

Religious tourism in Hungary – an integrative framework

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Abstract

Tourism to religious sites, shrines, temples, churches and religious festivities is significantly growing worldwide. Central and Southeastern Europe is historically a region where different ethnic and religious groups live. In the last century, during the 40 years of Communist rule over the social and political system in the Carpathian Basin, religion was banished and spiritual life could be practised mainly within the domestic environment. Since 1990, former socialist countries like Hungary (as also for example Poland, Slovakia, Romania etc.) have turned to capitalism, but without being prepared for the social, economical and psychological changes, with which that process would affect individuals and families. Faith and pilgrimages seem to have regained their roles in people's lives. This paper outlines an integrative framework on Christian religious tourism and discusses its cultural aspects. The framework emphasises the identification of geographical aspects of the phenomenon in terms of scale (local, regional, national and international) as well as in terms of the research theme (cultural, political and health-related aspects). In the first part, the history of religious tourism and its integrative framework are presented based on relevant international literature. In the second part of the paper, the focus is on the development and interpretation of the Via Maria pilgrimage route (especially at its most important station, Mátraverebély-Szentkút), the first established within the Central and Southeastern European area, and the primary results of our field research are presented.

Keywords: tourism, spiritual experience, pilgrimage route, Hungary

Introduction

Religious tourism has recently emerged as a significant field of study despite the fact that the phenomenon is contemporary to the birth of major world religions: Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism and Christianity (COLLINS-KREINER, N. 2010a). Pilgrimage is one of the symbols of Christian life deeply

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rooted in the Bible. The ecclesiastical view of a human being, of a Christian as *homo viator*, is a person on journey, a pilgrim on earth on the way to the heavenly life. Pilgrimage, moreover, reflects a human desire for fulfilment. Throughout history, pilgrimage has been a religious phenomenon that set people on a physical journey yielding spiritual results (TIMOTHY, J.D. and OLSEN, H.D. 2006). In general, related academic works deal with the complicated economic, political, social, psychological, and emotional relationship between pilgrimage and tourism (NOLAN, M.L. and NOLAN, S. 1992).

As COLLINS-KREINER, N. (2010a) assumes in her article on pilgrimages, the key issues and the arguments related to that research field also reflect the boundary between tourism and pilgrimage. Tourists and pilgrims visiting the same shrine might have different motivations for travelling, but similar needs are satisfied on the spot.

The research focused on the definitions of “religious tourism” as the individual’s quest for sacred places where the historical and cultural layer of meaning of the place might reinforce their spiritual experience (MAZUMDAR, S. and MAZUMDAR, S. 2004; NOLAN, M.L. and NOLAN, S. 1992). In addition, the search for something miraculous, better and purer, alleviating the perception of personal problems and offering a different perspective to the evaluation of life are key characteristics of modern secular pilgrimages (WARD-THOMPSON, C. 2011). In *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, group cohesion among pilgrims on route is not only a question of security during the journey, but it is a means for elaboration of the pilgrimage experience. Travelling with other fellows, the construction of groups and enhancing group cohesion are highly relevant aspects of religious tourism.

Going on a pilgrimage or participating in religiously motivated travels, however, might have several other reasons (OLSEN, H.D. 2010). In Europe, believers attribute healing effects to numerous shrines and the alleviation of physical suffering is one of the motivations to visit pilgrimage centres (Lourdes, for example). Moreover, GESLER, W. (1996) affirmed that medical geographers were attempting to show how people influenced by their material circumstances give meaning to their experiences related to health in places and how places, in turn, change their perceptions and experiences regarding health. RÁTZ, T. and MICHALKÓ, G. (2011) demonstrated that tourism has a beneficial effect on individuals’ perception of well-being and contributes to the positive valuation of quality of life. The importance of the natural environment is highly relevant and landscape is considered to be therapeutic (GESLER, W. 1996; POHNER, T. *et al.* 2009). The environment close to sacred places might relieve depression or stress (FOLEY, R. 2011) enhancing the wish to visit sacred and healing places.

Religiously motivated tourism, nowadays, is connected to cultural and heritage tourism as well. As it has been demonstrated, religious and secular pilgrims as well as cultural tourists often go on a journey for the same

reason: searching a spiritual experience (DIGANCE, J. 2003; MURRAY, M. and GRAHAM, B. 1997; NOLAN, M.L. and NOLAN, S. 1992). In Rome, the Holy See represents the core of the 'Eternal City' and it is embedded within the urban tissue of the city. It is worth noting that religious sites in Rome are at the same time important cultural sites as well. The overlap of cultural tourism seeking Christian traditions, heritage buildings, religious festivities and religious tourism represented by Christian believers is highly pronounced in the Vatican City. Following Pope Benedict XVI's resignation proclaimed on 11 February 2012, the Vatican has experienced an increased number of tourists' and pilgrims' arrivals. The last mass celebration of Pope Ratzinger was followed by thousands of pious believers giving a new sense of pilgrimage to a Pope who is still alive but despite that fact, celebrates his last mass.

Furthermore, religious tourism assumes the role of a niche tourism product in international tourism. Pilgrimage involves not only a journey from one place to another, but it is a spiritual and cultural experience changing or significantly influencing the pilgrims' lives (POHNER, T. *et al.* 2009). Those journeys, usually completed with fellow pilgrims, hardly ever in solitude, are about self transformation, gaining knowledge and spiritual experience (COLLINS-KREINER, N. 2010b; MURRAY, M. and GRAHAM, B. 1997; NOLAN, M.L. and NOLAN, S. 1992). In the 21st century, questing for spiritual experience and relief includes not only traditional sacred sites worshiped by Christians (the Vatican, Santiago de Compostela etc.) but also contemporary pilgrimage sites (SHACKLEY, M. 2001).

