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SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS
The Process of Value Co-creation within Religious Tourism

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Chapter 1: The General Theoretical Framework – The Architecture of Value in Religious Tourism

Chapter 1 lays the conceptual foundation of the dissertation through a twofold strategy: (1) it broadens the framework for understanding religious tourism/pilgrimage as a social, economic, and symbolic phenomenon—one that was strongly accelerated and reconfigured by the pandemic crisis;

(2) it proposes a theoretical scheme in which “value” is no longer treated as the outcome of a one-way delivery, but as an emergent process of use, interaction, and context, in the terms of Service-Dominant Logic (SDL). The chapter thus prepares the dissertation’s integrative model: the “value flow” (Provider → Channel → Beneficiary → Context)—which will later organize both the methodological design and the interpretation of the empirical studies.

1.1. The macro context: religious tourism and spiritual mobility

1.1.1. Market dynamics

The first section places contemporary pilgrimage within the broader field of mobility: pilgrimage functions simultaneously as a religious practice, a tourist experience, and a mechanism of community cohesion, and its effects are observable both economically (flows, related services, infrastructure) and socially (identity, belonging, norms, ritual). Through this positioning, the chapter argues that religious tourism cannot be adequately explained through a strictly transactional lens, because the stake of the “benefit” goes beyond immediate utility: it includes meaning, transformation, symbolic capital and, in the Orthodox tradition, a dimension of *order* (liturgical normativity) that structures the experience.

1.1.2. The pandemic catalyst

The chapter frames the pandemic as an accelerating factor and a stress test for the religious and tourism ecosystem: mobility is temporarily blocked, and practices reorient toward technologically mediated forms, which makes visible the tension between access/continuity and the risk of substitution or imitation of participation. In the dissertation’s logic, the pandemic does not create digitalization, but accelerates it and amplifies its effects: hybrid forms emerge, new routes of information and coordination appear, and the digital channel becomes an infrastructure for visibility and for maintaining ties with the community. This reconfiguration prepares the transition to the discussion of technological mediation and the fragility of mediated communion.

1.2. The ontology of the religious offer: from tangible artifacts to the phenomenology of experience

1.2.1. The tourism product

The second section clarifies what the religious offer “is,” analytically, when it is also viewed as a tourism offer: not only a set of objects/places (artifacts, destinations, souvenirs), but a set of resources (tangible and intangible) that acquire value only to the extent that they are integrated into a lived experience. The chapter insists that, in religious tourism, the intangible has structural weight: atmosphere, *order*, meaning, community, and the relationship with the sacred are constitutive components, not added value.

1.2.2. Religious service as process

In this subsection, religious service is described as a process: ritual and liturgy function as an institutionalized script of participation, and logistical support (organization, space, rhythm, access) is not external to the experience, but a condition of it. In other words, what appears “logistical” (pilgrimage organization, timing, rules, guidance, infrastructure) can decisively influence the possibility of lived experience: chaotic infrastructure or ambiguous communication can erode meaning and inner disposition, thus blocking the actualization of value.

1.2.3. The pilgrim’s experience: cognitive, emotional, and sensory dimensions (value-in-use)

The chapter describes the pilgrim’s experience as a composite phenomenon: it includes cognitive evaluations (interpretations of significance), emotional states (consolation, hope, intensity), sensory elements (space, rhythm, embodiment), as well as relational components (belonging, recognition, communion). In this key, value is not equivalent to consuming a product, but to value-in-use: what becomes real for the participant when the offered resources are integrated into one’s own life and one’s own frameworks of meaning.

1.3. From transaction to relationship: reconceptualizing value through SDL

1.3.1. The GDL–SDL transition

The third section explicitly introduces the transition from Goods-Dominant Logic (GDL) to Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), arguing that tourism—and even more so religious tourism—is a case in which the primacy of experience and the intangible makes SDL particularly suitable as an explanatory lens. The focus shifts from delivering an offer to the mechanism through which the promise becomes (or fails to become) meaningful lived experience.

1.3.2. Value co-creation: mechanisms of interaction and the actualization of meaning

The chapter defines co-creation as a fundamental mechanism: value emerges when the beneficiary integrates resources (material, symbolic, relational) within the context of their own life; otherwise, the offer remains merely potential. At the same time, it highlights a methodological problem: the concept is often used too broadly (any interaction = co-creation), but in Orthodox religious tourism roles and normativity must be clarified—because not any freedom of interaction is possible within a liturgical framework, and the participant’s inner disposition is decisive. The distinction between the value proposition and actual value thus becomes the dissertation’s operational axis.

