

Pilgrimage routes: Impacts on religious, recreational tourism and local development

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary pilgrimage combines religious, cultural, and recreational practices, promoting physical and psychological well-being. This study investigates how these routes benefit local communities and pilgrims, both in the therapeutic aspect and in economic development.

Keywords: Pilgrimage, Well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Since ancient and memorable times, pilgrimage has always played a significant role in human interactions with space and the sacred. Initially driven by religious reasons, these trips have undergone transformations over time, incorporating cultural and recreational aspects. Contemporary pilgrimage goes beyond devotion and belief, also involving wellness tourism, immersion in the local culture, and the search for enriching experiences (ALVARADO-SIZZO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023; ØIAN, 2020).

Tourist pilgrimage is a form of religious tourism that involves visiting holy places and performing rituals in many cases, but it can also be motivated by other reasons, such as escaping the routine or seeking varied spiritual experiences. Research by Petrikovicova and colleagues (2024) points out that modern pilgrims combine devotion with cultural and recreational interests differently from medieval pilgrims.

Famous paths, such as the Camino de Santiago, exemplify the fusion between spirituality, culture and leisure activities. This global trend is also evident in Brazil, where we find routes such as the Path of Faith and the Path of Graces and Prose. Both encourage not only religiosity, but also entertainment tourism and well-being, strengthening the relationship between spiritual activities and contact with nature.

Pilgrimage paths offer a rich cultural experience, as well as therapeutic benefits, which positively impact physical and mental health. According to ØIAN (2020), the experience of walking these routes offers a connection with nature, reduced stress and a strengthening of the

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sense of welcome, thus improving experiences aimed at people's well-being.

This study aims to explore how pilgrimage paths facilitate healthy recreational practices and promote psychological well-being, emphasizing their therapeutic value for both host communities and tourists. More specifically, it seeks to identify the advantages that these activities offer (physical, mental and emotional); examine how they affect social interactions and the feeling of participation, in addition to evaluating the difficulties and opportunities for the sustainable advancement of these routes.

Pilgrimage tourism currently plays an important role in the economy. Religious tourist destinations receive about 300 million visitors each year, generating approximately 18 billion dollars (LIRO, 2021) worldwide. In Brazil, about 17.7 million pilgrims traveled pilgrimage paths in 2014, according to data from the Ministry of Tourism (2015), as mentioned by Almeida et al. (2019), and routes such as the Path of Faith and the Path of Graces and Prose already reveal their potential to promote the growth of local economies through tourism, commerce and services.

Thus, the pilgrimage paths are configured as vibrant tourist destinations that mix spirituality, leisure and sustainable development. This research aims to assist in the appreciation of local culture, in the improvement of public policies aimed at tourism and in the academic advancement in the areas of tourism and well-being.

OBJECTIVE

This study aims to examine the advantages that pilgrimage routes offer in promoting healthy recreational habits and mental well-being. To achieve this goal, we will consider three specific goals: (a) to investigate how pilgrimage routes help the economic growth of local communities, whether through job creation or business sustenance; (b) understand the benefits and therapeutic properties that the pilgrimage experience offers, taking into account the effects on the psychological and emotional well-being of the participants; and (c) recognize the obstacles and future visions on the management of this type of tourism, with an emphasis on the conservation of the cultural and environmental heritage associated with these routes. The desire is to establish a comprehensive and complex vision of the role of pilgrimage routes in promoting social, economic and environmental advantages, in line with the principles of sustainable development.

METHODOLOGY

To conduct this research, the integrative review methodology was adopted, which,

according to Botelho, Cunha & Macedo (2011) and Snyder (2019), involves a systematic review of the literature, incorporating organized methods of identification, research and presentation of results, aiming at an integrated analysis of the findings. The review emphasized scientific articles that explore the relationship between pilgrimage routes and the promotion of healthy recreational practices and psychological well-being, highlighting their therapeutic potential for local communities and visitors. In the selection phase of the articles, the Web of Science (WoS) and Elsevier (Scopus) databases were used, using the search terms "Pilgrimage tourism and recreation". Thus, 44 documents were found. Subsequently, it was decided to select only studies published between 2019 and 2024, resulting in 16 significant articles for analysis.

