

## Article

# Journeys to Significant Places in Orthodoxy as a Source of Sustainable Local Development in Romania

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**Abstract:** Religious tourism has developed in post-communist Romania, after decades of restrictions on the manifestation of the population's religiosity. New monasteries and hermitages appeared and the number of travellers eager to arrive visit those and other religious places has increased. The purpose of this article is to support a sustainable orientation in the development of religious tourism in Romania. Content analysis of articles published by mass media in the last year regarding the two great Orthodox pilgrimages in Romania, to St. Parascheva in Iași and to St. Dimitrie the New in Bucharest, together with a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with group or solitary travellers and the results of two participatory observations conducted at monasteries in Făgăraș Land highlighted the types of journey to religiously significant places in contemporary Romania, i.e., pilgrimages, journeys to father confessor, spiritual journeys, group religious journeys and secular visits, as well as the particularities of hospitality related to them. Involving local communities in hosting and preparing meals for travellers to hermitages and monasteries would reduce pressure on monastic communities and contribute to sustainable local development. The inclusion of local historical sites in journey itineraries to religious places, and the revitalization of traditional local crafts would also contribute to this development.

**Keywords:** religious tourism; pilgrimage; Orthodoxy; local communities; sustainable development; historical sites; traditional crafts



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. *Pilgrimage, an Ancient Form of Tourism*

Pilgrimage is, according to P.J. Margry's comprehensive definition, "a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration, undertaken by individuals or groups, to a place that is regarded as more sacred or salutary than the environment of everyday life, to seek a transcendental encounter with a specific cult object for the purpose of acquiring spiritual, emotional or physical healing or benefit" [1] (p. 17). It is a journey motivated primarily by faith and pilgrimage has a strong ritual dimension [2]. Aside from its religious dimension, pilgrimage is a phenomenon entailing considerable social and economic dimensions. The various forms of pilgrimage can influence global trade and world health, have considerable political, economic, cultural, and social implications, and shape public spaces [3].

Religion is a common motivation for travelling [4]. Christian pilgrimage is a salient feature of European travel [5]. Pilgrimage and hosting pilgrims, encouraged by the Catholic Church, have been common practices since the beginning of Christianity [6]. Christian pilgrimage to the Holy Land, along with the identification of historical pilgrimage hallmarks of the new religion date back to the time when Christianity was acknowledged as a religion in the Roman Empire. Helen, the empress (also known as Saint Helen), was personally involved in the authentication process and laid the foundation for pilgrimages to the places

linked to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Saviour [7]. In this context, pilgrimage can be considered one of the oldest [8], if not the oldest [9] form of tourism.

In the postmodern contemporary world, the interest in the connection between pilgrimage and tourism is not only historical. Contemporary research approaches religion as a product generating benefits like self-exploration, finding meaning, forgiveness, salvation, or peace of mind. In this respect, the works on religious travel are riddled with marketing influences and various practical aspects [4]. The management of tourism to sacred places capitalizes on pilgrims' experiential satisfaction, their confidence, and celebrity attachment [10]. Generally speaking, there is a growing scholarly interest in the facets of the tourist's experience, i.e., mental engagement, sense of belonging, emotional connection, and relaxation [11] which also focuses on the postmodern shift of emphasis from religious quests to spiritual quests [12].

### *1.2. Teleological Clarifications*

The change of political regimes at the end of the eighth decade of the last century was followed by an increased focus on the importance of religion and religious tourism in Central and Eastern Europe. This is still an ongoing process more than thirty years after the fall of communism [4]. The contemporary history of former communist countries shapes the characteristics of this process and, thus, the relationship between pilgrimage and tourism [13]. Tourism is one of the industries that has long been concerned with sustainability [14]. The participation of the community, the collaboration of local actors for the development of positive tourism, as well as the adaptation of the tourist offerings to local resources are expressions of the interest in sustainability in tourism [15]. Such interest induces sustainable community development [16]. The sustainability of destinations has become an aspect that tourists pay attention to [17].

In this context, i.e., the growth of religious tourism in post-communist Romania and the growing importance of concerns regarding the sustainability of tourism, the development of sustainable religious tourism in Romania is desirable. Supporting the development of tourism with this orientation is also the purpose of this article. With a view to that, we will first highlight the types of Romanian travellers visiting places that are significant for Orthodox Christianity in the country. We will then look for and point out some ways to involve local communities in managing the presence and needs of travellers. These are differentiated modalities appropriate for the types of travellers that have identified. The article refers to visitors of significant Orthodox places because Orthodoxy is the main denomination in Romania (as per the 2022 census, 85% people declared themselves to be of the Orthodox denomination) [18].

### *1.3. Theoretical Framework*

#### *1.3.1. Pilgrimage, Pilgrimage Tourism, and Religious Tourism: Conceptual Differences*

The link between tourism and pilgrimage has raised the issue of conceptual clarifications and differentiations. On the one hand, pilgrimage is subsumed under religious tourism. Religious tourism is currently outlined as a major segment of tourism [19] and it is considered travel for the fulfilment of religious and spiritual desires [20]. In addition, pilgrimage includes festivals [4], mission trips, monastery visits and retreats, camps, meaningful encounters, gatherings, and other events attended by believers [20], that is all travel for religious purposes undertaken outside the usual environment [8], according to UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization) [21].

The inclusion of pilgrimage in religious tourism has imposed the term "pilgrimage tourism" and its use to differentiate pilgrimage from other forms of religious tourism. The boundary between the two is quite blurred. In the literature on tourism, the terms "religious tourism" and "pilgrimage tourism" are used distinctly, while in other works they are often used interchangeably [2]. For example, Cheng and Chen [22], in relation to the Mazu pilgrimage in Taiwan, identified two forms of pilgrimage tourism, namely pure spiritual pilgrimage and pilgrimage closely related to religious festivals, thus bringing

an activity from the broader area of religious tourism into the area of pilgrimage tourism. Similarly, R. Barber [23] divides pilgrimage tourists into visitors to sacred destinations who feel the spirituality of the places and visitors with superficial tourist interests. For the former, their feelings in relation to the place are important. For the latter, one's own behaviour in the respective place is important. When used separately, the term "pilgrimage tourism" refers strictly to pilgrimages, and "religious tourism" to religious travel other than pilgrimages.

Highlighting the differences between the two forms of tourism in this context is a conceptual clarification in itself. Pilgrimage destinations are places where miracles have been recorded, while religious tourists mainly visit shrines or temples. The fulfilment of certain rituals is obligatory for pilgrimage tourists, while in religious tourism there are no ritual obligations [2]. In pilgrimage tourism the journey to the sacred place takes place in special periods, when significant events take place there, whereas religious tourists are not strictly bound to a calendar of events [8]. While religious tourists take tours and conduct recreational activities, pilgrimage tourism does not include such activities and services since pilgrims spend their time in prayer and worship at sacred sites [2]. Pilgrims are not interested in secular activities and ignore the tourist attractiveness of the place [24]. The need for these clarifications signals a more subtle differentiation that can be stated as follows: in contemporary times, traditional pilgrimage is considered and managed as pilgrimage tourism [25].

### 1.3.2. Pilgrimage Tourism and Spiritual Tourism

There is also a subtle distinction between pilgrimage tourism and spiritual tourism. According to E.M. Hamberg [26], the term "spirituality" has two meanings: it can refer to a higher form of piety (with such meaning it is employed within a religion) and to a form of religiosity practiced as an alternative to the dominant, institutionalised religion, Christianity in particular. The growing interest of the postmodern West in spirituality as an alternative religiosity has given rise to the orientation and term "spiritual tourism". The earlier definition of pilgrimage as "a journey based on religious or spiritual inspiration..." [1] (p. 27) would justify considering spiritual tourism as subsumable to pilgrimage tourism and, by implication, religious tourism. E. Cohen [27], identifies five modes of the tourist experience based on the attitude of tourists toward a recognised centre and the location of that centre in relation to where the tourist lives. He argues that all tourists who travel in the existential mode can be considered pilgrims. However, pilgrimage is most often associated with official, recognised religions, whereas spiritual tourism is associated with the New Age movement. New Age tourists are more autonomous, not committed to religious traditions, and have a personalised, individualised spirituality. Pilgrimage tourists pay attention to the guide, the programme, the itinerary, and the reputation of the travel agency organising the trip [28]. Pilgrimage takes place within the determined religious framework and is motivated by the devotion prescribed in traditional religions, while spiritual tourism is motivated by the desire for personal growth, thus it is an external journey in the internal search for meaning. It is a search for transcendence and connection to it for the purpose of personal transformation, i.e., it has precisely the components identified by Joseph Campbell [29] as characteristic for mythic journeys, Joanna Kujawa [12] points out. As it is focused on balancing the relationship between body, mind, and spirit, spiritual tourism may or may not be linked to religion [8].

