

Deliverable 2.8: Policy brief

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This policy brief presents the state of the art of policies and governance frameworks concerning pilgrimage at the European level, drawing on evidence and specific examples from Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, which have developed different approaches to pilgrimage.





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Summary of the brief

Pilgrimage is experiencing a resurgence worldwide. Besides being a spiritual practice, pilgrimage can contribute to several of the EU objectives in terms of cultural heritage-led development and environmental protection, being linked to slow tourism, especially in rural regions.

This policy brief presents the state of the art of policies and governance frameworks concerning pilgrimage at European level, drawing on evidence and specific examples from the different countries of rurAllure partners (Hungary, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain). These countries have developed different approaches to pilgrimage, however, the interregional and transnational dimension of the routes is often overlooked.

Pilgrimage being a crosscutting phenomenon, the success of the policies lies in the multi-stakeholder collaboration at several and intersecting levels, contributing to fulfil a number of EU policy priorities in line with the European Green Deal. The brief argues that a common governance framework is required, in order to favour coordination among actors and unlock pilgrimage potential as effective catalyser for regional development and cohesion within the EU.

1. Introduction

European pilgrimage renaissance

The ancient medieval routes taken by wayfarers, pilgrims and merchants ever since the Roman age are fundamental elements of the European cultural heritage. Pilgrimage is arguably the forerunner of the modern phenomenon of tourism and lately it is experiencing a resurgence worldwide, with a multiplication of historic and contemporary pilgrimage routes being developed.

Pilgrimage has been recognised by UNWTO as **one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry**. The few thousand pilgrims to Santiago de Compostela in the 1980's¹ have soared to over 300 thousand before the pandemic². To that number, it is necessary to add over 2 million arrivals of traditional tourists-pilgrims, who reached the city with modern means of transportation³.

In 1987 the Ways of Saint James became the first European Cultural itinerary being certified by the Council of Europe, later followed by Via Francigena, Saint Olav Ways and Via Romea Germanica, among others. Even though pilgrimage routes have originally been inspired by a religious vocation (visiting sacred sites or shrines), contemporary pilgrims' motivations are often driven by the search for a personal dimension of spirituality, which might involve the connection with nature and authentic, life-changing experiences.

The **journey on foot or by bicycle** along ancient pilgrimage routes and historic itineraries is to be considered as a form of **slow mobility** that should be endorsed both for its low environmental impact and its important socio-cultural dimension. These slow itineraries support local livelihoods and strengthen cultural identity by engaging travellers with the people and culture of the territories visited.

¹ https://doi.org/10.1300/J150v12n01_03

² <https://oficinadelperegrino.com/en/statistics/>

³ <https://doi.org/10.21138/bage.2825>



The potential of pilgrimage for regional development

Pilgrimage routes and historic itineraries are widely considered as a resource, not only for their cultural and spiritual value but also for their **economic relevance in connection with territorial promotional activities and income generation opportunities**. They are traversed by thousands of people each year, mobilising substantial resources and serving to boost opportunities of economic development and job creation in less-developed rural areas, which suffer from depopulation and youth drain.

The strategic potential of pilgrimage lies in the fact that they constitute **linear territorial systems, linking the local, regional, national and transnational dimensions and cutting across several sectors** (culture, economy, rural development, environment, health, etc.). In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the rural areas traversed by pilgrimage routes have become increasingly attractive for tourists and pilgrims, as they can ensure physical distance and outdoor spaces coupled with the physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing as a result of travelling long distances across quiet and bucolic landscapes.

However, this potential is hindered by a **lack of a common governance framework** to allow coordination between the actors involved in pilgrimage at European level. In this perspective, pilgrimage routes are the outcome of complex networks of actors organized internally with a specific governance, that have to be coordinated with the wider governance framework at local, regional and national level. The success of routes lies in the **multi-stakeholder collaboration at multiple levels**, including local and regional governments, faith-led organisations, academia, residents, private companies, NGOs, that should work together to provide the infrastructure and services to meet pilgrims' needs. Most often there is a **lack of coordination between the territories** crossed by the routes, resulting in a far from homogeneous experience for the pilgrim. Cooperation among actors is also paramount to **access funding to effectively and consistently tackle common issues** related to infrastructure development, sign posting, management and promotion of the routes.

Since **pilgrimage is a crosscutting phenomenon**, contributing to fulfil a number of EU policy priorities in line with the **green and digital transition** called for by the European Green Deal, the first step is to understand the state of the art of policy and governance framework at European and country level in terms of pilgrimage routes' development and management, in order to unlock its potential as effective catalyser for regional development.

2. Evidence and analysis

The EU policy framework relevant for pilgrimage routes

References to pilgrimage routes can be found mainly under **three European policies: tourism, cultural heritage and rural development**. In terms of tourism and cultural heritage, the EU competence is limited to complement, support and coordinate actions of the Member States⁴, while for rural development it has higher powers as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The European Green Deal provides a key framework to achieve a green and digital transition across all economic sectors, with some of the strategies (i.e. soft mobility) particularly relevant for pilgrimage routes.

⁴ See the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, TFEU (Art 167 and Art 195).



