

Paper title:

**Tourism donations in sacred settings: An exploratory study of visitor donations in an English cathedral.**

Keywords: cathedrals, tourism, visitor donations, heritage attractions, intrinsic motivations.

**ABSTRACT**

This paper explores visitor behaviour in relation to making donations for Chichester Cathedral upkeep. It found that 94% of respondents were aware of the donation appeals and that 71% of them went on to make a donation, with the visitors aged 50 to 69 and living within 25 miles of the Cathedral being the most frequent and generous donors. When asked to suggest what they would consider an appropriate donation, 44% of respondents gave a figure between £1 and £2.

This paper argues that the present donation management measures at Chichester Cathedral are insufficient to bring the desired income and makes recommendations on the measures that Cathedral managers can implement to increase visitor donations. Among these recommendations, the most significant are the profiling of visitors, the identification and targeting of donors' personal meanings to give a donation and in the case of Chichester Cathedral, to specifically target these meanings on their local, middle-aged visitors.

**1. INTRODUCTION AND PAPER AIM**

This paper explores visitors' behaviour in relation to donations in Chichester Cathedral, and suggest measures that cathedral managers can

implement to encourage visitor donations. This paper also makes a contribution to the limited literature available on visitors' donations in tourism settings by discussing the views of visitors to an English Cathedral on their inclination to make donations for the building upkeep and the appropriateness of donated amounts.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 The changing role of cathedrals as visitor attractions**

Religious tourism is an increasing global phenomenon (Shackley, 2001) which is turning cathedrals into important players in the UK visitor attraction market (Churches Tourism Association, 2007). In Britain, a total of seventy cathedrals constitute an important part of England's visitor attraction market (ALVA, 2014), with three cathedrals (St. Paul's, Westminster Abbey and Canterbury) ranking among the UK's 25 most-visited paid attractions in the country, receiving over 5 million visits between them. The popularity of churches as visitor attractions clearly shows that there is a need for churches and cathedrals to generate sufficient income to maintain the fabric of the site (Shackley, 2006) and to manage all its users in a manner that is sustainable and reconciles the financial needs of visitor management with the religious needs of worshippers (ICORET, 2006).

### **2.2 The need for revenue generation in cathedrals**

Despite acting as the historic centrepieces of cities and having enormous financial burdens for their maintenance, British cathedrals receive no financial

help from central church funds or government (Shackley, 2006:134) and remain underfunded visitor attractions with few opportunities for generating revenue (Shackley, 2002: 347). Running costs in order to keep a cathedral open are high, ranging £11.000 a day for Lincoln Cathedral (Lincoln Cathedral, 2009) to £13.000 a day for York cathedral (York Minster, 2009). Further to this, it is estimated that Canterbury Cathedral will require £50 million over a five-year period to carry out essential restoration work to stonemasonry, windows and roof (Canterbury Cathedral, 2007). Therefore, many cathedrals have developed schemes to generate an income from increasing visitor numbers. However, Britain's cathedrals find themselves in a unique position among tourism attractions when it comes to the mechanisms they use to generate revenue for its upkeep. Boniface (1995:100) warns that any income generation activity must allow a religious site to "stay true to its essence and type".

### **2.3 Visitors' perceptions of donations in churches**

When considering how to raise revenue from their visitors, most cathedrals have resisted the introduction of entry fees on the grounds that a part of the church's mission is that a place of worship should be open to all (Winter and Gasson, 1996:176). Stevens *et al.* (1995:86) also found that the public tended to perceive 'pricing' activities as unsuitable to the aims of the church. Instead, cathedrals have encouraged visitors to make voluntary donations in order to support their upkeep, with a common figure for suggested donations of approximately £2.50 per visitor (Shackley, 2002: 347).

However, a review of the limited available evidence indicates that cathedral visitors are reluctant to make voluntary donations, either due to perceptions of the church as a wealthy institution, or due to the belief that cathedrals receive government support, “while those coming on organised tours think that their tour operators make a contribution to the building visited, which is hardly the case” (Shackley, 2006:138). Voase (2007:48) suggests that cathedrals requesting a voluntary donation as an alternative to charging “typically receive less than 20% of the recommended sum per visitor”, while Shackley (2002:347) places the “generally accepted figure” for visitor donations in English cathedrals in 2002 at 30 to 40 pence per visitor.

