrims but it can be a perfect destination for anyone who loves culture, history and art.

In detail, the following marketing suggestions for the development of Religious Tourism in Thessaloniki have occurred from the preceded analysis:

A.implementation of a religious tourism marketing plan

A.1 Identification between Brand name and religious character of Thessaloniki: in this case, the main brand name "Thessaloniki" will stay as the known brand. There is no doubt that the label "Thessaloniki" must be followed by another phrase, which will reveal the religious character of the city("Thessaloniki, the city of God" or "Thessaloniki, the New Jerusalem"). These examples include the brand name and at the same time indicate a religious orientation.

A.2 Good Knowledge of our markets: in any case, knowledge of our markets which reveal special needs of our guests can ensure the perfection in service. Questionnaires, studies and statistics that can be published every year, are very helpful sources of information.

A.3 Making a strong digital presence/dynamic digital marketing: Digital attraction of our guests is the secret of success for businesses and organizations that focus on the global Market. Thessaloniki has a good website (www.thessaloniki.travel) but there is great space for improvements according to the new ICT developments and the religious tourism requirements.

A.4 Use of (local and global) media for promotion: Thessaloniki should use the media which can present her religious heritage. There are local and national media that can advertise Thessaloniki's religious character. It could be helpful if the destination invests in the creation of films and documentaries related to the cultural-religious heritage of the city.

A.5 Cooperation between tourism principles and specific university department: Several distinguished Universities are located in Thessaloniki which offer study programs oriented towards tourism and cultural sectors. These universities generate a number of high-level new scientists, who live in Thessaloniki and know this city better than anyone. So, their cooperation will base the tourism product on stable foundations, offer work opportunities to young people and it will attract students from abroad (Christou, 2002; Cohen, 2003).

B. Combination of religious tourism with other forms of tourism

B.1 Combination between religious tourism and special interest tourism: As it is indicated above, religious tourism is a knowledge-based form of tourism. By learning the history and observing the architecture, religious tourists live the experience in its totality. It is obvious that religious tourism is linked with gastronomic tourism, wine tourism and other forms and this can create a series of motivations that can develop tourism inflow (Nella & Christou, 2016; Turker, 2016; Kambouraki, 2017).

B.2 Link between religious tourism and conference tourism: Conferences with religious content are conducted during the International Fair of Thessaloniki and they have the power to attract a number of scientists, who are interested in religious monuments (Chatzigeorgiou et al., 2017; Lagos & Christogianni, 2006).

C. Cooperation of the church and different communities (christians, muslims, hebrew)

C.1 Necessary participation of the Church in every procedure associated with Christian faith promotion: It is essential that cooperation between Church and tourism principles could lead religious tourism to a unique growth. Metropolises, monasteries and parishes can contribute to a first connection between guests and the local religious tradition of Thessaloniki.

C.2 Cooperation with the Israeli Community of Thessaloniki, embassies of Israel and Turkey and contribution to marketing design: The participation of these organizations in the marketing plan procedure can ensure the fair promotion among different aspects of religion in Thessaloniki. It is true, that these organizations can be the prefect pole of attraction, because they know how to approach their communities.

C.3 Activities, which are created by religious and cultural institutions of Thessaloniki: A perfect example is

Thessaloniki Museum of Photography, which, in cooperation with Macedonian Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, run the project "Sacred Common Places" for three months in 2017. It was a very good project that showed sacred places from the Muslim, Christian and Hebrew world.

D. New religious tours development

D.1 Religious tours from a group of individuals: In the last decades, the interest in culture has become more and more intense. In this frame, groups of individuals appear, who love their city and they want to show their love for the city to tourists, who visit Thessaloniki. So, they came up with the idea to make theme tours in the city. Some of these tours are associated with the city's past. These groups play an important role in religious tourism development and in the marketing procedure. They promote their tours to a wide range of tourists (Lagos & Christogianni, 2006). So, it would be helpful if the destination subsidizes these groups and therefore gives motivation to anyone, who wants to show to tourists how they live and how they see Thessaloniki.

