



Messages

Evaluation of religious pilgrimage routes in Vas County and the Muravian region

Study

2024.

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Evaluation of religious pilgrimage routes in Vas County and the Muravian region

The present study is an evaluation of the religious pilgrimage routes in Vas County and the Muravian region. The aim of this study is to provide technical assistance for the development of popular and sustainable pilgrimage routes, based on the experience of the development, maintenance and use of existing pilgrimage routes.

The study presents the types of pilgrimages and excursions that promote physical and spiritual renewal. It also analyses the pilgrimage routes in Vas County and the Muravian region and suggests directions for the development of pilgrimages and pilgrimage routes. The study was informed by a range of sources, including personal interviews, online and printed content on religious tourism, 189 questionnaires completed by respondents in two countries and two age groups, and 11 interviews with tourism professionals, pilgrimage guides and other stakeholders.

The study was prepared in the framework of the project Untold Stories - Pilgrimages in the Slovenian-Hungarian Borderlands, with the aim of providing a professional basis for the project. The project, known as MESSAGES, aims to create a pilgrimage route that will connect the Slovenian-Hungarian border region by presenting the spirituality of the martyred priests Blessed János Brenner (1931, Szombathely – 1957, Szentgotthárd-Zsida) and the Servant of God Dániel Halász (1903, Črenšovci - 1945, Hotiza). The project places particular emphasis on the involvement of young people and the local community, thereby establishing a living link between past and present, with a view to preserving and transmitting a shared cultural heritage. The pilgrimage route and associated cultural events will thus provide an opportunity for believers and tourists from both countries to share in the physical, spiritual and cultural experiences of the pilgrimage.

The MESSAGES project is implemented in the framework of the Interreg VI-A Slovenia-Hungary Programme, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund. The project is implemented jointly by the Muraba ETT, the Vas County Government and the Municipality of Lendva. The present document has been prepared by the Vas County Government.

Introduction

Vas County in Hungary, and the Muravian region of Slovenia have a rich tradition of religious pilgrimage routes, which perpetuate the religious, historical and cultural heritage of the area. Pilgrimages are deeply embedded in the life of local communities and have played an important role in the religious and spiritual life of believers for centuries. They not only provide a sacred experience for participants, but also contribute to a sense of local identity and cultural belonging.

Of particular note is the Route of Mary, which traverses Vas County and connects various sacred sites in both Slovenia and Austria. This route, which extends from Csíksomlyó in Romania to Mariazell in Austria, serves as a conduit for pilgrims to experience the region's natural and architectural heritage, including the Sarlós Boldogasszony Cathedral in Szombathely, a significant stop for pilgrims.

Another significant route is the St Martin's Pilgrimage Route, which is also highly popular in Central Europe. This route presents the figure and legacy of Saint Martin, who, as a saint with a connection to the region, plays an important role in local religious traditions. Pilgrims can visit a number of sacred sites and learn about the important milestones in the life of Saint Martin, which are closely linked to the region.

In the Muravian region of Slovenia, the pilgrimage of Mary to Radamos holds particular significance, as does the shrine of Brežje, which plays a pivotal role in the region's religious life. The shrine of Brežje is regarded as one of the most significant sacred sites in Slovenia, attracting numerous pilgrims annually in pursuit of spiritual solace. The area also features numerous small churches and chapels that serve to enhance the sacred experience of the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage routes offer opportunities for travel with a religious background and contribute to the area's tourist attractiveness. The hospitality of local communities and the discovery of historical and cultural monuments are experiences that make the pilgrimage routes unique.

Finding your way: pilgrimage, retreat or excursion?

The definition of the term 'pilgrimage' is unclear, and the question of whether it should be considered an excursion or a retreat remains unresolved. Furthermore, the manner in which participants engage with organised itineraries to religious sites, as opposed to individual pilgrimages, is yet to be determined. It is challenging to identify the "exact" formulation, as religious, spiritual and cultural needs are the primary motivations for undertaking a journey. However, it is crucial to differentiate between religious pilgrimages, the journey of the lay person and the tourist visit to the cultural values of the Church.

In addition to religious pilgrimages and secular, spiritual retreats, it is important to mention religious/cultural and tourist excursions, which may also be related to spiritual experiences, but which have a fundamentally different purpose and context. The clarification of the parallels and differences between these three categories is pivotal in facilitating a more profound comprehension of the spiritual and cultural requirements of the contemporary individual, as well as the role of pilgrimages and excursions in everyday life.

The purpose of organised pilgrimages, such as those facilitated by the **Church** or in conjunction with **ecclesial communities**, is to promote spiritual renewal and foster a sense of inner peace. These pilgrimages, as previously mentioned, are embedded within the framework of religious communities and involve visiting specific religious sites and holy places. The journey itself provides an opportunity for prayer, meditation and spiritual development for the pilgrims. These journeys typically offer participants a profound religious experience, where the focus is on deepening their faith, experiencing religious rituals and sacraments. The communal experience, along with the transmission of religious teachings, assumes significant importance in the context of pilgrimages, thereby fostering a deepening of the participants' connection with their religion and their community.

Conversely, **secular** retreats **of a spiritual** nature, though not inherently linked to church traditions, seek to cultivate inner peace and spiritual balance. These retreats are often personal journeys of self-discovery, where participants seek to connect with their own inner world or the spirituality of nature through meditation, yoga or nature walks. While church

pilgrimages provide a communal experience, secular retreats are usually based on individual experiences and are driven by personal spirituality rather than religious dogma.

In contrast, religious/cultural **tourism trips** focus less on deep inner spiritual experiences and more on the religious or cultural significance of the place. These trips are often designed to explore the religious heritage, with visits to sacred sites, churches, and monasteries being a common feature. However, the primary objective of these trips is to discover the cultural values and the beauty and history of religious buildings. While some participants may experience a spiritual element during these excursions, the cultural experience and the interest in religious heritage predominate.

A closer look reveals that a number of **commonalities** can be identified among these three distinct categories. In all three cases, the common goal is to leave the world, to immerse oneself in a different environment, be it religiously, spiritually or culturally motivated. The notion of physical movement, displacement and 'pilgrimage', whether literal or figurative, is a characteristic feature of all three types. These experiences offer participants the opportunity to gain novel perspectives on their lives, whether in terms of their faith, personal spirituality, or cultural knowledge.

However, the **differences** in motivation are clear. . While church pilgrimages are associated with deep religious faith and communal experience, spiritual retreats are more an individual exercise in self-discovery and spirituality. Furthermore, religious or cultural tourism excursions tend to prioritise heritage, architectural beauty and historical significance, offering experiences that are less personal and more intellectual in nature.

In conclusion, it can be posited that a commonality underpinning religious pilgrimages, secular retreats and religious/cultural tourism is the pursuit of spiritual rejuvenation, albeit with differing motivations in varied forms.

Presentation of the international pilgrimage routes and places of pilgrimage in the Hungarian-Slovenian border region

Route of Mary

The route and its meaning

The Route of Mary (Mária-út) is considered to be one of Europe's most significant Christian pilgrimage routes, connecting a number of notable religious sites across the Carpathian Basin, including the renowned shrines of Mariazell and Csíksomlyó. This route traverses multiple regions and countries, including Romania, Slovenia, Austria and Hungary (particularly Vas County). The Hungarian sections of the Route of Mary are well signposted, but personal interviews suggest that local communities could take more care in maintaining signs to welcome and assist pilgrims, as the route has a significant role to play in presenting cultural and natural values in addition to its religious values.

The focus of the questionnaires and personal interviews was mainly on the experiences of the Route of Mary. The fundamental purpose of the pilgrimage is to visit shrines associated with the Virgin Mary, where the faithful can seek spiritual purification and renewal.

The route traverses a number of historical and cultural sites in Vas County, providing pilgrims with the opportunity to discover the rich past and built heritage that has shaped the spirit of the local population.

The Route of Mary is not solely a religious experience; it also offers the opportunity to experience the proximity of nature, often through picturesque landscapes, forests, hills and rivers, which can facilitate the rejuvenation of body and soul. During joint pilgrimages, participants can engage in communal prayers and masses, and interact with fellow pilgrims, thereby fostering a sense of community and belonging.



Figure 1 The Route of Mary¹

Historical overview

The Route of Mary is an ancient tradition with deep roots in Christian history. Mariazell has been a significant pilgrimage destination since the 12th century, while Csíksomlyó owes its renown to the Pentecostal festival, which draws hundreds of thousands of pilgrims annually.

Routes and their stops

The route extends for more than 1400 km, traversing Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Romania. It is one of the main stops on the pilgrimage route:

Mariazell (Austria): the renowned Mariazell Basilica, which is regarded as one of the most significant Marian shrines in Europe. It is widely regarded as one of the most eminent monasteries in Europe.

¹ Source: https://www.maszol.ro/uploads/files/userfiles/images/tarsadalom/maria_ut_europa.jpg

Máriapócs (Hungary): is a Greek Catholic pilgrimage site, renowned for its distinctive tear-drop icon. The original icon, depicting the Virgin of Sorrows, is said to have begun to weep in 1696, and reports of miraculous events attracted believers. The church of the National Shrine of Mariapócs serves as the focal point of the Greek Catholic community in Hungary, where numerous farewells and solemn services are conducted annually. A replica of the icon is on display in the church itself, while the original is kept in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna.

Csíksomlyó (Romania): is the site of the Pentecostal feast, a significant religious and cultural event for Hungarians in Transylvania. The Church of St. Mary of Csíksomlyó occupies a central position within the site, housing the statue of Our Lady of Sorrows, a miraculous statue of the Virgin associated with miraculous healings and graces, dating back to the 16th century. The history of pilgrimages at Csíksomlyó extends over centuries, and the site continues to attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims annually. The open-air Mass on Mount Somlyó is an expression of shared faith and identity, with a special significance for pilgrims from all over the Carpathian Basin.

Religious and cultural significance

The Route of Mary is significant for both religious and cultural reasons, and is an important part of our cultural heritage. It serves as a conduit for the exploration of history, architecture and folk traditions that are intrinsic to the Central European region. The villages and pilgrimage sites along the route offer a variety of cultural programmes and events.

Popularity

Every year, thousands of pilgrims set off on the Route of Mary, with different motivations. Some are religiously committed, others are in spiritual search, while still others choose the route for its closeness to nature and the challenge it offers.

In a manner similar to that observed in neighbouring countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), associations have been established to ensure the maintenance and preservation of the quality of the pilgrim routes. These associations maintain websites that offer an interactive pilgrim map, route descriptions, and a list of shrines and accommodation, thus assisting individual pilgrims in the planning of their itineraries.

Its future and development opportunities

The Route of Mary is a constantly evolving entity, and at present an extensive network of roads has been created that links the Marian sites of Central Europe. The total length of this network is approximately 2,500 kilometres, extending from Mariazell in Austria to Csíksomlyó in Transylvania, forming a cross-shaped network across Central Europe.

In the first half of 2024, the Route of Mary Public Benefit Association submitted an application to the Council of Europe for the inclusion of the section of the Route of Mary in Hungary and the surrounding countries in the European Cultural Routes. Tamás Szabó, the founding president of the association, stated that the European Network of the Routes of Mary has been formed with the participation of eight countries, which are applying for the Route of Mary to become a European Cultural Route. The deadline for submitting the application was 31st July 2024, and a decision is expected in May 2025, following a one-year evaluation process.



Figure 2 The Route of Mary²

² Source : https://mariaut.hu/tart-farticle-19-576-1/A_Maria_Ut_utvonalai

Saint Martin's Route

The road and its meaning

The St. Martin's Pilgrimage Route is a unique path for Christian pilgrims, created in honour of St. Martin, who transitioned from a 4th-century Roman soldier to a bishop. Widely regarded as one of the most cherished saints of the Middle Ages, St. Martin is renowned for his contributions to assisting the impoverished and the destitute. The pilgrimages' objective is to perpetuate his legacy, honour his memory, visit the significant milestones in his life, and foster a communal and spiritual experience.

The route, which traverses twelve nations, is a testament to the historical and cultural significance of the pilgrimage. It is not only a destination for religious visitors but also a point of interest for those seeking to acquaint themselves with various facets of Christian culture and traditions. The Saint Martin's Pilgrimage Route plays a significant role in preserving Christian identity and European religious heritage, while contributing to the development of tourism.

Historical overview

The purpose of the pilgrimage is to pay tribute to Martin, one of the most renowned figures in the Christian Church whose life and work are commemorated in numerous narratives and legends, serving as a source of inspiration for both believers and pilgrims. In devising the itinerary, the organisers have sought to emphasise the significant stages in Martin's life, including his hometown of Savaria (presently Szombathely) and his final resting place in Tours, France.

