

A NEW NICHE IN THE ISLAMIC TOURISM: MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM

ABSTRACT

In today's multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, tourism experience has an emblematic role because it can represent a place-occasion of meeting between different experiences and cultures, between different religions, as a tool of recognizing identities and as a producer of communities of affection, shared places and common memories. Analyzing tourism in the Muslim society, we can find a new niche called Muslim friendly tourism that seems useful to deepen.

This paper focuses, in a first phase, the relationship between Islam and tourism through the considerations of doctrine and the Koran and then goes on to verify how relevant is, from a social and economic point of view, Muslim Friendly Tourism. The work will be conducted by analyzing the scientific insights and data relating to MFT in many Muslim and non – Muslim countries, in order to understand the peculiarities of this phenomenon, with some explicit references to Japan, Singapore and Italy (as examples of different attitudes towards MFT).

As a recent phenomenon, Muslim friendly tourism is an ever-evolving field and the subject of many studies in relation to the size of this market, the needs of Muslim travelers, the critical success factors in tourism favorable to Muslims and its economic repercussions. A certain fact is its constant economic growth; in fact, Muslim friendly tourism is becoming a relevant business, with a turnover that records a constant growth rate, even if recently hit by severe limitations imposed by Covid 19 on the movement of people.

In this panorama the Muslim friendly tourism is placed as an emerging and all-evolving sector. For these reasons it is and will be the subject of numerous future searches and projects, that will continue to focus and will delve into this market.

KEYWORDS: *Islamic Tourism, Religion, Muslim friendly tourism, Economic strength, Covid19.*

INTRODUCTION

Today, the management of diversity represents a broad challenge that affects many contexts of social life and, precisely in this perspective, the tourist experience takes on an emblematic role. In fact, tourism is not only one of the areas in which the management of diversity can be implemented, but rather a privileged ground in which to promote shared objectives, produce good examples and “good practices”, capable of generating effects also in other sectors of collective life, to improve the cultural and religious heritage of the territories.

These elements characterize a renewed dimension of tourism, also enhanced in the religious aspects and inserted in a broader philosophy of life in which experience the value and richness of diversity.

Tourism can thus be seen as a place-occasion of meeting between different experiences and cultures, between different religions, as a tool of recognizing identities and as a producer of communities of affection, shared places and common memories. Tourism, therefore, raises awareness and sense of belonging, without renouncing to own original identities, indeed managing to enhance them within wider and more inclusive belongings. In this space it is also understood that identities can foster contact with others and that differences foster peaceful and productive coexistence (Serino, 2009).

Therefore, tourism, fueled by the value of different identities, becomes the engine of a better mutual understanding, a strengthening of social integration and the promotion of higher living standards.

Religious tourism deserves to be placed in this context, as a phenomenon that uses the basic scheme of tourism, but creatively reinvents it with the grafting of religious experience, transforming its quality, purpose, rhythm and style of implementation. The so-called religious tourism does not coincide

with the pilgrimage (Dammacco, 2020), from which it differs in the contents and methods of realization, although the destinations coincide, which are the sanctuaries, the historic churches, the products of sacred art.

Religious tourism therefore has its own originality and presents itself as a complex and constantly evolving phenomenon, dominated by trends that express needs for knowledge, spirituality, consolation, root culture and socialization. Religious tourism, which disregards the individual religious options of tourists, is characterized by reasons in which an existential need prevails and represents an instrument of dialogue between cultures and religions; it is a formidable tool for modernization and fight against “ignorance”, as it makes knowledge of the elements of religious diversity and cultural diversity sustainable and promotes mutual tolerance, inclusion and solidarity (Notarstefano, Todisco, 2008).

The tourism experience can set and promote better standards relating to the way in which our societies deal with multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious relationships, the comparisons between different living conditions and experiences, between philosophies of life and beliefs, in an increasingly diversified and complex reality.

METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on library methods, initially analyzes the issue of religious tourism, defining and underlining its new dimension as an indicator of belonging and a tool for cultural and religious sharing, as well as highlighting the differences with pilgrimage (Rinschede, 1992), because the former, unlike the latter, is aimed at appreciating both spiritual and artistic-cultural dimensions of places.

Muslim religion greatly influences tourism and its development, to the point that pilgrimage and religious tourism become synonymous; in this sense it becomes important to evaluate and analyze the Muslim religious needs in the tourism field, in particular those related to hospitality, food and services offered. The analysis of Islamic tourism will take into great consideration, given the influence that the Muslim religion has on the whole life and

habits of Muslims (Jafari, Scott, 2014), the sacred text of the Koran, verifying its provisions about tourism. The central phenomenon of this research, the MFT, will be addressed in its cultural, religious and economic dimension, demonstrating how complex but central is its role in the tourism strategy of Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Therefore, the best practices linked to MFT will be presented and their use in the Italian territory will be verified, underlining a few critical issues.

Through statistical research, the work identifies the numbers of MFT and make comments on their relevance, highlighting two leading countries in the field of MFT, Japan and Singapore, which demonstrate the social and economic value of the phenomenon. Obviously, considering the current historical period, the work contains a reference to the Covid19 pandemic and its effects on the management methods of MFT and its numbers.

RELIGION AND TOURISM WITH PARTICULAR ATTENTION TO ISLAMIC TOURISM

Religious tourism is defined as a form of tourism that has faith as its main objective and, therefore, visiting places of religious interest (sanctuaries, churches, monasteries, convents and sacred places in general), in order to appreciate the spiritual dimension and the artistic-cultural beauty of the places, a sort of social tourism.

Unlike the pilgrimage which is a journey based only on devotion, penance or spiritual research in a place considered sacred. In other words, the pilgrim is the one who travels exclusively to go to pray at the sanctuary, to ask for indulgence and mercy, instead the religious tourist is any tourist who adds to the religious purpose also cultural and social leisure and entertainment activities. The doctrine, attempting to link the two concepts, argues that pilgrimage today is a way to discover the roots of faith, but also to immerse oneself in nature, in the history of places or to rediscover an identity. We could call it spiritual tourism (Cerutti, Piva, 2017).

The field of interest created around religious tourism/pilgrimage is so thriving that it has created the need to give birth to the first “Institute of religious

tourism and pilgrimage”, with the aim of analyzing both phenomena. The Muslim religion has a major influence on the way tourism and marketing develop in Muslim countries (Din, 1989); it also influences tourist behaviors, such as the choice of destinations and preferences of tourist products.

It is essential to meet Muslim religious needs in the tourism industry, especially those related to hospitality, attractions, transport and dining options. The Muslim prefers to remain within a family culture while traveling and this is due to the “revival” of Islamic cultures and the spread of Islamic values, an economic advantage for Islamic societies and strengthening of self-confidence, identity and Islamic beliefs faced with a negative idea of other cultures and lifestyles (Al-Hamarem, Steiner 2004).

Tourism of various kinds is however compatible with Islam and encouraged by its teachings (Ghadami, 2012). At the same time, however, religion requires adherence to the provisions regarding conduct, dress, food and prayer. Interpretations of religious restrictions are not uniform and change within and between countries which have different socio-cultural impacts, but societies in general tend to be conservative. Political factors are also critical and religion has become highly politicized among traditionally moderate regimes. The Islamic religion provides for particular types of travel that have maintained an important social and religious function, although constantly adapting to the changing world. Pilgrimages incorporate the obligation to migrate and pilgrimage is one of the five pillars of Islam alongside the belief in God and the Prophet Mohammed, prayers, fasting and charity. According to the text of the Koran, Muslims should travel to fully appreciate the beauty of God’s world and also visit their friends and relatives. They are responsible for providing hospitality to visitors who, under Islamic law, enjoy the rights of citizens (Okhovat, 2010).

