



Messages

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

2024.

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Evaluation of religious pilgrimage routes in Vas County and the Mura 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.

In the study we present the types of pilgrimages and excursions that promote physical and spiritual renewal, analyse the pilgrimage routes in Vas County and the Mura region, and suggest directions for the development of pilgrimages and pilgrimage routes. To inform our recommendations, we have used comments received during personal interviews, online and printed content on religious tourism, 189 questionnaires 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*, in order to provide a professional basis for the project. The project, known as MESSAGES for short, 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 Danijel Halas (1903, Črenšovci - 1945, Hotiza). The project pays special attention to the involvement of young people and the local community, creating a living link between past and present, helping to preserve and transmit a common cultural heritage. The pilgrimage route and related cultural offers 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 EGTC, the Vas County Municipality and the Municipality of Lendava. This document has been prepared by the Vas County Municipality.

Introduction

Vas County and the Mura region of Slovenia are quite 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.

One of the most important pilgrimage routes is the Mary's Route, which also passes through Vas County. The entire Mary's Route runs from Csíksomlyó (Romania) to Mariazell (Austria) and connects various sacred sites, so that pilgrims can admire the local natural and architectural heritage, such as the Sarlós Boldogasszony Cathedral in Szombathely, an important stopover for pilgrims.

Another important route is the St Martin's Pilgrimage Route, which is also very popular in Central Europe. This route presents the figure and legacy of Saint Martin, who, as a saint linked 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.

For those living in the Mura region of Slovenia, the pilgrimage of Mary to Radamos is of particular importance, as is the shrine of Brezje, which plays an important role in local religious life. Brezje is one of the most important sacred sites in Slovenia and is visited by many pilgrims every year for spiritual solace. Here, too, pilgrims can visit a number of small churches and chapels that reinforce the sacred experience of the pilgrimage.

The pilgrimage routes not only allow for travel with a religious background, but also contribute to increasing the tourist attractiveness of the area. The hospitality of local communities, the discovery of historical and cultural monuments are all experiences that make the pilgrimage routes unique.

Finding your way: pilgrimage, retreat or excursion?

Do we call it a pilgrimage, a retreat or an excursion, do we take part in organised or individual itineraries to religious sites? It is difficult to find the 'exact' definition, it is basically determined by religious, spiritual and cultural needs, but it is important to distinguish between religious pilgrimages, the journey of person willing to find him/herself and the tourist who wants to visit 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 have a fundamentally different purpose and context. Clarifying the parallels and differences between these three categories will help us to better understand the spiritual and cultural needs of modern man and the role of pilgrimages and excursions in everyday life.

The purpose of pilgrimages organised by the **Church** or in connection with **ecclesial communities** - spiritual renewal, the experience of inner peace - is, as already mentioned, within the framework of religious communities, and involves visiting specific religious sites, holy places, and the time spent on the road provides an opportunity for prayer, meditation and spiritual development of the pilgrims. These journeys usually offer participants a profound religious experience, where the focus is on deepening their faith, experiencing religious rituals and sacraments. Both the communal experience and the transmission of religious teachings play a significant role in pilgrimages, deepening the participants' connection with their religion and their community.

Secular retreats **of a spiritual** nature also seek inner peace and spiritual balance, but are not directly linked to church traditions. 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 often focus on exploring the religious heritage, visiting sacred sites, churches, monasteries, but their main purpose is



to discover the cultural values and the beauty and history of religious buildings. Although for some participants these excursions may have a spiritual content, the cultural experience and the interest in religious heritage predominate.

Similarities can be observed between the three types. 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. Physical movement, displacement and 'pilgrimage', whether literal or figurative, are characteristic of all types. In all three cases, participants can gain new 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. Religious or cultural tourism excursions tend to focus on heritage, architectural beauty and historical sites, with less personal than religious experiences, and more of an intellectual interest.

In summary, church pilgrimages, secular retreats and religious/cultural tourism have in common that they all seek renewal of body and soul, but in different forms and with different motivations.

Presentation of international pilgrimage routes and places of pilgrimage in the border region of Hungary and Slovenia

Mary's Route

The road and its meaning

The Mary's Route is one of the longest and most important Christian pilgrimage routes in Europe, linking the most beautiful and holy places in the Carpathian Basin, including the famous shrines of Mariazell and Csíksomlyó. The route passes through various regions and countries, including Romania, Slovenia, Austria and Hungary (including Vas County). The Hungarian sections of the Mary's Route 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 Mary's Route. The main purpose of the pilgrimage is to visit shrines linked to the Virgin Mary, where religious people can seek spiritual purification and renewal.

The route passes through a number of historical and cultural sites in Vas County, giving pilgrims the opportunity to discover the rich past and built heritage that has shaped the spirit of the people who live here. The Mary's Route is not only a religious experience, but also a way to take advantage of the proximity of nature, often through picturesque landscapes, forests, hills and rivers, to recharge the body and soul. During joint pilgrimages, they can participate in communal prayers and masses, and meet and talk to other pilgrims along the way, thus strengthening the sense of community and belonging .



1. fig. The Way of Mary¹

Historical overview

The history of the Mary's Route is deeply rooted in Christian tradition. Mariazell has been a major pilgrimage destination since the 12th century, while Csíksomlyó owes its fame to the Pentecostal feast, which attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year.

Routes and their stops

The route is more than 1400 km long and passes through Hungary, Slovakia, Austria and Romania. It is one of the main stops on the pilgrimage route:

Mariazell (Austria): the famous Mariazell Basilica, one of the most important shrines of Mary in Europe. It is the most famous of the most famous monasteries in Europe.

1

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

Máriapócs (Hungary): a Greek Catholic pilgrimage site, known for its famous tear-drop icon. The original icon, depicting the Virgin of Sorrows, began to weep in 1696, and reports of miraculous events attracted believers. The church of the National Shrine of Mariapócs is the centre of the Greek Catholic community in Hungary, where many feasts and solemn services are held each year. A copy of the icon is still in the church, while the original is housed in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna.

Csíksomlyó (Romania): the site of the Pentecostal feast, one of the most important religious and cultural events for Hungarians in Transylvania. The centre of the site is the Church of Mary of Csíksomlyó, which houses 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 dates back centuries and still attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year. The open-air Holy Mass on Somlyó Hill 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 Mary's Route is not only of religious significance, but also an important part of our cultural heritage. It is an opportunity to discover the history, architecture and folk traditions of 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 Mary's Route, 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.

Like in the neighbouring countries (Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), associations have been set up to maintain and preserve the quality of the pilgrim routes, and their websites include an interactive pilgrim map, route descriptions, and a list of shrines and accommodation to help individual pilgrims plan their itineraries.

Its future and development opportunities

The Mary's Route is constantly evolving and today an extensive network of roads has been created linking the places with a focus on Mary of Central Europe. The total length of the road network is around 2,500 kilometres. It stretches east-west from Mariazell in Austria to Csíksomlyó in Transylvania, and there is another route running north-south, together forming a cross across Central Europe.

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

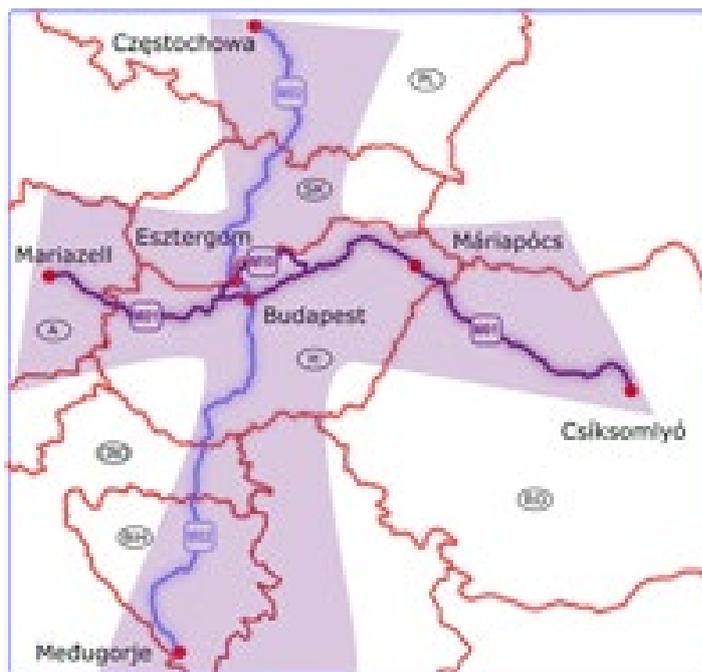


Figure 2 The Way of Mary²

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

Saint Martin's Route

The road and its meaning

The Saint Martin's Pilgrimage Route is a special route for Christian pilgrims, created in honour of Saint Martin, who became a bishop from a 4th century Roman soldier. St Martin was one of the most beloved saints of the Middle Ages, known for his work helping the poor and needy. The pilgrimage aims to showcase his legacy, cherish his memory, visit the major milestones of his life and strengthen the communal, spiritual experience.

The pilgrimage route from Szombathely to Tours township crosses several (12) countries, and the historical monuments along the way make it attractive not only for religious visitors, but also for those who are curious about different aspects of Christian culture and traditions. The Saint Martin's Pilgrimage Route also plays an important role in preserving Christian identity and European religious heritage, while contributing to the development of tourism.

