

The Mary's Route as a Possible European Cultural Route

Zsombor Kápolnai¹, Lóránt Dávid², Norbert Beták³, Dorottya Varga⁴

¹Mary's Route

² Hungarian University of Agriculture and Life Sciences (MATE), Institute of Rural Development and Sustainable Economy, Department of Sustainable Tourism

³ University of Nitra Constantine department of tourism Slovakia

⁴ Tourism and External Relations Officer Békés County Municipality Office

Introduction

The European Network Association of Mary's Route (Eunam) is a Christian-based cultural and tourist association on a European scale, with the important aim of preserving and strengthening European Christian traditions. The history of the Mary's Route dates back nearly two decades, when a pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó gave rise to the idea of a route linking the Marian shrines across the Carpathian Basin. The ideas were followed by actions, after pilgrimage events, meetings and planning, the route, which is more than 2000 kilometres long, was mapped out. Today, the Mary's Route is still supported by nearly 400 volunteers, and thanks to their sacrifice, the route and signs of the Mary's Route are still visible today. However, the Mary's Route is much more than a marked route through a beautiful natural environment. The Mary's Route carries the faith, history, ethnographic traditions and gastronomy of the Carpathian Basin. It also connects the 15 million Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin and the nations living with them. The Mary's Route is both an instrument of peace and of unity.

In 2021, the organisations that care for the Central European sections of the Mary's Route have joined a renewed alliance, the European Network of the Mary's Route.

The development of the Mary's Route at the Central European level must be pursued in a strategic way, especially as the award of the international trademark of the European Cultural Route will be an important milestone in promoting the international visibility of the Mary's Route in the near future.

Eunam has the important task of conveying values with 1000 years of roots as a sustainable tourism product that can be operated to the standards expected in the 21st century (in particular digitalisation, promotion, marketing, management).

This paper presents the main trends in religious tourism. Since the Way of Mary started its operation in Hungary, the study focuses on the situation of religious tourism in Hungary.

The Council of Europe's European Cultural Routes programme is presented. The Way of Mary would like to participate in this programme. The Way of Mary is active in several Central European countries, represented by an association called the European Network of the Mary's Route. The paper presents the historical background of the Way of Mary and its relation to the European Cultural Routes programme. The European Cultural Routes are categorised by theme. The Route of St Mary has been included as a candidate in the categories.

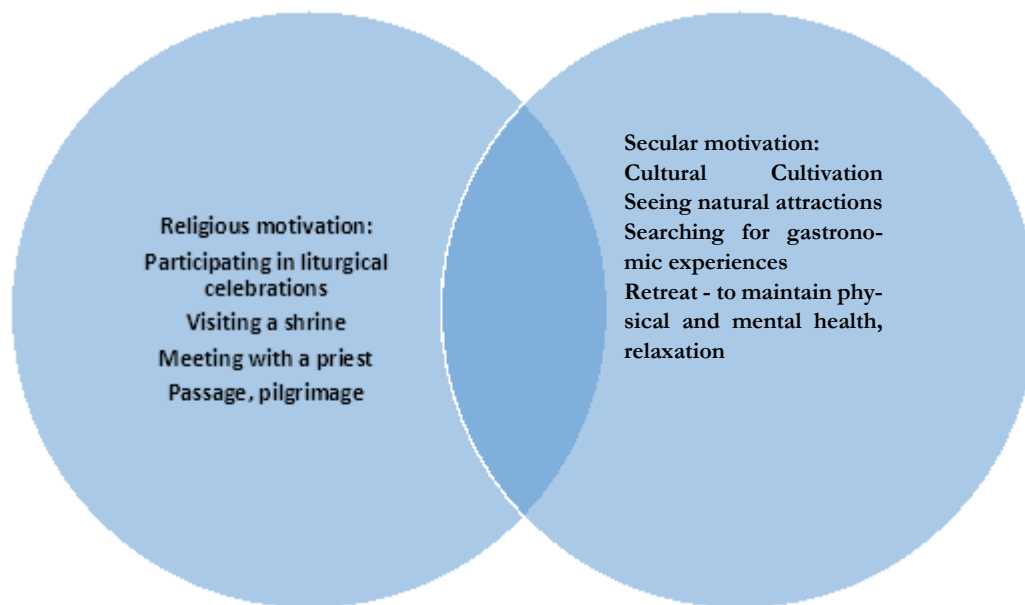
The main trends in religious tourism today

Religious tourism is one of the most dynamically developing sectors of tourism today. Worldwide, religious tourism accounts for more than 300 million trips per year, with more than 600 million trips in 2019 (UNWTO, 2020).