Over one million annual trips to Saudi Arabia for the *Hajj* require a massive organizational effort from the authorities (Travel & Tourism Intelligence). Many Muslims seem to share the common enthusiasm for travel and leisure, in fact, outbound tourism grows together with considerable wealth. Also in the tourism field, the gender differences observed elsewhere are manifested, due to some strictly patriarchal Islamic cultures that impose severe restrictions on women. The practices of industry and tourism movements are influenced

by unbalanced gender relations that are present in different societies. Male prominence is a feature of many Muslim countries in which women are denied a public role; in the Middle East, the lower status of women is legitimized by an incorrect interpretation of religious texts, with consequent barriers to participation in tourism and other spheres of activity (Okhovat, 2010). Simultaneously, many women believe that correct textual interpretation protects their rights; the veil, for example should be seen as an assertion not of female oppression, but of cultural identity. While recognizing the variations in Muslim women's perceptions of power and position, in general they appear to be disadvantaged as both workers and tourists.

In the context of tourism, and in particular religious tourism, the Islamic religion takes on particular importance since the mobility of the Muslim faithful is one of their characteristic features. The most important sacred places to which the flow of the faithful is consistent are found in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. It's relevant to underline that the concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage in Islamic culture coincide, because of the relevance of religion in daily life; while, the secularization process that has characterized the Christian world, allowing to distinguish the concepts of religious tourism and pilgrimage.

To address the issue of tourism in Islam, it is essential to start from what is contained in the sacred text, that is, how does the Koran deal with travel? The journey has a decisive role in Islam, in fact, with "the *Hegira* of Mohammed" (abandonment of Mecca by Muhammad, to move to Medina in 662 AD) the journey returns repeatedly within the sacred text and inside it it's possible to divide the verses that refer to this topic into two macro-categories: the verses that deal with the religious journey, with reference therefore to the pilgrimage and together with the verses on the pilgrimage, there are those that concern the *ziyārah*, or an act devotional that has developed over time, with which the Muslim faithful go to some places and visit sites related to the sacred history of Islam (visits to cemeteries, mosques and shrines). The *ziyārah*, it must be specified, does not constitute a traditional obligation for the Muslim faithful, but is only strongly recommended by some legal schools, although there is no uniformity of views on it. This type of dualism that emerges from the analysis of Islamic religious provisions, which refer to tourism, seems to benefit some

countries that have been able to exploit the issue. First among all, Uzbekistan, which is highly valuing religious tourism, offering religiously characterized tourist packages (Aniqoh, Hanik, 2021).

The second group of verses of the sacred text, on the other hand, is composed of religious provisions that invite the faithful Muslim to travel to discover the beauty of divine creation. In fact, in the Koran we read, among others, a paragraph in which the faithful are exhorted to go to the earth and see how Allah initiated creation. Therefore, the Koran admits and encourages tourism, makes it lawful, if all the other prescriptions present in it are respected.

MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM

Made this brief premise, we can ask ourselves why we need to identify a specific category for Muslim tourists comes from. Or rather, why we talk about Muslim Friendly Tourism? Islam, as is well known, not only regulates the relationship between God and man, but also all aspects of human action and while all these rules can be easily applied in Muslim-majority territories, where everything is religiously oriented, the situation becomes complicates in countries where Islam is in the minority. In these contexts, it becomes essential to identify fairly simple solutions, capable of allowing the faithful to experience the journey in accordance with their own religious principles (Carboni, Perelli, Sistu, 2014).

Among the most important issues, in this sense, there is the issue of food precepts, or those rules that host countries must respect in order to provide customers with products that are stored in such a way as to avoid contamination, that do not contain alcohol, that are prepared in compliance with specific rituals and that are served, at certain times of the year (for example during Ramadan), after sunset. With reference to religious nutrition, a decisive role is played by certifications, which ensure, or at least should ensure, the compliance of foods with religious precepts. In their absence, the faithful Muslim prefers to turn to traditional ethnic shops, in the belief that the common religious affiliation can be a guarantee of reliability.