The geographical scale of religious sites is determined by a possible place development. Current industry trends show that religious tourism has great economic potential and in some cases it contributes significantly to regional and local development. However, internationally relevant pilgrimage centres constructed around hidden sacred fountains in a forest or in remote alpine villages have impact on the natural environment and they pose questions on sustainability (PETRILLO, C.S. 2003; RINSCHÉDE, G. 1992). Difficult-to-access monasteries and abbeys have recently become tourism attractions, therefore infrastructural development as well as the construction of service facilities appear to be unavoidable. However, such development and commercialization of the places has strongly influenced the function, the work and the lives of monasteries involved.

In this paper the aforementioned framework for religious tourism is discussed. Pilgrimage is a common phenomenon to all major world religions, however, in this paper only tourism to European Christian sites and religiously motivated Catholic travels are analysed. In our approach aspects of authenticity, place identity and interpretation are highly relevant. We focus on the Via Maria pilgrimage route and present the results of the empirical research and fieldwork conducted at Szentkút.

Theoretical framework for religious tourism

Thinking about historical pilgrimage routes, the Holy Land and Jerusalem are the primary destinations coming to mind. The sacred city has been a holy place for Jews and Muslims, as well as for Christians for a long time. (However, in 2012 Israel hosted less than 4 million tourists (www1.cbs.gov.il). Over the centuries, the places of birth, life events and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ have become sites of pilgrimages for pious believers and secular tourists as well. In 2012, the birthplace of Jesus with the Church of the Nativity and the pilgrimage route to Bethlehem were included on the UNESCO World Heritage site list. In 1453 the conquest of Constantinople by the Ottoman Empire redrew the pilgrimage map of Europe. The Holy Land with Jerusalem was not accessible for Christian pilgrims during the Ottoman period and in its place numerous sacred sites appeared in Europe to fulfil the need of devotees for mercy through peregrination. Rome became the main destination for pilgrims, however, in the 12th century Santiago de Compostela, with its patron Saint James, became one of the most visited pilgrimage sites in medieval Europe (RINSCHÉDE, G. 1992).

The Bible is full of references to travel: leaving oneself behind, walking the walk and journeys of the soul. The destination might not be of such importance as the route itself while travelling away from familiar surroundings a pilgrim can meditate about his life. Pilgrimage to a sacred site, especially to a historically relevant place puts the traveller in situations where they think and behave differently (ANDRIOTIS, K. 2008). Today pilgrims travel for many reasons (RINSCHÉDE, G. 1992). One of the reasons for pilgrimages and religiously motivated travels is the personal need, the belief that being in a sacred location can bring healing, spiritual experiences or they just want to “give a try”. In postmodern and in stress-dominated societies where traditional values may seem to have vanished and more and more people are experiencing feelings of dislocation and rootlessness, religion and faith might be considered as islands of peace.

Participating in religiously motivated travel might have several reasons which can vary from the need for personal fulfilment, through the wish to participate at religious rituals, to offer prayers and vows or request for divine intervention in one's life. Furthermore, among the other motivations, we can find the sense of obligation to visit a sacred place because it is a must for Christians; nostalgic reasons or didactical purposes in terms of educating family members about religious beliefs (TIMOTHY, J.D. and OLSEN, H.D. 2006) and about national history which is often related to religious places as well. Fátima, in Portugal, has become a national meeting place for Portuguese people who live in another country. They come to the shrine from all over the world. Şumuleu Ciuc (Csíksomlyó), in Transylvania, is an extremely important national shrine for Hungarian pilgrims.

However, academic literature on religious tourism despite recent attention dedicated to that field is rather narrow. According to TIMOTHY, J.D. and OLSEN, H.D. (2006, p. 6), “most research and writing on the topic has centred on four distinct themes of inquiry: distinguishing the pilgrims from tourists; the characteristics and travel patterns of religious tourists; the economics of religious tourism; and the negative impacts of tourism on religious sites and ceremonies”.

The detachment from everyday life enables the pilgrims and tourists to intensify their understanding of spiritual life often in a place where the natural environment is considered to have healing effects. Sharing the spiritual experiences with other fellow pilgrims makes people open to new experiences and relationships and reconsider some aspects of life. Besides, studying the meaning of pilgrimage requires an application of transdisciplinary methods based on geography and sociology but also semiology and history, involving an interpretative approach to seeking hitherto neglected alternative meanings.

Cultural tourism at sacred sites

Cultural and heritage tourism today is connected to religious tourism since sacred sites, churches, monasteries and abbeys are not only places of religious rituals and prayers but they are monuments, ecclesiastical buildings and heritage sites as well. Holy places and sacred sites are nowadays being seen as tourist attractions and cultural resources. Following a content analysis of the UNESCO World Heritage list 2012, it has emerged that in Europe, 92 religious buildings and sites are listed and considered to have outstanding universal cultural values. Furthermore, ecclesiastical architecture and the listed religious buildings and sites reflect European history as well (*Table 1*). The number of ecclesiastical buildings listed by UNESCO (*Figure 1*) show that these monuments are considered by the international organisation unique cultural attractions.