DEVELOPMENT

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Multi-Sexual Effects of Pilgrimage Routes: Links Between Religious Tourism, Leisure and Local Growth

The pilgrimage routes interconnect religious and leisure tourism, favoring well-being, growth in local communities and the creation of public policies. Azevedo (2020) mentions that these routes bring spiritual, physical, and emotional advantages, encouraging healthy habits and a greater connection with nature, in addition to solidifying local economies and motivating policies focused on health and community development.

Animitza et al. (2024) point out that tourism related to these routes values cultural heritage, promotes social unity, and stimulates economic progress. In a complementary way, Alvarado-Sizzo and Mínguez (2023) state that these routes can help reduce migration, creating employment opportunities and conserving cultural customs.

Within the framework of sustainable development, Petrikovicova et al. (2024) highlight how routes incite individual reflections and a sense of community. Øian (2020) highlights that the interaction between religious and leisure tourists can support integrated public policies, bringing benefits to local communities.

In addition, Krool et al. (2021) and Godosi & Picuno (2024) see these routes as tools for the preservation of cultural heritage and for encouraging sustainable tourism, benefiting both visitors and local communities. Lin et al. (2022) link this type of tourism to an increase in public trust and collective health, while Zhagina & Pakhomova (2019) emphasize its aptitude for reducing seasonality and stabilizing regional economies.

Therefore, pilgrimage routes go beyond their spiritual significance, bringing economic, social, and environmental effects. By intertwining religious and leisure tourism, these routes are

established as means to strengthen the well-being of communities, promote sustainable development, and implement inclusive public policies.

Research on Pilgrimage

The reasons that lead pilgrims to make their journeys are diverse, including religious devotion and the search for self-knowledge and cultural immersion. Akhmedenov (2020) notes that pilgrimage combines spiritual and secular elements, promoting personal growth, aesthetic appreciation, and connection with nature and culture in the regions visited. This fusion enriches the experience by mixing faith and leisure.

Events such as the feast of San Francisco, in Real de Catorce, Mexico, illustrate this interaction, which mixes religious practices with cultural and recreational activities, such as community festivals (Alvarado- Sizzo & Mínguez, 2023). Animitza et al. (2024) state that many pilgrims begin their journeys motivated by religious reasons, but they also engage with local traditions and explore natural landscapes, amplifying the benefits of the experience.

Azevedo (2020) notes that pilgrimage routes provide physical and reflective advantages, functioning as therapeutic environments that unite spirituality and leisure. Recreational activities, such as hiking trails and cultural heritage appreciation, act as catalysts for transformative experiences (Krool et al., 2021; Leong et al., 2024).

These paths also encourage immersion in the culture and social bonding. Godosi and Picuno (2024) emphasize that routes such as the Camino de Herculia attract religious people and those seeking cultural experiences, promoting a welcoming environment. Kříčková and Salašová add that this union increases tourist appeal and helps with cultural and environmental conservation.

Liro (2021) and Øian (2020) warn of the difficulty of maintaining a balance between the spiritual value of pilgrimages and their growing commodification. Maintaining the spiritual essence of these paths is essential to prevent misunderstandings between pilgrims with different motivations.

The combination of religious and leisure motivations not only enriches personal experience, but also favors the growth of local communities, strengthening the relationship between culture, spirituality and entertainment.

Experiential Aspects of Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage is an activity that involves several dimensions, including spiritual, emotional, social, and physical. In the analyses, five main elements stand out: walking, rituals, social

interactions, sense of community, and physical well-being. These interconnected factors provide a complete and transformative experience, favoring both individual and collective well-being.

