

To Position Armenia as a Spiritual Tourism Destination

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Introduction

While the concept of spiritual tourism may seem to be a modern construct, in fact it is one of the earliest forms of tourism. Throughout history people have travelled to holy sites such as Jerusalem, Mecca and Vatican. In 2013 Jerusalem hosted 3.54 million tourists which is considered to be a record. According to the World Bank, approximately 14.3 million people visited Saudi Arabia in 2012, making it the world's 19th-most-visited country. These numbers are not accidental, because the motivation of people who visit these destinations has religious nature, and subsequently, it creates a base for the development of religious tourism.

What is spiritual tourism? One of the first challenges for those interested in “spiritual tourism” is giving an exact definition for the term. There is no actually any clear academic definition what spiritual tourism is despite the fact that humans' need in it is increasing. Believers taking part in religious pilgrimages such as Muslims doing the Hajj or Buddhists visiting the four sacred sites in India and Nepal are plainly recognized as “spiritual tourists” as are the 500 000 people belonging to various faiths (or none) who annually walk the Camino de Santiago (Way of St. James). But what about the avalanche of tourists who visit say Notre Dame to admire her architecture and history - are they really spiritual tourists or is there a different category again for spiritual sightseers?

To make things more precise, in the frameworks of this research the spiritual tourism will be acknowledged as such that combines religious and cultural tourisms together. It is very hard to draw the line where religious tourism ends and the cultural one begins and the vice-versa, simply because religion is part of culture, particularly Armenian culture, and these two are tightly interconnected.

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The main objective of this type of tourism is visiting religious and historic sites to satisfy the religious and spiritual needs of those who take part in this activity. The most common type of religious tourism is considered to be the pilgrimage. Although the motivation behind religious tourism is mostly associated with religion itself, people prefer this kind of travel to explore the world from a cultural aspect as well. This is very natural, because religious tourism is considered to be a branch of cultural tourism. Cultural tourism is defined by the World Tourism Organization (Report WTO, 2012) as "trips, whose main or concomitant goal is visiting the sites and events whose cultural and historical value has turned them into a part of the cultural heritage of a community". An interesting perspective of cultural tourism that is entailed by this definition is the assumption that visiting cultural and historical sites and events, related to cultural heritage is not necessarily the main motive for the trip. In this context cultural-historical tourism is rarely implemented in a "clean" look and most often is combined with other traditional and specialized types of tourism. Thereby, there are strong ties between cultural and religious tourism. Although the latter has existed for centuries, the modern world requires special strategies to develop it further. Such kind of strategies may be perfectly suggested by public relations which is a "strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics". Despite the trend of decreasing social and cultural importance of western Christianity and a continuous decline of church attendance, religious tourism grew exceptionally during the second half of 20th century. Many factors can be attributed to the rediscovery of the values of religious tourism: the 'privatization of religion'; the 'search for roots' and answers to important existential questions, such as faith and the supernatural; the rediscovery of traditional Christian spirituality and finally, the technological improvement of transportation infrastructures. Moreover, many people visit shrines to complement their

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knowledge and interest in local culture and history; the religious ceremonies performed in holy places (processions, holy masses, penitential rites), represent an experience of moral revival for the visitors' religious traditions and faith (Olsen, Timothy, 2006:3-5).

By understanding the essence and importance of spiritual tourism, it is also important to understand that there are certain countries and certain destinations that have a very big potential of becoming world famous spiritual tourism destinations. Armenia should be considered one of those countries. Even if Armenia is positioned to become a destination for religious tourism, it must implement a dynamic public relations strategy in this sphere to attract potential tourists.

What are the prerequisites for Armenia to become a world famous spiritual tourism destination? What exact PR strategies can serve as a key to reach this goal? This project aims to find the best answer to this question.

Literature Review

“Tourism is travel for pleasure.” This is the first and simplest definition of the term but in fact the function of tourism is a much wider and deeper phenomenon than just the satisfaction of human pleasure. Tourism plays a key role in spiritual satisfaction as well. As Jackowski (2000) estimates, approximately 240 million people a year go on pilgrimages, the majority being Christians, Muslims, and Hindus. Pilgrimage is the most fitting example of religious tourism. The latter has become a platform for many studies and research that include both theoretical

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discussions of the topic and interesting case studies that are a very efficient way for the practical observation of the situation in any part of the world.