The cultural heritage sites and better-known pilgrimage sites of Europe are capable of appealing to a wide range of visitors. According to SMITH, V.L. (1992), the continuum of visitors ranges from pious pilgrims and devout Catholics to cultural tourists who consider themselves Catholic but do not attend church ceremonies to and vacationers who visit the sites during their holiday (MURRAY, M. and GRAHAM, B. 1997). El Camino de Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain, the emblem of pilgrimage routes, was the first cultural itinerary in Europe to be protected by UNESCO. Every year El Camino attracts thousands of pilgrims and tourists who aim to fulfil their wish to walk along the medieval route. In 2012, a total of 192,488 pilgrims who obtained the *Compostelas* (the official certificate of having accomplished the pilgrimage) were registered (www.jacobeo.net). In Europe, other pilgrimage centres have also been included in the UNESCO list clearly evidencing the importance and cultural value of religious sites (*Table 2.*)

Table 1. Ecclesiastical architecture in Europe on the UNESCO World Heritage List, 2012

Country	Number of		Type of ecclesiastical architecture
	all	religious	
	World Heritage sites in the country		
Armenia	3	3	Byzantine monasteries, Armenian ecclesiastical architecture
Belgium	11	1	Cathedral (pre-Gothic style)
Bulgaria	9	3	Churches and a monastery
Croatia	7	2	Episcopal Complex, cathedral
Cyprus	3	1	Painted Churches
Czech Republic	12	4	Church, cathedral, Jewish Quarter in Třebíč, Holy Trinity Column
Denmark	4	2	Roskilde Cathedral (brick-built Gothic-style basilica), Jelling Mounds, Runic Stones and Church
Finland	7	1	Petäjävesi Old Church (Lutheran country church)
France	38	11	Abbey, cathedrals, Episcopal city, pilgrimage route
Georgia	1	1	Bagrati Cathedral and Gelati Monastery
Germany	37	10	Cathedrals, pilgrimage church, abbey, Luther Memorials, monastic island
Greece	17	7	Meteora, Mounth Athos, temple, sanctuary, monasteries
Holy See	2	2	Vatican City
Hungary	8	1	Benedictine Abbey
Italy	47	7	Church and Dominican convent, rupestrian churches, cathedrals, Basilica of San Francesco
Norway	7	1	Urnes Stave Church (traditional Scandinavian wooden architecture)
Poland	13	3	Churches, wooden churches, pilgrimage centre
Portugal	14	4	Convent, monastery
Romania	7	4	Churches and monasteries, villages with fortified churches
Serbia	4	1	Monastery
Slovakia	7	1	Wooden churches
Spain	44	7	Cathedrals, monasteries, route of Santiago
Sweden	15	1	Church Village of Gammelstad
Switzerland	11	2	Convents
Ukraine	5	1	Cathedral and Monastic Buildings
United Kingdom	28	2	Cathedral, abbey

Source: whc.unesco.org/en/list, authors' own elaboration.

Table 2. Pilgrimage routes and centres in Europe on the UNESCO World Heritage list, 2012

Name of the site with date	Country	Significance
Pilgrimage Church of Wies, 1983	Germany	The pilgrimage church is a perfect masterpiece of Rococo
Route of Santiago de Compostela, 1993	Spain	First European Cultural itinerary
Pilgrimage Church of St. John of Nepomuk at Zelená Hora, 1994	Czech Republic	Zelena Hora pilgrimage complex since 1721
Routes of Santiago de Compostela in France, 1998	France	The route played a key role in religious and cultural exchange during the later Middle Ages
Kalwaria Zebrzydowska: the Mannerist Architectural and Park Landscape Complex and Pilgrimage Park, 1999	Poland	Pilgrimage centre; outstanding example of Calvary, large-scale landscape design which incorporates national beauty with spiritual objectives

Source: whc.unesco.org/en/list, authors' elaboration.

Moreover, cultural heritage sites, since they represent universal cultural values, are visited by international tourists coming from different parts of the world and having different religious beliefs. The management of those sacred sites, religious heritage complexes, cathedrals, monasteries etc. must meet various requirements by pilgrims and tourists since visitors use the same places for different reasons (HUGHES, K. *et al.* 2013; COLLINS-KREINER, N. 2010b). Some historical churches, cathedrals and monasteries heavily depend on tourist income and the economic benefits of cultural tourism have been widely recognised (LEASK, A. 2010).

Place interpretation and semiotics in religious tourism

Via Maria is a recently established pilgrimage route connecting the most important shrines, sacred places and cultural heritage attractions related to the devotion of the Virgin Mary. Since this route lacks a long tradition, its establishment requires promotion among pilgrims and tourists and the role of signs, symbols and interpretation are key factors in that process. In the literature review previous research on semiotics and tourism is briefly reported (SCHEER, M. and WILLIAMS, J. 2003). Signs, symbols and their interpretation have always constituted a significant role in place identification and place attachment. It could be also affirmed that the use of a complex system of signs is a distinguishing characteristic of humans (ECHTNER, M.C. 1999). Signs are identified as anything that can be used to represent



