CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS, AND SPIRITUAL TOURISM ATTRACTIVENESS AMONG YOUNGSTERS

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Abstract

Being one of the first forms of tourism, cultural tourism has experienced several expansion and contraction phases over the years. In recent years, other subcategories of cultural tourism have increased greatly, such as spiritual tourism. If there is a trend, there are young people interested in 'newness', but to become a profitable trend, it must be promoted accordingly to the target market. In determining their desires and expectations, it turns out that young people between the ages of 18 and 35 are not only interested in spiritual tourism, but also in religious destinations when they are also busy with other activities. They associate religious tourism primarily with prayer or holy places, which some young people do not practice at all, but associate spiritual tourism with meditation or self-knowledge. While young people indicated that religious tourism could also be an attraction when combined with a good marketing strategy, most of them cannot recall seeing any marketing efforts in this regard. A good marketing strategy put in place after properly identifying the key objectives, desires, and expectations of the target market could open up great opportunities for businesses in this area.

1. Introduction

Cultural tourism has a long history and is probably the oldest form of tourism, originating in the Grand Tour. Moreover, it is one of the forms of tourism on which most policymakers seem to rely. For example, the World Tourism Organization indicated that cultural tourism accounts for 37% of global tourism and is expected to increase by 15% annually (Richards, 2003). In 2018, cultural tourism already accounted for 40% of all arrivals (UNWTO, 2019).
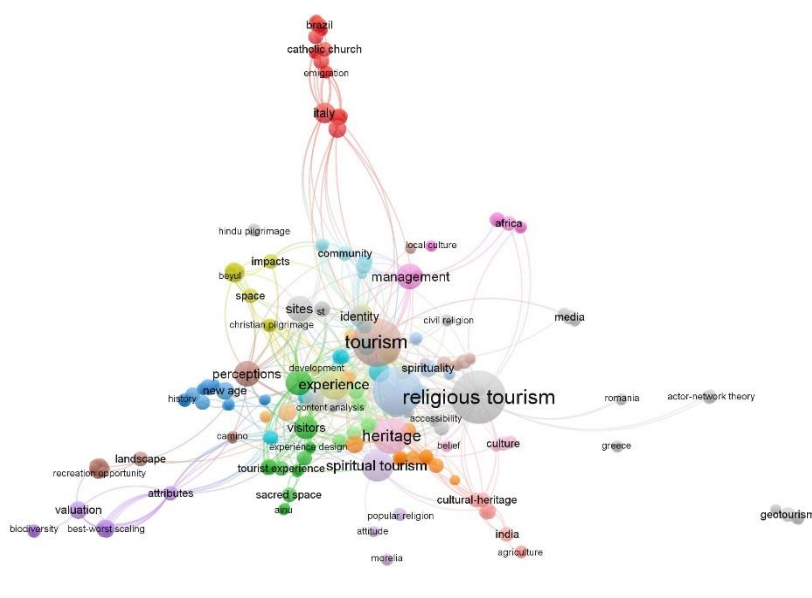

Fig. no. 1. Keyword-matches for Cultural, Religious, and/or Spiritual Tourism (85 WoS Articles)
Source: Authors' own processing using VOSviewer, based on the WoS Database
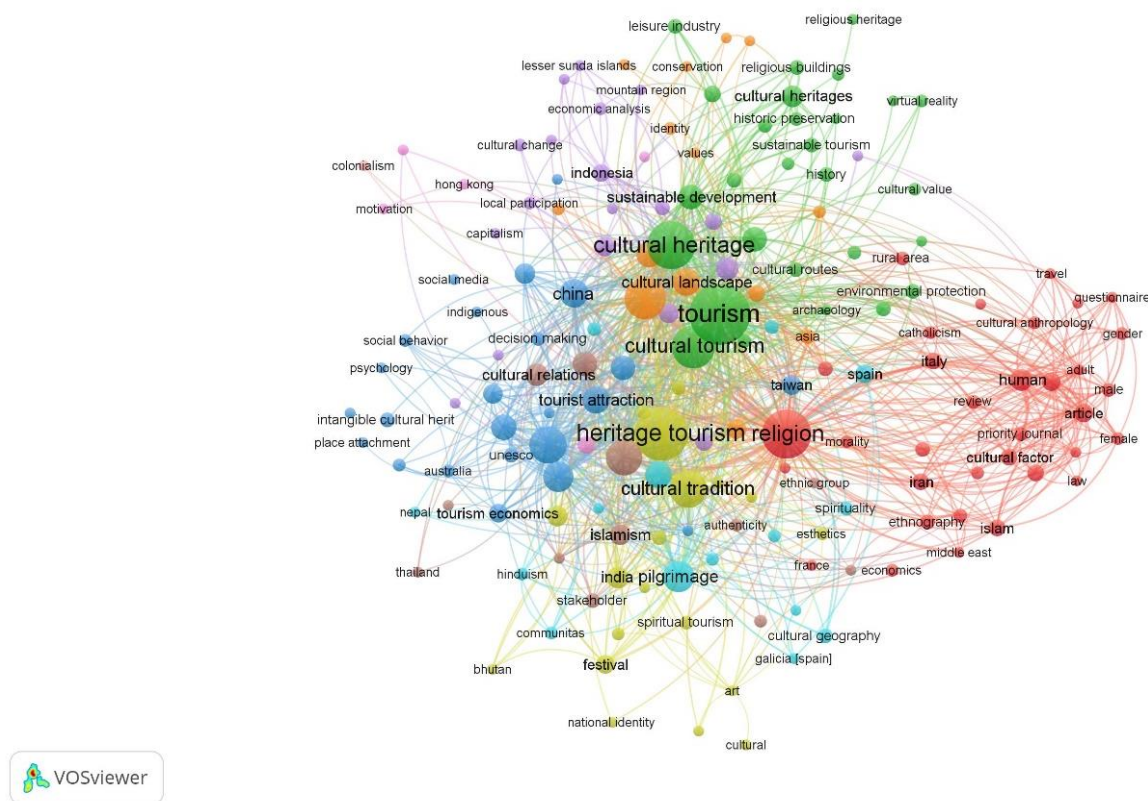
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Fig. no. 2. Keyword-matches for Cultural, Religious, and/or Spiritual Tourism (293 Scopus Articles)
Source: Authors' own processing using VOSviewer, based on the Scopus Database