In terms of their tourism profile, participants in religious tourism can be divided into those with a religious and those with a secular identity. Religious-identity participants are defined as those who are deep believers and travel specifically for religious purposes. The most common motivations are: to travel on a pilgrimage to a liturgical occasion, such as a farewell, to visit religious monuments (there are also many images and statues of Mary in Central Europe). The most important personal encounter is probably with the head of the Roman Catholic Church, which is possible on pilgrimages to the Vatican and on papal visits. An important motivation is to participate in pilgrimages, which is the most relevant of the religious tourism motivations for the Mary's Route.

Provision of gastronomic experiences and incentives for the preservation of physical and mental health Religious tourism must offer a range of products and services to satisfy the distinctive profiles described above (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Religious tourism motivations



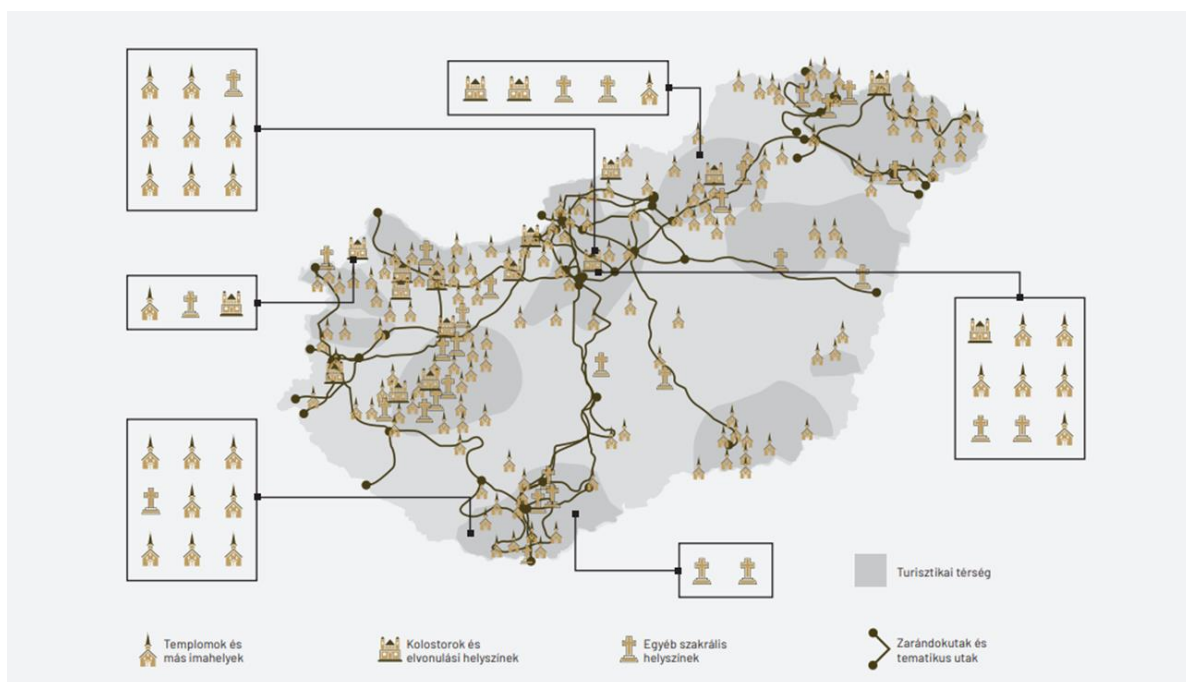
Source: Hungarian Tourist Agency

Religious tourism is an important pillar of tourism in the countries of Central Europe (SULYOK 2013). In Hungary, it was defined by the Hungarian Tourism Agency in 2021. The main directions for the development of tourism in Hungary are set out in the Tourism 2.0 Strategy, a defining framework plan prepared by the Hungarian Tourism Agency in 2021. The document also analyses the changes caused by the pandemic of the coronavirus. From the point of view of religious tourism, the Tourism 2.0 Strategy is of particular importance, as religious tourism has been included among the 4 pillars of the development of Hungarian tourism. In addition to religious tourism, other development pillars are hospitality, health tourism and the MICE segment (Tourism 2.0 Strategy).

