
The Role of Religious Tourism in the Regional Development of Tourist Destinations

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of this article is to define the role of religious tourism in regional development and to identify the main factors determining this impact.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article adopts a broader approach to integration processes, in which religious tourism encompasses not only traditionally understood pilgrimages undertaken in different cultures, but also cognitive -based travel with a component related to religion characteristic of different cultural circles. A qualitative study was conducted. Triangulation of methods was used, combining focus group interviews (FGI) and expert interviews (IDI) conducted in six European countries (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, Italy).

Findings: Discussions within the FGI and IDI studies allowed for the identification of three key issues indicating the impact of tourism on regional development: (1) The impact of an integrated religious tourism product on the tourism services market in the region, (2) The importance of sacred sites for local sustainable development, and (3) The preservation of the cultural heritage of regions with religious assets. The research confirmed the broad and multifaceted role of religious tourism in regional development.

Practical implications: The research has shown that the key factors determining the role of religious tourism in the development of tourist regions are: cooperation between multiple entities in shaping an integrated religious tourism product, taking into account the principles of sustainable development, and caring for cultural heritage in its tangible and intangible aspects.

Originality/Value: A broader approach to religious tourism was presented, taking into account its cultural elements relating to different European countries. The research is original due to the development of an original research methodology and the establishment of a method for selecting respondents.

Keywords: Religious tourism, regional development, European integration, cooperation, tourist product.

JEL codes: Z32, R11, Z12.

Paper type: Research paper.

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1. Introduction

Religious tourism, especially pilgrimages, is one of the oldest forms of tourism in the world and is considered to be the "axis" of cultural tourism in the broad sense. Over time, permanent destinations for religious travel have developed, marking out the most popular pilgrimage routes.

These routes have led to the development of tourism, which, starting from pilgrimage tourism, takes the form of religious and cultural tourism (Dallen and Olsen, 2006; Jackowski, 2010; Malchrowicz-Moško and Grzesiak, 2013; Pérez Guilarte and Lois González, 2018, Tomljenović and Dukić, 2017; Bayih, 2019).

This phenomenon can be observed in many places in Europe and around the world, regardless of religion, culture or continent. The particular importance of religious tourism can be seen in Europe, where there is a tradition of travelling to places of worship (Delphi, Rome, Santiago di Compostela, Mount Athos, Lourdes, Fatima, etc) (Jackowski, 2010; Różycki, 2010; Wilkońska, 2010). At the same time, tourism is developing rapidly around the world, including in Europe itself, and an important determinant of this development is the presence of attractions, including places of religious worship (Redžić, 2019; Niezgoda, *et al.*, 2025).

Places of pilgrimage in the modern world have begun to play the role of tourist centres, welcoming people who come for educational purposes. Currently, these processes reinforce the multiculturalism of modern European society and are related to the fact that tourist travel is undertaken for more than one reason (Niezgoda, 2024).

This has led to the development of the tourism market, which now offers a complex religious tourism product that includes not only elements related to worship, but also attractions and cultural assets of a given region, as well as services ensuring the arrival, stay and use of these assets by tourists. This article therefore assumes that this process influences the development of the region. However, it is necessary to identify the factors determining this impact.

The literature offers a variety of approaches to religious tourism and its impact on the development of various places associated with religious worship. Authors note the role of tourism in revitalising a specific town and its surroundings (Obasola, 2017; Redžić, 2019; Calero and Turner, 2020; Bellato, Frantzeskaki and Nygaard, 2022; Gemar, Soler, and Moniche, 2023; Buhalis *et al.*, 2023; Liu *et al.*, 2023).

However, there is a research gap on the impact of religious tourism on regional development in a broader sense, which results from the fact that this type of tourism is narrowed down to pilgrimages or the simple use of infrastructure in well-known places of religious worship (Pawlusiński and Mika, 2015; Smith, 1992; Aulet and Vidal, 2018; Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Collins-Kreiner, 2020; Liro, 2020).

