

**9th Annual International Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Conference:  
Religious Tourism under Fascist and Communist Dictatorships: Portugal and  
Slovakia**

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This work was supported by the Portuguese Research and Development Agency (FCT) and by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract No. SK-PT-2015-0011.

## Biographies

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## Abstract

Following the chronological analysis of Christian pilgrimages over the course of around 2,000 years of existence, we find that there have been swings in their level of popularity: strong whenever the ruling classes (whether religious or civil) protect the sanctuaries most in demand; with declines occurring whenever opinion makers manage to turn leadership against participation in pilgrimages.

The paper analyses how religious tourism was influenced by two dictatorships: a fascist one in a western European country, Portugal (1928-1974) and a communist one in a central European country, Slovakia (1948-1989) – at that time part of Czechoslovakia. In the first case the

transition from a dictatorship to a democracy didn't alter much the continuous development of religious tourism. In the second case many changes occurred with the fall of the dictatorship; the democracy allowed people to manifest freely their religious beliefs increasing therefore the number of domestic and international religious trips.

## **Introduction**

In the last three centuries of the European History there are strong examples of persecution such as the Enlightenment (18th cent.), the French Revolution and its spread to the rest of the continent (through the Napoleonic campaigns) encouraging persecution and, frequently, the destruction of the holy places of greatest significance to worshippers (19th cent.) or the Communist Dictatorships in eastern Europe (20th cent.) which discouraged religious practices. Nevertheless, during these same years, the exaltation of worship of the Virgin was reinforced (18th cent.), in the 19th cent., within the scope of Romanticism, pilgrimages were associated with people's hidden soul and, in the 20th cent., the organization of pilgrimages boomed, sometimes supported and stimulated by Fascist Dictatorships in southern European countries.

This paper analyses how religious tourism was influenced by two dictatorships: the fascist one in Portugal (1928-1974) and the communist one in Slovakia (1948-1989). Although the religious tourism in both countries is considered, the focus is on religious tourism dynamics in their two main shrines, respectively, Fátima and Levoča. The gathered data and the literature review help to show that in Portugal the transition from dictatorship to democracy didn't interrupt the growing development of Fátima. Already in Levoča that transition allowed the rebirth of the sanctuary permitting to look at it as a potential important religious tourism destination.

## **Literature Review**

The literature review is based on two pillars: the society, state and religion (in general); articles and data about number of pilgrims and pilgrimages in Fátima and Levoča (before and after the transition period from dictatorship and democracy). In the first case the analysis will be often justified with quotations from Barbalet, Possamai and Turner (Eds.) (2013) or Besier (2008) who reflected about the role of religion in leaders' policies and how society incorporates the new rules in its daily life. In the second, the data gathered and the articles reflecting on the

development or on the events which occurred in Fátima and Levoča help to show that a communist dictatorship affects negatively the religious tourism and the shrines' development.

## **Methodology**

Under a research project of a cooperation agreement between Portugal and Slovakia for religious tourism, researchers from both countries had the opportunity to visit the main Portuguese and Slovakian shrines. During those visits which occurred in 2016 and 2017, apart from discussing more pragmatic issues linked to the shrines' development there was also the opportunity to debate other topics as dictatorship and religion in both countries.

The project requires the publication of the research results in the form of articles. One of the choices was to write one focusing the fascist dictatorship in Portugal and the communist dictatorship in Slovakia and how they influenced the pilgrims' movements to Fátima and Levoča. Fieldwork was distributed amongst the researchers based on their particular expertise. The division fell on the following items: literature review focusing the countries' policies and religion; the data gathered in two case studies/shrines (logistic and opinion articles); the reflection about the subjects and justified conclusions.

## **Results**

In Portugal, during the fascist dictatorship (1928-1974), religion was an ideological instrument. The Government used it for dominating all social classes, especially the most disadvantaged. In this sense, the Clergy's role was of vital importance; many priests used the religious creed as a way to rule the souls / the citizens, many times with the purpose that they would not revolt against their precarious conditions of life. The motto God-Homeland-Family was adopted by the dictator Salazar as a leitmotiv for his policies. Within the hierarchical established corporate order was reserved a particular place to each one being one of its appanages the "honest poverty" promoted by the Portuguese Catholic Church.

In Slovakia, during the communist dictatorship (1948-1989), according to the socialist theories, religion was considered peoples' opium. The Government's policies to dominate society was based in a hierarchical laic system in which Church had no place. In fact, during that period the

rulers were against participation in pilgrimages and worshippers were persecuted/discriminated in their jobs/professions (mainly teachers/academics). Although some pilgrimages still took place (but monitored by the secret police), the regime restricted the number of priests and means of transport. Simultaneously, other actions were enticed to discourage people from attending religious events.

In both countries, religion had different developments with the transition to democratic regimes. In Portugal, democracy brought people more income and contributed to the growth of religious tourism, mainly in the best well-known Portuguese shrine – Fátima. In Slovakia, democracy allowed religious beliefs and doctrines to be freely professed and in the last decade some of the early popular shrines, as Levoča, have welcomed a growing number of pilgrims showing that religious tourism can become an important Slovakian tourism segment as is already the case in Portugal.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Irrespective of the shrines' golden periods, the changing of rulers' policies can bring many modifications in the way religion and religious tourism is accepted by a political regime as it is showed in this article. Thus, where the focus of our attention is applied to the development of religious tourism destinations (Fátima and Levoča, in particular), while in the short term there are no perceivable threats to the practice of pilgrimages, we identified the need to monitor changes in attitude and behaviour as regards to religion (in general) and pilgrimage sites (in particular) so as to contribute to better planning and diminish the risk of dangers that may arise. Indeed, we should never forget how history shows us that in the cycles of destruction it is the highest profile sanctuaries that are the first to succumb.

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