Then, there are the places being sacralised. With the help of the Internet and social networks, virtual communities can sacralise places in the physical world. The process of "sacralisation" consists of (re)inventing a mythical place, anchoring it in a pre-existing esoteric tradition, and creating a spiritual reputation for it. Inventing, reinventing, and combining myths into a new mythology is a skill and a hallmark of New Age manifestations [30]. This is, for example, the case of the Sphinx, the anthropomorphic megalith in the Bucegi Mountains, and the Ceahlău massif in Romania. In these cases, being anchored in esoteric tradition allows for the exploitation of the inability of historians to locate Kogainon,

the sacred mountain of the Dacians, in the absence of sufficient information [30]. In the horizon of the possibility that Kogainon is a generic term, it can then be used to refer to several spiritual centres located in the mountains [31]. However, it is not a strict local process. The celebration of nature and revival of pre-Christian religious traditions, the emphasis on personal responsibility, and the absence of dogma and hierarchy are common features of different forms of paganism [32]. C.I. Damian [31] considers Zalmoxianism, which values the tradition of the sacred mountain Kogainon, as the Romanian equivalent of Druidism claiming Stonehenge. Both spiritual movements use the celebrity of places to legitimize their beliefs and validate the sacredness of places, through these beliefs, in a circular manner. However, climbing the mountain on fixed dates when pyramids of light are expected to form (28 November at Sphinx, 6 August in Ceahlău) can be considered/assumed as a new form of pilgrimage. Some of those present are just curious tourists, but others are deeply spiritually engaged and ready to resonate with the energies of the place [30]. This seems to be an ongoing process of transforming spiritual tourism into pilgrimage tourism by establishing a pilgrimage centre independent of the main religion, but one that is esoterically anchored.

### 1.3.3. From Pilgrims to Accidental Tourists

Then, there is also comeback tourism, or “diaspora tourism”, a secular segment of tourism in which tourists visit their ethnic homelands. For many such tourists, travel has a significant spiritual component, due to the connection with their ancestors and the places where they lived, as well as with national shrines and monuments [3].

On the other hand, even the term “pilgrimage” has broadened its denotations in post-modernism. “Secular pilgrimages” designate journeys to non-religious places considered sacred, and emotionally or spiritually loaded [33,34]. These are nationally significant places or graves of heroes or celebrities. These journeys are now called “pilgrimages” by virtue of the fact that religious pilgrims and other travellers alike seek meaningful experiences that are spiritual [3]. Secular pilgrimages are also carried out in dark tourism, nature tourism, migration, literary tourism, or sports tourism, as M. Terzidou [35] points out. In this context, pilgrimage tourism should be defined holistically, so that the definition covers both traditional religious pilgrimage and secular travel, as N. Collins-Kreiner [36] points out.

Moreover, even sacred sites can be visited with different motivations. Not all such visitation can be considered religious tourism, let alone pilgrimage. Religious sites are often attractive to tourists because of their cultural heritage value [37]. Destinations that combine historical, architectural, and cultural value with religious, spiritual, traditional, or landscape aspects are attractive to contemporary tourists [38]. Even in the cases of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome or Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, tourism revenues represent a considerable financial resource [39]. On the other hand, religious and non-religious constructions coexist in the sphere of religious tourism [4,40]. Modern pilgrimage targets both the sacred and the profane [41]. Pilgrimage also satisfies tourist curiosities; it can also be valuable as an experience of knowing another culture [42]. Some pilgrims become tourists and tourists express concern for the spiritual integrity of the pilgrimage site [43]. Monasteries in Bucovina and north Moldova (areas in the northeastern part of Romania) are sought after as centres of Orthodox religious experience (an aspect which is more important for locals), but also as UNESCO Heritage sites with specific architecture and exterior painting in spectacular colours (features that are more important for foreign visitors) [39].

Finney, Orwig, and Spake [44] divide visitors to religious sites into lotus-eaters, seekers, pilgrims, and accidental tourists. Lotus-eaters have only tourist interests. Seekers are equally interested in experiences at secular and sacred sites. Pilgrims are classical religious travellers, who are interested only in sacred places. Accidental tourists are content to feel at home somewhere, and they have no explicit intentions of visiting sacred or secular places. When analysing tourism at pilgrimage sites, namely the sacred mountain Kailash in Tibet, Wang et al. [45] identify four types of tourists, differentiated by the reasons for

their presence in pilgrimage sites, the activities carried out, and the expected benefits: pilgrims, spiritual inquirers, hobbyists, and accidental tourists. The typology proposed in the study of Wang et al. [45] does not include the lotus-eater tourists from the previous classification. The authors attribute this absence to the difficulty of climbing the mountain and the reduced attractiveness of the trip for hedonists. Bond et al. [46] show that beyond a shared interest in history and culture, visitors to religious sites are divided into heritage-focused (they are attracted by the cultural relevance of the site), religious-oriented (they are interested in places important in their religious tradition), and pilgrimage-oriented (they seek deep spiritual experiences related to a significant saint or event in their community of faith).

#### 1.3.4. Continuum and De-Differentiation

Thus, pilgrimage is the form of religious tourism that is most strongly linked to established religions, but there is also secular pilgrimage, because famous places can be (re)sacralised by anchoring them in esoteric traditions, and sacred places can be visited by believers and non-believers alike. This context justifies approaching the contemporary relationship between pilgrimage and tourism (the latter being an umbrella term) as one unfolding along a continuum of different motivations and existential assumptions. The idea of this continuum is widespread in studies of religious tourism. The boundary between tourism and religion is increasingly difficult to draw [3,9], it has been gradually blurring since the last century [3], and that is linked to the contemporary de-differentiation of tourism segments [4]. The process is reported, for example, in relation to tourists in Kraków [47], those from the Greek Orthodox environment [35], and pilgrims on the Camino de Santiago [48].

What does this continuum and de-differentiation refer to? The blurring of the boundary between pilgrimage and tourism is visible in tourist visits to European cathedrals that are historical monuments. Tourists' expectations of those places are different from their suppositions concerning museums, they consider the former public spaces where access should be free, and they have diffused expectations about spiritual experiences inside [3]. From the perspective of religious organisations, pilgrims differ from tourists as they travel for spiritual reasons, not for curiosity or pleasure. However, from the perspective of service providers, pilgrims are tourists as they frequent hotels, restaurants, shops, etc. [3]. Even on Athos, one can speak of secularisation, due to the large number of visitors and material manifestations of religiosity [24]. Pilgrims in Tinos (Greece) consider tourist moments and activities as necessary for their religious experience, tourism is, for them, the antechamber of transformative religious experiences [35]. Tourists who travel to holy places unmotivated by faith can discover a path to faith [9].

V.L. Smith [49] considers religious tourism to be a continuum between pilgrimage and secular tourism. Along this continuum, Smith places pious pilgrims, pilgrims over tourists, religious tourists, tourists rather than pilgrims, and secular tourists. The continuum proposed by Smith (1992) is examined in the case of Jewish pilgrims to the Holy Land, who are differentiated into pilgrims, traditional visitors (believers, with a personal rather than canonically religious faith), and tourists, according to customs and behaviour [3]. Observing pilgrims at Buddhist temples and shrines in Thailand, E. Cohen (1992) [50] notes the gradual transformation of pilgrims into tourists as the pilgrimage destination is further from home, and that in religious centres of other religions, cultures, or societies, individuals are traveller-tourists, not pilgrims. Wang et al. [45] also place their tourist types along a spiritual–secular and personal–social continuum. Tourism and religion are linked through the piety stimulated by tourist performances, and the various secular pilgrimages generate “communitas”, similar to religious travel [35]. “Communitas” is the feeling of escape from current social structures and belonging to a distinct egalitarian community, constituted liminally between a state/place from which individuals have symbolically emerged and one they have not yet entered [51]. There is also an emotional load in pilgrims' and tourists' travels [3]. At Prilop, one of the important destinations of religious tourism

in Romania, visitors queue together to pass the grave of Father Arsenie Boca, respecting the discipline imposed by the place, whether they are religious or just curious [25]. The aggregation of hope, curiosity, effort, fear, and tension observed directly in the group trip to the Horia hermitage in southern Romania is proper both to tourism and to pilgrimage, says M. Bănică [13].

The polarized cultural identification of the pilgrim with a religious traveller and the tourist with a holiday traveller is reductionist and overshadows the often composite motivations for travel [49]. On the contrary, addressing the conceptual relationships between pilgrimage, religious tourism, and secular visits to sacred sites against the backdrop of the continuum of travel variants to spiritually and/or religiously significant places highlights these motivations. They are dynamic, and they crystallise when individual religious experience meets local cultural, social, and material specificities [40]. A 2018 study [39] highlights the main religious motivations for travel identified in the literature on the topic: feeling God's love, making sacred vows, experiencing inner peace, seeking enlightenment, strengthening faith, forgiving sins, improving health, praying, blessing objects, and attending liturgies. The study also highlights the main non-religious motivations, namely impulsive decisions, family ties to places, famous people associated with places, personal interest in architecture and history, or the natural environment. To these the authors add, while differentiating them, postmodern motivations, i.e., the search for authenticity and personal development, the attractiveness of a religion or certain new religious practices [39]. However, the motivations are not necessarily separate. Seeking spiritual experiences, satisfying religious sensibilities, or fulfilling cognitive needs can combine with secular motivations, such as understanding history or satisfying emotional interests [52]. Many tourists even seek spiritual well-being, enlightenment, knowledge, and social connections in conventional religious destinations [4,42].

#### 1.3.5. Hosting Pilgrims

In religious traditions in which giving to a stranger means giving to God, hosting strangers and meaning to give them hosting is seen as a way of strengthening the host's bond with God [6]. Offering shelter and quenching thirst and hunger to the guest is a moral obligation in many cultures and religions [53]. Catholic pilgrimage sites have hospitality infrastructures that are configured both commercially and non-commercially [6]. In Catholicism, hosting pilgrims and being a pilgrim are equally valued as religious experiences. Free domestic hospitality provides hosts with experiences similar to those of the hosted pilgrims [6]. Residents' perceptions of religious tourism and visitors are influenced by the cultural and religious identity of the former [54]. On the occasion of World Youth Day, which was celebrated in 2013 in Rio de Janeiro, locals responded to the church's request to host the young pilgrims participating, which proved that the church was very important to the locals. In an urban area with security problems, domestic hospitality has an even stronger and deeper meaning. Almost all hosts provided a daily meal and bed linens, despite the recommendations of the organisers of the pilgrimage [6].

