

THE PARTICULAR ROLE OF PROSOCIALITY IN CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS TOURISM

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Abstract

This review study investigates the key role of prosociality in cultural and religious tourism, based exclusively on the analysis of recent literature. The aim of this study is to identify how tourists' prosocial behavior such as helping other tourists, humanitarian donations, respecting local culture, respecting local attraction norms, protecting natural and spiritual resources and contributing to sustainability, enhance personal and transformative experiences as well as loyalty in cultural and religious destinations. The research methodology involves a systematic review of research studies from 2015 to 2026 (n>20 sources), selected through academic-based searches focusing on cultural and religious tourism, pilgrimages and community interactions. The results reveal that prosociality, influenced by religious norms, customs and emotional attachments, improves tourists' well-being, psycho-emotional experiences, social relationships and sustainable development of destinations. This study helps to carefully highlight the evolution of prosociality in the current context of cultural and religious tourism and may be implied in increasing revisit intentions for managers of cultural and religious tourist attractions. The findings emphasize the need to implement local and managerial strategies that promote prosociality to enhance loyalty in cultural and religious tourist destinations essential for sustainable development, and provide valuable insights into the academic literature.

Key words: *academic literature, cultural and religious tourism, prosociality, prosocial behavior, sustainable development of destinations.*

JEL Classification: *L83, D64, I31, Z12, Z32*

I. INTRODUCTION

This analytical study aims to conduct a critical review of the specialized literature from the last ten years in order to clarify the conceptual and interconnected relationship between prosociality and cultural-religious tourism but also to carefully highlight the evolution of prosociality in the current context of cultural and religious tourism. The academic investigations on how tourists behave prosocial have been very limited and unclear.

In the current context, prosociality in cultural and religious tourism has evolved from simply visiting tourist attractions to an experience based on empathy, social responsibility and deep human connection. Prosociality is translated into the desire of tourists to help each other, to be open to "the other" and to protect the cultural-religious heritage they visit. We are no longer talking about the "tourist who watches", but about the "man who contributes". Prosocial behavior means adapting to the norms of the place (dress code, silence), demonstrating respect for the religious feelings of the host community. Prosociality is the "invisible engine" that transforms a simple tourist visit from a cultural-religious place into a profound, unique and transformative experience. In cultural and religious tourism, interaction is not limited to viewing artifacts or attending various religious events, but to building connections between the visitor, the local community and sharing spiritual and cultural values (Van Cappellen et al., 2016, Zhu et al., 2022; Peng & Matilla, 2026).

Prosociality in the context of cultural and religious tourism, defined as a set of voluntary actions intended to confer various benefits to participants in the tourist act, plays a particular role in cultural and religious tourism where social interactions and shared values define the memorability of tourist experiences. In religious contexts such as pilgrimages or various cultural and religious processions and events, prosociality emerges from collective norms amplifying the psycho-emotional cohesion and the loyalty of tourists in destinations. Prosociality plays a key role in cultural and religious tourism by promoting sustainability and loyalty (Charan et al., 2024; Yu et al., 2025).

The intersection of prosociality and religious tourism creates a unique environment in which travel becomes a tool for each tourist to practice empathy and develop psycho-emotional and social skills. While religious tourism focuses on pilgrimage and visiting places of worship, the prosocial component adds a dimension of responsibility towards other tourists present on the trip and towards the host community (Iordache, 2020; Jia et al., 2024).

The study is organized like this: the upcoming part gives a comprehensive overview of the academic literature from the last ten years, summarizing important studies and research. The third part looks into the methods that were used for the research, a systematic review of research studies from 2015 to 2026 (n>20 sources), selected through academic-based searches focusing on cultural and religious tourism, pilgrimages and community interactions. The fourth part shares the outcomes of this study and talks about them. In the end, the last part wraps up the main points of the paper's findings.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite recent academic attention paid to prosocial behaviors in tourism, its central antecedents from a socio-psychological and cultural perspective are still not clear. Recent academic literature (2015-2026) positions prosociality as a mediator between tourism experiences and collective benefits in cultural and religious contexts. Religiosity stimulates behaviors such as donations or mutual aid during pilgrimages and has been correlated with various prosocial attitudes and actual behaviors, such as cooperation and generosity (Norenzayan et al., 2016; Saroglou, 2019; Lin et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022; Charan et al., 2024; Zammit et al., 2025).

Jiang et al., (2024) discuss in their article why travelers who have religious beliefs are usually more helpful and prosocial than other types of tourists. When it comes to religious tourism, people who don't believe in the faith but visit religious tourist destinations often feel a prosocial change, much like those who do believe. However, the reasons why this happens remains unclear. The reason for this change in their attitude isn't well understood. Looking at things from an existential and change-focused perspective, his research looks at how religious tourism experiences can change a person by making them more prosocial to others, more genuine in their relationships, and more emotionally supportive.

Academic research from the last ten years has shown that, to some extent, cultural-religious beliefs and practices are linked to prosocial behaviors, but less is known about the reasons why this happens. In addition, participation in religious processions and events can be particularly powerful in stimulating prosocial behavior among tourists (Saroglou et al., 2020; Agyeiwaah & Zhao, 2024; Kelly et al., 2024).

Jia et al., (2024) consider that prosocial behavior plays an important role in promoting a sustainable and inclusive society. Prosocial behavior, defined as voluntary actions intended to benefit others, has garnered increasing attention within tourism research. Recent studies in tourism shows that more people are traveling because they want to be prosocial with others tourists. It also explains how being in a tourism context can encourage people to act more prosocial, especially when they interact with different cultures and form temporary connections with local communities. Prosocial behavior in tourism reduces tensions between "locals" and "visitors", transforming tourism from an extractive industry into one of social regeneration (Fung et al., 2018; Al-Saidi et al., 2025; García-Quero et al., 2025; Saroglou et al. 2025; Kuppelwieser, 2026).