According to Mathieson and Wall, (2006, p.17) “tourism is both an economic and a social phenomenon that is an agent of change in these areas as well as for the environment. Tourism involves the tourists, the destination and its people, and the routes and means by which they are brought together.” PR may become this very “means” for “branding Armenia” as a spiritual tourism center in the world. Both theoretical analysis and a completed plan of useful and practical strategies will be a big contribution for this task. What is spiritual tourism? Does Armenia have the potential to become a famous religious-cultural tourism destination? How can a good PR contribute to the realization of this goal? All these questions need to be taken into consideration while going deep into the project.

A lot of studies have been done on tourism and PR, fewer studies on particularly religious and cultural tourism, and there is almost no study about the role of PR in the development of the spiritual tourism in Armenia.

Is spiritual tourism so important, that we should think of all the possible ways to develop it? Do the societies need this? Why? The recent developments of the modern world have brought forward all the threats that the cultural heritages are facing worldwide. All the unique characteristics that are specific to a certain nation are rooted in their culture and the preservation of these material or moral values is essential in preserving the nation itself. Interestingly enough, tourism has a direct impact on the socio-economic developments inside a country. Among the most important contributing factors to such developments are the cultural exchange and a change of outlook that are being faced by the members of all the societies who are involved in tourism.

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The development of tourism helps to gain the attention of the world by taking our place in their “national memory”, as by organizing impressive journeys to any country; one is contributing to the creation of a good image in the eyes of foreigners. Besides, as UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai has stated (2014), “Leveraging the growing interest for religious tourism worldwide is not only beneficial for the tourism sector, but crucial in building cultural dialogue and peace. Religious tourism can also be a powerful instrument for raising awareness regarding the importance of safeguarding one’s heritage and that of humanity, and help preserve these important sites for future generations”, he added.

The interaction with societies that belong to other religions often becomes an unforgettable experience both for the guests and the hosts and this process raises the awareness of people about religious differences that the societies have; thus, there is an aspect of educational development of the societies as well. Morinis (1992) suggested that spiritual journeys may in fact be an internal experience, rather than an external physical one. This means that such kind of journeys help to record a progress in the overall enlightening of the society.

Besides all the intangible outcomes mentioned above, the development of tourism will be a source of economic growth for the country. This factor has been the main reason for the recent rise of interest among the governments, researchers and local tourism centers who have discovered the potential of tourism for economic development of their countries. The situation in Armenia is the same, as the research shows there has been a little rise in government support for tourism, due to the government’s acknowledgement that this may become a really efficient source of financial benefit. The benefits of the development of tourism lay even deeper than simply financial growth of the country. There is a phenomenon called “soft power” that is “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments”, according to

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Nye (2004). By creating an attractive culture and impressing people we are gaining a special kind of power over them.

Public relations is such a phenomenon that is being currently used in almost all the spheres of human activities and professional spheres, and this flexibility is probably the reason of the difficulty that occurs when we try to define the term so that it generalizes all the aspects it involves. According to the definition of the International Public Relations Association founded in 1950 in London, these relations consist of “the determined, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organization and its surroundings, that is, the public” ([www. ipra.org](http://www.ipra.org)). When trying to find the link that draws the common line between tourism and public relations, it may be considered true that “the concept of public relations in tourism should refer to all activities used by the providers of a tourism offer to create a favorable opinion in the public about their overall activity, their work, their services and the goals of their work. Public relation is a conscious, thought-out and planned activity which might appear in the public spontaneously or under the influence of some other situations and circumstances on the market (Senečić and Vukonić, 1997). So, the next step is the implementation of all the perspective plans that the idea of spiritual tourism entails, and this is where the effective communication, particularly PR, becomes a key tool. All the mass communication strategies as well as promotional activities that include primary (advertising, public relations) and secondary activities (design, consumer services) are involved in this process. (Meler, 1999).