D.2 Creation of new religious-cultural tours: It is known that the tourism sector moves in a vivid way and changes rapidly. For this reason, rejuvenation is a necessary procedure. This rejuvenation is associated with services that exist and it shows the need of new ones. A good solution could be the combination of tours with painting or photography. For instance, a good idea is to motivate the tourist to take a picture and upload it in the social media. This could be a powerful tool for Thessaloniki's promotion. If we consider the rapid pace of technological innovation and especially the worldwide use of social media, this suggestion could be a great idea (Lagos & Christogianni, 2006; Chatzigeorgiou & Christou, 2016; Fotiadis et al., 2019).

D.3 Souvenirs as a recollection of the city: The souvenir is an issue of high importance because only an object has the power to make tourists think how beautiful their experience was. In particular, for religious tourism there are different types of souvenirs. Images, chrism, paintings, chaplets are examples of religious souvenirs, which constitute a "portable memory". Tourism principles could create a unique souvenir for Thessaloniki (Kartal et al., 2015; Gosar&Koderman, 2015).

E. Cooperation between countries and agencies that will promote religious tourism

E.1 Cooperation between Greece and other countries–markets of Thessaloniki that can disclose the religious product and its further promotion. Greece's neighbors like Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia and at the same time Israel and America are the main markets for Thessaloniki. The Greek authorities and the Ministry of Tourism should create friendly relationships with these countries and make deals with them. They have to create an ideal framework for religious tourism development and promotion. Greece takes part in bilateral deals with other countries. These deals are 60 in number and they aim to promote tourism, to create a tourism interdependence and therefore to ensure cooperation among all parties. These practices are necessary for the creation of a sustainable model and they constitute a pillar for tourism growth.

E.2 Diplomatic episodes must be avoided and a stable policy for tourism development is needed (Beech, 2000): A simple example can be the relations between Greece and Turkey, which are turbulent. The military coup that stopped in one night, created a wave of coup participants to leave Turkey and claim asylum in Greece. These facts made the relationship between the two countries problematic. At the same time, Turkey captured two Greek soldiers in 2018. These practices created an insecure tourism environment and many travels were canceled.

Thessaloniki is a blessed city in the Balkan and European territory. The great history and the excellent geographical location of the city make her a powerful cultural destination. Religion belongs in this spectrum of culture. Thessaloniki had been blessed to be the place that had hosted three monotheistic religions. All of them have left their own marks on the city and they have contributed to the formation of Thessaloniki's multicultural character. By applying the majority of the suggestions reported above, Thessaloniki can develop a stable and dynamic religious character. Possibilities and structures do exist but the only thing that does not exist is a good framework to organize and promote Thessaloniki's religious tourism.

REFERENCES

Ahmad F.A., Ammar A.G. et.all. (2014) , «Sustainable tourism development : A study on community resilience for rural tourism in Malaysia», Asia pacific International Conference on Environment- Behavior Studies, Sirius Business Park Berlin – yard fild, Berlin 24-26 February 2014 "Public Participation : shaping a sustainable future", *Procedia- Social and Behavioral Sciences* 168(2015), 116-122.

Almeyda-Ibáñez, M. & Babu, P.G. (2017). The evolution of destination branding: A review of branding literature in tourism. Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing, 3(1), 9–17. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.401370

Balomenou, C., Poulaki, P. and Lagos, D. (2015). Religious Tourism in Greece and regional development: The case of Samos Island. Paper presented at *the55th Congress of the European Regional Science Association. European Regional Science Association (ERSA),* Lisbon, Portugal: 25-28 August 2015.

Banica, M. (2016). Coach Pilgrimage: Religion, pilgrimage, and tourism in contemporary Romania. *Tourism Studies*, 16(1), pp. 74-87.

Beech, J. (2000). The enigma of holocaust sites as tourist attractions - the case of Buchenwald. *Managing Leisure*, 5(1), pp. 29-41.

Brown, L.C. (2000). Religion and State: the Muslim Approach to Politics, Columbia: Casebound.

Chadha, H. and Onkar P. (2016). Changing Cities in the Perspective of Religious Tourism – A case of Allahabad. *Procedia – Technology,* 24, pp. 1706- 1713.