1.3.3. The reverse: value co-destruction

The chapter introduces the idea that interactions can also produce negative effects: misaligned expectations, institutional frictions, social pressure, or excessive tourism can erode the symbolic climate and turn the experience into a dissonant one. This opening to ambivalence prepares the ecosystem approach and the role of context.

1.3.4. The ecosystem approach

Here the chapter consolidates the idea that value is the product of a network of actors and resources (institutions, communities, digital platforms, local infrastructures, norms), not of a single provider. Therefore, analysis must observe coordination, rules, the distribution of resources, and contextual effects (crises, local pressures, community acceptance).

1.4. Epistemic convergences: the functional isomorphism between divine *oikonomia* and market logic

Section 1.4 serves as a bridge between theological vocabulary and marketing/management: the dissertation argues for a functional (not identical) isomorphism between *oikonomia* as a pastoral economy of salvation/care and the logics of organization, mediation, and relating in economic life. At the same time, the chapter draws a firm boundary: applying SDL in sacred contexts must avoid a mercantile reduction.

The subsection critiques SDL’s axiomatic optimism (“the customer is always a co-creator”), showing that in religious tourism value can be transcendent, symbolic, and institutional, and liturgical normativity constrains the idea of consumer sovereignty. It also invokes a distinction of spheres (facilitation vs. co-creation proper in the shared sphere), suggesting that many effects

occur in the beneficiary's sphere without being direct co-creation, while the institution often remains a facilitator rather than a creator of value.

1.5. Technological mediation: platformization, phygital, and risks

Section 1.5 treats the digital as an active factor, not a neutral container: platforms reorganize visibility, community rhythms, and even forms of participation, producing a shift from infrastructure to mediated communion.

Digital tourism evolves from functional to experiential and then toward world-building registers; in religious tourism, the destination exists simultaneously as a physical place and as a set of representations and micro-narratives visible before/during/after the visit. In addition, platforms can function as institutional actors of trust and access, making digital visibility a pragmatic condition of participation for broad segments.

1.6. The dissertation's conceptual model: the value flow Provider – Channel – Beneficiary – Context

The chapter closes by operationalizing the literature into an integrative model: value is the result of resource integration, and co-creation is traced processually across four components. The Provider formulates the proposition (symbolic, ritual, discursive, relational resources), the Channel mediates it (with opportunities and constraints), the Beneficiary transforms the proposition into value-in-use (or rejects it), and the Context amplifies or slows the process (norms, crises, infrastructures, communities, cultural frames). In the Orthodox tradition, the chapter explicitly notes the existence of theological thresholds: the digital can support and extend, but there are situations in which embodiment, place, and shared rhythm cannot be technologically optimized and must be respected as limits of mediation.

Chapter 2: The General Research Methodology

Chapter 2 functions as the dissertation's methodological map: it justifies why a complex research architecture is necessary and explains how the six empirical studies are connected within a single processual logic aligned with the conceptual model Provider → Channel → Beneficiary → Context. The aim is not merely the selection of techniques, but the construction of an investigative strategy that captures value as an emergent outcome of co-creation, rather than as a unilateral delivery. In contemporary religious tourism, phenomena cannot be reduced to transactions (visits, consumption, flows), because what is at stake are ecosystems of meaning in

which tangible resources (places, infrastructures, access) and intangible resources (doctrine, tradition, symbolic authority, ritual and narrative frameworks) interact.

2.1. Research design: the mixed-methods approach

Starting from the heterogeneity of the object of study, the chapter argues that a single method would produce either a technicist reduction (indicators without meaning) or a hermeneutic reduction (meanings without observable regularities and dynamics). Therefore, a mixed-methods strategy is chosen—not as eclecticism, but as methodological fit: the quantitative component describes distributions/differences/dynamics where phenomena are public and comparable, while the qualitative component explains meaning-making mechanisms and the phenomenological conditions of value where significance is constitutive. This choice is also explicitly linked to the ambivalence of the digital channel: mediated communion is possible, but fragile; therefore, both observable interactions and conveyed meaning must be analyzed simultaneously.

2.2. Synoptic presentation of the studies: six pieces of the same explanation

The chapter shows that the studies are not parallel chapters, but complementary components that reconstruct the same process: how value is initiated, mediated, lived, and validated in religious tourism/pilgrimage under conditions of digital transformation and contextual pressure.