In the literature, two different main definitions of cultural tourism are known, one conceptual and one technical. The conceptual definition of cultural tourism refers to "the movement of people to cultural attractions outside their normal place of residence with the intention of acquiring new information and experiences to satisfy their cultural needs," while the technical definition is "all movements of people to specific cultural attractions, such as heritage sites, artistic and cultural manifestations, art, and theater outside their normal place of residence" (Mousavi et al., 2016).

Several classifications focus not only on the types of tourists, but also on cultural tourism: since cultural tourism is not a single category, there are several subcategories such as cultural ecotourism, indigenous cultural tourism, co-cultural tourism, and socio-cultural tourism (Petroman et al., 2013). Defining cultural tourism is further complicated by the fact that it is the most dynamic of all categories and subcategories of global tourism.

2. Literature review: from international tourism to religious and pilgrimage tourism, and spiritual experiences

Types of cultural tourism include the types of cultural attractions that help cultural tourism promote itself. These types include tangible culture (handcrafted, artisanal, and handmade products) and intangible culture (memorable and deeply inspiring experiences that touch tourists emotionally and connect them to a particular place, people, and culture) (CBI, 2021). A famous example comes from ECTARC, whose experts divide the types of cultural tourism attractions into the following: archeological sites and museums, architecture (ruins, famous buildings), art such as sculptures, handicrafts, galleries, festivals, events, music and dance (classical, folk and contemporary), drama (theater, movies, playwrights), language and literature study, guided tours, events, religious festivals or pilgrimages, complete (folk or primitive) cultures and subcultures (Duda, 2016).

The organization also considers destinations whose main attractions are archeological sites. Stonehenge, the Great Wall, Chichen Itza, and the Acropolis of Athens, to name a few. They gradually promoted cultural tourism and are now among the most sought-after destinations when it

comes to ancient sites worldwide (The Luxury Travel Expert, 2020). Romania also has several sites that would benefit from great popularity if properly promoted: Sarmizegetusa Regia, Alba Iulia, Sighişoara, Rupea, Enisala, Histria, and other citadels. As for the events and festivals, there are some countries that have some of the most famous in their portfolio, for example, the United States of America, Belgium, and the United Kingdom. In recent years, Romanian tourism has also shown a positive trend in this direction, developing many successful music festivals that are highly appreciated by foreigners and especially by young people (Electric Castle, Untold, NeverSea, Jazz in the Park, etc.). Regardless of the purpose of a festival, whether cultural, religious, or spiritual, the main concept on which a festival is built is that it attracts many inbound and outbound travelers to the designated locations.

Most festivals in the United States are music festivals such as Coachella, Ultra Miami, New Orleans Jazz Festival, or Stagecoach. Germany, on the other hand, is known worldwide for Oktoberfest, in addition to its many music events. It takes place in Munich, where people drink beer and eat pretzels while dancing and celebrating.

The world's biggest religious festivals, on the other hand, take place in India, Spain, Mexico, and Japan. In Spain, Semana Santa attracts about 1.5 million visitors and is held right before Easter Sunday (Enforex, n.d.). Mexico is known worldwide for its Dia de los Muertos, while Japan hosts the popular Obon festival. With its 500-year-old history based on a Buddhist myth, Obon honors the ancestors of civilization (Japan Guide, 2022), making it one of the largest religious festivals. Finally, India's Kumbh Mela is the largest religious festival in the world, with more than 200 million visitors in 2019 (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2022). The Kumbh Mela is a Hindu religious gathering held every 12 years, with each quarter representing a different stage of the pilgrimage (UNESCO, n.d.a).

The top 10 international destinations were listed in the UNWTO World Tourism Highlights 2019 (UNWTO, 2020). The top five destination countries were France, Spain, the United States of America, China, and Italy. The same World Tourism Organization report shows that the main purpose of travel worldwide was leisure (55% of trips), with the exception of the Middle East, where the main purpose of travel was "to visit friends or relatives or for health or religious reasons." The aforementioned category accounted for 28% of all trips, but is not meaningful for the present study, since "religious purposes" and "visiting friends and family" are grouped under the same category. It is worth noting that the UNWTO divides the categories into leisure, recreation, and vacation, visiting friends and family, health or religious purposes, business and professional purposes, and unspecified. That is, from the report's perspective, religious or health purposes are not included in "leisure and recreation".

By using the VoS Viewer tool (Figure 1 and Figure 2) and linking terms to specific keywords from articles and reports in 2018, the terms tourism, authenticity, and Europe began to appear around the word "leisure". As the number of articles increased and topics diversified, in 2022 the word 'fertility' appeared in conjunction with 'Europe" and 'tourism', leading to the conclusion that people are also seeking some kind of help with their 'recreational' or "leisure' travels. This reason motivates many travelers to go to certain worldwide destinations that are known for their healing properties - or destinations that have a spiritual or religious connection with their beliefs.

