Anchorite Sacred Caves in Serbia: Balancing Between Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism Development

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Introduction

Traditionally and historically, pilgrimage has been defined as a physical journey in search of truth, in search of what is sacred or holy (Vukonić, 1996). This search for truth, enlightenment, or an authentic experience with the divine or holy leads people to travel to sacrosanct sites that have been separated from the profane space of everyday life (Olsen & Timothy, 2006). Pilgrimages represent a component of all major world religions (Digance, 2003; Margry, 2008). According to UNWTO estimates, between 300 and 330 million tourists visit the world’s main religious sites every year, with approximately 600 million national and international religious journeys taking place annually in the world (Griffin & Raj, 2017). Pilgrimages are thus of significant religious, commercial and scholarly interest (Moufahim and Lichrou, 2019).

Sacred places serve as focal points for religious journeys (Musoni, 2016). Particularly unique sacred places, containing mysterious and deeply spiritual motives, are caves. The use of caves for religious activities has persisted since the earliest periods of civilization and caves related to such activities are attested in various cultures all over the world (Freikman, 2018). In many regions, caves serve as places of specialised activity that are differentiated from open sites associated with other spiritual aspects of human life (Carson, 2017). As a result of having sacred roles in many cultures, caves often contain tombs, altars, statues etc. Therefore, they are sites of great cultural heritage significance, which implies the need for high quality protection and conservation measures (Bednarik, 2016).

Caves have been widely used for spiritual purposes since the beginning of the Christian era (Bertash et al., 2016). These speleological objects have inspired the spirituality of many hermits, thereby, facilitating the development of a monastic culture. The representativeness and rarity of some landforms, their high aesthetic attractiveness and the geomorphic sites’ relationships with local history and culture clearly shows the link between geomorphology and spirituality (Pica et al., 2015). This connection further enhances the possibility of tourist affirmation of sacred caves, as tourists can be offered a wide range of geo-tourist values in addition to authentic spiritual experiences.

Worldwide, caves have carried out many functions, with some being used as churches; springs that some caves contain have sometimes come to be regarded as sources of Holy water, as at Lourdes in France, which is today visited by over 5 million Christian pilgrims and tourists annually (Kierman, 2014). Furthermore, caves can attract a large number of non-religiously motivated visitors, with so-called ‘show caves’ drawing people to view their towering caverns and significant geological formations (Büster et al., 2019).
Religious tours to sacred caves in Serbia could also include show caves as complementary geosites. In this way, the growth of both religious tourism and speleotourism is achieved.

Sacred caves facilitate a holistic perspective and integrative synthesis ranging between the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities, instead of the usual isolation of more or less arbitrary academic compartmentalisation (Sponsel and Natadecha-Sponsel 2004). Thus, the exploration of the sacred caves for tourism development purposes provides insight into a very wide range of scientific data. Encompassing the historical and cultural identities of many areas, these caves provide great opportunities for both pilgrims and recreational tourists. Providing spiritual comfort to pilgrims and interesting stories for recreational tourists, the explored caves represent the main points of religious-speleological tourism in Serbia. Therefore, a detailed analysis of the management and organisational structures that govern these geocultural heritage is analysed in detail in this paper.

### Study Area

The explored religious, cultural, historical and artistic sites are sacred caves near monasteries of national importance for Serbia. The special significance is reflected in the fact that in these places lived anchorites who left important traces in the spiritual heritage of the Orthodox Christian culture in this area. The geographical position of the explored caves is shown in Figure 1. It is noticeable that the Upper Savina cave is located in Central Serbia, near the Studenica Monastery, the Cave of Zosim Sijanit is located in Eastern Serbia, near the Tuman Monastery and the Caves of Mileševa are located in Western Serbia, near Mileševa Monastery. Detailed description of the distance between the monasteries and the cities from the caves are shown in Table 1.

