

## Article

# The Influence of Interpretation through Guiding Tour, Quality of Reception and Relics' Worship on the Satisfaction of Pilgrims Attending the Iasi Feast

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**Abstract:** Recently, in line with the increased attention paid to cultural tourism in general and to religious tourism in particular, researchers and practitioners have become increasingly interested in the analysis of various aspects related to cultural heritage in order to capitalize on its value by means of its interpretation, thus providing beneficial effects both for tourists and for tourism's sustainable development. The aim of this research is to analyze the extent to which the methods of interpretation of the religious cultural heritage: guiding tours, quality reception, and relic worship influence the satisfaction of tourists participating in the "Saint Parascheva" pilgrimage, held annually by the Metropolitan Cathedral in Iasi. The data were collected by means of a survey (N = 932) and the information was processed by using the SPSS version 25 program. Our results indicate the significant influence that the potential to worship relics has on pilgrims' satisfaction compared to other interpretation methods, such as the relationship with the Cathedral's staff or the possibility of participating in guided tours. Pilgrims' satisfaction is also perceived differently depending on certain aspects of their socio-demographic profile, i.e., their age and the perceived faith level. This study is relevant for researchers, managers, and students interested in the field of cultural heritage interpretation in general, and in the field of religious heritage in particular, and could significantly contribute to improving pilgrims' satisfaction as well as cultural heritage preservation.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage; pilgrims' satisfaction; personal interpretation methods; guided tour; potential to worship relics; reception; socio-demographic profile



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## 1. Introduction

Cultural tourism has become one of the most attractive fields of research due to its growing importance as a consequence of tourists' increasing interest in knowledge, learning, new experiences, cultural sensibility, and understanding by experiencing new cultural realities [1]. As part of cultural tourism and one of the oldest types of traveling, religious tourism has developed extensively, the number of people traveling for this purpose reaching 330 million. In 2017, the revenue from traveling to national and international religious sites was above USD 18 billion at the global level [2]. Such an evolution has occurred as a consequence of the increased interest in religious heritage as well as in finding an appropriate location for manifesting religious feelings and for exploring the spiritual dimension deeply ingrained in the human being. Therefore, the religious patrimony includes an extremely precious heritage, comprising both tangible (ancient cathedrals, churches, temples, impressive architectural sites, or historical documents) and intangible elements (rituals, monastic lifestyle, ancient traditions). Pilgrimages are placed between tangible

(praying sites) and intangible heritage (rituals, prayers, means to express faith and to build-up a relationship with the divinity) and have become extremely popular among travelers who choose them either for religious purposes or, sometimes, for spiritual or cultural ones [3].

The pilgrimage, sometimes referred to as religious tourism, represents a journey implying a religious experience, based on spirituality, in the shape of an encounter between humans and God [4]. Pilgrims seek to touch the sacred, i.e., to visit the unique physical location that they perceive as the embodiment of their profound religious values [5]. Religious sites, including churches, temples, and mosques, are endowed with extremely powerful intangible values. For this reason, they may be regarded as pilgrimage recollection and concentration sites [6]. In this context, definitions provided by geographers include the term “space”, understood as a “sacred or saint” place [3,7]. Actually, they insist on the existence of a Tourism Geography, which may include the so-called Geography of Religions. Quite naturally, “mobility”, i.e., movement toward a certain location, becomes attached to the idea of space. Therefore, the pilgrimage is a human mobility phenomenon that involves following the sacred reliquary toward a sacred location, thereby activating religious motivations and spiritual fulfillment [3,8–10]. On the other hand, specialists sometimes insist on the differences between religious tourism and pilgrimage. It is thus stated that, in terms of sustainability, the pilgrimage is more important than religious tourism because, in the first case, it is the profound experience itself that matters the most, while religious tourism is limited to scenic externality [11].

By synthesizing the various perspectives of different authors such as Collins-Kreiner [8], Digance [9], Reader [10], Collins-Kreiner and Kliot [7], and Hyde and Harman [12], we can state that the pilgrimage is the journey to and the communion with a specific, irreplaceable site that embodies and manifests, at the same time, pilgrims’ religious, cultural, and personal values as well as their profound understanding of the source of their basic identity.

According to Hoheisel [13], the pilgrimage implies three factors: a sacred place, its attractiveness as exerted at the individual or collective level, and a specific purpose (i.e., obtaining some spiritual or material benefits). Stoddard [14], for example, was inclined toward the spiritual side and believed that the pilgrimage is a “journey of the soul” that starts during childhood and continues during maturity. The motivation for this journey is related to the social perception of “duty” (they must do this), which proves stronger than those duties related to leisure time and relaxation [15].

Pilgrimages represent a means to reach the sacred, God, that enables people to approach and even contact the divinity [16]. The pilgrim may thus be described as a person in search of ways to improve, and who is convinced that this may be achieved at the pilgrimage site. According to Collins-Kreiner [8], there are three levels of change that should be considered: the external aspect, perceptions, and attitudes. The external aspect implies language, clothing, overall style, and accessories. Changes in terms of the visitors’ perceptions or visions of life, faith, and behavior may occur while pilgrims adopt new concepts during the visit or while they interact with the local population. The third level changes imply psychological or attitude-related shifts.

