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## Exploring the Spiritual Dynamics of Orthodox Religious Tourism: An In-depth Study of Visitor Experience at Osovica Monastery

Ivan Kosta

*PhD Student, Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia, kostaivan@gmail.com*

Anđelina Marić Stanković

*Faculty of Science and Mathematics, University of Niš, Serbia, andjelinamaric14@gmail.com*

Danijel Pavlović

*Academy of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, Belgrade, Serbia, dadeck@gmail.com*

*See next page for additional authors*

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## Authors

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## Ivan Kosta

Singidunum University, Belgrade, Serbia

kostaivan@gmail.com

## Andelina Marić Stanković

University of Niš, Serbia

andjelinamaric14@gmail.com

## Danijel Pavlović

Academy of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, Belgrade, Serbia

dadeck@gmail.com

## Marija Bratić

University of Niš, Serbia

marijabraticurizam@gmail.com

## Slobodan Čerović

Academy of Hospitality, Tourism and Wellness, Belgrade, Serbia

slobodane2@gmail.com

Religious tourism is increasingly becoming a significant component of global tourism trends, contributing to a substantial increase in tourist traffic worldwide. This study focuses on analysing the motives, reasons, effects, and expectations of visiting Osovica Monastery, a recently renovated sanctuary of the Serbian Orthodox Church within the Banja Luka Diocese in the Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Through a comprehensive literature review and empirical analysis, this research explores the motivations behind visiting the monastery, the impacts of these motivations on visitor satisfaction, and the factors influencing revisits and positive feedback. Utilising a methodological approach that incorporates both psychological and sociological perspectives, this study delves into the complexities of religious tourism dynamics, shedding light on the interplay between spirituality, culture, and identity preservation. The findings underscore the significance of spiritual motives in driving visits to Osovica Monastery and highlight the therapeutic effects of spiritual activities on visitors' well-being. Additionally, demographic characteristics such as gender, age, education, and employment status are examined to understand better their influence on visit motivations, reasons and effects. Overall, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of religious tourism dynamics, providing insights into future research endeavours in this domain.

**Key Words:** religious tourism, Osovica Monastery, motives, reasons for visiting, effects and expectations, monastery visitor

## Introduction

Religious tourism is taking on an increasingly significant role in global tourism trends, contributing to a substantial increase in tourist traffic worldwide. According to Hassan's research (2022), religious tourism stands out as one of the oldest forms of tourism, while also experiencing the fastest growth. Reflecting on that, the UNWTO estimated in 2014 that 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's religious and sacred sites every year (UNWTO, 2014). Furthermore, a recent study by

authors Sufi and Malika (2023) suggests that religious tourism may account for 25% of the total global tourism traffic, thereby emphasising its fundamental role in the structure of world tourism.

Religious tourism, among other things, entails journeys aimed at exploring the meaning and purpose of one's existence, with self-awareness playing a fundamental role in the transformation of the mind, body, and soul of the individual (Balakrishnan & Dileep, 2021), as well as the

promotion of individual and social identities (Liutikas, 2017). Additionally, tourism and pilgrimage are closely intertwined, with pilgrims' behavior, often not differing much from that of conventional tourists. Although tourists may not necessarily have a religious connection or motivation to visit pilgrimage sites like traditional pilgrims, numerous studies indicate that modern religious tourism can be understood as a contemporary transformation of traditional religious pilgrimage (Štefko *et al.*, 2015; Battour *et al.*, 2017; Dafuleya *et al.*, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2019; Kim *et al.*, 2020; Iliev, 2020; Rosak-Szyrocka *et al.*, 2023). Postmodernist theories highlight the phenomenon of 'blurring boundaries' between pilgrims and tourists, as well as between the sacred and secular spheres. This recognition points to the progressive nature of visitor experiences in religious destinations, emphasising the need to identify the underlying structures shaping those experiences beyond traditional boundaries defined by differences between tourists and pilgrims (Singh *et al.*, 2023).

According to Smith (2003), religious tourism involves the interplay between the spiritual and secular, individual and organised experiences, inner exploration, and sightseeing, as well as pilgrimage and cultural tourism. Studies have traced the development of religious tourism alongside shifting perceptions of religion's role in modern society. Spirituality is increasingly valued as a factor contributing to sustainable development, with young people representing central actors in this process (Stojsavljević, 2023).

The subject of this paper is the analysis of motives, reasons, effects, and expectations of visiting Osovica Monastery, which represents a recently renovated sanctuary of the Serbian Orthodox Church within the Banja Luka Diocese in the Republika Srpska (RS) of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH). Osovica Monastery was chosen as the subject of analysis in this research due to its significant role in preserving the Serbian identity in the northern part of Republika Srpska (BH), within the area of the Srbac municipality. The selection of this case is based on key factors, including its popularity among believers and its spiritual significance. These elements together contribute to the relevance of the monastery for a comprehensive analysis of its impact on the local community and beyond, highlighting its centrality in

preserving cultural, religious identity, and spiritual heritage.

The main objective of this research is to analyse the motives and reasons influencing visits to Osovica Monastery, as well as the expectations and effects arising from these visits. The research involved analysing relevant experiences during visitors' stays at the monastery.

With the definition of the main research objective, the following key research questions were opened:

- What are the basic motives and reasons that encourage visits to Osovica Monastery?
- How do motivational factors affect visitors' overall satisfaction during their stay at Osovica Monastery?
- What are the key factors that can predict return visits to the monastery, as well as the propensity to recommend and express positive ratings of experiences?
- What are the expectations and what are the effects resulting from the visit?

