

Cultural and religious tourism - the case of the Tesouro da Misericórdia Museum

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Biographies

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Abstract

This paper describes the process of implementation and development of “Tesouro da Misericórdia Museum”, a museum that was born in the building of the Misericórdia church in the city of Viseu (Portugal) and has contributed to improvement the tourism activity in the region. The methodology of the study was based on a structured interview with the director of the museum and on surveys of visitors of the museum, in order to perceive the profile of the tourist who visits the museum. A total of 101 questionnaires were collected and analyzed. Finally, future development strategies are presented in an interdisciplinary perspective, with the aim of showing how the cultural and religious heritage in the region of Viseu, specially the Misericórdia museum, is a fundamental axis to define a local and regional development strategy, driven by tourism.

Keywords: tourism, tourism development, cultural heritage, religious tourism, museums.

Introduction

Tourism is growing at a phenomenal rate and is one of the key socio-economic drivers worldwide, therefore impacting world development, prosperity and well-being. With over a billion travelers, tourism generates 9% of world's GDP and 1.4 trillion USD of export. Tourism induces extra job opportunities and more importantly helps improve the structure and balance of the economic activities in a society (Tutek, Gebble and Chan, 2017, UNWTO, 2016).

In Portugal, tourism is a strategic economic activity for the economic and social development of the country, namely for employment and export growth. The results obtained in 2016 confirm tourism as the country's largest export activity as a result of articulated work and a strong investment by private and public sectors.

In the Centro region, where the present study fits, tourism demand has also been increasing, although it does not reach the values achieved in the major tourist regions, such as Lisbon, Porto and Algarve. The hotel occupancy rate in this region still has low values, about 30.6% for room occupancy rate and 23.2% for bed occupancy rate, and an average stay of only 1.4 night to the domestic market and 1.8 nights for foreigners (TravelBI, 2017). Cultural and religious tourism can be a valuable contribution to improving these indicators, as is the case of the Misericórdia Museum, which will be discussed in this paper.

Literature Review

Religious cultural tourism not only provides pilgrimage travel services for religious believers, but also provides service activities for ordinary people to understand religious culture, touch religious culture and recognize religious culture (Nyaupane, Timothy and Poudel, 2015).

The diversification of tourism through the development of religious tourism allows the creation of integrated demand for trips to destinations linked to the region's tourism supply, increasing the flow of tourists to the region and, consequently, creating new jobs and reducing the impact of seasonality (Navruz-Zoda and Navruz-Zoda, 2016). Nowadays, these activities have an increasing indubitable worldwide relevance (Gonzalo, 2006).

Touristic destinations are, in order to be able to attract more tourists in the competition environment, in charge of developing marketing efforts, making the best of positioning their products and services together with their economic, cultural and social dimensions in the brain of tourists (Kocyigit, 2016). Thus, increasingly, the regions seek a regional development strategy based on the use of the cultural heritage in their territory (Bravo, 2014).

Methodology

The main objective of this research was to identify the profile of the visitors of Misericórdia Museum in terms of socio-demographic variables. Another objective was to understand the level of visitor satisfaction with the museum as well as the sources of information that different visitors have used to become aware of the existence of the museum. Thus, the methodology of this study was based on a semi-structured interview with the director of the museum and on surveys of visitors of the museum. A total of 101 questionnaires were collected and analyzed.

Results

The results of the interview with the Director of the Museum reveal that the number of visitors has increased over the years due to a policy of diversification of the museum collection, through the enrichment of the permanent collection and also through temporary exhibitions. It is also noted that more and more foreign tourists represent a larger share of the visitors. They visit the museum to complement the visit made to other museums in the city. Therefore, the existence of a network of museums in Viseu is valuable, benefiting all of them with this partnership. The director also points out that the existence of Misericórdia museum and several others spread throughout the city contribute significantly to the tourism of the region, increasing the average tourist stay and developing other activities related to tourism.

The analysis of the questionnaires allows to characterize the profile of visitors of the Misericórdia Museum. Thus, we find that this visitor is mostly between 51 and 60 years old, with 21.8% of the sample, and it can be mentioned that 52.5% are over 40 years old (table 1). In terms of gender, visitors are mostly female, with 52.5%, compared to 47.5% male. The visitors have a high level of education, with 56.5% equal to or higher than university degree.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic characteristics of visitors (n=101)

Socio-Demographic Variables	Value	Freq.	Percent
Gender	Female	53	52,5%
	Male	48	47,5%
	Total	101	100,0%
Age	Under 20 years old	15	14,9%
	20-30	19	18,8%
	31-40	14	13,9%
	41-50	17	16,8%
	51-60	22	21,8%
	Over 60 years old	14	13,9%
	Total	101	100,0%
Educational Level	Less than High School	19	18,8%
	High School	19	18,8%
	University degree	32	31,7%
	Master or Doctoral Degree	25	24,8%
	Professional Degree	6	5,9%
	Total	101	100,0%
Nationality	Portugal	79	78,2%
	Country of Europe	17	16,8%
	Country of not Europe	5	5,0%
	Total	101	100%

We also tried to find out how visitors took notice of this museum. We emphasize the value of the reference friends and relatives with 33.7% (table 2). This value underscores the fact that visitors make good references to the museum and may be satisfied with the service provided and collections presented. Increasingly, the positive word-of-mouth is becoming progressively important in the dissemination of products and services that organizations should not neglect, making tourists feel satisfied.

Table 2. How did you hear about Misericórdia Museum

How did you hear about Misericórdia Museum	Number	Percentage
Friends	22	21,8%
Advertising	6	5,9%
Internet	10	9,9%
Family	12	11,9%
Other	51	50,5%
Total	101	100,0%

Concerning the level of overall satisfaction with the museum, on a likert scale (1 – unsatisfied to 4 – very satisfied), we found that the majority of visitors had a high level of satisfaction, registering that 74.3% considered the museum very good and 23.8% considered good (Table 3).

Table 3. Level of satisfaction

How do you rate your level of satisfaction with your visit to Misericórdia museum?	Number	Percentage
Very good	75	74,3%
Good	24	23,8%
Reasonable	2	2,0%
Unsatisfactory	0	0,0%
Total	101	100,0%

Conclusion and Discussion

Nowadays, countries have used tourism as a strategic development tool for their national economy and they see it as a key sector that can increase their national GDP and employment. However, it is necessary to develop policies that promote the sustainability of tourism throughout the year, for which museums have made a great contribution. The cultural heritage allows to generate new

searches and attractions throughout the year, but for this it is necessary a great dynamism, with new attractions.

Thus, a region to benefit from tourism has to establish priorities, for example, to value the territory, allowing the use of the historical-cultural heritage and preservation of its authenticity, structuring tourism supply to better respond to demand.

In the case of the Misericórdia museum, it is important to generate networks and connectivity, through the strengthening of partnerships between the various institutions. Also important is the involvement of society in the process of tourism development and networking in joint promotion among the several sectors.

However, the development of tourism in Portugal and the growth of the museum in particular will be possible with a projection of Portugal, increasing the country's notoriety in international markets as a destination to visit, providing an increase in tourist demand in the country and in the various regions. Thus, offering greater benefits to tourism agents and local populations, enhancing the multiplier effect of tourism as a driver of local economic and social development.

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