1. **The Walk:** The walk offers a space for reflection and personal development. According to Alvarado-Sizzo & Mínguez (2023), Animitsa et al. (2024), and Azevedo (2020), traversing natural or historical landscapes facilitates disconnection from daily activities, promotes resilience, and generates a deep connection with one's environment and personal trajectory.
2. **Rituals:** The practice of activities such as meditation, prayer, and celebrations strengthens the bond with the sacred and faith, offering spiritual renewal and a reaffirmation of beliefs (Godosi & Picuno, 2024; Krool et al., 2021).
3. **Social Interactions:** Interaction between pilgrims solidifies relationships, creates emotional support networks, and promotes a sense of belonging, which alleviates loneliness and enriches community living (Leong et al., 2024; Lin et al., 2022).
4. **Sense of Community:** Sharing values and goals fosters solidarity and a sense of belonging, impacting in a lasting way how participants perceive themselves and their connection to the world (Petrikovicova et al., 2024; Liro, 2021).
5. **Physical Well-Being:** Physical activities, such as walking or climbing, have benefits for both physical and mental health, relieving stress and improving mood and vital energy (Turaev et al., 2023; Vistad et al., 2020).

These aspects demonstrate that pilgrimage goes beyond simple physical locomotion, engaging body, mind and spirit. This integral experience sheds light on the growing importance of pilgrimages in today's tourism, boosting sustainability and establishing deep connections with various cultural, natural and spiritual elements.

Religious Tourism

Religious tourism is defined by trips made with a spiritual purpose, involving visits to sacred places, participation in religious rituals and festivals, as well as fostering a sense of community. This form of tourism mixes spiritual and cultural elements, often intersecting with the practice of pilgrimage (Alvarado-Sizzo & Mínguez, 2023; Azevedo, 2020; Godosi & Picuno, 2024; Leong et al., 2024; Liro, 2021; Vistad et al., 2020).

Characteristics of Religious Tourism:

1. **Spiritual Motivation:** Unlike traditional tourism, this one is guided by spiritual goals, such as seeking enlightenment or devotion.

2. **Sacred Sites and Cultural Importance:** It includes visits to temples, churches, shrines and other places of spiritual and historical relevance, which also have great cultural value.
3. **Rituals and Practices:** Participating in rituals, ranging from prayers to religious festivities, enriches the experience and strengthens the bond with faith (Godosi & Picuno, 2024).
4. **Community and Social Interaction:** Creates bonds between those involved, encouraging a sense of belonging and mutual support during the experience.

Connection to the Pilgrimage

The pilgrimage journey, both physically and spiritually, is a key component of religious tourism, which entails visiting sacred sites with a goal of devotion (Alvarado-Sizzo & Mínguez, 2023). While every pilgrimage can be classified as religious tourism, not all religious tourism is necessarily a pilgrimage (Leong et al., 2024; Liro, 2021; Godosi & Picuno, 2024). The pilgrimage stands out for establishing specific paths and rituals aimed at the spiritual search and the fulfillment of promises.

Management and Sustainability: Religious tourism sites face challenges in maintaining their culture and spirituality while meeting visitor expectations. Among the various management approaches are:

- **Sustainable Practices:** Actions that aim to reduce environmental impacts and honor the spiritual significance of places.
- **Local Community Involvement:** Community participation is essential to ensure that development respects local values, promoting sustainability (Leong et al., 2024; Liro, 2021).
- **Adequate Infrastructure:** Development of facilities that cater to tourists without disrespecting the sanctity of the locals.
- **Education and Awareness:** Foster visitors' understanding of the cultural and spiritual importance of places in order to mitigate disruptive behaviors (Godosi & Picuno, 2024; Vistad et al., 2020).

Balance between Tourism and Spirituality: It is crucial to find a balance between the presence of tourists and the preservation of the spiritual atmosphere of the locals, so that religious activities are not harmed by the commodification of tourism (Azevedo, 2020).

Religious tourism, with its strong link to spirituality, cultural heritage and community practices, requires careful management to maintain its authenticity and ensure the sustainability

of destinations.

Recreational Tourism: Recreational Elements of Pilgrimage Routes

Pilgrimage trails provide a valuable experience that goes beyond their spiritual significance, offering significant recreational benefits to pilgrims. These activities cover physical, mental, emotional and social dimensions, forming a complete journey that favors well-being and satisfaction in leisure activities. Research underscores the importance of walking, appreciating the natural environment, and cultural immersion to create a rich and transformative experience.