Tourism

As part of the **New Industrial Strategy**⁵, tourism is the first industry to start co-creating the **transition pathway**, to achieve the 2030 vision of a greener, digital and resilient tourism ecosystem. Led by the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW), the finalised pathway (expected for early 2022) will set the basis for drafting the **European Agenda for Tourism 2030-2050** jointly with Member States and tourism stakeholders.

The aim of the strategy is to ensure that the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis is taken as an opportunity to make the tourism industry more resilient and sustainable, making use of the **Recovery and Resilience funds**. Some of these opportunities have the rural areas and cultural heritage as key focus, while several of the issues raised are in line with the promotion of pilgrimage routes such as the implementation of sustainable and multimodal mobility strategies, energy efficiency improvement for cultural and tourism related buildings, digital technologies for cultural heritage content creation, etc.

Cultural heritage

Cultural heritage is recognised as a strategic resource for a sustainable Europe. **Cultural tourism accounts for 40% of all European tourism** and 68% of Europeans believe that the presence of cultural heritage has an influence on their choice of holiday destination⁶. The **new European Agenda for culture**⁷ supports cultural heritage as a driver for socio-economic development, in line with a shift in perception from the “conservation” to the “transmission” of cultural heritage, corresponding also to the view of the Faro Convention that places local communities at the heart of cultural heritage management.

In this regard, the **Cultural Routes Programme** of the Council of Europe, through the Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA), supports the development and promotion of cultural routes, including historic pilgrimage trails. The programme offers an integrated model for transnational cultural and tourism management, enabling cooperation between national, regional and local authorities, private sector and civil society.

Rural development

Rural development is the second pillar of the common agricultural policy (CAP) and as such is concerned with diversifying the economy of rural areas. The CAP's contribution to the EU's rural development objectives is supported by the **European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)**.

The Commission Communication **“A long-term vision for the EU's rural areas up to 2040”**, launched in 2021, proposes a **Rural Pact and a Rural Action Plan** which aim at making the rural areas stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous. These four key drivers are closely linked to pilgrimage, mainly in terms of multimodal connections and cycling paths infrastructure, diversified economic activities and leveraging existing networks and all levels of governance.

Rural development policies recognise the potential of digitalisation to improve business competitiveness and the provision of services in rural areas⁸. The **Digital Agenda for Europe** and

⁵ COM (2021) 350 final.

⁶ Special Eurobarometer 466 – Cultural Heritage report (2017).

⁷ COM (2018)267 final – A new European agenda for culture.

⁸ Interreg Europe Policy brief on “The challenges and necessity of rural innovation”.



the **EU Action for Smart Villages** highlight how green and digital technologies can improve the quality of life in rural areas, by boosting business development, new infrastructure and services for citizens, as well as qualified jobs, thus decreasing the youth drain.

The **Cohesion Policy** through the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and its **Smart Specialization Strategy**⁹ addresses the gap between developed and lagging-behind regions. Less-developed regions where cultural heritage represents a major asset for economic growth can prioritise investments in this area. Furthermore, the **LEADER programme** has shown from the early 1980's that a **community-led, local development (CLLD) approach** can bring a number of economic, cultural, social and environmental benefits in rural Europe. This approach can support the development of cultural tourism products such as **transnational pilgrimage routes**, working with local communities around an integrated development strategy.

Box 1

LEADER 2014-2020 SUB-MEASURE 19.3, Cooperation among Local Action Groups

This sub-measure promotes and supports cooperation between Local Action Groups (LAGs) financing projects at interregional and transnational level, with the aim of improving local development strategies through joint actions. The exchange of ideas and best practices resulting from these actions contribute to innovation and further cooperation across territories.

The transnational project *“Bringing together the sites dedicated to St Michael in Europe”* led by the LAG Pays du Velay (France) and partnered with LAGs from Piedmont (Italy) and Catalonia (Spain) aim at **promoting and enhancing the routes and cultural heritage linked to St Michael** through common actions including strengthening the network of sites and stakeholders, a joint marketing strategy and the development of tourist itineraries. One of the goals at the end of the project is to present the nomination to the Council of Europe as European Cultural Route.

At inter-territorial level, the project *“Pilgrimage routes from the Apennines to the Po Delta: itineraries in rural areas of Emilia Romagna”* brings together for the first time the 6 LAGs of the Emilia Romagna region, with the objective of **developing itineraries along existing pilgrimage trails**, enhancing the local cultural and natural assets of each territory and involving the local population, including schools.

The **EU macro-regional strategies** provide a policy framework to tackle common challenges across countries with similar geographical characteristics, coordinate efforts and align national policies with the macro-regional objectives. **ROUTES 4U**, a recent joint programme of the Commission and the Council of Europe, shed light on **the role transnational routes can have in supporting regional development through fostering cross-border cooperation and territorial cohesion**. All of the macro-regional strategies (Adriatic and Ionian, Alpine, Baltic Sea and Danube) consider natural and cultural heritage protection and tourism promotion as key priorities and support the development of existing and new cultural routes, including pilgrimage.

⁹ <https://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/home>



State of the art on pilgrimage policies and governance at country level

Italy: A renewed boost to pilgrimage routes

In 2016 an official governmental directive declared that year as the so-called “Anno dei **Cammini**”, a year-long initiative on walking trails, which allowed to map over 40 itineraries in the country and gave as a result a **digital atlas of Italian walking paths**. Since 2021 pilgrimage and walking trails are the responsibility of the **Ministry of Culture**. The **Italian Alpine Club (CAI)**, a non-economic public body, is responsible for developing and maintaining the hiking trail network of Italy, one of the largest in Europe with about 60.000 kilometres.