Shackley (2006:136) argues that the level of donations and other revenue-generating activities by cathedrals is affected by a range of factors such as their location, size and profile as visitor attractions. Riecken *et al.* (1994:46) suggest that the individual success of an organisation in raising donations is affected by the high number of charities competing for a share of consumers’ income, citing a figure of 140,000 charities in the UK, coupled with a resurgence of materialistic and selfish values among the potential donor population.

#### **2.4 Managing and promoting visitor donations in religious settings**

Rosenblatt *et al.* (1986:235) argue that when faced with competing donation demands by non-for-profit organisations, potential donors will undertake a decision-making process similar to that of making a product purchase. The authors propose that the key factors on which donors base their

decisions are the perceived seriousness and visibility of the charitable cause; the potential alleviation of the issue brought about by the donation; how affected they feel by the issue causing the appeal, and the amount of effort they are willing to undertake in order to make a donation (Rosenblatt *et al.*, 1986:236).

On the other hand, in their determination of factors that influence an individual's charitable donation behaviour, Ranganathan and Henley (2008) add the religiosity of the individual who receives the donation appeal as a key factor in inducing the donation behaviour. This advice resonates with Bennett's (2003:26) conclusion, who argues that organisations seeking donations should identify and target donors who have a favourable impression of their organisational values and who have specific personality trait factors (low hedonism, empathy, valuing warm relations, achievement and inner self-esteem) that make them likely to donate consistently and generously. Lorenz *et al.* (2015:506) also suggest that when seeking monetary donations, it is more effective to make charitable appeals to in-group individuals under power-oriented messages. This suggests that in the case of a church requesting financial donations, such an appeal is more likely to succeed with members of the church's religious denomination by communicating to them that the goal of action is to affect change and that the action will be successful.

In terms of how and where the donation appeals are made, Savari *et al.* (2015) argue that the targeting a donor's self-signalling process linked to prosocial decision-making with hedonic references induces a shift in the utility derived from the donation. They go on to argue that such self-signalling increases the likelihood of donation behaviour as strongly as the social signalling process advocated by Basil *et al.* (2006), who argue that the

presence of others also enhances the donors' sense of responsibility to behave prosocially.

This review has highlighted that cathedral visitors present a viable opportunity for much needed income generation to fund the upkeep of these buildings. It has also shown that unless they apply specific management measures to increase charitable donations, cathedrals are unlikely to achieve adequate funding through the limited range of visitor-related income generation options at their disposal.

### **3. THE LOCAL CONTEXT: CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL**

One of Chichester Cathedral's strategic management priorities is a commitment not to charge admission fees (Chichester Cathedral, 2007), which limits their access to an immediate and substantial source of income, forcing the cathedral to ensure that alternative income sources such as donations are developed and implemented effectively.

Chichester Cathedral is open daily with no admission charge. Visitors are welcomed at the door by members of a large team of volunteer stewards. Complimentary information leaflets are distributed in a number of languages and a children's guide is provided. Free guided tours take place twice daily and roving guides are accessible at other times to answer questions (Chichester Cathedral, 2007).

Several traditional collections boxes are situated around the cathedral for visitor donations and provision is also made for donation by credit card through the use of two electronic donation terminals, similar to automated money dispensers. All donation points and boxes are accompanied by poster displays outlining the cathedral's running and maintenance costs, some citing a daily cost of £3000 while one gives a £1-million yearly figure. These posters also highlight the desire to avoid the imposition of visitors' entry fees and the need to protect and restore the building. Visitors are encouraged to make a minimum donation of £5, with the electronic donation terminals providing options for this amount and five larger sums up to £25 or 'more', although visitors are also encouraged to donate whatever they can afford. The income generated from donations is used to support the daily running of the building, but one collection box is specifically designated to the Restoration and Development Trust.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