The specific places described in detail by the authors are characterised by specific conditions. Therefore, the second research gap noted in this article is the lack of an attempt to generalise the factors that broadly determine the impact of tourism on the development of the region, and not just specific places. In order to deepen our knowledge of the impact of tourism on regional development, a broader approach to religious tourism has been adopted, taking into account the perspectives of different countries representing both different religions and different experiences resulting from the processes of integration and globalisation.

The aim of this article is to define the role of religious tourism in regional development and to identify the main factors determining this impact.

In order to take into account the role of integration processes and the impact of multiculturalism, qualitative research was conducted. Triangulation of methods was used, combining focus group interviews (FGI) and expert interviews (IDI) conducted in six European countries (Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, Italy). An original method was developed for selecting experts, who were representatives of universities presenting different positions and research areas.

The research questions concerned:

1. The scope of religious tourism in contemporary tourism
2. The role of religious tourism in the development of tourist destinations vs. lesser-known places with religious value
3. Factors determining the development of religious tourism and the development of places associated with this type of tourism.

However, the starting point for the research was to define religious tourism, which can be perceived differently by different authors, which often limits the scope of the research.

2. Literature Review: Religious Tourism – Definition and Scope of the Concept

Religious tourism includes not only traditionally understood pilgrimages undertaken in different cultures, but also "journeys undertaken for religious or cognitive reasons, whose main purpose is to visit places related to the history of religion, places of religious worship and religious events" (Mikos and Rohrscheidt, 2016). The components of religious tourism that fall within the scope of cultural tourism include: values, rituals, events, celebrations, performances, places of worship: shrines, cemeteries, religious centres, as well as, in general terms: religiosity, spirituality and related needs as motives for travelling (Mróz, 2017; Sołjan, 2007).

For many people, religious travel is not spiritual in nature, but stems from an interest in religion as one of the foundations of their own cultural circle. After participating in

a religious trip, tourists may become interested in both religion and the broader culture of the place they visited.

This is particularly important in the processes of integration and development of multiculturalism in Europe. Tomljenović and Đukić (2017) proposed a new perspective in which religious tourism can be a potential factor in individual and collective value transformation.

Developing this approach, it can be noted that religious tourism can become an important factor in learning about other cultures or a key to understanding historical events or artistic creation. This interest motivates people to travel to different places, influencing the sale of services and the development of infrastructure, which can contribute to the development of the region. Among such centres visited by tourists, the authors point to:

- places associated with the history of (various) religions (Bayih, 2019),
- former or still functioning centres of spirituality (Jackowski, 2010; Obasola, 2017, Redžić, 2019),
- places considered to be the cradles of various forms of religious worship (Mróz, 2017; Luz, 2020),
- areas with a concentration of outstanding works of art and architecture created on the basis of religious beliefs or for religious purposes (Mikos v. Rohrscheidt, 2016; Raj, 2012; Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Gutic *et al.*, 2010; Francis *et al.*, 2017),
- to travel along ancient pilgrimage routes (Carvache-Franco *et al.*, 2024; Pérez Guilarte and Lois González, 2018).

Not all of these behaviours can be classified as traditional pilgrimages or journeys motivated by typical religious needs (e.g., the search for meaning in life, asceticism and spiritual experiences, participation in religious events). Religious tourism therefore also has an exploratory character (Jackowski, 2010; Plichta, 2020; Sołjan, 2007), which may result both from the traveller's interest in religions (religious studies) and from more general cultural or artistic interests.