(1) The Provider – initiating the value proposition (Study 1 / Ch. 3). The transformation of religious authority is investigated in an ecosystem where visibility and relevance are publicly negotiated through interaction signals. The study tests whether institutional initiators can trigger the value flow in the digital environment without conflating engagement with spiritual telos; methodologically, it is a quantitative exploration of online presence/validation, theoretically anchored in the convergence between authority, trendsetting, and influence.

(2) The Channel – mediation: platform + narrative (Studies 2–3 / Ch. 4). The channel is not neutral: it produces opportunities (access, continuity, speed) and constraints (algorithmic logics, social rewards, risk of mimicking participation). Study 2 analyzes quantitatively and longitudinally how online communication adapts in crisis (pandemic/restrictions) and how the public responds through minimal, observable participation (engagement). Study 3 treats pastoral texts as a narrative infrastructure for sensemaking (interpretive frames, emotional stabilization, practical orientation), using qualitative content/discourse analysis.

(3) The Beneficiary – value-in-use (Studies 4–5 / Ch. 5). The beneficiary is not homogeneous; value depends on biographical conditions and cognitive frames. Therefore, two extremes of the

life cycle are selected: adolescents/Gen Z (quantitative approach via a self-administered questionnaire, examining the relationship between cognitive dimensions and ritual practice) and older adults (qualitative approach, with a liturgical/thematic focus, addressing the tension between biological fragility and spiritual/Eucharistic support).

(4) The Context – ecosystemic validation (Study 6 / Ch. 6). Validation is not only individual, but also communal: the destination and host community are treated as a resource platform, and residents' perceptions become an early indicator of sustainability and the risk of co-destruction (e.g., infrastructural pressure). Methodologically, the study is quantitative and is interpreted through the lens of social exchange and sustainability.

In conclusion, Chapter 2 establishes the integration logic: methodological plurality is justified by the nature of the phenomenon and by the need to trace, processually, the transition from the value proposition to value-in-use and then to ecosystemic validation, while intentionally leaving the technical details of the instruments for the empirical chapters.

Chapter 3: The Provider – Experience Initiators and the Transformation of Authority in the Digital Ecosystem (Study 1)

Chapter 3 addresses the first link in the dissertation's model (the Provider) and formulates a key problem for the value flow: the initiation of religious experience can no longer be understood solely through institutional authority, because in digital environments relevance is publicly tested through interaction signals. The chapter starts from the idea that an institutional offer of meaning needs a credible initiator; yet online, credibility is expressed (also) through visibility, attention, and quantifiable feedback. Hence the central metaphor: the metamorphosis of authority from pulpit to algorithm—namely, a shift from an authority exercised predominantly *ex cathedra* to one that is assumed by status but validated through platform-mediated interaction.

3.1. Purpose and positioning within the dissertation's architecture

The chapter clearly delineates its role: before discussing the channel and the beneficiary, it is necessary to understand who initiates the process and whether the initiator remains an active node in a socio-technical ecosystem where online VIPs can emerge quickly and attention is competitive. The integrated study empirically investigates the question: to what extent does formal institutional authority (the official trendsetter) convert into effective digital authority (a real influencer), measurable through engagement, when interaction is technologically mediated?

The objective is twofold: (1) the empirical validation of the “initiator” concept in digital space; (2) an assessment of the sustainability of the connection with younger segments, for whom platforms become the primary space of interaction.

3.2. Theoretical clarifications: trendsetter vs. influencer and the role of engagement

Conceptually, the chapter proposes an analytical distinction between **trendsetter** (an actor who sets the norm by virtue of position) and **influencer** (an actor who effectively manages to shape attention and interaction in networks). In SDL logic, engagement is not conflated with final value, but treated as an intermediate indicator: a minimal condition for the value proposition to move through the channel and later be integrated by the beneficiary. Therefore, the triad **views – reactions – comments** is justified as a bridge between the initiator and the possibility of co-creation.

3.3. Methodology: the ASCOR/Facebook case study (quantitative, retrospective longitudinal)

Methodologically, the chapter operationalizes the Provider stage through a quantitative, retrospective longitudinal study focused on the consumption of religious lectures published on Facebook by ASCOR branches (Romania and the diaspora) over a two-year interval: **1 April 2020 – 31 March 2022**. The unit of analysis is the original published lecture, and for each entry the following are collected: speaker identity, status (bishop / other clergy / layperson), topic, and three engagement indicators (views, reactions, comments). Sampling starts from 21 branches and applies inclusion criteria (original lectures, not reshared content/partnerships), resulting in 13 eligible pages.