Another particularly relevant topic for Muslim travelers is that of prayer and, therefore, in non-Muslim countries that want to welcome Muslim tourists it is necessary to imagine solutions to facilitate the practice of prayer. Those above are just 2 of the examples that can be made with reference to the topic under analysis. It is clear, therefore, that countries wishing to attract a Muslim clientele must equip themselves to guarantee the Muslim faithful the opportunity to live the experience of travel in compliance with religious precepts. In the analysis of MFT, it is mainly necessary to note whether and to what extent this phenomenon is important in the Italian and international panorama. The most recent statistics (Global Muslim Tourism Index 2021) show that Muslim tourism is constantly growing and the data made available show constant growth until 2019, with 160 million Muslim travelers, only to suffer a stop due to Covid19 and drop to 42 million in 2020; but the forecasts are absolutely positive, so we could probably return to high values as early as 2023.

In addition to the advantageous economic effects, which will be discussed later, the MFT can become a good vehicle for interaction and integration and this from two points of view: an internal point of view, in the sense that thanks to the MFT, dialogue would be strengthened with the local Islamic communities, which should be involved in tourist activities aimed at Muslims and at the same time it is necessary to imagine travel itineraries that put Muslim tourists in contact with the locals.

An external point of view, since the way in which tourism is approached also affects the image of the country abroad, because tourism could be considered an excellent tool for public diplomacy (Laurano, 2011). Currently, the diplomatic process sees as protagonists not only the institutional actors, but also the people and groups who carry out political relations with their activities.

At this point, it is useful to highlight the best practices with reference to Muslim friendly tourism, which represent excellent suggestions for potential interested parties. The criteria to keep in mind are basically 5:

- facilitations incoming, or the ease of the criteria for obtaining a visa;
- communication, i.e. the ability of social networks and specific internet sites to attract Muslim customers;
- environment, understood in a very broad sense, therefore on the one hand with reference to the climate, on the other with reference to

several elements, such as the security of the territory, the degree of religious freedom guaranteed within the host territory and the acceptance of Islamic practices;

- inclusion of the local Muslim community, to make tourists feel at ease and at the same time integrate the Islamic community into the socio-economic structure of the territory;
- services and experience that are offered. The services are divided into essential and possible. The essential include religiously oriented nutrition and attention to prayer (for example, attention in hotels to the presence of rugs for ritual prayer, the indication in the rooms of Mecca, the absence of alcoholic beverages). The possible ones include, however, the meeting with local Muslim communities, the visit to the Islamic sites that may be present, the possibility that the hotel is equipped with special prayer rooms and also that there are some spaces reserved for Muslim families and women, such as swimming pools (Zawawi, Ramli, 2017).

At the light of all these criteria, it is easy to understand why Muslims travel mainly to countries where Islam is the dominant religion. How and to what extent does Italy deal with the phenomenon of MFT? Looking at the statistics concerning this aspect, Italy does not have a good position, because it lags far behind other countries that have made MFT a real business, such as Japan and Singapore which are quickly equipped to ensure many services, one of them, the mosques inside the airports. Italy, so far, has failed to attract a good share of Muslim travelers and this is due to the scarcity of services, despite the large historical and artistic heritage. By analyzing the above criteria, Italy proves that it does not create particular problems or limitations with regard to the criteria for obtaining a visa. Problems begin to emerge when it comes to prayer in the places of arrival and transit, in fact there are few airports that have Islamic halls for prayer, such as the airports of Turin and Pisa or interreligious prayer rooms, such as the airport of Rome.

Regarding communication, even if there are some web sites that deal with MFT, they are still few and poorly articulated to meet the needs of Muslim travelers and the same can be said for the tourist packages offered to Muslim travelers which are still few and “unattractive”. Italy certainly gets a good

evaluation for the environment, because of the wide protection of religious freedom and the freedom to wear religious symbols, or the possibility for Muslim women to freely wear the veil, are extremely positive elements that increase the level of security of the territory. The critical element of the MFT in Italy is represented, as already mentioned, by services. For example, if we talk about halal services actually offered by hotels, they are very few and are mainly present in hotels in big cities. The same can be said for places of worship to pray.