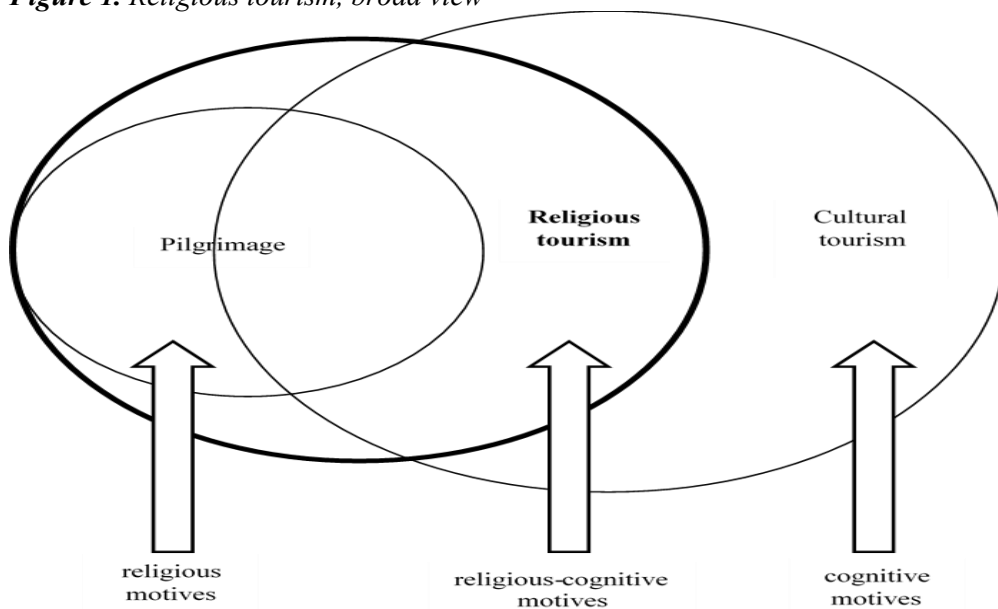
Religious tourism therefore also includes trips to important centres of religious worship undertaken by people from outside a given religious tradition. As Rinschede (1992) noted "Religious tourism is closely connected with holiday and cultural tourism. For the participation of organised pilgrimages, a free day is often planned in the programme, so that pilgrims can also make day trips into the surrounding area".

This approach means that religious tourism can have a significant share in the tourism market, influence tourist arrivals in specific regions and contribute to their development. Wang *et al.* (2016) point out that religious tourism is gaining in importance precisely because of its impact on economic development, social culture

and the perceived value of the inhabitants of the regions visited. According to Liro *et al.* (2018), it is a sector that is considered one of the most developed in the new millennium precisely because of its socio-cultural effects in a globalised world, acting as an engine of spatial transformation, generating economic benefits and promoting the development of tourist infrastructure in the regions visited.

Therefore, conducting research on this form of tourism is important, as it can help to improve tourism services and better explain this type of tourism (Najib *et al.*, 2020). A broader view of religious tourism, which includes both traditional forms pilgrimages – and forms related to the broader aspect of culture, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Religious tourism, broad view



Source: Own study.

3. Methodology

In order to examine the broad aspects of the impact of tourism on regional development, a qualitative study was conducted. Triangulation of methods was used, combining focus group interviews (FGI) and expert interviews (IDI) conducted by eight organisations in six European countries (Poland [2], Romania, Bulgaria, Spain, Greece, Italy [2])⁴.

⁴The selection of countries and organisations is based on their participation in the international ReligiTour project "Enhancement of the competences and possibilities for religious tourism development and for better integration and management of religious sites in the urban environment: ReligiTour" (2023-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000156074).

Qualitative research has been well established in the social sciences for decades, offering a valuable set of methodological tools for data collection, analysis and interpretation, and its effective use has been confirmed in various disciplines (Agius, 2013).

In tourism-related sciences, qualitative research has also been recognised as valid, as it allows for the exploration and explanation of complex and dynamic tourism practices, enriching existing ways of thinking, understanding and researching tourism phenomena (Welch *et al.*, 2013; Bell *et al.*, 2017; Wilson *et al.*, 2020; Plakoyiannaki and Stavraki, 2022).

The strength of qualitative research "lies in its ability to provide textual and complex descriptions of the causes and ways of experiencing specific phenomena" (Oranga and Matere, 2023). Currently, there is a noticeable increase in interest in these research methods, and thus an increase in openness to the value of the qualitative data obtained within their framework (Thelwall and Nevill, 2021; Pyo *et al.*, 2023, Aguzzoli *et al.*, 2024).

The authors decided that the issue in question requires a qualitative data collection method, as the results obtained allow for a more detailed explanation of the issue (including identifying needs, formulating hypotheses, obtaining background information, initiating ideas) and, consequently, the full achievement of the identified objective. It was assumed that qualitative research answers the questions "what", "how" and "why" and can be characterised by a free method of obtaining information (scenario, interview outline, open questions) and purposeful selection of respondents (Maison, 2001; Denzin, 2009).

