



Messages

Evaluation of religious pilgrimage routes
based on the comments of people living in
the Iron County and the Muravian Region

Extract from

Content

Evaluation of religious pilgrimage routes on the *basis of comments from people living in the Iron County and in the Muravian Region*3

Wayfinding: pilgrimage, retreat or excursion?.....4

Presentation of pilgrimage routes and sites in the Hungarian-Slovenian border region6

Study of pilgrimages: a methodological overview8

Summary of survey experiences and personal interviews9

Recommendations and proposals for the development of new pilgrimage routes.....11

Evaluation of ecclesial pilgrimage routes

based on the comments of the people of the Iron County and the Muravian region

The aim of this document is to **provide professional guidance for the development of popular and sustainable pilgrimage routes**, based on the experience of the development, maintenance and use of existing pilgrimage routes.

It presents the types of pilgrimages and excursions that promote physical and spiritual renewal, analyses the pilgrimage routes in the Iron County and the Muravian Region, and suggests directions for the development of pilgrimages and pilgrimage routes.

This document is an extract from the corresponding study, which was prepared with the aim of summarising and briefly presenting a detailed assessment of the situation. Both documents have been prepared in the framework of the project *Untold Stories - Pilgrimages in the Slovenian-Hungarian Border Region*, in order to provide a professional basis for the project. The project, known as MESSAGES for short, aims to create a pilgrimage route linking the Slovenian-Hungarian border region, 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 pays special attention to the involvement of young people and the local community, creating a living link between the past and the present, helping to preserve and transmit a common cultural heritage. The pilgrimage route and related cultural offerings will thus provide an opportunity for believers and tourists from both countries to share 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 Vármegyei Municipality and the Municipality of Lendva. This document has been prepared by Muraba ETT and the situation analysis on which it is based is the work of the Vas Vármegyei Önkouever omavalitsei Hivatal.

Wayfinding: pilgrimage, retreat or excursion?

Do we call it a pilgrimage, retreat or excursion, do we take part in an organised or individual way on the routes leading to religious sites?

It is difficult to find a "precise" formulation, religious, spiritual and cultural needs are the main motivation for setting out on a journey, but it is important to distinguish between religious pilgrimages, the journey of the lay person and the tourist visit to the cultural values of the Church!

Form of wayfinding	<i>Religious pilgrimage</i>	<i>Secular, spiritual spiritual retreat</i>	<i>Religious-cultural tourist excursion</i>
Purpose	spiritual renewal, inner experience of inner peace	inner peace and spiritual spiritual balance	to discover the place visited
Features	<p>Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - community experience, - religious sites, sacred places visits to sacred places, - time spent on the road is important, which opportunities to pray, meditation, spiritual development of the pilgrims - the role of the spiritual guide is important <p><i>In Atala, they provide participants with a deep religious experience, where the deepening of their faith, religious rituals and sacraments are at the heart of the experience. and rituals.</i></p>	<p>They feature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not directly linked to church traditions. - usually individual are based on individual experiences, and are rather inspired by personal spirituality are driven by personal personal spirituality. 	<p>Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - they are essentially cultural cultural experiences and religious heritage - may carry a spiritual dimension spiritual content, but not the primary purpose of the visit

Participants in religious pilgrimages, secular retreats and religious/cultural tourism all seek renewal of body and soul.

Their common characteristics are:

✚ the aim is to escape from secular life, **to immerse oneself in a different environment,**

📍 physical movement, **change of place**, "pilgrimage", whether literal or figurative, is a characteristic of all types.

"" participants can gain **new perspectives** on their lives, whether their faith or personal spirituality or cultural knowledge.

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

The Iron County and the Muravian Region are rich in 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.

The most important pilgrimage route for Hungarian pilgrims is the **Route of Mary, which** also passes through Vas County. It connects Csíksomlyó with Mariazell over a distance of 1400 kilometres, passing through the most beautiful and holy places of the Carpathian Basin. The route is not only religiously significant: it also gives pilgrims an insight into the history, architecture and folk traditions of the Central European region. Associations have been set up to maintain and preserve the quality of the route, and their websites offer an interactive pilgrimage map, route descriptions and a list of shrines and accommodation facilities to help with route planning. In the first half of 2024, the Mary's Way Public Benefit Association submitted an application to the Council of Europe for the inclusion of a section of the Mary's Way in Hungary and neighbouring countries in the European Cultural Routes.