#### 1.3.6. The Involvement of Host Communities Is Important for Tourism

For tourism to be successful, all stakeholders must work together. Host communities are important for religious tourism [9,55], they are key stakeholders in pilgrimage, and thus are more important than business and government bodies [55]. The hospitality of locals [56] and their cooperation with tourists [9] are necessary for tourist activities to run smoothly. Conversely, poor cooperation between stakeholders sabotages tourism development [57].

The religiosity of locals, especially residents in a sacred area, influences their attitudes toward tourism. Pilgrims and local believers in Jerusalem are often irritated by the behaviour of secular visitors who do not respect local faith practices [56]. Rejection of tourists can also occur in communities with many non-believers, as well as in cases of dysfunctions in the organization of tourist flow [9]. However, the financial benefits that locals gain may make them adopt a more approving attitude toward tourism. If local people feel that the

environmental, economic, or social benefits outweigh the costs, they favour tourism and promote it [56]. On the other hand, excessive interest in commercial benefits can negatively affect holy sites [5], and a study on mass religious tourism in Mashhad, Iran highlighted sustainability challenges and the predominantly negative representations of residents about the environmental impact of religious tourism, despite the positive environmental effects recorded in the vicinity of the shrine, showing that mass religious tourism can pollute the environment [58]. Many religious groups are willing to receive ignorant tourists who disrupt the organization of religious centres due to the economic efficiency of religious tourism [5]. More and more negative consequences of tourists' misbehaviour in sacred destinations are being recorded and need to be managed [28].

#### 1.3.7. Advantages for Locals

Pilgrims are consumers of services and a source of income for host communities [8]. Pilgrimage involves a functional network of mundane services [59], pilgrims travel, sleep, eat, and have various other needs [9]. All visitors to Mount Athos, regardless of the motivations for their visit, need services to meet their basic needs, as K. Andriotis [24] points out. Religious souvenirs are attractive as a vehicle for pilgrimage benefits. Mass-produced, even kitsch objects, acquire relational value as they link the place of pilgrimage to the pilgrims' home environment and the deity with their loved ones, therefore they function and are purchased as relics. Lourdes offers a variety of accommodations, food, entertainment, and souvenir sales, Higgins and Hamilton [60] show. Mazu is a Chinese goddess at the centre of a regional folk religion. Mazu worshippers offer prayers to the goddess for health, peace, fertility, and well-being and bring her offerings of flowers and incense. They make donations to temples and give food and drink to pilgrims and tourists as an expression of their devotion to Mazu. The temples, which coordinate business between their residents and businesses, compete with each other in offering rituals, martial arts performances, parades, religious art and architecture, fireworks, and entertainment, points out C.-P. Lin [55].

Religious pilgrimages have long supported the economic development of destination areas [5]. In religious power centres people spend money, infrastructure has been developed, there are complex accommodations, and trade services are offered [61]. Enterprises [28] and local communities [9,45,62] are beneficiaries of these developments. In many places (almost everywhere in the world) communities support tourism as a source of income [9]. Approximately 900 million tourists travel to religiously significant places worldwide [4], of which over 300 million are religious pilgrims [28,39,55], and their estimated contribution to tourism revenues are USD 18 billion [28].

At the same time, the services demanded by tourists and pilgrims result in the cultural change of the place and changes in the built landscape [5]. A study on the impact of tourism on monastic life in Romania shows that the economic benefits resulting from commercial activities, perceived by monks and nuns as a means of survival in addition to donations, are assumed together with the disadvantages related to the disruption of monastery life [5].

It is therefore a question of balance. Religious tourism can contribute to the sustainable development of monasteries and hermitages in Romania, because in general the commercial activity carried out by monasteries respects the principles of sustainable development, supporting the well-being of the community, as Stănciulescu and Țîrca [5] show. The authors point to the Sâmbăta Academy of Spirituality, Culture, Arts, and Science at the Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus as a good example of combining religious, cultural, and economic interests.

#### 1.3.8. Orthodox Pilgrimage

Orthodox pilgrimage differs from that of most religions. It does not involve walking or sustained physical effort. In the Orthodox Church, relics and objects belonging to saints are honoured as places of the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. The miracles associated with them are considered evidence of God's consent to this honour [63]. Orthodox pilgrimage is

centred on devotion and worship at places of worship that house relics and objects to be honoured. In front of the iconostasis and surrounded by frescoes, the faithful making the sign of the cross, lighting candles and kissing icons, and feel that they are in the presence of God and the saints [24]. For the Orthodox then, pilgrimage means a long wait in line, and is not centred on walking, as it is in Western Christianity [13]. Praying and singing together are felt as authentic experiences, where the timing turns the crowd into a vehicle of godliness [35].

The icon of Panagia Evangelistria in Tinos is at the centre of the most important pilgrimage in Greece, comparable in importance to those of Lourdes and Fatima. Pilgrims go to share their personal problems, and many people are attracted by the therapeutic reputation of the pilgrimage to Tinos, where *communitas* turns into “*sufferitas*”, differentiated in accordance with the specific problems of the pilgrims. Pilgrims to Tinos touch the icon with pieces of cloth, crosses, rosaries, or other objects, which will be given to family and friends. These objects are materialisations of the past, present, and desired future [35]. In the Orthodox Christian context, women are the ones who provide the link between the family and the sacred [40], and pray for all family members [25], so many women participate in Orthodox pilgrimages.

### 1.3.9. Orthodox Pilgrimage in Romania

Religious pilgrimage is on the rise in Romania [13,25]. Under communism, some churches and monasteries were closed and official religious practices were restricted. The preservation of religiosity, which became a privately managed issue, was supported by the assumption of the closeness between religion and national identity [25]. After the fall of communism, restrictions were lifted and there was a significant revitalisation of religious practices [25]. Existing pilgrimage sites have developed, new monasteries have appeared, and pilgrimage centres have multiplied [64]. A monastery, a church, or a hermitage was once built in every place considered “holy” [5]. The development of monasteries, including their commercial offering, is attributed by monks and nuns to the needs of visitors and their increasing numbers [5]. The expansion of accommodation capacities of places of worship supports the development of religious tourism [9].

Orthodox pilgrimages in Romania are also linked to major feasts and patron saint days, saints’ relics, miracle-working icons, healing springs, and spiritual priests with spiritual vocation [25]. Two great traditional pilgrimages are held every year, namely in Iași, to St. Parascheva (14 October), and in Bucharest, to St. Dimitrie the New (27 October). The two cities that host them are the capitals of the two large Romanian extra-Carpathian provinces, Moldova and Wallachia. On these occasions, the relics of the two saints are taken out of the churches that currently house them and large crowds of believers pass by and worship. Usually, in addition to the relics of celebrated saints, other holy relics are brought out on the occasion of pilgrimages. The relatively short period of time (a few days) in which the relics are exposed outside the church and the belief that on feast days the believers’ connection with the celebrated saints is closer, so that the latter respond more easily to the requests addressed to them, create a very long wait time when passing in front of the relics. Pilgrimages take place in autumn, when the weather can be cold and rainy in Romania. Pilgrims are prepared for such situations with umbrellas, capes, plastic sheets. Sheltering from the rain together reinforces the state of *communitas* that is formed during the long wait in the queue [65]. The queue, i.e., the long line of believers approaching the relics, represents the core of the Orthodox pilgrimage, it is its “backbone” and the mechanism for transforming the individual willingness into a part of the collective willingness [65]. Larger groups are better able to withstand the long waiting hours. At the stalls set up along the pilgrimage routes, icons (mostly from China or Russia), crucifixes, myrrh, bags with holy cotton wool that have been touched by the relic casket, handkerchiefs that will be touched by the relics and then, at need, to the painful parts of the pilgrim’s body, are sold [65].

Prislop Monastery is also a significant pilgrimage site in Romania. Large pilgrimages are held at Prislop, with socio-economic implications for the surrounding area. The



monastery is one of the most visited, thanks to the grave of Father Arsenie Boca. He died in 1989, and the faithful pray at his grave because they are convinced that their prayers are answered. Some pilgrims come with their families and stay a few days in the surrounding area, while organised groups come and go on the same day [25]. Due to the large number of visitors, especially on 28 November, the date of Father Arsenie's death, car access near the monastery is blocked and those who want to reach the grave have to walk several kilometres (about six). This effort arouses the dissatisfaction of the pilgrims, especially the elderly women. The dissatisfaction that is expressed signals the differences between the Orthodox pilgrimage, centred on expectation, and the Catholic pilgrimage, centred on dynamic effort [65]. At Prislop, the faithful tell stories while standing in line about how Father Arsenie Boca angered the Ceaușescus by telling them that they would not live until after Christmas in 1989, about how the Father attended his mother's funeral in Transylvania even though he was in detention, far away, in the southeastern part of the country, about the prohibition to take earth from the grave without the consent of the oldest of the nuns of the monastery, and other events from the hagiographic background associated with his name. Father Arsenie Boca is not canonized yet, but popular representations of his life and miracles precede that moment, participating in preparation for it [65].

The development of religious tourism in Romania is especially aimed at the significantly increasing group journeys to monasteries. These journeys, called "pilgrimages" in the offers, can be organised by travel agencies, by parish priests, or by individuals. The Romanian Patriarchate has its own travel agency, Basilica Travel [66], which in addition to trips to Israel, Greece, Bulgaria, and Turkey, offers "domestic pilgrimages"—trips on the occasions of patron saint days and major Orthodox holidays [67].