For hypothesis testing, differential hypotheses are formulated for each indicator: bishops should obtain significantly more views (H1), reactions (H2), and comments (H3) than non-bishops, with sub-comparisons (bishops vs. other clergy; bishops vs. laypeople). Statistical inference follows a two-step procedure: an F-test for variances followed by the appropriate t-test (equal/unequal variances), interpreted via p-values.

3.4. Results and their meaning within the model

Before comparisons across speaker categories, the chapter highlights an institutional fact: not all branches consistently use Facebook as an infrastructure for original lectures, indicating variability in initiation capacity in the digital environment. Out of 21 branches, 13 (≈62%) had

collectable data; 2 pages were inactive (last posts in 2017/2018), and 6 had no content meeting the criteria. This finding supports the chapter's managerial conclusion: if belonging and attention become more volatile, the institution needs mechanisms to maintain the connection in competitive feeds, and interactional performance becomes an early signal of the capacity to remain a credible initiator.

Chapter 4: The Delivery Mechanism – Mediating the Value Proposition

Chapter 4 addresses the second link in the dissertation's conceptual model (the Channel) and explicitly treats it as a non-neutral mechanism with a dual function:

- (1) a platformized infrastructure that makes minimal participation visible (engagement), and
- (2) a narrative infrastructure that organizes the meaning of crisis through framing and pastoral recommendations.

To avoid reductionism, the chapter integrates two methodologically distinct studies, reported separately but interpreted as a unified whole: Study 2 (longitudinal monitoring on Facebook) and Study 3 (qualitative content analysis of bishops' pastoral letters).

4.1. The channel as a theoretical and operational problem

The chapter starts from the premise that, under crisis conditions (COVID-19), the digital channel becomes a pragmatic condition of continuity: when physical access is restricted, community connectivity shifts to platforms, and the religious institution tests its ability to sustain the relationship through observable signals (posting rhythm, content types, reactions/comments/shares). In parallel, the institutional discursive channel (episcopal pastoral letters) takes on a sensemaking role: it provides interpretations, legitimizes emotions, offers orientation and spiritual solutions, reducing anxiety and stabilizing the collective. In SDL terms, the channel mediates the passage from a value proposition to the possibility of value-in-use, without guaranteeing conversion.

4.2. Specific methodology: two complementary studies

4.2.1. Study 2 – Longitudinal monitoring of Facebook communication

Study 2 operationalizes the Channel as a socio-technical infrastructure (Facebook) and tracks how communication adapts around the shock of the state of emergency. The design is retrospective longitudinal, built on a 360-day window split into five temporal segments: 120 days “Before” (15.11.2019–15.03.2020), 60 days “State of Emergency” (16.03.2020–14.05.2020), and 180 days “After” divided into three 60-day sub-periods (Post 1 / Post 2 / Post 3). Operationally, two dimensions are tracked:

1. emitted communication (frequency + content types) and
2. the community response (engagement: reactions, comments, shares).

The database includes over 6,150 posts and ~1.6 million reactions, and statistical analysis is performed in SPSS, using Spearman correlations ($p < 0.05$) for relationships between variables (e.g., entity type and posting frequency).

4.2.2. Study 3 – Content analysis of Orthodox hierarchs’ pastoral letters

Study 3 treats the Channel as a normative message with high authority (pastoral letters), investigating how the crisis is framed and what repertoire of meaning is proposed to the community. The method is systematic qualitative content analysis, with a longitudinal comparative design, since the corpus is organized across three successive liturgical moments. The method combines deductive coding with inductive coding. The corpus includes 33 pastoral letters, intentionally selected to capture the highest level of discursive authority (diocesan hierarchs). Coding and analysis are conducted in MAXQDA, using quantitative mapping tools and semantic analysis.

4.3. Results: co-creation through interaction and story

The chapter advances an integrative thesis: continuity of religious service in crisis is supported through two complementary mechanisms—co-creation through interaction (platform) and co-creation through story (discourse).

4.3.1. Study 2 – adaptation dynamics and engagement

The results first show that the Channel element is internally heterogeneous: ecclesial entities’ Facebook presence profiles are not uniform (active/public pages vs. inactive, private profiles, or

absence), which limits institutional visibility and produces differences in mediation capacity even within the same structure.