And last but not least, Budiutami et al., (2026) consider that prosocial behavior and cultural openness play important roles in shaping favorable perceptions, reinforcing the importance of social interactions and openness to cultural experiences. Social identity, while slightly less influential, still contributes meaningfully to shaping attitudes, particularly in terms of local pride and cultural identity and background.

III. METHODS

The objective of this research is to highlight the particular role of prosociality in cultural and religious tourism and to examine the socio-cultural and religious perspectives of prosocial behaviour in the current context of cultural and religious tourism by reviewing the specialized literature from the last ten years.

The research used a narrative-systematic review approach of the academic literature including peer-reviewed articles from the period 2015-2026, identified through key queries on Google Scholar and scientific international databases. 20+ relevant academic sources to prosociality in cultural and religious tourism were selected, excluding non-empirical or outdated studies.

Thematic analysis identified recurring themes such as activating norms, emotional mediators and impacts on loyalty, integrating post-pandemic and religious contexts.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the methodology of systematic literature review from more than 20 academic sources from 2015-2026 period, the results show an evolution of prosociality from moral tourism, then pandemic tourism and then to volunteer tourism and increased social rituals. Religiosity emphasizes prosocial tourist intentions in

cultural and religious tourism, prosociality directs tourist experiences towards sustainable loyalty in tourist destinations (see Tabel 1).

Table 1. The evolution of prosociality in the period 2015-2026 in cultural and religious tourism

Period	Particular role	Examples from cultural and religious tourism	Sustainability impact
2015-2019	Cultural and religious evolution; authentic religious processions and spiritual services	Increasing cooperation through religions and prosocial beliefs	Reducing monitoring costs; expanding tourist groups
2020-2023	Pandemic period	Active and intensive pro-social behaviors on the heritage sites	Harmony, tourist destinations attachment
2024-2026	Volunteering tourism in cultural and religious environment	Increased number of cultural and religious tourists; aid donations and sponsorships; preservation of tourist attractions	Increasing social value, sustainable loyalty

Source: created by the author; adapted from Norenzayan et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2022; Kala and Chaubey, 2024; Avolio et al., 2024.

Prosociality enhances sustainability by reducing destination overstrain and community cohesion and acts as a protective mechanism for sensitive destinations. Tabel 2 compares quantified impacts of prosociality from the scientific literature reviewed.

Table 2. The impact of prosociality on the sustainability of tourist destinations

Dimension	Prosocial manifestation	Result
Local economy	Direct purchasing from locals	Poverty reduction and maintenance of traditions
Behavior	Respect for silence in places of worship	Protection of the sacred atmosphere for residents
Education	Correct transmission of cultural information	Combating misinformation and cultural kitsch

Source: created by the author; adapted from Van Cappelen et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2022; Agyeiwaah and Zhao, 2024; Jia et al., 2024.

From a practical perspective, tourism managers should recognize the cultural and religious background, social perceptions and self-esteem evaluations to encourage prosocial behaviors among tourists. In the context of cultural and religious tourism, prosocial behavior (altruism, empathy, cooperation, and willingness to help) is not just an ethical option, but a structural component of the entire tourist experience in cultural-religious destinations (see Tabel 3).

Table 3. The role of religious aspects of prosociality in cultural and religious tourism

Religious aspect	Prosocial influence on tourism	Practical examples	Impact on tourism
Collective rituals and spiritual ceremonies	Increasing generosity; social bonding	Pilgrimages; religious processions	Emotional loyalty
Moral beliefs	Pro-group norms; divine rescue and spiritual transcendence	Post-ceremonies donations	Regional development
Sacred volunteering	aid donations and sponsorships	Religious events	Social value

Source: created by the author; adapted from Van Cappelen et al., 2016; Li et al., 2022; Agyeiwaah and Zhao, 2024; Avolio et al., 2024.

The reviewed academic literature demonstrates that tourists' prosociality increases well-being and attachment in cultural and religious tourist destinations, being mediated by the social and interpersonal relationships practiced by tourists. In religious tourism, collective religious ceremonies increase generosity through group cohesion and the experience of deep emotions observed during participation in services or certain spiritual events.

V.CONCLUSION

Prosociality, amplified by spirituality in cultural and religious tourism, promotes sustainability through cohesion and loyalty, supporting the development of tourist destinations. Prosociality has a particular role in cultural and religious tourism, promoting sustainable loyalty through emotional connections and collective norms in tourist destinations. Managers of cultural and religious destinations should develop and integrate prosocial programs, such as rituals and interactive religious events to maximize community benefits. Future empirical research can validate these findings.

A critical examination of the prosocial antecedents of destination loyalty in this context will not only contribute to the theoretical advancement of the prosociality concept but also assist tourism managers in planning for sustainability of cultural and religious events. Furthermore, results will provide key strategies by

which managers and planners can use and promote religious ceremonies and events by acknowledging the role that attendees' attachment, on-site emotional experiences and religious affiliation play in contributing to loyalty and sustainable development.

Prosociality in cultural and religious tourism acts as a bridge between the sacred and the mundane, transforming religious places of worship into spaces of positive social interaction, while supporting economic sustainability and the preservation of cultural identity.

VI.ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper was financed by The Bucharest University of Economic Studies during the PhD program.

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