The total distance travelled in this potential pilgrimage tour is almost 400 km. The tour would include many complementary tourist sites that could be very attractive to potential tourists. The cities of Požarevac, Kragujevac, Kraljevo, Prijepolje would be visited, and in the case of foreign tourists Belgrade and Novi Sad would also most likely be included. This tour could
Upper Savina Anchorite Cave

Upper Savina is an anchorite sacred cave near Studenica Monastery (Figure 2) and the city of Kraljevo, in central Serbia. This cave belongs to the Studenica Monastery. It is located 8.1 km from the Monastery, and it is situated high in the hills called Nemanjina Kula, on the slopes of Mount Čemerno, upstream along the Studenica River. Upper Savina, as well as Lower Savina (church), represent cultural property as a cultural monument of Serbia.

The hermitage was established in 13th century by Saint Sava (Rastko Nemanjić), Serbian prince, monk, writer, diplomat and first archbishop of the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church. Medieval records reveal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nearby Monastery</th>
<th>Distance from the Caves (km)</th>
<th>Nearby City</th>
<th>Distance from the Caves (km)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upper Savina Anchorite Cave</td>
<td>Studenica Monastery</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Kraljevo (Central Serbia)</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorite Cave of Zosim Stjanit</td>
<td>Tuman Monastery</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>Golubac (Eastern Serbia)</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorite Caves of Mileševa</td>
<td>Mileševa Monastery</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Prijepolje (West Serbia)</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Studenica Monastery

(Photo taken from: http://zzskv.rs/manastir-studenica/)
that in an inaccessible gorge he established an entire transcriptional school from which books written in Serbian and Cyrillic originated to give people education (Ćatić, 2008).

The smaller church dedicated to St. George and the cells are closed when there are no monks, except for one room, which is hidden by wooden doors with no markings. Behind these doors is the Cave in which the saint lived, according to tradition. The last permanent resident of the hermitage was monk Gabriel, who spent his last forty-three years here. He tragically died in a fire in December 1981 (Ćatić, 2008). The magnificent hermitage, which is surrounded with rich karst formation is shown in Figure 3.

**Anchorite Cave of Zosim Sijanit**

The Anchorite Cave of Zosim Sijanit is located near the Tuman Monastery, near the city of Golubac in Eastern Serbia. The name of the monastery is linked to several traditions of Miloš Obilić, a celebrated Kosovo hero from the 14th century. Miloš was born in the nearby village of Kobilje and had his own castle in the nearby village of Dvorište (www.manastiri-crkve.com/manastiri/manastir_tuman.htm). When he went hunting, he inadvertently wounded anchorite Zosim Sinajit, who resided in a nearby cave. To bring sin to rest, Miloš established a monastery foundation, in which he placed Zosim's relics (Simić, 2011).

Over the last ten years, there has been a significant improvement in recognition of the Tuman Monastery among believers and tourists. The monks, in addition to their spiritual duties to the local community and all visitors, have taken the initiative to manage this cultural and religious complex with great attention to quality. Although they do not yet have the capacity to perform statistical monitoring and analysis of tourist traffic, it is evident that the monastery is now being visited by a much larger number of people than a decade ago.

A special attraction for all believers is the cave where saint Zosim Sijanit lived (Figure 4). For religious tourists, this complex has become a very important place of pilgrimage in Serbia (Figure 5). Furthermore, natural tourist sites in this area are very attractive to...
tourists and they are often visited (waterfalls, caves, gorges and others).

The popularity of the Tuman Monastery (Figure 6) has reached a level that it has become an integral part of many tours that are promoted nationally to recreational tourists. There are also testimonies concerning the healing effects of this spiritual space. However, the monks strictly require that believers turn to physicians for all health problems and embrace modern medicine for all necessary treatment measures. Nevertheless, visiting the monastery complex satisfies the spiritual needs of tourists and therefore healing them through tranquillity and peace.
Due to their cultural, historical and artistic significance, the Mileševa and Studenica monasteries have long been on the tourist maps of domestic and international tourists. Their greater tourist utilisation is definitely possible with a visit to the inaccessible, yet crucially significant sacred caves. The Anchorite Caves of Mileševa, Mileševac Medieval town and Mileševska River are shown in Figure 7.