Currently, there is [a project of a national law](#) (expected to be debated in early 2022) to promote interregional routes as cultural itineraries. Notably, one of the proposals under discussion is to **set up a permanent body** with representatives from the competent central administrations, regions and autonomous provinces, local authorities, private and non-profit sector aimed at coordinating actions and establishing common guidelines for the development and promotion of walking trails.

In Italy, **regions (NUTS2) are mainly responsible for enacting policies** and pilgrimage is usually under the tourism and/or culture sectors:

- A number of regions have **specific policies** regarding walking trails and pilgrimage routes, such as Tuscany, [Lazio](#), [Veneto](#) or [Friuli Venezia Giulia](#). These laws mainly refer to promotion and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage along existing routes, with only a few of them describing maintenance duties in charge of the region.
- Puglia region has established in 2018 a **Committee for Cultural Routes and Itineraries** and a **Forum** that involves local administrations, trade associations and enterprises, to coordinate the planning and promotion of Apulian itineraries.
- Emilia Romagna region has launched in 2015 the project [Cammini Emilia Romagna](#) promoting slow tourism through the pilgrimage trails traversing the region.

Provinces and municipalities are mainly responsible for implementing the actions under the direction of the regions and financed or co-financed by them. The role of **local associations** is fundamental since in Italy most **pilgrimage routes are bottom-up initiatives**, with local associations taking care voluntarily of the path maintenance and territorial activation.

In few cases the **Catholic Church** is involved as stakeholder, thanks to special agreements between specific regions and the regional Conference of Bishops.

The recently approved **Italian Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR)** presents a number of opportunities for pilgrimage routes, under the strategic priorities “Regeneration of small cultural sites, cultural, religious and rural heritage” and “**Tourism 4.0**”. In particular, the Sustainable Tourism Fund with a budget of 500 million euros, has among its actions “Developing new cultural tourism walking routes” (including the restoration of historic railway lines).

A further opportunity for pilgrimage is represented by the 2025 [Jubilee \(Holy Year\)](#), which will provide additional funding for the **initiative “Caput Mundi - Next Generation EU”**. The aim is to establish a sustainable tourism model that bring pilgrims and tourists from Rome to lesser-known regions along national itineraries.

Box 2 The Via Francigena in Tuscany region

Tuscany has recognised the Via Francigena as an opportunity to promote lesser-known towns in the region and its approach is considered a best practice of interregional and multisectoral cooperation. Through the **Master Plan 2010-2014**, all the necessary restoration and enhancement work was taken along the 400 km of the route to make it a viable itinerary, as well as the refurbishment of cultural heritage and accommodation facilities, **in coordination with municipalities and provinces**. The Tuscany region invested a total of 16 million euros funded by European Structural Funds.

Furthermore, under the Regional Law n.86 of 2016, an **agreement was signed among the 38 municipalities interested** by the route in order to ensure their commitment to maintain the trails and promote **Via Francigena as a homogeneous tourist product**.

The strategic importance of pilgrimage routes for the Tuscany region has been enhanced by the [Regional Law n.35 of 2018](#) on the recognition, enhancement and promotion of regional routes, as well as the recent initiative of a **“Regional Atlas of routes”**, identifying **7 pilgrimage routes** with the potential to become a tourist product like Via Francigena.

Spain: Galicia leading the “Way” to a new Spanish tourism model

There are several pilgrimage and cultural routes in Spain, being the **Ways of Saint James** the most well-known and the one that has been more extensively regulated. It was recognized as the **first European Cultural Route** in 1987 and as **World Heritage Site for the French Way** in 1993 (extended in 2015 to the ways in the north of Spain).

At national level, the “Way” has been declared a historical heritage site since 1985, attributing it the highest level of protection for heritage in Spain. The protection and safeguard of cultural heritage, as well as the tourism development fall within the **competence of the autonomous communities (NUTS2)**. The role of the central government is limited to coordination and cooperation through the **Jacobean Council**, a territorial cooperation body attached to the **Ministry of Culture**, whose purpose is to facilitate communication between the central government and the autonomous communities through which the pilgrim’s way passes.

Although many regions crossed by the different trails (Galicia, Navarra, La Rioja, Castilla y León, Extremadura, Andalucía) have enacted specific laws and policies regarding the Way, **Galicia has taken the lead** since the 1990’s, when the region decided to boost the Way of Saint James to attract international visitors. The [Holy Years of 1993 and 1999](#) were decisive to set up strategies and actions to position it as the main European pilgrimage route. Nowadays, it is still the main source of international tourism in the region, and a major part of tourist promotion policies, integrating most cultural policies too.

- This process of merging cultural policies into touristic ones can be seen on policy documents such as the **“2020 Shock Plan against the touristic and cultural crisis caused by COVID-19 pandemic”**, and the **“O teu Xacobeo”**, a specific aid programme for the socio-cultural revitalisation of the Camino de Santiago and the promotion of Xacobeo 2021.
- Because of the large economic impact of the St. James’ ways, the **Galician public legislation on pilgrimage is the most advanced in Europe**. Since 2001 all the regional legislation related to the Way has been harmonized under the [Decree 45/2001](#), which concerns aspects such as conservation and promotion, the functioning of the regional



network of hostels, and the establishment of the International Committee of Experts on the Way of St. James.