1. **Walking: Advantages for Physical and Mental Health:** Walking, which is the main activity of pilgrimage trails, results in clear physical benefits, such as improved cardiovascular health, muscle strengthening, and increased physical fitness. In addition, it has a significant impact on mental health, helping to reduce stress and anxiety, as well as providing emotional balance. The repetitive pattern of walking also induces a meditative state, helping pilgrims find mental clarity and concentration (Animitsa et al., 2024; Azevedo, 2020).
2. **Appreciation of Nature - Connections to the Natural Ecosystem:** Being surrounded by natural scenery, a vital aspect of pilgrimage journeys, provides serenity and calm, which are crucial for emotional health. Interaction with the environment reduces stress, improves mood, and encourages conscious presence, in addition to promoting deeper environmental awareness (Godosi & Picuno, 2024; Kříčková & Salašová, 2024).
3. **Cultural Discovery - Immersion in Regional Traditions:** Immersion in cultures during pilgrimage trips, including learning about local customs, gastronomy, history, and architecture, enriches the pilgrims' experience. In addition, relationships with other travelers and local communities strengthen social bonds, creating emotional support networks and stimulating the exchange of narratives that enrich the journey (Lin et al., 2022; Leong et al., 2024).
4. **Contributions to Well-Being and Leisure Gratification:** The recreational elements of pilgrimage routes not only serve physical health, but also mental and emotional well-being. The activity of walking and immersion in nature favor the reduction of stress, promoting relaxation and revitalization, offering a breather from daily demands. These activities also encourage personal development and inner discovery, increasing satisfaction in leisure experiences (Turaev et al., 2023; Øian, 2021).

In summary, pilgrimage routes provide a rich experience in multiple aspects that extend beyond the spiritual, bringing significant recreational contributions to physical and mental health. Walking, valuing nature and cultural immersion are essential for the integral well-being of pilgrims, enriching the pilgrimage experience and transforming it into a journey of self-discovery and personal development.

Principles of Sustainable Tourism and Their Application on Pilgrimage Routes

The fundamentals of sustainable tourism are crucial to ensure that pilgrimage routes are managed in a way that maintains their cultural, social, and environmental values, while providing economic advantages to local communities. Several studies emphasize the need to incorporate sustainable practices in the development and management of these routes. The fundamental principles of sustainable tourism, according to the analysis of several scholars, include environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Environmental Sustainability: Environmental sustainability is a key guideline in sustainable tourism, particularly on pilgrimage routes that often cross ecologically sensitive areas. Recommendations include preserving natural resources, protecting natural landscapes, using water responsibly, and properly managing waste. Different authors, such as Alvarado-Sizzo and Mínguez (2023) and Lin et al. (2022), emphasize that maintaining biodiversity should be a priority, focusing on local flora and fauna. In addition, the use of environmentally friendly transport and sustainable materials for tourism infrastructure is vital. Environmental management also encompasses actions such as conserving routes and imposing limits on the number of visitors to prevent erosion and other damage to the environment, as highlighted by Leong et al. (2024) and Øian (2021).

Social Sustainability: Social sustainability represents another essential facet of sustainable tourism on pilgrimage routes. The participation of the local community in the planning and administration of the routes is fundamental, as noted by Alvarado-Sizzo and Mínguez (2023), Leong et al. (2024) and Liro (2021). The engaged participation of communities ensures that their needs and values are taken into account, fostering local pride and acceptance of tourism. It is also important to encourage cultural preservation, as Leong et al. (2024) and Lin et al. (2022) indicate, promoting respect for local traditions and allowing pilgrims to authentically connect with cultures along the routes.

Economic Sustainability: Economic sustainability seeks to ensure that the benefits generated by tourism are shared fairly, allowing local economies to benefit from this sector. Researchers such as Alvarado-Sizzo and Mínguez (2023) and Leong et al. (2024) point out the

importance of supporting local establishments, including lodgings, restaurants, and craft shops, promoting job creation and driving economic growth in pilgrimage regions. The equitable distribution of benefits is a central issue to prevent tourism profits from being concentrated only in external investors or large corporations, which can result in economic inequalities. In addition, sustainable tourism should also contribute to diversifying sources of income, reducing dependence on a single sector, as highlighted by Lin et al. (2022).