Historical overview

The aim of the St Martin's Pilgrimage was to pay tribute to the saint, one of the most famous figures in the Christian Church. Martin's life and work live on in many stories and legends, inspiring believers and pilgrims alike. In designing the itinerary, the organisers have sought to showcase the most important places in Martin's life, including his hometown of Savaria (now Szombathely) and his resting place in Tours, France.

Route(s) and stations

The route is unique in that it connects the major sites of St Martin's life, winding thousands of kilometres across Europe, including Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Slovenia, Italy, Croatia, Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium, the Netherlands and France.

Via Sancti Martini - the main route of Saint Martin:

It leads from Martin's birthplace (Szombathely) to the place of his death (Candes):
SZOMBATHELY - LJUBLJANA - VENEZIA - PAVIA - MILANO - VIENNE - TOURS - CANDES

Among the most important stations are:

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. One of the most famous sacral places in the town is the Church of St. Martin, which attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. For pilgrims, the experience of being here, in this historic place, is particularly important to gain an 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.

Along the way, pilgrims will discover the many great cities of the route, such as Ljubljana, Venice, Pavia, Milan, Lyon, 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.

In 2005, the Council of Europe declared the St. Martin's Route from Szombathely to Tours a European Cultural Route, thus promoting the life and cult of one of Europe's most popular saints, Martin.

Popularity

Every year, thousands of pilgrims set off on the pilgrimage routes of Saint Martin. The hospitality of the local communities and the religious monuments along the pilgrimage routes offer pilgrims a unique experience. The pilgrimage aims not only at spiritual purification, but also at strengthening community ties and promoting dialogue between different cultures. The pilgrimage route links religious and historical monuments, offering pilgrims the opportunity to walk a route that has inspired believers for centuries in the spirit of helping the poor and practising charity.

Its future and development opportunities

The St Martin's Pilgrimage Route is constantly evolving, 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 Way⁴

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

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

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 Europe's most famous pilgrimage route, an extensive network of roads leading to Santiago de Compostela in Spain, where the tomb of the Apostle St James is located. The pilgrimage route has a tradition stretching back thousands of years, crossing thousands of kilometres of Europe. El Camino is popular not only as a religious journey, but also as a personal, spiritual journey, an opportunity to deepen self-knowledge, spiritual purification and a prayerful life.

The pilgrimage route of St James is not only of great religious importance, but also of great cultural significance, as there are many historical sites, churches and monuments along the route. The route attracts hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year, who make the journey for the communal experience, spiritual enrichment and to discover the historical treasures. (According to EuroNews, last year 446,035 pilgrims came to Santiago de Compostela, of which around 1,000 were Hungarian.)⁶ The El Camino offers not only a religious experience but also an insight into Europe's cultural heritage, 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.magyarurir.hu/hirek/rekordot-dontott-az-el-caminon-gyaloglo-zarandokok-szama>
[St James' Way, El Camino - Tips and advice | Spain](#)

Route(s) and stations

The pilgrimage route of St James takes several routes across Europe, the most famous being the French route, which starts at the French-Spanish border and passes through the northern Spanish provinces.

There is also an official section in Hungary, which passes through the following main stations:

Budapest: the starting point from where pilgrims set off.

Zsámbék: The Medieval 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 Mura Region, the centre of the Diocese of Murska Sobota

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

Maribor: Slovenia's second largest city, with many historical and cultural attractions (e.g. Maribor Castle, St John the Baptist Cathedral, Main Square, Stara Trta, Vinag Winery, Lent Festival, River Drava)⁷

Religious and cultural significance

The Pilgrimage Route of St James is one of the most important and sacred Christian pilgrimage routes, and is significant not only from a religious but also from a cultural point of view. By the 12th century it had spread throughout the Christian world and become a major pilgrimage route, but with the spread of the Reformation, by the early 1900s the Compostela pilgrimage route, like so many others, had lost its importance. However, in the last two decades, this opportunity for witness has been revived and thousands of people are once again using the pilgrim routes that had been forgotten.

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

During the journey, pilgrims discover the rich history and culture of the Central European regions. The villages along the pilgrimage route offer visitors a variety of religious and cultural events that showcase local traditions and values.

The St James Pilgrimage Route has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 1993.

Popularity

According to statistics from⁸, the St James Pilgrimage Route is the 3rd most visited route in the world. People choose this route for different reasons: religious commitment, spiritual quest and physical challenge. Along the route, a range of accommodation and services are available for pilgrims to ensure a hassle-free experience.

The St James pilgrimage is not only a religious experience for the participants, but also a physical and spiritual challenge, during which they can get to know themselves better. During the route, participants will have the opportunity to experience a sense of community, meet pilgrims from other countries, share their experiences and experience the beauty of the pilgrimage together.

What makes the St James' Way special is that the communities along the way all contribute to the care and support of the pilgrims, so that participants experience genuine hospitality.

Its future and development opportunities

The St James Pilgrimage Route is constantly evolving, both in terms of infrastructure and the services offered to pilgrims. The aim is to make the route even more attractive to young and older generations alike.

The Hungarian sections go to Lébény and from there to Mosonmagyaróvár - Rajka - Bratislava - Wolfsthal, from where there are several routes to Santiago de Compostela.

In 2022, work will start on revitalising the section through north-eastern Slovenia. The revitalisation of the section to Hungary is also planned with the involvement of local communities and tourist associations, tourism and catering units in Mura and Prlekija regions.

⁸ [Telex: The wildest El Camino: along the coastal mountain route](#)

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 St James the Apostle via Italy.

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

In Slovenia, the St James' Route passes through picturesque landscapes, including the towns of Maribor and Ptuj, where pilgrims can discover the local religious and cultural heritage. It also offers a special opportunity for believers and tourists from both countries to experience the pilgrimage together and learn about the cultural links between the two countries. In Slovenia, the St. James' Route will be developed like a tree trunk with its branches and leaves, reaching every village and through which they want to share their history, culture and art with pilgrims from other countries.

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

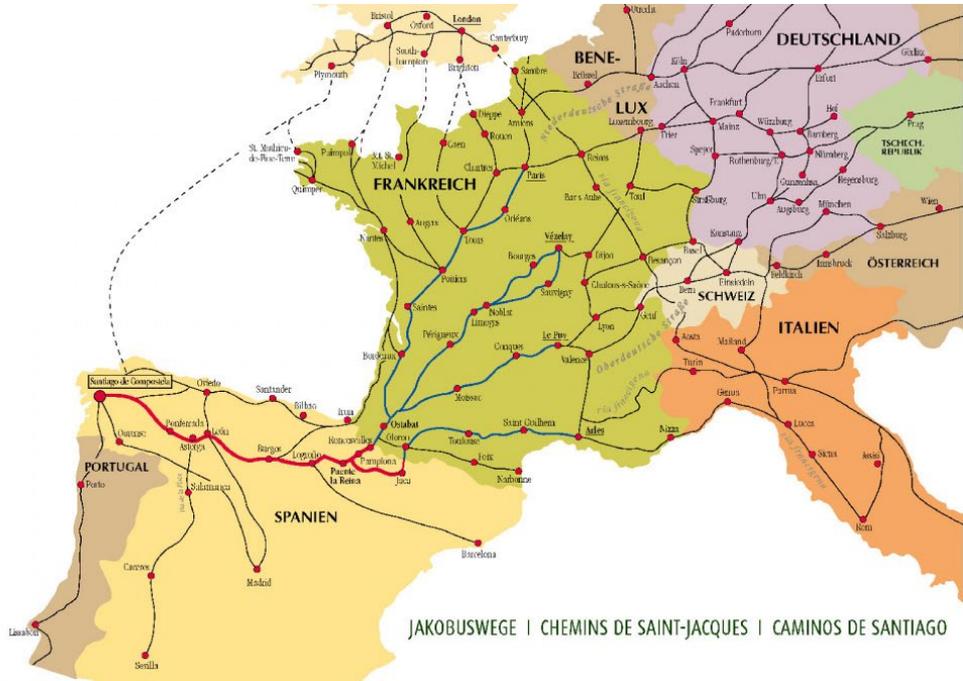


Figure 5 Network of St James' routes in Europe | https://hu.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szent_Jakab-%C3%BA

Way of the Pearls / Via Margaritarum West

The road and its meaning

The Way of the Pearls (*Via Margaritarum* in Latin) is another important pilgrimage route based on the veneration of Mary, linking Hungary and Austria. The name of the route refers to the metaphor of the "pearls", representing the various religious sites as jewels along the route. The Way of the Pearls is particularly significant for Christian traditions and devotion to Mary, as pilgrims can visit shrines associated with the Virgin Mary, enjoying a rich religious and cultural experience.

The western section of the Way of the Pearls, highlighted for our research because it leads to Mariazell, is not only of religious and spiritual importance, but also of cultural and touristic significance, as it links the worship of Mary, religious traditions and the heritage of local communities. This route offers pilgrims the opportunity to come into deeper contact with the most important sites of Christian faith and culture, while also benefiting from personal and communal experiences.

Historical overview

The Via Margaritarum, also known as the Way of the Pearls, is a medieval pilgrimage route through Hungary and Austria (connecting Mátraverebély with Mariazell).

The road connected the ecclesiastical and cultural centres of medieval Hungary, and thus played an important role in Christian pilgrimages.

Route(s) and stations

The western section of the route starts from Budapest and heads towards Austria, with major stops in Budapest, Esztergom, Székesfehérvár, Veszprém, Celldömölk and Mariazell.

The route of the road mostly follows the paths of the medieval highways on which pilgrims used to travel.