- The regional government, **Xunta de Galicia**, is the **main policymaker** having incidence on the pilgrim's way. The [Decree 107/2016](#) has set up an inter-departmental Commission in order to coordinate the **Galician Tourism Agency**, the **Ministry of Cultural Heritage** and the **S.A. de Xestión do Plan Xacobeo**. The latter is a public body, under the functional tutelage of the Galician Tourism Agency, responsible for the cultural and tourist enhancement of the Way, its promotion especially in Holy Years, the maintenance of the routes, the management of the hostels' network, and any other action that benefits the Way of Saint James.
- The **Catholic Church**, **another important actor**, has full authority over access to the Santiago's Cathedral and grants the "Compostela", the official certificate of completion of the Camino for those pilgrims that have walk at least 100km (or 200km by bike or on horseback). The Compostela is the unit of measurement for counting the number of pilgrims who walk the Camino each year, which reached **350.000 pilgrims in 2019**, according to the Pilgrim's Reception Office in Santiago de Compostela.

Other regional government have specific regulations as well, but not as detailed and developed as in Galicia. La Rioja stands out as the region with the largest number of protected heritage sites directly connected to the Way, as well as with specific legislation to protect the areas crossed by the Way. Other legislation in regions such as Navarra and Andalucía protects the use of public paths to ensure the transit of pilgrims across private lands.

Municipalities along the route are in charge of land management, therefore any physical actions (in terms of maintenance, sign posting, etc.) is implemented through them. They also participate in heritage conservation and promotion along their stretch of the Way, in coordination with the regional government.

At international level, the **Associations of Friends of the Way of St. James** are instrumental to the promotion of the way. The first Association was founded in Paris in 1950 and today there are 324 Associations in 24 countries on all continents, promoting a wide range of cultural activities linked to the Camino.

Box 3

Master Plan of the Way of St. James 2015-2021 and the Holy Year

The **Xunta de Galicia** has invested **56.1 million euros** in developing and implementing its [Master and Strategic Plan](#) of the Way of St. James 2015-2021, co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund. The plan acts as a roadmap to promote, protect and enhance the Ways of St. James in Galicia, and as a management tool, establishing the role and responsibilities of all the public and private actors involved.

Among the **governance actions**, there are the promotion of cooperation between the regional governments involved in the Way, collaboration between Galician government and church authorities, international relations with other countries of the Jacobean route and collaboration with the associations "Friends of The Way of St. James".

Due to the pandemic, the Holy Year of 2021 has been exceptionally extended to 2022 and there are high expectations both at regional and national level for the recovery of tourism as

reflected in the **Xacobeo National Tourist Plan 2021-2022**. The project aims at promoting the pilgrims' way as a cultural tourism product, to transform the Spanish tourism model in line with the post-pandemic trends. The plan allocates 121 million euros (financed with EU Next Generation Funds), with 45 million euros allocated specifically to the development of new tourism products.

Portugal: Promoting thematic routes with a leading tourism player

At national level, the **Secretary of State for Tourism** sits within the **Ministry of Economy and Digital Transition**. The national tourism authority, Turismo de Portugal reports to the Secretary of State for Tourism. In 2017, the Government launched its long-term **Tourism Strategy 2027**, to drive economic, social and environmental development throughout the country and position Portugal as one of the world's most competitive and sustainable tourism destinations. **Turismo de Portugal** is responsible for coordinating and promoting the implementation of the strategy.

Among the strategy's **priority projects** there is the structuring and promotion of thematic routes and itineraries based on historic, cultural and natural assets. **Inter-modality and interoperability** between different means of transport as well as **soft mobility** are promoted to improve connectivity.

Two programmes have been launched lately, in order to **boost walking and cycling trails**:

- The **Portuguese Trails** platform, which offers several walking and cycling routes across the seven Portuguese regions.
- The **Paths of Faith** project, that **promotes Portugal as a destination for spiritual and cultural enjoyment**, anchored on the themes of Marian Worship (Fatima Ways, Marian Altars), the Ways of St. James and Jewish Heritage.

Both projects focus on increasing visitors' flows especially out of the main seasons, and include information on the routes, regions and tourism services related to the trails. The governance model of the projects articulates both public and private actors, involving Turismo de Portugal as the national coordinator and promotional body, the regional tourism bodies as the ones structuring the product, the municipalities taking care of trail maintenance and enhancement, and the Regional Agencies for Tourism Promotion (ARPTs) to promote the packages.

The **Decree-Law n.º 51/2019** develops a framework for pilgrimage policies, in terms of safeguarding, enhancement and promotion of the pilgrimage route to Santiago de Compostela through the **certification of its itineraries**. The **General Directorate of Cultural Heritage (DGPC)** is responsible for the protection of the cultural heritage and Turismo de Portugal assumes its promotion, with other two bodies involved in the process:

- The **Certification Commission**, a non-permanent body composed by technicians from the DGPC and Turismo de Portugal, which analyses the certification requests of the Ways of St. James routes.
- The **Consultative Council**, the advisory body of the certification commission, composed of representatives of the municipalities, parishes, the Catholic Church, pilgrims' associations, regional tourism entities, associations for the defence and promotion of cultural and environmental heritage and civil institutions in the safeguarding and promotion of the St. James Way.