Education and Awareness

Education and awareness are essential elements for the implementation of sustainable tourism on pilgrimage routes. According to Leong et al. (2024) and Liro (2021), it is crucial to inform both visitors and locals about the relevance of environmental protection and cultural appreciation, encouraging responsible habits. This can be accomplished through educational initiatives that motivate pilgrims to take sustainable action and support the conservation of natural and cultural resources.

In summary, adopting the principles of sustainable tourism on pilgrimage routes is vital to ensure that these sites continue to be cherished by future generations. The combination of environmental management practices, the involvement of local communities, cultural conservation, and economic viability can be effective in reducing the negative effects of tourism, while promoting social and economic advantages for local populations. Through a comprehensive approach, pilgrimage routes can be managed while respecting and protecting both the environment and local cultures, while providing sustainable benefits for all participants.

Environmental, Social, and Economic Effects of Tourism Growth in Pilgrimage Destinations

Tourism at pilgrimage sites can bring economic and cultural advantages, but it can also result in environmental damage, social conflicts, and economic inequality. The overexploitation of natural resources and the commercialization of local traditions are some of the adverse consequences. Table 1 illustrates the positive and negative impacts that Pilgrimage Tourism can have on the communities that host it.

Quadro 1 – Possible environmental, social and economic impacts

Impacts	Environmental	Social	Economic
	<p>Conservation and Preservation: Sustainable tourism supports the conservation of landscapes, wildlife, and heritage sites by promoting the management of natural resources and encouraging environmental awareness and responsible behaviors from tourists and communities.</p>	<p>Cultural Exchange and Social Cohesion: Pilgrimage tourism favors cultural exchange, reinforces community pride, promotes cultural preservation, and strengthens identity and a sense of belonging through the engagement of local communities.</p>	<p>Job Creation and Local Development: Tourism generates jobs, diversifies the local economy, and creates new sources of income in sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and commerce, driving economic development.</p> <p>Infrastructure Improvement: Investment in infrastructure for tourism improves access and quality of services, benefiting both pilgrims and local residents.</p>
Negative	<p>Environmental Degradation: Increased pilgrim traffic can cause environmental degradation, such as soil erosion, habitat destruction, and pollution, including waste and water contamination.</p> <p>Resource Depletion: Increased tourism can overwhelm essential natural resources such as water and energy, especially in areas with limited infrastructure or fragile ecosystems.</p>	<p>Cultural Commodification: Increased tourism can result in cultural commodification, altering local traditions to meet tourist expectations and undermining the authenticity of the pilgrimage experience.</p> <p>Displacement and Social Tensions: It can cause displacement of local communities, increase real estate prices, and generate social tensions, especially when the benefits are not realized by resident populations.</p>	<p>Vulnerability to Seasonality: TP can be vulnerable to seasonality, generating economic instability for local businesses due to variations in the number of tourists throughout the year.</p> <p>Economic Inequality: Tourism can breed economic inequality, with large corporations dominating the market and leaving few advantages for small local businesses and resident communities.</p>

The advancement of tourism in pilgrimage sites, despite providing several social, economic and environmental benefits, also brings considerable challenges. The implementation of sustainable tourism principles is crucial to minimize adverse effects and amplify benefits for ecosystems and local communities. Attentive management and effective planning are essential to ensure that pilgrimage tourism provides a rewarding and sustainable experience for all participants.

Local Development and Public Policies

Pilgrimage tourism provides several economic advantages to local communities, acting as a significant driver for the region's economic progress. The creation of direct and indirect jobs, in addition to the collection of revenues through taxes and investments, are fundamental elements

of this process. Well-designed public policies can enhance these advantages, promoting the development of infrastructure and ensuring the economic and environmental viability of tourism.