The Hungarian Tourism Agency has identified nearly 4,000 sacred sites in the Tourism 2.0 Strategy, which it has narrowed down to a tenth of the number of sites based on tourism criteria. In the strategy document, the 237 most relevant sites in Hungary from a tourism point of view were identified as religious tourism, with the sites being concentrated in the North-Middle Mountain axis and Lake Balaton. All tourist regions have a number of outstanding sacral treasures, but most of them are concentrated in five tourist regions: Budapest and its surroundings (46), Tokaj and Nyíregyháza (28), Lake Balaton (25), Mátra-Bükk (23), Pécs-Villány (18).

Pilgrimage routes and thematic routes link the treasures. The longest pilgrimage route in Hungary is the Mary's Route, which connects the treasures in both the west-east and north-south directions (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Hungary's sacral treasures based on a restricted database (2021)



Source: *Tourism 2.0 Strategy*

The Hungarian Tourism Agency has classified the assets into three main groups: flagship assets, asset enhancers and asset complements. Flagships are those assets which are of tourist attraction in themselves, serving as a destination for visits. The flagship assets are those that make a significant contribution to the tourism offer of a destination and are a key element of the visit. The third category is for asset additions, which are not considered to be a tourist attraction during a trip. In this analogy, the Route of Mary's network of routes in Hungary and internationally includes flagship assets, asset enhancers and asset enrichers.

Our flagship assets fall into four main categories:

- Shrines, pilgrimage sites, churches and other places of worship: 168 sites
- Monasteries and retreats: 20 sites
- Pilgrimage routes and thematic routes: 8 routes
- Other sacred sites: 31 sites.

Source: *Tourism 2.0 Strategy*

With its several hundred kilometres in Hungary, Mary's Route is one of the most relevant sites of outstanding natural value identified by the Hungarian Tourism Agency. The Mária Út Közhasznú Egyesület (Association for the Public Benefit of the Mária Út) in Hungary is a member of Eunam, the European Network Association of Mary's Route. The Hungarian section of the Mary's Route is also an important part of the European network. In this context, it is particularly important for Eunam to adapt to the trends outlined in the Tourism 2.0 Strategy of the Hungarian Tourism Agency. Furthermore, the networking and the development of the partner network will be carried out along the lines of the guidelines laid down in the Tourism 2.0 Strategy. It is important for us to meet the needs of visitors with a religious and secular profile, to coordinate marketing, to promote pilgrimages to the main sites of interest and to promote the sites of interest widely.

The institutionalised coordinating body for religious tourism is the National Religious Tourism Forum, which brings together the Hungarian Tourism Agency, professional tourism organisations, churches and the most important pilgrimage routes, including the Mary's Route. The Forum is an opportunity for Eunam to engage in a continuous professional dialogue with the religious tourism stakeholders and to participate in the development of religious tourism in Hungary and Central Europe.

European Cultural Routes

Founded in 1949, the Council of Europe is one of the oldest international organisations in Europe, with 47 member states. In 1987, the Council of Europe created the European Cultural Routes programme, which showcases the cultural contribution of each country to Europe's common heritage. The Cultural Routes put into practice the values that the Council of Europe considers important, such as identity, diversity and cultural democracy, as tourist attractions. The European Cultural Routes serve as trademarks which can be awarded to routes through a certification process. Certificates for certified European Cultural Routes must be renewed every three years. Currently 45 European Cultural Routes are certified.