Box 4

“Appreciation of the Saint James trails - The Portuguese Coastal Way”

To revive interest in the historic route, [10 municipalities from the north of Portugal signed an agreement in 2015](#) to improve the infrastructure conditions, enhance the cultural heritage and renovate accommodation facilities along the trail. Besides restoration, the municipalities promoted a cultural programme along the route and the publication of printed and digital materials such as a guide for hikers.

The [total investment for the project was 2.1 million euros](#), with the European Regional Development Fund contributing 1.4 million euros through the “North Region Operational Programme” for the 2014-2020 programming period. The investment falls under the priority “Jobs, Growth and Investment”.

Among the 6 routes leading to Santiago de Compostela from Portugal, the Central route is the main one and the Coastal Way is the one gaining increasing popularity in recent years.

Norway: Pilgrimage as a national strategy

The Norwegian government established in 2012 the [Strategy on Pilgrimage](#), the only national-level strategy of this kind in Europe. Pilgrimage is perceived as a phenomenon contributing to fulfil a number of key objectives for society and this is reflected in the number of ministries involved in setting up the strategy, including the Ministry of Climate and Environment, the Ministry of Culture and Church affairs, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Fisheries, the Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Food.

The country decided to **focus on the St. Olav ways** with the possibility to include new pilgrim’s trails later on.

The policy relies upon a strategy of **multi-level governance** of the pilgrimage route, which describes the responsibilities of the different actors involved at **national, regional and local level**.

- The **Ministry of Culture** is the responsible body of the strategy.
- A **National Pilgrimage Centre (NPC)** was established in 2012 in order to facilitate the route’s development and to coordinate the stakeholders towards a common direction. Currently the NPC is under the Nidaros Cathedral Restoration Workshop (NDR), an administrative body part of the Ministry of Culture.
- There are **five Regional Pilgrims Centres (RPC)** coordinated by the NPC, which are in charge of stimulating the route development in cooperation with the regional and municipal governments, the Church, NGOs, museums and all other actors involved. They also act as information centres for pilgrims. The national and regional pilgrim centres are funded by the Ministry of Culture.

Counties (NUTS3) are administrative regions in Norway and are responsible for trail development and for securing funding. They also coordinate and support the municipalities along the trails, in collaboration with the regional and national pilgrim’s centres. In turn, the **municipalities** are responsible for maintaining (marking, managing and cleaning) the trails, in collaboration with **volunteer associations**.

The National Strategy on Pilgrimage has lately been updated through a consultation process that has resulted in the [Long Term Action Plan 2020-2037 The Pilgrimage - A Journey of](#)



Wonder. The aspiration of this action plan is to extend the governance framework of the strategy beyond the NPC, to include a range of public and private partners.

There are high expectations for **2030** as an opportunity to promote pilgrimage to Trondheim, since it will mark the **1000th anniversary of the Norwegian nation** (and also St Olav's death).

Box 5 St. Olav Ways in Scandinavia

The St. Olav's Ways represent a **network of routes through the Scandinavian countries** to the **Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway**. The most developed route is the one from Oslo, through the valley of Gudbrandsdalen, to Trondheim and the creation of the five regional pilgrim centres along this stretch represent this clear investment priority.

The decision to revitalize the ways was taken after the **Winter Olympic Games in 1994** and since then the routes have developed gradually, including the construction of infrastructure, provision of services and promotional activities. The **Norwegian government invests €1.4 million per year to coordinate pilgrims' activities**.

In 2010 St. Olav Ways became a **certified European Cultural Route**. The Association for the Cultural Routes of St. Olav Ways (ACSOW) coordinates the activities between all Nordic countries with routes to Trondheim (**Norway, Sweden and Denmark**). **Finland** has been working on the enhancement of the **St Olav Waterway**, an ambitious project funded by the Interreg Central Baltic programme (2016-2020) to develop pilgrimage routes through sea passages. There is **potential for further joint initiatives among all four Nordic countries**, in particular relating to online presence, as the respective websites focus on the national territories separately.

Hungary: Pilgrimage as a religious tourism niche

The responsibility for tourism was some years ago transferred from the Ministry of National Development to the **Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister**, demonstrating the importance the government attaches to tourism. In fact, the **National Tourism Development Strategy 2030** (first version developed in 2017 and updated in 2021) envisions making tourism the leading sector of economic growth.

The **Hungarian Tourism Agency (MTÜ)** is responsible for the overall development and management of tourism, including the definition of the tourism strategy, providing advice on the allocation of European funds and the development of new tourism products. The agency provides recommendations to the Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister.

Pilgrimage is considered as **part of the tourism sector and placed specifically within religious tourism**, under the responsibilities of MTÜ. The 61/2017 Governmental decree that defined the duties of the agency has been modified by the 579/2021 decree, assigning authority to MTÜ to provide recommendation and express opinion in issues related to religious tourism.

- The recently released Tourism 2.0 Strategy deals extensively with religious tourism, including pilgrimage and thematic routes, which are recognised among the four most important attraction categories.