The information in this paper was requested by cathedral managers to inform discussion about methods of income generation and forms part of a larger, 28-question long, self-administered questionnaire. This data relates to five questions that explored visitor behaviour towards donations (appendix A). Two of these questions related to the visibility of signs soliciting donations from visitors, and the fact that donations were requested for different purposes. Two questions asked visitors if they had made a donation and if so, the method used (card or cash) and the amount donated. Finally, after informing visitors of the

cathedral's daily running cost of £3000, respondents were requested to state what they would consider to be an appropriate minimum donation amount to suggest to visitors. The collected data was supplemented with profiling questions about the respondents, including their age and distance travelled.

Data collection was carried out at Chichester Cathedral over an eleven-day period covering two weekends, one of which was an extended Holiday weekend, and three days midweek; with the peak holiday period purposefully chosen to maximise the number of casual visitors. There were no special events taking place at the cathedral during this time. Data collection was carried out between 10am and 6pm to ensure a good cross-section of visitors. Care was taken to avoid times of formal worship to increase the chance that respondents would be casual visitors. A sample size of 350 respondents was chosen for this research, with the majority of visitors being approached after having completed their visit to the Cathedral but before they left the building. A systematic random sampling frame was used to select respondents, with every 3<sup>rd</sup> visitor walking towards the door being approached for participation. In case of refusals, the next available visitor leaving the Cathedral would be approached until a person would agree to participate. If the selected individual was part of a group, it was left to the group to decide which group member should complete the survey. Selected individuals were asked by the researcher if they would like to participate in a research project on behalf of the cathedral, and given the opportunity to read the questionnaire disclaimer. If the response was positive, the individual was given a questionnaire and invited to sit at the back of the cathedral to complete it.

The completed questionnaires were processed using Microsoft Office Excel, with further analysis obtained using data comparison functions on Microsoft Office Access (Microsoft, 2003). Nearly 37% of participants chose not to reply the question 'If you made a donation today, how much did you donate?' and 32% participants declined the request to indicate an 'appropriate figure for a minimum donation'. For the first question the researchers assigned minimum potential donation figures for all respondents who said they had donated in order to calculate a rough estimate of the total amount donated, while in the second question all the respondents who declined to answer were isolated for analysis purposes.

Although the relatively small sample size means that it is not possible to extrapolate the results to the overall population of visitors to Chichester cathedral or any other cathedrals in the UK, it is sufficient to provide a useful indication of the breadth of opinion and attitudes under investigation.

## **5. RESULTS**

This section discusses the findings about respondents' attitudes towards donations and entrance charges in Chichester Cathedral.

### **5.1 Visitor behaviour towards donations**

A total of 352 responses were received, of which two were deemed incomplete and discarded. For the remaining 350 respondents, Figure 1 shows

their distribution across their respective age ranges. As there were only two respondents under 15 years of age who participated in the research, this age group was under-represented and was thus eliminated from the sample for further analysis to avoid distorting the tendencies displayed by the other age groups, bringing the total number of valid responses to 348.

### **FIGURE 1 HERE**

Visitors to Chichester Cathedral were highly aware of appeals for donations, with 64% of visitors noticing several appeals inside the building and 30% noticing at least one, with only 6% not noticing any. This indicates that the notice boards and collection boxes inside the cathedral, informing visitors of the cost of running the building and requesting donations, are effective in raising visitor's awareness of the cathedral's financial needs. There did appear to be some confusion, however, over the nature of the appeals, as only 46% of respondents were aware that there were appeals for different funds, while 48% had not noticed this distinction.

Almost three quarters of respondents (71%, n= 249) stated to have made a donation towards the cathedral, of which 67% donated cash and 4% donated by credit card using the electronic donation terminals. Just 23% of visitors said they had not made a donation and 6% did not answer this question.

The proportion of visitors who made donations as a percentage of their age group shows that roughly between 60% to 75% of all visitors across all age ranges made donations, with the propensity to donate being higher between

the 30 to 69 age ranges, while those under 29 or over 70 were slightly less likely to donate (Figure 2).