In the 21st century, pilgrimages are no longer limited to the religious area. Collins-Kreiner [8] emphasized the fact that contemporary pilgrimage may be divided in two integrated elements: (1) a conventional sacred journey and (2) a secular modern journey. As a matter of fact, the existence of a relation between the sacred and the secular was emphasized a long time ago in the research of Eliade from 1959 and 1964 (cited by [12]) and, more recently, in that of Hung et al. [17] and Hyde and Harman [12].

Romania is a country with a religious population, the majority of which is Orthodox (81.9% [18]). In the studies and research carried out over the years, Romanians have constantly expressed their religious values and faith in the Church as an institution able to meet their spiritual needs as well as to solve their social, family, and moral issues [19,20]. The perception of their own religiousness is confirmed by a great number of Romanians (over 70% of those up to 35 years old and over 80% of those over 35 years old). Young

Romanians tend to be more religious compared to their European peers, although not to the same extent as the adult population [20]. To most Romanians, faith in God as a life spirit or force, and even as an embodied force is an important value [20]. In 2019, Romanians stated that the Church came second in the top institutions they trusted, following the Army (represented by the National Defence Ministry) [21], thus considering it more trustworthy than the EU or NATO. There are numerous occasions dedicated to pilgrimages at the national level, and the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral pilgrimage, celebrating the clerical life of Saint Parascheva, is among the most representative examples. On this occasion, thousands of pilgrims travel to Iasi every year (over 90,000 in 2019 [22]).

Any tourist site generating significant tourist flows requires appropriate management focused on acquiring long and short-term sustainability, and this implies, among others, the necessity to provide positive experiences for pilgrims and tourists, irrespective of how strong their religious motivation might be [23]. Positive experiences will be reflected in the overall pilgrimage satisfaction, and the desired effects, such as future returns to the site or word-of-mouth recommendations, will be reached; that is why awareness of the factors that can lead to increased satisfaction is highly important. Consequently, inquiries regarding the interpretation methods that should be used to increase pilgrims' satisfaction are necessary. Therefore, the aim of this article is to identify the extent to which personal interpretation methods have contributed to increasing pilgrims' overall satisfaction and to make recommendations regarding the elaboration of efficient management strategies for the site under analysis and for the pilgrimage itself so as to ensure long-term benefits for all parties involved. Given the analyzed studies, this paper is structured as follows: introduction, analysis of the specialized literature in the field of cultural heritage interpretation of religious tourism, hypotheses and research methodology description, results, discussions and conclusions.

## 2. Literature Review

The specialized literature provides a complex debate regarding religious tourism, particularly in terms of its definition based on the motivation of travelers to religious sites as well as on the way they spend their time at the destination [4].

### 2.1. Guiding as a Personal Interpretation Method in Religious Tourism

Cultural heritage interpretation enables learning in places such as historical sites, natural parks, zoos, or museums, and thus, by using a wide range of approaches, from guided tours to sophisticated exhibitions, cultural heritage is revived [24]. The interpretation methods proposed by Beinstein et al. [25] and used in churches are: promotional materials, pamphlets, texts written on metal plates, guided tours, and high-tech tools.

Guiding (or guided trips) represents an activity that may be employed in order to provide visitors with a perspective of what happened at a certain moment in the past [26].

The issue of pilgrims' ability to identify the "guide" once they have reached the destination is quite controversial. The problem may become even more serious when huge numbers of people are involved and when the management of the whole organization, guiding, and "attending" process turns out to be challenging. Taking on such a responsibility may prove difficult sometimes and, due to this, it is often avoided. Shackley [27] mentioned that the people actively involved in managing a pilgrimage destination are perceived as "worship facilitators" or "guardians of the site" rather than managers.

Irrespective of the form in which the "guides" occur, they play at least two roles. The first one is to "interpret", i.e., "an educational activity aimed to reveal significance and relations by using original items, by direct experience and illustrative means rather than by simply communicating factual information" [28]. The Association for Heritage Interpretation (AHI) considered that our life is enriched by cultural heritage interpretation due to the fact that it involves emotions, improved experiences, and in-depth understanding of both past and contemporary places, people, events, and artifacts [29].

The quality of interpretation is a basic condition for achieving satisfaction [30]. Interpretation may be regarded from two perspectives: the first one implies personal contact and the second implies non-personal services. In the first case, Ndivo and Cantoni [31] placed a high importance on the personal services that enable interaction with an interpreter, access to information, carrying out guided tours, informal discussions, and contacts. Personal guidance services include a series of advantages that are personal and credible because they imply direct contact between visitor and interpreter. Concerning the second aspect, visitors have access to interpretation via media services, such as written materials, self-guided activities, exhibitions, visiting centers, interpretation panels or billboards (with text, images, illustrations, maps, etc.), interactive kiosks, audio tours, audio-visual support, etc. [31,32].