Religious and cultural significance

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

The route passes through holy sites such as Mátraverebély-Szentkút and Mariazell, which are of particular importance to Hungarian pilgrims.

Popularity

Pilgrimages are becoming increasingly popular thanks to the promotion of the route, and its continuously accessible, well-marked trail has also contributed to Via Margaritarum becoming a popular pilgrimage route in Hungary.

The numerous pilgrim accommodation facilities and other infrastructure elements (e.g. additional accommodation, catering services) along the route also contribute to the accommodation and catering of pilgrims.

Its future and development opportunities

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

The designation of the western branch of the route is an excellent example of how to designate high-quality pilgrimage routes using other pilgrimage routes and hiking trails in a sustainable way!



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

Pilgrimages, pilgrimage sites in Slovenia

Slovenia is a religious nation of believers, and in addition to the two most important pilgrimage routes (St Martin and St James), there are several pilgrimage sites and pilgrimage shrines, mainly dedicated to the Virgin Mary, which are regularly visited by the faithful. These include the Basilica of Brezje, which was declared a national shrine in 2000, and, in line with the project area, mainly in villages linked to the Mura settlements closer to the Slovenian-Hungarian border.

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

Marija Pomagaj Brezje / Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary

The Basilica of Brezje, also known as the Shrine of the Virgin Mary, is one of the most important sacred sites in Slovenia, attracting thousands of pilgrims every year. The pilgrimage to the Virgin Mary is of great importance to Slovenes, many of whom still arrive on foot, as promised. The pilgrimages to the shrine aim at spiritual purification and contemplation through the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The Basilica of Brezje is an important pilgrimage destination not only for Slovenes but also for believers from neighbouring countries. Many pilgrims have reported unusual happenings and miraculous healings after reciting the supplications.

The history of the sanctuary dates back to the 1800s, when many miraculous healings and conversions were attributed to the intercession of the Virgin Mary. The icon of the Virgin Mary in the centre of the shrine is a place of special veneration and is often visited by the faithful for spiritual comfort and solace. Visitors to the basilica can see the image of the Virgin Mary, but also attend mass.

The Basilica of Brezje can be reached from several directions, with roads leading through mountainous countryside, which offers pilgrims a special experience. The routes often pass through small villages and towns, where pilgrims can learn about local traditions and culture.

Local communities offer pilgrims a warm welcome and the opportunity to immerse themselves in their religious life.

One of the special features of the pilgrimages to the Basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary is the communal experience, where participants pray, sing and share their faith together. The shrine hosts a variety of religious events and celebrations, during which pilgrims can celebrate together and share in the Slovenian religious traditions. Such communal experiences strengthen the bonds between believers and contribute to spiritual development.

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

The Pilgrimage Route of Mary (Croatian: Marijanski hodočasnički put) is a network of more than 700 km of marked hiking trails connecting Croatia and Slovenia, passing through various shrines of Mary, churches and chapels. It is 409 km long in Slovenia and 393 km long in Croatia. Its most important pilgrimage centres include Ptujška Gora and Svete gore nad Bistrica ob Sotli, where there is a long tradition of pilgrimage, and the Marija Bistrica pilgrimage centre in Croatia, which is also a Croatian national shrine.

The route offers experiences for nature lovers, cultural heritage enthusiasts and pilgrims alike, showcasing the rich religious traditions of the region.

The pilgrimage route is well signposted, with rest stops and information signs. The information panels provide very useful information and data to share with pilgrims.

The route is part of the International Mary's Route network, which runs from Częstochowa (Poland) via Lőcse (Slovakia) to Mariazell (Austria), passing through Ptujška Gora and Sveta Gora 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

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

The pilgrimage sites of the Hetés villages

For many years, the parish of Dobrovnik was the main sacral centre of religious life in the villages of Hetés, but visits to the surrounding pilgrimage sites or to strange apparitions and miracle-working places also played an important role. These included the Church of the Holy Trinity in Lendava, the chapel of St. Vid at the spring near the village of Dobrovnik, and the Tree of Mary in Radmožanci.

"The connection of the people of Hetés to the church in Dobrovnik is still in the popular memory. From some villages, there were paths leading to Dobrovnik "under gardens", which were popularly known as the "mass roads". They were the shortest way to get to the parish church.¹⁰

After the Treaty of Trianon, the villages of Hetés were split up, and many people stopped practising their religion as a result of the political system that had been established. In the late 1990s, after the change of regime in Hungary, the border situation eased, and today more and more pilgrims from Hungary the Holy Vid spring or the Máriafa in Radmožanci. These sites have become a new common pilgrimage site for the people of Hetés on both sides of the border.

Pilgrimage site of the former apparition of Mary of Radmožanci

Similar to the pilgrimages to Brezje, the village of Radmožanci (Radamos), closer to the Hungarian border, is also a frequent pilgrimage destination for Slovene and Hungarian believers.

There are many legends and stories about the oak tree in the Black Forest where Our Lady appeared. Because of this, people from the surrounding countries came in droves, which after World War II did not please the authorities of the time, and many were punished and even imprisoned.

¹⁰ Zoltán Lendvai Kepe's doctoral dissertation "Population and farming in the villages of Hetés in the 18th-20th centuries"

"Despite the ban, in times of hardship and distress, people came to the Virgin Mary to support their vows with statues of the Virgin, leaves, holy pictures, rosaries... and carried away the bark of the tree, which is believed to have miraculous healing powers. To this day, pilgrims from near and far come in groups to the Tree of Mary, where they seek spiritual reconciliation, solace and miracles in the lap of the vast Radmožanci forest."

Source: Ella Pivar: Radmožanci-Radamos Pilgrimage site Mary's tree in the Radamos forest. Lendava Municipality Development Centre. n.d.

The villages of Hetés were divided after the Treaty of Trianon, but the border situation was eased after the change of regime in Hungary in the late 1990s, now more and more people from Hungary are visiting the Máriafa in Radmožanci, which has started to become a new common pilgrimage site for the people of Hetés on the Hungarian and Slovenian sides of the border.

St. Vid - fountain / Babys' well

Saint Vid was particularly respected by farmers, especially in the Mura region. It is therefore no coincidence that Vid's chapel is located here, where Vid's Day is celebrated every year. On the site of the present chapel, a church was built in 1828 by the parishioners of the Bogojina (Bagonya) Parish. A spring springs up in the immediate vicinity of the chapel, and its waters are said to have medicinal properties. The chapel is located in the neighbourhood of the village of Strehovci, on the hillside above Lake Bukovnik and belongs to the Bogojina parish.

The legend of the St Vid's Well in Dobrovnik in the Mura region is linked to three stories. The first one is about a sunken monastery, the spring is also known as the Babys' Well because children were taken there to avoid eye pain. Other stories tell of a shepherd who washed his eyes in the water and regained his sight. In the third story, a partisan during World War II shot into the chapel and became very ill because of the violation of the shrine and suffered for a long time, but could not die.

The Vid Well and Vid Day celebrations still play an important role in the lives of the people of Dobrovnik. On 15 June, Vid's Day the Hungarians went to mass at eight o'clock and the Slovenes at ten o'clock, the first mass was celebrated by the parish priest of Dobrovnik, the

Slovenes by the priest of Bukovnik. The families always went to the shrine on foot, praying, the children usually accompanied by their grandparents, and the older children joined them later. This is perhaps one of the reasons for the popularity of the place, which has become not only a place of pilgrimage but also a popular place for recreation and spiritual recharging.

"According to locals, washing and drinking the water from the spring has improved the eyesight of some people. Even those who doubt the miraculous power of nature will benefit."

Source: <https://www.dobrovnik.si/objava/87857> - Bukovnik municipality website

Even today, thousands of people visit the spring every year, where bioenergeticists have created what is known as an energy park. To this day, people still believe in the healing powers of the spring and take its water home in bottles, although the site and the healing hopes attached to it have changed to adapt to modern times, but this has not diminished the religious value of the place.

Presentation of the survey methodology

The aim 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 used two main methods: a questionnaire survey and personal interviews. The combination of methods allowed for a combined analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, thus providing a deeper and more accurate insight into the experiences, problems and suggestions related to pilgrimages.

Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire survey aimed to assess the habits and needs of pilgrims and to gather their opinions on the infrastructure elements. The survey asked the following research questions:

- Who takes part in pilgrimages and what motivates them?
- What pilgrimages do they seek 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 questionnaire survey provided structured responses from participants, which allowed for the use of scales and options to make the responses comparable and analysable. The completed questionnaires were pilot tested in advance with small groups to ensure that the questions were understandable and asked in a way that was appropriate for the respondents.

The questionnaires were completed in Slovenia and Hungary in summer/autumn 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 will be 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 below:

- 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

Data collected through questionnaires and interviews were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative data were processed using statistical methods, while qualitative data were evaluated using thematic analysis. 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.