Under the pressure of the state of emergency, communication intensifies, and the increase is clearer for parishes than for monasteries; in the data, the average posts/entity rises non-significantly for monasteries (~7%), but substantially for parishes (~57% rural and >120% urban). The relationship between entity type and posting frequency is very weak but significant ($r = 0.10$; $p = 0.01$), suggesting that structural differences explain only marginally the volume of communication.

The most important change appears in audience response and in the vehicles generating participation: content type correlates moderately with reactions ($r = 0.24$; $p = 0.01$), and video produces far more reactions than text/photo (on average ~1,377 reactions/video vs. ~150 reactions for photo/text). Moreover, after the state of emergency, reactions to video rise from ~750 reactions/post (during the emergency) to over ~2,500 reactions/video (after), suggesting that video becomes a privileged infrastructure of connectivity. Overall, the study indicates: intensification during the emergency, sustained high engagement after the peak for certain entities, concentration of reactions around high-performing institutional nodes (outliers), and a consistent advantage for video.

4.3.2. Study 3 – themes, framing, and temporal evolution

The results of the narrative study support the claim that the COVID-19 theme is consistently integrated into the pastoral agenda: references to the pandemic appear in 85% of the texts (28/33), confirming that religious leadership treats the crisis as a major context requiring interpretation and orientation. In addition, the reliability of identifying relevant passages is very high: Cohen's Kappa indicates "very high" inter-coder agreement ($\kappa = 0.97$ Easter 2020; $\kappa = 0.94$ Christmas 2020; $\kappa = 0.98$ Easter 2021), which strengthens the idea that crisis references are explicit enough for systematic analysis.

In summary, the study highlights:

- (a) a decrease in thematic weight over time, suggesting the "normalization" of the crisis;
- (b) a recency effect in message architecture;
- (c) two framing regimes (direct vs. indirect);
- (d) co-occurrence of threat with positive codes (emotional counterbalancing); and

(e) an evolution of recommendations toward a core of symbolic stability (“prayer–hope”) as the crisis becomes prolonged and exhausting.

4.4. Limitations: validity, transferability, integration

The chapter explicitly delineates limitations: Study 2 has generalization limits (regional frame – the Archdiocese of Vad, Feleac and Cluj), dependence on a single platform (Facebook and its algorithmic logic), observability bias (active public pages vs. private/inactive), and the limitation of engagement as a proxy (it is not equivalent to liturgical participation or personal transformation). It also notes outlier effects (concentration of reactions around a few pages) and causal limitations (concurrent factors: seasonality, local events, etc.).

Study 3 has sampling limitations (regional corpus and liturgical windows), perspective limitations (emphasis on sender, not reception), interpretive limits (although κ supports consistent selection, framing interpretation remains contextual), and source limitations (texts from public archives, with possible gaps).

Chapter 5: The Beneficiary’s Experience – Consumption and Reception of Value

5.1. The heterogeneity of experience

Chapter 5 shifts the dissertation’s center of gravity from the offer and institutional mechanisms to the beneficiary—namely, to the way the value proposition is transformed into value-in-use across different age segments. The core premise is that beneficiaries are not homogeneous, and that differences in age, pace of life, expectations, and vulnerabilities generate different regimes of value activation. Accordingly, the chapter proposes a comparison between two extremes of the life course—adolescents/Generation Z and older adults—in order to capture how religious experience is reconfigured between a stage dominated by identity evaluations and a stage dominated by vulnerability and existential concerns.

5.2. Quantitative study: adolescents, religiosity, and religious consumption behaviors (Turda)

The first empirical part of the chapter is a cross-sectional quantitative study based on a self-administered questionnaire applied in Turda, across five public high schools. The sample includes 383 high-school students (grades 9–12), with an average age of around 16–17, a gender distribution slightly in favor of girls, and an Orthodox confessional majority, plus a Pentecostal sub-sample. The aim is not only to describe how religious young people are, but to capture the structure of practices and the factors that explain it: denomination, gender, and a simplified cognitive variable (prioritizing faith vs. prioritizing reason).

The instrument tracks two behavioral registers: private practice (prayer) and public practice (attendance at services), plus a cost–benefit evaluation (to what extent the sacrifice associated with practice is perceived as justified by benefits). Statistical analysis uses nonparametric tests appropriate for ordinal data and distributions, reporting effect sizes and applying a correction to the significance threshold to limit Type I errors.