In this paper, the authors used a methodological approach that includes the analysis of motives and satisfaction to gain a deeper insight into the psychological and sociological dynamics of religious tourism.

## Literature Review

Within the comprehensive study of the phenomenon of religious tourism, the academic community is increasingly devoting attention to the analysis and understanding of this specific form of tourism. This area of research is expanding thanks to a thorough approach that allows for in-depth consideration of characteristics and trends relevant to religious tourism and pilgrimage. Works by Collins-Kreiner (2020a, 2020b) emphasise the importance of continuous monitoring and analysis of current trends in religious tourism, laying the groundwork for future research initiatives in this domain. Additionally, Collins-Kreiner proposes special attention to be paid to the development of methodological frameworks that would enable a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

The emergence of the religious tourism market in Central and Eastern European countries is reinforcing the need to promote sacred sites to develop tourism to enhance

religious and cultural heritage. Many Central and Eastern European countries are very religious and believe in holy books (Torah, Bible and Quran) as books of God. The majority of people practice and attend religious sites to enhance their religious beliefs compared to Western European countries (Pavlović & Raj, 2017).

Kim & Kim (2019) highlight key factors shaping religious tourism through systematic analyses, while Rashid (2018) contributes to a better understanding of visitor motivations and satisfaction by exploring various dimensions of religious tourism. On the other hand, Heidari *et al.* (2018) focus on the socio-economic aspects of religious tourism, emphasising its positive impacts.

In scholarly circles, various authors explore the importance and impact of religious tourism and pilgrimages on culture, society, and tourism policies. Some authors, such as Vučetić (2021), emphasise the importance of communication between internal stakeholders in religious tourism and policymakers, to improve social status and understanding of the impact of religious tourism. Mylonopoulos *et al.* (2019) highlight the importance of pilgrimages as a key element of human culture. Sharpley and Jepson (2011) analyse religious tourism through the lens of postmodernist theories, while Kujawa (2017) and Robledo (2015) consider its role in the search for deeper spiritual meaning and alleviation of feelings of emptiness. Griffin & Raj (2017) and Dhali (2020) emphasise the crucial role of pilgrimages in shaping global mobility and intercultural understanding, while Duda & Doburzynski (2019) highlight the significance of pilgrimage sites in cultural landscapes and structuring tourist destinations. Together, these works point to the complexity and significance of religious tourism in contemporary society.

Numerous studies indicate significant positive socio-economic effects of religious tourism, encompassing job creation, preservation of cultural and natural heritage, and promotion of sustainable development. Cugini (2021) emphasises the contribution of religious tourism to local economies through the creation of new jobs and the promotion of cultural heritage. Raj & Griffin (2015), Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo (2020), and Singh *et al.* (2023) highlight how religious tourists seek experiences that combine spirituality with

recreation and learning, thereby promoting innovative approaches to tradition preservation. Stojsavljević (2023) underscores the importance of sustainable development through respect for local traditions and direct benefits to communities from tourism. Neir & Babu (2002) demonstrated the significant socio-cultural and economic impact of religious festivals in India, while Pardo *et al.* (2023) point out the economic benefits of pilgrimages in Spain, especially through the Camino de Santiago, as an example of enhancing and developing new tourist routes. Much academic attention has been paid to sacred site management and the reconstruction of historical sites that were banned or destroyed during Socialist rule (Pavlović & Raj, 2017). These findings collectively affirm that religious tourism plays a crucial role in promoting cultural diversity, economic prosperity, and sustainable community development.

Research on religious tourism highlights the motivation of visitors seeking spiritual guidance at holy sites, leading to an increase in secular visits to places of special significance (Digance, 2003; Collins-Kreiner, 2020a). Additionally, studies show that a strong religious orientation can contribute to reducing anxiety and depression and increase life satisfaction, confirming the positive influence of beliefs on mental health (Huang & Pearce, 2019). However, despite the rich cultural heritage of sites, a study examining challenges for the development of religious tourism at the Tigray Mosque in Ethiopia, points out issues with the site such as lack of awareness, poor heritage management systems, infrastructure deficiencies, conservation absence, and risk management inadequacies (Nigatu *et al.*, 2023).

In his research, Andriotis (2009) identifies five interconnected factors or motives that are essential for travelling to religious sites: spiritual, secular, cultural, educational, and ecological. Hassan *et al.* (2022), analysing the motives of pilgrims from Bahrain who visited Mecca, found **four** motivational dimensions: religious, social, cultural, and shopping. However, in earlier studies, Keeling (2000) emphasises that the key motives for visiting most religious destinations are admiration for temples and prayer, but visitors, in addition to religious reasons, also visit these places for secular motives. According to the cited author, motives for religious travel vary from impulsive decisions to family

ties, connections to events, as well as cultural interests such as fascination with historical buildings or artworks. In the context of Chinese religious tourism, the research study by Wang *et al.* (2016) focuses on Mount Putuo as an exceptionally popular Buddhist destination in China. Implementing a theoretical framework of motivation, the study identifies and classifies religious beliefs and mental relaxation as primary 'push' factors driving tourists to visit such places. Concurrently, enjoyment of culture and certain elements of religious beliefs are recognised as 'pull' factors that attract tourists with their unique values and experiences available at the destination.