Route(s) and stations

The unique nature of the route is evidenced by its traversal of vast distances within Europe, encompassing several countries including Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

Via Sancti Martini - the main route of the Via San Martino:

The pilgrimage commences in Szombathely, the birthplace of Martin, and culminates in Candes, the site of his death:

SZOMBATHELY - LJUBLJANA - VENEZIA - PAVIA - MILANO - VIENNE - TOURS - CANDES

The following are among the most significant stations:

Szombathely (Hungary): the birthplace of St. Martin, where the Church of St. Martin is located.

Pannonhalma (Hungary): the Benedictine Abbey, a major religious centre and the seat of the Benedictine Order in Hungary.

Tours (France): the burial place of Saint Martin and home of the Basilica of Saint Martin, where his relics are kept.

Religious and cultural significance

The pilgrimage route of Saint Martin plays an important role in Vas County, as Szombathely is the birthplace of Saint Martin (Jones, 2016). One of the most famous sacral places in the town is the Church of St. Martin, which attracts thousands of pilgrims every year (Smith, 2019). For pilgrims, the experience of being in this historic place is of particular importance, as it provides insight into the life of Saint Martin, who, even as a young man, was dedicated to the service of the community. The main route continues on to Tours via Slovenia and Italy, but sections of the route through several European countries are also linked to the legacy of Saint Martin.

Pilgrims will discover the many great cities of the route, such as Ljubljana, Venice, Pavia, Milan, Lyon, and Vichy, and the rich history and architecture of the regions concerned. At the stops, cultural and religious programmes will be organised, evoking the time of Martin and the spirit of medieval Europe.

The St. Martin's Route, stretching from Szombathely to Tours, was designated a European Cultural Route in 2005 by the Council of Europe, thus promoting the life and cult of one of Europe's most popular saints.

Popularity

Each year, thousands of pilgrims embark on the pilgrimage route of Saint Martin, seeking spiritual enrichment and a unique experience offered by the hospitality of local communities and the religious monuments that adorn these routes. The pilgrimage's objectives encompass spiritual purification, the strengthening of community ties, and the promotion of dialogue between different cultures. The pilgrimage route connects religious and historical monuments, providing pilgrims with the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of believers for centuries, imbued with a spirit of helping the poor and practising charity.

Its future and development opportunities

The St. Martin's Pilgrimage Route is undergoing continuous evolution, both in terms of infrastructure and the services offered to visitors. As part of the Transdanube Travel Stories project³, a 7-day St. Martin's Cycling Pilgrimage Route has been developed, showcasing the cultural and religious heritage along the route. The project aimed to further develop cultural routes in Europe, promote sustainable tourism and seek to engage the younger generation through the development of the cycle route.

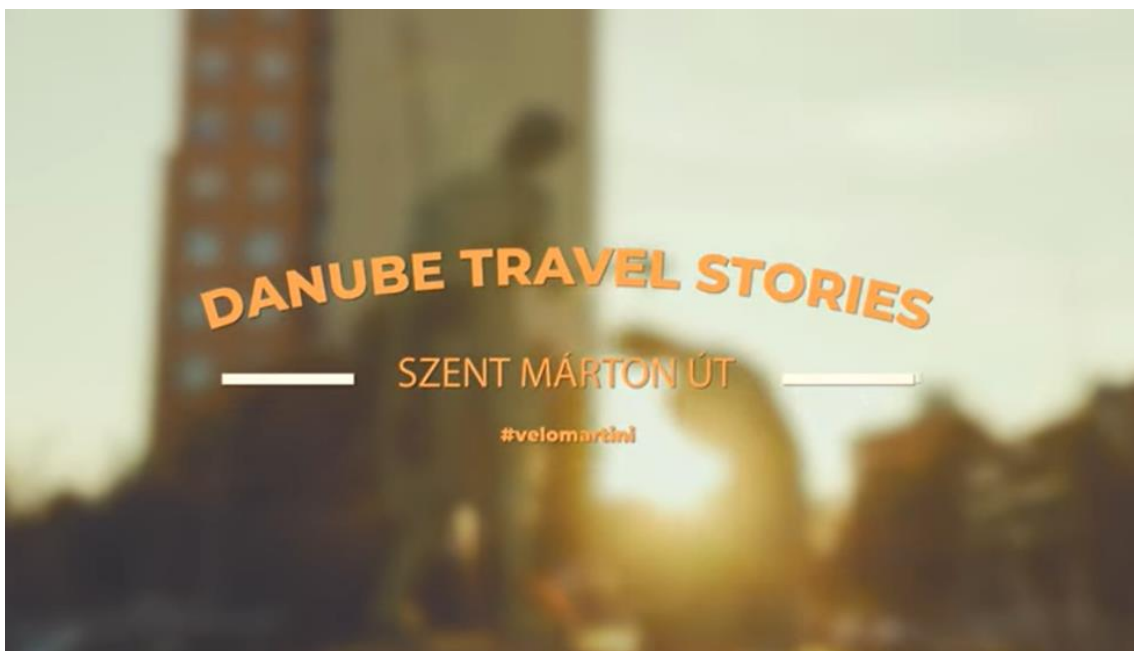


Figure 3 Transdanube Travel Stories - St Martin's Route⁴

³ <https://www.danube-pearls.eu/en/danube-travel-stories>

⁴Source : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YKhdPOPueWc>

The Via Sancti Martini network in Hungary and Europe



Figure 4 Network of Saint Martin's routes in Europe and Hungary | Via Sancti Martini⁵

⁵ Source : <https://viasanctimartini.hu>

St. James Pilgrimage Route

The road and its meaning

The pilgrimage route of St. James, also known as El Camino, is considered to be Europe's most renowned pilgrimage route, constituting an extensive network of roads that lead to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where the tomb of the Apostle St. James is located. The pilgrimage route boasts a tradition that spans millennia, traversing vast distances throughout the European continent. The journey is regarded not only as a religious undertaking, but also as a personal and spiritual voyage, offering the opportunity for self-discovery, spiritual purification, and a more devout life.

The pilgrimage route of St. James holds significant cultural importance, featuring numerous historical sites, churches, and monuments along the way. The route attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims annually, who embark on the journey for the communal experience, spiritual enrichment, and to discover the historical treasures. (According to EuroNews, 446,035 pilgrims made their way to Santiago de Compostela last year, with approximately 1,000 of these being Hungarian.)⁶ The El Camino offers not only a religious experience but also an insight into Europe's cultural heritage, thereby helping to strengthen links between different countries and enriching the experience of the European community.

Historical overview

The pilgrimage route of St. James, also known as the Camino de Santiago, is a medieval pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela, the capital of the Spanish province of Galicia. According to tradition, it is here that the remains of the Apostle Saint James are found, making it a sacred destination on the pilgrimage route. Since the Middle Ages, millions of Christian believers have made pilgrimages here to pay their respects and receive spiritual purification.

The Hungarian section of the route was designated in the early 2010s, and more and more people started using it.

⁶ <https://zarandok.ma/fellenduloben-a-zarandoklatok-a-camino-de-santiago-2023-ban-uj-rekordot-dontott/>
<https://www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/rekordot-dontott-az-el-caminon-gyaloglo-zarandokok-szama>
[Szent Jakab-út, El Camino - Tippek, tanácsok | Spanyolország](#)

Route(s) and stations

The pilgrimage route of St James traverses several European regions, with the most renowned being the French route, which commences at the French-Spanish border and traverses the northern Spanish provinces.

An official section within Hungary encompasses the following primary stations:

Budapest: The starting point from which pilgrims embark on their journey.

Zsámbék: The Roman Church of Zsámbék.

Győr: Pannonhalma Benedictine Archabbey.

Lébény: the Romanesque church of St James, which was an important stopping point for pilgrims in the old days.

The Slovenian section passes through the following main stations:

Muraszombat: a region in the eastern part of Slovenia, the Muravian Region, the centre of the Diocese of Muraszombat.

Ptuj: one of the oldest cities in Slovenia, with a rich history.

Maribor: As the second largest city in Slovenia, Maribor boasts a plethora of historical and cultural attractions, including Maribor Castle, St. John the Baptist Cathedral, Main Square, Stara trta, Vinag Winery, Lent Festival, and the River Drava.⁷

Religious and cultural significance

The Pilgrimage Route of St. James is considered one of the most significant and sacred Christian pilgrimage routes, holding great importance from both religious and cultural perspectives. By the 12th century, it had disseminated throughout the Christian world and evolved into a prominent pilgrimage route. However, with the advent of the Reformation, by the early 1900s, the Compostela pilgrimage route, akin to numerous others, had diminished in significance. Nevertheless, in the last two decades, this opportunity for spiritual enrichment

⁷ <https://latnivalok.info/szlovenia/maribor/>

has been reinvigorated, with thousands of individuals once again traversing the pilgrimage routes that had been consigned to oblivion.

Pilgrims undertaking this journey will discover the rich history and culture of Central European regions, with the villages along the route offering visitors a variety of religious and cultural events that showcase local traditions and values. The St James' Pilgrimage Route has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993.

Popularity

According to statistics⁸, the St. James Pilgrimage Route is the third most visited route in the world. Pilgrims embark on this journey for a variety of reasons, including religious devotion, spiritual quest, and the desire to face a physical challenge. The St. James Pilgrimage Route offers a range of accommodation and services to ensure a seamless experience for pilgrims. This journey is not only a religious experience, but also a physical and spiritual challenge, providing an opportunity for introspection and self-discovery. The journey is imbued with a profound sense of community, fostering interactions with fellow pilgrims from diverse backgrounds, facilitating the exchange of experiences, and offering the opportunity to collectively experience the pilgrimage's splendour. A distinctive attribute of the Route of St James lies in the active involvement of the communities along the route, all contributing to the welfare and support of pilgrims, ensuring an authentic and welcoming atmosphere.

Its future and development opportunities

The St. James Pilgrimage Route is a dynamic entity, undergoing continuous evolution in terms of its infrastructure and the services it provides to pilgrims. The objective is to enhance the appeal of the route to both young and older generations.

The Hungarian segments of the route extend from Lébény to Mosonmagyaróvár - Rajka - Bratislava - Wolfsthal, from which multiple routes lead to Santiago de Compostela.

In 2022, work will commence on the revitalisation of the section through north-eastern Slovenia. The revitalisation of the section through north-eastern Slovenia is also planned, with

⁸ [Telex: A legvadregényesebb El Camino: végig a tengerparti hegyi útvonalon](#)

the involvement of local communities and tourist associations, tourism and catering units in Muravia and Prlekija.

In Hungary, several designated pilgrimage and hiking trails from **Szentgotthárd** can be used to reach Lébény, but the Slovenian section of the pilgrimage route would be particularly important to link Hungary with the Camino routes to the west, thus providing access to the resting place of Apostle St. James via Italy.

The churches and chapels that line the route offer a unique experience for participants, each with its own history and spiritual significance.

In Slovenia, the Route of St. James traverses picturesque landscapes, including the towns of Maribor and Ptuj, where pilgrims can explore the local religious and cultural heritage. The route also presents a valuable opportunity for believers and tourists from both countries to experience the pilgrimage together and to learn about the cultural links between the two nations. In Slovenia, the Route of St. James is to be developed in a manner reminiscent of a tree trunk with its branches and leaves, reaching every village and through which they wish to share their history, culture and art with pilgrims from other countries.

In Slovenia, Kobilje (Kebelesentmárton) is the only village where two famous pilgrimage routes, the St- James and St. Martin routes, meet.