Chami, M. & Kaminyoge, G. (2019). Closed house of wonders museum: Implications to the tourism of Zanzibar Stone Town, UNESCO World Heritage Site. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, 5(1), 31–36. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2641253.

Chantziantoniou, A. & Dionysopoulou, P. (2017). The religious tourism in Greece: Case study of Saint John Russian in N. Evia. Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing, 3(2), 15–24. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1160590.

Chatzigeorgiou, C. & Christou, E. (2016). Destination branding and visitor brand loyalty: Evidence from mature tourism

destinations in Greece. Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism, Vol. 11, No. 5, pp. 102-123.

Chatzigeorgiou, C., Christou, E. & Simeli, I. (2017). *Delegate satisfaction from conference service quality and its impact on future behavioural intentions.* Published in: 5th International Conference on Contemporary Marketing Issues ICCMI, June 21-23, 2017 Thessaloniki, Greece (21 July 2017): pp. 532-544.

Chatzigeorgiou, C., Christou, E. & Simeli, I. I (2019). *Confidence and loyalty for agrotourism brands: The Lesvos paradigm.* Published in: Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism, Vol. 14, No. 1, pp. 151-166.

Chenini, A. & Touaiti, M. (2018). Building Destination Loyalty Using Tourist Satisfaction and Destination Image: A Holistic Conceptual Framework. Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing, 4(2), 37–43. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.1490491

Christou, E. (2002). Examining the impact of tourism destination image and reputation on visitor loyalty likelihood. Tourism Today, 2(1), 34-46.

Christou, E. (2003) On-line buyers' trust in a brand and the relationship with brand loyalty: the case of virtual travel agents. Tourism Today, Vol. 3, No.1, pp.95-106.

Christou, E. (2010). Relationship Marketing Practices for Retention of Corporate Customers in Hospitality Contract Catering. Tourism & Hospitality Management, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp.1-10. Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=2066590

Christou, E. & Nella, A. (2010). A review of wine tourism research from 1995 to 2010: Analysis of 110 contributions. Journal of Hospitality & Tourism, 8(1), 112-123.

Cohen, E.H. (2003). Tourism and Religion: A Case Study - Visiting Students in Israeli Universities. *Journal of Travel Research*, 42, pp. 36-47.

Collins-Kreiner, N. and Wall, G. (2015). Tourism and Religion: Spiritual Journeys and Their Consequences (pp. 689-707). In S. D. Brunn (Ed.) *The Changing World Religion Map*, Springer.

Drakoulis, D. P. (2015). The Historical Urban Geography of 17th century Ottoman Selanik (Thessaloniki). The evidence from EvliyaÇelebi (pp. 143- 173). In E. Gavra et al. (Eds.) *Culture and the Balkan Area 17th-20th century, International Symposium.*

Duff, A. (2009). Unlocking the Potential of Church Tourism, Tourism Insights. Online available: http://cvta.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/unlockpotential_churchtrsm.pdf

EgresiI. O. and Kara F. (2018). Residents' attitudes to tourists visiting their mosques: a case study from Istanbul, Turkey,*Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 16(1), pp. 1-21.

Fotiadis, A, K Abdulrahman and A Spyridou (2019) The Mediating Roles of Psychological Autonomy, Competence and Relatedness on Work-Life Balance and Well-Being. Frontiers in psychology, Vol. 10.

Gavriil, E.S. (2017). Religious Tourism Promotion through the GNTO digital guides. The case of Ionian Islands, *2nd Pan-Hellenic Conference on Digital Cultural Heritage- EuroMed 2017* (1-3 December 2017), Volos: University ofThessaly .

Gilli, M. and Ferrari, S. (2017). Marginal places and tourism: the role of Buddhist centers in Italy. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change,* 15(5), pp. 422-438.

Gkougkoulitsas, Th. (2016). *Strategic Marketing Plan for Thessaloniki as tourism destination,* Thessaloniki: Hellenic Open University.

Kambouraki, K. (September 2017). *Religious Tourism as a lever for tourism development Case study: The city of Thessaloniki,*HOU Thesis, Athens.