The major routes promoted by the UNESCO (n.d.b) World Heritage Sites, as well as the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes program, launched in 1987, take a journey through space and time to show how the heritage of Europe's different countries and cultures contributes to a shared and vibrant cultural environment. Some examples of important cultural sites in Europe are the Pilgrim Routes of Santiago de Compostela, the Viking Routes, the European Route of Jewish Heritage, the Route of St. Martin of Tours, the Via Regia, the Routes of the Reformation, the Iron Routes of the Pyrenees, and many more (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Religious tourism is the best-known subcategory of cultural tourism. Religious tourism dates back to ancient times, when religion was one of the main reasons for travel. Whether these trips were associated with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, or other religions, the population traveled to other regions or cities, reinforcing their strong belief in something natural or higher (Balomenou, Poulaki and Dimitrios, 2015).

In their early years (centuries ago), pilgrimages took weeks or even years due to the lack of infrastructure and transportation, but due to these developments, they have become more and more in demand, and thus more accessible to tourists from other regions and countries (Balomenou, Poulaki and Dimitrios, 2015). This context broadens the tourist horizons of those who love to travel and transforms religious tourism into something more complex than it was originally intended, namely, a contact with faith and a practice strongly linked to faith.

Among the most famous pilgrimages/pilgrimage sites/pilgrimage routes in the world are: the Way of St. James in France and Spain, Israel as the center of Christianity, the pilgrimages to Medina and Mecca in the Arab world, the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash in Tibet, the Inca Trail in Peru or Char Dham in India. There are also popular pilgrimages in Romania, such as the pilgrimage of Saint Parascheva, the pilgrimage of Saint Filoftea, or the pilgrimages to the churches of Dobruja and Moldavia, the pilgrimage of Șumuleu Ciuc, the pilgrimage of Nicula, etc. The participants in these pilgrimages are usually elderly people or people who regularly go to church and (actively) perform religious practices. It is quite difficult to attract young people to these types of trips, since they are either not advertised appropriately or do not offer the appropriate activities for this group of people.

In order to organize such trips, not only for cultural purposes, but especially for spiritual and religious ones, tourists join together in different social networks and apps to communicate and share information about different destinations, instead of turning to tourism intermediaries that do not seem to be very present with such offers. As for the Romanian market, the organization of groups practicing religious tourism is mostly supported by local churches and congregations or by travel agencies specialized in this type of activities. On the other hand, it seems to be somewhat difficult for an institution in spiritual tourism to find potential clients. Therefore, it is more convenient for travelers to turn to social media or close communities of like-minded people who share the same beliefs and practices.

In Romania, religious tourism enjoys great popularity, at least among people between the ages of 45 and 70. Many companies have taken advantage of this and have opened numerous travel agencies specializing in religious tourism. Analyzing the database of legally licensed travel agencies in Romania (as of December 2020), based only on the name of the travel agencies, a number of 20 agencies were filtered out. Three of the 20 companies do not organize pilgrimages in Romania, but focus entirely on foreign tourism. At the same time, three other agencies do not organize international pilgrimages, but rather domestic trips to national holy sites. When analyzing their marketing, it was found that 50% of the selected agencies do not have a functioning website or no website at all, while the agencies that do have an online presence offer information on their websites only in Romanian, without the possibility of translating the content (Hampu and Coroș, 2021).

Looking even more closely at how companies approach spiritual tourism in Romania, a travel agency called Interad SRL (2019, 2021) was identified as offering a wide range of options. It focuses on energy initiation camps and organizes trips to various locations in Romania and abroad, such as citadels, caves, or castles. After looking at the list of services offered by another company that strongly correlates with the previously mentioned one, Travel Infinit not only organizes trips, but also educates people towards spirituality. They offer workshops on self-healing and self-knowledge techniques, conferences on energetic portals to the universe, in short - anything that trains participants to have a different perspective on life and access the energies within themselves.

On the age criteria of the research, referred to in the Cambridge Dictionary as 'older children' or simply 'young people'. The main group of interest for this study is people between the ages of 18 and 35. This range was set because young people over the age of 18 are thought to have already developed beliefs that are relevant to the proposed application, and, furthermore, they can make travel plans on their own. The upper limit of 35 years was chosen because Romanian legislation considers everyone 'young' until they become "of age";

So, what attracts young people? Young people tend to follow the trend and what is current. The main consumer trends in tourism today are the emergence of the "access" economy; solo and multigenerational travel - as a result of the aging population; the growing awareness of sustainability; the pursuit of "healthy living" and wellness tourism; travel "to change" - to live like a local, to pursue,

a quest for authenticity; travel "to show off" - "Instagrammable" experiences, destinations, etc. (Fresnoza, 2021: 27-28).

In recent years, an increase in demand for spiritual experiences has been observed as more people and influencers on social media have begun to promote such activities as lifestyle practices. Spiritual tourism is traveling to find meaning and purpose in one's life (Rao, 2020), and in today's world where personal development and connecting one's body to an inner energy is a real movement, its boundaries are expanding rapidly. This type of tourism views the experience as a quest for personal discovery or knowledge and the act of discovery as a spiritual experience in and of itself. If there were a single ideal form of spiritual tourism experience, this would be it, and certainly this is how the term is understood in people's language (Norman, 2012; Rao, 2020). Moreover, spirituality in tourism seems to have become disconnected from religious tourism in recent years. Perhaps this is also due to the increasing number of people who consider themselves non-religious and non-believers, but practice meditation for self-development. This is also consistent with the views of some authors (Smith and Puczkó, 2009), according to whom spirituality is now the core of 'wellness tourism', while spiritual development is considered a key element in the attempt to balance body, mind and spirit.