**Methodology**

This study was based on the bibliographical-speculative method in the phase of defining the theoretical framework and the descriptive method during processing and interpretation. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT analysis) was also used in order to obtain more in-depth results of the study. The results of the SWOT

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**Anchorite Caves of Mileševa**

Mileševa Monastery is known as the home of the famous White Angel fresco, but also the burial place of Saint Sava. It is located six kilometers from the city of Prijepolje on the Mileševka River. The Anchorite Caves of Mileševa are a cave complex in which Saint Sava resided. They are located about 5 km away from the Monastery of Mileševa near the city of Prijepolje. Below the caves is the Mileševska River and above them the medieval town of Mileševac (Pešić et al., 2010).

According to legend, the monks inhabited these caves in the thirteenth century and traces on the walls show that there were churches in those caves. The caves are reached by a very narrow path and it is not recommended to tour without a local guide.

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![Figure 7: Mileševa Anchorite Caves, Medieval town Mileševac and Mileševska River](https://www.poklonik.com/sr/?page_id=896)
analysis were implemented in strategic and analytical analysis (TOWS analysis) that helped in the process of identifying the relationship between the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The matrix also provided the basis for formulating strategies on these relationships.

TOWS analysis represents a variation of SWOT analysis that identifies various factors and then binds them together (Božac, 2008). This analysis helped to determine the quality of the explored anchorite sacred caves in Serbia. SWOT analysis enables the development of strategies when used with TOWS analysis. Strategies within TOWS analysis are based on a suitable combination of factors that represent strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; and in undertaking this, TOWS analysis contains four strategies:

- **Strengths-Opportunities Strategy (SO).** This strategy is focused on strengths and opportunities. It explains how strengths can be used for the realisation of certain opportunities.

- **Strengths-Threats Strategy (ST).** This strategy shows strengths in relation to threats (e.g. From competitors). Basically management should strive to use all resources in order to minimise threats or completely remove them.

- **Weakness-Opportunities Strategy (WO).** This strategy demonstrates weaknesses in relation to opportunities. It is necessary to overcome weaknesses to be able to take advantage of the opportunities.

- **Weakness-Threats Strategy (WT).** This strategy shows weaknesses in comparison to threats. It is extremely defensive strategy. The goal is to minimise weaknesses and avoid threats.

For TOWS analysis to perform successfully it is necessary to systematically explore the internal and external condition of the environment, define the information used in the analysis, as well as information used in the process of identifying the key relationship between the environment variables. Only then can competitive strategies be carried out (Božac, 2008).

### Results and Discussion

Using caves for tourism purposes has been studied by numerous authors (Cigna & Forti, 2013; Cigna & Burri, 2000; Garofano & Govoni, 2012; Santos Lobo, 2015; Tičar et al., 2018; Tomić et al., 2019; Antić et al., 2019; Kasim, 2011). However, the influence and significance of the sacred caves, which combine religion and geosciences (speleology, geology, karstology, etc.) have not been sufficiently studied in terms of their touristic exploitation.

There were many anchorites, who lived in caves in historical Serbia and their influence remains to this day. However, in order for strategic tourism development to succeed, the most representative caves with the most authentic history should be selected. The explored Anchorite Sacred Caves in Serbia are religious tourist sites of high quality, combining religious, cultural, historical and artistic values with speleological geoheritage. Therefore, their inclusion in the tourism market would bring a lot of innovation and encourage the promotion of Orthodox Christian heritage. Furthermore, these sites have the possibility of a scientific and educational interpretation, which can be very significant and useful for school trips and family vacations.

The identified strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the explored caves are shown in Table 2. The significance of Studenica Monastery contributes a lot to the development of religious tourism in Serbia. Firstly, because it is one of the most visited monasteries, it preserves the tomb of the founder of the Nemanjač Dynasty (Stefan Nemanja), which established the Serbian medieval state and is decorated with one of the most beautiful frescoes in Serbia. Also, Studenica Monastery was built in the Raška style, which means that it is representative of the Raška Architectural school. Moreover, a very important indicator for the development of religious tourism and heritage in Serbia is that the Studenica Monastery is on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Sacred caves are a unique holy places, which are often surrounded with rich natural environment. Therefore, they can satisfy a wide range of tourists' needs and thus continuously attract new tourists. This is important because religious tourism can have a significant impact on the local, regional, even national economy, as it generates a lot of income.