The first certified route was the Santiago de Compostela pilgrimage route, which was awarded certification in 1987. Although El Camino has a centuries-old tradition, it is a route visited by thousands of pilgrims every year. However, there are many European cultural routes for which the physical route is not the primary link. These routes represent a heritage that does not derive from pilgrim traditions, but rather represents a link between other historical or cultural values. Examples of such routes include the European Historic Spa Towns Route (2010 - year of certification), the Iron Curtain Route (2019), the European Industrial Heritage Route (2019), the European Ceramics Route (2012), Via Habsburg (2014), Napoleon's Destination (2015), the European Route of the V. Charles V's European Route (2015), In the footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson (2015), Roman Emperors and the Danube Wine Route (2015) (European Cultural Routes 2021).

The European Network of the Mary's Route Alliance intends to build on both possible models:

It will have both physical signposted routes, similar to the pilgrimage routes with a long tradition, and related and complementary online routes (GPS tracks). It will also bring together tourist, scientific and religious organisations that bring together cultural and historical traditions, beyond the limits of the physical route, in Central Europe and, later, throughout Europe.

The main criteria to be fulfilled by the routes to be certified as European Cultural Routes are as follows.

- Present a theme that represents European values and involves at least three European countries;

- The topic should be the subject of transnational, multidisciplinary scientific research;
- Contribute to the understanding of European memory, history and heritage, and to the understanding of Europe's current diversity;
- Support cultural and educational exchanges of young people;
- Contribute to the development of exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development;
- Promote the development of tourism products for different target audiences.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes>

The aim of the European Network Association of Mary's Route is to promote the development and preservation of the traditions of religious tourism and pilgrimage in Hungary and the Carpathian Basin, through the certification of the European Cultural Routes. In addition to its marketing value, the European Cultural Routes label functions as a long-term quality assurance scheme and as an opportunity for Eunam to meet the criteria required by the European Cultural Routes certificate as a key element in defining the network development strategy of the organisation. The guidelines outlined above will be used as a basis for contacting potential cooperation partners.

Presentation of Mary's Route by topic

The Eunam focuses on the tradition of Marian devotion and its living expression today. The concept of the itinerary is to organise the sites of the theme in Central Europe in a coherent system, involving scientific and cultural partners in a networked way, and to transform them into a secular tourism programme.

The Association of the European Network of the Mary's Route is present in several Central European countries (Austria, Croatia, Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Germany). In these countries, cultural routes with the theme of the Mary's Route are operating under different names, which (Marganska Put, Marieweg, Mary's Route) are being transformed into a single cultural route.

The main destinations of the Eunam network are the largest Marian shrines in Central Europe: Altötting (D), Mariazell (A), Pannonhalma and Mátraverebély-Szentkút (H), Máriapocs (H) Częstochowa (PL), Nikolau and Csíksomlyó (RO) and Medjugorje (Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The Central European network of the Mary's Route brings together in a single system nearly 100 settlements and pilgrimage sites still visited today. This theme is still a living tradition, present as an intangible cultural heritage. The spiritual and cultural heritage is not only in buildings, rooms and monuments, but also in the buildings, monuments, paintings and other artefacts, but also in actions and deeds.

In Central Europe, the pilgrimages of Mary still today move tens of millions of people. Częstochowa in Poland attracts 3.2 million people a year, Mariazell in Austria and Csíksomlyó in Romania 1 million to 1 million a year, and Medjugorje in Bosnia attracts at least 3.5 million a year (UNWTO 2021).

It connects places in Central Europe in a networked way with pilgrimage routes on foot and by bike (horseback, water), where the devotion to Mary is a living reality, manifested in local and regional pilgrimages.

The Mary's Route is not only a spiritual and thematic route, but also a cultural and natural route that explores and offers all the historical, architectural and even natural values that the routes touch.

The routes of the Mary's Route are physically linked and can be followed on foot or by bicycle. The main routes of the Way of St. Mary form a criss-cross network across Central Europe. The east-west route runs from Altötting in Germany through Mariazell in Austria to Csíksomlyó in Romania, while the north-south routes weave from Częstochowa in Poland to Medjugorje in Bosnia, through Slovakia, Hungary and Croatia. The main routes are complemented by regional and local routes, including several Shrines of Mary, completing the network

The historical background of the Mary's route, its contribution to Europe's cultural heritage

The pilgrimage of Central Europe in the 21st century, the century-old dedication of the Mary's Route, is a centuries-old historical phenomenon.