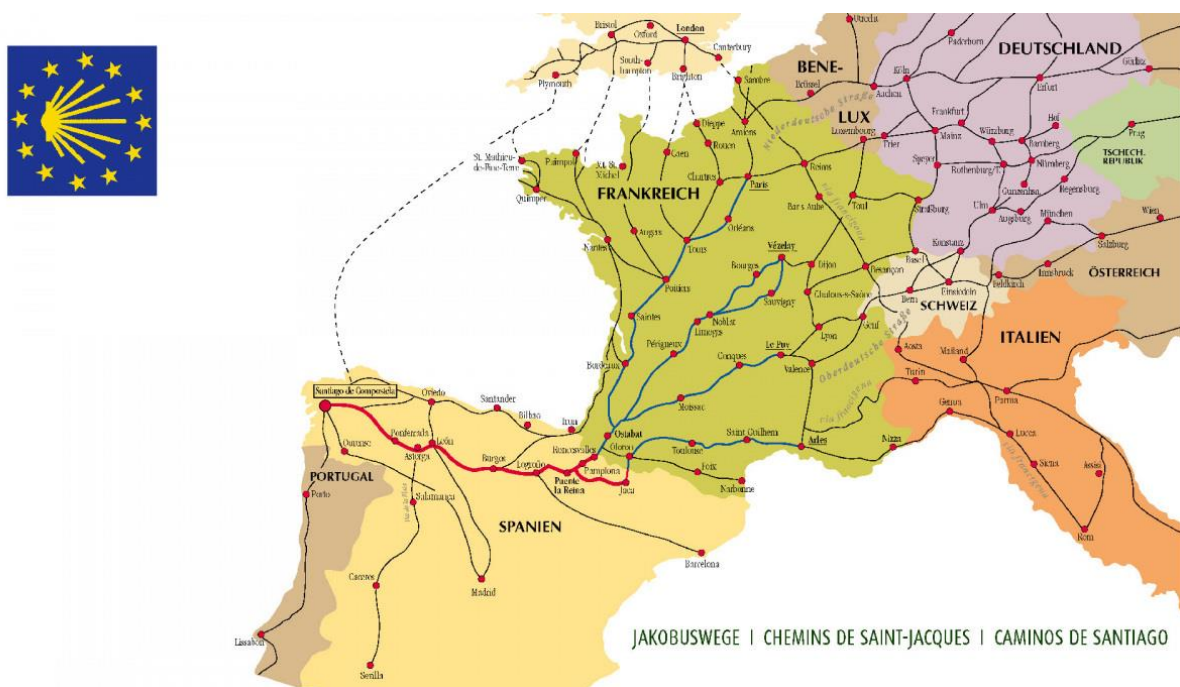


Figure 5 Network of St James' routes in Europe | https://hu.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szent_Jakab-%C3%BA

Way of the Pearls / Via margaritarum West

The route and its meaning

The Way of the Pearls (*Via Margaritarum* in Latin) is another significant pilgrimage route based on the veneration of Mary, linking Hungary and Austria. The nomenclature of the route derives from the metaphorical use of "pearls", which serve to represent the array of religious sites that adorn the route. The Way of the Pearls is of particular significance within the context of Christian tradition and devotion to Mary, as pilgrims can visit shrines associated with the Virgin Mary, thereby enjoying a rich religious and cultural experience.

The western section of the Way of the Pearls, selected for our research due to its connection to Mariazell through Vas County, is significant not only for its religious and spiritual significance, but also for its cultural and tourist value. This is due to its role in linking the veneration of Mary, religious traditions, and the heritage of local communities. This route offers pilgrims the opportunity to engage more profoundly with the most significant sites of Christian faith and culture, while also partaking in personal and communal experiences.

Historical overview

The Via Margaritarum, otherwise referred to as the Way of the Pearls, is a medieval pilgrimage route that traverses both Hungary and Austria, thereby connecting Mátraverebély with Mariazell.

This route served as a pivotal conduit, facilitating the connection between the ecclesiastical and cultural centres that characterised medieval Hungary. Consequently, it played a significant role in the facilitation of Christian pilgrimages.

Route(s) and stations

The western section of the route originates in Budapest and traverses Austria, with significant halting points in Budapest, Esztergom, Székesfehérvár, Veszprém, Celldömölk and Mariazell.

The route follows the trajectory of medieval highways that were historically utilised by pilgrims.

Religious and cultural significance

The Via Margaritarum is a route that links sacred sites and historical monuments that played an important role in medieval Christian spirituality.

It passes through several holy sites, including Mátraverebély-Szentkút and Mariazell, which are of particular importance to Hungarian pilgrims.

Popularity

The popularity of pilgrimages is increasing, and this is partly due to the promotion of the route. The Via Margaritarum has become a popular pilgrimage route in Hungary thanks to its continuously accessible, well-marked trail.

The presence of numerous pilgrim accommodation facilities and additional infrastructure elements (e. g. further accommodation, catering services) along the route also facilitates the accommodation and catering of pilgrims.

Its future and development opportunities

To further develop and promote the Via Margaritarum, a range of programmes and events can be organised to increase the number of pilgrims and enhance the tourist value of the route.

The designation of the western branch of the route serves as a commendable exemplar of the designation of high-quality pilgrimage routes, integrating other pilgrimage routes and hiking trails in a sustainable manner.

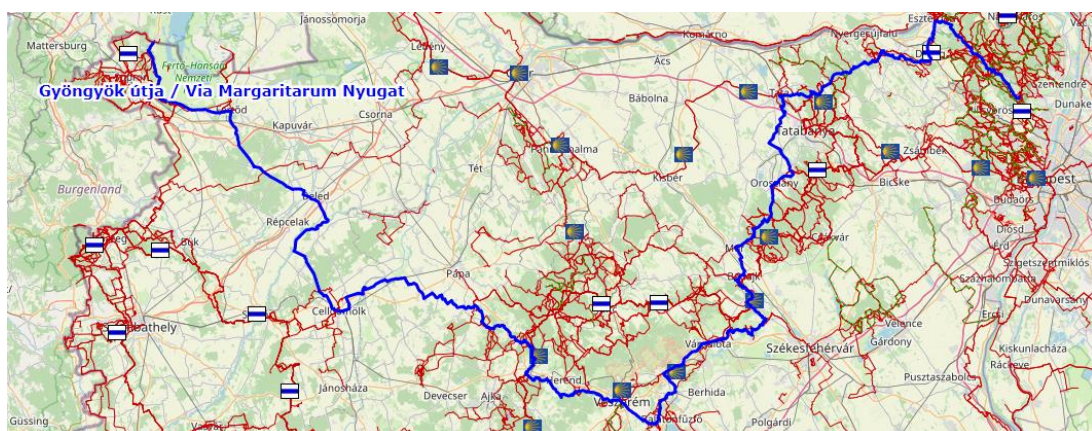


Figure 6 Way of the Pearls / Via Margaritarum West | <https://turistautak.openstreetmap.hu/turut-4057053>

Pilgrimages, pilgrimage sites in Slovenia

Slovenia is a nation with a strong religious identity, and in addition to the two primary pilgrimage routes (St. Martin and St. James), there are numerous pilgrimage sites and shrines, predominantly dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which are frequently visited by the faithful. Notable examples include the Basilica of Brežje, designated a national shrine in 2000, and the numerous pilgrimage sites and shrines scattered throughout the project area, predominantly in villages with historical ties to the Muravian settlements situated near the Slovenian-Hungarian border.

Pilgrimages to the national shrine of the Virgin Mary of Slovenes - Brežje

Marija Pomagaj Brežje / Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Basilica of Brežje, also referred to as the Shrine of the Virgin Mary, is considered one of the most significant sacred sites in Slovenia, attracting thousands of pilgrims annually. The pilgrimage to Our Lady of Brežice is of significant cultural and religious importance to the Slovenian people, with many pilgrims arriving on foot in accordance with their vows. The purpose of these pilgrimages is twofold: to seek spiritual purification and to engage in contemplation, through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The basilica of Brežje is an important pilgrimage destination not only for Slovenes but also for believers from neighbouring countries. Numerous accounts have been documented of remarkable occurrences and miraculous healings subsequent to the recital of supplications.

The origins of the shrine can be traced back to the 1800s, a period which saw numerous miraculous healings and spiritual conversions attributed to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The icon of the Virgin Mary, which occupies a central position within the shrine, is a site of particular veneration, and is frequently visited by the faithful for spiritual solace and comfort. Visitors to the basilica have the opportunity to view the image of the Virgin Mary in the shrine, as well as attend mass.

The Basilica of Brest is accessible from multiple directions, with roads winding through the mountainous landscape, offering pilgrims a unique journey. The routes often pass through small villages and towns, where pilgrims can learn about local traditions and culture. Local communities extend to pilgrims a high level of hospitality and the opportunity to immerse themselves in their religious life.

A distinctive characteristic of the pilgrimages to the Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the communal experience, where participants engage in collective prayer, song and the sharing of their faith. The shrine plays host to a variety of religious events and celebrations, during which pilgrims can engage in collective celebration and engage with the rich tapestry of Slovenian religious traditions. The communal nature of these experiences has been demonstrated to foster a sense of unity and strengthen the bonds among believers, thereby contributing to their spiritual development.

The Pilgrimage of Mary, linking the Marian Shrines of Slovenia and Croatia

The Pilgrimage Route of Mary (Croatian: Marijanski hodočasni put) is a network of over 700 km of marked hiking trails that traverse both Croatia and Slovenia, passing through numerous Marian shrines, churches, and chapels. The Slovenian segment of the route extends for 409 km, while the Croatian portion covers 393 km. Notable pilgrimage centres include Ptujška Gora and Svete Gore nad Bistricom ob Sotli, where a long tradition of pilgrimage is observed, and the Marija Bistrica pilgrimage centre in Croatia, designated a Croatian national shrine.

The route caters to a diverse range of interests, offering experiences that resonate with nature lovers, cultural heritage enthusiasts, and pilgrims alike, thereby showcasing the region's rich religious traditions.

The pilgrimage route is meticulously signposted, with designated rest stops and informative signs. The information panels provide useful information and data for sharing with pilgrims.

The route is part of the International Route of Mary network, which runs from Czestochowa (Poland) via Lőcsé (Slovakia) to Mariazell (Austria), passing through Ptujška Gora and Svete Gore in Slovenia and Marija Bistrica in Croatia.

The development and promotion of the route, including the preparation of tourist packages and pilgrimage products tailored to the needs of pilgrims, was carried out within the framework of the Interreg 2007-2013 Slovenia-Croatia Cross-border Cooperation Programme.⁹

The pilgrimage sites of the villages of Hetés

For a considerable duration, the parish of Dobronak functioned as the primary sacral centre of religious life in the villages of Hetés. However, visits to surrounding pilgrimage sites, or to locations reputed to be sites of apparitions and miracles, also played an instrumental role. These included the Church of the Holy Trinity in Lendava, the chapel of St. Vid at the spring near the village of Dobronak, and the Tree of Mary in Radamos.

The historical and cultural connection between the people of Hetés and the church in Dobronak remains a vivid memory in the collective consciousness. From certain villages, there were paths leading to Dobronak "under gardens", which were popularly known as the "mass roads". These were considered the most direct route to the church of the Plebiani.¹⁰

Following the Treaty of Trianon, the villages of Hetés were divided, with the border being established on both sides. Following Hungary's accession to the European Union, the border became easily crossable again, making the former sites accessible to people living on both sides of the border. Today, an increasing number of pilgrims from Hungary visit the St. Vid spring or to the **Tree of Mary** in Radamos.

Pilgrimage site of the former apparition of Mary of Radamos

Analogous to the phenomenon of pilgrimages to Brežje, the village of Radmožanci (Radamos), situated in proximity to the Hungarian border, is frequently visited by both Slovene and Hungarian pilgrims.

Numerous legends and folkloric narratives are associated with the oak tree in the Black Forest, which is believed to have been the site of the apparition of Our Lady. This site attracted

⁹ <http://www.si-hr.eu/map/marys-pilgrimage-route/>

¹⁰ Excerpt from Zoltán Lendvai Kepe's doctoral dissertation titled "*The Population and Economy of the Villages of Hetés in the 18th–20th Centuries*" – written in Hungarian

numerous visitors from neighbouring countries, a practice that was frowned upon by the authorities of the time following World War II, and which led to the imprisonment and punishment of many.

Despite the imposition of a ban, people continued to flock to the site, bearing tokens such as statues of the Virgin, leaves, holy pictures, and rosaries, as well as the bark of the tree itself, which is believed to possess miraculous healing powers. To this day, the Tree of Mary continues to attract pilgrims from near and far, who come in groups to seek spiritual reconciliation, solace and miracles in the embrace of the vast Radamos forest.¹¹

It is evident that an increasing number of individuals from Hungary are undertaking pilgrimages to the Tree of Mary in Radamos, which is evolving into a prevalent new destination for the people of Hétis on both sides of the border.

St. Vid's Well / Babies' Well

The veneration of Saint Vid was particularly pronounced among the agricultural community, particularly in the Muravian region. The location of the chapel, therefore, is a strategic one, chosen for the annual celebration of Vid's Day. The present chapel was erected in 1828 by the parishioners of the Bogojina (Bagonya) Parish on the site of an earlier church. A spring, reputed to possess medicinal properties, is located in the immediate vicinity of the chapel. The chapel is situated in the vicinity of the village of Strehovci, on the hillside above Lake Bukovniško jezero, and is part of the Bogojina Parish.

The legend of the St Vid's Well in Dobronak in the Muravian region is linked to three stories. The first of these narratives concerns a sunken monastery, whilst the spring is also known as the Babies' Well because children were taken there to cure eye pain. Other narratives recount instances of a shepherd who, by washing in the waters of the spring, experienced the restoration of his sight. A third narrative recounts the tale of a partisan who, during the Second World War, discharged a firearm into the chapel, consequently causing significant harm to the

¹¹ Source: Ella Pivar: Radmožanci-Radamos Zarándokhely Mária-fa a radamosi erdőben. Lendva Község Fejlesztési Központ. é.n. (Radmožanci–Radamos Pilgrimage Site: The Tree of Mary in the Radamos Forest. Lendva Municipality Development Center. n.d.)

shrine. This act of desecration led to the prolonged suffering of the partisan, who ultimately succumbed to his injuries.