Distinct from these, are what M. Bănică [13] calls "coach pilgrimages", or improvised, hybrid trips, religious and touristic alike, organised by individuals with hired means of transportation. Similar forms of religious tourism were tolerated by the communist authorities under the name of "cultural-educational trips to monasteries", the monasteries were considered only heritage objectives in that context. The organisers choose the places to be visited, give advice, provide primary medical care, and check that the group members are properly dressed. The prices of trips of this kind are low and their financial aspects are unclear. Travellers offer the monks food bought from nearby shops. Some monks are sought after for the "gift of clairvoyance" and pilgrims wait for hours for a few words from them. Waiting has a theological and therapeutic purpose, because people tell each other their "troubles" while waiting, as Bănică [13] shows. Pilgrimages of this kind, which are advantageous practices for all those involved (pilgrims, guides, monasteries, transporters), are expressions of the "deregulation of religion", Bănică [13] also points out. The fact that city dwellers attend liturgies in monasteries, instead of doing so in their towns, in the parishes to which they belong, means they are assuming an autonomous religious practice. Participants in the coach pilgrimages discuss communism with nostalgia, ignoring the religious restrictions of communism, but are open to including the Romanian gulag memorial sites as destinations on the pilgrimage route. The paradoxical combination of antagonistic attitudes shows that memory of Eastern Europe is complex and must be researched as such [13].

The tourist relevance of religious buildings in Romania is related to their historical and cultural, as well as religious and economic characteristics [61]. From a socio-cultural perspective, the age, style, personalities linked to the place, and state of preservation are relevant. From the religious perspective, ancient and/or miracle-working icons are relevant, and from the economic perspective, infrastructure, accessibility, and potential valorisation are relevant. However, there is no correlation between economic and the others, cultural or religious value [61].

## 2. Materials and Methods

Thus, the specialized literature distinguishes pilgrimage from other journeys for religious purposes and, at the same time, from journeys of spiritual searching which are

marginal in relation to official religions. All of these journeys are currently managed in a touristic way. On the other hand, religiously significant places can be visited with very different motivations, and not all of them are religious. According to their motivations, tourists are distributed along the continuum between pilgrimage and secular tourism. Hospitality toward travellers to holy places is a duty in many religions and the involvement of local communities is important in its exercise. For local communities, tourism is a potential source of benefit.

As we have shown above, the first objective of the article is to create a typology of Romanian travellers to Orthodox sites in Romania. The second objective consists of indicating ways to transform religious tourism into a more important resource for sustainable local development. To achieve these objectives, we analysed the content of media references to the great pilgrimages in Romania, we conducted and analysed several semi-structured interviews with religious travellers and used the results of participatory observations made during journeys to monasteries.

With regard to the two great traditional Orthodox pilgrimages in Romania, we analysed the content of the materials from the central and local media regarding events organised in 2022. There are about 64 materials related to the St. Parascheva pilgrimage and 42 materials related to the St. Dimitrie the New. These are all collected from the news, reports, and press releases about pilgrimages accessible on Google in the online editions of newspapers, on the websites of news agencies, and television stations in Romania. We assumed that the presentation of pilgrimages in the written press would be rather negative, with an emphasis on the strange, irrational behaviour of the pilgrims and on the crowding around the relics. We also assumed that the hospitality of the hosts was greater in Iași than in Bucharest. The first of the assumptions is in agreement with the findings before the COVID-19 pandemic regarding the dominant positioning of the media toward the phenomenon of pilgrimage. In accordance with the assumptions made, we used the categories: pilgrims' faith (with the indicators: relics, believers, waiting, procession, prayer, miracle, ornaments, piety, bigotry, naivety, credulity, songs; the last four indicators are associated with a negative representations of the pilgrimage, including religious songs in public, which considered a manifestation of habotnicity), pilgrimage organization (with indicators: gendarmes, volunteers, medical assistance, agglomeration; the last indicator is associated with a negative representations), and hospitality (with indicators: accommodations, food, drink).

We conducted eight semi-structured interviews with people who travelled to monasteries in organized groups (numbered I1–I8) and six semi-structured interviews with solitary travellers (numbered I9–I14). Group travellers are elderly pensioners. Solitary travellers are mature adults. The choice of respondents is non-probabilistic and we used the snowball technique. The interview guides contain questions related to journey motivations, expectations, how it is carried out, impressions, but also interactions with locals and available accommodations and meal solutions. The interviews were analysed thematically. This methodological option is based on the fact that thematic analysis has several characteristics that make it suitable for less investigated research areas: it is flexible and independent from a predetermined theoretical framework [68]. Respondents were informed and gave their written consent to the use of their answers in an article about religious journeys in Romania.

We also used the results of participatory observations on the behaviour of visitors to monasteries in Făgăraș Land, in southern Transylvania. One of the observations took place before the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2019, at the Berivoi, Șinca Veche, Șinca Nouă and Dejani monasteries, and the other took place in the fall of 2022, at Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus. In the first case, the observer was a member of a group of religious travellers and in the second case, the observer was a member of a group of secular tourists.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The Great Pilgrimages Reflected in the Written Media

In the 64 written materials identified in local and central press regarding the pilgrimage to St. Parascheva in 2022, the term “relics” (of St. Parascheva, that are removed on the occasion of the pilgrimage from the Metropolitan Cathedral and displayed in a reliquary under a decorated canopy in the courtyard of the cathedral, together with the reliquary containing the relics of St. Cuv. Paisie from Neamț) was used 149 times, “believers” (referring to those who come to Iași to worship the relics) 85 times, “in line”/“row” 59 times and “procession” 40 times (to describe what the Orthodox pilgrimage consists of; in 2022 it is believed that approximately 260,000 pilgrims travelled the route to the reliquary [69], “prayer” (referring to the belief that the Saint listens to the faithful as long as they pray to her) 29 times, “miracle”/“wonder” (regarding the life of St. Parascheva and the hopes of the pilgrims) 20 times, “waiting” (regarding the duration of the route to the reliquary with the Saint’s relics lasting for about 12 to 20 h) 16 times, “flowers” (which adorn the canopy where the relics are deposited) eight times, and “piety” (referring to the pilgrims’ state of mind) eight times. These are the indicators related to the pilgrims’ faith category. The tone of the references to them was favorable. No references to bigotry, naivety, credulity, or songs were recorded.

Regarding the organization of the pilgrimage, the terms “Gendarmerie” and “gendarmes” (referring to their role in maintaining order during the pilgrimage) were used 20 times, “volunteers” (referring to the members of the organization “Voluntarii Sfintei Parascheva”, involved in guiding and supporting the pilgrims, since their arrival in the city) 15 times, “medical assistance” (referring to health incidents managed on site) 13 times, “agglomeration” (referring to the disruption of the functioning of the city during the pilgrimage period) five times.

Related to the hospitality category, the term “food” (referring to the packaged food packages offered by the Metropolitanate of Moldova and generous schoolchildren, but also to the recommendation that the food be non-perishable) was used 18 times, “sarmale” was used distinctly 12 times (referring to a dish considered to be specifically Romanian and consisting of a mixture of rice with meat/various vegetables, wrapped in cabbage, vine, etc. leaves; the “sarmale” dish served during the pilgrimage is prepared in the kitchens of the County General Directorate for Social Assistance and Child Protection, with the help of the residents in the city’s retirement homes; in 2022, 85,000 “sarmale” were prepared [69]), the words “tea”, “water”, and “coffee” (offered by volunteers) were used 16 times in total, and “accommodation” (referring to the rate of occupation of accommodation places in the city long before the pilgrimage) was used seven times.

The media reports on the pilgrimage to St. Parascheva were favourable in 2022. The reports focused on the scale of the event after the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic were lifted, the duration of the pilgrimage route, the physical resistance of the pilgrims, and the efforts of the city hall and the Metropolitanate to support the pilgrims.

In the 42 materials identified in the local and central media regarding the pilgrimage to St. Dimitrie the New in 2022, the term “relics” was used 185 times (meaning the relics of Dimitrie the New, the Holy Emperors Constantine and Helen, the Holy Hierarch Nectarius of Aegina, and of the Holy Hierarch Grigorie Palama, the latter having been brought especially for the pilgrimage to Bucharest), “believers” 52 times, “in line”/“queue” 28 times and “procession” 53 times, “prayer” 16 times, “miracle”/“wonder” six times, “waiting” five times, “flowers” (referring to the flowers carried by pilgrims) five times, and “piety” once. These are the indicators related to the pilgrims’ faith category. The tone used by journalists in referring to them was favorable. No references to bigotry, naivety, credulity, or songs were recorded. Instead, there are 16 references to the distribution of antidoron packets and nine references to the fact that the pilgrims prayed also for peace in 2022. There were an estimated 80,000 participants in the pilgrimage in 2022 [70].

Regarding the organization of the pilgrimage, the term “volunteers” (from the organization “Youth in action”) was used 21 times, and the terms “Gendarmerie” and “gen-

darmes" were used nine times. No references to medical assistance and agglomeration were recorded. Instead, there are numerous references to the pilgrimage "schedule" (50) and to the "itinerary" (53) of the procession within the pilgrimage.

In relation to the category of hospitality, the term "food" was used seven times and "water" eight times. No references to "sarmale", tea, coffee, and accommodations were recorded.

With the exception of an article about the roadblock in the capital during the pilgrimage period and about the competition between Iași and Bucharest regarding the number of saints relics on the pilgrimage and the number of pilgrims [71], the media was favourably neutral toward the pilgrimage to St. Dimitrie the New in 2022. The media materials focused on the schedule of the pilgrimage, the presentation of the procession itineraries, and the role of volunteers in supporting the pilgrims.