The central conceptual result is formulated as a difference between two modes of value activation: **calendar rhythm** and **life rhythm**. For some adolescents, religiosity is expressed mainly through communal reference points and holidays (occasional participation), while for another segment practice is integrated into weekly or daily routines. This distinction is important within the dissertation’s logic: value depends not only on claiming to be religious, but on how religious resources are integrated into everyday life.

The strongest differences appear in public participation. Pentecostal adolescents report far more frequent weekly (or more often) attendance than Orthodox adolescents, and the difference is large enough to be practically meaningful, not merely statistically significant. Private practice (prayer) also shows differences across segments, but is discussed as less dependent on communal infrastructure and more dependent on the devotional routine culture specific to the confessional environment.

The cognitive variable “faith > reason” functions as an independent predictor for practice intensity, especially daily prayer: those who prioritize faith report significantly more frequent daily prayer than those who prioritize reason. This relationship suggests that beyond denomination there are different micro-segments within the same denomination: an identity/declarative zone with rare practice and a practicing zone with stable routines.

Gender moderates results in a direction familiar to the specialized literature: girls report daily prayer more often than boys. However, the chapter emphasizes that gender differences are smaller than those associated with denomination and cognitive orientation. A nuanced

observation—important for the value-in-use paradigm—is that the “sacrifice–benefit” evaluation may remain relatively convergent between denominations even when religious behaviors differ strongly; in other words, perceived utility can be similar while the intensity of integrating resources into life can differ.

5.3. Qualitative study: the liturgical offer for older adults – Communion as a value resource

The second part of the chapter completely changes the methodological register and addresses the beneficiary segment of older adults through the analysis of a liturgical corpus associated with the Sacrament of Holy Communion: the canon and the prayers before/after Communion. The idea is that for older adults, religious value often manifests in a context of fragility: illness, loneliness, anxiety, decline, and proximity to death. In this key, liturgical texts are interpreted as an institutional value proposition: they offer reference points, promises, warnings, and a “preparation script” that can generate benefits—or, if treated superficially, can lead to negative effects.

The analysis is thematic, software-assisted, focused on semantic fragments that express effects, benefits, and risks of Communion. The central conclusion is that the liturgical proposition of value is holistic: it includes healing/strengthening, cleansing/forgiveness, illumination, peace, protection, union, and also an eschatological dimension (preparation, ultimate meaning). At the same time, a clear register of warning appears regarding unprepared Communion; the chapter uses this observation to support the idea that in the religious domain value co-creation is **conditional** (on preparation, disposition, and understanding), not automatic.

The chapter proposes an interpretive matrix in which the vulnerabilities of older age (medical, psychological, social, theological) are mapped onto the repertoire of liturgical benefits. Thus, value for older adults becomes intelligible as the integration of resources in “limit contexts”: consolation in suffering, emotional stabilization, recovery of meaning and belonging, plus a horizon of hope.

Finally, the chapter reaffirms the SDL framework: the institution can propose resources, but value effectively emerges only insofar as the beneficiary integrates them into their life, and differences between youth and older adults are explainable through distinct integration regimes (routines, vulnerabilities, existential ends).

Chapter 6: Ecosystem Context – Sustainability and Residents

Chapter 6 closes the dissertation's analytical trajectory through the Context link: the destination and the host community as the space in which value co-creation is validated or, conversely, degraded. The underlying argument is that the value of religious tourism cannot be evaluated exclusively from the pilgrim's (beneficiary's) perspective or the institution's (provider's) perspective. In an ecosystem, experience is conditioned by infrastructure, local norms, social tolerance, and the perceived distribution of benefits and costs. Thus, a destination can have high symbolic attractiveness while simultaneously generating pressures that lead to co-destruction (crowding, overloading public services, tensions between residents and visitors).

6.1. The destination as a resource platform

In SDL terms, the destination is described as a platform of shared resources: tangible resources (mobility, space, services, utilities, safety, infrastructure) and intangible resources (hospitality, identity, atmospheres, norms, and cultural interpretations). Value co-creation emerges when these resources are integrated harmoniously by ecosystem actors; co-destruction emerges when integration is conflictual or perceived as inequitable. The chapter insists that residents are not "scenery," but ecosystem actors: through attitudes and interactions, they can amplify or inhibit the value of the tourist experience.