The St. Vid's Well and Vid Day celebrations continue to play an important role in the lives of the Dobronak community. On 15 June, the day of Vid's Day, a farewell service was held. The Hungarian community attended mass at 8 o'clock, while the Slovenian community attended at 10 o'clock. The first mass was celebrated by the priest of Dobronak, while the Slovenes were served by the priest of Bakonak. Historically, these events were attended by families, typically on foot and accompanied by grandparents, with older and older children joining them later. This tradition has contributed to the site's popularity, evolving into a destination that combines pilgrimage, recreation and spiritual rejuvenation.

“Local folklore attributes the enhancement of visual acuity to the consumption of water from the spring. Even those who doubt the miraculous power of nature will benefit.”¹²

Even today, thousands of people visit the spring annually, where bioenergeticists have established an energy park. Despite the evolution of the site and the healing hopes attached to it to adapt to modern times, the religious value of the place remains unchanged.

¹² Source: <https://www.dobrovnik.si/objava/87857> Dobronak municipality website

Presentation of the survey methodology

The objective of the present research was to explore the knowledge of pilgrimage routes and sites and to provide a comprehensive picture of pilgrimage tourism in the Slovenian-Hungarian border region, with a special focus on pilgrimage customs, infrastructure and services.

The study utilised two primary research methods: a questionnaire survey and personal interviews. The combination of methods enabled a combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, thus providing a more profound and precise insight into the experiences, problems and suggestions related to pilgrimage.

Questionnaire Survey

The objective of the questionnaire survey was twofold: firstly, to assess the habits and needs of pilgrims; and secondly, to gather their opinions on the infrastructure elements. The survey posed the following research questions:

- Who takes part in pilgrimages and what motivates them?
- What pilgrimages do they seek out and how often do they participate?
- Where and on the basis of what information do they find the calls for pilgrimages?
- What infrastructure and service gaps do pilgrims experience along the routes?
- What services do pilgrims seek during their pilgrimage (accommodation, meals, information, etc)?

The utilisation of a questionnaire survey facilitated the collection of structured responses from participants, thus enabling the application of scales and options to ensure the comparability and analysability of the responses. Prior to the main study, a pilot testing phase was conducted with small groups to ascertain the comprehensibility of the questions and the appropriateness of the survey administration.

The questionnaires were administered in Slovenia and Hungary during the summer/autumn of 2024.

Survey respondents:

- Slovenia 101 persons
 - Students 46 students
 - Adults 55 persons
- Hungary 88 persons
 - Students 26 students
 - Adults 62 persons

Personal Interviews

The data from the questionnaire survey are complemented by personal interviews to provide a deeper insight into pilgrims' experiences and to explore in more detail their experiences and expectations of pilgrimages. During the interviews, respondents were able to give their views in more detail in the following topics:

- Personal experiences and expectations of pilgrimages
- Infrastructure and service gaps, perceptions
- The spiritual, religious and communal aspects of pilgrimages

Face-to-face interviews combine open and closed questions, providing an opportunity for respondents to give their detailed opinions while ensuring a structured analysis. Once the interviews were recorded, the data were analysed in depth and the responses were thematised to inform subsequent recommendations for improvement. During the face-to-face interviews, pilgrims, pilgrimage organisers, parish priests, tourism professionals and project developers shared their personal experiences and opinions, often confirming the feedback received during the questionnaire survey.

Personal interviews: 11 persons

- Slovenia 4 persons
- Hungary 7 persons

Data Processing and Evaluation

The data collected through questionnaires and interviews were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantitative data were processed using statistical methods, while the qualitative data were evaluated using thematic analysis. It is anticipated that the recommendations and suggestions based on the results obtained will help to improve the pilgrimage routes, in particular to meet infrastructure and service needs. The results will be used in future project activities related to the organisation and development of pilgrimages and educational activities.

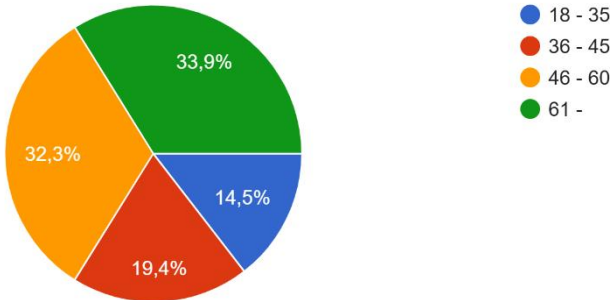
Analysis of the information received from the questionnaire survey in Hungary

Results of the Hungarian adult pilgrims' questionnaire survey

1. Distribution by age

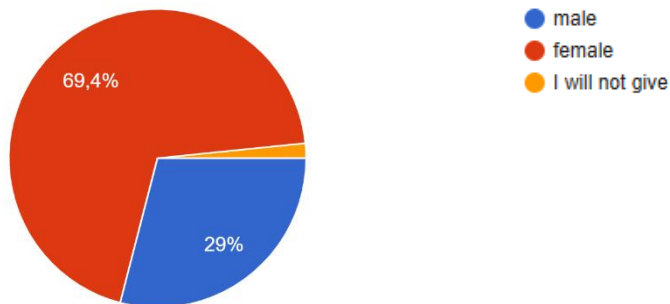
The 62 subjects who completed the questionnaire were drawn from a variety of age demographics, with the highest percentage of respondents being in the **61+ age** group (33.9%), closely followed by the 46-60 age group (32.3%). Notably, 33.3% of respondents were under the age of 45. The remaining respondents were in the 36-45 age group (19.4%) and young people aged 18-35 (14.5%).

The age distribution of respondents offers an interesting insight into the motivations and needs of pilgrims of different age groups. The younger cohort may be motivated by a search for adventure and spiritual enrichment, while the older age group may prioritise religious significance and the experience of community.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data indicates that both male and female respondents participated in the survey, with women constituting approximately two-thirds of the total number of respondents. This observation aligns with the prevailing trend in pilgrimage-related events and surveys, which consistently exhibit a higher participation rate among female respondents.



3. Breakdown by place of residence

A total of 62 individuals residing in Hungary participated in the survey, with the majority residing in urban areas, though hailing from diverse geographical locations across the country, including Budapest and smaller towns and villages in Vas County. It is plausible that respondents' geographical location exerts an influence on their preferences, particularly with regard to the distance they are willing to travel to access a pilgrimage route or site. It is hypothesised that rural respondents may be more inclined to visit regional pilgrimage sites, while for metropolitan residents, logistical and infrastructure issues may be of particular concern.

4. Knowledge of pilgrimage routes

The majority of respondents expressed familiarity with pilgrimage sites in other prominent European countries, in addition to the well-known Hungarian sites. The responses encompassed a range of both well-known and lesser-known European pilgrimage routes and sites. Conversely, respondents demonstrated a notable lack of knowledge regarding pilgrimages within Slovenian territory.

Pilgrimage routes and sites in Hungary

The most prevalent **pilgrimage sites and routes in Hungary** are as follows:

The **Route of Mary** - This pilgrimage route is among the most frequently cited, connecting numerous shrines such as Maria Pocci, Matraverebély-Szentkút, Maria Garden and Mariazell. It draws a substantial number of pilgrims and originates from diverse locations across the country.

Máriapócs - a significant Marian shrine in north-eastern Hungary, traversed by several Marian routes and is a popular destination for spiritual renewal.

Mátraverebély-Szentkút - another prominent pilgrimage site, is frequented by numerous pilgrims and is part of the Route of Mary and the St. Martin's Route.

Celldömölk - Another prominent pilgrimage site, also known as "little Mariazell", the shrine is part of the Route of Mary and has a significant pilgrimage traffic.

St Martin's Route - a route often mentioned, is primarily associated with Szombathely, the birthplace of St. Martin, and offers visitors the opportunity to visit several churches and pilgrimage sites along the way.

Pusztacsatár and Vasvár - are also popular pilgrimage sites and are often visited as part of the Route of Mary.

Máriagyúd: a site popular with pilgrims in southern Hungary, has also been mentioned several times.

Esztergom: plays an important role as a historical Hungarian church centre and a central destination for pilgrimages.

The Hungarian Camino - A pilgrimage route in Hungary, modelled on the Spanish Camino route, connecting several shrines, which is becoming increasingly popular among Hungarian believers.

The Camino Benedictus and the Way of the Pearls - These routes are less popular, but are also among the answers that connect places of pilgrimage.

According to the respondents' knowledge, the places most visited and known by Hungarian pilgrims reflect the religious, historical and cultural interconnections. The responses indicate that the Route of Mary occupies a significant role in the context of pilgrimages in Hungary, a phenomenon that may be attributed to the accessibility of prominent shrines such as Máriapócs and Mátraverebély-Szentkút from multiple directions. These routes and sites serve to link the Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic traditions, and include a number of other smaller shrines. Of particular significance is the St. Martin's Route, which is regarded as valuable not only from religious but also from historical and cultural viewpoints.

Smaller but popular places such as Vasvár, Pusztacsatár and Csatka play an important role in the faith life of local communities and in the cultivation of local traditions, and these points are often mentioned in the responses.

Pilgrimage routes and places of pilgrimage in Slovenia

The responses indicate that the majority of the participants (65%) are not familiar with **Slovenian pilgrimage routes** or sites, suggesting that Slovenian pilgrimage tourism is less well-known among the Hungarian pilgrims who completed the questionnaire.

The most common pilgrimage sites and routes in Slovenia were:

Saint Martin's Route - The Saint Martin's Pilgrimage Route links significant sites associated with the life of Bishop Saint Martin.

The Route of Mary - a pilgrimage route of particular renown in Central Europe, connects numerous Marian shrines across multiple countries. In Slovenia, the "Pilgrimage Route of Mary" was established as part of a prior Slovenia-Croatia cooperative programme, uniting the Slovenian and Croatian Marian Shrines in the south-eastern region of the country. The route is further integrated into the international Route of Mary network, spanning from north to

south: Częstochowa (Poland) - Lőcse (Slovakia) - Mariazell (Austria) - Ptujška Gora and Sveta Gora (Slovenia) - Marija Bistrica (Croatia).

Maribor, Celje and Ljubljana are three of Slovenia's flagship cities, home to sites of religious and cultural significance. The churches of Maribor and Celje and the historic churches of Ljubljana are important stops for pilgrims.

Ptujška Gora - a renowned pilgrimage destination, boasts the Shrine of Mary, a significant attraction for pilgrims. The church is renowned for its exquisite Gothic architecture and a long historical tradition.

The responses indicate a potential lack of awareness regarding Slovenian pilgrimage sites, possibly due to their absence from pilgrimage routes in Hungary.

International pilgrimage routes and sites

In the field of **international pilgrimages, several international pilgrimage sites and routes** are known to the responders. Among the most frequently mentioned sites are El Camino, the Shrine of Csíksomlyó, Mariazell, Lourdes, Medjugorje, and Fatima. El Camino is particularly popular as the best-known Christian pilgrimage route in Spain, leading to Santiago de Compostela, but Rome and several Central and Eastern European shrines of great religious and historical value were also mentioned.

El Camino (St James' Route) - El Camino, also known as the St. James' Route, is one of the world's most renowned pilgrimage routes, leading to Santiago de Compostela, where the tomb of the Apostle St James is located. The various sections of "El Camino" attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims each year, who visit the route to deepen their faith and to gain a spiritual experience.

Csíksomlyó (Romania) – Csíksomlyó, situated in Transylvania, holds particular significance for Hungarian pilgrims. Renowned for its Pentecostal pilgrimage, the site attracts a growing number of believers annually. The site's spiritual significance is underscored by the presence

of a chapel dedicated to the Virgin Mary, situated within a landscape of picturesque mountains.

Mariazell (Austria) - is another significant destination, renowned for its significance as a shrine, particularly among pilgrims from Central Europe. The basilica's iconic statue of the Virgin Mary has served as a pivotal site for centuries, attracting numerous devotees along the Route of Mary pilgrimage route.

Lourdes (France) - is renowned for the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, with the shrine attracting millions of visitors annually seeking healing and spiritual solace. The town is also known for its holy spring, which is believed by believers to have healing powers.

Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina) - is another site of pilgrimage, renowned for its apparitions of Mary, which began in 1981. Since then, it has become an important stop for Catholic pilgrims seeking spiritual purification and reflection.

Fatima (Portugal) - Another notable site is Fatima, in Portugal, which is famous for the apparitions of Mary to three shepherd children in 1917. This site is regarded as one of the most renowned Catholic pilgrimage destinations worldwide and is associated with a message of peace and faith.

Częstochowa (Poland) - is home to the renowned icon of the Black Madonna, which is enshrined within the Jasna Góra Monastery. This site attracts numerous pilgrims annually.

Rome (Italy) - As the centre of the Catholic Church, Rome offers many places of pilgrimage, including the Vatican and St Peter's Basilica.

Assisi (Italy) - the birthplace of St Francis, a city with a message of humility and love of nature.