In identifying the way young people today view or practice religion, the new phenomenon of "liquid religion" has been discovered to properly explain this transition of the spiritual and religious world among young people. According to de Groot (2008), young people have a different attitude toward religious practice. Analyzing churches and institutions in the Netherlands and interviewing people who participate in religious activities in Germany, it was concluded that young people not only participate in church sermons in general, but also have formed various activity groups and organize events outside the church, forming their own small communities. This used to happen in tight-knit communities where the church was the main meeting place, but instead young people have now turned it into a social network. In short, Liquid Religion is 'meetings in a secular setting without the involvement of organized religion', for example, theater performances, various courses, or even music concerts (de Groot, 2008).

To separate spirituality from the religious part of the issue, researchers have found that spiritual travel methods involve a geopsychological disconnect from normal lifestyle (Cheer, Belhassen and Kujawa, 2017). By taking a person out of their normal environment, one eliminates stress or other distracting factors that can interfere with achieving one's goal. Spiritual tourism can be viewed as a lens through which people can recognize, examine, and practice spirituality in ways that may not be accessible to them in their normal lives (Cheer, Belhassen and Kujawa, 2017). If the ultimate goal is spirituality, then traveling is an ideal environment for people to connect with this side of faith.

Another excellent approach to spiritual tourism is how it has been transformed by the people who practice it and how it is slowly becoming distinct from religious tourism. Fedele (2009) referred to the people who practice spiritual tourism as 'the new pilgrims." In this study, tourists perceive Mary Magdalene as a 'counterpoint to a patriarchal and dogmatically organized Christianity' and conclude that such a perception cannot be achieved through a normal pilgrimage that shows Mary Magdalene from a different point of view. According to Hall (2006: 66), spiritual tourism refers to "a total way of interpreting and living life" that is practiced even by people who do not believe in God or in the religion presented at the chosen destination. He would describe the spiritual part of tourism as something that 'comes from within," a desire to find more rather than practice what has been presented to humanity for thousands of years. In recent years, this "spiritual" part of our lives has become a social phenomenon that is becoming more and more popular, creating a niche market for tourists interested in this field.

Considering how young people are influenced by their environment, the perception is strongly related to the way different issues are approached. For example, in our country, there are many hip-hop listeners among young people, and among other topics, religion is discussed in these songs. After conducting their study, the researchers concluded that this type of music has had a great impact on young people in recent years. Moreover, given the diversity of religious manifestations and spiritual concepts, it is crucial to make a distinction between these two concepts (Chirilă and Chaney, 2018).

Pilgrimages have been proven throughout their history to generate tremendous economic returns. This leads to the statement that many people practice pilgrimages or are attracted to what they offer. An important aspect of pilgrimages is related to the stages in which one finds oneself: the departure, the journey itself, and the arrival, which represents the 'quest' as completed, marked by the worship of the tourist at the chosen destination (Stavrou, 2000).

In order to relate the tourist to the pilgrim, two different approaches have been identified in relation to their relationship. The first one is also the most used, referring to the fact that the tourist and the pilgrims are considered similar, followed by the second one, which aims to prove that the pilgrims are not the tourists and they do not identify with each other (Chiș, Drule and Stănciulescu, 2010).

In order to distinguish the tourist from the traveling pilgrim, the action was divided into phases. To date, five modes have been identified as characteristics of the modern pilgrim: the recreational mode, the diversionary mode, the experiential mode, the experimental mode, and the existential mode (Collins-Kreiner and Kliot, 2005). By determining which mode best defines travel, one can distinguish the pilgrim from the tourist.

When developing the term "modern pilgrim," one should understand the basis of the pilgrimage. In the past, a pilgrimage served to repent of sins and practice faith. Aspects such as the nature of the path, where the pilgrim sleeps and eats, or how certain activities are performed did not matter. The traditions of pilgrimage continue, but now a new concept of seeking identity and enhancing the quality of life through these experiences is transformed and brought into the equation of the "modern pilgrim" (Post, 1994). The same article mentions the difference between 'pelgrimage' and "bedvaart" (in Dutch), which is quite an interesting approach to the topic. Translated into English, they mean 'pilgrimage' and "prayer journey", and these two terms make a distinction between accounts that are classified as elite because they practice religion and popular culture. In Dutch, 'pelgrimage' is a personal decision, the development of a different attitude toward life, a withdrawal from the attractions of normal existence (Post, 1994). A pilgrimage is seen as an alienation from oneself, from polite society, and from the ecclesiastical environment, an alienation that tourists realize during the pilgrimage. In the case of "bedevaart" it is a religious "people" who go on a prayer excursion, where alienation and estrangement do not play a role, or at most a subordinate one. A closer look at the differences between 'pilgrimage' and "bedevaart" will allow us to further clarify the character of our educated "pilgrims' (Post, 1994).

In his book, Norman argues that Western tourists often engage in religious practices during their travels, even if these practices are not part of the traveler's background or faith. However, they represent a more spiritual dimension and contribute to the projection of the tourists' personality and sense of self (Norman, 2011).

As evidence that spiritual tourism has become a global phenomenon, UNWTO organized the first conference on Spiritual Tourism for Sustainable Development in 2013. Sustainability has also become a global issue and goal, as pollution and limited natural resources force humanity to adapt to the changing environment. Therefore, it is of great importance to develop sustainable forms and niches of tourism at both the international and national levels. Sustainable development focuses on meeting the needs of tourists without compromising the natural or cultural resources of the destinations. It is also based on the development of the local economy and the creation of value in the selected areas of interest by raising the standard of living of the locals (Arikan and Steckenbauer, 2016).