The second role of the guide is that of an intermediary, i.e., broker. Guides can ensure visitors' physical access to sites and spaces, to meetings (interactions with host communities), thus making sure that visitors' awareness (cognitive access) and empathy (emotional access) contribute to the increase the tourists' overall satisfaction [33,34].

### 2.2. Pilgrims' Reception

The perceived tourist satisfaction in the particular case of the pilgrimage has been analyzed in few studies; however, reported results can guide us in developing our own research hypotheses.

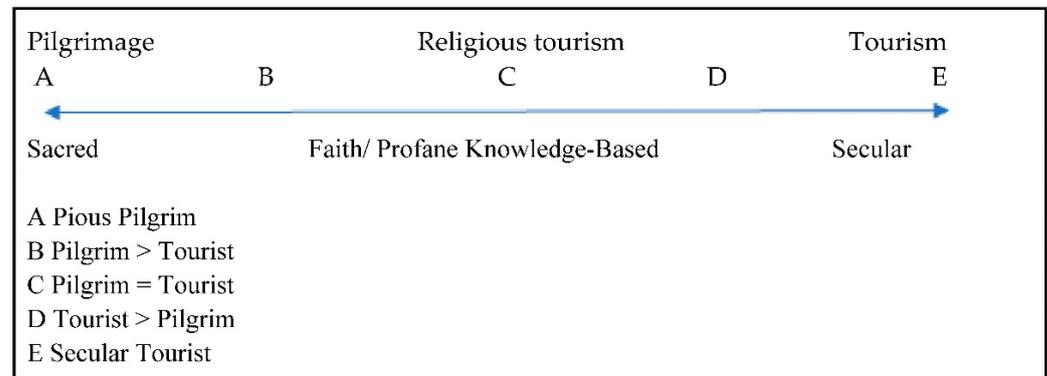
In a study on the Medjugorje pilgrimage carried out by Krešić et al. [23], the authors focused on the analysis of the factors leading to dissatisfaction in cases of perceiving poor performance (transport infrastructure, quality of information, hygiene-related issues) as well as of the hybrid factors leading to increased satisfaction in cases of perceiving a high performance (tourist facilities, human factors, safety). The authors reached the conclusion that, in the future, attention must be paid to all hybrid factors because the level of their contribution to increasing satisfaction is relatively high. The human factor implies the staff's courtesy and hospitality as well as the local community's friendliness.

An important aspect is the fact that the pilgrimage management staff do not necessarily perceive their role in relation to managerial attributions but rather to facilitating pilgrims' worship of reliquaries and/or as site guardians [27]. This enables the decision-making process to be based on providing pilgrims with the necessary support, which may contribute to increasing satisfaction.

### 2.3. The Ritual

Nowadays, common journeys for all believers are often organized by the Church and their aims may or may not have a strictly religious character. Although the itinerary of these guided trips typically includes a "sacred site" tour, they may also have a well-defined tourist character [26]. The religious component of the journey is determined by the obligation to participate in certain religious practices and rituals throughout the day. This is also the case in Romania, where it often happens that pilgrimages are organized and led/guided by the priest of the parish that pilgrims belong to. The ritual is defined as a person's religious, traditional, or formal act, endowed with symbolism, power, social and ceremonial procedures [35,36]. In socio-cultural anthropology, the ritual includes stylized performances, traditional ceremonies, or symbolic voluntary activities and transition ceremonies in the context of a particular community. To Campesino and Schwartz [37], "spirituality is a basic value, almost universal. The purpose of spiritual values is to reach inner sense, coherence and harmony by transcending every day reality." In his study Kellehear [38] showed that religious needs are integrated among spiritual needs to the same extent as the need for transcendence or for reading life anew. He defined the six essential religious needs that have to be met: redemption (salvation from sin, error or devil), divine pardon, religious rituals and oaths, clergy visits, religious literature, and, finally, conversations about God and eternal life.

The tourists interested in religious sites have been identified as placed between two poles, one associated with the sacred, the other with the secular, on an imaginary continuum, as illustrated in Figure 1 [5]:



**Figure 1.** The Pilgrimage–Tourism Continuum. Sursa: Smith cited by Durán-Sánchez et al. [5].

Spiritual motivations based on religious faith, such as the wish to connect with the divinity and to show gratitude, hold a special place in religious tourism; however, other motivations associated with secular needs may occur [5,39]. On the one hand, religious experience and emotional connections are positively affected by deeply religious attitudes, such as faith and practice, while, on the other hand, they are negatively affected by secular material attitudes. Taheri [40] and Becker [41] stated that “Piety is the means by which religious identity is embodied and expressed.”

The pilgrimage, traditionally associated with religious values [11], requires the pre-existence of religious motivation [42,43]. The pilgrim’s motivation is to participate in a ritual, prayer, or religious event and to achieve the satisfaction provided by the authentic experiences of communion with the other members of the community and of fulfilling the religious task, etc. [11,39]; this may be achieved by worshiping relics (or other sacred items/objects associated with the pilgrimage destination), which is central to pilgrimages made by the Romanian Orthodox people.