Taizé (France) - is the seat of an ecumenical community that spreads a message of peace and understanding, and is popular with young people from all over the world.

A survey of pilgrims revealed that 93.5% of respondents had previously embarked on one of the pilgrimage routes they had previously mentioned, with only 4 respondents indicating that

they had not. Of these, two expressed a willingness to consider a pilgrimage, but financial constraints precluded them from participating.

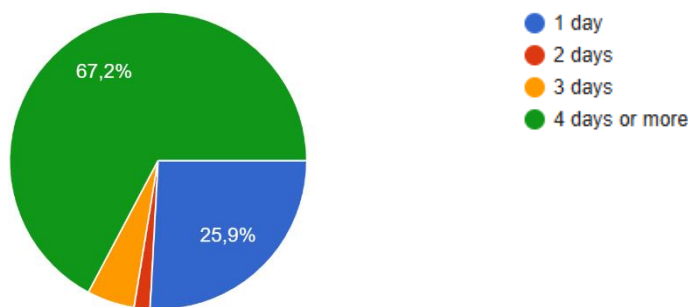
5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

General and organisational information and comments on pilgrimages

The respondents to the questionnaire evaluated their experiences of pilgrimages in Hungary, with almost half of them mentioning the Route of Mary, the Marian Shrines (Route of Mary / Máriapócs / Mátraverebély-Szentkút / Celldömölk) and the St. Martin pilgrimage route.

The majority of respondents were motivated by spiritual/intellectual (85%) and religious (83%) needs, complemented by cultural and natural values.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that the majority of respondents (66%) had participated in a pilgrimage that spanned several days, while a significant minority (25%) opted for a one-day pilgrimage.



Approximately 60 percent of respondents obtained information regarding pilgrimages from their immediate social circle, predominantly from friends and relatives, or within the context of a religious service. Approximately half of the respondents also use the internet, while a smaller proportion have come across them through various media.

The data indicates that pilgrimages organised by churches or civil-religious associations are the most popular choice, with 70 percent of respondents opting for this option. A travel

agency was selected by 6.9 percent of respondents, while the remaining 20 percent planned their pilgrimages individually or with a small group of friends. While group pilgrimages remain the most popular among adults, there has been an increasing trend of individuals organising pilgrimages for smaller groups, such as family and friends.

The responses of pilgrims further reveal that the majority (75.4%) were informed by organisers and guides, 28% utilised paper maps, and 16% employed publications as reference materials. Furthermore, the responses indicated a notable increase in the use of digital devices, with a third of respondents (33%) reporting the utilisation of mobile applications during their pilgrimage.

The most popular type of pilgrimage among respondents was walking, followed by organised pilgrimages to visit a specific site. The mode of transportation employed by participants, contingent on their place of residence, typically involves the utilisation of a car or public transportation to reach the designated departure point, with local residents often opting for more pedestrian-oriented options.

Information on infrastructure, services, programmes

The satisfaction levels of participants with regard to the quality of the pilgrimage routes, infrastructure and services was indisputable, with over 60% reporting no discernible deficiencies. However, 40% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the number of rest areas, benches, waste bins, toilets and water points available. Additionally, concerns regarding signage were noted, with many individuals finding brochures and information material concerning the pilgrimage sites to be inadequate.

The quality and navigability of the routes were generally acknowledged as satisfactory, though minor issues with signage, including directional and informational elements, were noted. However, the majority of respondents expressed their ability to clearly identify the route through these signs.

Despite these shortcomings, the pilgrimage routes were found to be well-maintained and enjoyable, providing the experience expected by pilgrims, which was enhanced by the services used and the cultural and historical values.

The accessibility of the pilgrimage sites was also positively commented upon, and based on the comments on infrastructure conditions, it can be stated that the facilities for basic needs and prayer/retreat are provided (e. g. toilets, water fountains, resting places, benches, waste bins), but that food facilities, grocery shops, cultural programmes, information points are more limited in the vicinity of the pilgrimage sites. It is noteworthy that 67% of respondents identified deficiencies in the facilities at the pilgrimage sites, primarily regarding the number of toilets, rest areas, benches, and signposts. However, there were also concerns about the absence of waste bins and various information materials. Notwithstanding, the satisfaction levels with the facilities and services provided were generally high, though opinions were mixed regarding the number of places to stay. The accommodation provisions for larger groups were found to be inadequate, and this was identified as a key factor in the perceived absence of basic amenities.

It is noteworthy that the exploration of the broader environs of pilgrimage sites has gained significant popularity in recent times. In addition to their religious significance, visitors expressed interest in the cultural and historical role of the sites, finding it beneficial to receive information on these aspects. It was further noted that greater emphasis should be placed on harmonising the parallel programmes, as these individuals expressed a keen interest in acquiring a more comprehensive understanding of the sites.

6. Summary of evaluations and suggestions for improvement

An analysis of the responses received indicates that the most popular pilgrimage routes in Hungary, such as the Route of Mary, the Marian Shrines and the St. Martin's Route, are primarily visited for spiritual and religious enrichment. However, these routes are also closely associated with the discovery of cultural and natural values. The majority of respondents have participated in longer pilgrimages, but there are also indications that an increasing number of people are opting for one-day pilgrimages.

The predominant sources of information regarding these pilgrimages are friends, relatives, and church services; however, the internet and other media have also emerged as significant sources. The most popular pilgrimages are organised by churches or religious associations, but the number of individual and small group pilgrimages is also high. Organisers and tour guides, in addition to digital tools such as mobile applications, are playing an increasingly important role in the provision of information. The quality and walkability of the trails received generally positive feedback, but pilgrims also noted some shortcomings, such as the low number of rest areas, toilets, water points, benches and waste bins. While the infrastructure, particularly in terms of amenities that address fundamental needs, was found to be generally adequate, instances of overcrowding at pilgrimage sites were observed, particularly during periods when larger groups were present.

The cultural and religious values of the pilgrimage sites and the quality of the information provided were also positively rated by respondents. However, the limited availability of dining facilities and complementary cultural programmes were identified as areas for improvement.

Infrastructure development needs: older age groups also use digital devices extensively, with an increasing number using mobile applications. It is evident from the responses that interest in digitalisation extends beyond younger demographics, as evidenced by the use of seal collection applications. Furthermore, the necessity for adequate charging facilities for mobile devices is a key requirement. While the service needs of the older age group are comparatively modest in terms of accommodation and catering, both age groups express concerns regarding the inadequate number of rest areas and toilets, a problem that is especially pronounced during larger group pilgrimages.

The incorporation of interactive elements is of particular interest, as participants express a keen interest in the historical aspects of pilgrimage sites and are eager to engage with narratives and information presentations. It is important to consider that all the presentations running in parallel could be of interest to them, but several of them indicated that their choice was limited by their financial means.

The enhancement of wayfinding and digitisation is a crucial aspect, as older individuals exhibit an increasing openness to digital solutions, a sentiment that is also shared by younger

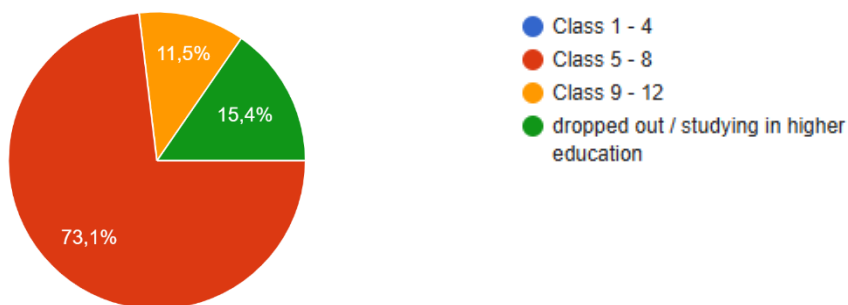
demographics. In addition to the use of electronic devices and apps, programmes should include the possibility to charge phones. The integration of interactive maps and route markers within the wayfinding system has been identified as a potential strategy to enhance orientation for participants.

Optimising programmes: programmes should be designed to meet the needs of different age groups. Spirituality and the facilitation of community-building discussions and meetings are highly valued by people of all ages. Pilgrim guides are also instrumental in enriching the experience of participants, leveraging their experience and expertise. It is recommended that parallel presentations and activities be organised in a manner that caters to the interests of all participants, leveraging the potential benefits of free admission programmes when applicable.

Results of the questionnaire survey of Hungarian students

1. Distribution by age

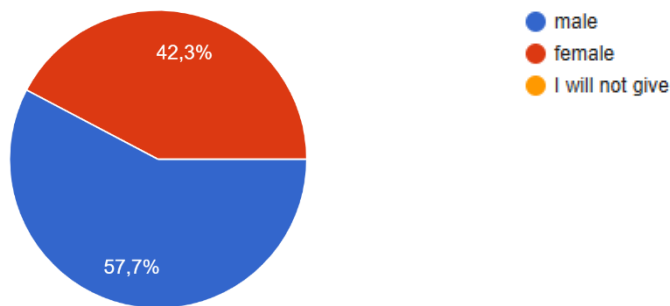
The respondents were comprised of individuals from various age demographics, with the majority of the 26 students who completed the survey (73%) enrolled in upper primary school, 15.4% having completed upper secondary education (either in higher education or dropping out), and 11.5% pursuing post-secondary education. It is important to note that younger and older students have different reasons for participating in pilgrimages and therefore different needs and experiences for each age group. For example, younger students are more interested in pilgrimages for the companionship and the social experience, while older students are motivated by spirituality and other religious reasons.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data demonstrate that pilgrimages are popular among young men and women, with more than half (57,7%) of participants being male. This proportion shifted among adult respondents, where nearly 70% of respondents were women.

In the future activities of the project, it would be important to maintain the commitment of young men to pilgrimages, so that they continue to be active visitors to these events as adults.



3. Breakdown by place of residence

A total of 26 students completed the questionnaire. All of the students resided in Hungary, with half residing in the country and the other half residing abroad. The students selected towns and villages in Vas County as their place of residence. The geographical location of the place of residence was not relevant in this case, as those living in villages and towns were open to pilgrimages both nearer and further away, even international ones (e. g. the Croatian town of Medjugorje, a particularly popular destination for young people).

4. Information on pilgrimage routes, organisational information

It was found that only a small number of pilgrimage sites and routes were identified by respondents.

The most popular pilgrimage sites identified by respondents were:

Youth pilgrimage in the footsteps of the saints <i>(Szentpéterfa/Güssing/Rábakethely)</i>	61,54%
Mariazell	11,54%
Medjugorje	11,54%
Czech Mind Centre	3,85%
Szombathely-Gencsapáti	3,85%
Vasvár	3,85%

The present study examined the participation of students in the "In the footsteps of the Saints Youth Pilgrimage," a religious event organised by the Diocese of Szombathely. The event was publicised within the educational framework and the majority of responding students, constituting 61.54% of the total sample, participated in the pilgrimage. The three-day pilgrimage, undertaken on foot, focused on the lives of the saints (Blessed László Batthyány and Blessed János Brenner), and provided an opportunity for young people to experience community, engage in prayers, singing and games, and to deepen their faith and strengthen their sense of community.

In the future, the project's scope may be expanded to encompass a study of the sites and routes identified, delving into the reasons behind their significance, both religiously and culturally, for young people.

The pilgrimages were predominantly undertaken on foot, though there were also accounts of pilgrimages being made by bus and train.

The majority of participants (57,7%) undertook a 3-day pilgrimage, while nearly a quarter (23,1%) embarked on a 4-day or longer journey.

5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

Information on infrastructure and services

In a manner consistent with the responses provided by adults, the younger age group also provided ratings for questions regarding services and infrastructure.

The majority of them gave an overall good/very good rating for the quality and accessibility of the routes and were satisfied with the infrastructure, with the availability of facilities and services for basic needs. However, nearly 40% reported shortcomings in terms of accommodation and sanitation (e. g. toilets) and waste collection facilities.

The responses further revealed that, in contrast to the concerns of older respondents, younger people expressed greater emphasis on the availability of quality and nutritious main meals and comfortable accommodation.

The responses to the question regarding signage and wayfinding were mixed. The majority of respondents expressed minimal reliance on these signs, depending on the selected route and the provided guide. Conversely, a minority found them to be either sufficient or lacking.

The feedback received is reflected in a documentary video summary on the internet made by a student who walked the Hungarian Pilgrimage Route.¹³ The video emphasised the necessity for increased attention to be paid to the updating and maintenance of direction signs and the posting of information boards. The use of interactive wayfinding applications (e. g. QR codes; offline maps) could also facilitate wayfinding, especially for the younger generation.