The research data disproved the initial assumption, signalling a change in the media's perspective on the great pilgrimages in Romania. For many years, pilgrims who willingly waited in line to touch relics, believing that they would bring them health and prosperity, and the crowding (not only for the relics but also for enjoying the "sarmale" dish) that the law enforcement forces could not control have sometimes been entertaining topics for journalists, many of them trained during the programmatically atheist communist regime, or who had journalists trained in communism as masters/teachers. The change in approach indicates the acceptance of the two great pilgrimages as part of the local Orthodox religious life. The great number of participants after the two years of pandemic restrictions also contributed to that.

Concerning hospitality, the media reports also suggest a greater involvement on behalf of local authorities and locals from Iași and its surrounding areas compared to Bucharest.

### 3.2. Individual Journeys to the Father Confessor: Semi-Structured Interview Processing

Orthodox believers know that if you really want a suitable priest, you will find him. For most of the Romanian Orthodox, the parish priest is also the father confessor, that is, the one who hears their confession periodically (usually during the great fasting periods or, at least during the Lent), establishes their penance, and gives them communion, or does not. For others, the relationship with the father confessor means much more, because it is an assumed path to an assisted closeness to God. In contemporary Romania, in every generation there have been several very famous priests and monks working as father confessors wearing an aura of legend. The father confessors must be sought. "You ask yourself certain questions that you think you will find an answer to in the spiritual world, and the monks are the ones you expect to have this answer. Since I couldn't find these answers from the priests in the city, I set out on a kind of pilgrimage to known father confessors, about whom I had learned from acquaintances and friends" says one of the respondents (I10).

Sometimes the father confessor is purposefully, programmatically searched. "It was the result of a search in the spiritual field, an inner search, as I had read in the books of Fr. Ioanichie Bălan" (a famous father confessor who lived at the end of the 20th century, o.n.), "so, it's one thing to go as a tourist to see Voroneț, and the other monastery there, Moldovița, and others, or to go and meet great spiritual guides" and "then that's how I chose them, from books. I found about them in books, I had read *The Russian Pilgrim* that was the trigger. I said I would be a pilgrim, but not like that anyway, not as a tourist" emphasizes another individual traveller we interviewed (I9). He explained in detail his searches "He had the reputation of being the greatest of our father confessors, even if I was not impressed by his stricter approach . . . . My thinking was already worked with some prototypes, it was the version with the formal rule, this was an extreme, and the insistence on the letter, on tradition, we have to do those, yes we do the canons, the same was the case with the other one, but there was about freedom... So these were the prototypes, one focused on complying with the rules, one with the freedom, but I needed something... I found him, his approach was somewhere in the middle compared to the others and surpasses those,

in my opinion, because in his I found exactly an unrest that the others did not have" (I9). For other individual travellers the meeting with the father confessor was not sought, it simply happened. For one of the respondents, that happened years ago, when she was in a treatment facility in the precinct of the priest's monastery "In front of the cell there were many people waiting to meet him, every day people came to confess to him, or just to talk to him. In the evening I would see him at the balcony of the cell, he had a warm look and caught my attention because he had a big, white beard...then he would walk through the corridors of the monastery and talk to everyone who passed by him... I decided to go and talk to him. I stood in line to enter the father's cell... after some time I managed to see him. I went in and sat down... honestly I didn't know what to say to him..." (I11).

There are also spiritual sons of the father confessor for whom the connection with him was built and strengthened over time on an almost equal basis, each recognizing the prestige of the other in his world. Teachers, doctors, important politicians, and representatives of the authorities listen to their priests. "You cannot listen" (I13), "That's why he's a father confessor, to listen to him" (I14).

Meeting the great father confessors is impressive. "I was impressed by the certainty with which they spoke... They described a somewhat new and vaguely unknown, but prescient world, an unseen world that the respective priests seemed to see" (I10), recounts one of the travellers. When the father confessor met is the one that is sought, the spiritual connection is established for a long time and is a source of good for the spiritual son: "I came to the father because I felt something special... maybe even holy... to confess to him. I had never felt that before, it was a feeling of deep peace and it was as if I knew it from somewhere. Every time I met him, it felt like it was not years that passed... but days" (I11), "while as I talking with him in the cell, I felt a spiritual relief... there I feel closer to God. It is a place where you find yourself" (I12), or "It was so quiet there, I had never felt so peaceful before, maybe only in my childhood" (I14), the respondents confess.

They are impressed by the father confessor's ability to reach the souls of believers: "He spoke calmly, he had a kindness in his soul and above all a gentle look... he would succeed every time to reach the person's soul and really help them. I don't want to say that I didn't have any more troubles after talking with him... but he was succeeding to soothe your soul. He didn't take the trouble... but he brought a part of his goodness into your soul and that's how you had the strength to move on..." (I11); "The cell set up within the monastery was amazingly simple... it had a bed, a table, a chair and was surrounded by many icons and photographs from his youth... it was like he had an aura around him... but mostly I liked our talks.... I liked how he would talk to every person and try to make you forget all your troubles. He spoke people's language... not from the books. He never tried to convince me of anything... I realized it myself... but I was under the guidance of his gentleness" (I12); "he's so delicate, as if he's asking for forgiveness for telling me things about me, he takes care to comfort me" (I13).

Solitary travellers are often hosted in monasteries, and they are not picky about the accommodation conditions ("In Moldova at Sihăstria we crowded together, there were two of us in a bed, it was very crowded", I1). When they cannot sleep at the monastery, they look for guesthouses nearby. For some of them, the monastery food is appetizing, "the food was very good. On Wednesdays, Fridays and fasting days, they served us fasting food which was very good. When fish was allowed, we had fish on the menu. Fasting time were strictly respected" (I11) and "fasting days were respected... but even then the food was very good" (I12), they say. For others, eating with the father confessor, who "always makes sure that there is what is needed on the table" (I13), is in itself an occasion for joy.

When they are staying at the monastery, the travellers take part in the religious services with interest. "It was night, they woke us up to go to the service. At Frăsinei (an Athonite order monastery, where women are not allowed, o.n) they woke us up from one o'clock and we stayed in the church until five o'clock" (I9) says one of them, and another traveller specifies: "We would participate in all the religious services in the church of the monastery. A priest was serving there, and the nuns were singing at the lectern... when the bells rang,

it was like I was going back in time and I was thinking about how I used to go to church with my mother... so I didn't miss the services there" (I12).

In connection with that, solitary travellers are impressed by the large number of locals and tourists also participating in religious services, especially on holidays ("There were so many people that you would see them lining up all the way into the street... There were special moments... to see so many people gathered for the religious service", I12), but their interactions with the locals are sporadic. A situation like the one in the following story is rather unusual: "Because of the snow, the bus didn't come to the monastery, we had to walk a few kilometres down to another village, where some people invited us to a boiled plum brandy and greaves" (I9).

### 3.3. Group Journeys to Monasteries: Semi-Structured Interviews Processing

According to the interviewees, the group religious journeys they had participated in were organized by parish priests, the Pensioners' Union ("the head of the Union is in charge", I4), a "pensioners' association" (I3), or the County Pension House. The trips are called "pilgrimages" by everyone, even with the encouragement of parish priests: "The father once explained to us, if we only go to monasteries, it's a pilgrimage, otherwise it's an excursion" (I5). There are trips by minibus or coach. The respondents travelled all over the country, from the Danube and the Black Sea to Maramureş and Bucovina in the north, and from Moldova, in the east, to Crişana, in the west. The respondents indicated a variety of motivations for them to join group religious journeys including the participation in the religious services at the monastery (I1), the worship of holy icons (I2), spiritual enrichment, since "prayers to the holy miracle-working icons and to the holy relics that are in the various monasteries everywhere are very important. In fact, pilgrimages are organized for these reasons" (I3), peace of mind, and because the places are closer to God (I4–I8). Attending religious services at the monastery is an event in itself. "I really like the atmosphere there, but also the religious services are much more impressive ... although I go to Church every Sunday, the religious services at the monasteries are closer to my soul" (I2) confesses one of the respondents. "In fact, this is also the idea of these pilgrimages, to be closer to God through those who have chosen to serve Him and dedicate their lives to Him", states another respondent.

Travellers have guides and their role is acknowledged: "It is much more practical to have a guide because it tells you the essential information about the places you are to visit. The guide is the one who explains the itinerary and the main objectives, their significance" (I1); "If you have a reliable guide you can be sure that the information you receive is authentic" (I2). The best guides are those of Basilica Travel, the travel agency of the Romanian Patriarchate "there is no comparison, you can see that they are good at it, that they know what they are saying" (I5), but also some of the parish priests are appreciated as guides: "the father knows everything and he tells us, he always tells us interesting things... he tells us about places and events" (I7). The journeys begin with a prayer said on the bus, this can be "Our Father, which is the prayer of the journey" (I3) and the "Akathist of the Mother of God" (I5) is read sometimes on the way and it is sung, and "one felt a spiritual relief of joy" (I2). Travellers enjoy the road. "It is a pleasant atmosphere. We were a small group...so the atmosphere was very friendly... I felt like I was on a class trip... I went back in time!" (I1) confesses one of them. "After visiting each objective, they discuss all kinds of prayers, about the miracles of some saints... but they also discuss other aspects related to everyday life. In general, the discussions are on religious topics...everything is pleasant and quiet... an oasis of peace of mind" (I3).