Pilgrims may also be motivated by the possibility of earning religious merit or sin redemption [9,44,45]. Other pilgrims seek physical healing or solutions to their worldly problems [5,45].

We believe that the perception of sacredness, which is a fundamental aspect of pilgrimage [46], is determined by worshiping relics and that this significantly contributes to pilgrims’ overall satisfaction.

#### 2.4. Participation in Religious Pilgrimages—Tourists’ Satisfaction

A general definition of satisfaction, which may serve as a basis for all theories regarding customer satisfaction, is the one provided by Kotler and Keller, cited by [47]: “Satisfaction is a feeling of well-being which occurs whenever a need is satisfied.” This “well-being” is based on the comparison between a subjective experience and a previous state [48]. Thus, we reach a paradigm that is widely used to disconfirm expectations: the hope disconfirmation model posits that it is the difference between expectation and perception that determines the final satisfaction state [49–51]. According to the model, if perceived performance is superior (inferior) to the expectations resulting from personal experience, from word-of-mouth recommendations, or the mass-media [52], then a positive disconfirmation and satisfaction increase (decrease) will follow. At the same time, Weiler and Ham [53] and Huang et al. [30] introduced the impact of interpretation in achieving tourists’ satisfaction, i.e., the triad: what I do—what I feel—what tourists do, thus establishing a connection between the cognitive and the emotional. Satisfaction may also be regarded from a different perspective, i.e., as a relation between the sacrifices people make and the rewards they get, depending on the time, costs, or effort and value involved in

the process [54] or, put otherwise, satisfaction may be regarded from the equity theory perspective. Armario [55] synthesized the relations between the different variables that influence tourists' behavior decisions: traveling motivation and distance (the first stage, before the journey begins), service consumption (the second stage, the tourist's experience at the destination), the overall experience and future attitudes and behavior (the third stage).

In this paper, pilgrims' satisfaction is defined as the pilgrims' subjective perception of the result of the comparison between their expectations regarding the event and the pilgrimage experience itself.

Some studies have indicated the existence of a direct and significant relation between pilgrims' socio-demographic profiles and their perceptions regarding the satisfaction level derived from the pilgrimages they participate in. In such a study, conducted by Hugues, Bond and Ballantyne [26], the authors pointed to the existence of some differences in terms of pilgrims' perceptions regarding their satisfaction with the Canterbury Cathedral interpretation, depending on their psychological profile (facilitator, recharger, explorer, experience seeker, and hobbyist). In other studies, such perception differences are based on the pilgrims' sex, age, nationality, religion, professional status, income [56].

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Research Purpose and Hypotheses

Based on the increasing interest in the interpretation of cultural heritage for tourism, the purpose of our research is to identify the extent to which personal interpretation methods influence the satisfaction of pilgrims participating in the Saint Parascheva Feast, held in Iasi, Romania.

Therefore, our research hypotheses are determined by the abovementioned aim, i.e., to identify and measure the influence of interpretation on the satisfaction of pilgrims attending the Iasi feast, based on the specialized literature and on the increasing interest in cultural heritage interpretation. This includes the purpose of intensifying the care for the sustainability of cultural heritage-based tourism by International Council of Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) [57], capitalizing on cultural heritage in order to ensure its long-term preservation and authenticity, and to reveal its significance so as to benefit all stakeholders.

The previously referred to studies show that personal interpretation through guided tours [58], the quality of communication with the cultural sites staff, the potential to worship relics, destination rituals, and activities are all interpretation techniques perceived as attractive by tourists visiting such destinations [59], thus contributing to the overall pilgrimage satisfaction. By relying on these aspects, we formulated the following hypotheses:

**H1.** *The guided tour significantly influences pilgrims' perceptions regarding their satisfaction with attending the Iasi feast.*

**H2.** *The potential to worship relics (the ritual) significantly influences the general and spiritual satisfaction of the pilgrims attending this feast.*

**H3.** *Pilgrims' satisfaction is significantly influenced by the perceived quality of communication with the staff outside the church (reception).*

**H4.** *Pilgrims' satisfaction is significantly influenced by the perceived quality of communication with the staff inside the church.*

Also, depending on gender, age, area (urban or rural), faith, income level, etc., demographic characteristics may influence pilgrims' perceptions of this event organized by the Iasi Cathedral. Consequently, we formulated the following additional hypotheses:

**Ha1.** *Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on gender.*

**Ha2.** *Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on respondent age.*

**Ha3.** *Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on respondent area (urban or rural).*

**Ha4.** *Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on their perception of faith (in God).*

**Ha5.** *Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on their income level.*

### 3.2. Research Method and Sample

In order to identify the extent to which personal interpretation methods and techniques, the guided tour, reception and ritual (the possibility of worshiping relics) influence the satisfaction of pilgrims participating in the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral feast, we conducted a study based on a questionnaire addressed to pilgrims in the period 11–15 October 2019. The questionnaire was pre-tested by asking the first 25 interviewed people to make any necessary observations so as to eliminate any potential errors regarding the collected data, to provide information regarding any potentially ambiguous questions, and to help us avoid redundant or untrue answers. The data collection method relied on the structured interviews with pilgrims at the Cathedral exit, with the replies written by interviewers and study authors. The sample comprised 932 people who participated in the Saint Parascheva (whose relics are kept in the Metropolitan Cathedral) annual feast held in Iasi. According to the data provided by the local authorities, an average number of 150,000 people participated in the feast [60]. The sample volume was calculated by using a specialized software, i.e., Raosoft, by employing the random sample method, which is currently highly popular among social sciences researchers. Given the fact that it is essential to identify the extent of the phenomenon, the level of significance, as well as the maximum error level, the calculation formula was the one proposed by Cochran [61], which proved extremely useful in the absence of information regarding the population total volume [62]. According to Raosoft.com, which was used to calculate the sample size, it should comprise 594 people. The data were uploaded in SPSS and processed by using SPSS Statistics 25.

The questions were formulated so as to provide information on pilgrims' perceptions regarding the influence of the interpretation method on their satisfaction with the event they attended. Consequently, for each interpretation technique, one item was formulated by using a Likert-type scale (1 = total disagreement; 5 = total agreement) in order to measure the perceived level of satisfaction with the service quality, the facilities provided during guided tours, the interaction with the staff inside and outside the church, the possibility of worshiping relics, and other activities for adults available during the pilgrimage. The question was: "Are you satisfied with the services and facilities provided?" The respondents were asked to choose a level of satisfaction (on a Likert scale from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied) for each of the services that constituted the interpretation techniques taken into account (guided tour, reception outside the church, reception inside the church, activities for adults, possibility of worshiping relics). Also, by using a Likert scale of 1 to 5 for the statement "the visit met my expectations", the pilgrims' satisfaction was measured as a variable expressed by the perception of the relation between expectations and overall experience.

### 3.3. Data Processing and Analysis

The data were processed by using the SPSS 25 statistical analysis tool and then verifying the hypotheses and analyzing the relations between variables: multi-variate linear regression, descriptive analysis, and ANOVA test were employed to note the differences in the respondents' perceptions depending on socio-demographic variables.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Demographic Data

The number of questionnaire respondents reached 932 people, all of them pilgrims who attended the Iasi feast. The main data considered relevant in identifying the respondents' potential differences of perception, based on socio-demographic variables, are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Pilgrims' socio-demographic profile.

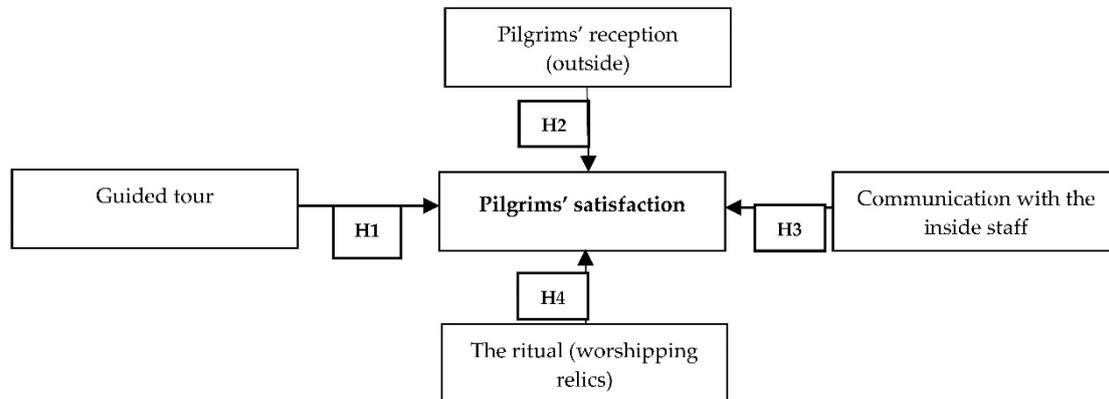
Variables	Attributes	Number of People	Valid Percent
Gender	Female	449	48.2
	Male	483	51.8
Age group	Under 20 years old	74	7.9
	21–40 years old	343	36.8
	41–60 years old	369	39.6
	Over 60 years old	146	15.7
Area	Urban	515	55.3
	Rural	417	47.7
Religion	Orthodox	903	96.9
	Catholic	22	2.4
	Greek-Catholic	4	0.4
	Other	3	0.3
Education	Primary School	40	4.3
	Middle School	97	10.4
	Highschool	480	51.5
	University	258	27.7
	Master+Doctorate	57	6.1
Income	<RON 1163i	269	29
	RON 1163–1199	342	36.8
	RON 2000–2999	227	24.4
	RON 3000–3999	57	6.1
	RON 4000–4161	15	1.6
	>RON 4162	19	2
Missing values		3	0.3
The way pilgrims relate to religious faith:	“Do you consider yourself a religious person?”		
	Yes	442	47.4
	Yes, but I do not attend the mass regularly	310	33.3
	So-so	153	16.4
	No	27	2.7

Source: own representation.