There are examples of such countries as Romania, Spain and Croatia that have come to a very high level of development from the aspect of religious tourism and there are interesting case-studies that take into consideration specific places in these countries that have become well-known religious tourism destinations. For instance, Israel has become one of the most important

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destinations of the oldest pilgrim routes. There should be drawn a comparison between this success story and the situation we are facing today in Armenia. What is the secret behind their success? Can Armenia become “another Jerusalem for the world”? Without any doubt, Armenia has the potential for realizing this goal but there is a need for support. The latter should be not only in form of financial investments but also as creative approaches toward the issue that should be reflected in the PR strategies, proposed for the development of spiritual tourism in Armenia.

This project will be the first one that will bring together the ideas of spiritual tourism and PR into Armenian reality. The qualitative and quantitative analysis will support to do further observations and to find out what is the current situation in the country and what we want it to be like in the future and, subsequently, what steps should we undertake for reaching the desired destination.

Statement of central research question(s)

Research Question: “What specific PR strategies can position Armenia as a spiritual tourism destination?”

Sub-questions:

1. What is the current situation in the country as a spiritual tourism destination?
2. What are the advantages of Armenia that give the country the potential to become a famous spiritual tourism destination?

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3. What actions should be undertaken to raise Armenia's reputation as a famous spiritual tourism destination?

Hypothesis: A clearly defined public relations strategy can help transform Armenia into a world-class destination for spiritual tourism.

Methodology

The topic of my Capstone project is two-fold. It will include both a research section based on theoretical analysis and a creative part that entails developing a set of PR steps. This process requires a thorough investigation of the topic by trying to understand the essence of spiritual tourism and all the interesting characteristics it typical to it. To complete this task, qualitative and quantitative analyses will be applied. Following the analyses, practical steps will be discussed and a set of PR strategies will be designed and presented as the final outcomes. The latter will be a helpful guideline for the tourism sector in Armenia.

Religious tourism is predominantly associated with its most common form - pilgrimages. This approach, however, does not capture the whole meaning of this phenomenon that is much wider than simply a pilgrimage or the realization of one's religious "duties." 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). In order to move beyond the limited understanding of the field, this study will try to reveal what motivations can be created

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and enhanced in Armenia that will have a direct impact on positioning the country as a religious tourism destination.

Observation methods were employed to gather quantitative data. The observations were done in cooperation with tour agencies to understand the motivations for tourists. Surveys were conducted to understand the specific motivations of tourists in Armenia or what suggestions they have for improvements. The-tour guides were helpful for organizing the surveys as they can distribute the questionnaires that will be made beforehand. Other sources include secondary data such as statistics that show the economic and social contribution of travel and tourism in Armenia.

By and large, religious tourism is highly interconnected with cultural tourism and this means that being aware of Armenian culture and its thorough investigation is an important contribution to the development of religious tourism. Part of this research includes a study of historical Armenian sanctuaries and holy sites, as well as revealing the more interesting pages of its history that may reveal motivational elements.

Interviews were conducted with historians, experts in religious studies, priests, PR specialists, representatives of tour agencies, etc. Further interviews were conducted with ordinary residents, who are enthusiastic about Armenia, Armenians and Christianity; because interestingly enough they see such special things in the country and culture that a common eye may not even notice.

PR strategies of the project to be developed will be comprised of two components: the cognitive component and the affective dimension. The cognitive component refers to the beliefs or knowledge a person has of the characteristics or attributes of a tourist destination, while the

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affective dimension is represented by the individual's feelings toward the tourist destination (Chen and Uysal, 2002; Kim and Richardson, 2003; Martin and del Bosque, 2008).

There is an interesting model proposed by As Peter Wiltshier and Maureen Griffiths that is expressed as "Report, Store and Access" (RSA). The idea behind this model is the transferring of knowledge into practice. By connecting this model to this project, the aim of which is to position Armenia as a religious tourism destination, the need and efficiency of a good PR campaign becomes vivid. The RSA model will be very useful for my project because it presents the theoretical explanation of the idea that will be implemented through this project and specifically in the context of Armenian society. In other words, the objective of the whole project is to put in practice all the knowledge and skills of PR that we have and to do this in such a manner that there will be a big shift in the appeal of our country as a tourism destination. Thus, based on theoretical analysis we will design a practical guideline of actions.