- One important pilgrimage route crossing Hungary is [Mária út](#) (or the Way of Mary), a spiritual way linking 8 countries of Central Eastern Europe towards the shrine of Şumuleu Ciuc/ Csíksomlyó in Romania.
- Among the several **challenges** which must be addressed there are the **lack of awareness** about the rich religious heritage of the country and the need for a **closer cooperation** between representatives of the church and tourism authorities, the **collection of data** on pilgrimage to identify pilgrims' profiles, and the improvement of the accommodation quality and the accessibility to sites along pilgrimage trails.
- Moreover, the Tourism 2.0 Strategy proposed to establish a **National Religious Tourism Forum**, coordinated by MTÜ, in which all stakeholders relevant to religious tourism are represented. The primary purpose of the Forum would be communication and preliminary conciliation in far-reaching decisions affecting religious tourism. It could also serve as a platform to the religious, professional and institutional parties for cooperation and communication.

Slovakia: An opportunity under the new tourism agency

A new **Sustainable Tourism Strategy** to guide the long-term development of tourism to 2030 is currently being prepared and will update the Tourism Development Strategy 2020, which aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the tourism sector, balance existing regional disparities and create jobs with a focus on two key areas: raising the quality of the tourism offer and promoting Slovakia as a tourism destination.

- The main goal of the new strategy (expected to be released in March 2022) is to reduce seasonal disparities by creating a comprehensive tourism offer, with considerable effort in **supporting cycling and hiking tourism development**.
- These priorities are endorsed by the [National Strategy for the development of Cycling transport and Cycling tourism](#), whose goal is to fully integrate cycling with other transport modes and boost cycling tourism.

Responsibility for tourism rests with the **Ministry of Transport and Construction**. The Tourism section of the Ministry is responsible for strategy formulation and implementation, marketing and promotion. Similar to Hungary, pilgrimage is seen as part of religious tourism and mainly a responsibility of the tourism sector. However, there is **no legislation concerning pilgrimage routes**.

The **Church Department** inside the **Ministry of Culture** deals with relations between the state and the church. Pilgrimage does not fall directly within the Church Department competences but they have supported religious tourism through the use of national cultural monuments owned by churches and religious societies.

The newly established **Slovakia Travel Agency (STA)** is given responsibility for tourism marketing and promotion. Pilgrimage and religious tourism are among their areas of interest, especially in light of the upcoming "Year of Christian Culture", to be announced in 2022 under the auspices of the **Conference of Bishops of Slovakia** (another important stakeholder which normally cooperates with state institutions).

Tourism responsibilities are delegated to the eight **self-governing regions (NUTS3 level)**, while municipalities also play an important role in the development of tourism. **Local and regional Destination Management Organisations (DMOs)** are responsible for the development of tourism products and promotion. Local DMOs are created by municipalities, tourism business



entities, non-profit organisations, foundations and associations with activities in the field of tourism. Regional DMOs are formed by the regional authorities and at least one local DMO. Currently there are **37 local and 7 regional DMOs operating in Slovakia**, funded by subsidies provided by the Ministry, membership fees and other sources.

Romania: Potential for pilgrimage but still in its infancy

Pilgrimage routes in Romania fall within the competences of the **Ministry of Tourism** and the **Ministry of Culture**, as they are considered cultural assets with tourism development potential.

The **National Tourism Development Strategy 2019-2030** was developed with the support of the World Bank in 2018, and the strengthening of the tourism policy making capacity is among the key priorities identified. Pilgrimage and more in general hiking trails are only briefly mentioned. However, the **Strategy for Ecotourism Development 2019-2029**, includes the development of walking routes and trails as a way to promote sustainable tourism in protected areas. The **Association of Ecotourism in Romania (AER)** advocates for nature conservation and tourism development, granting the Eco-Romania certification and promoting a number of trails including cycling, trekking and interpretation trails. Pilgrimage routes are not among these trails though.

The **National Culture and Heritage Strategy 2016-2022** recognise thematic cultural routes as part of cultural heritage. Actions planned in the strategy include:

- Connection of **thematic cultural itineraries** from Romania to similar routes at European and international level.
- Creation of **networks to promote the UNESCO heritage sites** in the country.
- Inclusion of historical monuments, cultural heritage and natural landscapes along the routes in coordination with tour operators.

Moreover, an important project of the Ministry of Culture is the **Heritage Code** (Codul Patrimoniului), a legislative act in which the national heritage becomes one of the fundamental resources for socio-economic development and its protection falls both under the duties of central and local administration as well as local communities.

Pilgrimage routes have been almost **exclusively the responsibility of churches, ecclesiastical and non-governmental organizations**, such as the [*Transylvanian Way of Mary Association*](#) and the [*Via Transilvanica*](#) project. The **State Secretariat for Religious Affairs**, which is a political institution appointed by the Prime Minister, does not deal with religious pilgrimage routes.

A decentralization process is currently underway, with representatives from the ministry working with local partners to help implement the national tourism policy. Responsibilities of the **local administrations** related to trails include the certification of pedestrian routes, mountain and tourist trails, the improvement of the quality of products, and the surveillance of tourist activity.

At international level, Romania has been particularly active, collaborating within the **Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe** and promoting all Council of Europe cultural routes crossing Romania (16 transnational cultural routes).