Cathedral and Gelati Monastery. *Germany*: 30 = Aachen Cathedral; 31 = Speyer Cathedral; 32 = Pilgrimage Church of Wies; 33 = St Mary's Cathedral and St Michael's Church at Hildesheim; 34 = Abbey and Altenmünster of Lorsch; 35 = Collegiate Church, Castle and Old Town of Quedlinburg; 36 = Cologne Cathedral; 37 = Luther Memorials in Eisleben and Wittenberg; 38 = Monastic Island of Reichenau; 39 = Roman Monuments, Cathedral of St Peter and Church of Our Lady in Trier. *Greece*: 40 = Temple of Apollo Epicurius at Bassae; 41 = Meteora; 42 = Mount Athos; 43 = Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidaurus; 44 = Paleochristian and Byzantine Monuments of Thessalonika; 45 = Monasteries of Daphni, Hosios Loukas and Nea Moni of Chios. *Holy See*: 46 = Historic Centre of Rome, the Properties of the Holy See; 47 = Vatican City. *Hungary*: 48 = Millenary Benedictine Abbey of Pannonhalma and its Natural Environment. *Italy*: 49 = Church and Dominican Convent of Santa Italy Maria delle Grazie with "The Last Supper" by Leonardo da Vinci; 50 = The Sassi and the Park of the Rupestrian Churches of Matera; 51 = Cathedral, Torre Civica and Piazza Grande, Modena; 52 = Assisi, the Basilica of San Francesco and Other Franciscan Sites; 53 = Historic Centre of Rome, the Properties of the Holy See; 54 = Piazza del Duomo, Pisa; 55 = Early Christian Monuments of Ravenna. *Norway*: 56 = Urnes Stave Church. *Poland*: 57 = Kalwaria Zebrzydowska: the Mannerist Architectural and Park Landscape Complex and Pilgrimage Park; 58 = Churches of Peace in Jawor and Świdnica; 59 = Wooden Churches of Southern Little Poland. *Portugal*: 60 = Convent of Christ in Tomar; 61 = Monastery of Batalha; 62 = Monastery of the Hieronymites and Tower of Belém in Lisbon; 63 = Monastery of Alcobaça. *Romania*: 64 = Churches of Moldavia; 65 = Monastery of Horezu; 66 = Villages with Fortified Churches in Transylvania; 67 = Wooden Churches of Maramureş. *Russia*: 68 = St Basil's Basilica, Moscow; 69 = Cultural and Historic Ensemble of the Solovetsky Island; 70 = Architectural Ensemble of the Trinity Sergius Lavra in Sergiev Posad; 71 = Church of the Ascension, Kolomenskoye; 72 = Ensemble of the Ferrapontov Monastery; 73 = Ensemble of the Novodevichy Convent; 74 = Wooden Churches of Kizhi Pogost. *Serbia*: 75 = Studenica Monastery. *Slovakia*: 76 = Wooden Churches of the Slovak part of the Carpathian Mountain Area. *Spain*: 77 = Burgos Cathedral; 78 = Monastery and Site of the Escorial, Madrid; 79 = Cathedral, Alcázar and Archivo de Indias in Seville; 80 = Poblet Monastery; 81 = Route of Santiago de Compostela; 82 = Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe; 83 = Catalan Romanesque Churches of the Vall de Boí. *Sweden*: 84 = Church Village of Gammelstad, Luleå. *Switzerland*: 85 = Benedictine Convent of St John at Müstair; 86 = Convent of St Gall. *Turkey*: 87 = Great Mosque and Hospital of Divriği; 88 = Selimiye Mosque and its Social Complex. *Ukraine*: 89 = Kiev: Saint-Sophia Cathedral and Related Monastic Buildings, Kiev-Pechersk Lavra. *United Kingdom*: 90 = Durham Castle and Cathedral; 91 = Westminster Palace, Westminster Abbey and Saint Margaret's Church; 92 = Canterbury Cathedral, St Augustine's Abbey, and St Martin's Church

something else, holding a second layer of meaning. Semiotics recognised that there are usually several layers of meaning (BARTHES, R. 1995) within a sign system and they are bound in culture and context. Semioticians set out that the meanings of sign structures are not inherent and universal, but they are arbitrary and established through particular social conventions.

The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de SAUSSURE (1978) coined the term 'semiology' in linguistic studies analysed the sign as created by the relationship between the signifier (a word) and the signified (the object or concept). However, the interpretation of signs could be dated back to the Graeco-Roman period, represented by the etymology of the word itself, since 'sign' derives from Gr. *semeion*. Texts, representations, icons and places related to world religions, including Christianity, are heavily interwoven with signs and symbols interpreted by Christians. COHEN, E. (2008) referring to research on Jewish adolescents highlighted that symbols are important in representing ethnic and religious identities.

As ECHTNER, M.C. (1999) observes the applications of semiotics in tourism research are still focusing on the system of signs and the layers of meaning applied to tourism marketing. KNUDSEN, D.C. and RICKLY-BOYED, D.M. (2012) in their recently published research note on tourism sites debate on the conceptualisation of tourism as performance and the role of semiotics related to authenticity. Their findings are relevant to the examination of the complex system of signs applied for the promotion of a pilgrimage route evidencing place authenticity (BELHASSEN, Y. *et al.* 2008). BELHASSEN, Y. *et al.* argue that physical features of place and the socio-political context for its understanding, especially in the case of pilgrimage, are deeply influenced by the interconnections between human experience, perceptions and social meaning.

Geographical scale of religious sites

Throughout Europe there are numerous pilgrimage sites which attract pious believers and secular tourists as well. The range of attraction of those sacred sites can be international, national, regional and local level. The term religious tourism according to the officials of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe is used to refer to all travels directed to destinations associated with Roman Catholic faith. That system encompasses a range of holy places, great cathedrals, monasteries, rural chapels as well as the service facilities associated with those sacred sites, religious rituals, ceremonies, choir performances etc. (NOLAN, M.L. and NOLAN, S. 1992; RINSCHADE, G. 1992)

The geographical characteristics of religious sites are extremely determinant for two reasons, on one hand, numerous sacred sites have become the economical resource for regional development (GATRELL, J.D. and COLLINS-

KREINER, N. 2006). Highly evolved pilgrimage centres have an international catchment area and they usually represent the main economical engine for the villages and their surrounding areas. International airports operate to meet the tourism requirements of pilgrims, for example in Lourdes located in southern France; in the small Irish city of Knock; in Fátima in Portugal and in Santiago de Compostela in northern Spain.