Research on traditionally religious destinations, such as Saudi Arabia, where pilgrimages are common throughout the year, indicates a significant motivational impact of oral traditions on the destination in terms of demand for religious tourism (Alanzi *et al.*, 2023). In a similar context, a study conducted by Auf *et al.* (2016) focused on examining how oral transmission of information influences consumer behaviour, viewing it as a mediating factor in the context of religious orientation in Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Terzidou *et al.* (2018), analysing motivational factors for visiting religious sites in Greece, identified that the majority of religious tourism participants express a desire to make vows and pay homage at sacred sites.

In Western societies, visits to churches are driven by diverse motives, encompassing a wide range of interests beyond purely religious ones (Hassan *et al.*, 2022). Robina Ramírez & Fernández (2020) identify five motives for visits to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe in Spain: religious, cultural, ecological, social, and educational, while visits to churches in Great Britain are predominantly focused on historical and cultural aspects rather than religious ones (Hugnes *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, the results of the study on motives for visiting Cathedrals in Chichester (England) primarily lie in historical interest, architectural observation, and curiosity, emphasising a predominantly secular nature rather than a spiritual dimension (Gutic *et al.*, 2010).

However, studies have shown that motivation for religious travel varies by gender, as demonstrated by Abbate & Di Nuovo's (2013) study analysing Italian travellers visiting the shrine of Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The

results of this study showed that the main motivation for male religious tourism is the need to discover something new (whether feelings of peace or the visual appearance of temples), while for women, the desire is motivated by the need for socialisation. The study by Knežević *et al.* (2019) analysed how sociodemographic characteristics influence pilgrim motivation by examining visits to the UNESCO-listed monasteries of Visoki Dečani and Peć Patriarchate in Kosovo.

Many authors have explored Orthodox religious tourism in the Balkans (Stamenković, 2006, 2009b; Stamenković *et al.*, 2010; Anđelković, 2019). Some authors have focused their research on clearly defined issues, such as sustainable religious tourism in Fruška Gora (Stamenković *et al.*, 2009a), the transformation of the religious landscape in the Balkans (Troeva & Hristov, 2017), the role of religious events in the development of cultural tourism in the city of Sinj, Croatia (Zadel *et al.*, 2018), and so on. Exploring pilgrimage activities in Serbia, Pavlović (2020) analyses religious and pilgrimage motives that drive visits to shrines. He emphasises that these motives encompass various activities such as participation in the Liturgy, group and individual prayers, the act of kissing relics of saints, the ritual of dressing statues of saints, prayers for the health of the sick, akathists, attendance at solemn vigils, etc.. Antić (2020), in addition to classical temples and shrines, highlights a different potential for the development of religious tourism, namely three pilgrimage caves; one located near the Studenica Monastery, the second near the Tumane Monastery, and the third not far from the Mileševa Monastery. The caves have significant historical and spiritual value, making them attractive to believers and recreational tourists. In his research, Valenta (2016) analyses religious tourism in Bosnia and Herzegovina through Catholic pilgrimage, emphasising that social and cultural factors greatly influence the development of this form of tourism in multi-ethnic environments. The cited author also highlights the thin line of demarcation between the identities of pilgrims, tourists, and guides.

Through the analysis of relevant literature and research, insight is gained into the dynamics of religious tourism and its complex interaction with broader socio-economic and cultural factors. These studies are essential for a comprehensive understanding of religious tourism

within both the academic community and the broader social context.

Problems in analysing the competitive position of countries as destinations for religious tourism are often associated with a lack of adequate recognition of these countries as key destinations for religious tourism in a broader context. Religious tourism, as a complex field of study, focuses on places that attract religious tourists, pilgrims, and other believers as well as regular tourists. These issues require deeper analysis and understanding to better grasp the complexity of competitive dynamics in the field of religious tourism. This topic has a scientific character as it requires systematic research and analysis to identify the key factors influencing the competitive position of countries in this area (Čerović, *et al.*, 2017). As a result, motivation and the effects of visiting the monastery have been selected for the analysis.

Based on the literature review, this study focuses specifically on the key motives and effects that are specific to religious tourism within Serbian Orthodox Christianity. It is worth noting that Orthodox religious tourism is a topic that has been less explored in the literature compared to religious tourism and pilgrimage in the Islamic and Catholic faiths.

## Research Methodology

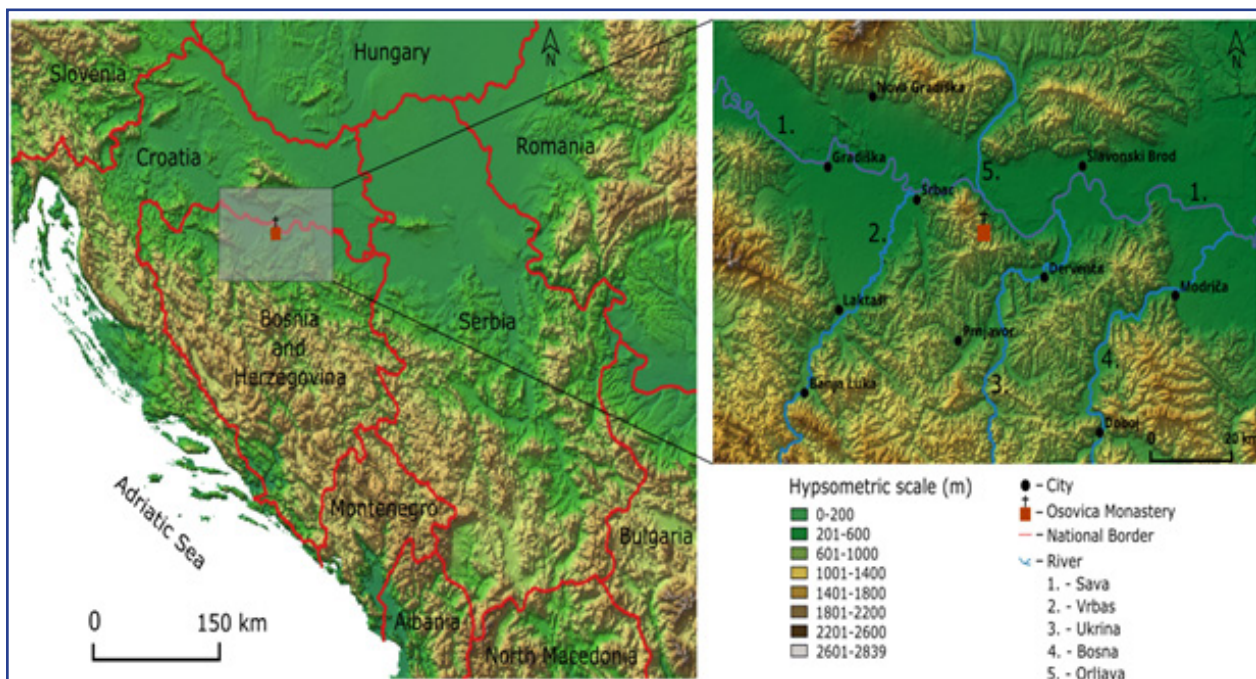
This study analyses the motives, reasons, expectations, and effects based on visits to Osovica Monastery, examining the relevant experiences of visitors during their stay at the monastery.