Therefore, it is necessary to understand which elements should be aimed at to attract the attention of Muslim travelers. Certainly, should be enhanced the Islamic cultural heritage, thriving in Italy, and then the made in Italy both for food and for other sectors, such as fashion. It would also be important to develop Islamic-oriented services and think about shared places of worship, as an instrument of mutual knowledge and integration.

Eco-friendly itineraries should also be designed, given the attention that Islam places on the protection of creation. Basically, respect for religious precepts becomes an element of economic growth, demonstrating the link that can be created between religion and economy and how much religious freedom represents a useful element for economic growth when used as a parameter for managing certain activities.

THE ECONOMIC STRENGTH OF MUSLIM FRIENDLY TOURISM

MFT is just a fashion that will disappear in a few years or is a real opportunity for business as sustainable tourism for example? I think it is a real opportunity for business, but let's see the numbers.

One billion six hundred million Muslims to the world, which according to United Nations estimates will reach the 2 billion marks by 2030, are numbers that cannot be confined to a marginal market. Certainly not all of them will be potential tourists, but let's consider about 50% of that includes those who can travel and who have the skills to do it: it's almost one billion people, a number higher than the total number of people inhabitants of the European

continent (COMCEC Coordination Office, 2017). We can also consider the rampant Islamophobia that in the last 20 years bringing Muslims to deepen their knowledge increasingly and consequently to practice it more, to defend their identity (religion is a fundamental element of it).

An instinctive social trend which is having important effects on international politics and above all on the economy, with an exponential growth in the Halal market sector and consequently in the MFT. More and more countries are moving actively to accommodate this target, creating synergies, drawing up agreements, implementing its structures and infrastructures, forming its own tourist offer regarding interculturality, sponsoring fairs and exhibitions related to the theme, promoting the destination in target countries and many other similar actions that consider Muslims traveling. This shows that MFT is taking place increasingly configuring as a significant business, with a turnover that currently stands at \$ 150 billion a year but which has a growth rate 8% per year, according to Dinar Standard estimates (State of the Global Economy Report, 2016/17).

Despite the Muslim market is still growing, this niche market is significantly made up of young (Cuesta-Valiño, Bolifa, Nuñez.Barriopedro, 2020) who are vibrant and longer life spans. Considering the year of 2030, as done above, it is projected that 29 percent of the global young population aged 15 till 29 years old will be Muslim. Likewise, the characteristics of young Muslim segment are computer literate even always enthusiastic about the advanced of technology, modern, and faith believer. As a matter of fact, Islam has been seen as way to improve themselves. Not to mention, they are loyal towards brands as well as conscious. Under those circumstances, the key players in tourism industry need to understand insightfully the behavior of these young travelers so that they can tailor made their need well through appropriate channel. Moreover, Muslim market is a large and faster flourishing population. Globally the Muslim market, with usd 151 billion of total expenditure on travel by the year 2015, is in fact the second largest travel source countries after China (usd 168 billion). Similarly, countries with majority Muslim market are fastest growing economy countries, for instance: Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and so forth. How to capitalize this big market which leads to global opportunity? Since there is a demand for Muslim friendly destination and then obviously there is a need to promote Muslim friendly destination.

Correspondingly, Muslim market is promising market to tap and invest in. Moreover, the minority Muslim countries have become more popular destination for Muslim travelers from majority Muslim countries since they want to have different travel experience; one of the examples of minority Muslim countries where has managed to attract more Muslim visitors coming year to year is Japan (Hasanah, Harun, 2018, pp. 447-450). This is demonstrated by the growing number of restaurants and hotels in Japan that provide services for Muslim tourists and which create the country's good reputation among Muslims.

The Japanese policy, in terms of MFT, is the result of a valid collaboration between government and population in the sense that the former has managed the rules and structures aimed at welcoming Muslim tourists and the population has shown that it is capable of welcoming in a correct way the same tourists with cultural and religious habits very different from the local ones (Pratama, 2022).