Perhaps the first step towards this was taken by the Hungarian king and founder of the state, St Stephen, who opened up what is now Central Europe to pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem around 1030, thus helping to make the movement a reality.

The tradition of a unified spiritual journey organised by the Mary's Route also dates back to the 13th century. Most pilgrimage sites were visited 800 years ago.

The idea of the Mary's Route was conceived in the early 2000s with the aim of linking the great Marian shrines of Central and Eastern Europe: Mariazell with Csíksomlyó, Częstochowa with Medjugorje, and smaller pilgrimage sites such as Máriapócs with Máriaremete (BARNA 2001).

The aim is to make all Marian pilgrimage sites accessible to travellers not only on foot but also by bicycle, horse or, where possible, by water, through a network of pilgrimage routes, a unified pilgrimage system. These holy sites have been welcoming pilgrims from all over the world for centuries (BARNA 2001).

Mariazell has attracted pilgrims since the 12th century and is one of the most important shrines in Central Europe. Csíksomlyó in Romania has been a favourite destination for pilgrims since the mid-15th century.

The Pentecost pilgrimage is particularly well-known, with visitors coming from Hungary and Romania.

Pannonhalma in Hungary has been the spiritual and cultural centre of the region since the 11th century. Częstochowa is the most visited shrine in Poland.

According to legend, the Evangelist Luke created the icon of the Black Madonna, which still attracts millions of visitors to the city. Medjugorje is located in Bosnia and Herzegovina and apparitions since 1981 still attract nearly a million pilgrims a year. The veneration of the Virgin Mary is a bridge between different languages, different arts and sciences, providing an opportunity to bring different cultures closer together (BARNA 2011).

The possibility of a common 'trait', the veneration of Mary, has not only brought younger generations of different nations closer together, but has also brought nations historically portrayed as enemies back together. Young and old, friends and former enemies speak the common language of tradition, expressing the indestructibility of ancient common roots. This experience has been captured in many ways by people from different cultures, and the pilgrimage along the route of the Virgin Mary has inspired many prominent artists.

Pannonhalma in Hungary has been the intellectual and cultural centre of the region since the 11th century. Częstochowa is the most visited shrine in Poland.

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Altötting, in Germany, has been visited since the 15th century and is still visited by a million people a year.

The Hungarian Máriapócs and the Romanian Nicolau have been known since the 18th century as places of reconciliation between Greek Catholics and the long-feuding Orthodox.

Máriaradna in Romania has been the intellectual and spiritual centre of the Transylvanian Saxons since the 18th century, following the Turkish occupation. The intellectual role of Doroszló in Serbia is recorded from the 14th century (Barna 1994).

Marija Bistrica in Croatia has been a well-known destination for the people of the region since the 15th century. Marijanka in Slovakia (near Bratislava) has been a spiritual place shared by the Slovak, German and Hungarian peoples since the 13th century. The above examples (among many others) can be interpreted as the basis for a unified network of cultural routes along the Marijaška route over several centuries.

Lócsé in Slovakia has been a place of pilgrimage since the 13th century. Pope John Paul II visited the site in the 20th century. The prologue of the Mary's Route is the political-cultural changes of the late 20th century, when the spiritual-cultural heritage was revived. The Mary's Route as a network of cultural routes was given an organised form in 2006, when the Mary's Route Association was established in Hungary (as a non-profit NGO). A few years later, the Mary's Way Association was established in Romania and Slovakia. Nowadays, a thematic passport covers more than 2000 km of life in this region (according to the Mary's Route website).

European Council Cultural Routes by theme

The European cultural itineraries are grouped according to their themes. The research identified eight different themes. The European Cultural Routes are presented below by theme.

Historical person

The routes are linked to a historical or mythological person. Among the itineraries linked to a person, we find memorials to artists such as Leonardo Da Vinci or Mozart. Mythical persons include Aenas and Cyrriióll and Method, their lives are not known exactly. Charles V and Napoleon are known as politicians.