Box 6: RURITAGE: Heritage-led regeneration strategies for rural areas

Cultural heritage enhancement can be a driver for rural regeneration as proposed by the H2020 project [RURITAGE](#). As part of this project, “**Rural Heritage Hubs**” have been established in rural areas choosing one role model and one replicator. The hub acts as a living lab where local stakeholders and inhabitants cooperate to develop new **heritage-led regeneration strategies** for their territory in 6 systemic innovation areas: **Pilgrimage**, Resilience, Sustainable Local Food Production, Integrated Landscape Management, Migration and Art and Festivals.

Territories involved in the project choose one main systemic innovation area. In the case of **Harghita county** in **Romania**, two rural heritage hubs have been established and the **pilgrimage route** [Way of Mary](#) has been selected as a role model for its significance, connecting Western and Eastern Europe. The enhancement of cultural and natural heritage along the route through sustainable tourism acts as a complement to the traditional economic activities of the county (mainly agriculture) while contributing to social inclusion, creating a network among neighbouring countries (comprising also Hungary and Slovakia).

Key takeaways, challenges and opportunities across countries

National vs. regional

- Pilgrimage routes are gaining a **renewed momentum** by governments in all the countries analysed, under religious, cultural or outdoor tourism perspective.
- Apart from being an already consolidated phenomenon in Spain thanks to the Saint James Ways, countries like Italy are considering enacting a national law, while Norway can boast of having the only national-level pilgrimage strategy in Europe.
- Other countries do not have specific policies on pilgrimage but do make reference to hiking, cycling and slow tourism itineraries in other strategies, motivated by the increasing attention to physical and spiritual wellbeing as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The actual role of regional governments (NUTS2) depends on the administrative organisation of the country. While some countries adopt a decentralised model, giving larger autonomy to regions, such as the case of Spain or Italy, other countries are very much centralised, such as Hungary or Slovakia.

Culture or tourism?

- In terms of policy sector, **pilgrimage is generally positioned under the culture and tourism sectors**, since they are generally perceived as part of the tangible and intangible cultural heritage as well as tourist assets with the potential to generate economic benefits, mainly in rural areas.
- Some of the analysed countries place pilgrimage as **part of the religious tourism niche**, while others relate them to wider motivations including, but not limited to, religious motivations.



| KEY GOVERNANCE FEATURES | ITALY | SPAIN | PORTUGAL | NORWAY | HUNGARY | SLOVAKIA | ROMANIA |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|---------|---------|----------|--------------------------|
| Policies concerning pilgrimage | X | X | X | X | | | |
| Policies including pilgrimage/ hiking/ cycling/ thematic routes | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Main sector responsible* | 1) Culture 2) Tourism | 1) Tourism 2) Culture | 1) Tourism 2) Culture | Culture | Tourism | Tourism | 1) Culture 2) Tourism |
| Policy makers involved (NUTS level) | | | | | | | |
| NUTS1 | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| NUTS2 | X | X | | | | | |
| NUTS3 | | | | | | | |
| Key role voluntary and community organizations | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |

* Meaning 1= main sector and 2= secondary sector. However, following NUTS administrative structure, the responsible sector may vary between culture and tourism.

Rural development role

- The adoption of a **wider approach to pilgrimage** (not limited to religious motivations) increases its potential, as pilgrimage is a crosscutting theme that can benefit from a higher level of cooperation across sectors: tourism, culture, environment, landscape, agriculture, etc.
- Pilgrimage routes can provide opportunities for social integration and a shared sense of belonging, contributing to the **social rejuvenation of rural areas** that suffer depopulation.
- **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** are instrumental to support the creation of networks of actors along pilgrimage routes. They act as catalysers for territorial development, using culture and tourism as drivers for rural development, complementing the traditional agriculture sector and a series of recent examples confirm their strategic role (see box number 1).

Public-private partnerships

- **Destination Management Organizations (DMOs)** are increasingly playing a leading role, as they are able to bring together public and private sector and work at local/regional level to implement national policies, as well as informing national policies with place-based knowledge.
- The value of **voluntary and community organizations** in trails' management has yet to be fully acknowledged, as a number of trails and thematic routes are **created and maintained mainly through a bottom-up approach**.

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Key challenges

- One of the main challenges that pilgrimage routes face is that **each administrative region has its own policy and governance framework**. In most of the cases this hampers an effective coordination among the regions and countries where the trail passes by.
- A key critical issue is that **the interregional and transnational dimensions of the routes are often overlooked**.
- This **fragmentation** results in a series of different experiences for the tourist, a weakening of the transnational characteristics of the route and also in the lack of a unified brand related to the route, with cases where a transnational route is only identified with a certain region.
- A challenge closely linked to that of policy and governance framework is **funding**. Funds are generally allocated at local and/or regional levels, while the nature of pilgrimage routes is predominantly interregional and transnational, making an overall coordination difficult and thereby weakening the potential benefits accruing from a financing framework which take into account important economic as well as cultural spill overs.
- **European funds represent an opportunity** to support territorial development through pilgrimage routes; however, **access to these funds is difficult for pilgrimage routes** since they are networks formed by micro, small and medium size enterprises (MSMEs) with little human and financial resources to comply with the requirements to access EU funds.