The tourism industry itself in Japan has become more crucial since Tokyo has won the bid to host Olympic games 2020. The government of Japan has targeted to increase the number of tourists from foreign countries to twenty million by the year of 2020; but the Covid 19 pandemic has changed the matter, as I will say later.

Another non-Muslim country very popular for Muslim tourists is Singapore. The latter has been able to make the most of its geographical proximity to two Islamic countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, and the flow of international tourism to them, presenting itself as a country specialized in Muslim friendly products. This qualification was supported by the presence of advanced infrastructures thanks to which Singapore, in 2017, assumed leadership on non-Muslim destinations.

Singapore has also correctly created an appropriate legislative framework in line with the increase in international tourism demand for Islamic tourism and has established a halal certification body (Council of Islamic Scholars). Then Singapore also managed to take advantage of the diversity of its surrounding cultural environment and the rich composition of its people (which coexist peacefully and make it an excellent example of multicultural country) (Elghuzawany, 2019).

It is also worthwhile for Italy to focus on this segment to diversify its tourism offer, also obtaining large profits, given the high spending capacity of Muslim tourists. In recent years, many efforts have been concentrated in Italy in attracting new tourism segments, by virtue of their economic rise: an example is the Russian or Chinese clientele. Even Muslim tourism begins to represent an important investment for Italy (as demonstrated for example by the Italian Muslim Friendly, an innovative project for Muslim Tourism that includes a large network of companies operating in this sector and this tourist industry), because it would allow Italy to further enhance its territory, making it known through effective and study promotional campaigns, the wonders that make up our country.

It will be also the opportunity to promote not only art cities, beaches, lakes or mountains, already known internationally but also territories that are less known to the general public and which have great potential because they offer different experiences and peculiarities and so are original. Italy is conducting many initiatives, with reference to MFT, with moderate results, but the main problem (that create other practical problems, such as the quality of services mentioned in the previous paragraph) is still the lack of a network among companies. In the structuring of a tourist offer, there are no “intermedium” structures and companies between a step and another, which can offer fundamental services for the Muslim tourist. The only packages made in Italy for tourists of Muslim faith the “Puglia Halal Tour” and “Sicilia Muslim Friendly”; the first one has already requested from the United States, Malaysia and the countries of the Middle East, but at the moment this initiative is stopped due to the Covid19. The numbers of the MFT are important, as mentioned above, if you manage to enter this market segment and Italy is an extremely coveted country. But without the necessary precautions, it risks being ousted from this market, which could engage many companies operating in the tourism sector, and create new jobs, as well as new professional figures who could spend their knowledge also in foreign countries.

The frame is changed because of Covid19. One of the first effect of the impact that the Covid-19 pandemic is having on the world is the adoption by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) of the unprecedented decision to postpone the start of the Olympic Games by one year and Tokyo 2020

Paralympics (the postponement of the 32nd edition of the Games, took place from 23 July to 8 August 2021). Nonetheless Japan still is at top position among countries which boosting Muslim friendly destination. This is in line with Japanese hospitality style, spirit of *omotenashi* which means become more welcome and provide warmth towards guests including Muslims.

This paper is about Islamic tourism, so it cannot fail to keep in mind how Islam reacted to the recent world emergency caused by the spread of Covid-19 (El-Gohary, 2020). Each religious faith has responded to the crisis by using the tools that derive from its theological reflection and its own tradition and as regards Islam, since the beginning of the pandemic, official religious institutions have played a very important role, covering the role of mediators between citizens and political institutions.

Although Islam encourages motivates Muslims to travel around the globe, during all trips Muslims must preserve safety while doing that. So, it's required to them to avoid travelling and to stay safe and look after their wellbeing.

The Fatwa European Council – an institution founded in the 1990s by Yūsuf al-Qaradāwī with the aim of developing Islamic jurisprudence for Muslim believers living in Europe-, which usually meets once a year to examine the most relevant issues for the European Islamic diaspora, have organized two extraordinary meetings in March and April to analyze and discuss the tragic issue of Covid-19 and its practical implications in society.