Research Findings, Analysis and Recommendations

There is no statistics that may show which percent of tourists visits Armenia with spiritual motifs but there is this statistics that 14% of the tourists in Armenia are travelling to our country for having a rest or simply for their pleasure and leisure.

Before starting the analysis of the topic my purpose is to distinguish some terms and realize the target market.

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What is tourism? It is the business activity connected with providing accommodation, services and entertainment for people who are visiting a place for pleasure. Some people say that tourism is the tourist industry. Business itself is the activity of making, buying, selling or supplying goods or services for money. We are going to attract the consumers only, that is to say only part of marketing which is important for us. So, it is the activity of presenting, advertising but not selling. Selling has quite different shades. Our product here is something abstract.

As we know marketing is concerned with getting the right product to the right place at the right time. I am eager to come to right conclusion and I want you to understand my painful points which can be solved. Any business must have a marketing plan. This should be based on a clear analysis and understanding of the present market position. I think experts in market forces and marketing mix can help us to have prices policy with profit.

Religious tourism is considered a modern type of tourism. By the way, looking through a lot of books and articles on it I just found out that this type of tourism goes back to ancient times. Why? Let us go through an explanation.

In the Middle Ages pilgrims appeared and they travelled in groups because it was safer and also more enjoyable. To prove they had done the pilgrimage, the rules were quite strict. They had to follow a well-planned route and visit important places of culture where they took or bought something to prove they had been there: stones, icons, plants, etc. They had to travel on foot or by horse or by camel and why not by donkey. They could stay in special hostels or in some kind of tents. For some, the pilgrimage was an important religious experience, but for many it was a chance to have a nice holiday and do some sightseeing. These days the rules are less strict. You only have to travel on foot or horseback or by bicycle as well, but you are not supposed to drive

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or hitchhike. Nowadays you don't even have to be very religious. Many people see religious tourism as an alternative or part of other types of tourism. In this case tourists want to do it in the peace and quiet which pilgrims in the past enjoyed. I think the best is travelling out of season and avoid crowded ceremonies. Apart from it, I want to remind pilgrims don't eat in fashionable restaurants but they have their last and main gesture which has become part of the pilgrim tradition. It is to touch holy statue, holy stones, rocks, drink water from saint springs. These activities have attracted believers and tourists for many hundreds of years.

The tour management/ Better quality of guides

The role of specialized experts in travel tourism management or so called leisure management or hospitality management is of great importance as well. They can figure out all the necessary services and the range of them must be endless.

Apart from all these there is another, a very important problem which needs attention. It's so called harmony in staff and tourists groups and this aspect is where the role of public relations is also becoming revitalized. Harmony among these blocks exists throughout most of the time tourism was formed. Naturally, at the first period it was unconscious, later –growing into a new field of science, it became conscious. Every person at work has a unique character, set of skills, attitudes and weaknesses. Every group of people working together, travelling together will behave differently from every other group because of its individuality. Every manager is different and so is his relationship with the people he manages and each management process is under unique conditions.

A successful manager has the ability to “read” the characters and behavior of his staff but it is not so easy to do with tourists. What do the psychologists recommend? How do the

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psychologists try to help people? Clever managers have a psychologist-consultant in the staff because they can arrange so called “relaxation” and “co-understanding”. They can simply say: “Don’t worry! Cheer up! They make people recognize mistakes in communication and improve them. We must remember there are people who are afraid to talk especially when they know people well enough. We have to remember, a happy relationship is the result of hard work, not luck. To make travelling memorable a good relationship must be created. Millions of people suffer from depression, anxiety, fatigue and that are linked to loneliness. Most of them try to cure themselves with the help of tourism. Guides have to be good in psychology and help “problematic” tourists enjoy the company. Guides have to be some kind of “ice-breakers”. I think guides’ professionalism is one of the most important parts of tourism. They have to be good “actors” with charm and sense of humor. Guides for religious tourism have to know theology to be able to answer the tourists’ questions as well as history and archeology and even architecture. Recently a guide was complaining about a tourist who was always asking questions about geology. I told her that she had to complain about herself because she did not know anything else about our country except history. We-the hosts must make memorable journeys.