On the other hand, the use of space is influenced by heavy infrastructural development and constructions but the aim is still to conserve place identity and evidence the holiness of the site. AMBRÓSIO, V. (2003) elaborated different categories of shrines and religious tourist attractions according to their visitor numbers and religious functions. Three major categories were identified:

1. Pilgrimage shrines both with low (Fátima in Portugal) or high (Burgos in Spain) value as tourist attractions, shrines with pilgrimage events (St. Torcato in Portugal).

2. Religious tourist attractions (ecclesiastical structures, famous cathedrals and monasteries).

3. Sites of religious festivals (Holy Week and Corpus Christi processions).

With the aim of providing religious services and tourism facilities, a significant sum has been spent on the construction of local airports, on road networks, accommodation services such as hotels, apartments, transport and on health care for pilgrims and tourists alike. The level of commercial development located in the large surrounding area of a shrine exceeded in some cases the carrying capacity of the place. The overcommercialization of some sacred sites, as in the case of Lourdes and Santiago de Compostela, might have a negative influence on pilgrims' experiences once at the places in question. Some pilgrimage sites have become extremely popular and they attract hundreds of thousands of pilgrims and tourists from all over Europe and in some cases even from outside of Europe.

Large shrine complexes constructed in small communities generate a significant place transformation and they also influence the socio-economical and natural environment. The small and remote village of Međugorje in Bosnia-Herzegovina has recently been discovered as a sacred place (VUKOVIĆ, B. 1992) but the increased number of pilgrims and visitors has transformed the place. VUKOVIĆ, B. (1992) noted that the parish office estimated the arrival of 3,000–5,000 people in Međugorje each day. According to recent statistics, a total of 47,500 holy communions were distributed in January 2013 (www.medjugorje.hr). The popularity of the site is in part due to the Catholic press which spread 'news' of the Virgin Mary's appearance and of some miraculous healing cases said to have been experienced in Međugorje. Sites can be arranged in a hierarchy according to the size of their catchment areas. The small village in Bosnia-Herzegovina has definitely a global catchment area since pilgrims arrive not only from Europe but also from the United States of America, Argentina and Japan.

Invisible tourism and its aspects in religious tourism

The conceptual framework of invisible tourism includes all those travels which could be positioned in the liminal zone of conventional tourism activities. Short-term tourism distinguishes itself by spatially limited travels and short stays (BRAND, H. *et al.* 2008; GLINOS, I. *et al.* 2010). Same-day visitors who stay less than 24 hours at a destination cannot be registered at public accommodation services and they are invisible to official tourism data collection. Tourism consumption of invisible tourists can be identified despite the statistical gap. Religious tourism in Central and Southeastern Europe, and in particular in Hungary, usually attracts only one-day visitors. The distance between the travelers' home and the religious site is relatively short. Those one-day domestic travels elude the official survey system and for that reason it is difficult to measure the importance and the range of religiously motivated travels.

The organisational form of religious tourism highlights new aspects of invisible tourism. SHINDE, K. (2012) notes that the contemporary religious tourism industry evolved from traditional pilgrimages and religious actors continue to drive the industry by providing transportation and accommodation services along with religious services during the journey and at the destination. People travelling alone along a pilgrimage route or visiting a sacred shrine by themselves are extremely rare, they represent the minority. Undertaking a journey to a sacred site and participating in a pilgrimage evokes interactions with other fellows. For this reason people on a religious trip generally prefer to belong to a large or a small group of organized pilgrims. The pilgrimage groups are mostly organized by officially credited travel agencies, however, tours for fellow believers are often organized by parishes, dioceses, youth groups, schools or senior clubs. In this case, commercial activities related to religious tourism remain invisible and hidden since they fail to meet the official requirements of tour organization.

Tour organization for pilgrimage groups by parishes or dioceses has historical roots. In Poland, for example, following the end of the Second World War and during the decades of Soviet state control, pilgrimages were secretly organized at national and local level. The communist authorities tried to weaken the influence of the Church and they systematically refused to give permissions for group travels especially to pilgrimage sites (JACKOWSKI, A. and SMITH, V.L. 1992). In Poland, the Catholic Church represents one of the strongest elements of Polish nationalism and identity and one which could not be oppressed by communist rule. Pilgrimages to Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and to Czestochowa were organised illegally.

Furthermore, as NOLAN, M.L. and NOLAN, S. (1992) highlighted in their research on pilgrimages, invisible tourist activity is also present

on the supply side. Religiously motivated travels like all tourist activities which last more than one day need tourism related services. In the case of pilgrimages organized by parishes or dioceses, sometimes private homes offer accommodation and food for religious tourists. At the pilgrimage site of San Sebastian de Garabandal, in northern Spain and in San Damiano, in northern Italy, which are geographically small and hidden pilgrimage sites, service facilities are sponsored by nonprofit groups.

The geographical and historical context of Hungarian religious tourism

During the last century, in the historical turmoil, populations living in Central and Southeastern Europe witnessed several political, social and economical changes having a great influence on people's private lives as well. Since the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008, general living conditions have continued to worsen in these countries where social fragmentation and the dissolution of family ties due to the emigration of relatives and friends have had a great influence on the quality of life of individuals (EGEDY, T. 2012).

The relationship between the State and the Catholic Church has faced several conflicts. The tragedies of the 20th century, the two world wars, the right and left wing dictatorships and the establishment of the Communist political system significantly affected the role of the Catholic Church in those countries (ROMSICS, I. 2005). After the end of the First World War, the aim of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in Hungary was to mop-up the Catholic Church. Under the terms of the peace-treaty imposed on Hungary, the country lost a great part of its territories and population which made the devastation of the war even more tragic due to Hungary's new borders and her contested role within the region (KOC SIS, K. and VÁRADI, M.M. 2011). During the period between the two world wars, the State and the Church worked in symbiosis in order to reconstruct the country from its ashes. The position of the Catholic parties in politics was highly significant (IRIMIÁS, A. 2009) since the aim was to build a national and Catholic country. The relationship between the State and the Church changed drastically some years later.