### Location of Study Area

Osovica Monastery is located between the villages of Gornja Lepenica and Seferovci, within the municipality of Srbac, on Motajica Mountain, near the old road from Prnjavor to Kobash (Figure 1).

Osovica Monastery is situated in the valley of a small stream called the Manastirica, which flows into the Osovica River about 300 meters east of the monastery complex. Although significant written sources are lacking, historians suggest that Osovica Monastery was endowed by King Stefan Dragutin (1253–1316) from the Serbian Nemanjić dynasty. Today, Osovica Monastery represents one of the most significant religious centres in the northern part of Republika Srpska (Bosnia and Herzegovina), accessible via a well-maintained asphalt road marked with appropriate tourist signage.

Figure 1: Geographical Location of Osovica Monastery



Source: Authors

**Figure 2: Monastery Complex**



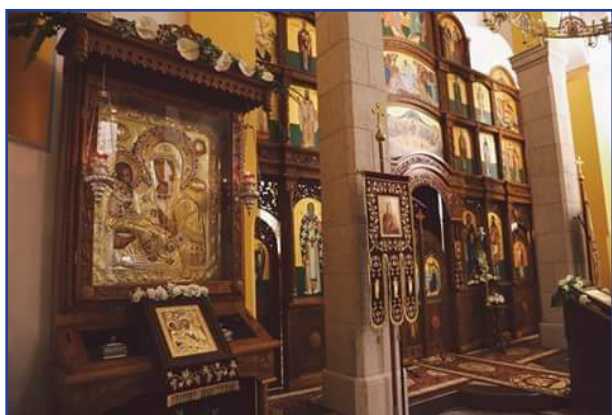
Source: Authors

Within the monastery, in the cathedral church of the Annunciation of the Holy Mother of God, there is a replica of the miraculous Icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God, which was donated by The Holy Imperial Lavra of Hilandar Monastery to Osovica Monastery (Figure 2). The original icon was transferred from the Monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified in Palestine by the hand of the first Serbian Archbishop, St. Sava, to Serbian lands, and later transferred to Hilandar Monastery on Mount Athos (in medieval times). Today, this artefact is considered one of the most important Serbian national shrines.

### *Study Research Instrument*

A questionnaire was created for use as an instrument for empirical research and collecting primary data on the quality of tourist visits to Osovica Monastery, covering key segments of motivational factors and reasons for the visit, expectations, and effects of the visit. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part focused on the motives and movement elements of tourists and pilgrims, while the second part of the questionnaire survey related to the demographic characteristics of the participants, examining variables such as gender and age of the visitors, education, employment status, and religion.

**Figure 3: Icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God**



Source: Authors

### *Data Collection*

The data were collected from June to July 2023 and February 2024. Surveys were distributed using a standard pen-and-paper questionnaire among visitors during their visit to Osovica Monastery. The target subjects were domestic tourists and pilgrims. Respondents were informed about the general purpose of the study, as well as the voluntary nature of their participation. In Orthodox religious journeys and pilgrimage, there are certain



specificities. Pilgrimages are primarily directed towards holy sites and organised visits to monasteries, which may have a pilgrimage character. What is particularly characteristic of visits to Orthodox Monastery is that, apart from pilgrimage journeys, there are regular visits by believers and tourists, whether related to holidays or visits unrelated to specific religious dates, holidays, or rituals. These visits often include regular liturgies.

Consequently, the opportunities for surveying visitors were substantial. However, the period from June to July 2023 encompassed participants on regular visits and holidays, while in February 2024, it was primarily a holiday period, during which larger numbers of visitors were expected. The rationale for conducting the research over two periods was to enhance the reliability of the study across different periods and to increase the sample size sufficiently for meaningful statistical analysis.