Qualitative research usually involves observing a population and conducting in-depth interviews or focus group discussions (Corner *et al.*, 2019). Qualitative interviews are not simply a matter of asking questions, but rather an in-depth discussion aimed at exchanging views, thanks to which the material obtained allows for the analysis of relationships between phenomena (Pilch and Bauman 2001; Moser and Korsrjens, 2018).

Qualitative interviews emphasise the importance of examining respondents' experiences and perspectives in order to better understand social reality (Edwards and Holland, 2013; Flick, 2018). Focus groups are considered a form of interview that allows for the collection of richer and deeper information and is better suited to studying perceptions, attitudes and motivations (Agan *et al.*, 2008; Krueger and Casey, 2014; Connaway and Powell, 2010).

The purposeful sampling used in qualitative research was crucial for the authors, as it allowed them to select respondents who had expert knowledge on the analysed issue. It was decided that interviews with experts at the exploratory stage of the project were a more efficient and focused method of data collection than systematic quantitative

research (Bogner *et al.*, 2009). The authors assumed that experts are individuals recognised by society as authorities in a specific field, qualified specialists with extensive scientific or professional experience (Wyciszkiewicz and Gluza, 2024).

It was assumed that, in order to consider the role of tourism in the region, the knowledge of experts who are familiar with the diverse conditions of their countries of origin should be used. It was assumed that, in the initial stage of the research, only the guidance obtained from experts could be used for more in-depth research on a heterogeneous, complex tourism product. Such a product is shaped by many service providers and decision-makers, so comparing the statements of representatives of a diverse tourism supply may not yield comparable results.

Therefore, a two-stage research process was adopted. In each country, the first stage was a focus study, for which a selection of respondents was developed. They were experts: university professors, junior and senior assistants, university researchers, postdoctoral scholars, and PhD students working in the field of religious tourism. The participants represented three categories of distinct target groups:

- experts involved in religious tourism (TRT) issues,
- experts who deal with broader issues related to culture or tourism, but not strictly religious tourism (TTC),
- experts involved in other issues (TOS).

The focus study involved groups of 5 to 9 participants. The selection of focus group participants was carried out using the snowball method. This set of respondents allowed for discussion and comparison of opinions. The second stage of the study, conducted in each country, was an interview with an expert specialising as a lecturer in religious tourism (TRT) (Table 1).

Table 1. Study participants (FGI, IDI)

Type of study	Country/Number of respondents and their characteristics:					
	Bulgaria	Romania	Spain	Italy (2)	Greece	Poland (2)
FGI	7 (2TTC, 5TOS)	8 (2TRT, 2TTC, 4TOS)	7 (3TRT, 1TTC, 3 TOS)	12 (4TTC, 6TRT, 2TOS)	9 (3TRT, 4TTC, 2TOS)	16 (5TRT, 6TTC, 5TOS)
IDI	1(TRT)	1(TRT)	1(TRT)	1(TRT)	1(TRT)	1(TRT)

Source: Own study.

The study was conducted between 4 April and 8 May 2024. The discussions lasted between 80 and 120 minutes without interruption. The study was moderated by individuals with experience in conducting marketing research. The study was recorded in order to accurately collect the results and analyse the course of the discussions. The research tool was a partially structured interview scenario with a prepared list of topics

to be discussed. The material used as a basis for further work consisted of detailed transcripts of the interviews, made independently and saved in MS Word. These were supplemented by notes from participant observation.

The research material covered three key elements: the respondents' verbatim statements, their non-verbal behaviour and, in the case of the focus study, additional comments describing communication events. The study in all groups proceeded according to the planned scenario, and no significant problems associated with focus group studies, such as the risk of groupthink, group polarisation, idleness or social conformity (Oyster, 2002), were observed.

4. Research Results and Discussion

Discussions within the FGI and IDI studies allowed us to identify three key issues indicating the impact of tourism on regional development (Table 2).