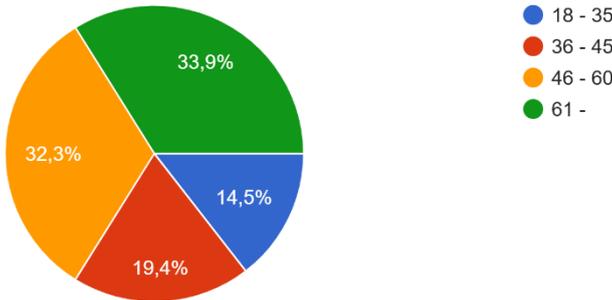
Analysis of the information received from the questionnaire

Results of the Hungarian adult pilgrims' survey

1. Distribution by age

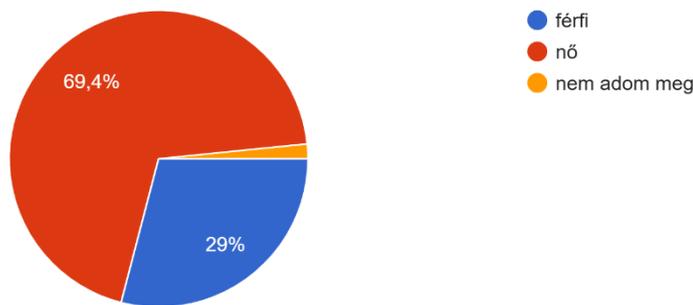
The 62 people who completed the questionnaire were of different age groups, with the highest percentage of respondents **aged 61 and over** (33.9%), followed closely by the 46-60 age group (32.3%). 1/3 of the respondents were pilgrims under 45 years old. The remaining respondents were in the 36-45 age group (19.4%) and young people aged 18-35 (14.5%).

An interesting insight into the interest in pilgrimages is provided by the age distribution of respondents, as younger or older age groups may have different motivations and needs when going on pilgrimages. The younger age group may be looking for adventure and spiritual experience, while the older age group may place more emphasis on religious significance and community experience.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data shows that both men and women participated in the survey, with nearly 2/3 of the respondents being women. This reflects the trend that pilgrimage-related events and surveys often have a higher participation of women.



3. Breakdown by place of residence

The questionnaire was filled in by 62 people, all living in Hungary, most of them in the city, but from different parts of Hungary, including Budapest and smaller towns and villages in Vas County. The geographical location of residence may influence the preferences of respondents, particularly in terms of the distance they are willing to travel to reach a pilgrimage route or site. 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 know the sites of pilgrimages to other popular European countries in addition to the prominent Hungarian sites, and the answers include both more famous and less known European pilgrimage routes and sites. On the other hand, respondents had significantly less information about pilgrimages on Slovenian territory.

Pilgrimage routes and sites in Hungary

The most frequent **pilgrimage sites and pilgrimage routes in Hungary** were:

The **Mary's Route** - This is one of the most frequently mentioned pilgrimage routes, linking several shrines such as Máriapócs, Mátraverebély-Szentkút and Mariazell. The route attracts many pilgrims and starts from different parts of the country.

Máriapócs - An important shrine dedicated to Mary in north-eastern Hungary, which is also crossed by several routes of Mary. The shrine is highly frequented and many pilgrims come here for spiritual renewal.

Mátraverebély-Szentkút - One of Hungary's most important pilgrimage sites, also a frequent pilgrimage destination. Among the routes that pass through the site are the Mary's Route and the St. Martin's Route.

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

St Martin's Route - This route is often mentioned, and is mainly linked to Szombathely, where St Martin was born. Several churches and pilgrimage sites can be visited as part of the route.

Pusztacsatár and Vasvár - These two sites are also popular with pilgrims and are often visited as part of the Mary's Route.

Máriagyúd: Popular with pilgrims in southern Hungary, it has also been mentioned several times.

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

Hungarian Camino - A pilgrimage route in Hungary, modelled on the Spanish Camino route, which links several shrines and is becoming increasingly popular with Hungarian believers.

Camino Benedictus and the Way of the Pearls - These routes are less popular, but are among the answers that also 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 show that

the Mary's Route plays a prominent role in pilgrimages in Hungary, possibly due to the fact that important shrines such as Máriapócs and Mátraverebély-Szentkút can be reached from several directions. These routes and sites link the Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic traditions and include a number of other smaller shrines. The St. Martin's Route is of special importance, as it is valuable not only from a religious but also from a historical and cultural point of view.

Smaller but popular places such as Vasvár, Puztacsatár 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

According to the responses, the majority of the participants (65%) are not familiar with **Slovenian pilgrimage routes** or pilgrimage sites, which may indicate that Slovenian pilgrimage tourism is less known among the Hungarian pilgrims who filled in the questionnaire.

The most common pilgrimage sites and routes in Slovenia were:

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

The Mary's Route - The Mary's Route is the best-known pilgrimage route in Central Europe, linking Marian shrines in several countries. In Slovenia, the " Mary's Pilgrimage Route " was developed in the framework of a previous Slovenia-Croatia cooperation programme, linking the Slovenian and Croatian Sanctuaries of Mary in the south-east of the country. The route is also connected to the international route network of the Mary's Route in the North-South direction: Częstochowa (Poland) - Lőcse (Slovakia) - Mariazell (Austria) - Ptujška Gora and Sveta Gora (Slovenia) - Marija Bistrica (Croatia).

Maribor, Celje and Ljubljana are three of Slovenia's main 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 - one of Slovenia's best-known pilgrimage sites, where the Shrine of Mary is a special attraction for pilgrims. The church is famous for its beautiful Gothic architecture and has a long historical tradition.

Based on the responses, the awareness of Slovenian pilgrimage sites is probably lower because these sites are not linked to pilgrimage routes in Hungary.

International pilgrimage routes and sites

For more information on **international pilgrimages**, fillers can find more **international pilgrimage** sites and itineraries. 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' Way) - El Camino, also known as the Way of St James, is one of the world's most famous 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 every year, who visit the route to deepen their faith and to gain a spiritual experience.

Csíksomlyó (Romania) - Csíksomlyó is located in Transylvania and is of special importance for Hungarian pilgrims. The site is famous for its Pentecostal pilgrimage, which attracts more and more believers every year. Csíksomlyó, with its chapel built in honour of the Virgin Mary and the surrounding mountains, offers visitors a spiritual enrichment.

Mariazell (Austria) - One of Austria's most important shrines, especially popular with pilgrims from Central Europe. The statue of the Virgin Mary in the basilica has been a central object of prayer for centuries and is an important stop on the Mary's Route.

Lourdes (France) - Famous for the apparitions of the Virgin Mary, the shrine attracts millions of visitors every year 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**) - a site known for its apparitions of Mary, which began in 1981. Since then, the site has become an important stop for Catholic pilgrims seeking spiritual purification and reflection.

Fatima (Portugal) - Famous for her apparitions of Mary to three shepherd children in 1917. Fatima is one of the most famous Catholic pilgrimage sites in the world and is associated with a message of peace and faith.

Częstochowa (Poland) - The famous icon of the Black Madonna is located in the Jasna Góra Monastery in Poland and is visited by many pilgrims every year.

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

93.5% of those who completed the questionnaire had already been on one of the pilgrimage routes they had mentioned, with only 4 respondents saying no. Of these, two would be open to pilgrimage, but all of them could not/do not want to go due to financial problems.

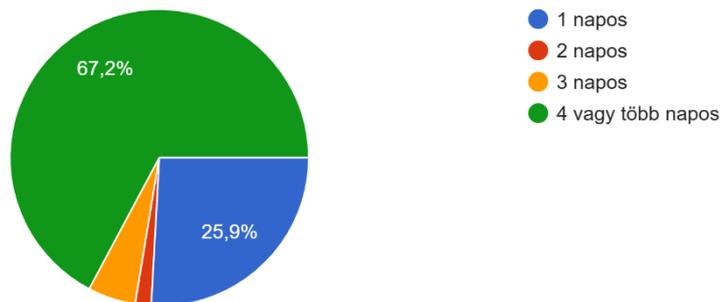
5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

General and organisational information and comments on pilgrimages

The questionnaire respondents typically evaluated their experience of pilgrimages in Hungary, with almost half of the respondents mentioning the Mary's Route, the Marian shrines (Mária Út / Máriapócs / Mátraverebély-Szentkút / Celldömölk) and the St. Martin pilgrimage route.

Most of them are motivated by spiritual/intellectual (85%) and religious (83%) needs, complemented by cultural and natural values.

Almost two thirds of respondents had taken part in a longer pilgrimage lasting several days, while a quarter of them preferred a one-day pilgrimage.



About 60 percent of respondents get information about pilgrimages from their inner circle, most of them from friends, relatives or in the context of a holy mass. Around half of them also use the internet and a smaller proportion have come across them through various media.

About 70 percent of respondents said that pilgrimages organised by churches or civil - religious - associations were the most popular, 6.9 percent chose a travel agency and the remaining 20 percent planned their pilgrimages individually or with a small group of friends. It is clear that group pilgrimages are the most popular among adults, but it is also clear that more and more people are organising pilgrimages for small groups of family and friends.

According to the answers of the pilgrims, most of them (75.4%) were informed by the organisers and guides, 28% used paper maps and 16% used publications. The responses also showed that digital devices are becoming increasingly popular, even among adults, with a third (33.) indicating that they (also) used a mobile app during the pilgrimage.

Walking pilgrimages are the most popular among respondents, followed by organised pilgrimages to visit a specific site. Depending on their place of residence, participants usually use some form of transport - car, public transport - to get to the place of departure, with locals arriving on foot.

Information on infrastructure, services, programmes

Participants were definitely satisfied with the quality of the pilgrimage routes, infrastructure and services, with more than 60% of them not noticing any shortcomings. Forty per cent felt that the number of rest areas, benches, waste bins, toilets and water points was insufficient, but there were also complaints about signage, and many people felt that brochures and information material about the pilgrimage sites were lacking.

The quality and passability of the routes were considered good, but there were - minor - problems with signage, both directional and information signs, but most of them said that they could clearly identify the route from the signs.