Travellers like the atmosphere at the monastery, the welcoming interior of the monastery churches, the quality icons, the paintings that "are of rare beauty and you remain fascinated and eager to continue looking at them" (I1), but also the surrounding landscape. The historical importance of the place gives added value to the journey. This is, for example, the case of the anti-communist resistance monument at the Brâncoveanu Monastery of Sâmbăta de Sus, where "they raised a memorial cross for the fighters right at the gate of the

monastery" (I7), or that of the Dealu Monastery, where the head of the Romanian Voivode Michael the Brave, assassinated on the battlefield, is located: "and in the place where the head of Michael the Brave is there is an impressive inscription about the place where the honest head of the Christian Michael the Great Voivode lies... and his body lies elsewhere... in Câmpia Turzii . . . I was very impressed by this inscription... honest Michael... it is a place imbued with the history of our nation where you feel that you are part of the soul of your people" (I1), says one respondent.

The respondents mentioned the large number of people who were at the monasteries with them at the same time, "everywhere there were dozens of coaches, small cars, minibuses with pilgrims from all areas of the country, even from abroad" (I3). The interviewed travellers were impressed by the hospitality of the monks and nuns. "Everywhere we were received with great warmth and kindness, the priests and nuns enjoyed our presence and they were waiting for us to come back another time" (I3), states one of them. The travellers felt like "dear and important guests" (I8), they felt that they were given "real attention" (I7), and that the monks and nuns took the time to take care of them.

During the journeys (we prefer not to call these group religious journeys "pilgrimages", in order to preserve the theoretical coherence of our approach, despite the fact that they are called so by the organizers and participants) the respondents were mostly accommodated in guesthouses near the monasteries. This type of accommodation leaves them the freedom to decide when and how much they participate in religious services: "In general, the whole group tries to participate in religious services, but sometimes this is not possible, not all of us manage to arrive..." (I1), "sometimes this is not possible... most of the time we also participated in services" (I2). There are also cases when travellers sleep at the monastery. This solution has its advantages: "I like it better when we stay at monasteries, there is a schedule that must be respected, and we must adapt to their schedule. At a guesthouse or hotel, you feel like you're on vacation... for me, the idea of a pilgrimage is not to have all the comforts and to adapt to the conditions in which the monks or nuns stay" (I3). Such a solution is closer to the meaning of the religious journey. There are also short, one-day journeys without accommodations.

Travellers bring food from home; they are ready to fend for themselves. Or they eat "somewhere on the way at a guesthouse or a tourist stop... it depends on those on the bus" (I2). That happens if they cannot eat at the monastery, "if there is no time... or the meal cannot be served there" (I2). However, it is also a common thing that "the meal is usually served at the monastery after the Holy Liturgy together with all the pilgrims and monks or nuns from that place" (I3). The food is "simple, fasting" (I6).

The respondents pointed out the distinct presence of local people in the monasteries, "judging by their clothing they were from the nearby" (I6), especially on Sundays and on the occasion of other religious holidays. In interactions with travellers, the locals are open and eager to share their knowledge resulting from their closeness to the vicinity with the place of worship. They teach travellers what to bring to the monastery and what to carry with them in order to be blessed and then taken home (I2), "they offered to provide us all the necessary support" (I3).

Interview responses reveal an emotional involvement and strong assumption of religiosity. The religious dimension of journeys to religiously significant places prevails both in the case of individual travellers and group journeys. Hosting travellers and feeding them in monasteries are sources of joy for travellers, it meets their expectations, and is part of the path toward approaching the sacred. The guest status in the place of worship is important for travellers. The choice to get accommodations in guesthouses and eating at restaurants represent solutions adopted when needed, in the absence of more suitable ones. These findings show the importance travellers give to consolidating their connection with the place(s) of worship.

### 3.4. *The Monastery, as a Destination of Religious Journey: Results of Participatory Observations*

At the small monasteries in Făgăraş Land, it rarely happens that two or more groups of travellers are present at the same time in the monastery on regular working days. Besides these groups, a few solitary travellers humbly pray inside the church. At the entrance there is a stand with books (works of the great theologians of Orthodoxy, testimonies about the lives of living Christians, guidance for religious life, etc.) and other religious objects. There is also a box where the “pomelnice” are left, i.e., lists of the living and the dead to be mentioned in the church during services. Along with the lists, the believers also give money in an amount of their own choice. Most of the time there is a monk or a nun at the stand, and they answer travellers’ questions about rituals, schedules, and confession. Lists and money can also simply be left at the stand.

At Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus there are visitors throughout the day, attracted by both the religious and touristic prestige of the place. They have access to the monastery courtyard, the museum collection of religious objects, the old church, and the pond. It is a common space where monks strive to do their own tasks without being disturbed.

During the holidays, the agglomeration at the monasteries increases spectacularly. The locals are easy to identify among travellers, by their clothing (specific to the rural area of Făgăraş Land) and by the self-confidence with which they move inside the monastery. They thus signal the fact that they go there often and know what they have to do. In Sâmbăta de Sus, the locals can also be identified by the place they occupy in the church during the liturgy. They sit in the front, close to the altar, while outsiders sit at the back. This arrangement indicates that the local people view the monastery as their own, and they consider themselves to have additional rights there.

The number of locals among the participants in the service differs. In some places they are the majority and they come accompanied by their children. In other places, they are few. In the monasteries where there are many locals, the monks and nuns are close to them and they seem to know them personally.

The behaviour of travellers differs in monasteries that welcome many tourists compared to the less sought-after monasteries. In the presence of tourists, even religious travellers are less pious, allowing themselves more freedom of attitude and behaviour. In the small monasteries, the atmosphere is different and it suggests a closer connection with the divinity. On the other hand, the attitude of the monks and nuns toward all visitors, religious travellers, or secular tourists, differs significantly from monastery to monastery. In the presence of tourists, they are reserved and they seem to use a protocol of minimal effective interaction. In some of the small monasteries, the monks and nuns are friendly and more talkative and in others the compliance with the rules of monk/lay separation is rigorously and insistently enforced. It is the management of the monastery that sets the tone for the relationship between monks and visitors. Some priests manage to make those present feel that they are participating in the service, while others want order and peace in the church.

Some of those present at the monastery during the services prefer to stay outside, so the churches have sound systems. Both for tourists and religious travellers the in/out pairing is significant, as if the door of the monastery church is the threshold between the sacred and the profane space. When crossing the threshold, the one who enters the church changes gestures, posture, and is filled with humility and hieratism. It is not a conscious change, but rather it is a reaction to the encounter with the sacred.

The courtyards of the monasteries are well tended, and the skill of the caretakers can be noticed. There are many flowers, the alleys are clean, and the place is always swept. Food products and handicrafts, from jams to decorative braids, made in the monastery are sold almost everywhere.

At the gates of the big monasteries there are beggars, and many of those who leave offer them modest amounts of money. There is a real fair at the gate of the Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus, where visitors can buy items such as traditional bread



and cheeses, dresses for festive events, sports items, and toys. The merchants at this fair are laymen.

### 3.5. *Types of Travel to Religiously Significant Places in Romania: A Taxonomic Attempt*

Based on the research data obtained and the already published works on this topic, we identified the following types of travel of Romanians to religiously significant places in the country: (a) great pilgrimage (the one from Iași and the one from Bucharest), at fixed dates; (b) small pilgrimage, determined by the temporary presence of relics or miracle-working icons at various churches in the country, or at springs considered healing, on the occasion of the Orthodox holiday the Healing Spring; (c) journey to the father confessor; (d) spiritual journey (in a group or individually); (e) group religious journey; and (f) secular tourist visit. We used the term “visit” for the last type of travel we identified to mark the connotative distance between it and the other types of travel. During the journey the road and the destination are perceived together, the road anticipates and prepares travellers for the destination. During the visit, the focus is on the destination, and the road is free of significance and compliance obligations.

The order in which these types of travel are listed is the result of an attempt to place them in the continuum highlighted by Smith [49] between pilgrimage and secular tourism. However, it is not about an even, balanced arrangement. Leaving aside the secular tourist visits, which also represent the limiting variant in Smith’s continuum, the types of travel of Romanians are grouped in the first half of the continuum, i.e., in the area of pilgrimage-religious tourism.

Pilgrimages (great and small) are motivated by the participants’ personal canonical Orthodox faith and devotion. We believe that a phenomenon of imposing a new great pilgrimage is emerging at Prislop given the multitude of pilgrims, the stories about the wonderful deeds performed by Father Arsenie, and the miracles people expect of him. Although the fact is that Father Arsenie has not yet been canonized, those who pass by his grave have expectations related to his miraculous powers and give the journey there a dimension of spiritual tourism (with a meaning that is alternative to canonical religiosity).

Journeys to a father confessor are also motivated by the traveller’s personal canonical Orthodox faith. They are not pilgrimages because they are not held on a specific date, nor for the worship of relics. They are motivated by the search for a confessor, a suitable spiritual father, and by the active preservation of the father–spiritual son bond. Spiritual journeys are also motivated by strong and authentic, but less canonical, personal beliefs. They are related to esoterically anchored quests and expectations that may, but not necessarily, interfere with the prestige of known religious centres. Their destinations are mostly places with rediscovered spiritual significance, declaratively established or in the process of being established. However, consecrated religious places can also become centres of spiritual travel by resignifying their religious history.