Table 1 shows that most pilgrims were male (51.8%), aged between 41 and 60 years (39.6%), came from urban areas (55.3%), with an average level of education (high school—51.5%) and with an income below the net average salary (65.8%), which, according to the National Institute of Statistics, was RON 2790 at the time [63]. Most pilgrims perceived themselves as religious (80.7%), either fervent practitioners (47.4%) or simply religious people who did not participate in the mass on a regular basis (33.3%). Only 2.7% of the questioned pilgrims stated that they were not religious, which supported the information provided in the abovementioned studies regarding the high level of faith among Orthodox Romanians and indicated a high level of participation of religious people in this event.

#### 4.2. The Proposed Model and Hypotheses Testing

The model we propose illustrates the influence of personal interpretation methods on the satisfaction of pilgrims who attended the Iasi feast and is presented in Figure 2.



**Figure 2.** The influence of personal interpretation methods on pilgrims' satisfaction. Source: own representation.

#### 4.3. The Variables Included in the Model

In elaborating on the model illustrated in Figure 1, we introduced the following variables in order to test the proposed hypotheses: pilgrims' satisfaction with the Iasi feast, measured by their perceptions of satisfaction in relation to expectations, expressed in the item "the visit met my expectations", was considered the dependent variable. Based on the specialized literature, the independent variables we took into account focused on the role that personal interpretation plays in increasing tourists' satisfaction with attending such an event: the importance of the guided tour, the quality of reception, the communication with the staff inside the church, and participation in the worshipping relics ritual. Although initially included among variables, "activities for adults" was eliminated due to high collinearity compared to other variables. We also analyzed the perception differences that may be determined by the pilgrims' socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, income level, education, faith, marital status, professional status.

#### 4.4. Results

The model was tested by using regression and correlation tests as well as the indicators required in this case (standard deviation, average, *t* test). The Enter method was used to check whether dependent and independent variables should or should not be included in the model.

Table 2 shows that the lowest average was 3.55 for the "Guided tours" variable while the highest average was reached for "Worshipping relics"—4.19. Deviations from the average were small, i.e., 0.033, and the highest standard deviation reached 1.013 for the "Guided tours" variable, limits accepted as significant for the sample considered [64]. Moreover, the average for the satisfaction level perceived by pilgrims was 4.18, thus indicating their positive perceptions of the Iasi feast. The standard deviation from the average was 0.028 and the standard deviation obtained was 0.867, which may be considered within the limits of a relevant model.

**Table 2.** Descriptive analysis—statistics regarding the variables included in the model.

Variables	Average	SEM	SD
Independent variables:			
Worshiping relics	4.19	0.029	0.896
The staff inside the church	3.86	0.030	0.907
Reception	3.68	0.032	0.964
Guided tours	3.55	0.033	1.013
The dependent variable			
Pilgrims' satisfaction	4.18	0.028	0.867

Source: own representation.

In order to test the validity of the model and to include the appropriate variables, as well as to assess the pilgrims' satisfaction, which was 0.784 and relevant, in this sense, according to specialized literature [64], the Cronbach's alpha score was calculated for the standardized coefficients for the selected items. In order to test the hypotheses with all variables included in the linear regression model, the linear association model was used and the Enter method was applied. According to the ANOVA test, the R value was 0.763, and  $R^2 = 0.582$ ,  $SE = 0.772$ ,  $MS = 36.975$ ,  $F = 62.027$ ,  $sig. = 0.000$ , thus indicating that the variables included in the model were appropriate. The data obtained for the standardized coefficients, with a 5% significance threshold, are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** The value of coefficients for the model regarding the personal interpretation contribution to the pilgrims' satisfaction.

Variables	Standardized Beta Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Tolerance	Statistics VIF
Personal interpretation methods					
The visit met my expectations (satisfaction)					
Worshiping relics	0.362	13.537	0.000	0.822	1.371
The staff inside the church	0.091	2.449	0.014	0.621	1.610
Reception	0.072	1.931	0.050	0.616	1.217
Guided tours	0.051	1.481	0.039	0.729	1.624
(Constant)		13.538	0.000		

Source: own representation.

We calculated the standardized indicators, *t* test and sig. coefficient in order to assess the extent to which each variable contributed to the pilgrims' satisfaction. According to these, personal interpretation, viewed in terms of the four interpretation techniques employed, influenced the satisfaction of pilgrims participating in the Iasi feast particularly by providing them with the possibility "to worship relics" (beta coefficient st. = 0.362). The quality of reception outside or inside the church had a limited influence on the pilgrims' satisfaction (beta coef. st. = 0.01 and 0.072, respectively) and so did guided tours (beta coef. st. = 0.051), which was also indicated by other research focused on this topic that pointed to issues such as the tourists' reluctance to interact with the Cathedral staff or the prevalence of the spiritual side of the journey [26]. Collinearity tests were also important and their results (tolerance lower than 1 for all variables and Variante Inflation Factor (VIF) lower than 2) showed that their inclusion in the model was appropriate.

The differences in the perceptions of the pilgrims' level of satisfaction, determined by their socio-demographic profile, were identified by means of ANOVA and Fisher tests. The results are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** ANOVA—differences in the perception of satisfaction with attending the Iasi event as determined by the pilgrims' demographic profile.