Guides must have knowledge of international etiquette. There are some taboos at holy and sacred places and guides have to inform tourists on time. They have to take into consideration the tourists’ age, nationality, interests, financial security, etc. Speaking the tourists’ native language fluently the guide has to know their typical features. Once, a friend of mine visited us and she was upset. It came out she was invited to be the guide for two different groups naturally, on different days. My uncle, who has travelled all over the world and knows people well enough, suggested her to make breaks with some jokes. One group was from Russia and my uncle told my friend some jokes about their misunderstanding because of drunk conditions. He told her

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when to tell and where to tell. The same about next group, the tourists were from the USA and the jokes were about money. Later, in a week she came to us again with a surprise on her face. It came out she had got the highest grade from the tourists and she realized that was because of jokes. Poor experienced ones were the other guides who got lower grades. So, the atmosphere has to be comfortable for the tourists and they have to remember about taboos and social customs and religious practices of our country. Tourists should remember: “When in Rome do as the Romans do.” Apart from all problems information about expenses must be given or sent to the tourists or tour agencies in details (journey time, distance(from...) , price of petrol, speed limit, price of hotel room, price of entertainments, advantages and disadvantages and so on. Some questionnaires answered by tourists can be very helpful for them. Questions can be like these: Can you adopt the local lifestyle? Can you eat local food?

There are some tourists who want to avoid crowded places or they want to have cheaper tours. Tour agencies can suggest “out of season” tours. I think it is easy to overcome seasonal difficulties in our country. Generally, tours in Armenia can charge the tourists with positive and lively emotions, leave unforgettable trace in their memories.

Business-trips for Armenian guides to worldwide famous destinations

I don't want to miss a very important issue. Everything was discussed from the point of view of a host but people in our country would like to visit other countries if they have already arranged religious tourism. By the way, it is very important for those who are going to work or have already worked in this service. I am sure, they will not copy everything. They will find better solution and create something new here. The most experienced country in religious tourism is

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Jerusalem where Armenian Apostolic Church has patriarchate. How many people from travel agencies have had business trips there yet?

We can go back to history of tourism in England because history can prompt something. In fact, before the middle of the nineteenth century, travelling for pleasure was rare and very expensive and only a few rich people travelled abroad. The man who changed all these and brought in the age of mass tourism was Thomas Cook. By the way, he was the secretary of a local church organization. Was it the first to religious tourism? Let's see! Thomas Cook started his business in tourism in 1841. He arranged rail travel for members of his church. This was the world's first package trip. After this first success, he organized many more for his church. Then, in 1845 he advertised a package tour to Liverpool for the general public and before it took place he went to Liverpool to meet the hotel staff, and check the accommodation and restaurants.

His business enlarged year after year. In 1851 he published the world's first travel magazine which had details of trips, advice to travellers, articles and reports about the places to visit. After 1855 he took groups to all European capitals and then to New York in 1866. In 1868 to the Holy Land with tents because there were no hotels there at that time.

So, from Cook's experience, we conclude that religious tourism does not mean only to invite and be the host but also- visit and learn. I have mentioned above that advertisement is very important. Magazines in foreign languages are the best way because films are more expensive ones. English famous poet who wrote the first English-Armenian dictionary, George Gordon Byron wrote after visiting Armenia: "There is no other land in the world so full of wonders as the land of Armenians..." Let us see what can we call "wanders" in this tiny country which was called "from sea to sea" Armenia?

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Rebranding of Historic values

Over 5000 monuments, all the way from prehistoric cave paintings, temples, monasteries, cross stones which survived to our days are scattered over modern Armenia. At every turn in the Armenian landscape, the echoes of history can be heard. It is an unbroken cultural memory that reaches back three millennia, an identity so tenacious that it has weathered every imperial rise and fall from Babylon to perestroika. Inscriptions in old Persian make the earliest recorded allusion to a land known as Armenia in 518 B.C. Legend has it that the Hai (Armenians call themselves this way) are descended from renowned archer Hayk, a great-great-grandson of Noah who escaped the doomed city of Babel before its celebrated tower fell. In the Bronze Age, several states flourished in the area of Greater Armenia, including the Hettite Empire. The Kingdom of Armenia was at the epoch of its power under Tigran the Great, who reigned between 95-55 B.C., becoming one of the most powerful kingdoms of its time within the region. In 301, Armenia became the first country in the world to adapt Christianity as the official state religion.