6.2. Methodology: residents' perceptions as a sustainability indicator

To operationalize Context, the chapter uses a case study for Cluj-Napoca, based on a questionnaire and probabilistic sampling (simple random sampling), administered face-to-face across all neighborhoods. Sample size is calibrated for a small margin of error, and the final dataset includes just over one thousand validated respondents. The questionnaire covers perceived tourism potential, interaction with tourists, and evaluation of impacts (positive and negative), plus socio-demographic variables for segmentation. Interpretation is anchored in Social Exchange Theory: residents' support depends on the balance of perceived benefits and costs.

6.3. Results: a favorable climate, risks concentrated in infrastructure

Results describe a generally positive climate: most residents consider the city to have tourism potential, and a large proportion report having interacted with tourists. In impact evaluation, positive dimensions are strong in the areas of city image, cultural opportunities, and leisure possibilities, alongside perceived economic benefits and urban development.

The risk core is not concentrated around safety, but around infrastructure and capacity: traffic congestion and pressure on public services are the most prominent problems. A factor analysis reduces impact items to two main components—positive impacts and negative impacts—and the negative component is defined by a small number of clear elements, suggesting that risks are identifiable and can be managed through targeted policies (mobility, flow management, public services).

6.4. Conclusion: residents as ecosystem sensors

The chapter concludes that residents function as sensors of sustainability: when they perceive benefits as legitimate and costs as manageable, their support facilitates co-creation. When costs rise (especially infrastructural ones), support decreases and the risk of value co-destruction emerges, including for religious tourism. Therefore, Context must be treated as a constitutive part of the model, not as a simple background.

Chapter 7: Final Conclusions and Future Directions

Chapter 7 closes the dissertation by coherently integrating the results obtained in the empirical studies (Chapters 3–6) and by formulating contributions, managerial implications, limitations, and a future research agenda. The unifying thread is the “Value Flow” model (Provider → Channel → Beneficiary → Context), anchored in Service-Dominant Logic (SDL), through which religious tourism/pilgrimage is interpreted as a process of transformation and co-creation (or co-destruction) of value, rather than as simple consumption of space or attractions.

7.1. Research synthesis: the reconfiguration of value in religious tourism

The general conclusion is that religious tourism functions more adequately as a **holistic transformation service** than as a transactional activity. Value is not treated as a stable property of the destination (or of the offer), but as a phenomenological reality that is actualized when the beneficiary integrates resources (symbolic, ritual, relational) into their own life regime (needs, rhythm, discipline, belonging). At the same time, interaction does not guarantee value: when resources, norms, and expectations are misaligned, the process can derail into co-destruction, and in religious tourism this degradation carries a special weight because it affects not only satisfaction, but also the integrity of the regime of sacredness and the destination’s symbolic sustainability.

7.2. Conclusions of the empirical studies: an ecosystem diagnosis along the value chain

Section 7.2 organizes conclusions from the empirical chapters as a stage-by-stage diagnosis to highlight interdependencies between initiation, mediation, lived experience, and validation. The logic is that each link creates conditions of possibility for the next:

- (1) the initiator must be recognized,
 - (2) the channel must ensure continuity and intelligibility,
 - (3) the beneficiary transforms the proposition into value-in-use,
 - (4) the context validates the process ecosystemically or erodes it.
- **Provider (initiation and recognition):** results show that institutional authority (a de jure trendsetter) does not automatically convert into digital influence (a de facto influencer) when recognition is measured through public interaction signals. The implication for the model is decisive: if the initiator does not activate attention and minimal participation in the mediation space, the value flow becomes fragile from the outset.
 - **Channel (socio-technical and narrative mediation):** the channel is not a neutral vehicle; it operates as an infrastructure of participation (observable interaction) and a narrative infrastructure (frames of meaning/sensemaking), and effectiveness emerges when the two are synergistic.
 - **Beneficiary (value-in-use and heterogeneity):** value is decided at the beneficiary level: the same proposition can produce different outcomes depending on ritual competence, inner disposition, and biographical constraints; hence the legitimacy of segmentation and differentiated interventions (e.g., Gen Z vs. older adults).
 - **Context (community validation and thresholds):** context (norms, institutions, community, infrastructures) is not scenery, but a validation mechanism; it can support co-creation or generate co-destruction thresholds, especially when different institutional logics come into conflict or when tourism pressure degrades the symbolic climate.