Table 2. *The importance of religious tourism in regional development*

Type of impact	Selected quotes
The impact of an integrated religious tourism product on the tourist services market in the region	Just thinking of how the industry has developed around certain places of worship, religious sites that are 'tourist hotspots' – these are catalysts for local industries, such as souvenirs, accommodation, local guides, catering. A proper understanding of religious tourism's potential can serve as a powerful economic engine for local communities (TTC, Bulgaria). During pilgrimages, participants, mainly women, are very fond of buying various products. These include souvenirs from holy places, often for family and friends, but also for their own memories. It also happens that purchases include completely different things. It is as if the participants have more joy during the spiritual journey (TRT Poland). The shopping sphere needs to be organised, demand needs to be met, as religious tourists spend a lot of money on publications and souvenirs (TRT, Poland). So, it has a significant role in promoting the local economy. They can also play an important role in community development (TTC, Romania). We should have packages tailor-made for different types of religious tourism and different types of participants (TRT, Romania).

The importance of sacred places for local sustainable development	Religious tourism can be a significant economic driver for local communities. Religious tourism can contribute to strengthening local identity, a local consciousness, and to sustainable local development (TRT, Romania). The presence or existence of a resource linked to religious tourism can contribute to strengthening the development of a destination through the creation of tourism products oriented towards religious tourists, without forgetting that the celebration of certain events generates an important economic impact on destinations and their environment. Just think of the celebrations of Easter, Corpus Christi or the Youth Meetings, pilgrimages to Mecca, or the Kumbamela (TRT Spain). There are several religious tourism destinations that are a clear example of a tourist destination. Currently, many cities are betting on events and exhibitions of a religious nature to achieve good occupancy rates (TRT, Spain). In many cases, religious sites (sanctuaries) are the only factor that attracts tourists, the only attraction. These sites can form the basis for the development of tourist routes or a network of tourist products (network product) (TTC, Poland). It should be shown that even in little-known localities there can be interesting attractions related to religion, these issues should be introduced, because in one country residents may not know these attractions (TRT, Greece).
Preserving the cultural heritage of regions with religious assets	Culture and cultural heritage are essential elements of human society, shaping our identity, fostering creativity, strengthening social cohesion and contributing to economic development. By protecting and promoting our cultural heritage (including religious heritage), we are not only respecting our past, but also investing in a dynamic and sustainable future (TTC, Bulgaria). Religious sites are an important part of European identity. They reflect the continent's rich history and diversity of cultures. By promoting religious tourism, we can help to ensure that these sites are valued and preserved for future generations. Religious tourism can be a powerful tool for intercultural dialogue. When people from different cultures visit religious sites, they can learn about each other's beliefs and traditions. This can help to break down barriers and promote understanding and respect (TTC, Bulgaria). Religious heritage is an important part of cultural heritage in Romania. It is important to preserve our national identity in the European context (TRT Romania). There is a need to define tools and products on religious tourism which tries to build bridges and links among different and common EU cultural roots and identities (TOS, Italy). The study of religious cultural heritage will contribute to local development processes, as each European region is endowed with its own religious cultural heritage (particularly Jewish and Christian, but also Islamic), both material and immaterial. (TTC, Italy).

	The study of religious cultural heritage must highlight the strengths and weaknesses for preserving the value of this heritage and for religious tourism. This will formulate ideas and proposals for s that could be accommodated in relevant legislation and regulations at local, national and EU level. (TRT, Italy). It is extremely important to invest in the promotion of religious heritage, not only for specific landscapes, but also to preserve and maintain a society rooted in specific values, traditions and culture, which in the end is what makes each tourist area different and unique (TRT, Spain). Religion is the basis for creating one's own culture (TRT, Poland). The creation of itineraries focused on resources linked to religious heritage can also contribute to their proper management (TRT, Spain).
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Source: *Own study.*

The results of the study confirmed the conclusion that modern patterns of travel and tourist activity cannot be fully understood without taking religion into account (Mattila, 2001). The activities of the UNWTO confirm the growing interest of the tourism industry in religious tourism (Jaremen, 2017). Religious tourism makes a significant contribution to sustainable development and the protection of cultural heritage.