**Participants**

Participants in the study were visitors to the monastery, aged between 20 and 60 years old, with only 6 respondents being over 60 years old. The total number of respondents was 230, with 211 surveys being evaluated for further research. There was a slight difference in the sample between male and female respondents (women 49%, men 51%). Analysis of age indicates that the largest number of respondents were between 21-40 years old (40.3%). The majority of respondents who visited the monastery had a high level of education (college) (49.8% of the total surveyed). Among the respondents, domestic tourists dominate (61.6%). This may represent the actual situation at the monastery as the survey was undertaken in as random a manner as possible. The religious affiliation of respondents was very homogeneous with the major proportion being Orthodox (91.9%). There were some Catholics (5.2%) and the remainder (2.4%) preferred not to declare their affiliation.

**Table 1: Correlation Between Reasons for Visiting and the Effects of Visiting Osovica Monastery**

Motives For Visit		Peace, Tranquillity				Solving Life Problems			
		Not	Yes	$\chi^2$	sig	Not	Yes	$\chi^2$	sig
Spiritual reasons - prayer	No	158 (78.61%)	43 (21.39%)	2.687	.101	48 (23.88%)	153 (76.12%)	3.091	.079
	Yes	10 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	10 (100%)		
Getting acquainted with the sacred object, a cultural monument	No	158 (78.61%)	43 (21.39%)	2.687	.101	48 (23.88%)	153 (76.12%)	3.091	.079
	Yes	10 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	10 (100%)		
Excursion and other forms of organized arrival and visits	No	168 (79.62%)	43 (20.38%)	/	/	48 (22.75%)	163 (77.25%)	/	/
	Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
Visit and spiritual rituals in front of the icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God	No	61 (58.65%)	43 (41.35%)	55.564	.000	48 (46.15%)	56 (53.85%)	63.927	.000
	Yes	107 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	107 (100%)		
Finding peace	No	164 (79.23%)	43 (20.77%)	1.044	.307	48 (23.19%)	159 (76.81%)	1.201	.273
	Yes	4 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	4 (100%)		
Lighting candles	No	167 (79.52%)	43 (20.48%)	.257	.612	48 (22.86%)	162 (77.14%)	.296	.586
	Yes	1 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	1 (100%)		
Life problems and a conversation with a priest	No	132 (100%)	0 (0%)	90.238	.000	0 (0%)	132 (100%)	103.820	.000
	Yes	36 (45.57%)	43 (54.43%)			48 (60.76%)	31 (39.24%)		

**Methods**

The data were analysed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 20. A significance level of  $\alpha=0.05$  was chosen for all statistical tests. Variables such as gender, age, education, employment, and religious affiliation were analysed through demographic statistical analysis. The chi-square test was used to analyse tourist motivations, movement elements, and the attitudes of different categories of respondents. Through the chi-square test, we determined the relationship between reasons for visiting and the effects of visiting Osovica Monastery, the connection between different motives for visiting, the realisation of effects after visiting, as well as the association of these factors with demographic variables.

**Empirical Research Findings**

During the research, visitors were asked to highlight the primary reasons for their visit to Osovica Monastery.

To enable a more detailed analysis, the research involved statistical data processing - investigating the correlation between visitors' motives for visiting and their demographic characteristics, including gender, age, education, employment status, and religious affiliation.

To study the correlation between different reasons for visiting Osovica Monastery and the achieved effects after the visit, the chi-square test was applied. Within the test, seven reasons for visiting were crossed with two effects: the sense of peace and tranquillity, as well as the possibility of resolving life issues (Table 1).

The results of the analysis presented in Table 1 indicate a significant correlation between spiritual motives for visiting Osovica Monastery and achieving a sense of peace and tranquillity, as well as resolving life problems. Specifically, visitors who travelled to the monastery for spiritual reasons, especially for prayer or participation in spiritual rituals in front of the icon of the Three-

**Table 2: Correlation Between Motives for Visiting Osovica Monastery and Effects Achieved After Visit**

Motives For Visit		Peace, tranquillity				Solving life problems			
		No	Ye	$\chi^2$	sig	No	Ye	$\chi^2$	sig
Cultural value and architecture of the monastery	No	153 (78.06%)	43 (21.94%)	4.133	<b>.042</b>	48 (24.49%)	148 (75.51%)	4.755	<b>.029</b>
	Yes	15 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	15 (100%)		
Historical value of the monastery	No	161 (78.92%)	43 (21.08%)	1.853	.173	48 (23.53%)	156 (76.47%)	2.132	.144
	Yes	7 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	7 (100%)		
The beauty of the natural environment in which the monastery is located	No	162 (81.41%)	37 (18.59%)	6.880	<b>.009</b>	42 (21.11%)	157 (78.89%)	5.377	<b>.020</b>
	Yes	6 (50%)	6 (50%)			6 (50%)	6 (50%)		
Interesting story about the monastery	No	162 (81.82%)	36 (18.18%)	9.563	<b>.002</b>	41 (20.71%)	157 (79.29%)	7.623	<b>.006</b>
	Yes	6 (46.15%)	7 (53.85%)			7 (53.85%)	6 (46.15%)		
Holiday	No	150 (77.72%)	43 (22.28%)	5.037	<b>.025</b>	48 (24.87%)	145 (75.13%)	5.795	<b>.016</b>
	Yes	18 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	18 (100%)		
Following modern trends	No	167 (79.52%)	43 (20.48%)	.257	.612	48 (22.86%)	162 (77.14%)	.296	.586
	Yes	1 (100%)	0 (0%)			0 (0%)	1 (100%)		
Other	No	53 (80.3%)	13 (19.7%)	.028	.868	13 (19.7%)	53 (80.3%)	.509	.476
	Yes	115 (79.31%)	30 (20.69%)			35 (24.14%)	110 (75.86%)		