### **FIGURE 2 HERE**

Unfortunately, 37% of respondents who made a donation declined to say how much they donated. Figure 3 presents the responses of the 63% of respondents who were willing to state the amount of donation made, with the most frequent donation amount stated being between £1 - £2, which is significantly below the £5 amount suggested by the Cathedral in its donation posters and under half of the amount of £4 that Cathedral managers believe visitors should donate in order to attain a sustainable level of funding from donations.

### **FIGURE 3 HERE**

It is difficult to estimate the total amount of donations given by visitors, as donation amount ranges were used to facilitate respondents' replies and also because 37% of respondents who made a donation did not want to reveal how much they gave. For those visitors who revealed how much they have given, it was assumed that they made the minimum donation within their donation bracket (i.e. £1 given if £1-£2 bracket was chosen). For those visitors who did not reveal the donation given, a £5 figure was used for those respondents who said they have donated by card, as this is the minimum amount that the card donation terminal displays on its screen; while a 30 pence figure was used for those who donated cash without revealing the amount, as

this is a commonly cited figure for average donations received by cathedrals in previous surveys (Winter and Gasson, 1996; Shackley, 2002).

Using the assumptions above, a figure of £589.50 was regarded as a conservative estimate of the total amount of money that could have been donated by respondents for the period of study, giving a total of £2.36 per donating respondent (n= 249). Considering the total number of respondents (n= 348), including those who didn't make a donation, this figure amounts to an average donation of £1.69 for this particular group of cathedral's visitors. This estimated value is considerably higher than those found in previous studies on cathedral donations, with Winter and Gasson (1996) citing an average figure of about 38 pence for three English cathedrals that didn't charged admission, while Shackley (2002) quotes a figure of 30 to 40 pence per visitor. It is also significantly higher than existing data for donations from visitors at Chichester Cathedral, which amounted to 68 pence per visitor in 2006. Although there are no other estimates of visitor donations in cathedral settings, the estimation made based on the findings of this research is surprisingly high compared to the existing data from other studies. It should be noted that that the cathedral could not provide the actual donation amounts corresponding to the study period. Therefore, there is a lack of triangulation data that may corroborate or challenge this study's results. Thus, the estimated figure for donations presented here must be taken with great caution.

The data collected suggest that the visitor's age has an impact on donation behaviour, with Figure 1 showing that people within the 50-59 age

range constituted the largest group of visitors, followed by those in the 60 to 69 age range, while Figure 4 shows that these two age groups also constitute the most generous donors, particularly those aged between 50 to 59, with more than 50% of this age group donating from £3 upwards, including nearly 33% of these respondents who gave upward from £5. These results are likely to reflect the increase in disposable income typical of middle-age groups whose children have left home. On the other hand, the fact that the visitors giving least generous donations were those aged under 29 years and those over 70 years old is also a likely reflection of the limited disposable income typical of recently employed or retired age groups.

#### **FIGURE 4 HERE**

Figure 5 shows that the distance travelled to visit the cathedral also has an impact on donation behaviour, with the most generous visitors being local residents, i.e. those travelling less than 25 miles, while the visitors who gave less overall were those who had travelled over 200 miles, including international visitors. However, this pattern of donations follows the general distance-travelled profile of the respondent sample, with local visitors travelling less than 25 miles accounting for nearly 41% of the respondent sample, followed by those travelling under 50 miles (22%).

#### **FIGURE 5 HERE**

## **5.2 Suggested Minimum Donation**

The survey explained that the daily cost of running the cathedral is approximately £3,000, and asked visitors to suggest an appropriate figure for a minimum donation. Almost a third of all respondents (32%) chose not to answer this question. From those who answered, the most commonly suggested donation figures were £2 (28% of respondents) and £1 (16%) (Figure 6).