Following the end of the Second World War, Hungary was "liberated" by the troops of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Communist political and social system began in 1947. The Church became one of the main enemies of the system therefore it had to endure several punishments during the Communist dictatorship (confiscation of properties, schools, institutions etc.). Religion was banned and many (politically active) priests, friars and even the cardinal were persecuted (ROMSICS, I. 2005). In 1989 following the fall of the Berlin Wall and with the change of the socio-political system in Hungary, the Church started to regain its power and influence.

The “rebirth” of the Catholic Church and faith and the rediscovery of the cultural and religious heritage related to Maria, the patron saint of Hungary, highlight the importance of this study. The Via Maria pilgrimage route is 1,400 km long and it connects the sacred and cultural heritage sites related to the Virgin in the Carpathian Basin. The Hungarian regions have several socio-economic and regional differences (Kovács, Z. 2004) which might influence the pilgrimage experiences along the route. One of the aims of the founders and managers of the route was to attract not only devout pilgrims but tourists as well. Since the route is set mainly in forests and in conservation areas far from urban centres, it presents some implications to develop sustainable tourism along the route. Pilgrimage is strongly linked to sustainability since it promises not only physical but spiritual well-being too. In the case of the sacred site of Mátraverebély-Szentkút, the function of the holy well is embedded in the need of pilgrims to search for something material which is believed to have healing power because of its holiness.

The cult of Maria began in the 12th century and spread rapidly. It has had a great influence in Hungary since Maria is the patron saint of the country. Originally, Marian shrines included such relics as hair, bits of clothing and milk, however, later the relics were replaced by statues of the Virgin as objects of devotion. The small Maria statue of Szentkút is considered to be special, so its clothing and hair are taken care of and the statue is adored for its power to cure infertility of women. The devotion to Maria became localized in a number of specific places, and people accepted the plurality of Virgins. Mary’s gender, some think, plays an important role in her appeal. Concepts perceived to be feminine such as motherhood, faith, tenderness, forgiveness and hope are represented by the Virgin. The model to establish the Via Maria pilgrimage route was the Camino towards Santiago de Compostela, however, the managers of the route underlined the specificity of Via Maria, since it is a female pilgrimage route opposed to the masculinity of the Camino.

Methodology

The research on this recently established Via Maria pilgrimage route in Hungary is concerned with applied implications of the phenomena of sustainable tourism and management of religious tourism sites. The geographical perspective highlights the importance of place and landscape since the route leads mainly through protected natural areas and is connected to already existing trekking paths. The relationship of sites, location and images of the sacred place of Mátraverebély-Szentkút were analysed applying, in part, the methodology used by semioticians to understand the different layers of meaning to a place. Data on the routes of movement, the catchment areas of pilgrims and the size

and scale of pilgrimage were obtained from secondary sources published by the managers of the route itself.

In 2012, field research was conducted at one of the major stations of the route, Mátraverebély-Szentkút, which is a holy well for Christian devotees. The methodology of observation was applied documenting the pilgrims' movements, clothing and the rituals during the mass celebration by taking photographs and notes. Moreover, some pilgrims were interviewed informally on the spot. The shrine was visited several times during the summer of 2012 on Sundays when the holy mass was celebrated for pilgrims. The calendar of the mass celebrations is published online by the Friars on the site³. The dates of mass celebrations are linked to Catholic festivities, however, the most important patronal festival is dedicated to Saint Anne on 28–29 July. At Szentkút, several pilgrimages and patronal festivals are organised for different target groups such as children, the elderly, young couples, single persons etc. Special events, especially festive pilgrimages involving folkloric expressions, draw a highly mixed crowd of participants and visitors to the shrine. Since pilgrims' motivations can vary and the "thematic" patronal festivals address different target groups, several site visits were needed during the research.

Findings (case study of Szentkút)

This section sets the Mátraverebély-Szentkút phenomenon within the historical context of journeys taking place over the last several centuries in Hungary for the purpose of obtaining redemption from sin or cures for infertility. At that pilgrimage site, pilgrims pray to Mary that she will intercede for them. The Via Maria route (*Figure 2*) traverses northern Hungary, an interior region of rural tourism.

The need to mark and authenticate sites of importance to the Catholic history of Hungary connecting specific locations to the pilgrimage route like Mátraverebély-Szentkút was the basis for the establishment of the trail (*Photo 1*). Mátraverebély-Szentkút is a shrine close to the Hungarian-Slovakian state border located in a hilly region. Similarly to other places of worship managed historically by Franciscans, Szentkút has always been a common place to meet different people. Franciscan monasteries have always been multiethnic and the church services were delivered in the mother tongues of the people.