In the case of group religious journeys, the number of variants is wide. Besides the “coach pilgrimage” variant organized by individuals and described by M. Bănică [13], there are journeys organized by parish priests for their own parishioners and journeys organized by specialized tourist agencies, including Basilica Travel, with the help of local subsidiaries of institutions or organizations dealing with pensioners. In the case of the last two variants, the journeys benefit from specialized guidance and they also serve a catechizing role. The trips organized by individuals have destinations (places and monks sought out by the travellers) that are not considered important or representative of the image of the Romanian Orthodox Church. The other two types of group journeys have recognized traditional religious centres as destinations. The motivations of the participants in the religious journeys called “coach pilgrimage” by Bănică are “(1) the desire to meet a charismatic character, a spiritual guru, at the very edge of the tolerance of the official Church; (2) low-cost tourism, with a spiritual allure, for people with modest means and without personal cars, who wish to escape a tiring and polluted city; and (3) the opportunity to make new friends or to find useful professional connections even after the pilgrimage

is over, in daily life. The pleasure to meet people of the same generation, in particular for retirees, and to talk together about similar life experiences mostly related to the communist era" [13] (p. 84). With these motivations, religious journeys organized by individuals stretch the pilgrimage–tourism continuum beyond religious tourism, toward tourism rather than pilgrimage. The other two types of religious journey remain in the first half of the continuum, in the area of pilgrimage over tourism and religious tourism.

### *3.6. Where Do Travellers at the Religiously Significant Places in Romania Eat and Sleep: A Recapitulation of the Variants*

In the case of the actual pilgrimages, the participants are on their own. They generally bring water and food from home, as they expect long hours of waiting in line. Additionally, during the pilgrimage from Iași to St. Parascheva, the local authorities prepare the impressive amounts of "sarmale" that the media reports about, and in Bucharest private donors bring and offer food to the pilgrims. In terms of accommodation, everyone chooses the option that suits them, from booking a place in a guesthouse in the city to sleeping in the park or at the train station.

In the case of journeys to a father confessor, the travellers are also on their own, but often they are considered guests of the monastery where the monk lives, and they sleep and eat there with the monks. The spiritual journey participants are on their own as well. It may happen that they too are guests of some Orthodox hermitages and monasteries, when their searches bring them around an Orthodox monk whose authority they recognize.

In the case of group religious journeys, there are many options for meals and accommodations for travellers. They may be invited to eat at the monastery, by virtue of informal arrangements between the journey organizers and the administration of the place of worship. Sometimes it is the prestige of the organizing priest that turns his parishioners into guests of the monastery. It also happens that the personal friendship or kinship relations of the organizing priest turn the travellers into guests of some parishes in the destination area. The local host community mobilizes in these cases at the request of its own parish priest and waits for its travelling guests with a cooked meal. There is also the option of organizing picnics along the route, which is especially popular with groups of townspeople. However, many times, travellers eat at restaurants along the route. On journeys that span several days, travellers can sleep at monasteries that have expanded and diversified their accommodation offerings in recent years, or at guesthouses along the route.

## **4. Discussion**

### *4.1. Particularities of the Typology of Religious Journeys in Romania*

As we have shown above, the types of travel to religiously significant places in Romania are distributed with predilection in the first half of the pilgrimage–tourism continuum.

We believe that this fact has two causes. The first concerns the contemporary history of the country, namely the fall of the communist regime in 1989. The freedom to manifest religiosity then regained by Romanians extends to their appetite for authentically religious journeys. The results of the research on the media presentation of the great pilgrimages and on the mainly religiously motivated journeys to significant places in Romania corroborate the conclusions of previous studies on the development of religious tourism in post-communist countries [4,13,65]. The spectacular increase in the offer of religious journeys [5,9,13,25,64] is the answer to this appetite. The involvement of parish priests in organizing and guiding journeys (which they call "pilgrimages" for added prestige), as well as the establishment of the Romanian Patriarchate's tourism agency, imposed and strengthened the religious dimension of group journeys.

The second cause, we believe, is the wisdom with which the Orthodox Church manages the rather unclear border between the religious and the spiritual. The Orthodox Church has harmoniously managed its relationship with popular religion over time [13]. Orthodox priests found subtle variants of working with the background of pre-Christian beliefs and practices [72,73]. In this context, spiritual seekers have an open path to confes-

sors, such as the believers who consider Father Arsenie Boca a saint before his canonization, expect miracles from him, and turn his grave into a place of pilgrimage, therefore, the reputations of some monks as spiritual gurus are tolerated.

Thus, in Orthodoxy the search for spirituality, which emerges as a significant motivation in tourism [74], does not necessarily increase in relevance at the expense of religious searches. Additionally, in the context of the harmonious relationship with popular religion, in the areas of central European influence in Romania (Transylvania, Bucovina) “pricesne” is sung during religious journeys. These paraliturgical songs of clear Greek Catholic heritage are tacitly accepted by the Orthodox Church, and they even function as an Orthodox marker of intra-denominational identity [75].

#### 4.2. Hospitality as a Resource for Sustainable Development of Local Communities

Sustainable tourism requires the involvement of local communities in managing the presence of tourists in the area [76]. Providing accommodations and food are simple, basic forms of involvement. They are part of the network of mundane services indicated by [59] as a necessary condition for pilgrimage tourism. We believe that for some types of travel to religiously significant places in Romania, a stronger involvement of local communities would be beneficial for both locals and travellers. We will demonstrate further in what way this would be beneficial.

Orthodox pilgrimages in Romania take place in cities, within a limited time frame, and involve the slow walk on an urban itinerary to the place where holy relics and/or miracle-working icons are exhibited. The development of a network of services similar to the one at Lourdes [60], or at other Catholic pilgrimage centres, is not justified in this context. In the case of Orthodox pilgrimages, the involvement of local residents in the hosting services would focus on providing a support structure (luggage storage, heating, short rest periods), with the possibility of expanding to domestic accommodation if needed. These are services that townspeople, who are usually reserved about dealing with outsiders, could still offer at the request of their parish priests. It would be a response like the one recorded in Rio de Janeiro in 2013, for World Youth Day [6]. Traditional “sarmale” provided by the authorities, portions of food provided by generous private donors, restaurants, and shops in the vicinity of the urban pilgrimage routes restrict the area of useful intervention of the locals to offering water and hot tea to the pilgrims.

Things are different for other types of religious journeys. Tourism, as a complementary alternative to traditional rural occupations [17], is a strategic way of economically revitalizing villages [76,77]. The involvement of local, predominantly rural, communities in the vicinity of religiously significant places represents a considerable source of sustainable development of both religious tourism and the respective local communities. As we mentioned above, the research results highlight the importance of travellers’ emotional connection with the place of worship and the significance of monastic hospitality in this context.

Many local communities are in a privileged relationship with neighbouring monasteries and hermitages. As we have shown above, the locals are easily recognizable among the tourists, they know the places, the practices, the monks or nuns, and they signal that they are at home within the walls of the religious place. In order to expand this good relationship, part of the hospitality obligations of the monastic communities could be transferred to the neighbouring rural communities. That would allow, on the one hand, more travellers to be accommodated by locals than the sleeping places that the monastery can offer.

On the other hand, it is about the community taking over the activities of preparing meals for travellers. Eating together has a symbolic meaning for them, it amplifies the spiritual significance of the journey [13]. Having the meal in the host community near the religious place can be a good, friendly, and, at the same time, a symbolically charged substitute for the meal inside the place of worship since it is prepared under the guidance of monks or nuns, at their recommendation and with their blessing. The local community gains its prestige and recognition through the proximity and blessing of the monks or nuns.

At the same time, if travellers have a meal in the community, the disruption of monastic life, considered by monks and nuns to be a disadvantage in monasteries on tourist itineraries [5], diminishes. The number of hermitages and monasteries that can provide accommodation and meals for travellers, with the help of local people, thus increases.

What, for travellers, represents an occasion of joy and for monks and nuns represents a relief, is for the local community is a source of economic benefits and development. The community can provide workers, locally sourced ingredients, and, last but not the least, the experience of cooking together. In traditional rural communities, on the occasion of various community events, women cooked together for all participants [78,79]. There was even a tacit competition between neighbouring villages over recipes and the craftsmanship of housewives. The available knowledge and the nostalgia for participating together in such activities, which have almost fallen out of use in many areas of the country in recent years, deserves to be capitalized upon. Jobs, priority in the market for local agricultural food products, and pleasant work with familiar people are benefits of the community taking over the task of preparing the meals for those who arrive at hermitages and monasteries. Managing such a task is a challenge for social entrepreneurs, but it is an appropriate tourism social entrepreneurship activity. Social entrepreneurs are “change agents” who orchestrate the sustainable development of communities [80]. Tourism social entrepreneurship is a social innovation with the role of catalysing the host communities [14], the efficient mobilization of local resources [81], and the creation of sustainable livelihoods [14,82]. Tourism social entrepreneurship strengthens and uses local social networks to support regional economic initiatives [83] in a holistic approach [14,76,82].

In Romania, the food cooked at the monastery has the reputation of being very tasty, although simple and often for fasting. Food prepared in the community, but under the guidance of monks and nuns, could benefit from an extension of this notoriety. The supervision of the preparation process by monks and nuns would, in addition, represent a guarantee of the full observance of Orthodox culinary restrictions, which is an important fact for religious travellers.

Supporting the travellers with food also has a minimal variant, namely that of offering some cooked, hot dishes, specific to the place, near the monasteries as street food. Romanians are great eaters of “ciorbă” (sour soup) [83], which is almost always on their daily menu. A wide variety of soups and sour soups are prepared in Romania, with significant regional differences. Hearty, easy to prepare in large quantities, and easy to market [78,79], warm soups and sour soups are dishes that Romanian travellers would be happy to find at the end of their journey, and locals could offer with relatively little effort.