The major weaknesses of the analysed sacred caves are the lack of management and organisational structure,
### Table 2: SWOT Analysis of the Explored Caves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strengths</th>
<th>Opportunities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>S1:</strong> UNESCO protection of Studenica Monastery</td>
<td><strong>O1:</strong> The growing popularity of Serbia's cultural and historical heritage among tourists (especially Tuman Monastery)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S2:</strong> National and historical significance of Studenica Monastery</td>
<td><strong>O2:</strong> Launching creative and artistic-spiritual workshops in major cities of Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S3:</strong> A large number of visitors to the Studenica Monastery and Tuman Monastery</td>
<td><strong>O3:</strong> Organisation of Spiritual Lectures at Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S4:</strong> High historical and architectural values of all sites</td>
<td><strong>O4:</strong> Establishment of national organisations for the development and promotion of religious tourism in Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S5:</strong> High artistic values in Mileševa Monastery</td>
<td><strong>O5:</strong> Subsidise tourist agencies for religious tourism in Serbia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S6:</strong> Existence of young and dedicated monks</td>
<td><strong>O6:</strong> Continuous learning about spiritual caves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S7:</strong> Unique holy places in Serbia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S8:</strong> Rich natural environment around all caves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S9:</strong> Spirituality of the caves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Threats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>W1:</strong> Poor economic situation at local and national level</td>
<td><strong>T1:</strong> Unstable geopolitical situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W2:</strong> Absence of sufficient tourist offers</td>
<td><strong>T2:</strong> Disrespect for cultural and religious heritage by visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W3:</strong> Lack of adequate information service</td>
<td><strong>T3:</strong> Ignorance of the basic principles of the Orthodox Christian faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W4:</strong> Lack of guide service to the caves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W5:</strong> Lack of management for the development of religious tourism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W6:</strong> Poor promotion of spiritual values at national level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W7:</strong> Lack of support from local authorities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>W8:</strong> Inadequate marketing strategy of local tourism organisations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3: TOWS Analysis of the explored Caves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength-Opportunities Strategy (SO)</th>
<th>Strength-Threats Strategy (ST)</th>
<th>Weakness-Opportunities Strategy (WO)</th>
<th>Weakness-Threats Strategy (WT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S3 will accomplish O1</td>
<td>S2 + S4 + S5 + S6 will overcome T2</td>
<td>removal of W1 + W2 + W3 + W4 + W5 + W6 + W7 + W8 will accomplish O1</td>
<td>removal of W1 will overcome T1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S5 will accomplish O2</td>
<td>S6 will overcome T3</td>
<td>removal of W1 + W5 + W6 + W7 will accomplish O2</td>
<td>removal of W5 + W6 will overcome T2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4 + S7 will accomplish O3</td>
<td></td>
<td>removal of W1 + W6 will accomplish O3</td>
<td>removal of W3 + W5 + W6 will overcome T3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1 + S2 + S3 + S4 + S5 + S7 will accomplish O4</td>
<td></td>
<td>removal of W1 + W2 + W3 + W4 + W5 + W6 + W7 + W8 will accomplish O4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S9 will accomplish O6</td>
<td></td>
<td>removal of W1 + W7 will accomplish O5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~21~
Figures 8 and 9 show the utilisation of strengths and weaknesses for achieving opportunities and eliminating threats. Almost all strengths are used twice for the development of the four TOWS strategies. The exceptions are S1 (used only once), S4 (used three times) and S8 (was not used). Unlike strengths, weaknesses were used differently. Weaknesses W1 and W6 were most used and weaknesses W2, W4 and W8 were least used.
the lack of information and guidance services, and the poor economic situation, both locally and nationally. Also, poor promotion of spiritual values at the national level, lack of support from local authorities and inadequate marketing strategy of local tourism organisations are the primary shortcomings that need to be corrected.

By applying the SWOT-TOWS analysis, it was determined that with the help of strengths all opportunities could be accomplished and with the elimination of all weaknesses all threats could be eliminated. The analysed strengths of these caves indicate that tourism potential exists and that their utilisation must be a priority. Table 3 shows the SWOT analysis indicators, which are strategically applied to develop the four TOWS strategies.