7.3. Final refinement of the model: “Value Flow” and threshold conditions

The model is reformulated as a process in which the provider formulates a value proposition (symbolic/ritual/discursive/relational resources), the channel mediates it through specific infrastructures and logics, the beneficiary integrates (or rejects) the resources in their life, and the context amplifies or slows the process through norms, institutions, crises, and community dynamics. The section also fixes synthetic propositions: initiation does not guarantee co-creation;

the channel creates opportunities and constraints; value is phenomenological; context validates and can generate co-destruction.

Refinement explicitly includes threshold/limit conditions. A first set concerns crisis vs. non-crisis: the pandemic functions as a stress test that accelerates digitalization, but also makes visible tensions of mediation (attention fragmentation, instant feedback pressure, the risk of confusing platform emotion with experiential depth). A second set concerns ontological limits: the digital can extend and support, but where practice requires body, place, and shared rhythm there is a threshold beyond which technological optimization no longer works. A third set concerns institutional alignment and governance: co-destruction also appears as a coordination failure between actors with different rules (e.g., hospitality expectations vs. local liturgical norms), leading to the proposal of a distinct dimension: **spiritual sustainability**.

7.4. Original contributions

The chapter delineates theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions. Theoretically, the dissertation systematically applies SDL and the distinction between value proposition vs. value-in-use/in-context in a domain sensitive to transactional reductions; it proposes an epistemic bridge (a functional isomorphism between theological-pastoral *oikonomia* and market logic, without reducing religion to consumption); and it operationalizes co-destruction in sacred spaces through specific mechanisms (misalignment between promise and normative regime, institutional conflict, degradation of the symbolic climate, etc.), introducing spiritual sustainability as an analytical dimension. Methodologically, the major contribution is the mixed design deliberately structured along the value flow and the treatment of the channel as a dual object (platform + message), avoiding the equation of interaction volume with the content of meaning.

7.5. Managerial implications and practical recommendations

Implications are formulated ecosystemically: effective interventions cannot be isolated to a single actor; unilateral optimizations can become counterproductive if they conflict with the place's institutional arrangements and the logic of the sacred.

- **For religious institutions:** professionalizing digital presence as an extension of mission, consistent content design and segment differentiation; plus explicit expectation management for pilgrims through applied mystagogy (clarifying norms, guidance, preparation materials) to protect the symbolic climate and reduce co-destruction risk.

- **For digital channel managers:** separating engagement as an interaction signal from religious participation in the full sense; avoiding optimization guided exclusively by metrics; complementary design (participation + meaning) and moderation as governance; multi-platform diversification to reduce dependence on algorithmic logic.
- **For destination managers/authorities:** polycentric governance and rapid interventions at pressure points (mobility, crowd management, public services), with residents treated as early sensors of co-destruction thresholds; shared rule architectures between ecclesial and secular actors; the destination as a learning destination (monitoring, feedback loops, adaptive adjustment).
- **For private operators:** a paradigm shift toward relational design and institutional compatibility, group preparation and avoidance of “attraction” discourse where the aim is transformative; managing online reputation as part of the service (reviews as a barometer of misalignments).

7.6. Limitations

The dissertation acknowledges limitations of generalization (anchoring in local/regional contexts and “publicly observable” units), channel limitations (dependence on Facebook and algorithmic logic; selection bias; engagement as proxy, not a measure of transformation), beneficiary-level limitations (urban sample, cross-sectional design, self-reporting and some reduced operationalizations), as well as limitations of the older-adult study (focus on text and support mechanisms from the corpus, not the full spectrum of lived experience). For context, co-destruction thresholds require replication in destinations with high symbolic load and in periods of maximal pressure.

7.7. Agenda for future research

Proposed future directions follow from limitations and from the model’s explanatory potential:

- (1) extending the Channel toward comparative multi-platform design
- (2) post-crisis longitudinal studies (beneficiary-centered panels) to observe the persistence of digital habits;
- (3) methodological triangulation for the Beneficiary (self-report + interviews + participant observation + indirect measures) to bring measurement closer to “value-in-use”;

- (4) testing co-destruction thresholds and governance in sacred destinations under high pressure, including modeling the reputation–flows–pressure–experience–reputation feedback loops;
- (5) exploring emerging infrastructures (AR/VR, metaverse, AI) as environments of mediated presence and narrative design, with attention to risks of gamification/desacralization and institutional conflict;
- (6) convergence between ecological sustainability and spiritual sustainability (e.g., “green pilgrimage”).