Variables	F	Sig.	Mean	Variance
Gender	1.005	0.404		
Marital status	0.788	0.533		
Education	0.659	0.621		
Professional status	0.149	0.963		
Income	0.320	0.865		
Faith	10.274	0.000		
Yes, I consider myself a religious person			4.34	0.002
Yes, but I do not attend the mass regularly			4.08	0.002
So-so			3.89	0.005
No			3.88	0.029
Age groups	7.084	0.000		
Under 20 years old			3.84	0.010
21–40 years old			4.11	0.002
41–60 years old			4.21	0.002
Over 61 years old			4.37	0.005

Source: own representation.

The ANOVA test results (Table 4) showed that there were differences in the perceptions of the pilgrims' satisfaction only among age groups and that, in the case of the perceived level of the pilgrims' faith,  $p < 0.05$ , which was also confirmed by the Fisher and sig. test sizes (significant for the two variables). Thus, the people who perceived themselves as religious and who participated in the rituals and masses organized during the feast enjoyed a higher satisfaction level ( $M = 4.34$ ) compared to the pilgrims who did not attend such masses and rituals on a regular basis and a lot higher compared to those who were neither religious nor non-religious and to those who had no faith ( $M = 3.89$ ,  $M = 3.88$ , respectively). Regarding age, pilgrims over 61 years old perceived the highest level of satisfaction among all age categories ( $M = 4.37$ ), higher than that of pilgrims aged between 41 and 60 years old ( $M = 4.21$ ); the lowest satisfaction level was perceived by those younger than 20 years old.

Therefore, we confirmed that both age and stated faith level influenced the pilgrims' perception of satisfaction with attending the Iasi event. None of the other variables reached scores indicating the existence of a significant impact or influence on the pilgrims' satisfaction and, consequently, the differences of perception determined by those aspects were not analyzed. These results were in line with other studies [56] that demonstrated the existence of differences of perception determined by certain features of the respondents' socio-demographic profile: age, education, and income level [65]. However, in the present study, the rather weak connection between satisfaction and certain socio-demographic factors may be explained by the high level of faith, characteristic of both pilgrims attending the Iasi event and Romanians in general, which causes them to consider the ritual itself the main purpose of the journey, and this happens irrespective of gender, education and income levels, or professional status.

## 5. Discussions, Limits and Further Research

The results of the multivariate regression analysis showed that the guided tour and the quality of the interaction with the reception staff hardly influenced the pilgrims' satisfaction with attending the event, despite the fact that such interpretation methods are considered extremely important in the process of capitalizing natural or cultural heritage and of improving service quality and satisfaction [33,34,66]. We, therefore, assume that hypothesis H1: "The guided tour significantly influences pilgrims' perception regarding the satisfac-

tion with attending the Iasi feast" is partially confirmed, the beta standardized coefficient result being below 1. Moreover, hypotheses H3–H4: "Pilgrims' satisfaction is significantly influenced by the perceived quality of communication with the staff inside/outside the church (reception)" is partially confirmed, the beta standardized indicators being lower than 1. There have also been other studies [26] that point to pilgrims' reluctance to interact with the church staff or to benefit from a guided tour (which, generally, implies an additional fee). Also, the guided tour is considered a very efficient personal interpretation method, contributing to the overall satisfaction of participants in such events [56,66]. The ability to participate in certain rituals (worshipping relics) was the most important variable influencing the satisfaction of pilgrims attending the Iasi feast, and this was mostly due to their traveling motivation (essentially religious), given the fact that Romanians perceive themselves as highly religious and active participants in religious rituals. Hypothesis H2: "The potential to worship relics (the ritual) significantly influences the general and spiritual satisfaction of the pilgrims attending this feast" is confirmed; consequently, in organizing pilgrimages, managers should primarily focus on providing access to such rituals because other religious heritage interpretation methods are less appreciated among participants. Since they were beyond the purpose of this article, the non-personal interpretation methods and their contribution to pilgrims' satisfaction were not analyzed but could, nevertheless, constitute a new research direction for the authors of this.

Another interesting aspect derives from the satisfaction-related perception differences among pilgrims, which depend on the socio-demographic variables taken into account. Thus, depending on their age group, pilgrims perceived a higher or, on the contrary, a lower level of satisfaction. Moreover, the declared level of faith was relevant in assessing the satisfaction level felt by participants because people who perceived themselves as religious declared a higher level of satisfaction compared to people who did not consider themselves at all religious. Age was also important for evaluating the pilgrims' satisfaction level; for example, young people generally registered the lowest scores. Although we did not identify a great number of studies focused on evaluating this aspect, the authors who have approached the topic suggest that pilgrims perceive the level of satisfaction with certain religious events or journeys they participate in differently, depending on a series of demographic characteristics, such as the psychological profile [26], age, gender, education and income levels [56,65]. The results confirm the additional hypothesis Ha2: "Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on respondents' age" and Hypothesis Ha4: "Pilgrims' level of satisfaction with the event organized by the Iasi Metropolitan Cathedral differs significantly depending on their faith (in God)."