Often, it is small centres that can develop thanks to this type of tourism. The influx of tourists from different religions and cultures interested in a given place can promote multiculturalism in Europe and European integration. Because of this conciliatory and integrative role, religious tourism is called an agent of peace. As stated by T. Rifai, Secretary-General of the UNWTO: "Religious tourism is a key agent of peace. It is a transformative force that breaks down cultural barriers and builds bridges between people, communities and nations. Leveraging the growing interest in religious tourism is crucial in building cultural dialogue, mutual understanding and peace" (A Network of Religious Tourism, UNWTO 2014, Project Brief, p. 1).

One can agree with the opinion of Mikos von Rohrscheidt A. (2016) that for many people, religious travel is not spiritual in nature, but stems from an interest in religion as one of the foundations of their own cultural circle. After participating in a religious trip, tourists may become interested in both religion and culture in a broader sense. This can influence their wider interests and visits to the region.

The research also confirmed the conclusions of Y. Pérez Guilarte and R.C. Lois González (2018), who point to the key role of cooperation in regions hosting religious tourists. Of interest in this regard are the results of a study on the impact of factors related to ancillary services on the spiritual satisfaction of Muslim pilgrims, which indicate the important role of aspects such as the quality of transport, accommodation, food, medical services and guide services in the positive perception of religious tourism (Hassan, Abdou, Taha, Abdelmoaty, and Salem, 2022). From an economic, environmental and social point of view, stakeholder collaboration and mutual cooperation is valuable for all (Fyall, 2011).

The role and synergy of stakeholders in the field of tourism are also visible in the area of smart tourism, which is based on the integration of ICT with physical infrastructure in order to improve the experience of tourists at their destination and increase the efficiency and competitiveness of tourism enterprises. Research conducted by Boes *et al.* (2016) shows that the combination of innovative ICT-based solutions, social capital, human capital and leadership, as key elements of a smart tourist destination, has a positive impact on its competitiveness. Therefore, cooperation, the use of technology and innovation lead to the sustainable competitive development of a given tourist area (Gajdošík, 2019).

In order for religious tourism to serve the preservation of heritage and regional development, it is important to support the process of intercultural integration and research on terrorism and the future security of Europe (Lixinski, 2023; Chowdhury *et al.*, 2017; Korstanje and Seraphin, 2020). This conclusion stems from the fact that the problem of terrorism often affects places of worship. Terrorist activities may affect both visitors to these places and be related to the destruction of cultural and religious heritage sites. This is an important conclusion that will influence the future and requires further research.

5. Conclusions, Proposals and Recommendations

The results of the study confirmed that religious tourism can have an impact on regional development, but when examining the development of diverse European regions, it is necessary to take into account the conditions resulting from (1) an integrated tourism product, (2) sustainable development, and (3) the preservation of cultural heritage.

(1) The impact of the integrated religious tourism product on the tourism services market in the region

According to the results of the study, a tourism product should be integrated and based on cooperation between various service providers. In accordance with the principle of marketing, which is important in the contemporary approach to the tourism market, the supply side should adapt its offer in order to best meet the needs of tourists (the demand side). The proper satisfaction of demand and the adaptation of the supply offer result in economic effects and the development of the target region (Niezgoda, 2024).

The starting point is knowledge of these needs, which is why, according to experts, a region offering religious tourism products should have elements that support future service providers and organisers of religious tourism in order to create an offer that is adequate to the needs of consumers, as confirmed by the results obtained by Zouni and Digkas (2019), Carvache-Franco *et al.* (2024).

Cooperation should involve various entities with which tourists visiting the region come into contact. These include:

- tourist guides,
- catering and hotel managers,
- managers of places of worship and shrines,
- clergy with whom tourists come into contact.

Cooperation should serve to ensure a high-quality tourist product, thereby contributing to the competitive advantage that determines the development of the region hosting tourists.

(2) The importance of sacred places for local sustainable development

Religious tourism to places where there are no other attractions apart from religious ones is of significant importance for sustainable development. In this situation, tourism related to visiting these attractions contributes to job creation, the development of the local economy, crafts and culture, and promotes income growth and living standards in often economically poor areas (Niezgoda, 2024).