### **FIGURE 6 HERE**

The donation figures suggested by respondents closely matched the actual amount donated by the majority of visitors and confirms that if Chichester Cathedral were to rely solely on donations for income generation, it would be unlikely to meet the financial expectations of its managers.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Virtually all visitors surveyed (94%) were aware of the Cathedral's appeals for donations during their visit, and a significant proportion of them (71%) went on to make a donation. In terms of the method used to make a donation, only a very small proportion (4%) of visitors used the two electronic donation terminals to do so, with the majority preferring to use the traditional appeal cash boxes distributed through the cathedral. This brings into question the cost-effectiveness of using electronic donation points for fund-raising purposes in a cathedral setting, as the cost of their maintenance and security must be funded by the value of the donations made. Although it can be argued that the default settings on the donation screen, starting at a minimum of £5,

will steer most users towards making high-value donations, it is recommended that any organisations using electronic donation points for fund-raising purposes should audit them to assert if they are providing a satisfactory cost/income ratio.

The majority of visitors surveyed for this research live within 25 miles of the cathedral and tended to be middle-aged (40 and over), peaking at an age range between 50 to 59, with this segment also accounting for the majority of the donations. Thus, the bulk of donations is coming from what could be considered the cathedral's local community, suggesting that the older these visitors are and the closer they live to the cathedral, the more likely they are to make a donation and the more generous their donations are likely to be. For this reason, it is recommended that the Cathedral focus their fundraising efforts around their local, middle-aged target population, with this issue being discussed in more detail below along with suggestions on how to increase donations.

The values of the average donation amount given by respondents (£2.36) and the estimated total amount of donations in relation to respondent sample size, including non-contributing visitors (£1.69), seem considerably high compared with the findings of previous studies. This suggests that respondents may have exaggerated their stated donation amount, hoping that this would show them in a better light in response to a question that they might have perceived to be judgemental. Questions of this nature rely on the co-operation

and frankness of respondents and can suffer distortion if participants wish to be seen “in a more favourable light” (Oppenheim, 1992:210).

A strong indication that respondents may have exaggerated their stated donation amount is the fact that the authors manipulated the donation data to test both the possibility that the assumption made for the calculation of card donations using the electronic donation terminals was overly optimistic, or alternatively that the 37% of respondents that didn't want to reveal their donation amount did not make any donation. In both cases the amount of donations in relation to respondent sample size still remained above £1.50 after adjusting the data with these new assumptions, indicating that the large donation figure originates from the data for the actual amounts stated by the respondents rather than from the ranges estimated by the authors. This indicates both the need to treat with caution the stated amount of donations given by respondents, but also highlights the need for any future similar research to conduct donation audits at the same time that visitors are requested to state their donation amounts, so that a reliable triangulation point can be established for data analysis.

The largest proportion of donations made (25%, £1 - £2 range) and the estimated average donation for the respondent sample (£1.69) are significantly below the £4 that Chichester Cathedral managers believe visitors should be giving in order to fund the cathedral's running costs. This is a clear indication that visitors do not feel a financial responsibility towards maintaining the cathedral, suggesting that if Cathedral managers continue to rely solely on

donations for income generation as currently implemented, they will not be able to achieve a sustainable level of funding from their visitors.

The literature on donations suggest that several options are available to Chichester Cathedral in order to encourage a more consistent level of donations among its visitors, but before specific measures are implemented, its managers need to decide which of the available approaches would be more likely to provide the optimum return on investment. This decision would depend on the socio-demographic characteristics of the visitors being targeted, which in this case would be their age and place of residence; their motivations to make a donation; the desired value of the donation and the types of marketing activities to promote donation behaviour that are regarded as appropriate at a sacred setting. The way each of these factors is likely to affect donations within the context of Chichester Cathedral is discussed below.

It is suggested that a similar approach to that proposed by Swanson (2004:341) can be taken at Chichester Cathedral to maximise the value of donations, by which the intrinsic, personal meaning for making a donation should be identified and appealed to during fund-raising approaches. Given the context where donations are being requested, one such intrinsic meaning could be the enjoyment of a feeling or atmosphere of sacredness and religiosity in a cathedral. Thus, a personal meaning by which donations could be promoted is the support and maintenance of the cathedral atmosphere by linking it to the visitors' sense of place sacredness.