When guides tell historical facts tourists demand “prove it”. It is important to prove it. This small world is one of those exceptional ones where all stages of humanity, history are included in inscriptions, in rocks and stones. Symbols, signs in petroglyph drawings, in architecture and ornaments can be seen nearly at every holy place and must be explained. For example, Ram’s symbol is everywhere, this pre-Christian symbol accompanies some gods everywhere, even Mihr god’s crown has the imitation of Ram. Why? It must be explained.

There had been several cities as residences of Armenian kings and Armenia was called the kingdom of Ararat. Ararat had mystical influence on Armenians and was worshipped and made part of the legends. In past, Ararat was famous hunting ground of the Armenian kings full of

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bears, tigers, lions and lynx. Ararat is the sacred symbol of the Armenian nation, the Armenian statehood and the lost territories of the Western Armenia.

There are legends and monuments, there are culture galleries, concert halls and theatres but most of all Matenadaran is important, especially for spiritual tourism. Matenadaran is depository of ancient manuscripts. The Matenadaran's collection of about 17000 manuscripts includes almost all the areas of ancient and medieval Armenian culture and sciences-history, geography grammar, philosophy, law, medicine, mathematics-cosmography, thory of calendar, alchemy-chemistry, translation, literature, chronology, art, history, miniature, music and theatre, as well as manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Greek, Syrian, Latin, Euthopian, Indian, Japanese and other languages. This institution is the center of cultural heritage and its history dates back to the creation of the Armenian alphabet in 405.

Organizing performances

Generally, legends are very interesting for tourists especially when they are told by very old people who had heard from their grandparents. Public relations strategy can find the best ways to arrange it. Armenian folk songs are very interesting, again-especially when they are performed by ordinary people not professional actors. In folk songs are used some names which are met in Hititte myths and their Old Greek parallels.

Performing some scenes is very important for religious tourism. Anyhow, they are coming to enjoy it. Very serious, scientific information can be very short. Performed scenes have to be very natural, that is to say, the actors' costumes and make-up must show the times in very detail. I notice again – professionals' consultation is very important.

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Involving the Youth

For raising the interest and involvement of the youth in the organization of beautiful tours there may be created a special internship program for all the students who are acquiring profession in the sphere of arts or craft. The tourists will be satisfied and the students will benefit.

The advantages of documental films

There are many documental films which can be helpful for religious tourism. There is a film “The Temple of the Sun” made in “Hayk” documentary film studio. The script was written by writer Vahan- Ter- Ghazarian. The film is about Garni pagan temple built in 1st century A.D. and was devoted one of the Armenian pagan Gods- Mitra. This temple was considered a marvel among the temples of the Orient. Its uniqueness lies in the fact that it is the only example of the Hellenistic architecture of the territory of modern Armenia and the Caucasus. The film makes attempts to show some ceremonies and helps realize their sense. The experimentation for the film was done very accurately and it revealed an amazing phenomenon. It came out that the ray from the small window on the roof reflected on the bronze mirror then reflected on the pond and then to the idol-it lined a rectangular which coincided with the plan of the temple both in size and form. Is that simply architectural trick or another mystery?

Film shows this and it can be good for tourists. I think library of these kinds of films is necessary for religious tourism. Foreigners like the sad but with happy end story which is presented in the film. The Russian authorities decided to destroy Garni and transfer to Tiflis and reconstruct there in the end of the 19th century and Tiflis (now Tbilisi) was the capital of Transcaucasus at that time. They failed. The heaviness of huge rocks saved it. Either the idea had difficulties or

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shifting was rather expensive. We are grateful to the old masters. Tourists dream to touch the stones after listening to this story.

