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Research in Graubünden

Religion - Culture - Tourism

“Travelling fosters inter-religious understanding”



The monastery of St. Johann in the Val Müstair attracts many cultural tourists every year. Image credit: Adobe Stock

Tourism plays an important role in Graubünden. It creates jobs and contributes to the development of infrastructures. The grandiose alpine landscape of Graubünden attracts travelers from all over the world. They come here to experience nature, to do sports, to relax, to attend a conference or to learn about the history and culture of Graubünden. It is therefore not surprising that the education providers in the canton not only train future tourism experts, but also explore the various facets of tourism. What may be surprising is that the Theological University of Chur is also involved in research on tourism, more specifically on the relationship between religion, culture and tourism.

In a three-year research project (01/2023-12/2025), Christian Cebulj, professor of religious education, and doctoral student Anna-Lena Jahn are investigating the significance of religion and the churches in cultural tourism. Cebulj sees a knowledge gap in this area: “Churches, monasteries, chapels and cathedrals are important attractions for people who spend their vacations in Graubünden. Not only in Graubünden, but throughout Switzerland, churches take part in cultural tourism. However, they do not fulfill this role sufficiently yet. In addition, the relationship between churches and tourism has hardly been investigated so far.”

Jahn would like to close this knowledge gap – at least in part. A native of Bern, she graduated with a master’s degree in Religion, Economics, Politics from the University of Zurich before taking up her position as a research assistant at the TH Chur in January 2023. In her doctoral

thesis, which is being done in collaboration with the University of Lucerne, she wants to analyze what interreligious experiences tourists have when they visit religious places in Switzerland: “My thesis is that travel promotes contact between religions. An interreligious encounter can create understanding, appreciation and respect for each other. Therefore, I would like to investigate what effect Christian church spaces have on guests traveling to Switzerland. What do people who do not belong to any Christian religion see and experience?”

Jahn is still at the beginning of her doctorate, which is integrated into an international research project and cooperates with the association “Churches and Tourism Switzerland”. The first steps include a thorough literature review and the development of the research design, i.e. the planning and structuring of the research work. The research design includes several components: Jahn needs to formulate her research questions and consider what kind of data (e.g., surveys or observations) she can use to best answer them. In Graubünden, she plans to include in her project the monastery of St. Johann in the Val Müstair, which is one of Switzerland’s UNESCO World Heritage Sites and attracts many cultural tourists every year.

Christian Cebulj, Anna-Lena Jahn and Daniela Heinen



Anna-Lena Jahn. Image provided.

More information

The Theological University of Chur is a research university under the auspices of the Catholic Church. The main areas of study and research include philosophy and ethics, as well as biblical, historical, systematic and practical theology. The TH Chur reflects on socially relevant contemporary issues in an interdisciplinary way. www.thchur.ch

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