The **pilgrimage route of Saint Martin**, which winds for thousands of kilometres, connecting the important sites of the saint's life, also covers the Vas County and the Muravides. Along the way, pilgrims can visit many of Europe's great cities, such as Ljubljana, Venice, Pavia, Milan, Lyon and Vichy, and discover the rich history and architecture of the regions concerned. At the stations, cultural and religious programmes will be organised to evoke the time of Saint Martin and the spirit of medieval Europe. Every year, thousands of people set off on the St Martin's Way. In 2005, the Council of Europe designated the section of the Route of Saint Martin from Szombathely to Tours as a European Cultural Route.

The **Pilgrim's Route of St James**, commonly known as El Camino, is the best known and most popular pilgrimage route in Europe. Its main section starts from the French-Spanish border, crossing northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela, the tomb of St James the Apostle. It is the third most visited route in the world: in 2023, 4 460 035 pilgrims arrived at the famous cathedral. Along the main stretch of the route, there are numerous accommodation and services available for pilgrims. The El Camino

is constantly evolving, both in terms of infrastructure and the services it offers to pilgrims, while its network now covers the whole of Europe. The official sections of the Way of St James are located in both Hungary and Slovenia, and by linking them, Hungarian pilgrims could have direct access to Santiago de Compostela via Italy.

The religious centre of the **villages of Hetés** was for a long time the parish of Dobronak, but the Church of the Holy Trinity in Lendava, the chapel at the spring of St. Vid and the Mary Tree in Radamos also played an important role in the life of the villagers of Hetés. After the peace of Trianon, the villages of Hetés were placed on both sides of the border, and then, due to political regimes, religious practice was reduced in many places. Following EU accession, the border became truly crossable, allowing a revival of shared traditions. Today, more and more pilgrims from Hungary are visiting these sacred sites, which are once again becoming a common pilgrimage site for Hittites on both sides of the border.

Many make the trek on foot to the Basilica of the Helping Virgin Mary in Brezje **in north-western Slovenia**, the national Marian shrine of the Slovenes. And the Pilgrimage Route of Mary is a network of more than 700 km of signposted hiking trails linking Croatia and Slovenia, visiting various Marian shrines, churches and chapels.

The development of pilgrimage routes linking the two countries can strengthen religious and cultural links through communal experiences, while also providing an opportunity to discover the natural and historical heritage of the region.

Study of pilgrimages: a methodological overview

The aim of the situation analysis was to map pilgrimage tourism in the Slovenian-Hungarian border region, with a special focus on pilgrimage customs, infrastructure and services.

The study was based on 189 questionnaire surveys among pilgrims (2 countries and 2 age groups) and 11 interviews. During the face-to-face interviews, experienced pilgrims, pilgrimage organisers, parish priests, tourism professionals and project developers gave their personal experiences and opinions; generally confirming the feedback received during the questionnaire survey.

The questionnaires were used to learn about the habits and needs of pilgrims, while the interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of experiences, infrastructural aspects and the spiritual, religious and communal aspects of pilgrimages.

The information was processed through statistical and thematic analysis, the results of which were used to formulate recommendations for the improvement of pilgrimage routes. The results will be used in our future project activities related to the organisation and development of pilgrimages and educational activities, but will also be valid for the development of pilgrimage routes planned in other regions.

Summary of survey experiences and personal interviews

Pilgrimage routes such as the St. Mary's Way, the St. Martin's and the St. James' Pilgrimage Routes **offer** pilgrims today **not only religious experiences but also cultural discoveries**.

The hospitality of the local communities and the discovery of historical and cultural treasures make these routes really special and add to the tourist attractiveness of the area.

The tradition of pilgrimage also carries significant religious and cultural values in the Hungarian-Slovenian border region.

Pilgrimages involve different age groups, with slightly different needs and expectations. Younger people, especially those in secondary school and university, often choose pilgrimages for the **social experience and adventure**, while for older people the most important motivating factor is **religious and spiritual enrichment** and the transmission of **traditions**.

Supporting spiritual processes and fostering community experiences, while ensuring adequate infrastructure and taking into account the specific needs of pilgrims, are essential for the success of pilgrimages.