Observations on the programmes and experiences offered during the pilgrimages

The majority of students reported that they derived enjoyment from participating in a variety of activities. The most popular of these are:

team games	61,5 %
quizzes	50,0 %
interactive sessions	30,8 %
stamp print collection	23,1 %

A significant proportion of the participants obtained insightful and significant information regarding the cultural and religious significance of the sites visited, primarily from the pilgrim guides (80%), during lectures and guided tours (64%), through games and quizzes (44%), or from information boards (24%). In the event of an interest in a pilgrimage site or theme, the predominant method of acquiring further information is through internet research (69,2%). Furthermore, they expressed a willingness to engage in face-to-face meetings and interactive discussions (38,5%), and indicated a preference for receiving further information through information boards (23,1%), paper (15,4%), or digital (7,7%) formats.

The expansion of interactive learning opportunities, for instance through the development of mobile applications that facilitate knowledge acquisition through quizzes, is a potential area

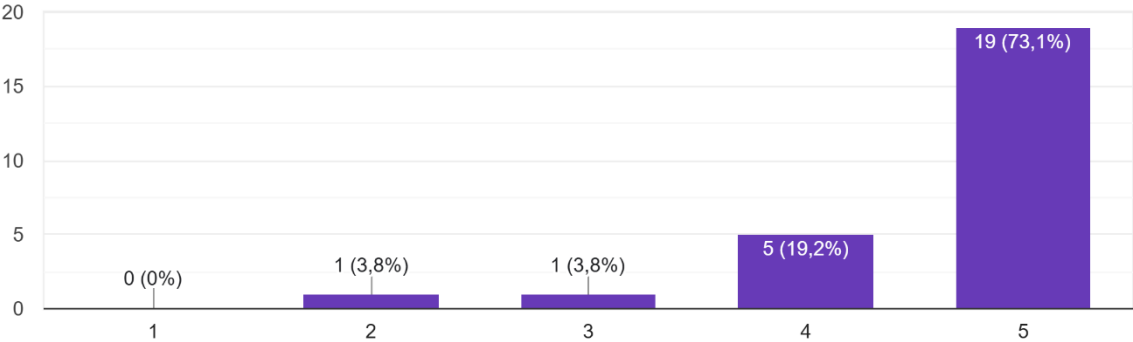
¹³ https://youtu.be/svyVZ5ZYNSg?si=tN3aCsOPyYt9y9_9

for enhancement. Digital stamp print-collecting apps have proven to be particularly popular among younger students. The organisation of team games has been conducive to fostering a positive atmosphere and providing a valuable experience for larger group pilgrimages.

It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the presentation of the historical context, thereby enabling participants to gain a more profound understanding of the pilgrimage sites.

The majority of respondents reported positive experiences during the pilgrimages, with 19,2% feeling very well and 73,1% feeling extremely well, and these experiences were not necessarily attributed to the services and infrastructural facilities.

Overall, how did you feel during the pilgrimage? Did you get the experience you expected? (worst rating = 1, best rating = 5)
26 answers



The atmosphere of the pilgrimage and the sense of community experienced by participants were met with a largely positive response. The majority of respondents expressed a preference for the atmosphere amongst fellow pilgrims, with 50% of participants citing this as their primary satisfaction. A significant proportion, 23,1%, underscored the significance of forging new personal connections during the pilgrimage. Furthermore, 19,2% of respondents indicated a preference for the available information concerning the pilgrimage destination, while the remaining 7,7% attested to the enduring significance of the pilgrimage's theme.

The results of the study indicate a willingness to participate in pilgrimages to Hungary and other countries, as well as attendance at summer camps and events designed to facilitate the acquisition of religious and cultural knowledge.

In the design of the pilgrimage programme, it is recommended that the needs of young people be given due consideration, for example by incorporating more team-building activities, recreational games and spiritual exercises. Furthermore, programmes should be rendered more flexible, with the objective of increasing the number of young people who can participate in events, whilst also providing opportunities for individual exploration.

6. Summary of evaluations and recommendations for improvement

The survey of Hungarian students revealed that the majority of respondents were from upper primary and secondary school, and participated in pilgrimages for a variety of reasons. Notably, younger participants sought a communal experience, while older students sought spirituality and religious motivation. The survey also revealed a gender disparity, with the majority of respondents being male. This finding suggests that in the design of future programmes, a particular focus should be placed on maintaining the engagement of young men.

The students' knowledge of pilgrimages was found to be limited, with the majority being familiar only with the "In the footsteps of the Saints Youth Pilgrimage", organised by the Diocese of Szombathely, where young people learn about the lives of saints through community programmes. The majority of the pilgrimages were undertaken on foot, with some young people also participating in bus and train pilgrimages. The duration of most pilgrimages was found to be between three and four days.

The quality of the routes and infrastructure was found to be satisfactory, though certain deficiencies were identified in areas such as accommodation, sanitation, and waste management. The updating and maintenance of wayfinding signage and signposting was identified as a crucial aspect in need of special attention, with the use of digital tools such as mobile applications being recommended for enhancing navigation. The programme's interactive activities, particularly team games, were found to be the most popular element.

The students expressed a keen interest in the religious and cultural significance of the pilgrimage sites, with a readiness to seek further information through online sources or during face-to-face interactions, such as meetings, talks and guided tours. The programmes were designed to encompass social experiences and the establishment of new contacts, which were considered integral components. The respondents evaluated the atmosphere and the social experience of the pilgrimages highly, indicating a willingness to delve deeper into religious and cultural subjects.

It is recommended that programmes be designed with the specific needs of young people in mind, incorporating a greater variety of team-building activities, recreational games, and a more flexible programme structure to enhance their appeal.

Infrastructural development needs: the younger age group expressed a need for comfort, while the older age group did not express such a need; improvements to toilet and drinking water facilities are recommended.

Incorporating interactive elements: digital and paper-based exercises, games, and stamp print collection are the primary methods to increase participant involvement.

Improving wayfinding and digitisation: clearer wayfinding markings and interactive maps are recommended. The younger generation is very open to electronically accessible information, and efforts should be made to create easy-to-use, transparent and youthful online interfaces, also taking advantage of the opportunities offered by social media platforms.

Optimising programmes: taking into account the different interests and expectations of students, it would be useful to include team-building, spiritual and leisure activities to stimulate their interest in pilgrimages.

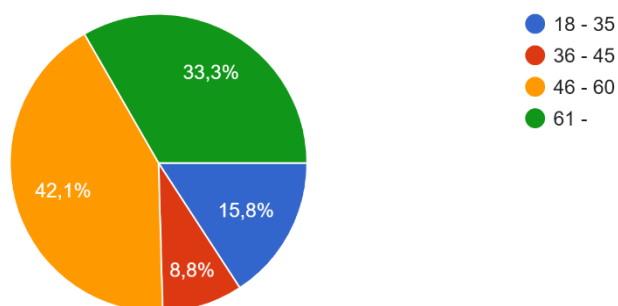
Analysis of the information received from the questionnaire survey in Slovenia

Results of the questionnaire survey of Slovenian adult pilgrims

1. Distribution by age

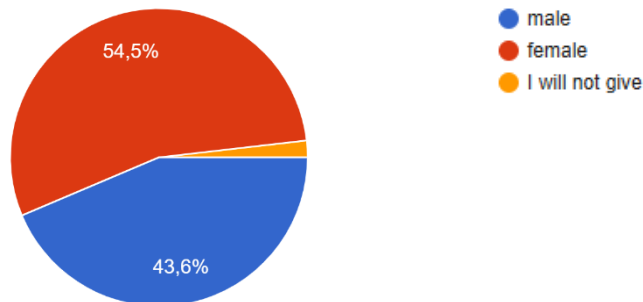
The respondents were divided into different age groups, with the largest proportion of respondents falling into the 46-60 age group (42,1%), closely followed by the 61+ age group (33,3%). A quarter of respondents were pilgrims under 45 years old: the 36-45 age group (8,8%) and young people aged 18-35 (15,8%).

In a manner consistent with the responses given by respondents from Hungary, Slovenian respondents also demonstrated a higher level of activity in the older age group. The distribution of age groups suggests that motivations and needs during pilgrimages may vary. The former group, comprising younger pilgrims, may be motivated by a search for adventure, spiritual experiences, or other challenges, while the latter, older age group, is likely to place more emphasis on religious significance, carrying on traditions, and community experience.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data demonstrate that both men and women responded in almost equal proportions.



3. Breakdown by place of residence

The survey was completed by 55 respondents, all residing in Slovenia, with the majority located in the Muravian region. The responses indicate that the majority of respondents reside in urban areas; however, their geographical location may also influence the distance they are willing to travel to reach a pilgrimage route or site. It is hypothesised that rural respondents may be more inclined to visit regional pilgrimage sites, while for urban residents, logistical and infrastructure issues may be of particular concern.

4. Visit pilgrimage routes

The majority of respondents, in addition to local pilgrimage sites in close proximity to their place of residence, also demonstrated familiarity with pilgrimage sites in other popular European countries. This finding is consistent with the responses of Hungarian respondents, who also cited more renowned and less renowned European pilgrimage routes and sites. A smaller proportion of Slovenian respondents expressed familiarity with the more prominent pilgrimage routes, sites and shrines in Hungary, yet the majority of them possess a more extensive understanding of international pilgrimage.

Pilgrimage routes and places of pilgrimage in Slovenia

An analysis of the responses indicates that the most visited Slovenian sites are Brežje, Turnišče and Ptujška Gora, with several other smaller pilgrimage sites, including Hotiza and Svete Gore,

linked to them. These sites are of particular importance to religious communities, and pilgrims often combine itineraries to visit multiple shrines in a single pilgrimage.

Brežje - site which is frequently mentioned in pilgrimage literature, is renowned for its Marian shrine. Numerous pilgrimages are organised here, and it is one of the most visited sites in the survey.

Turnišče - is another popular destination for pilgrims, particularly due to its numerous Marian shrines. It is frequently visited as part of a combined itinerary with Brest and other locations.

Ptujška Gora - is another notable site, renowned for its Church of the Assumption of Mary, a prominent pilgrimage destination in Slovenia. Many believers visit this site to pray and seek spiritual solace. The survey data indicates a high attendance rate at this site.

Grad - while less frequently visited, is mentioned in the survey as part of a combined pilgrimage.

Svete Gore - also known as the Holy Mountain, is a site of spiritual significance.

Hotiza - while less renowned, is a significant pilgrimage site for the local community.

Pilgrimage routes and sites in Hungary

In Hungary, the primary religious destinations for Slovenes undertaking pilgrimages are Budapest, Szombathely, Pécs and Máriapócs.

Budapest - the capital is frequently cited as a destination of pilgrimage for religious visits.

Szombathely - this city is also a frequent destination, particularly due to its religious significance associated with St Martin.

Pécs - the city was mentioned in several responses and plays an important role in religious life, with a plethora of churches and religious monuments.

Máriapócs - a site of particular significance within the Hungarian context, is renowned for its Greek Catholic church and its role as a pilgrimage destination.

Esztergom - while not mentioned by all respondents, is widely regarded as one of the most significant religious centres in Hungary due to its affiliation with the Hungarian Catholic Church and its status as the site of the Esztergom Basilica, a landmark of architectural and historical importance.

Szentgotthárd and Csesztreg - hile not as prominent as the aforementioned sites, are of local significance and are also visited by individuals from neighbouring Slovenian settlements.

International pilgrimage routes and sites

The most popular international pilgrimage sites among respondents were Lourdes, Medjugorje, Mariazell and Fatima. These locations are frequently visited by numerous pilgrims seeking spiritual rejuvenation and healing. However, Rome and Marija Bistrica also receive a significant number of Slovenian pilgrims.

Lourdes (France) - the site that was most frequently mentioned, renowned for its apparitions of Mary. It is a significant destination for individuals seeking healing and spiritual empowerment.

Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina) - the second most popular site, Medjugorje has become a pilgrimage centre due to its apparitions of Mary, and is visited by a large number of people, especially younger ones.

Mariazell (Austria) - is a significant Central European Marian shrine, attracting numerous pilgrims, particularly from Austria, Hungary, and Slovenia.

Fatima (Portugal) - a pilgrimage site that rivals the popularity of Lourdes or Medjugorje. Renowned for its Marian apparitions, the site attracts thousands of pilgrims annually.

Rome (Italy) - widely regarded as the centre of the Catholic religion, the city is an important destination for believers, with the Vatican and papal ceremonies.

Marija Bistrica (Croatia) – is a Marian shrine of particular importance for Croatian pilgrims, and is often visited by Slovenian believers (a previous Slovenian-Croatian ¹⁴ cooperation has created a Marian itinerary, with the shrine of Marija Bistrica as an important stop).

Furthermore, the majority of respondents expressed familiarity with popular pilgrimage sites in other prominent European countries. Slovenian respondents demonstrated a high level of knowledge, similar to their Hungarian counterparts, regarding routes and pilgrimage sites associated with Mary and El Camino. However, they exhibited a limited understanding of pilgrimages within Hungary. The responses indicate that the most popular pilgrimage sites within Slovenian territory are predominantly Marian sites and the St. Martin and St. James routes.