Religious themes

European cultural itineraries with a religious theme are based on the centuries-old tradition of European pilgrimages. The first pilgrimage of the European Cultural Routes programme was the

Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes. In the last 30 years, the pilgrim routes of Northern Europe (Route of Saint Olav Ways) and the Via Francigena connecting Western Europe with the Mediterranean countries have become European Cultural Routes. Religious routes are typically connected by a network of paths which tourists can follow on foot.

Historical events

Many European cultural itineraries are based on a series of historical events. The Viking Route, The Hansa, Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route are based on past events. A particular theme is World War II, which is the subject of three European cultural routes.

Historical institutions

European cultural routes linking historical institutions have been identified as a separate category. These institutions are present in most European countries and are still in operation today. Such historical institutions are Cemeteries, Fortified Towns, Historic Gardens, Historic Cafés, Historic Pharmacies, Historic Thermal Towns

Natural Heritage Sites

We find European cultural itineraries that have a natural asset as their primary theme. These include the Olive Tree, Transhumance Trail and Iter Vitis trails. These trails are strongly geographically constrained by the distribution of the plants concerned.

Built heritage

Cultural routes with a built heritage theme are perhaps the most spectacular, with significant geographical coverage. The themes of the routes are the same as for the art history categories, Megalithic Culture, Transromanica.

Works of art

In this category, literary and visual art works are the theme of the routes.

Ethnic groups

Some European cultural routes focus on a particular ethnic group spread throughout Europe, some of which have disappeared from Phoenicia and others which are still alive in Europe today, for example Jewish Heritage (Table 1).

Table. Categorisation of European Cultural Routes by theme

Historical person	Religious themes	Historical event	Historical institutions	Natural Heritage Sites	Built heritage	Work of art	Ethnic groups
Destination Napoleon	Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes	The Hansa	European Cemeteries Route	Routes of the Olive Tree	European Route of Megalithic Culture	Réseau Art Nouveau Network	European Route of Jewish Heritage
European Mozart Ways	Route of Saint Olav Ways	Viking Route	Fortified Towns of	Transhumance trails	Prehistoric Rock Art Trails	Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades	Phoenicians' Route

			the Grande Region				
European Routes of Emperor Charles V.	Via Francigena	Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route	European Route of Historic Gardens	Iter Vitis Route	Transromania	Women Writers Route	Huguenot and Waldensian Trail
Alvar Aalto Route	Via Regia	Iron Curtain Trail - EuroVelo 13	Historic Cafés Route		European Route of Industrial Heritage	European Fairy Tale Route	
European Route d'Artagnan		Liberation Route Europe	European Route of Historic Pharmacies		Cluniac Sites in Europe		
Leonardo Da Vinci Route		Iron Age Danube Route	European Route of Historic Thermal Towns		Iron Route in the Pyrenees		
Aeneas Route		Atrium European Cultural Route					
Cyril and Methodius Route							
In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson							

Source: *European Cultural Routes website*

The Route of the Marys, one of the European cultural routes, based on the theme

According to the themes, the Way of Mary can be included in the group of European cultural itineraries with a religious theme. Mary does not appear as a person, but as a summary name for pilgrimages in Central Europe. In recent years, the Way of Mary has developed a partnership with other European cultural itineraries with similar themes. The cooperation includes Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes Route of Saint Olav Ways Via Francigena and the Mary's Route. The cooperation has created a common online map to help pilgrims to get to know the significant pilgrims in Europe. The online map is available at rurrallure.com.

Summary

In autumn 2021, the European Network of the Mary's Way Association could officially start its activities and the networking could continue in a formal framework. The development of religious tourism in Hungary along the lines of complex state-level plans is expected to provide a favourable space for pilgrimage routes in the Carpathian Basin as well. The establishment of the

association has already started a number of positive processes in the first half of the year, and we are working to ensure that in the long term the European Network will succeed in achieving results at the international level, similar to the Hungarian Route of Mary. Eunam continues to serve missionary objectives, while aiming to achieve the European Cultural Routes trademark certification, and to create a sustainable religious tourism product. We see it as a mission to promote Christian values on a broad scale, thereby helping to point the way to Europe's Christian roots for as many people as possible. Through our activities we see many people across Europe working to nurture our Christian heritage which strengthens our faith in the future of our Alliance.

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