**Table 3: Correlations Between Motives for Visiting Osovica Monastery and Gender of Respondents**

Motives For visit		Demographic Characteristic - Gender			
		Male	Female	$\chi^2$	sig
Cultural value and architecture of the monastery	No	94 (88.68%)	102 (97.14%)	5.722a	.017
	Yes	12 (11.32%)	3 (2.86%)		
Historical value of the monastery	No	105 (99.06%)	99 (94.29%)	3.743a	.053
	Yes	1 (0.94%)	6 (5.71%)		
The beauty of the natural environment in which the monastery is located	No	102 (96.23%)	97 (92.38%)	1.454a	.228
	Yes	4 (3.77%)	8 (7.62%)		
Interesting story about the monastery	No	101 (95.28%)	97 (92.38%)	.768a	.381
	Yes	5 (4.72%)	8 (7.62%)		
Holiday	No	93 (87.74%)	100 (95.24%)	3.805a	.051
	Yes	13 (12.26%)	5 (4.76%)		
Following modern trends	No	105 (99.06%)	105 (100%)	.995a	.318
	Yes	1 (0.94%)	0 (0%)		

Handed Mother of God, often reported experiencing a sense of peace and tranquillity ( $\chi^2 = 55.564$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, the results indicate a frequent association between conversations with the spiritual leader and visitors' intention to solve life problems ( $\chi^2 = 90.238$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

In contrast, visitors who travel to the monastery for other reasons such as excursions or getting acquainted with the sacred object, rarely reported experiencing a sense of peace or solving life problems. These results emphasise the importance of spiritual motives and activities in visiting Osovica Monastery compared to other reasons for the visit. Other motives for visiting, such as finding peace or lighting candles, did not show a statistically significant correlation with the achieved effects after the visit ( $p > 0.05$ ), suggesting that these motives are not dominant factors in achieving peace or resolving life problems for visitors to Osovica Monastery.

To test the correlation between different motives for visiting Osovica Monastery and the achieved effects after the visit, the chi-square test was used (Table 2). Within

this statistical analysis, seven motives for visiting were crossed with two effects: a sense of peace and tranquillity, as well as the possibility of solving life problems.

Regarding the motive of visiting related to the cultural value and architecture of monasteries, a statistically significant association was observed with achieving a sense of peace and tranquillity ( $\chi^2 = 4.133$ ,  $p = 0.042$ ), as well as with the possibility of solving life problems ( $\chi^2 = 4.755$ ,  $p = 0.029$ ). This suggests that visitors who visit the monastery for its cultural value and architecture often express a sense of peace and tranquillity, as well as an intention to solve life problems.

Similarly, motives such as the beauty of the natural environment and interest in the monastery's story also showed a statistically significant association with achieving a sense of peace and tranquillity ( $\chi^2 = 6.880$ ,  $p = 0.009$ ;  $\chi^2 = 9.563$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) and the possibility of solving life problems ( $\chi^2 = 5.377$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ;  $\chi^2 = 7.623$ ,  $p = 0.006$ ).

To examine the association between different motives for visiting the monastery and demographic characteristics, we also used the chi-square test, the results of which are presented in Tables 3-7.

**Gender and Motivation**

Regarding the motivation of visiting due to the cultural value and architecture of the monastery, the statistical test ( $\chi^2 = 5.722, p = 0.017$ ) indicates that a larger number of female respondents choose this motive compared to male respondents. Similarly, although there is a tendency for more women to visit the monastery because of its historical value, the difference is not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 3.743, p = 0.053$ ). Regarding the beauty of the natural environment, there is no significant difference between men and women ( $\chi^2 = 1.454, p = 0.228$ ), nor in motivation arising from interest in the monastery’s story ( $\chi^2 = 0.768, p = 0.381$ ).

Interestingly, there is a tendency for men to visit the monastery more often for the purpose of rest compared to women, but this difference is not statistically significant

( $\chi^2 = 3.805, p = 0.051$ ). On the other hand, the majority of respondents, regardless of gender, do not visit the monastery to follow modern trends, which is statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 0.995, p = 0.318$ ).

Overall, the results suggest that the gender of the respondents may influence the choice of motivation for visiting the monastery, especially cultural and historical aspects. However, for other motives such as natural environment and rest, differences between men and women are not statistically significant.

**Age and Motivation**

Analysing different motives for visiting the monastery in the context of age groups, we notice significant differences that highlight the specificities of motives among different age groups. While analysing the motive of visiting due to the cultural value and architecture of the monastery, we observe statistically significant differences among age groups ( $\chi^2 = 21.661, p = 0.000$ ). Younger respondents, especially those up to 20 years old, rarely visit monasteries for this reason compared to older age

**Table 5: Correlation Between Motives for Visiting Osovica Monastery and Respondents' Education**

Motives for Visit		Demographic Characteristic - Education						$\chi^2$	sig
		Primary school	High School	College	Master	Master's degree	Ph.D		
Cultural value and architecture of the monastery	No	5 (100%)	48 (80%)	100 (97.09%)	19 (100%)	11 (100%)	13 (100%)	21.519	.001
	Yes	0 (0%)	12 (20%)	3 (2.91%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
Historical value of the monastery	No	5 (100%)	60 (100%)	96 (93.2%)	19 (100%)	11 (100%)	13 (100%)	7.592	.180
	Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (6.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
The beauty of the natural environment in which the monastery is located	No	4 (80%)	57 (95%)	96 (93.2%)	18 (94.74%)	11 (100%)	13 (100%)	3.652	.600
	Yes	1 (20%)	3 (5%)	7 (6.8%)	1 (5.26%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
Interesting story about the monastery	No	2 (40%)	59 (98.33%)	94 (91.26%)	19 (100%)	11 (100%)	13 (100%)	31.170	.000
	Yes	3 (60%)	1 (1.67%)	9 (8.74%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
Holiday	No	5 (100%)	56 (93.33%)	91 (88.35%)	18 (94.74%)	10 (90.91%)	13 (100%)	3.495	.624
	Yes	0 (0%)	4 (6.67%)	12 (11.65%)	1 (5.26%)	1 (9.09%)	0 (0%)		
Following modern trends	No	5 (100%)	59 (98.33%)	103 (100%)	19 (100%)	11 (100%)	13 (100%)	2.529	.772
	Yes	0 (0%)	1 (1.67%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		