Furthermore, the data indicates that 91,1% of respondents had previously participated in one of the specified pilgrimage routes, with only 5% responding in the negative. Notably, 2% of respondents expressed a willingness to consider participating in a pilgrimage. The decision-making process will be informed by considerations such as accommodation options, physical fitness, and prevailing weather conditions.

5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

General and organisational information and comments on pilgrimages

The respondents evaluated their experience of pilgrimages in Slovenia, with the majority of respondents visiting nearby pilgrimage sites (Brežje / Turnišče / Ptujška Gora).

¹⁴ <http://www.si-hr.eu/map/marys-pilgrimage-route/>

The majority of respondents were motivated by religious reasons (50,9%) and sacramental experience (36,4%), with spiritual/intellectual enrichment being a further motivation (36,4%), and cultural and natural values being a third motivation.

The analysis revealed that nearly two-thirds of respondents (61,8%) had participated in a one-day pilgrimage, while longer pilgrimages were also popular, with 21,8% and 14,6% of respondents indicating pilgrimages of 3 or 4 days, respectively.

The data further reveal that approximately half of the respondents had been informed about pilgrimages in the context of Holy Mass, while several respondents had been recommended pilgrimages by friends and relatives. However, it is noteworthy that information seen or heard on the internet or other media is also common, with a smaller number of respondents having used a travel agency or searched independently for suitable pilgrimages.

was proclaimed at a mass	49,09%
recommended by a relative / friend / acquaintance	38,18%
found on the internet	14,55%
heard about it on a television or radio programme	10,91%
read about it in a newspaper/magazine	10,91%
saw it in a travel agency advertisement	7,27%
On your own / family recommendation	5,45%

The majority of respondents (54,6%) expressed the opinion that organised church/parish pilgrimages are the most popular, with 10,9% of respondents stating that they still use a travel agency. The remaining 40% of respondents reported that they plan their pilgrimages individually, either with family or a small group of friends. It is evident that group pilgrimages are the most prevalent among adults (70,1%). However, the personal interviews conducted revealed a decline in the number of pilgrimages involving a large number of people in Slovenia due to the impact of the epidemic. This decline may also be attributed to an increasing trend of individuals, families, or small groups organising their own pilgrimages (60,0%).

organised with larger groups of 21-50 people	70,91%
with family/friends 2-10 persons	60,00%
I have been to events that attracted large crowds	23,64%
organised with small groups of 10-20 people	5,45%

The responses of pilgrims indicated that 38,2% of them were informed by organisers and guides, 29.9% used mobile applications or printed paper maps, and 10,9% used publications. The responses also showed that digital tools are becoming increasingly popular, even among adults, with nearly a third of them indicating that they (also) used a mobile application during the pilgrimage!

In Slovenia, the most prevalent pilgrimages are of a short duration, spanning a single day, and are organised with the aim of visiting a single pilgrimage site. The most common mode of transportation to these sites is by car (50,1%), followed by bus (32,7%), and on foot (14,6%).

Information on infrastructure, services, programmes

The satisfaction rate of participants with regard to the quality of the pilgrims' route, infrastructure and services was notably high, with over 80% of respondents – including those from Hungary – reporting no discernible shortcomings. However, a proportion of respondents – particularly those who perceived deficiencies – expressed concerns regarding the inadequate provision of resting places, benches, waste bins, toilets and water supply facilities. Furthermore, criticisms were levelled at the signage, with a notable number of individuals requesting brochures and introductory material concerning the pilgrimage sites.

The quality and navigability of the routes were generally satisfactory, though minor issues with signage, particularly directional indications, were noted. However, the majority of respondents reported being able to clearly identify the route through these signs.

Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, the pilgrimage routes were found to be well-maintained and enjoyable, and visitors received the expected experiences, which were enhanced by the services provided and the cultural and historical values they encountered.

The accessibility of the pilgrimage sites was also positively commented upon, and based on the comments on infrastructure conditions, it can be stated that service facilities and prayer/retreat facilities for basic needs are provided (e. g. toilets, watering places, resting places, benches, waste bins), but that food facilities, grocery shops, cultural programmes, information points are more limited in the vicinity of the pilgrimage sites. A minor proportion of respondents (21,3%) noted deficiencies in the facilities at the pilgrimage sites, primarily expressing dissatisfaction with the number of rest areas, benches and signposts, but also lamenting the absence of waste bins and various information materials. While the respondents expressed satisfaction with the facilities and services, opinions were divided on the number of places, with the sites being overcrowded to accommodate larger groups. This was also responsible for the perceived lack of basic needs.

In contemporary times, there has been an increasing trend of individuals exploring pilgrimage sites on a broader scale. In addition to religious values, respondents expressed a keen interest in the cultural and historical significance of the sites, with a preference for guided tours and sightseeing activities. Furthermore, respondents have commented on the necessity for improved communication, with several respondents proposing that greater attention and information should be allocated to the organisation of pilgrimages. Additionally, some respondents have advocated for increased publicity to be given to the trips organised.

6. Summary of evaluations and recommendations for improvement

The responses received indicate that Slovenian respondents, akin to their Hungarian counterparts, predominantly visit pilgrimage sites for religious purposes, with a focus on spiritual and intellectual enrichment, as well as the discovery of cultural and religious values. The majority of respondents visited local Slovenian pilgrimage sites such as Brežje, Turnišče and Ptujška Gora, but international sites such as Lourdes and Medjugorje are also popular. The majority of pilgrimages undertaken were one-day excursions; however, there has been an observed increase in the popularity of longer pilgrimages, often spanning several days.

Information about pilgrimages was mostly obtained in the context of Holy Mass or from friends and relatives, but the internet and other media also played a significant role. The most

popular pilgrimages are organised by the church; however, there has been an increase in pilgrimages organised by individuals, families or small groups of friends.

Infrastructure development needs: Slovenian respondents expressed comparable sentiments to their Hungarian counterparts concerning the quality of roads. While the majority expressed satisfaction with the amenities provided to meet fundamental needs, several respondents identified a deficiency in the number of rest areas, toilets, water points and benches. For larger groups, some pilgrimage sites were found to be overcrowded, and pilgrims often indicated a need for more information material, such as signposts and other communication tools.

The **incorporation of interactive elements** was identified as a key area for development, with a significant proportion of respondents expressing an interest in the religious and historical significance of pilgrimage sites and the potential for enhanced participation in narratives and information presentations. It is recommended that the programmes take into account the interests of different groups.

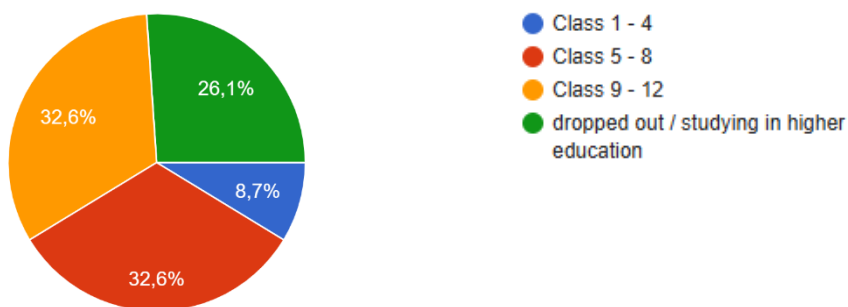
Improving wayfinding and digitalisation: Slovenian respondents are increasingly open to the use of digital tools, with many indicating that they use mobile apps and other digital tools during pilgrimages. To enhance the wayfinding system, it is imperative to provide more interactive maps and route markings, and to prioritise the maintenance and updating of signposts. The utilisation of electronic aids, such as offline maps and QR codes, could assist pilgrims in navigating the route.

Optimising programmes: When designing programmes, it is useful to take into account the different interests and expectations of pilgrims. While there is a shared appreciation among all pilgrims, irrespective of age, for the spiritual experience and the role of community, it is crucial to recognise the importance of catering to their cultural needs. For instance, the organisation of city tours or guided visits to the pilgrimage sites, with a focus on the history and culture, can serve to enhance the experience. In addition to group activities, it is important to include opportunities for individual retreats and prayer, so that each participant can find the experience that best suits them. Finally, greater attention must be paid to communication and publicity activities in the organisation of pilgrimages.

Results of the questionnaire survey of Slovenian students

1. Distribution by age

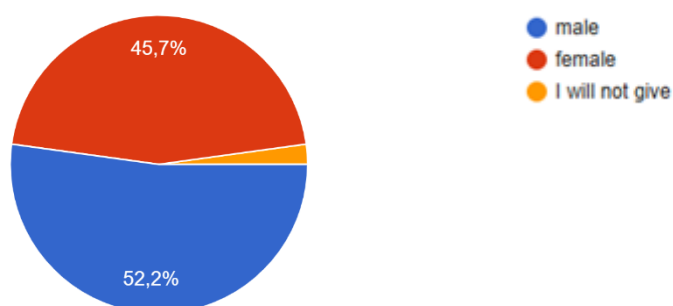
The respondents were drawn from a range of age demographics, with the majority of the 46 students who completed the survey falling into the following age brackets: 32,6% had already completed their studies (either in higher education or dropping out), 32,6% were in secondary education, and the remaining 34,8% were in primary school. It is important to note that different age groups have different needs, as they participate in pilgrimages for different reasons, and thus have different experiences in different age groups. For instance, younger people participate in pilgrimages for companionship and the communal experience, while older people engage for spiritual reasons and other religious motivations.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data indicates that pilgrimages are popular among young men and women, with 52,2% of participants being male and 45,7% female. This proportion remained consistent for adult respondents in Slovenia, in contrast to the observed changes in Hungary. The adult pilgrimage population in Slovenia is characterised by a nearly equal distribution of both men and women, with a proportion of approximately 50% for each gender.

In subsequent phases of the project, it is imperative to assess the tools and methodologies available in Slovenia to assist in the retention of young male pilgrims.



3. Breakdown by place of residence

Of the 46 students who completed the questionnaire, all of whom resided in Slovenia, approximately half selected towns and villages as their place of residence. The geographical location of residence was not found to be a relevant factor in this case, as those residing in villages and towns were found to be open to pilgrimages of an international nature, whether closer or further away (e. g. Medjugorje in Croatia, also a preferred destination for young Slovenians).

4. Information on pilgrimage routes, organisational information

The respondents tended to identify smaller pilgrimage sites of local importance and the pilgrimage route of Mary. Furthermore, Slovenian respondents, particularly those of a younger demographic, also identified one or two sites in Hungary. The majority of respondents indicated the Brežje / Turnišče / Marijina pot sites as the route:

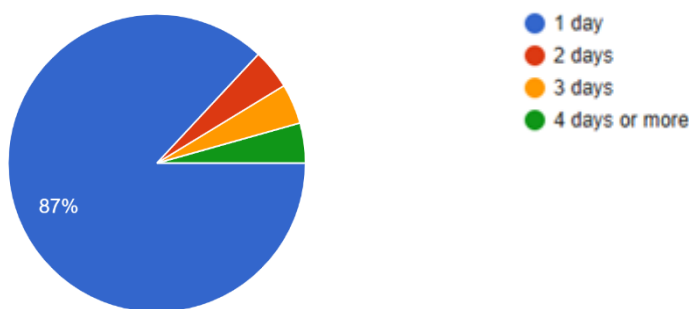
Brežje	30,43%
Turnišče	26,09%
Marijina pot	8,70%

The majority of respondents had not travelled abroad, with only 6,52% having participated in a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in Croatia, while an equivalent proportion had visited Hungary, for example Szentgotthárd.

The majority of the students who responded, 63%, visited the pilgrimage sites individually or with family/friends, while 34,8% participated in a "pilgrimage" organised by a church or school.

The predominant mode of transportation for these pilgrimages was by bus (45,7%) or on foot (32,6%), with bicycle also being reported as a means of travel. It is noteworthy that the Daniel Halász Memorial Walk, an integral component of the summer church camps, was also cited as a destination of interest in both the questionnaires and personal interviews.

A contrast can be drawn between the preferences of young Slovenians and Hungarians in this regard. The former group demonstrates a preference for shorter, one-day pilgrimages, with 87% opting for this option. Pilgrimages of a more protracted nature, which may last several days, are less popular; pilgrimages abroad are an example of this latter category.



5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

Information on infrastructure and services

As with the responses provided by adults, the younger age group also provided ratings for questions regarding services and infrastructure.

The majority of respondents provided favourable ratings, indicating satisfaction with the quality and accessibility of the routes, and expressed contentment with the infrastructure. The availability of facilities and services to meet fundamental needs was also confirmed. However, it is noteworthy that approximately a quarter (23,9%) of the respondents reported shortcomings in rest facilities, toilets and accommodation.

The question regarding signage and wayfinding received favourable responses. Furthermore, 82,6% expressed satisfaction with the quantity and quality of signs, with only 4,1% reporting dissatisfaction, which hindered their ability to find the correct direction.