The First strategy (SO) is dedicated to using strengths to accomplish opportunities. In order to accomplish all opportunities from the SWOT analysis, all strength indicators were used, except S6 (Existence of young and dedicated monks). The second strategy (ST) uses strengths to overcome threats. In this case the strengths are: S2, S4, S5, S6. However, not all threats can be overcome by applying these strengths. Unstable geopolitical situation can not be so easily eliminated and represents a great disadvantage for the development of religious tourism in Serbia. The third strategy (WO) removes weaknesses in order to accomplish opportunities. For O1 and O4 all weaknesses must be removed, while the success of O2 depends on removal of W5, W6 and W7. Furthermore, subsidising tourist agencies for religious tourism development in Serbia is only possible when the economic situation at the national level is improved. The fourth strategy (WT) focuses on overcoming threats by eliminating weaknesses. Disrespect for cultural and religious heritage by visitors (T2) can be eliminated as a threat by removing W5 and W6, while ignorance of the basic principles of the Orthodox Christian faith (T3) can be eliminated as threat by removing W3, W5 and W6. The only factor that can help improve the geopolitical situation is economic empowerment. Serbia is not an EU member state, but there are possibilities to become a partner in an EU funded programme. In this way, a much more comfortable working atmosphere can be created, in which financial support would significantly facilitate a number of necessary indicators, such as promotion, route creation, education, etc.

The introduction of the explored caves into the tourist market would significantly improve the position of religious tourism in Serbia. The utilisation and continuous improvement of the developed strategy would affect the growth of religious tourism, as well as the local economy and the reduction of unemployment. It is also important to constantly promote the historical, cultural, religious, artistic and traditional heritage of the Serbian people in order to preserve their unique identity.

**Conclusion**

Insight into the advantages and disadvantages of the explored caves open up many possibilities, which can make a significant contribution to religion and tourism in Serbia. Of particular importance is the fact that these caves imply pilgrimage, and it can be concluded that their maximum utilisation would fully balance the development of religious tourism and pilgrimage experience. The theoretical basis in the paper showed the importance of pilgrimage and religion in the sociological and historical sense, and the results of the research using the SWOT-TOWS analysis showed the potential that these caves possess for tourist affirmation.

It is evident that sacred caves are mysterious and mythological sites with rich natural surroundings. Their cultural heritage is essential to the religious identity of the people living in the area. The continuous balance between pilgrimage and the development of religious tourism is achieved on the basis of the sustainability of spiritual principles and ethical concepts. Without the application of these values, the development of religious tourism will have no significance, regardless of economic results. Maintaining spiritual and moral values is a primary priority when it comes to the strategic development of religious tourism. Therefore, the conservation of these caves is crucial for the survival of faith and spirituality. Tourism and caves can be in much greater contact, as research findings have shown. However, the lack of adequate organisational and marketing strategies adversely affect the development of religious tourism. Pilgrimage, as a primary spiritual experience, will become more present when it comes to the sacred caves. In order to develop the religious tourism of the sacred caves in Serbia, it is necessary to take a more professional approach to the general development of religious tourism.

The promotion and mass popularisation of the explored caves can contribute to preserving the Christian Orthodox spirituality, only if organisational monitoring of proper ethical behaviour is established. Spiritual
environments must be constantly vigilant, both for primary security and for the growth of tourism, considering that tourists can sometimes be an extremely careless group of individuals.

The strong development of religious tourism in Serbia is highly needed, due to the large number of churches and monasteries, which make up an important part of the cultural, artistic, historical and traditional aspect of this area. Moreover, the development of religious tourism can significantly influence the interests of the younger generations and direct them to activities that have spiritual values and moral identity. Furthermore, the uniqueness of the potential tourist experience is maintained in the natural environments and geomorphological attractions that these caves possess. The anchorites who lived in these caves and their surrounding landscapes, wishing to separate themselves from organised society, found the grace of God through nature and its stillness. Appropriately managed and sustainability focused tour visits could allow tourists the same experience.

Reference