There are a lot of old legends and stories. They are interesting for tourists, especially when they find similarities with their ones. Nearly all mountainous peaks and springs have become saint and places for pilgrimage in Armenia. The maple forest near Armavir became a holy place too. They say rustling of the leaves has helped priests predict. Special trees, rocks, caves which are sanctified later were named in honor to different gods.

When new religious structures were being formed the professed ancient pantheistic places were not changed but only the names were changed leaving even the functions the same. Nowadays some of religious traditions are kept by common people. For example, transfiguration is celebrated but is not arranged well enough. Many elements of the occasion are absent and young people, rarely older ones only spray water on each other. Children call it just “spraying water”. But in Ara village on Ara mountain it is arranged with necessary elements. Holiday there lasts a few days and clergymen accompany people. I think the most exciting and spectacular is the moment when white doves are thrown up during the water-spray. As I remember it is performed in a film and tourists will take part with pleasure.

Another pilgrimage ceremony in the monastery of Bardughimeos apostle, is well described in the novel “Flashes of Fire” by Armenian classic novelist Raffi. The goosans (Armenian national poet-singers) tell stories glorifying the nature, people, bards give mini-concert too. Young people, girls and boys, dance and arrange a quiz.

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I can numerate and the list seems endless. I think as a beginner, classic is the most insured way in any case. In religious tourism the best is pilgrimage with some improved or reconstructed elements. The older and experienced people say: “Tried water is better than unknown wine”.

Construction of an ethnographic village

There is this idea of constructing a big park around the Khor-Virap. Americans have constructed Noah’s ark and this has become a very good source of financial profit. We can construct another Noah’s ark in the top of one of the hills around Khor-Virap with 3D cinema inside it where Noah will welcome the tourists. The tourists will turn on headphones and the story of Noah will be told. This kind of idea seems unreal from the first sight but, in fact, if this idea was realized it will be quite interesting and attractive. There may be showed the beautiful ceremony of viticulture and involve the tourists in the process of wine-making itself. There is a village near Khor Virap and we can make it an ethnographical village. An ethnographic village is a real or artificial settlement which portrays complete historical and ethnographic characteristics of life of a certain ethnic group. The concept is close to that of an open-air museum or "living museum". This will something totally new in Armenia that did not exist before but for which we have all the potential prerequisites. Actually this is a complex idea. Let us see discuss some details. The villagers will be given money and each of them will be responsible for a specific activity: bobbin spun, making vodka, pottery, etc. The villagers as well as the tourists will benefit. Near Khor-Virap is the territory where the ancient Armenian capital Dvin was located. The latter can be revitalized and reconstructed as a “new but old” historic city. There will be a special district where the hotels and restaurants will be located. Thus, the tourists may spend several days in this place.

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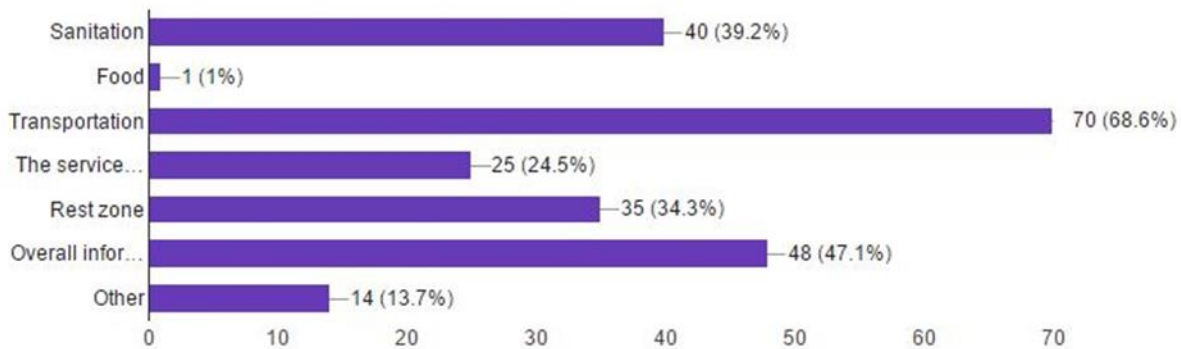
To implement the idea there may be made an investment program and present it to the US. By realizing this cooperation Armenia will be able to solve even issues of security that seems far from tourism with its scope but in fact these to phenomenon can be interdependent in this case. Why? Because American investment will be a guarantee for Armenians that Turks will not invade from that part.