Job Creation: Pilgrimage tourism generates direct job openings in areas such as accommodation, transportation, and commerce, and indirect opportunities in sectors such as agriculture, construction, and services. Public policies can support capacity-building initiatives to develop the local workforce, ensuring that residents can take advantage of these opportunities effectively (ALVARADO-SIZZO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023; ANIMITSA et al., 2024; AZEVEDO, 2020; PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024).

Revenue Generation: Interest in pilgrimage tourism increases tax collection, including taxes on hotel accommodations and fees for visiting holy places, which can be reinvested in community services and infrastructure. In addition, tourism attracts investments from the public and private sectors, helping to build tourist facilities and improve the quality of local life (ALVARADO-SIZZO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023; TAKADA, 2024).

Infrastructure Development: The increase in pilgrimage tourism brings benefits to transport networks and public services such as roads, public transport, information centres and leisure areas. Public policies can prioritize interventions in these areas, ensuring the well-being of both visitors and residents. An emphasis on green infrastructure, such as sustainable housing and renewable energy sources, can also provide lasting benefits to the community (AZEVEDO, 2020; PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024).

Community Engagement: The active participation of local communities in the planning and definition of tourism-related strategies is vital to ensure that their demands are met and that development occurs in a sustainable manner. Public policies that foster community involvement can encourage more responsible tourism practices, in addition to preserving and valuing local cultural heritage (ANIMITSA et al., 2024; PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024; TAKADA, 2024).

Ecological Practices and Promotion: To ensure that the results of pilgrimage tourism are distributed fairly and that the environment is protected, it is essential to adopt public policies that encourage sustainable tourism. The promotion of destinations and the dissemination of cultural events play a vital role, attracting a greater number of visitors and highlighting the cultural and spiritual relevance of these places (ALVARADO-SIZZO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023; AZEVEDO, 2020; TAKADA, 2024).

In summary, an integrated and well-planned strategy for public policies, which focuses on job creation, increased revenue, infrastructure improvement, community participation, and ecological practices, can convert pilgrimage tourism into a driver of local economic development, valuing culture and valuing the environment (ALVARADO-SIZZO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023;

ANIMITSA et al., 2024; PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024).

Challenges and Opportunities to Balance the Needs of Local Communities, Pilgrims, and the Environment

Pilgrimage-oriented tourism brings both economic and cultural advantages, but it also imposes difficulties in maintaining a balance between the requirements of pilgrims, locals and the environment. Below, the main challenges and opportunities are presented.

Challenges

1. **Overtourism:** The excessive influx of tourists can overwhelm available resources, impairing the quality of life for residents and the experience for pilgrims (LIN et al., 2022; LIRO, 2021).
2. **Cultural Erosion:** Tourism can promote the commodification of local traditions, which diminishes their cultural and spiritual value (TURAEV et al., 2023; ALVARADO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023).
3. **Environmental Degradation:** The increase in the number of visitors can result in damage to the environment, such as the destruction of ecosystems and pollutants (LIRO, 2021; TURAEV et al., 2023).
4. **Economic Disparities:** Profits generated by tourism are not always redistributed fairly, favoring large corporations over local small businesses (LIN et al., 2022; ALVARADO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023).
5. **Infrastructure Strain:** Infrastructure can be excessively pressured, affecting the safety and quality of available services (ALVARADO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023).

Opportunities

1. **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Modalities such as ecotourism and effective waste management can reduce impacts on the environment and promote sustainability (LIN et al., 2022; LIRO, 2021).
2. **Community Engagement:** The inclusion of residents in tourism planning results in more equitable economic benefits and strengthens local empowerment (TURAEV et al., 2023; ALVARADO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023).
3. **Cultural Preservation:** Tourism can enable restoration projects and raise awareness of cultural importance (LIN et al., 2022; ALVARADO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023).

4. **Economic Diversification:** Promoting local businesses, such as handicrafts and tourism services, generates new income opportunities and creates greater resilience in the economy (TURAEV et al., 2023).
5. **Infrastructure Development:** The growth of tourism can justify improvements in transportation and sanitation, raising the quality of life (LIRO, 2021; ALVARADO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023). While there are obstacles such as overtourism and cultural and environmental degradations, pilgrimage tourism also opens doors to possibilities for sustainability, cultural conservation, and economic progress. The key lies in developing public policies that prioritize sustainability and community involvement.