This sacred site is a highly relevant place in Hungarian history because of its legends related to Ladislaus I of Hungary, a chivalrous king in the 11th century. In 1091–1092, King Saint Ladislaus, according to the legend, was escaping from his enemies when he reached a precipice which forced him to stop and make his horse jump over the precipice. When his horse jumped, miraculously, a well

³ www.szentkut.hu



Fig. 2. The Via Maria pilgrimage routes in Central and Southeastern Europe, 2012

Stations of the Czestochowa–Medugorje (North-South) route: *Poland*: 1 = Olsztyn; 2 = Karlin; 3 = Krzeszowice-Kamien; 4 = Kalwaria Zebrzydowska; 5 = Jordanów; 6 = Orawka. *Slovakia*: 7 = Oravský Podzámok (Árvaváralja); 8 = Ružomberok (Rózsahegy); 9 = Liptovská Osada (Oszada); 10 = Staré Hory (Óhegy); 11 = Banská Bystrica (Besztercebánya); 12 = Zvolen (Zólyom); 13 = Banská Štiavnica (Selmecbánya); 14 = Hontianske Nemce (Hontnémeti); 15 = Plášťovce (Palást). *Hungary*: 16 = Kemeence; 17 = Márianosztra; 18 = Esztergom; 19 = Dobogókő; 20 = Márianosztra; 21 = Budapest-Máriaremete; 22 = Szigetszentmiklós; 23 = Ráckeve; 24 = Dunavecse; 25 = Solt-Kalimajor; 26 = Kalocsa; 27 = Fajs; 28 = Szekszárd; 29 = Ófalu; 30 = Püspökszentlászló; 31 = Pécs; 32 = Máriagyúd. *Croatia*: 33 = Donji Miholjac; 34 = Beničanci; 35 = Našice; 36 = Čaglin; 37 = Podcrkavlje. *Bosnia and Herzegovina*: 38 = Kolibe Gornje; 39 = Derventa; 40 = Kotorsko; 41 = Dobo; 42 = Maglaj; 43 = Žepče; 44 = Nemila; 45 = Zenica; 46 = Novi Travnik; 47 = Bugojno; 48 = Kupres; 49 = Šujica; 50 = Donji Brišnik; 51 = ; 52 =



Photo 1. Pilgrimage to Szentkút, 2012 (Photo by IRIMIÁS, A.)



51 = Corici; 52 = Široki Brijeg. Stations of the Mariazell–Șumuleu Ciuc (Csíksomlyó) (West-East) route: *Austria*: 1 = Terz; 2 = Höllental; 3 = Schottwien; 4 = Unterberg; 5 = Rattersdorf. *Hungary*: 6 = Kőszeg; 7 = Csepreg; 8 = Csénye; 9 = Sárvár; 10 = Celldömölk; 11 = Mihályháza; 12 = Attyapuszta (Pápa); 13 = Bakonybél; 14 = Csatka-Szentkút; 15 = Bodajk; 16 = Majkpuszta (Oroszlány); 17 = Nagyegyháza (Felcsút); 18 = Zsámbék; 19 = -Máriaremete (Budapest); 20 = Szent Anna-rét (Budapest); 21 = Rákosszentmihály (Budapest); 22 = Máriabesnyő (Gödöllő); 23 = Petőfi-forrás (Bag); 24 = Ecséd; 25 = Kislána-Eger; 26 = Kács; 27 = Miskolc-Görömböly; 28 = Mád; 29 = Tarcál; 30 = Tokaj; 31 = Rakamaz; 32 = Nyíregyháza; 33 = Napkor; 34 = Máriapócs. *Romania*: 35 = Foieni (Mezőfény); 36 = Tiream (Mezőterem); 37 = Tășnad (Tasnád); 38 = Carastelec (Kárásztelek); 39 = Șimleu Silvaniei (Szilágysomlyó); 40 = Zalău (Zilah); 41 = Hida (Hidalmás); 42 = Șarmașu (Nagysármás); 43 = Fănațele Mădărașului (Hidegvölgy); 44 = Târgu Mureș (Marosvásárhely); 45 = Valea (Jobbágyfalva); 46 = Sărățeni (Sóvárád); 47 = Praid (Parajd); 48 = Suseni (Gyergyóújfalu); 49 = Cârța (Karcfalva)

sprang up on the spot. This legend and the king's great achievements provided the basis to elaborate a literary figure of him. An image, according to which Ladislaus can be compared to Moses emerged. It is believed that the Hungarian king is the one who brought order to his people through his laws like Moses did with the Commandments to the Hebrew people. Springs of mysterious origin are common in Catholic history. Water has a high importance in religions throughout the world. Water, as a literature *topos* as well, means cleanness, purity and regeneration. That interpretation is present in the case of Szentkút, since it is reflected in the location's name itself, Szentkút means a 'Holy well'.

The well is thought to have healing forces. The first event of a miraculous recovery (from an illness) at Szentkút was dated back to the 13th century when the Holy Mother with her son in her arms appeared to a mute shepherd. During her appearance, Maria told him to dig (a hole) into the soil and drink the water of the spring he would find there. The boy obeyed her and was cured miraculously, his ability to speak being given back to him.

Pilgrims started to construct a church in the village of Mátraverebély around 1210 from where a procession was organised to the holy spring at Szentkút (about 4 km away from the village inhabited mainly by a Roma population). The Church recognised the holiness of the place (crediting the miraculous events to it) and since 1400 has afforded the shrine the highest benefits. In 1700, Pope Clement XI ordered the detailed analysis of some miraculous healing events at Szentkút following which he declared that those were all authentic. Deep in the surrounding forests there are some hermit's abodes, still open to tourists, which were used by hermits until the second half of the 18th century. Traditionally, the Franciscans were the inhabitants of the monastery and the shrine was still flourishing in the period between the two world wars. However, its evolution was sharply stopped by the system of Communist rule. In 1950, the Friars were expelled by the Communist dictatorship, the monastery was overtaken by the state and it was made to become a home for the elderly. The Franciscans could only come back to Szentkút in 1989 when the Communist system collapsed and they had the opportunity to purchase their once owned properties which they started to develop and restore to their former glory.