Despite the shortcomings observed, 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. 67% of the respondents noted shortcomings in the facilities at the pilgrimage sites, mostly dissatisfied with the number of toilets, rest areas, benches and signposts, but also lacking waste bins and various information materials. Overall, however, there was satisfaction with the facilities and services provided, but opinions were mixed on the number of places to stay. In terms of accommodating larger groups, the sites were found to be overcrowded, and this was also the reason for the perceived lack of basic needs.

Today, exploring the wider surroundings of pilgrimage sites is becoming increasingly popular. In addition to the religious values, the cultural and historical role of the sites is also a subject of interest to visitors, who have found it useful to be given information on this. Several commented that more attention should be paid to reconciling the parallel programmes, as they are open and interested in learning more about the sites.

6. Summary of evaluations and suggestions for improvement

According to the responses received, the most popular pilgrimage routes in Hungary, especially the pilgrimage routes of the Mary's Route, the shrines of Mary and the Saint Martin Route, are visited for spiritual and religious enrichment, but are also closely linked to the discovery of cultural and natural values. The majority of respondents have taken part in longer pilgrimages, but there are also signs that more and more people are opting for one-day pilgrimages.

Most people get information about pilgrimages from friends, relatives or during holy mass, but the internet and other media also play a role. Pilgrimages organised by churches or religious associations are the most popular, but the number of individual and small group pilgrimages is also high. During pilgrimages, organisers and tour guides, as well as digital tools such as mobile applications, are playing an increasingly important role in providing 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. Infrastructure, particularly services related to basic needs, was generally adequate, but pilgrim sites were sometimes crowded for larger groups.

Respondents also rated positively the cultural and religious values of the places of pilgrimage and the quality of information provided. Given the limited number of dining facilities and complementary cultural programmes, these areas could be identified as areas for improvement.

Infrastructure development needs: the older age group is also an active user of digital devices, more and more of them are using mobile applications, and it is clear from the responses that not only young people are interested in digitalisation possibilities, e.g. to access seal collection applications. They also need the possibility to charge their phones. Compared to young people, they have more modest service needs in terms of accommodation and catering, but both age groups consider that the number of rest areas and toilets is insufficient, especially for larger group pilgrimages.

Incorporate interactive elements: participants are interested in the history and past of the pilgrimage sites and are keen to participate in the 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.

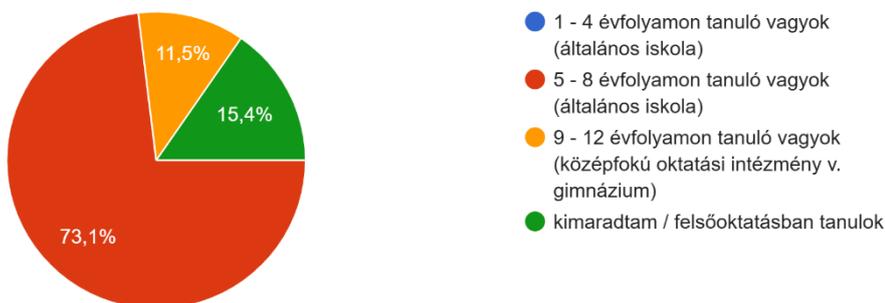
Improving wayfinding and digitisation: older people are increasingly open to digital solutions, alongside younger people. In addition to the use of electronic devices and apps, programmes should include the possibility to charge phones. Improving the wayfinding system, for example by using interactive maps and route markers, can help to orient participants.

Optimising programmes: programmes should be designed to meet the needs of different age groups. Young and older people alike value the experience of spirituality and the community-building discussions and meetings. In addition, pilgrim guides have an important role to play, contributing with their experience and expertise to the experience of the participants. During the programmes, it is advisable to coordinate the parallel presentations and activities in such a way as to attract everyone's interest, taking advantage of the free admission programmes where possible.

Results of the questionnaire survey of Hungarian students

1. Distribution by age

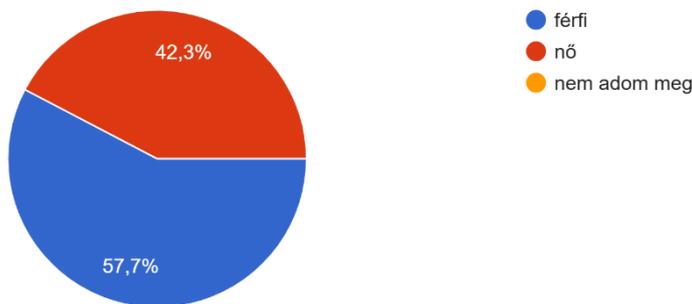
Respondents were of different age groups, with most of the 26 students who completed the survey, 73 percent, studying in upper primary school, 15.4 percent having completed upper secondary education (either in higher education or dropping out) and 11.5 percent studying in post-secondary education. It is important to note that the age group of younger or older students is different - they participate in pilgrimages for different reasons, therefore there are different needs and experiences for each age group, e.g. younger students are more motivated by the companionship and the social experience, while older students are motivated by spirituality and other religious reasons.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data show 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

The questionnaire was filled in by 26 students, all of them living in Hungary - half of them in Hungary and half in Hungary - who chose 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. Medjugorje in Croatia, a particularly popular destination for young people).

4. Information on pilgrimage routes, organisational information

Only a few particularly important pilgrimage sites and routes were identified by respondents.

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

The majority of the responding students, 61.54%, participated in the "In the footsteps of the Saints Youth Pilgrimage" , organised by the Diocese of Szombathely, which was advertised in

the school framework. During the 3-day pilgrimage on foot, the young people learned about the lives of the saints (Blessed László Batthyány and Blessed János Brenner) and had the opportunity to experience community, participate in prayers, singing and games. The aim of the programme was to strengthen young people's faith and sense of community.

It would be useful to include in the future work of the project a study of the sites and routes identified, and why they play a particularly important religious and cultural role for young people.

The pilgrimages were mainly on foot, but there were also reports of pilgrimages by bus and train.

Young people prefer longer, multi-day pilgrimages, with the majority (57.7%) having made a 3-day pilgrimage, but nearly a quarter (23.1%) having made a pilgrimage of 4 or more days.

5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

Information on infrastructure and services

Similar to the adult responses, the younger age group also rated questions about 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, but nearly 40% reported shortcomings in terms of accommodation and sanitation (e.g. toilets) and waste collection facilities.

Their responses also showed that young people are more concerned about having a quality and nutritious main meal and a comfortable place to stay, while older people were less critical about these areas.

There were mixed responses to the question on signage and wayfinding. The majority did not pay much attention to them, depending on the route and the guide, while others found them sufficient or even incomplete.

Based on the feedback received, as reflected in a documentary video summary on the internet, which is also available at¹¹, the Hungarian Pilgrimage Route student's comments, increased attention should be paid to the updating and maintenance of direction signs and the display of information boards. The use of interactive wayfinding applications (e.g. QR codes; offline maps) could also help with wayfinding, especially for the younger generation.

Comments on the programmes and experiences organised during the pilgrimages

The majority of students enjoy participating in different activities. The most popular are:

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

Many of the participants received interesting and valuable information about the cultural and religious significance of the sites visited, mainly from the pilgrim guides (80%); during lectures and guided tours (64%); through games and quizzes (44%) or from information boards (24%). If they are interested in a pilgrimage site or theme, they mainly look for more information about it on the Internet (69%). They are open to face-to-face meetings and interactive discussions (38%) and welcome further information on information boards (23.1%), paper (15%) or digital (23.1%) (7,7 %) in the form of publications and information material.

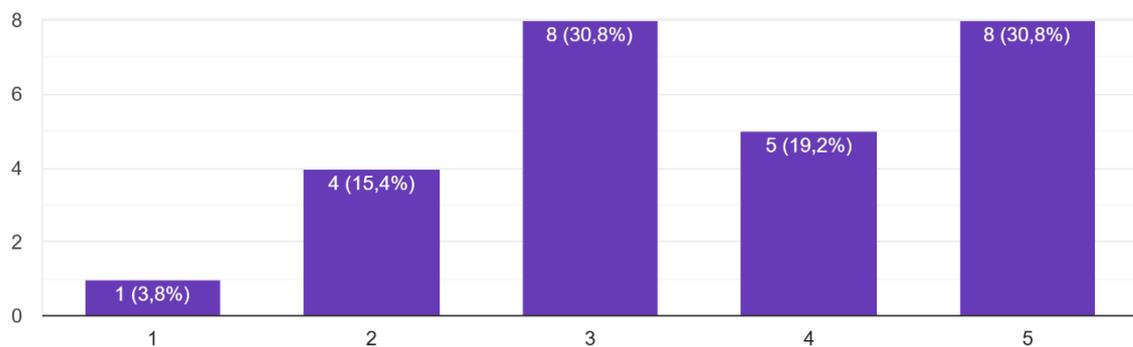
Interactive ways of imparting knowledge could be expanded, for example by developing mobile apps that impart knowledge through quizzes. Digital seal-collecting apps are popular with younger students. The organisation of team games has been a great atmosphere and experience for larger group pilgrimages.

¹¹ https://youtu.be/svyVZ5ZYNSg?si=tN3aCsOPyYt9y9_9

It may also be worthwhile to put more emphasis on the presentation of the historical context, so that participants can gain a deeper knowledge of the places of pilgrimage.

The majority of respondents felt well (192%) to very well (73.) during the pilgrimages and had the experiences they expected, and not necessarily because of the services and infrastructural facilities!