There are further donation maximisation strategies that the authors regard as suitable and which Chichester Cathedral could consider implementing. One of these is the targeting of visitors' altruism by segmenting and targeting spiritual visitors with appropriate advertisement messages that contain a generic spiritual or religious appeal (Ranganathan and Henley 2008:8). Alternatively, Cathedral managers could identify and target donors with a favourable impression of the Cathedral's organisational values (particularly improving society) and with specific personality trait factors (low hedonism, empathy, valuing warm relations, achievement and inner self-esteem) that make them likely to donate consistently and generously (Bennett, 2003:26).

From the suggested donation management approaches discussed above it is clear that Chichester Cathedral needs to develop a detailed understanding of who their donors are and move away from the generically-focused, 'upkeep costs'-related charitable appeals. Instead, Cathedral managers should both target specific population segments more effectively and use charitable appeals that are more pertinent to, and effective with, the desired donor segments. Presently, the Cathedral does not collect information about their visitors' socio-demographic characteristics or their motivations to make a donation. As the majority of donation-increasing approaches discussed in this paper consider both of these elements as essential in order to develop more targeted messages, it is recommended that the Cathedral should urgently develop a systematic information-gathering approach that identifies their donors' motivations and socio-demographic characteristics.

However, at this stage, it would also be relevant for Cathedral managers to consider what form of charity marketing would be most appropriate to use on a sacred setting. In this sense, consideration should be given to Rosenblatt *et al.* (1986:235) views that when confronted with charitable donations requests, the decision-making process of the targeted visitors is similar to that of making a product purchase and should be handled through effective marketing approaches. However, Stevens *et al.* (1995) argue that members of the clergy and the general public tend to consider any church-related marketing activities aimed at increasing donations as inappropriate. Their advice on how to develop church-related marketing messages seems pertinent to Chichester Cathedral, in that they argue that donation-related marketing in religious settings should be of a personal, non-intrusive nature, with high emphasis on personal choice that reflects religious individualism and limited content and substance in terms of religious dogma (Stevens *et al.*, 1995:95).

## **7. CONCLUSION**

This research has demonstrated that a donations-only approach, as implemented at present, is insufficient to generate the sustainable funding stream required by Chichester Cathedral for their upkeep and maintenance. However, the authors believe that more targeted and sustained efforts at promoting donation behaviour among visitors are likely to increase both the frequency and amounts of donations. These efforts should target donors' personal meanings and intrinsic motivations to give a donation, which should

be based on non-specific religious marketing messages promoting donors' feeling of sacredness relating to Chichester Cathedral. However, in order to implement these targeted efforts, Chichester Cathedral would first need to implement a visitor profiling programme to better understand who their donors are beyond the fact that most are middle-aged local residents. Ultimately, it is possible that a donation-only approach might not ever fully meet the financial needs of such complex, difficult to maintain infrastructure and additional fundraising measures will have to be eventually implemented.

In terms of limitations of this study, it is feasible that questions regarding donations could be interpreted as judgemental, and thus it is possible that respondents could have felt obliged to answer in a particular manner in order to justify themselves (Burns, 2000). For this reason any results relating to donations must be interpreted with care, and any conclusion drawn from these results must be regarded as an indication of the respondent's intentions rather than as hard fact.

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**Appendix A:** extract of the questionnaire used for data collection with the questions on which this paper is based:

**20. During your visit today did you notice any appeals for donations towards the upkeep and running of the Cathedral?**

- 1. Yes, one
- 2. Yes, several
- 3. No

**21. Did you notice that the donation points were collecting for different funds?**

- 1. Yes
- 2. No

**22. Did you choose to make a donation today?**

- 1. Yes, cash
- 2. Yes, by card
- 3. No

**23. If you made a donation today, how much did you donate?**

- 1. < £1
- 2. £1 - £2
- 3. £3 - £4
- 4. £5 - £6
- 5. £7 - £8
- 6. £9 +

**24. It costs approximately £3,000 a day to keep the Cathedral open for visitors and worship. Donations from visitors are a vital source of income. What do you think is an appropriate minimum donation to suggest to visitors? Please state amount**