To determine if there is indeed a target market for this type of tourism in Romania, there are already some companies and/or associations developing this type of tourism, but it is not yet clear how much popularity they enjoy among young people. Some examples of such adventure trails in Romania have been identified (e.g. Drumul Maramureșului, Via Transilvanica or Tășuleasa), which proves that there are enough opportunities to analyze this part of Romanian tourism in the framework of the present research.

In order to get a better understanding and overview of the topic, several word combinations were searched to identify research studies already conducted in this direction (Table 1).

In Romania, very few to almost no studies have been conducted on the relationship of young people to religious tourism, and even fewer on spiritual tourism. A noteworthy aspect is that when searching for general cultural or religious tourism in Romania, there are many results, but when additionally adding "youth" as a keyword, the search results decrease significantly. An important aspect is also the steady increase in the number of articles published after 2005 on religious tourism in general. The number of 17,100 articles on cultural and religious tourism is remarkable. When it comes to religion and young people, there is clearly an interest in this area, because in the 70s and 80s, in a communist country like Romania, there was no relationship or was not allowed to exist between these two areas.

Table no. 1. Keywords searched on Google Scholar

	Keywords			
Timeframe	Religious and pilgrimage tourism, Romania	Religious tourism and youngsters, Romania	Young travelers and religion, Romania	Cultural and Religious tourism of Romania
1970-1989	481	168	2,970	3,270
1990-2005	2,950	1,190	15,080	15,800
2006-present	12,200	4.540	17,100	17,500
Total	**15,631**	**5,898**	**35,150**	**36,570**

Source: authors' processing based on Google Scholar (excluding citations and patents) as of 28th of August 2022

In order to make a comparison, the results from the WoS and Scopus databases (Figure 1 and Figure 2) were also analyzed by searching for "Cultural, Spiritual, and Religious Tourism". You can filter the results by the most common keywords that appear in the articles. The most popular keywords related to the topic included India, Islamism, globalization, heritage preservation, indigenous people, and perception. In contrast, the least frequent keywords included Santiago de Compostela, religious heritage, attitude toward health, autoethnography, or national identity. Some outstanding keywords worth mentioning were priority, trade, nationalism, virtual reality, or social behavior.

Considering the above aspects, the authors argue that more studies and researches need to be conducted in this direction of cultural, religious and spiritual tourism, in order to investigate exactly how these elements can be used in the future development and differentiation of Romanian tourism. The current understanding of the topic was developed while studying the interaction between religious tourism and the tour operators that promote it. By creating a theoretical background that preceded this research, the authors were able to identify different patterns of travel agencies and their focus on religious and spiritual tourism. Moreover, it was possible to identify the possibility of expanding the topic, aiming to identify the typology of tourists who practice this type of tourism, as well as the trend associated with cultural and spiritual tourism activities (Hampu and Coroș, 2021). As the current international trends show, different segments of tourists are attracted to religious and pilgrimage tourism or spiritual experiences.

3. Methodology

The hypotheses formulated by the researchers determined the research objectives. The main hypothesis was that young people find cultural, spiritual, and religious travel attractive. Another hypothesis was that people, especially young people, would be attracted to a travel agency specializing in spiritual tourism to organize their trips. The final hypothesis that contributed to the objectives of the study was that young people are attracted to what is trendy and that spiritual tourism is one of the most popular subcategories of tourism.

In order to identify the typology of tourists or the trends that influence cultural, spiritual, or religious tourism, a questionnaire was developed based on the information provided by the theoretical background. Google Forms was chosen as the platform for the dissemination of the questionnaire because it is easily accessible and user-friendly, even for older people. The questionnaire was prepared in two different languages, Romanian and English, for accessibility reasons. For the distribution of the questionnaire, the researchers chose the snowball system, passing the form to friends, relatives, and acquaintances. The form was posted on various social media platforms, such as

Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, with the aim of identifying other potential respondents and sharing it further. They also identified specific groups on Facebook where the questionnaire could be shared. Some of the groups were Santiago de Compostela Official Group, Tineri Creștini în Cluj, Întâlnirea Tinerilor Ortodocși, Santiago de Compostela Women, Santiago de Compostela Romania, Excursii și pelerinaje de o zi, Vacanțe Excursii Pelerinaje, Profesioniști turism, and Via Transilvanica.

The researchers assumed that people would be reluctant to answer the questionnaire because it is a sensitive topic, especially in a former communist society. The questionnaire consists of 23 questions in Romanian and 24 questions in English (an additional question was added in case a Romanian citizen completed the questionnaire in English) and has two parts. The first part of the questionnaire is about finding out the respondents' opinions on certain topics, such as religious tourism among young people; whether they consider themselves to practice spiritual tourism; what destinations they would like to visit, and for what purpose; or whether they identify with a faith. The second part of the questionnaire is about understanding the background of the respondents by asking about their age, gender, main occupation, whether they would choose a travel agency for their spiritual trips, or their county (Romanian citizens) or country of origin.

4. Results

Although the number of respondents is not representative of foreign tourists, the English version of the questionnaire reached 55 responses. Of these, 3 were not included in the study because they came from Romanian respondents and were not considered relevant to the opinion of foreigners on this issue. As mentioned above, the number is not representative, but it was considered useful for a comparison between the foreign and Romanian respondents.

The total number of responses for the Romanian version of the questionnaire was 175. Of the 175 respondents, 42% were young people (18-35 years old), 39% were active adults (36-60 years old), 13% were elderly (over 60 years old), and 6% did not want to give their age. Female respondents accounted for 61.5% of the total, while males accounted for only 37.8%. The most frequent districts of the respondents were: Sibiu, Cluj, Hunedoara, Alba, Suceava, and Bacău.