groups. The historical value of the monastery also shows some differences among age groups, although these differences are not statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 5.428, p = 0.143$ ). Most respondents, regardless of age, rarely visit the monastery for historical reasons. However, regarding the motive of visiting for rest, there is a trend that older respondents visit monasteries for this reason more often than younger visitors ( $\chi^2 = 7.146, p = 0.067$ ), although, again, this difference is not statistically significant.

Motivation due to the beauty of the natural environment of the monastery, interest in the monastery’s story, and following modern trends do not show statistically significant differences when analysed according to age ( $\chi^2 = 5.078, p = 0.166$ ;  $\chi^2 = 2.994, p = 0.392$ ;  $\chi^2 = 2.529, p = 0.470$ ).

Overall, the results suggest that there is variation in motives for visiting the monastery depending on the age of the respondents, with cultural and historical motivation being less prominent among younger respondents, while the motivation for rest is higher among older ones.

**Education and Motivation**

By analysing the influence of education on motives for visiting the monastery (Table 5), a statistically significant variation in motives among different educational levels was discovered. For the cultural value and architecture of the monastery, a statistically significant difference was found among educational groups ( $\chi^2 = 21.519, p = 0.001$ ). Respondents with lower education levels, such as primary and secondary school, more often visit monasteries for this reason compared to respondents with higher academic education, such as masters, postgraduate, and doctoral degrees.

Regarding the interest in the monastery’s story, significant differences were also observed among education levels ( $\chi^2 = 31.170, p = 0.000$ ). Individuals with primary and secondary education more frequently visit monasteries due to their interest in the story compared to individuals with higher education.

Regarding other motives, such as the historical value of the monastery, the beauty of the natural environment, rest,

**Table 6: Correlation Between Motives for Visiting Osovica Monastery and Work Status of Respondents**

Motives for Visit		Demographic Characteristic - Work status			
		Employed	Unemployed	$\chi^2$	sig
Cultural value and architecture of the monastery	Not	183 (96.32%)	13 (61.9%)	33.908	.000
	Yes	7 (3.68%)	8 (38.1%)		
Historical value of the monastery	Not	183 (96.32%)	21 (100%)	.800	.371
	Yes	7 (3.68%)	0 (0%)		
The beauty of the natural environment in which the monastery is located	Not	182 (95.79%)	17 (80.95%)	7.761	.005
	Yes	8 (4.21%)	4 (19.05%)		
Interesting story about the monastery	Not	181 (95.26%)	17 (80.95%)	6.698	.010
	Yes	9 (4.74%)	4 (19.05%)		
Holiday	Not	172 (90.53%)	21 (100%)	2.175	.140
	Yes	18 (9.47%)	0 (0%)		
Following modern trends	Not	190 (100%)	20 (95.24%)	9.091	.003
	Yes	0 (0%)	1 (4.76%)		

**Table 7: Correlation Between Motives for Visiting Osovica Monastery and Respondents' Religion**

Motives For Visit		Demographic Characteristic - Religion						$\chi^2$	sig
		Orthodox	Catholic	Islamic	Atheist	Other	I don't want to make a statement		
Cultural value and architecture of the monastery	No	169 (91.85%)	11 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	2.370	.796
	Yes	15 (8.15%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
Historical value of the monastery	No	177 (96.2%)	11 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	5 (100%)	5 (100%)	1.062	.957
	Yes	7 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)		
The beauty of the natural environment in which the monastery is located	No	183 (99.46%)	8 (72.73%)	3 (100%)	2 (66.67%)	2 (40%)	1 (20%)	102.064	.000
	Yes	1 (0.54%)	3 (27.27%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.33%)	3 (60%)	4 (80%)		
Interesting story about the monastery	No	179 (97.28%)	8 (72.73%)	0 (0%)	2 (66.67%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)	63.762	.000
	Yes	5 (2.72%)	3 (27.27%)	3 (100%)	1 (33.33%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)		
Holiday	No	173 (94.02%)	6 (54.55%)	3 (100%)	2 (66.67%)	4 (80%)	5 (100%)	24.710	.000
	Yes	11 (5.98%)	5 (45.45%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.33%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)		
Following modern trends	No	184 (100%)	11 (100%)	3 (100%)	3 (100%)	5 (100%)	4 (80%)	41.396	.000
	Yes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (20%)		

Source: Created by authors in IBM SPSS Statistic 20

and following modern trends, no statistically significant difference was observed among educational groups ( $\chi^2 = 7.592$ ,  $p = 0.180$ ;  $\chi^2 = 3.652$ ,  $p = 0.600$ ;  $\chi^2 = 3.495$ ,  $p = 0.624$ ;  $\chi^2 = 2.529$ ,  $p = 0.772$ ).