A zárándokútvonal során kapott szolgáltatások (pl. szálláshelyek, ételek, foglalkozások, stb.) mennyiben járultak hozzá az élményhez? (legrosszabb értékelés = 1, legjobb értékelés = 5)
26 válasz



The atmosphere of the pilgrimage and the community experience received generally positive feedback. The majority - 50% - liked **the atmosphere of** the pilgrims the most, 23.1% thought it was important to **make new personal contacts**, 19.2% liked the information about the place of the pilgrimage, and the remaining 7.7% thought the theme of the pilgrimage was a lasting memory.

They would like to take part in pilgrimages to Hungary and abroad, summer camps, events where they can gain religious and cultural knowledge.

When designing the pilgrimage programme, it is worth taking into account the needs of young people, for example by including more team-building activities, recreational games and spiritual exercises. Programmes should be made more flexible to allow more young people to be involved in the events, but also to give them the opportunity to explore on their own.

6. Summary of evaluations and recommendations for improvement

According to the questionnaire survey of Hungarian students, the respondents were mainly upper primary and secondary school students, who participate in pilgrimages for different reasons: younger ones seek a communal experience, while older ones seek spirituality and religious motivation. The majority of the respondents were male, an important consideration in the design of future programmes may be to maintain the engagement of young men.

The students' knowledge of pilgrimages was limited, mainly to the "In the footsteps of the Saints Youth Pilgrimage", organised by the Diocese of Szombathely, where young people learned about the lives of saints through community programmes. The young people mainly participated in pilgrimages on foot, but there was also feedback from bus and train pilgrimages. Most of the pilgrimages were 3-4 days.

The quality of the routes and the infrastructure were positively assessed, but shortcomings were noted in some areas, such as accommodation, sanitation and waste collection. Updating and maintenance of signage and signposting requires special attention, and digital tools such as mobile apps can help them find their way around.

Team games and interactive activities were the most popular part of the pilgrimage programme. The students were interested in the religious and cultural significance of the pilgrimage sites and were keen to find out more information online or during face-to-face meetings, talks and guided tours. Social experiences and new contacts were an important part of the programmes. Respondents rated the atmosphere of the pilgrimages and the social experience as the best and were open to learning more about religion and culture.

Programmes should be designed with young people's needs in mind, with more team-building activities, recreational games and a more flexible programme structure to attract more young people.

Infrastructural development needs: the younger age group has a need for comfort, the older age group did not have such needs: more toilets, rest areas and drinking water.

Incorporate interactive elements: digital and paper-based exercises, games and stamp collection are the main ways to increase the involvement of participants.

Improving wayfinding and digitisation: providing clearer wayfinding markings and interactive maps. 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.

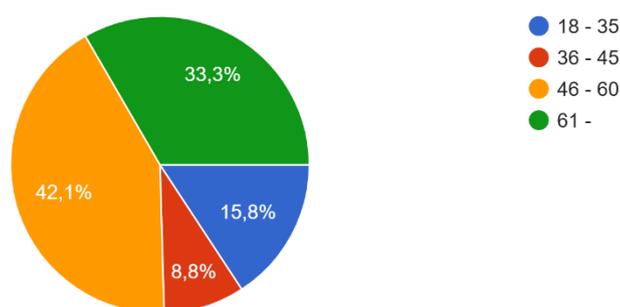
Analysis of the information received from the questionnaire - Slovenian side

Results of the questionnaire survey of Slovenian adult pilgrims

1. Distribution by age

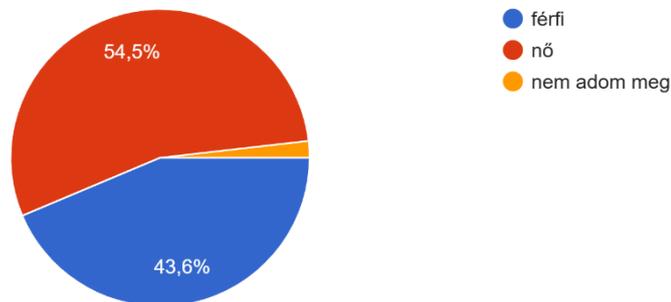
Respondents were of different age groups, with the highest proportion of respondents in the 46-60 age group (42.1%), followed closely by the 61+ age group (33.3%). A quarter of respondents were pilgrims under 45 years old: the 36-45 age group (8.8%) and young people aged 18-35 (15.8%).

As with Hungarian respondents, Slovenian respondents seem to be more active in the older age group. The distribution of age groups suggests that they may have different motivations and needs during pilgrimages. Younger people are still looking for adventure, spiritual experiences or other challenges, while the older age group is likely to place more emphasis on religious significance, carrying on traditions and community experience.



2. Breakdown by gender

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



3. Breakdown by place of residence

The questionnaire was filled in by 55 people, all in Slovenia, most of them living in the Mura region. The answers given indicate that most of them live in cities, but the geographical location of their residence may also influence the distance they are willing to travel to reach a pilgrimage route or site. 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 the respondents, besides the local (closer to their home) sites, also know pilgrimage sites to other - popular European - countries, similar to the Hungarian respondents, more famous and less known European pilgrimage routes and sites were also mentioned. A smaller proportion of Slovenian respondents know about the more important pilgrimage routes, pilgrimage sites and shrines in Hungary, but most of them have more information about international pilgrimages.

Pilgrimage routes and places of pilgrimage in Slovenia

According to the responses, Brezje, Turnišče and Ptujška Gora are the most visited Slovenian sites, with several other smaller pilgrimage sites such as Hotiza and Sveta Gora linked to them.

These sites are particularly important for religious communities, and pilgrims can often combine itineraries to visit several shrines in a single pilgrimage.

Brezje - One of the most frequently mentioned pilgrimage sites, famous for its sanctuary of Mary. Many pilgrimages are organised here and it is one of the most visited sites in the survey.

Turnišče - A popular spot for pilgrims, especially because of the shrine of Mary. Often visited as part of a combined itinerary with Brezje and other places.

Ptujška Gora - The Church of the Assumption of Mary is a prominent pilgrimage site in Slovenia, where many believers pray and seek spiritual solace. It also has a high attendance rate according to the survey.

Grad - Less common destination, but mentioned in the survey as part of a combined pilgrimage.

Sveta Gora - The Holy Mountain is a spiritually significant place.

Hotiza - Less known but an important pilgrimage site for locals.

Pilgrimage routes and sites in Hungary

In Hungary, Budapest, Szombathely, Pécs and Máriapócs are the main religious destinations for Slovenes on pilgrimage.

Budapest - The capital is often mentioned as a place of pilgrimage for religious visits.

Szombathely - Also a frequent destination, particularly because of its religious significance associated with St Martin.

Pécs - The city was mentioned in several responses and plays an important role in religious life, with many churches and religious monuments.

Máriapócs - One of Hungary's most important shrines of Mary, famous for its Greek Catholic church and pilgrimages.

Esztergom - Although only one respondent listed it, Esztergom is one of the most important religious centres in Hungary, as the Esztergom Basilica is the centre of the Hungarian Catholic Church and is also very popular with tourists.

Szentgotthárd and Csesztreg - sites that are of more local interest and are also visited by visitors from neighbouring Slovenian settlements.

International pilgrimage routes and sites

The most popular international pilgrimage sites among respondents are Lourdes, Medjugorje, Mariazell and Fatima. These sites are often visited by many pilgrims for spiritual replenishment and healing, but Rome and Marija Bistrica are also frequently visited by Slovenian pilgrims.

Lourdes (France) - The most frequently mentioned site, famous for its apparitions of Mary. It is an important destination for many pilgrims 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) - A major Central European Marian shrine, also visited by many pilgrims, especially Austrians, Hungarians and Slovenians.

Fatima (Portugal) - A pilgrimage site as popular as Lourdes or Medjugorje. Known for its Marian apparitions, the site is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

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

Marija Bistrica (Croatia) - A Marian shrine of particular importance for Croatian pilgrims, often visited by Slovenian believers (A previous Slovenian-Croatian ¹² cooperation has created an itinerary, with the shrine of Marija Bistrica as an important stop.)

The majority of respondents also know about popular pilgrimage sites in other popular European countries, and overall, Slovenian respondents - like Hungarians - are most familiar with the routes and pilgrimage sites related to Mary and El Camino, but they have less information about pilgrimages on the Hungarian side. The responses show that the most popular pilgrimage sites on Slovenian territory are also the Marian sites and the St. Martin and St. James routes.

91.1% of the respondents had already been on one of the pilgrimage routes they had indicated, only 5 answered no, 2 of them would be open to go on a pilgrimage. They will make their decision based on accommodation options, physical fitness and weather conditions.

5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

General and organisational information and comments on pilgrimages

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

Most of them are motivated by religious motivation/sacramental experience (50.9%) and spiritual/intellectual enrichment (36.4%), complemented by the experience of cultural and natural values.

Nearly two thirds of respondents (61.8%) had participated in a one-day pilgrimage, but longer pilgrimages are also popular, with 21.8% and 14.6% of respondents indicating pilgrimages of 3 or 4 days, respectively.