48.07% young people, 38.46% active adults and 11.53% elderly people answered to the English version of the questionnaire. More than half of the respondents, 51%, were male and 44.9% female, while 4.1% preferred not to state their gender. The countries of origin of the respondents underline the cultural diversity: the USA, Argentina, Palestine, Mexico, South Africa, Italy, Bangladesh, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.

Before going into the answers and conclusions of the questionnaire, we should mention that 23.28% of the young respondents from the Romanian questionnaire do not identify with any faith (they consider themselves not religious at all), while all the older Romanian respondents identify with a faith and tend to practice it actively. Of the foreign respondents, 45.83% of the youth do not identify with any faith, while 16.6% of the elderly also do not identify with any faith. In comparison, foreigners are more reluctant to identify with a faith than to mention one, even though they do not believe in or practice it, as is the case in Romanian society.

The first two questions were intended to provide a better understanding of how respondents perceive spiritual and religious tourism. For a better explanation, we refer to the form in Romanian as Form A and the English version as Form B.

In the case of Romanian respondents, regardless of age group, they all have a similar opinion about spiritual tourism. The most frequent answers for the 18-35 age group were meditation, self-knowledge, and faith. For the 36-60 age group, it is meditation, religion, and faith, while the 60+ age group believes that faith, meditation, and self-knowledge define spiritual tourism. Among foreigners, young people thought self-knowledge, meditation, and personal development were the most accurate terms to describe spiritual tourism, while adults associated faith, religion, and meditation with the same concept. Older people answered almost the same as active adults, but they too thought of healing instead of meditation. In both scenarios, it can be observed that young people tend to say that spiritual tourism is more about themselves (meditation, self-knowledge, personality development), while active adults and older people associate it more with the religious part, thinking that they can

achieve healing through the practice of faith or religion. Other responses additionally mentioned by respondents were: Peace, a conscious journey of spiritually meeting the Creator, retreat, meditation, or time to reflect, or serenity.

Regarding the second question, among Romanians, half (49.7%) of the respondents associate religious tourism with prayer, while among foreigners, more than two thirds (69.23%) of the respondents have the same orientation. This suggests that a large majority of people make a connection between religion and prayer, regardless of their nationality. While younger people associate religious tourism with prayer, sacred objects or destinations, and faith, older people see a connection with faith, belief/belief, or spirituality. Apparently, however, young people do not see religion as a "tool" to connect/experience their inner self or faith, as expected, but simply as destinations, a "must" of prayer, or just faith in general. At the same time, older people focus more on the spiritual part of religion, relying on the connection that religion makes to people, rather than an obligatory set of things that must be done. Other respondents also mentioned that "religious tourism" for them means respect for their faith, reflection, and better knowledge.

When asked if they consider themselves as people who practice spiritual tourism, 50.9% of foreigners answered yes, while 49.1% answered no after giving a definition of spiritual tourism. Most of the foreign youth (54.16%) stated that they do not practice spiritual tourism, although the percentage of those who answered the opposite was not significantly different (45.84%). On the other hand, the results for the Romanian respondents are slightly more differentiated, as a total of 37.7% answered 'yes' and 62.3% answered 'no' to the same question. Considering all three age categories of the Romanian survey, the 36-60 years category leads with the highest percentage (72.05%) of people who do not practice this type of tourism, followed by 60.27% of young people who have the same orientation. However, 39.73% of young people said that they practice this type of tourism, compared to only 27.95% of active adults. In addition, 52.17% of elders answered that they practice spiritual tourism, which probably refers to spiritual and religious tourism as a whole.

The fourth question aimed to determine exactly what attracts each age group and provided further insight into the topic. Romanian young people are most interested in cities and architecture, experiences, and gastronomy, making them cultural tourists. Those aged 36-60 have the same interest, while older people are attracted to cities, archeological sites, museums, and experiences. Romanian young people show the least interest in religious destinations and music and art (festivals). It could be said that it is not the festival itself that brings young tourists to a particular destination, but that the festival makes the city known and popular, so that it becomes more attractive as a destination, which is sought by young people only afterward. In contrast, foreign young people are attracted almost by the same categories, but additionally by music and art. Adults and older foreigners, on the other hand, are more attracted to cities, religious destinations, or archeological sites. Some mentioned local communities, rural areas, indigenous knowledge, or sacred sites of ancient civilizations. Looking at the responses of foreigners, religious destinations abroad seem to be of interest, even though they may not practice the same religion that the destination has, so they can be more equated to regular cultural tourists.

Two-thirds (66.67%) of Romanian youth believe that cultural tourism is more popular among them than religious tourism, while 57.7% of all respondents believe this. Only 4% of the respondents disagreed with this statement. When asked if spiritual tourism is more popular than religious tourism, 35.61% of young people were unbiased, while 36.3% of older people disagreed with the statement. 20.83% of foreign young people are unbiased on this question, while 67% of older people somehow agree (Likert scale) that spiritual tourism is more popular among young people than religious tourism.

When asked who they think practices religious tourism, 59.4% of all Romanian respondents mentioned older people, while only 13.7% also mentioned young people. This means that, as expected, religious tourism enjoys great popularity among older people, while spiritual tourism is associated by many respondents with the younger generation. The international respondents have the same opinion, only the values of the percentages differ, with 63.6% of the elderly and 18.2% of the young people practicing religious tourism. Looking at the percentages, even more people associate

religious tourism with older people, and a slightly higher number also think that young people practice it.