Groups of travellers to the monasteries would be the main beneficiaries of the efforts that neighbouring communities put into preparing the meal. To be functional, the variant requires good communication and coordination between all the actors involved, i.e., the travel organizers, monks or nuns and locals. Secondly, the meal in the local community represents a viable solution for solitary travellers looking for their father confessor, especially during periods of agglomeration in the four important fasting periods in Orthodoxy, and for spiritual seekers, when their searches lead to the monastery.

Eating together increases the state of *communitas* [6,43]. By hosting and cooking for travellers, the locals become part of this state. Hosting affects the religious life of the hosts, because it strengthens their connection with the divinity [6]. By cooking for the guests of the monasteries, the locals strengthen their ties with the monastic community and, implicitly, improve their sense of identity. They can feel closer to the centre of religious events and experiences.

For all these reasons, the involvement of local communities in the management of hospitality in religious places is sustainable.

Near the famous monasteries, located in the tourist circuits, there are numerous guesthouses and restaurants. Religious travellers sleep and eat there when they cannot do so at the monasteries. However, guesthouses and restaurants are more for secular tourists. Accommodations and meals in nearby communities, with the blessing of the monks or nuns,

is an alternative more suited to the profile of religious group travellers. More importantly, the taking over of hospitality tasks by communities considerably increases the number of places of worship that can serve as a travel destination and the freedom to configure itineraries that are distinct from the main tourist circuits.

#### *4.3. Local History as a Sustainable Development Resource Associated with Journeys to Religious Places*

Respondents to the interviews confessed their interest in visiting some touristic objectives during group journeys to monasteries. In this way, they signalled the sustainable development potential of associating local historical sites with religious journeys. On the one hand, it is about places that are significant from a national point of view. Heritage sites are nevertheless used by political and religious authorities to construct national identity [40]. However, the connection between religion and national identity fuelled the religiosity of the population during the communist period [25], despite the programmatic atheist state, and in post-communism the increase in importance of religion is accompanied by an increase in nationalism [4]. For example, the fortresses, voivodeship churches, and even the tomb of Stefan the Great, the most famous voivode of Moldova, at the Putna monastery, are linked in the minds of Romanians to the part of Moldova (province in eastern Romania) located beyond the Prut River, which is currently the Republic of Moldova. Another example is a cave designed as a museum near the Tismana monastery built in the 14th century in Wallachia (the southern province of Romania), where the treasury of the National Bank of Romania was hidden in the complicated context of the approaching end of the war in 1944. Romanian historians believe that the Romanian people were born Christian. On the background of the rise of right wing political movements in Europe before the Second World War, the Bucharest university professor Nae Ionescu was the mentor of a spectacular generation of young interwar Romanian intellectuals (Mircea Eliade, Emil Cioran, and Eugen Ionescu are some of them). From this position and in this context, he emphasized the organic, defining link of Romanians with Orthodoxy, an emphasis signalled by K. Hitchens [84]. Echoes of that emphasis are still present in the speeches of representatives of the Romanian Orthodox Church and contemporary right wing politicians.

On the other hand, it is about significant places for the suffering and resistance of the locals to various aggressions, as well as for situations where it seems that history has done justice. In many cases, but not necessarily, resistance has a relevant religious component. This is, for example, the case of the places of detention of the Romanian political and religious elites before communism. Organized as museums, these former prisons are dramatic testimonies of the sufferings of the prisoners, but also of the growth of their faith. Then, there are museums about active, armed resistance against the newly installed communist regime in the middle of the last century. Resistance groups were organized in most mountainous areas of the country. The memory of the confrontations and of the terror exercised on the locals by the Security (“Securitate” in Romanian) units—the repressive military instrument of the communist state—are still sensitive and painful topics for the local communities, as is the case, for example, in the foothills of the Făgăraş Mountains [85–89]. Events have become legendary and their locations can be significant in planning the routes of religious journeys. In the northern part of the Făgăraş Mountains, between the mountains and the Olt River, lies Făgăraş Land. This area is an important destination for religious tourism, thanks to the Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus, supporting, according to tradition, the anti-communist fighters in the mountains, but also thanks to the newer monasteries built on the sites of old Orthodox hermitages and monasteries that disappeared in the 18th century in the process of imposing Greek Catholicism in Transylvania [90]. In the evaluation of the tourist value of the places of worship in Romania, those in the centre and west of the country received low scores on the socio-cultural dimension compared to those in the north of Moldova and Wallachia [61]. These low scores are partly attributed by the authors to Hungarian, German, and Austrian influences related to the history of the areas.

We believe that the religious history of a place, in all its complexity, can itself be a source of increasing the regional socio-cultural scores. In the history of Făgăraş Land, an old medieval Romanian state formation, there are still many significant moments [89], that associate places to visit. Their introduction into religious journey routes would contribute to the economic development of the area and to the strengthening of the community identity of the locals. This is also the case with the promotion of numerous village museums with a historical and ethnographic profile. Sometimes the national significance of historical sites is intertwined with their religious significance.

#### *4.4. Traditional Local Crafts as a Sustainable Development Resource Associated with Travel to Religious Sites*

The souvenir trade has always flourished near religious centres. Objects taken from pilgrimage centres connect pilgrims with those at home and with the religious place, in a spontaneous *communitas* experienced both individually and socially. These objects convey meanings, meaning that those at the home where they end up become beneficiaries of the pilgrimage [60]. In Orthodoxy, ordinary objects are transformed into containers and vehicles of the divine essence through contact with sacred objects [63], or by simply keeping them in their proximity. These objects transform the houses where they are kept into places of religious experience, because they purify and bring inner peace. The vehicular function prevails over their aesthetic value, which is why so many kitsch objects are offered for sale in commercial areas near religiously significant places. This is not a feature specific to religious places in Romania, there are similar practices at Lourdes [61] and likely in most religious places in the world. However, the offer can be improved by revitalizing and encouraging traditional local crafts, especially those directly related to religion. For example, Bucovina is famous for the eggs that are traditionally painted before Easter [91].

In Făgăraş Land there were famous centres for painting icons on glass [92] and at Brâncoveanu Monastery in Sâmbăta de Sus there is an important collection of such icons. The craft of glass icons spread to Transylvania from the Nicula monastery in the northwest of the province at the beginning of the 18th century. Aside from the practice being continued in monasteries, painting workshops and camps could be established. Operating under the guidance of the monasteries and benefiting from the prestige of such guidance, they would sustainably develop the neighbouring communities as well.

## **5. Conclusions**

In post-communist and predominantly Orthodox Romania, traveling to religiously significant places is a widespread phenomenon. In the pilgrimage–tourism continuum, these journeys seem to be prioritized in the area of pilgrimage–religious tourism and much less in the area of religious tourism–secular tourism. The research data are in agreement in this respect with those of a previous identification of the main motivations of Romanian travellers to monasteries as being religious ones [64]. Taking into account the placement of the journeys in the first half of the pilgrimage–tourism continuum, we proposed some ways of involving the locals in carrying out these journeys according to the religious expectations and identity–cultural sensitivities of the travellers. The involvement of local communities near places of worship in hosting and preparing meals for travellers frees the members of the monastic community from the obligations of hospitality, protecting the normal course of monastic life, with its specific constraints and restrictions on interactions with lay people. At the same time, the involvement of local residents sustainably develops their communities. Adding some objectives of historical interest to the journey program, with a national stake or one commemorating the Romanian resistances against the various challenges (in Transylvania these often refer to the complicated relations of the Romanians with the Hungarian minority, for a long time politically privileged before the union of the province with Romania, after the First World War), strengthens the religious significance of these journeys, due to the close connection between religion and national challenges. Visitors to local historical sites provide income for local residents. The same happens in

the case of the sale of traditional craft products in the monastery fairs, as an alternative to objects produced in large quantities and devoid of links with local religious specificity. All of that outlines journeys to religious places in Romania as a source of sustainable and local community development in the context of the contemporary development of religious tourism, and the predominantly religious motivations of travellers and the importance of the identity of Orthodoxy for Romanians.

The interviews conducted highlighted the importance of individual journeys to the father confessor for Orthodox Christians. This type of search for a guide on the path to God is not often addressed in academic discussion. We believe that these special journeys are worth researching separately.

Our research limitations are important to note. Once activated and coordinated through tourism social entrepreneurship, the local structures for hosting, offering food, valuing history, and traditional crafts could expand toward differentiated services for different types of travels. Our research looked at journeys to religiously significant places from the traveller's perspective, and we identified avenues for local development by offering useful and attractive services to travellers. How willing the local people are to get involved in supporting travel, how important the religious/secular profile of the travellers is to them, how willing they are to listen to the monks or nuns, and how many resources the community still has for the resumption of traditional crafts are questions for further research, but the answers to them are necessary to provide complete perspective on the role of local people in sustainable tourism to religious places.

Interviews with participants in religious group journeys targeted people who travelled with acquaintances, either members of the same parish or of pensioners' clubs/organizations. The homogeneity of groups represents a factor with influence on travellers' motivations, implicitly on the location of journeys to religiously significant places in the pilgrimage–tourism continuum, and on travellers' hospitality expectations. The results presented and the sustainable development suggestions we made refer to homogeneous groups of travellers. Interviews with travellers in heterogeneous groups, in a larger research project, would certainly be useful for acquiring a more complete perspective on the issue.

In this article, we only addressed the Orthodox pilgrimages in Romania. However, in this country there are also traditional Greek Catholic pilgrimages (like the one from Nicula, Cluj county) and Roman Catholic pilgrimages (like the one from Șumuleu Ciuc, Harghita county). The relationship between the locals and the pilgrims in those cases deserve distinct research projects, which would allow for more complete representation on the sustainable development dimensions of pilgrimage in Romania.

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