¹² <http://www.si-hr.eu/map/marys-pilgrimage-route/>

About half of the respondents had received information about pilgrimages in the context of Holy Mass, several had been recommended by friends and relatives, but information seen or heard on the internet or other media is also common. A smaller number of them 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 my own/family recommendation	5,45%

The majority of respondents (54.6%) think that pilgrimages organised by the church/parish are the most popular, with 10.9% still using a travel agency. The remaining 40% plan their pilgrimages individually, with family or a small group of friends. It is clear that group pilgrimages are the most popular among adults (70.1%). Unfortunately, the personal interviews confirmed that the number of pilgrimages with a large number of people has also decreased in Slovenia due to the COVID epidemic, perhaps also due to the fact that more and more people are organising pilgrimages individually, with family or friends, in small groups (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%

Based on the responses of pilgrims, 38.2% of them were informed by organisers and guides, nearly 30% used mobile apps/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 app during the pilgrimage!

In Slovenia, the most popular pilgrimages are short - 1 day - when pilgrimages are organised to visit a single pilgrimage site. The most common way of getting to the specified sites is by car (50.1%) or bus (32.7%), or on foot (14.6%).

Information on infrastructure, services, programmes

Participants were definitely satisfied with the quality of the pilgrims' route, infrastructure and services, with more than 80% of them - like Hungarian respondents - not noticing any shortcomings. The number of resting places, benches, waste bins, toilets and water points was considered low by those who felt there were shortcomings, but there were also complaints about signage and more people asked for brochures and introductory material about the pilgrimage sites.

The quality and passability of the routes were considered good, but there were some - minor - problems with signage, especially with direction signs, but most of them said that they could clearly identify the route from the signs.

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

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 small proportion of respondents (21.3%) noted shortcomings in the facilities at the pilgrimage sites, mostly dissatisfied with the number of rest areas, benches and signposts, but also lacking waste bins and various information materials. Overall, they were satisfied with the facilities and services,

but, as with Hungarian respondents, opinions were divided on the number of places, with the sites being overcrowded to accommodate larger groups, and this was also responsible for the perceived lack of basic needs.

Nowadays, it has become more and more popular to explore pilgrimage sites on a wider scale. Responses showed that, in addition to religious values, visitors are also interested in the cultural and historical role of the sites, in the form of guided tours and sightseeing. Several respondents commented on communication, saying that more attention and information should be paid to the organisation of pilgrimages, and some respondents said that more publicity should be given to the trips organised.

6. Summary of evaluations and recommendations for improvement

According to the responses received, Slovenian respondents, similar to Hungarian respondents, visit pilgrimage sites primarily for religious reasons, where the focus is on spiritual and intellectual enrichment and the discovery of cultural and religious values. The majority of respondents visited local, Slovenian pilgrimage sites such as Brezje, Turnišče and Ptujška Gora, but international sites such as Lourdes and Medjugorje are also popular. Among respondents, most pilgrimages were one day, but an increasing number of respondents were looking for longer pilgrimages of 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. For respondents, pilgrimages organised by the Church are the most popular, but the number of pilgrimages organised by individuals, families or small groups of friends is increasing.

Infrastructure development needs: Slovenian respondents rated the quality of roads similarly to Hungarian respondents. Although the majority were satisfied with the services provided to meet basic needs, the number of rest areas, toilets, water points and benches was found to be insufficient by several respondents. For larger groups, some pilgrimage sites were found to be crowded and pilgrims often indicated that they would need more information material, such as signposts and other communication tools.

Incorporating interactive elements: a large number of respondents were interested in the religious and historical significance of pilgrimage sites and would have liked to participate in the narratives and information presentations. The programmes should take into account the interests of different groups.

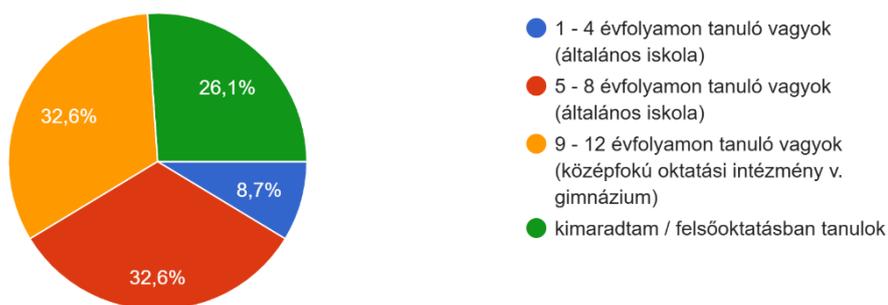
Improving wayfinding and digitalisation: Slovenian respondents are increasingly open to the use of digital tools, with many indicating that they use mobile apps and other digital tools during pilgrimages. In order to improve the wayfinding system, it would be important to provide more interactive maps and route markings, and more attention should be paid to the maintenance and updating of signposts. Electronic information, such as offline maps and QR codes, could help pilgrims to find their way around.

Optimising programmes: when designing programmes, it is useful to take into account the different interests and expectations of pilgrims. Younger and older pilgrims alike value the spiritual experience and the role of community, but cultural needs should also be catered for, e.g. organised city tours or guided tours that include the history and culture of the pilgrim's place of pilgrimage. 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 him or her. In the organisation of pilgrimages, greater attention should be paid to communication and publicity activities.

Results of the questionnaire survey of Slovenian students

1. Distribution by age

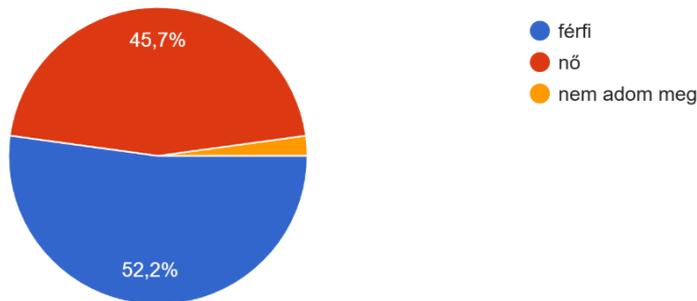
Respondents were of different age groups, with most of the 46 students who completed the survey: 32.6% had already completed their studies (either in higher education or dropping out), 32.6% were in secondary education, and the remaining 34.8% were in primary school. It is important to note that different age groups have different needs, as they participate in pilgrimages for different reasons, and thus have different experiences in different age groups. For example, younger people go on pilgrimages for the companionship and the social experience, while older people go for spirituality and other religious reasons.



2. Breakdown by gender

The data show that pilgrimages are popular among young men and women, with 52.2 percent of participants being men and 45.7 percent women. This proportion did not change for adult respondents - unlike in Hungary - as in Slovenia the adult pilgrims are almost equally divided between men and women.

In the future activities of the project, it would be important to examine what tools and methods are available in Slovenia to help retain young male pilgrims.



3. Breakdown by place of residence

Of the 46 students who filled in the questionnaire, all living in Slovenia, roughly half of them chose towns and villages as their place of residence. The geographical location of residence was not relevant in this case, as those living in villages and towns were open to pilgrimages - international - closer or further away (e.g. Medjugorje in Croatia, also a favourite destination for young Slovenians).

4. Information on pilgrimage routes, organisational information

Respondents tended to identify smaller pilgrimage sites of local importance and the pilgrimage route of Mary. Slovenian young respondents also included one or two sites in Hungary. Majority indicated Brezje / Turnišče / Marijina pot sites, route:

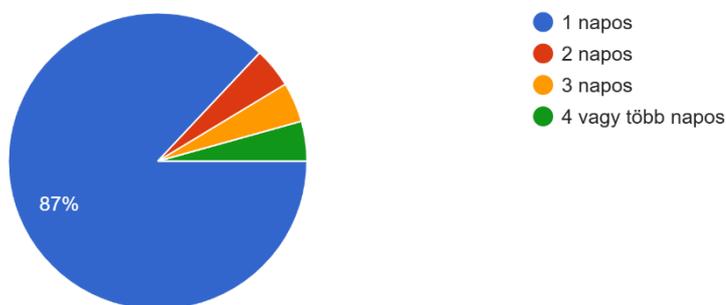
Brezje	30,43%
Turnišče	26,09%
Marijina pot	8,70%

The majority of respondents had not been to any foreign destinations, with only 6.52% of them having been on a pilgrimage to Medjugorje in Croatia, while the same number of students had visited Hungary, for example Szentgotthárd.

The majority of the students who responded, 63%, visited the pilgrimage sites individually - with family/friends - and 34.8% participated in a "pilgrimage" organised by a church/school.

The majority of pilgrimages were by bus (45.7%) or on foot (32.6%), but there were also reports of pilgrimages by bicycle. Not only in the questionnaires, but also in personal interviews, it was mentioned that they also visit the Danijel Halas Memorial Walk as part of the summer church camps.

Young Slovenians, unlike Hungarians, prefer short one-day pilgrimages, with 87% of them choosing this option. Longer pilgrimages lasting several days are less popular, with pilgrimages abroad falling into this response category.



5. Observations and experiences during pilgrimages

Information on infrastructure and services

Similar to the answers given by adults, the younger age group also rated questions about services and infrastructure.

Most of them gave an overall good/very good rating for the quality and accessibility of the routes and were satisfied with the infrastructure. Facilities and services were available to meet basic needs. Approximately a quarter (23.9%) reported shortcomings in rest facilities, toilets and accommodation.

The question on signage and wayfinding received positive responses. 82.6% were also satisfied with the quantity and quality of signs, while only 4.1% indicated that they found them insufficient, making it uncertain for them to find the right direction.