Respondents were also asked if religious tourism could gain popularity with a good marketing strategy. Of all the responses, 59.4% agreed, while only 18.9% did not think this type of tourism was realistic. What the study is most interested in is the opinion of young people. 69.38% of the respondents said that religious tourism could gain popularity with a good marketing strategy, while only about a third (35.6%) did not think so and 16.4% did not consider religious tourism trendy at all. Moreover, 41.6% of foreign young people agreed, while 29.24% did not consider it trendy, which is more than Romanians. This means that young people are quite open to the idea of religious tourism if it is accompanied by good marketing (which is not necessarily the case in Romania).

To determine whether non-existent marketing is just a stereotype or whether people do not notice it, the results in the survey split almost evenly between the 32% who had noticed marketing for religious activities or destinations and the 34.3% who had not noticed any such activities at all, while 33.7% could not recall any programs or campaigns. When looking at the responses of the young people, it was found that 58.89% of the Romanian respondents had not noticed any marketing activities related to religious tourism. The conclusion of the previous question states that marketing is the key to success when it comes to attracting new generations. So, if young people believe that marketing could make religious tourism popular, but most of them cannot recall any marketing efforts in this direction, then there are significant opportunities for development. So, they rely on marketing, but when asked if a travel agency specialized in spiritual tourism would attract them, 30.13% of Romanian young people were unbiased, while 28.7% did not think it would bring customers. However, the foreigners agree or tend to agree with the statement that a travel agency specialized in spiritual tourism could attract young people (54.16%).

To gain an even better understanding of young tourists, respondents were asked which destinations they visit or which one they would like to visit. Thus, the most visited religious destinations by Romanians, regardless of age, are the wooden churches of Maramureș, the painted monasteries of Bukovina, the churches of Meteora, Vatican City, the Holy Land or Egypt. Other religious destinations visited by Romanian respondents included both international and national sites such as Bruges, Matera, Thailand, Asissi, Loretto, Fatima, Prislop, or Rohia. The main religious destinations that Romanians would like to visit include the Holy Land, Machu Picchu, Vatican City, Egypt and India. While the younger ones are more interested in Machu Picchu, Egypt, India or the Holy Land, the older ones prefer the Holy Land, Machu Picchu, and, surprisingly, Nepal. Other destinations include Sri Lanka, Istaphan, Fatima, and Plum Village - France.

There were slight differences in responses among international respondents, but nothing drastic. The most visited religious destinations include the Vatican, Santiago de Compostella, and the Holy Land, while respondents would like to visit Machu Picchu, Santiago de Compostella, or the Holy Land. Many young and older people from abroad know the route to Santiago de Compostella, which shows that this type of route is very popular among foreigners. Foreigners also visited destinations such as Taize, Ohrid, or Liebana, and they are interested in Taiwan, Iceland, or Bali.

Romanian young people indicated that they would visit the above destinations for cultural (60.2%), spiritual (31.5%) or religious reasons (8.2%). The seniors answered that their main purpose was a cultural one (45.45%), followed by spiritual and religious reasons with similar percentages (27.27% each). Among the international respondents, 70.83% of the youth answered that the main purpose of their trips was a cultural one, while only 4.16% had a religious purpose in mind. Seniors (over 60 years) were evenly distributed (33.33%) among the three categories of purpose: cultural, spiritual, and religious.

When asked how they would organize the trip and what budget they would have for a spiritual experience, most Romanians (70.9%) said they would organize the trips themselves, while 93.2% of young people would prefer to take care of the organization themselves instead of using the services of a travel agency. The highest percentage of respondents who would turn to a travel agency is found in the age category over 60 (63.63%), while only 6.8% of Romanian young people would choose a travel agency, but more young people from abroad would turn to a travel agency (12.5%). Regarding their

budget, overall, young people seem willing to pay a lot of money for their trips: between 500 and 1000 euros per person for a spiritual experience, with 6.84% of Romanians and 12.5% of foreigners who would pay more than 1500 euros per person. This result indicates that young people would be really willing to invest money in such potential experiences, revealing great market opportunities for spiritual tourism in Romania and also abroad.

5. Conclusions

Based on all the findings from the secondary research, a research topic with high potential was identified, which concerns cultural, spiritual, and religious tourism among young people. The number of tourists has increased over the years, so that today tourism is at one of its peaks, except for the 2020 pandemic (UNWTO, 2018, 2019, 2020). The pandemic has had a significant impact on the need to travel, so people are now even more motivated to explore and travel than before. At the same time, finding methods for sustainable tourism that also take into account the interests of new tourists has become a major concern worldwide.

On a national level, tourism has increased (both domestically and internationally), resulting in a large potential market for businesses. Companies specializing in religious tourism have focused on promoting their products to the older generation, excluding young people from their target market. Companies should identify the type of tourist for each age category and, after thoroughly understanding the needs and expectations of their potential customers, offer specific products for each age group.

As young people nowadays are attracted to 'Instagrammable' or attractive destinations, the tourism market should adapt to the needs of the new generation. While older generations view religion or religious tourism as a respectful activity that brings them closer to their faith, younger generations are more inclined to activities that promote self-development and well-being (UNWTO, 2018, 2019, 2020). This is why spiritual tourism is gaining popularity among the younger generation and contributing to a new perception of the world as a different way of interpreting life (Hall, 2006).

Young people have also changed the way religion is practiced. The term "liquid religion" has been introduced to accurately explain their motivations. Studies have shown that young adults prefer to engage in activities with people who share the same interests rather than gather in a specific place and practice something out of obligation rather than desire - for example, going to church (de Groot, 2008). This statement supports the findings from the research - young people are more attracted to experiences than to pilgrimages or the practice of religious activities. The main hypothesis (young people find cultural, spiritual, and religious travel attractive) was confirmed because young people are attracted to all of the previously mentioned things, but religious tourism attracts them the least.