The Dimensions of Individual Well-Being Impacted by Pilgrimage Experiences

The practice of pilgrimage presents an integrated perspective on personal well-being, influencing physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual aspects. Research shows that this experience can generate positive transformations in the lives of pilgrims, helping to achieve a balance between body, mind and spirit.

Physical Well-Being: The pilgrimage implies vigorous physical activities, such as walking, which contribute to improving physical condition, endurance and cardiovascular health. Hiking in natural environments also decreases stress and optimizes immune system function (LIRO, 2021; PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024; ALVARADO-SIZZO & MÍNGUEZ, 2023).

Emotional Well-Being: This activity provides relief from stress and provides a break from everyday activities, with many hikers expressing happiness and contentment as they reach their destinations. In addition, the emotional bonds formed with other pilgrims strengthen the sense of belonging and identity (AZEVEDO, 2020; LIRO, 2021).

Psychological Well-Being: Acts of pilgrimage create occasions for internal reflection, self-knowledge, and personal development, which increases self-awareness and the ability to cope with emotions and psychological challenges (PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024; VISTAD et al., 2020; AZEVEDO, 2020).

Spiritual Well-Being: The practice of pilgrimage deepens the connection with religious or spiritual beliefs, offering a renewed sense of transcendence and purpose, as well as fostering inner peace (LIRO, 2021; PETRIKOVICOVA et al., 2024; VISTAD et al., 2020).

In summary, pilgrimages affect well-being in different ways, bringing together physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual advantages, providing a transformative experience that transcends religiosity, fostering harmony and human and spiritual connections.

The Dimensions of Community Well-Being Influenced by Pilgrimage Experiences

Pilgrimage paths serve as a crucial element in strengthening local communities by providing social, cultural, and economic advantages.

Social Cohesion: These paths encourage community participation, cultivating a sense of belonging and common identity. The conservation of trails often requires joint effort, and the interaction between pilgrims and residents favors cultural exchange, consolidating social networks and stimulating dialogue between different cultures (Azevedo, 2020; Animitsa, 2024; Vistad et al., 2020).

Cultural Preservation: The paths value cultural heritage, promoting the revitalization of traditional practices and the preservation of historical landmarks. They also perform an educational function, raising awareness among pilgrims about local heritage and reinforcing the pride of communities (Turaev et al., 2023; Azevedo, 2020; Animitsa, 2024).

Economic Development: Tourism related to pilgrimage creates jobs and favors local businesses, such as restaurants and craft fairs. In addition, improving the routes can benefit infrastructure, including roads and signage, helping both pilgrims and residents. Strengthening the local economy and diversifying activities increase the resilience of communities (Akhmedenov, 2020; Azevedo, 2020; Vistad et al., 2020; Turaev et al., 2023).

These paths promote collective change in communities, driving social cohesion, cultural preservation, and economic development. To optimize these benefits, strategic planning and collaboration among stakeholders is essential (Liro, 2021; Animitsa, 2024).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The pilgrimage paths stand out as diverse spaces that go beyond the spiritual search, offering a rich variety of experiences that promote the physical, mental and social well-being of pilgrims. Investigation of the five core dimensions—journey, rituals, social interactions, sense of community, and physical well-being—illustrates how these experiences are interconnected, creating an environment conducive to self-discovery and personal development. In addition, pilgrimages play a significant role in strengthening cultural and social links, contributing to the cohesion of local communities and the protection of traditions.

As pilgrimage tourism develops, it is crucial that public policies and local development projects recognize and integrate these factors, promoting sustainability and inclusion. Investing in infrastructure and services that serve both pilgrims and local communities can reduce the seasonality of tourism and ensure that economic and social advantages are distributed equitably. In this way, pilgrimage paths not only enhance the lives of individuals, but also



strengthen the social and cultural fabric of the regions they travel, constituting a valuable journey for personal and community development. This conclusion highlights the relevance of pilgrimage routes for both individuals and collectivities.

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