Karagiannooulos, I. (2001). *The Byzantine State*, Thessaloniki: Vanias.

Kartal, B. (2015). Examining the religious tourism potential of Manisa, Turkey with a marketing perspective. *Tourism Review*, 70(3), pp. 214 -231.

Keitumentse O.S. (2014), «Cultural Resources as sustainable Enables: Towards a community-based cultural heritage resources Management (COBACHREM) model», *Sustainability* 6, 70-85.

Kurar, I., Akbaba, A. and Inal, M. E. (2015). A Qualitative Study on Situation Analysis of Faith Tourism: The Case of Tarsus. *Tourism Academic Journal*, 2(1), pp. 62- 76.

Lagos D. and Christogianni, P. (2006). *Religious tourism development in Greece.* Thessaloniki: University of Macedonia.

Lyons, A. & Branston, C. (2006). Cross cultural change, adjustment and culture shock: UK to USA. Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal, 54(4), 355-365. Available at: https://hrcak.srce.hr/161568

Mazower, M. (2006*). Salonika, city of ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews (1430-1950),* London.

Moira, P. (2009). *Religious Tourism*, Athens: INTERBOOKS.

Moira, P. (2003). From pilgrim to religious tourist. Sociological Approach, *Tourist Scientific Review*, 1(1), pp. 87-102.

Muresan I.C. ,Oroian C.F., Harun R. et.al., (2016) «Local Residents' attitudes toward Sustainable Rural tourism development », *Sustainable* 8, 1-14.

Nella, A. & Christou, E. (2016). Extending tourism marketing: Implications for targeting the senior tourists' segment. Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing, 2(1), 36–42. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.376336.

Pilving T., Kull T. et.al. (2019),«The tourism partnership cycle in Estonia :Striving towards sustainable multisectoral rural tourism collaboration», *Tourism Management Perceptions* 31, 219-230.

Pirnar, I., Kurtural, S. & Tutuncuoglu, M. (2019). Festivals and destination marketing: An application from Izmir City. *Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing*, 5(1), 9–14. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2640987.

Revilla Hernández, M., Santana Talavera, A. & Parra López, E. (2016). Effects of co-creation in a tourism destination brand image through twitter. Journal of Tourism, Heritage & Services Marketing, 2(2), 3–10. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.376341.

Rinchende, G. (1992). Forms of Religious tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research,* 19, pp. 51-67.

Ron, A. S. and Timothy, D.J. (2013). The land of milk and honey: Biblical foods, heritage and Holy Land tourism. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 8(2-3), pp. 234-247.

Selebou, A.M. (2016). *Religious Tourism in Greece: The case of Thessaloniki,* Thessaloniki: Auth.

Shinde, A. K. (2017). Planning for urbanization in religious tourism destinations: insights from Shirdi, India. *Planning Practice and Research*, 32(2), pp. 132- 151.

Shinde, A.K. (2015). Religious Tourism and Religious tolerance: insight of pilgrimage sites in India. *Tourism Review*, 70(3), pp. 179- 196.

Sigala, M. & Christou, E. (2006) Investigating the impact of e-customer relationship management on hotels' website service quality. ECIS 2006 Proceedings. 118. http://aisel.aisnet.org/ecis2006/118.

Skoultsos, S. and Vagionis, N. (2015). Cultural and Religious tourism as part of Greek Tourism Product, Paper presented at the *1st International Conference on Experiential Tourism*, Santorini, Greece: 9-11 October 2015.

Tsarouchis, I. (2016),*New types of Tourism: Cultural and Religious Tourism in Greece*, Piraeus

Τσιγκου Β.Α. , *Ο ανακαινισμός του Ανθρώπου κατά τη δογματική διδασκαλία του Αγίου Σιμεών το Νέου Θεολόγου* , Θεσσαλονίκη 2009

Turker, N. (2016). Religious Tourism in Turkey (vol. 121, pp. 151-172). In I. Egresi (Ed.) Alternative Tourism in Turkey,Geojournal library.

Vakalopoulos, E.A. (2005). *Modern Greek History: 1204-1985*. Thessaliniki: Vanias.