The results of our study are important due to the topic approached, thus contributing to the literature on how personal interpretation methods influence the pilgrims' satisfaction level, an aspect that has only recently caught researchers' attention, particularly if we refer to pilgrimages. The present study, singular in Romania, aims to identify the extent to which the pilgrims' satisfaction with participating in an extremely important religious event for the Romanian Orthodox community is influenced by the quality of interpretation services and demonstrates that there are some differences between these and other types of pilgrims. For the Orthodox Romanians, a highly religious people in general, the greatest contribution made to the overall satisfaction with this event is religious per se, i.e., the ability to worship relics, while to other religious tourists, it is the quality of other services provided that is highly important. This research focused on a new topic in the specialized literature, i.e., the effect that various interpretation methods of religious cultural heritage have on the Romanian Orthodox pilgrims' satisfaction. Due to the novelty in terms of services provided to visitors at religious sites, there are few studies on this topic, i.e., interpretation. In response to the greater openness that Orthodox authorities manifest toward their cultural heritage capitalization through tourism, the present study contributes to widening both theoretical and practical knowledge of interpretation of religious cultural heritage and to using it successfully to increase Romanian pilgrims' satisfaction with participating in

religious events. Pilgrimage organizers and managers should also consider new ways to create and provide appropriate information and services and to ensure that these are particularly significant in terms of the interest raised and satisfaction acquired among pilgrims; this may be achieved by adapting these methods to a series of socio-demographic characteristics, such as the pilgrims' age and faith. Non-personal interpretation methods and their contribution to the pilgrims' satisfaction form the focus of our future research.

The present study is focused on the experience of pilgrims attending the 2019 Iasi feast, an annual event that is highly significant for its participants. Consequently, its results reflect the existing situation at that particular time. A study focused on the same event and/or other similar events during the following years constitutes a future research direction that the authors are considering in order to observe the religious tourism tendencies in Romania. Another future research direction involves the additional use of non-personal interpretation methods within the analysis in order to carry out a comparative study of the two types of interpretation methods and techniques employed in religious tourism and of the roles they play in achieving pilgrims' satisfaction. Given the fact that our study is focused on the contribution that personal interpretation and relic exposure make to pilgrims' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with participating in the Iasi annual event dedicated to Saint Parascheva, a research limit derives from the fact that the questionnaire did not include any variables able to help us analyze the relationship between visitors and original cultural artifacts, such as the ones preserved in museums, for example. Nevertheless, the authors will consider including this variable in the questionnaire so as to collect data that could be used in future research.

## 6. Conclusions

Cultural heritage interpretation is an area of concern for both researchers and practitioners interested in identifying new means to raise public awareness of its crucial importance and to capitalize on patrimony resources in order to ensure their preservation for future generations, through tourism. Moreover, cultural heritage interpretation is a topic that has recently attracted the attention of tourism researchers and managers due to the fact that it is the only sector able to capitalize on cultural heritage resources through cultural tourism. As a key component of cultural tourism, religious tourism has developed rapidly during the last decades, particularly by building bridges between tangible and intangible elements and tourists. It is these elements that highly influence tourists' (interested in satisfying spiritual needs, reviving the past, or understanding religion) and religious people's attraction to traditional events such as pilgrimages, which have been organized since Medieval times or, on the other hand, to newly discovered routes, to attending religious feasts or simply visiting sacred sites.

The Iasi pilgrimage is organized annually and those attending it are mostly Orthodox Christians, of all ages, who come to worship the relics of Parascheva, the patron saint of the city. The aim of the present research was to study the influence of the personal methods of cultural heritage interpretation on the satisfaction of pilgrims attending the Iasi feast. Therefore, the questionnaire we used was aimed to identify the extent to which the guided tour, the quality of reception inside and outside the church, as well as the ability to worship relics contributed to increasing the pilgrims' satisfaction, thus contributing to the literature in the field of personal interpretation in religious tourism, and to provide decision makers with useful recommendations meant to improve pilgrims' overall satisfaction by using appropriate methods and techniques.

The results reached by using multiple regression methods, based on the information gathered and processed by means of the SPSS-25 program, showed that, in the respondents' view, the ability to worship relics was the most important factor influencing their overall satisfaction with attending the event. This phenomenon is explained by the high level of trust that Romanians invest in the Church as well as by their high level of religious faith; moreover, together with age, the perceived level of religious faith is, in turn, correlated with the pilgrims' satisfaction. Therefore, irrespective of their socio-demographic profile,

i.e., education and income levels, area, or gender, pilgrims participated in this event with the main purpose to worship relics. However, a series of differences may occur when aspects such as faith (its higher level determines a higher level of satisfaction among pilgrims) or age (compared with adults and elderly people, the young are usually less satisfied with attending the event) are considered. There are few studies focused on the influence of personal interpretation on satisfaction [58], and the relevance of such research is provided by the possibility that decision makers and event managers get to meet pilgrims' expectations and to improve their overall satisfaction while capitalizing on the religious heritage and generating benefits for all parties involved, all these by supporting sustainable development in tourism.

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