A survey was conducted among 102 tourists in Armenia. The majority of them were Christians (51%). Among the interviewees were representatives of such nations as Persians, Russians, Ukrainians, Filipinos, Georgians, Greeks, Jews, etc. It was interesting to find out the motivations behind their visits to Armenia.



To the question what should Armenian touristic attractions improve for the country to become a famous spiritual tourism destination the tourists' answers implied the following:

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Does the government support to the development of the spiritual tourism? As the head of the State Tourism Committee of Armenia Zarmine Zeytuntsyan explained, the organization of a specific trip such as a pilgrimage or a spiritual tour is being implemented by a private sector. The State Tourism Committee of Armenia does not have anything to do with the tour planning. What the committee is responsible for is the processing of a specific policy, and a strategic approach for developing the sphere of tourism as a whole. The committee is also responsible for presenting Armenia in the international platform as a spiritual tourism destination. Are we active in the international arena from this aspect? Unfortunately, as Zeytuncian stated, Armenia is not taking part in any international conference or exhibition that is connected with either spiritual tourism or tourism in general. To fill this gap the committee has assigned certain tour-operators to design such programs that will be worth presenting to the world by the committee.

By drawing a comparison with Israel it comes out that the secret behind their success in spiritual tourism is the right way of packaging their resources. Moreover, there is a business approach, marketing and good public relations. According to Zeytuntsyan: "What we do in Armenia is quite different. We are not good at presenting our product. What we do is telling the tourists some historic facts about our churches, uninteresting dates for the tourists who, actually, seek the entertaining part of the journey. We ignore our traditions and ceremonies. The result is that after

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visiting the 3rd church, a tourist naturally gets bored. Is this a religious journey or even a pilgrimage? Not really. Pilgrimage involves in it the direct participation and involvement of the tourists.”

The most important reason behind such a failure, according to the head of the Committee is the lack of PR specialists in the tourism management of Armenia. Both professionals and volunteers can take part in the development programs of tourism. We have a problem in the way we approach this field: the development of tourism should be acknowledged as a start-up, as a business, and which is most important a sphere where PR’s role is crucial.

Limitations and Avenues for Further Research

The more purposes travellers may have the more types of tourism there are and will be. The list can be rather long: cultural and educational tourism, ecological and adventure tourism, hiking and cycling, special-interest and hobby. Special-interest and hobby are really expensive. Such examples are cookery and bird-watching, gambling and painting, motor racing and horse riding, botany and survival and a lot of others. I agree and repeat again the up-to-date hobbies are really expensive. What about some other new types of tourism in the world today? Some of the new types that will continue developing in the future are called the third-age and the fourth- age tourism. Third-age tourism concerns retired people and the fourth-age tourism involved disabled people. Both terms “third” and “fourth” age devised for the sake of convenience and politeness towards these kinds of tourists. Imagine how expensive they can be, and we do not forget that

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convenience includes toilet service, politeness, also can include “the first aid” service a plus to the other services.

Long-time travel industry observer and journalist Mr. Imtiaz Muqbil gave an interesting overview of a tourism industry in transition - moving from what he called the three “S”s of the old tourism - Sun, Sand and Sex towards what he sees as the emerging three “S”s in the new tourism being Serenity, Sustainability and Spirituality. (UNWTO’s international conference on Spiritual Tourism)

In any case, as long as the human need for meaning and wisdom is present, spiritual tourism can only develop and if well organized, it can bring forward diverse benefits such as personal spiritual growth, increased inter-cultural understanding and inter-faith literacy, sustained economic growth and even a deeper recognition of the rich and amazingly diverse spiritual heritage of humanity.

In an age of soulless materialism and endless consumption, taking time out to explore the depths of the world’s wisdom traditions is probably a good idea. Such “spiritual vacations” may well be a catalyst that brings greater enlightenment to the individual, increased understanding between different cultures and may even help to foster an emerging spiritual renaissance.

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