### Employment and Motivation

Regarding the cultural value and architecture of the monastery, there is a statistically significant difference between the employed and unemployed ( $\chi^2 = 33.908$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). The unemployed more often choose to visit the monastery for cultural aspects compared to the employed. Similarly, differences are also noticed in the perception of the beauty of the natural environment and the interest in the monastery's story ( $\chi^2 = 7.761$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ;  $\chi^2 = 6.698$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ). The unemployed are more likely to appreciate these aspects during their visit to the monastery compared to the employed. Following modern trends also show statistically significant differences among employment statuses ( $\chi^2 = 9.091$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ), with the unemployed visiting monasteries for this reason more frequently compared to the employed.

### Religious Affiliation and Motivation

Analysing the influence of religious affiliation on motives for visiting the monastery, it was found that there is variation in perception of the cultural value, architecture, and historical significance of the monastery among different religious groups. However, significant statistical differences were not observed in these aspects ( $\chi^2 = 2.370$ ,  $p = 0.796$ ;  $\chi^2 = 1.062$ ,  $p = 0.957$ ), indicating that religious affiliation does not play a crucial role in choosing the monastery for cultural and historical aspects.

However, within the aesthetic appeal of the natural environment of the monastery and the interest in its story, significant differences were observed among religious groups ( $\chi^2 = 102.064$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ;  $\chi^2 = 63.762$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). Most Orthodox respondents visit monasteries more often for these reasons compared to respondents from other religious communities. Regarding the motive of visiting for rest, significant differences were observed among religious groups ( $\chi^2 = 24.710$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), with

Orthodox respondents visiting monasteries for this reason more frequently compared to respondents from other religious affiliations. As for following modern trends, statistically significant differences were observed among religious groups ( $\chi^2 = 41.396$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ), although most respondents, regardless of religious affiliation, do not visit the monastery for this reason.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Osovica Monastery stands as a focal point of interest for both the research community and the public due to its profound cultural and spiritual significance. This scientific inquiry delves into the underlying motives driving visits to the monastery and explores their correlation with the demographic characteristics of the respondents, alongside the resultant effects post-visit.

Utilising the chi-square test, the data undergo rigorous analysis to unveil statistically significant relationships among various factors. A comprehensive review of literature on religious tourism elucidates a plethora of viewpoints, highlighting both commonalities and disparities among authors. The discourse surrounding visitor motivations to monasteries adds depth to our comprehension of this phenomenon. Scholars such as Cugini (2021), Raj & Griffin (2015), Robina Ramírez & Fernández Portillo (2020), Singh *et al.* (2023), Stojšavljević (2023), Neir & Babu (2002), and Pardo *et al.* (2023) stress the importance of sustainable development in religious tourism. This notion aligns seamlessly with the findings of our study, which underscore the significance of spiritual engagement in fostering a sense of peace and tranquillity—a crucial facet and outcome of sustainability.

Our research accentuates the pivotal role of spiritual motives as catalysts for visits to Osovica Monastery, a trend corroborated by prior studies on pilgrimage motivations to Mecca or religious tourism in Greece, China, and Saudi Arabia (Andriotis, 2009; Auf *et al.*, 2016; Wang *et al.*, 2016; Terzidou *et al.*, 2018; Hassan *et al.*, 2022). Analysis of the nexus between spiritual motives and subsequent effects post-visit reveals that visitors motivated by spiritual inclinations, particularly prayer or participation in spiritual rituals before the icon of the Three-Handed Mother of God, often report feelings

of tranquillity and intent to resolve life challenges. These findings suggest that spiritual activities within the monastery wield a significant ‘therapeutic’ effect on visitors, aiding them in navigating the vicissitudes of daily life. This underscores the paramountcy of the spiritual dimensions of visiting the monastery in engendering profound meaning and fulfilment, mirroring previous research emphasising the therapeutic potential of spiritual activities in religious settings. Huang and Pearce (2019) affirm the importance of spiritual activities for mental health, while Pavlović’s study (2020) underscores the therapeutic potential of spiritual practices in monastery settings. These insights buttress the imperative of incorporating spiritual dimensions in the analysis of religious tourism, underscoring their pivotal role in visitor experience and well-being.

Conversely, visitors motivated by other reasons, such as excursions or cultural exploration, seldom report similar post-visit effects. This underscores the predominant influence of spiritual motives in visits to Osovica Monastery compared to other rationales for visitation. The examination of demographic characteristics of visitors to Osovica Monastery draws upon Andriotis’ (2009) taxonomy of motives to deepen our understanding of the factors shaping the selection of specific religious destinations.

Female respondents demonstrate a heightened inclination towards visiting monasteries for their cultural and architectural value compared to males, deviating from previous studies where women’s visits were primarily driven by socialisation. This variance may stem from differences in faith traditions, as evidenced in Catholicism, such as in Međugorje, where a similar phenomenon is observed among the female demographic (Abbate & Di Nuovo, 2013). Additionally, our study reveals that older respondents exhibit a greater propensity for visiting monasteries for relaxation compared to their younger counterparts. Moreover, education and employment status emerge as influential factors in determining motives for visiting the monastery. Individuals with lower levels of education and unemployed respondents display a heightened interest in the cultural and natural aspects of the monastery compared to their counterparts with higher education and employment.

These findings underscore the imperative of tailored marketing strategies to attract specific demographic cohorts. In sum, this research yields profound insights into the motives for visiting Osovica Monastery and their interplay with respondent characteristics. Future inquiries could delve into other factors shaping monastery visits, such as visitors' emotional states or past experiences.

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