The tradition of pilgrimage on foot has become reinforced since the beginning of 1990's. The shrine attracts devotees from a distance up to 150 km. In 2006, the shrine was declared to be the most significant place of worship by the cardinal who entitled it as a National Shrine. Not only pilgrims but also cultural tourists visit the shrine and their visits frequently embrace a subconscious emotional dimension as well. Various reasons have been put forward for the recent resurgence in pilgrimage to Szentkút and other shrines. The phenomenon should be viewed not only on a personal level but taking in consideration the social, cultural, political and economic environment.

This place of worship unlike other significant pilgrimage sites in Europe devoted to Mary could not be developed because of the forty years of Communist rule in Hungary and in Central and Southeastern Europe in general. However, in 2012 more than 200,000 pilgrims visited the shire and the holy well to enjoy the wild beauty of nature and to feel the Holy presence during the mass service and to find alleviation through confession and during prayer.

There is a long tradition of mixing the sacred and the secular at pilgrimage sites in Western Europe. It is similar in Central and Southeastern Europe as well and visitors are impressed by the contrast between piety and commercialism, between serenity of religious worship and the chatter of a festival. During the field observations, that contrast was evidenced delineating a clear geographic aspect of space where two distinct areas could be distinguished. The profane space is nearby the main route with small shops selling souvenirs, toys, devotional objects and bottles of holy water along with street vendors of hamburger, sweets and, in small amounts, alcohol. While the sacred space is restricted to the area that surrounds the basilica minor, the confessionals (12 ones), the grotto (cave) and the holy well. Tourism consumption, buying memorabilia, postcards and toys were practiced by pilgrims and many of them took home several bottles of holy water from the well.

There are two types of pilgrims who come for mainly religious purposes: the ones who come with an organised group, usually organised by their own congregation or group of students organised by their school, and the individuals and families. Today pilgrims come by bus, by private car or on foot. The pilgrimages are organised by dioceses or by local parishes. Schools are the most important tour organisers of groups for the ceremonies dedicated to children and young students. In July, during the fieldwork, labourers and rural, elderly people were strongly represented among pilgrims. The majority of them were women and two-thirds of them were over 60. Although many, if not all visitors, consider themselves to be pilgrims, others would call themselves tourists (informal interviews on site).

At Szentkút, one of the most significant moments of the pilgrimage is the confession. Pilgrims often come from small communities, from villages where they know each other's private lives. From the interviews with the Friars, it turned out that many pilgrims wanted to confess their sins to someone other than the local parish priest. Confession is also considered to have purifying effects. Since medieval times, there has been a common belief that physical diseases might have spiritual causes (such as sin) and the specific goal of a religious pilgrimage, in the past and today as well, has been a cure for diseases. As emerged from the informal interviews with pilgrims, landscape and the peaceful natural surrounding have a relatively important role in the healing process. Szentkút is enclosed in a spectacular natural beauty, it is relatively isolated, far from urban centres and human activities. Pilgrims affirmed

that the location of Szentkút and its deep connection to nature enhances the pilgrimage experience, along with the perception of intimacy with the patron saint and the physicality of the holy water, to be a sacral one. Drinking water from the holy well reinforces the spiritual experience and makes the pilgrims feel that they have done something to their health.

Conclusions

The Via Maria pilgrimage route is an artificially constructed trail linking the sacral and the secular heritage sites related to the Virgin in Central and Southeastern Europe. The establishment of the pilgrimage route, based on the example of the UNESCO World Heritage route El Camino, was the first initiative in the region to bring together pilgrims and tourists to visit the religious and cultural sites of the Carpathian Basin. The route has a particular resonance in itself during the Communist period religion and religious activities were banished and they had to be practiced illegally. The properties of the Church were confiscated and priests were persecuted. However, some shrines and sacral places linked to the devotion of Maria managed to function also during the Communist period. The rebirth of the Catholic Church can be dated back to 1990. Sacred sites are socially constructed as sacred and they are accepted by believers to have a special power on individuals' lives. The Virgin Mary is considered to be a holy figure who alleviates pain, offers hope and cures infertility. However, the importance of Szentkút also has national historical roots linked to one of the Hungarian kings.

Pilgrims and tourists who visit sacred sites may experience intense personal, emotional experiences which are mediated by the visitors' beliefs. Since the pilgrimage route Via Maria has been recently established the management of the route has applied signs and symbols to delineate the path (the pictogram indicating the Via Maria depicts a male and a female pilgrim on their way) and the route in some places coincides with previously lined trekking routes. The aim of the managers and organisers of the pilgrimage route was to attract believers, pilgrims and tourists as well. However, some implications (e.g. the conservation of natural protected areas) to sustainably manage the route has to be faced. Sacred sites as Szentkút, one of the most important shrines on the route, seem to have succeed in managing the massive arrivals of pilgrims. On Sundays 4,000–5,000 pilgrims attend the mass services and participate the patronal festivals. The shrine and the holy well can only be reached on foot. All vehicles are banned from the site and must be parked near the basilica minor.

Sustainability is one of the key factors in the development of the pilgrimage route since the landscape and natural environment are key attractions along the route. The conservational areas located in a beautiful natural

environment are tourist attractions as well. Moreover, it was outlined by the interviewed pilgrims that the beauty of landscape was perceived to have some healing effect on them and reinforce the spirituality of their experience. During the communist era religiousness was banned. Faith could be practiced privately or illegally and this process had a great effect on individuals' perception and their relationship with the Church. During the field research at Szentkút it has been observed that the communication of the Friars during the mass services were continuously referring to the past years dominated by Communism. The Friars tenderly addressed the pilgrims and the common participation at the mass service created a friendly, almost a familiar atmosphere. It has emerged from the informal interviews that pilgrims had felt alleviated after the ceremony and their perception of well-being had changed in a positive way.

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