Based on the experiences of pilgrims and the interviews conducted, the **development of pilgrim routes** should take into account several areas. The maintenance of routes and signposting is of paramount importance to ensure that the routes are easy to follow for all participants. In addition to traditional signposting and wayfinding, the role of digital tools such as mobile apps and digital offline maps is becoming increasingly important to support wayfinding.

The provision of accommodation, meals or cooking facilities, especially for pilgrimages of several days, is essential to accommodate a larger group. Rest facilities,

toilets and water points are essential for both younger and older participants.

The key to **the success of pilgrimages** is the promotion of spiritual reflection and community experiences. Religious experiences, communal prayers, community and interactive programmes are particularly attractive to the younger age group. Discovering the historical and cultural background of places of religious significance and meeting local communities also enriches the pilgrims' experience.

The sustainability of the pilgrimage routes can be ensured by involving local service providers and communities, while also increasingly promoting the principles of sustainable tourism, so that they contribute to the development of the area from an economic point of view, while preserving religious and cultural values.

Recommendations and proposals for the development of new pilgrimage routes

Infrastructure development

1. **Infrastructural improvements:** proper waymarking, signposting and rest areas along the pilgrim routes are essential. Maintenance of the routes and provision of water points and toilets are essential to increase the comfort of pilgrims.
2. **Development of facilities:** accommodation and dining facilities in the vicinity of pilgrimage sites should also be provided and continuously improved. In addition to simple, low-cost accommodation, there is a growing demand for premium services, especially among those willing to pay more for a more comfortable experience.
3. **Use of digital tools:** the use of digital tools, such as mobile apps and interactive maps, makes it easier to find your way around, especially for younger people. When using smartphones, it is important that planned itineraries are available offline.

Preservation and integration of local assets

4. **Integration of existing religious and cultural monuments:** When designing new pilgrimage routes, it is of paramount importance that they are based on local religious and cultural traditions, thus preserving and transmitting the heritage of the area.

It is proposed that the routes be integrated with existing tourist and cultural developments so that they reinforce each other and offer pilgrims a unique experience. If this integration is not achieved, the long term sustainability and attractiveness of the routes may be called into question.

5. Preserving **memories and stories:** pilgrimages should be promoted not only for their religious but also for their role as a memory. Memory and personal stories are an experience for all target groups. Archives and libraries are important for the promotion of memories and experiences.

The role of archives and libraries can also play a key role in organising and making accessible such stories.

6. **Cross-border cooperation:** the development of multilingual (Hungarian, Slovenian, German, English) information materials for Slovenian and Hungarian pilgrims and memorial sites could increase interest and accessibility. The development of local accommodation and the combination of existing religious/tourist elements can further enhance the sustainability of the pilgrimage routes.

👉 Audience-centred design 🏠

7. **Respecting individual experiences and expectations:** As the concept of pilgrimage varies from person to person, flexibility to meet individual expectations should 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. **Age-appropriate:** Pilgrimages and itineraries should be designed to appeal to both younger and older age groups. Young people should be provided with interactive, community-building activities, while older people should be provided with comfortable and easily accessible accommodation and rest facilities.

👉 Programme and Experience Tourism 🏠

9. **Fostering individual experiences:** during pilgrimages, individual - religious - experiences and reflections are particularly important, and we can contribute to their intensification by training pilgrim guides and developing background material and organising spiritual exercises.
10. **Training of pilgrimage guides and organisers:** the importance of training based on local knowledge is paramount. Although centralised, possibly subsidised, training can provide more impetus, it is essential to involve local actors and to make local routes known. Religious and organisational activities should be treated separately (spiritual guidance and pilgrimage organisation).

11. **Programmes and experiential tourism:** when designing new pilgrimage routes, it is advisable to plan programmes that offer not only religious but also cultural, historical and community experiences. Programmes based on experiential tourism, such as interactive activities, team-building events and historical walks, can greatly contribute to the attractiveness of pilgrimages.
12. **Use of modern tools:** digital solutions such as VR technologies and influencers can help to reach younger generations. The content and digital development of the Pilgrim's Guide, such as a QR code-based seal collection app, could also meet modern needs.

Ç Sustainability Ç

13. **Sustainable tourism:** it would be important to take sustainable tourism principles into account when planning pilgrimage routes and organising pilgrimages. Involving local communities and preserving the natural and cultural heritage, programmes should be designed to help develop the local economy.

Building on tradition and combining new, modern elements in a harmonious way can ensure that routes are not only spiritually but also culturally and economically relevant.