Religious tourism can therefore promote socio-economic transformation to improve the quality of life of communities in places visited by tourists. In particular, the improvement in living standards results from the development of tourist services (hotels, restaurants, route and attraction services), in which residents can be employed or can be service users. The origins of pilgrimage and religious tourism confirm that it is usually this type of tourism that initiates the development of the tourism industry in a given area, contributing to the development of local entrepreneurship, including trade and services. Tourist infrastructure and cultural offerings develop around places of worship.

Hotels, restaurants, service establishments, marketplaces, galleries, exhibitions, festivals, fairgrounds, etc. are created. Social and road infrastructure is also expanding, which, as Jaremen (2017) and Bayih (2019), is a prerequisite for regional development. In response to this problem, an international project called ReligiTour is currently being implemented in Europe with the aim of enhancing the competences and possibilities for religious tourism development and for better integration and management of religious sites in the urban environment.

The results presented here relate to the research part of the project, which aims to identify existing deficits and approaches in the existing education process in the field of religious tourism and management of religious sites and heritage (www.religitour.eu, project no: 2023-1-PL01-KA220-HED-000156074).

(3) Preservation of the cultural heritage of regions with religious values

In the literature on the subject, authors refer to heritage when they link it to cultural objects and the possibility of using them in regional development processes (Graham *et al.*, 2020). Cultural heritage and its individual material components are of

significant value from the point of view of tourism, therefore it should be recommended that it is not only the moral but also the legal duty of current generations to pass on this cultural legacy to future generations in the best possible condition, as confirmed by the results obtained by Niezgoda, Kiryluk, and Markiewicz, (2025).

In discussions on cultural tourism (including religious tourism), it is emphasised that it would not exist without cultural heritage, but the question should be asked: would cultural (religious) heritage survive without tourism? According to the results of the presented research, religious tourism, thanks to proper information, can contribute to the preservation of cultural heritage, which can be a source of competitive advantage influencing tourist arrivals, income growth and regional development.

Therefore, an important conclusion emerges as a recommendation for tourism supply: that regional development initiated by the development of religious tourism supports the preservation of cultural heritage. Cárdenas (2022) emphasises how intangible heritage, including religious rituals and ceremonies, attracts tourists seeking authentic and meaningful experiences, thus contributing to the maintenance of local communities and the preservation of cultural identity.

The role of each religious centre in a given country or region has been and continues to be determined by factors such as the history of the place, its location, transport accessibility, accommodation and catering infrastructure, as well as the degree of economic development of the locality associated with its religious function.

These elements determine the popularity of a given centre, which means that it can be known on a regional, local, national, European and even global scale. Religious tourism contributes to the development of the region and can also contribute to improving the situation of smaller and less known centres. However, this requires proper promotion and information about the place, which is an important practical recommendation resulting from this research.

In summary, the research confirmed the broad and multifaceted role of religious tourism in regional development, which is particularly reflected in:

- learning about the history and culture of a given region through participation in a tourist trip that includes a place of worship, which affects tourist demand in the region through the sale of goods and services;
- the preservation of cultural heritage through the protection of places of worship, sanctuaries and religious monuments, which determines the uniqueness of a given place and its competitive advantage in the tourist market;
- economic, social and cultural revitalisation of marginalised areas, commonly perceived as unattractive, forgotten and little known, by attracting tourists with different travel motives, including religious and spiritual ones.

It can therefore be noted that religious tourism not only serves to attract tourists and increase income through the use of tourist services, but also influences the development of the region in a broad, humanistic sense, by encouraging tourists to travel not only for strictly religious reasons, but also for broader reasons (cultural tourists). It has therefore been shown that the heritage of religious tourism promotes the development of tourism in general due to its inextricable link with the art and culture of the region.

The study also identified limiting factors. The main one is the problem of excessive tourist influx (so-called "overtourism"), which can also be caused by religious tourism and pose a threat to monuments, including places of worship. This leads to an important recommendation, which is the need to develop appropriate marketing (promotional) activities to encourage tourists to visit lesser-known and therefore less developed places, and to limit visits to places struggling with overtourism.

Another important recommendation that counters restrictions is the need to find a balance between preserving the spiritual and religious values of a place and designing and implementing tools that enable sustainable tourism development in these places.

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