Comments on the programmes and experiences organised during the pilgrimages

The majority of students report satisfaction in engaging in a variety of activities. The most popular of these are:

puzzles, quizzes - or similar short exercises to transfer knowledge	26,5 %
interactive exercises with digital tools	34,8 %
team games	32,6 %
seal collection systems	28,3 %
other	8,7 %

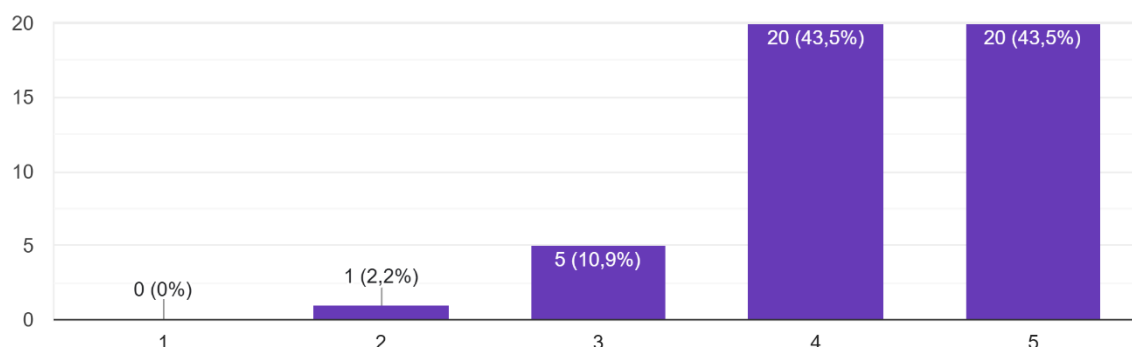
A significant proportion of the participants obtained insightful and valuable information regarding the cultural and religious significance of the visited sites, primarily from pilgrim guides (52,2%), lectures and guided tours (41,3%), games and quizzes (17,4%), and information boards (13%). In the event of an interest in a pilgrimage site or theme, the predominant method of acquiring further information is through internet research (58,7%). Furthermore, Slovenian young people expressed a willingness to engage in face-to-face meetings and interactive discussions (47,8%), and to receive further information via information panels (32,6%), paper (30,4%) or digital (13%) publications and information material.

It is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the presentation of the historical context, with the aim of facilitating a more profound understanding of the pilgrimage sites among participants.

The majority of respondents reported a positive experience during the pilgrimages, finding them to be aligned with their expectations. No written comments were submitted that addressed deficiencies or potential areas for enhancement.

How did you feel overall during the pilgrimage? Did you get the experience you expected? (worst rating = 1, best rating = 5)

46 answers



The atmosphere of the pilgrimage and the sense of community experienced have been met with a largely positive response, with 71,7% of respondents expressing a preference for the **location of the** pilgrimage, 67,4% considering the **atmosphere to** be significant, 26,1% enjoying the theme, 28,3% appreciating the organisation and the information provided about the pilgrimage destination, and 26,1% deriving benefit from the personal contacts made.

The majority of respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the prospect of participating in pilgrimages to Slovenia and abroad, as well as visits to the Pope and summer camps. These events were identified as opportunities for the acquisition of religious and cultural knowledge.

In the design of pilgrimage programmes, it is recommended that the needs of young people be given due consideration, with the incorporation of activities such as team-building exercises, recreational games and spiritual exercises. The programmes should be rendered more flexible to encourage the involvement of a greater number of young people in the events, while also providing them with the opportunity to explore independently.

6. Summary of evaluations and recommendations for improvement

A questionnaire survey of young Slovenian pilgrims revealed that the largest proportion of participants were either in higher education or no longer studying. The motivations of respondents for undertaking pilgrimages vary. Younger people cited companionship and social

experiences as their primary motivations, while older people indicated a stronger emphasis on religious and spiritual experiences. The majority of respondents resided in urban areas, and although their geographical location did not significantly influence their chosen pilgrimage destinations, they exhibited openness to both local and international pilgrimages.

The results of the survey also highlighted the need for **infrastructural improvements**. The quality and accessibility of the routes were considered satisfactory by the young Slovenian pilgrims, and the provision of basic amenities such as rest areas, toilets, and water supply were deemed adequate. However, a number of respondents indicated that more rest areas and toilets were needed, especially for the more visited, local pilgrimage sites. The majority of respondents found the signage and wayfinding to be adequate; however, a minority of students expressed uncertainty due to a perceived lack of signage.

The incorporation of interactive elements was identified as a key area of interest, with respondents expressing a desire to engage in activities such as interactive exercises, digitally supported programmes, and puzzles. Young people are particularly attracted by events that are enriched with digital tools and by searching for information on pilgrimages on the Internet. Furthermore, they expressed a willingness to engage in face-to-face interactions and interactive discussions. It is imperative to incorporate the historical context into the programmes to facilitate a more profound comprehension of the sites.

The enhancement of wayfinding and digitalisation is a key area for consideration. Digital wayfinding, encompassing mobile applications and online maps, has emerged as a pivotal aspect of the young respondents' experience. To enhance the wayfinding system, it would be advantageous to introduce more interactive digital tools such as QR codes, mobile apps or offline maps. This type of development would facilitate navigation for young people in particular.

The programmes of the pilgrimages themselves should be adapted to the needs of young people, taking into account the priority given to community experiences, team-building activities and leisure games. It is imperative to recognise the significance of a flexible programme structure for young people, ensuring the integration of independent exploration, social interactions, and spiritual exercises. It is also crucial to acknowledge the financial

constraints experienced by pupils, and the pilgrimages should be structured in a manner that caters to their limited financial resources.

The prevailing sentiment among respondents was one of satisfaction with the atmosphere of the pilgrimages, the community experience, and positive feedback was given on the organisation, the pilgrimage sites, and the personal contacts that left lasting memories. The participants expressed a desire to participate in further pilgrimages, both within Slovenia and internationally, as well as summer camps and events designed to enhance their religious and cultural knowledge.

A summary of the survey experience and personal interviews:

The narratives and customs associated with pilgrimages in the Central European region, including the border region between Hungary and Slovenia, are imbued with profound religious and cultural values. Pilgrimage routes such as the Route of Mary and the St. Martin or St. James pilgrimage routes have evolved to offer participants a combination of religious experiences and cultural discoveries. The development of pilgrimages between the two countries has the potential to strengthen religious and cultural links through communal experiences, while also offering the opportunity to discover the natural and historical heritage.

The objective of the present study was to explore the current status of pilgrimages, the needs of participants, and suggestions for their development. The data collected during the survey was analysed on the basis of questionnaire responses and personal interviews, which provide a broad and detailed picture of experiences and comments on pilgrimages. The results indicate that interest in pilgrimages remains significant in the present day, particularly with regard to meeting the need for religious and communal experiences. The study found that participants came from diverse age groups, and their needs and expectations were found to vary.

The younger generation, notably high school and university students, often select pilgrimages for their social aspects and the adventure they offer. In contrast, for the older generation, the primary motivating factor is religious and spiritual rejuvenation and the transmission of traditions. It is imperative to acknowledge that pilgrimages address both spiritual and physical needs, underscoring the necessity for enhanced infrastructure and services to ensure participants can complete the routes in a secure and comfortable manner.

The personal interviews conducted for this study yielded additional insights into the organisational aspects and developmental trajectories of pilgrimages. The interviewees concurred that the enhancement of the community experience, the provision of adequate

infrastructure, and the continuous consideration of pilgrims' needs are pivotal to the success of pilgrimages.

Drawing upon the experiential knowledge amassed during the pilgrimages, several areas for enhancement were identified. Of paramount importance is the maintenance of the routes and the clarification of the signposting. The availability of accommodation, dining facilities and other services is also identified as being essential, especially for longer pilgrimages lasting several days. It is imperative that the routes are easily navigable and that adequate resting places, toilets, and water points are available for pilgrims, irrespective of their age. In addition to the importance of signposting and waymarking, the use of digital tools such as mobile apps and offline maps is also becoming increasingly important for orientation.

The success of a pilgrimage is not solely determined by its physical conditions, but also by the spiritual experience it offers. Community and religious experiences, communal prayer, stories and interactive programmes are of particular importance for the younger generation. The historical and cultural aspects of places of religious significance should also be presented to participants to provide them with an even richer experience. The involvement of service providers and local communities is essential, and the principles of sustainable tourism are also increasingly coming to the fore, so that pilgrimages can bring not only religious and cultural benefits, but also economic ones.

Recommendations and proposals for the development of new pilgrimage routes:

1. **Infrastructure development:** the establishment of proper waymarking, signposting and rest areas along the pilgrim routes is of paramount importance. The maintenance of the routes and the provision of water points and toilets are essential to increase the comfort of pilgrims.
2. **Development of services:** another key consideration, with the establishment and continuous enhancement of accommodation and catering facilities in the vicinity of pilgrimage sites being paramount. In addition to basic, economical accommodation, there is an increasing demand for premium services, particularly among those willing to pay more for a superior experience.
3. **Utilisation of digital tools:** such as mobile applications and interactive maps, facilitates navigation, particularly among younger demographics. It is imperative that planned routes are available offline when using smartphones.
4. **Integration of existing religious and cultural monuments** is of paramount importance when designing new pilgrimage routes, in order to preserve and transmit the heritage of the area.

It is recommended that the proposed itineraries be integrated with existing tourism and cultural developments, with the aim of reinforcing each other's impact and offering a unique experience for pilgrims. The failure to achieve this integration may result in the long-term sustainability and attractiveness of the routes being called into question.
5. **Preserving memories and stories:** The promotion of pilgrimages should extend beyond their religious significance, emphasising their role as repositories of memory. Memory and personal narratives are experiences that can be accessed by all target

groups. Archives and libraries can also play a key role in organising and making available such stories.

6. **Cross-border cooperation:** the development of multilingual (Hungarian, Slovenian, German, English) information material for the János Brenner and Dániel Halász memorials and for Slovenian and Hungarian pilgrims could increase interest and accessibility. The development of local accommodation and the combination of existing religious/tourist elements could further enhance the sustainability of the pilgrimage routes.
7. **Respecting individual experiences and expectations:** The concept of pilgrimage varies from person to person, and as such, flexibility to meet individual expectations must be provided, as the opportunity to step out of one's comfort zone, to experience community and to retreat is important for all participants.
8. **Taking into account the needs of different age groups:** The needs of different age groups must be taken into account when designing pilgrimages and itineraries to appeal to both younger and older age groups. Interactive, community-building activities should be offered to younger people, while older people should be offered comfortable and easily accessible accommodation and rest facilities.
9. **Facilitating individual experiences:** The facilitation of individual experiences: during pilgrimages, individual experiences and reflections are of particular importance. The intensification of these experiences can be achieved through the training of pilgrim guides and the development of background materials, as well as the organisation of spiritual exercises.
10. **Training of pilgrimage guides and organisers:** the importance of training based on local knowledge is paramount. Although centralised training, possibly subsidised, can provide more impetus, it is essential to involve local actors and to promote local routes. It is imperative to recognise the necessity of distinguishing between religious and organisational activities (spiritual guidance and pilgrimage organisation).

11. **Programmes and experiential tourism:** In the context of designing new pilgrimage routes, it is recommended to formulate programmes that offer a diverse array of experiences, encompassing religious, cultural, historical, and community aspects. The incorporation of experiential tourism components, such as interactive activities, team-building exercises and historical guided walks, has been demonstrated to significantly enhance the appeal of pilgrimages.

12. **Use of modern tools:** The integration of contemporary tools, such as virtual reality technologies and the utilisation of influencers, has the potential to enhance the appeal of pilgrimages to younger demographics. The content and digital development of the Pilgrim's Guide, such as a QR code-based seal collection app, could also meet modern needs.

13. **Sustainable tourism:** The principles of sustainable tourism must be taken into account during pilgrimages. Involving local communities while preserving the natural and cultural heritage would be advisable, as would the development of programmes to support the local economy.

A balanced integration of tradition and modernity is pivotal in ensuring that the routes not only remain spiritually significant but also become culturally and economically relevant.

Closing words

In light of the recommendations formulated for the development of pilgrimage routes and in consideration of contemporary experience, it is imperative for the effective organisation of pilgrimages to encompass the physical and spiritual requirements of the pilgrims, whilst concurrently fostering active community involvement. The establishment of adequate infrastructure, the provision of services tailored to the needs of pilgrims, and the facilitation of community experiences have the potential to significantly contribute to the success of pilgrimages and the enrichment of the religious and cultural landscape of the region. The development of future pilgrimage routes should also take into account sustainability and the development of the local economy, so that pilgrimages contribute to the development of the region in economic terms as well as in religious and cultural terms.

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Project-Based and Own Data Collection

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 - Dr. Gábor Bódis
 - Imre Csire
 - András Dancsecs
 - Eszter B. Markovits
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 - Simon Štihec
 - Alojzij Kozar
 - Janez Magyar
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