The questionnaire was designed first to identify young people's preferences and inclinations when traveling, and secondly to check whether there is a suitable market for spiritual tourism for young people. Most of the people who responded to the questionnaires (both Romanians and foreigners) were young people between 18 and 35 years old.

In both cases, younger generations view spiritual tourism as something focused on personal development and fulfillment, while they associate religious tourism with prayer or faith. This means that they would choose a spiritual experience rather than a religious one. According to their answers, young people assume that mainly older people practice religious tourism, which could be one of the reasons why some do not practice it, as it is considered "outdated". Although spiritual tourism also does not seem to be as widespread as one would expect, 39.73% of young people indicated that they practice this subcategory of tourism. However, this is a representative percentage for this age group. If we also consider that the young people would travel for cultural or spiritual reasons due to their desired destinations, it becomes clear that religion is not really a reason for the Romanian young adults' travels. By analyzing the responses, the researchers concluded that the young people would like to travel to destinations such as Machu Picchu, Nepal, or the Vatican, which confirms the hypothesis (young people today are attracted to what is trendy, and spiritual tourism is one of the most popular subcategories of tourism).

According to the young people who responded to the questionnaire, 69.38% of Romanian youth believe that religious tourism could gain popularity with a good marketing strategy. This led to the next question, to which 58.89% answered that they had not noticed any marketing activities related to religious tourism, which means that companies or travel agencies should direct their focus to updated marketing strategies for the coming generations. All in all, the problem does not seem to be young people's aversion to religion or practicing a faith, but the lack of proper promotion among them. If the presentation of an activity is made more attractive, the popularity of that activity will also increase.

The future of travel agencies does not look very promising, as only 6.8% of young respondents would consider a travel agency for their trips. This is because young people want to be more independent than previous generations. Thus, they would rather organize a trip themselves than leave it to someone else, even if some of their desired destinations are unreachable (e.g., Machu Picchu or Nepal). The hypothesis that people, especially young people, would be attracted to a travel agency specializing in spiritual tourism to organize their trips could not be confirmed, as the vast majority of respondents indicated that they would rather travel on their own than choose a travel agency. Considering the budget available, young people would surprisingly spend a lot of money on a spiritual trip, as much as an adult or an elderly person would pay.

Considering the offer of Romanian tourism for cultural, spiritual and religious trips, one could conclude that the presence on online platforms could make a difference among young people. After informal conversations, the researchers found an Instagram page of a church called Mânăstirea Oașa, whose main purpose is to gather young people in camps to practice their faith together. At these camps, they organize many fun activities such as photography courses, spirituality in architecture, or iconography workshops. They combine spirituality and religion in a particularly creative way, putting the emotions and spiritual well-being of their participants above all else.

In addition, the Romanian Ministry of Tourism has published a list of cultural routes in Romania to promote cultural, religious, or spiritual paths at the local, regional, and European levels (Romanian Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, 2022). At the local level, there are a total of 15 routes that cover the entire country and include fortified churches, ethnographic museums, or medieval cultural sites. At the regional level, there are 27 regional routes such as the Route of the Ancient History of Romania on the Black Sea, the Route of Faith and Hope in Constanta County, the Route of the Teutonic Knights, and many others. As for the last category, the European routes, Romania is included in 9 of the European routes, such as: The Romanesque Routes of European Heritage, The European Route of Art Nouveau, The Route of Historical Cafes, and others. For the local and regional routes, you can find information on the websites of the municipalities (which is very useful especially for the younger generation, as they depend on finding information easily), but the European routes in which Romania participates are not very detailed in terms of information for potential travelers.

The research has its limitations in terms of coverage of the topic, since the samples (both in Romanian and English) are small. This only proves that the respondents are not available for the chosen topic. The answers from the English form might not be relevant for the study, but the authors considered them worth mentioning in order to make a comparison. Another limitation of the study was that older people did not respond to the questionnaire due to the title, as it was initially 'Amongst Youngsters', which prompted the authors to change the title of the form.

In terms of future research, this study broadens the horizon of possible research on young travelers and the development of religious tourism in the future. Future work could draw on this study to understand how supply can meet youth demand and expectations for religious tourism, travel agencies, or spiritual camps or trips. A study focusing specifically on travel agencies could be of great importance for Romanian tourism, as this part of the national tourism industry is suffering a lot and is not as popular as it used to be.

Having proceeded with the literature review and identified several theories of cultural, spiritual and religious tourism, we can see that there are significant differences between these three types. Each type of tourism represents a different form and a different type of experience for the tourist. Cultural tourism is based on the idea that by practicing this type of tourism, one expands one's horizons and gathers more knowledge about a civilization, society, country or city. Religious tourism, in simple

terms, is an activity in which a tourist goes to a specific place to interact or experiment with his religion or faith. This form of travel takes place in places that represent significant religious concepts that correspond to their faith. In contrast, spiritual tourism is defined as an activity that is not only for relaxation, but also engages the traveler to actively participate in the 'transformational' process that occurs when practicing spiritual tourism. It is not only about relaxation and the power of transformation, but also about the idea behind the concept. People gather with a common goal, which interestingly is not a religious one, and form groups to engage together in this amazing process of spiritual travel.

In summary, young people do not have such a rigid opinion about spiritual or religious tourism or even about certain practices, but it is the lack of publicity that leads to this apparent disinterest. Young people are always open to new concepts, and according to their responses, they still like some of the traditional religious destinations such as the Holy Land or Vatican City. With an available budget that cannot be ignored, young adults are a very strong potential clientele for companies that could specialize in this field, opening many opportunities for the Romanian tourism market.

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