Comments on the programmes and experiences organised during the pilgrimages

The majority of students enjoy participating in different activities. The most popular 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 %

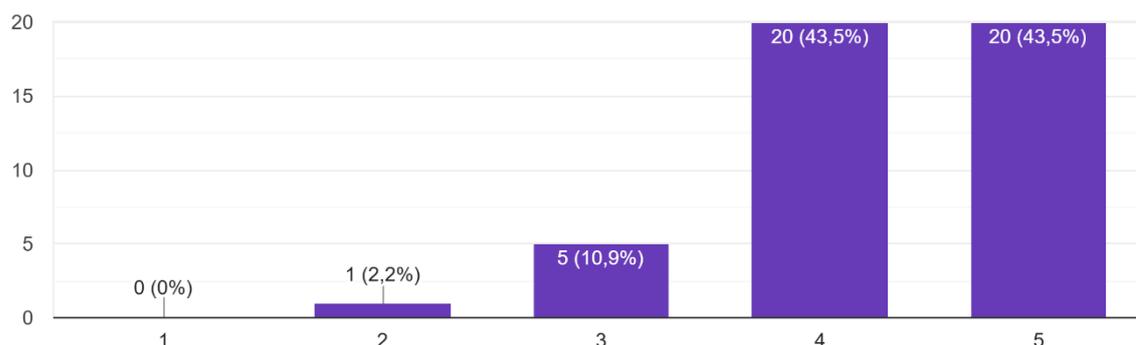
Many of the participants received interesting and valuable information about the cultural and religious significance of the sites visited, mainly from the pilgrim guides (52.2%); during lectures and guided tours (41.3%); through games and quizzes (17.4%) or from information boards (13%). If they are interested in a pilgrimage site or theme, they mainly look for more information about it on the Internet (58.7%). Slovenian young people are also open to face-to-face meetings and interactive discussions (47.8%) and are also willing to receive further information in the form of information panels (32.6%), paper (30.4%) or digital (13%) publications and information material.

It may also be worthwhile to put more emphasis on the presentation of the historical context, so that participants can gain a deeper knowledge of the places of pilgrimage.

The majority of respondents had a good time during the pilgrimages and received the experiences they expected. There were no written comments on shortcomings or areas for improvement.

Hogyan érezte magát általában a zárándoklat során? Megkaptad a várt élményt? (legrosszabb pontszám = 1, legjobb pontszám = 5)

46 válasz



The atmosphere of the pilgrimage and the community experience received generally positive feedback. The majority - 71.7% - liked **the location of the** pilgrimage the most, 67.4% considered the **atmosphere of** the pilgrimage important, 26.1% liked the theme, 28.3% liked the organisation and the information about the place of the pilgrimage, and 26.1% liked the personal contacts made.

They would be happy to participate in pilgrimages to Slovenia and abroad, visits to the Pope and summer camps. Events where they can also gain religious and cultural knowledge.

When designing the pilgrimage programme, it is worth taking young people's needs into account, for example by including more team-building activities, recreational games and spiritual exercises. Programmes should be made more flexible in order to involve more and more young people in the events, while giving them the opportunity to explore on their own.

6. Summary of evaluations and recommendations for improvement

According to a questionnaire survey of young Slovenian pilgrims, the largest proportion of young people who participated were either in higher education or no longer studying. Respondents have different motivations for pilgrimages: younger people are looking for companionship and social experiences, while older people are more religious and spiritual. The majority of respondents live in an urban environment and although the geographical

location of their residence did not significantly influence the pilgrimage destinations they chose, they were open to both local and international pilgrimages.

Infrastructural improvement needs: feedback from young Slovenian pilgrims indicated that the quality and passability of the routes were considered good and that the provision of basic needs such as rest areas, toilets and water supply was adequate. However, a number of respondents indicated that more rest areas and toilets were needed, especially for the more visited - local - pilgrimage sites. Signage and wayfinding were also adequate for the majority, with only a few students indicating a lack of signage, which caused them uncertainty.

Incorporation of interactive elements: respondents are interested in the religious and historical significance of pilgrimage sites and are keen to participate in interactive exercises, digitally supported programmes, puzzles, quizzes. Young people are particularly attracted by events that are enriched with digital tools and by searching for information on pilgrimages on the Internet. They are also open to face-to-face meetings and interactive discussions. It would also be important to present the historical context during the programmes to gain a deeper knowledge of the sites.

Improving wayfinding and digitalisation: digital wayfinding, such as mobile apps and online maps, are becoming increasingly important for young respondents. To improve the wayfinding system, it would be useful to introduce more interactive digital tools such as QR codes, mobile apps or offline maps. This type of development would make it easier for young people in particular to find their way around the pilgrimages.

Optimising the programmes: the programmes of the pilgrimages should be adapted to the needs of young people, taking into account the priority given to community experiences, team-building activities and leisure games. For young people in particular, a flexible programme structure is important, allowing for independent exploration, while also including social experiences and spiritual exercises. The pilgrimages should cater for a variety of interests and take into account the more modest financial means of the pupils.

Overall, respondents were satisfied with the atmosphere of the pilgrimages, the community experience, and gave positive feedback on the organisation, the pilgrimage sites and the

personal contacts that left lasting memories. They would like to participate in pilgrimages in Slovenia and abroad, summer camps and events that would enrich their religious and cultural knowledge.

Summary of survey experiences and personal interviews:

The stories and traditions of the pilgrimages carry significant religious and cultural values in the Central European region, including the border region between Hungary and Slovenia. Some pilgrimage routes, such as the Mary's Route and the St. Martin or St. James pilgrimage routes, nowadays offer participants not only religious experiences but also cultural discoveries. The development of pilgrimages between the two countries can strengthen religious and cultural links through communal experiences, while also providing an opportunity to discover the natural and historical heritage.

The aim of the study was to explore the current situation of pilgrimages, the needs of participants and suggestions for the development of pilgrimages. 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 show that interest in pilgrimages is still significant today, particularly in terms of meeting needs for religious and communal experiences. Participants come from different age groups and their needs and expectations are somewhat different.

The younger generation, especially high school and university students, often choose pilgrimages for the social experience and adventure, while for the older generation the religious and spiritual recharging, the transmission of traditions is the most important motivating factor. Pilgrimages are not only about spiritual but also about physical needs, so it is essential to improve infrastructure and services to enable participants to complete the routes in comfort and safety.

The personal interviews provided further important information on the organisation and development of pilgrimages. The interviewees agreed that strengthening the community experience, providing adequate infrastructure and taking into account the needs of pilgrims on an ongoing basis are essential for the success of pilgrimages.

Based on the experience gained during the pilgrimages, several areas for improvement were highlighted. Maintenance of the routes and clarification of the signposting is one of the most important tasks. The availability of accommodation, dining facilities and other services is also

essential, especially for longer pilgrimages lasting several days. For young and older people alike, it is essential that the routes are easy to follow and that adequate resting places, toilets and water points are available for pilgrims. In addition to signposting and waymarking, the use of digital tools such as mobile apps and offline maps is also becoming increasingly important for orientation.

Not only the physical conditions, but also the spiritual experience contribute to the success of pilgrimages. Community and religious experiences, communal prayer, stories and interactive programmes are particularly important 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. **Taking into account the needs of different age groups:** new pilgrimage routes should be designed to appeal to both younger and older people. Interactive, community-building programmes for young people and comfortable and easily accessible accommodation and rest areas for older people should be provided.
2. **Infrastructure development:** 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.
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 routes are available offline.
4. **Facilitating 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 materials, as well as by organising spiritual exercises.
5. **Sustainable tourism:** it would be important to take into account the principles of sustainable tourism during pilgrimages. Involving local communities, while preserving the natural and cultural heritage, it would be advisable to develop programmes that help the local economy.
6. **Development of services:** accommodation and catering facilities in the vicinity of the pilgrimage sites should be provided and continuously improved. In addition to simple, inexpensive accommodation, there is a growing demand for premium services, especially among those willing to pay more for a more comfortable experience.

7. **Programmes and experiential tourism:** when developing new pilgrimage routes, it is advisable to organise 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
8. **Integration of existing religious and cultural monuments:** when designing new pilgrimage routes, it is of paramount importance that they build on local religious and cultural traditions, thus preserving and transmitting the heritage of the area. The routes should be linked to existing tourist and cultural developments in an integrated way, 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. A harmonious combination of building on tradition and new, modern elements can ensure that the routes are not only spiritually but also culturally and economically relevant.
9. **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 can also play a key role in organising and making available such stories.
10. **Respecting individual experiences and expectations:** as the concept of pilgrimage varies from person to person, flexibility to meet individual expectations must be ensured, as the opportunity to step out of one's comfort zone, to experience community and to retreat is important for all participants.
11. **Use of modern tools:** digital solutions such as VR technologies and influencers can help 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.

12. **Training of pilgrim guides:** the importance of training based on local knowledge is paramount. While centrally funded training, possibly subsidised, can provide more impetus, it is essential to involve local actors and to promote local routes. Religious and organisational activities should be treated separately (spiritual guidance and pilgrimage organisation).
13. **Cross-border cooperation:** the development of multilingual (Hungarian, Slovenian, German, English) information material for the János Brenner and Danijel Halas 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.

Closing words

Based on the recommendations made for the development of pilgrimage routes and on current experience, it is essential for successful pilgrimages to take into account the physical and spiritual needs of the pilgrims and to actively involve local communities. Adequate infrastructure, services adapted to the needs of pilgrims and the provision of community experiences can all contribute to the success of pilgrimages and to the enrichment of the religious and cultural life 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.