The Council then elaborated 34 *fatwe* issued (a *fatwa* is an explanation of Islamic law, given by an expert in religious law, regarding a specific question, often at the request of a person or judge to resolve a problem on which Islamic jurisprudence is not clear enough) to regulate the life of European Muslims in the time of the Coronavirus – from the question of prayer, to funeral rituals, to the way of living Ramadan in quarantine, preceded by an introductory reflection on the Islamic conception of epidemics. From these provisions, with reference to a verse of the Creator's *sura* (35,43), is clear that the Islamic vision of epidemics is based on the system of "customs" (*sunan*) that God has established for the functioning of man and natural realities. The *sunan* system is based on the principle of causality and provides for the existence of two types of causes: direct and immanent causes and metaphysical and abstract causes. This means events do not happen only with the intervention of God

in human life but are the effect of both this intervention and of immanent causes, which in any case act within a system governed by divine laws. From the Islamic point of view, this distinction is of great importance because it allows us to hold man responsible for his actions (Pellegrino, 2020).

Therefore, the epidemic should not be understood as a divine punishment, but as an event aimed at reminding men of the blessings with which God fills them and would represent a warning for all men on the importance of constantly entrusting themselves to God, invoking their protection because «it is in adversity that man seeks help» (Cor. 35,15 and 31,32). Consequently, Islam would perform a reassurance function, because the strength of faith leads man to good and allows him to face adversity with courage, guaranteeing him psychological protection and conducting him, pushing him towards good habits and prohibiting those bad.

Even the *Hajj*, the particularly important pilgrimage to the Mecca of Muslims, has been “very limited” in 2020 due to the coronavirus. Saudi Arabia has clarified that at time of Coronavirus, to protect the health of all Muslims, only a limited numbers of local pilgrims will be allowed to perform *Hajj* in 2020.

In normal times the pilgrimage is one of the most significant moments in the Muslim religious calendar. But only citizens from countries around the world who are already resident in Saudi Arabia were allowed to attend in 2020.

Only an extremely limited number of people currently living in the kingdom may take part, so no *Hajj* will be permitted to believers coming from outside Saudi; they cannot travel to Mecca in 2020 due to the elevated risk of infection.

While the *Hajj* has been restricted and suspended in the past because of conflict or disease, 2020 is the first time Saudi Arabia – established in 1932 – has so significantly curtailed the pilgrimage. Indonesia and Malaysia, which combined send around a quarter-million Muslims to the *Hajj* each year, had already announced they would not be sending their citizens to the pilgrimage this year, in part because it had become too late to prepare for it.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated, for a Muslim, religion is an important component of daily and practical life. Furthermore, the Islamic doctrine encourages work, trade and also travel, an action that has several objectives according to Islamic teachings: explore the world and thus appreciate creation, confront people from other cultures, exchange knowledge and develop trade, take advantage of the psychological benefits of journey to relax the mind and increase one's spirituality.

Based on these premises, it was decided to analyze the issue of MFT, because it is considered as an emerging and all-evolving sector (Som, Masutami, Ahmad, 2016). In the opinion of the writer, this phenomenon represents an excellent opportunity for cultural and economic growth of the country that decides to become Muslim friendly, as well as representing a tool for inclusion. Furthermore, the analysis of MFT is also interesting with reference to people, or tourists of Muslim faith who, above all, have a strong propensity to travel both for business and leisure reasons, have an increasing spending capacity, as well as having a medium-high level of education and an intense use of technology.

For these reasons, for sure, it is and will be the subject of numerous future searches and projects, that will continue to focus and will delve into the size of this market, needs of Muslim travelers, their religious considerations during holidays, segmentation criteria for Muslim tourists, critical success factors in MFT, destination planning and product development customized based on different MFT sub-segments. Related to MFT there are many interesting areas of research, such as the food certification system and the Islamic finance. In these fields there are already interesting researches and studies in international arena, but they deserve to be more explored to offer better experiences to Muslim travelers and the impacts of these activities on the destinations might also reveal interesting results.

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