Monitoring impacts

- There is a **need for the development of monitoring tools** capable of measuring properly the impacts of routes, as recognised by the Routes4U reports for the four European macro-regions.
- The lack of effective monitoring tools might help to explain why policy makers have not attached pilgrimage routes the importance they deserve, in terms of positive economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts.

3. Policy recommendations

On the basis of the analysis performed and the opportunities and challenges identified, this policy brief derives **four recommendations**, as explained in the next pages.

These preliminary recommendations stem from an extensive desk research as well from a field analysis based on a series of interviews to qualified stakeholders. They will be further complemented with primary data coming from the four pilots of rurAllure in a number of European historic pilgrimage routes.

The final outcome expected for 2023 will be the **“White book of recommendations for the decade”**, a **research and innovation agenda for rural cultural heritage** directed to policy makers and stakeholders to improve the cooperation of European cultural, creative and economic agents related to the rural environment. The white book will be informed by the lessons learned from the rurAllure pilots and will complement this policy brief.

Recommendation #1

Developing a common governance model with shared priorities and clear responsibilities, allowing dialogue and coordination

In order to overcome the differences between policy sectors and governance mechanisms across the territories traversed by the routes, the opportunity emerges for the creation of a kind of **permanent board of cross-border regions**. Ideally, each country could establish a technical body to coordinate the plurality of actors at horizontal (public, private, third sector) and vertical (local, regional, national) levels that could then dialogue at transnational level. For religious pilgrimage routes, the churches needs to be involved, also at different scales.

Governance could be coordinated through the 4 existing macro-regions: Adriatic and Ionian, Alpine, Baltic Sea and Danube. This is, in fact, proposed in the [Routes4U report on Policies for the Danube Region](#), where macro-regions are recognised as suitable "*regional hubs for policy exchange, networking and transfer of good practices in terms of joint cultural routes management*". Therefore, pilgrimage could be better integrated in their respective priorities in areas of tourism, culture and rural development, recognising the crosscutting nature of pilgrimage and creates the enabling environment for Member States to align their policies more effectively.

Examples of multi-level governance of this kind exist at single route level, such as the case of Via Francigena, which has agreed a Memorandum of Understanding among the 13 European Regions of the Via Francigena and has set up the European Committee for Technical Interregional Coordination. This was made possible by the European project "PER VIAM".

Recommendation #2:

Supporting infrastructure development and management of pilgrimage routes through the Recovery and Resiliency Facility and current programming period funds

- Fund the development of infrastructure for walking and cycling trails, as well as the renovation of pilgrim's hostels and accommodation (also in areas feasibly within reach from the paths), in line with the **EU Green Deal** goals of zero pollution and carbon neutrality, while generating economic opportunities through slow tourism in rural areas and contributing to the health and wellbeing of European citizens.
- Provide **coordination and common guidelines for the use of funding for pilgrimage routes**, devoted to the standardization of infrastructure, so that countries use them homogeneously along entire routes.
- Building on the legacy of the [European Year of Rail](#) in 2021, promote inter-modality, combining walking and cycling with transport by train to main points of access of the trails, ensuring at the same time greater accessibility (both physical and digital) to less known, rural areas, leaving no one behind.
- Take advantage of the opportunities the **digitisation** process provides to make new uses of cultural heritage, as well as enhance the experience of users, give visibility to routes and exchange knowledge among network members.

Recommendation #3: Setting common standards and criteria to measure the performance and impacts of pilgrimage routes

Even if not all pilgrimage routes need to become cultural tourism products, those that do aspire to become one need to **fulfil minimum standards**, in order to reach a given level of quality and homogeneity across the route. A set of common standards at European level would help harmonising at national and regional level what is understood as pilgrimage routes, and what is expected from them. The Cultural Routes certified by the Council of Europe already meet a given set of criteria.

On the other hand, measuring and monitoring the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of routes can also offer evidence-based support to the policy decisions and build the case for funding their development and management. This monitoring tool could build from the **European Tourism Indicator System (ETIS)**, the only common framework developed by the European Commission to measure and monitor the impacts of tourism holistically.

Moreover, it could be integrated in the macro-regional strategies which recognise the lack of adequate data collection and management in transnational cultural routes.

Recommendation #4: Fostering opportunities for public authorities' capacity building at local and regional level on pilgrimage routes

Raise awareness among national and regional authorities to appreciate the potential of pilgrimage routes to contribute to socio-economic, cultural and environmental goals of the territories involved, is a crucial goal in line with the recently signed [Memorandum of Cooperation between UNWTO and Council of Europe](#). Pilgrimage routes can be considered as **consolidated model of sustainable tourism**, promoting its replication as successful tools for territorial development.

Capacity building should be organized for operators in the culture and tourism sectors, fostering synergies among them. Local inhabitant's involvement in existing or new routes should be encouraged, as a bottom-up involvement is paramount for the route's sustainability in the long term.

Lastly, pilgrimage routes should be endorsed as an opportunity to bring children and young people in direct contact with their surrounding cultural and natural heritage, as well as to appreciate the benefits that walking brings to health and physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing.



4. Additional sources of references

[Interreg Europe Policy Brief on Cultural Routes in Europe.](#)

[Interreg Europe Green Pilgrimage project reports.](#)

[Interreg Danube Programme - INSIGHTS project reports](#) (Integrated Slow, Green and Healthy Tourism Strategies)

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