

# RELIGIOUS ROUTES IN SLOVAKIA<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** KROGMANN, Alfred – KRAMÁREKOVÁ, Hilda – PETRIKOVIČOVÁ, Lucia – GREŽO, Henrich – MRÓZ, Franciszek. *Religious Routes in Slovakia*. We have noticed an uptick in the popularity of cultural routes in recent decades. They combine several tourist attractions into one product, which is more attractive to a potential tourist than the individual tourist elements by themselves. With its Christian foundations, Europe – including Slovakia – has natural predispositions for pilgrimage routes. In addition to the economic effects for a wider range of beneficiaries along the route, they bring knowledge and peace to the tourists/pilgrims, and they have a spiritual dimension. The goals of this article are multidimensional – identification of the relationship between cultural and religious routes, classification of religious routes according to various criteria against the background of the religious structure of the Slovak population, and analysis of the current state of knowledge about eight religious routes identified on the basis of the patronages in their name. The assessment of their condition leads to the conclusion that they have great potential for development. Their development is mainly provided by the Church, various grants and voluntary activities. However, experience also suggests that state support is essential in maintaining and developing the activities of this type of sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** *religious structure of the population, religious routes, Slovakia*

## Introduction

Historical monuments and culture have always been at the center of people's interest. Their knowledge was an integral part of education and it made people travel already in ancient times. This is documented e.g. by the names of Greek tourists from the 5th century before Christ carved on the bases of Memnon's colossi in Thebes (Goeldner – Richie 2014, 34). In the 17th century historical monuments turned into important stopovers on the sightseeing and educational journeys (the so-called Grand Tour of Europe) undertaken by young and wealthy Englishmen. The Grand Tour phenomenon is considered one of the most significant landmarks in the history of tourism, and is even considered by some researchers to be the beginning of modern tourism (Matlovičová – Klamár – Mika 2015, 81).

In recent decades, various thematic routes have gained popularity because they satisfy modern tourists who want to experience the visited territory with all their senses (Sieczko 2017, 105). Thematic routes are a similar response to the demand: they are focused on the authenticity of

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tourism products and their high emotional value and content (Pérez-Calderón – Ortega – Milanés-Montero 2016, 107).

Cultural routes belong to thematic routes. A cultural route is “any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality to serve a specific and well determined purpose, which must fulfill the following conditions (Maak 2010, 63):

- it must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multidimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, counties, regions or continents over significant periods of time,
- it must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage,
- it must have integrated into a dynamic system the historic relations and cultural properties associated with its existence.”

The development of cultural routes has accelerated since 1987 when the European Cultural Routes project was launched under the initiative of the Council of Europe. The primary goal of this project is to implement some of the key cultural principles of the Council of Europe, i.e. human rights, cultural democracy, cultural diversity and identity, dialogue, mutual exchange and mutual enrichment across borders and centuries. The secondary goal is to support the expansion of individual tourism and the development of tourism (Heřmanová 2017, 14). The European Cultural Routes project was described in detail in a study published by Peterka (2016, 107-109).

Due to the strong religiosity in the European area, several cultural routes have been established as religious or pilgrim routes. Following the example of Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes, which was recognized as the first Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in 1987, other routes followed, with elements of religiosity and pilgrimage to a greater or lesser extent. These include e.g. Via Francigena (1994), European Route of Jewish Heritage (2004), Saint Martin of Tours Route (2005), VIA REGIA (2005), TRANSROMANICA (2007), European Route of Cistercian Abbeys (2010), Route of Saint Olav Ways (2010) or Cyril and Methodius Route (2021). The emergence of such routes as tourism products caused a natural stir among the tourists, and, as such, they also became an object of research. This research is focused on the potential of creating new pilgrimage routes (e.g. Mróz – Mróz – Krogmann 2019, 57; Nemčíková et al. 2020, 225; Horák et al. 2015, 175), economic and social benefits of pilgrimage routes (e.g. Fernández Fernández – Fernández Mendez – Riveiro 2021, 527; Hortelano – Luis – Fernández Sagrador 2022, 166) or the traveler profile and motivation to travel (Gomes - Losada - Pereiro 2019, 36). Given the long pilgrimage tradition on the St. James’s Ways and a high turn-up on these routes, e.g. with 178,912 pilgrims in Santiago de Compostela in 2021 (Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino 2021), problems related to overtourism (e.g. Lopez – Pazos Otón – Piñeiro Antelo 2019, 21) and loss of identity have emerged recently. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the number of pilgrims, country of origin, motivation for the visit, or age segments, are also currently being monitored (among others, for example, by Mróz 2021, 643).

The objectives of this paper are multidimensional: identification of the relationship between cultural and religious routes, classification of religious routes against the background of the religious structure of population in Slovakia, and an analysis of their current state.

## Religious routes in the context of the religious structure of Slovakia

It is commonly assumed that religious routes are primarily intended for the religious population. However, as a product of tourism, these routes can also be used by people with a positive relationship to the natural environment they cross, or with the cultural and historical objects that connect the routes.

In Slovakia, the performance of state administration in the area of churches and religious societies is ensured by the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic in accordance with the Competences Act. Churches and religious societies are respected by the Ministry as legal entities on the “sui generis” basis, they have a recognized place in society and the Ministry cooperates with them through partnerships without interfering in their internal affairs. There are currently 18 registered churches and religious societies operating in Slovakia (Churches and Religious Societies 2023):

1. Apostolic Church in Slovakia,
2. Bahá'í Community in the Slovak Republic,
3. Fraternal Union of Baptist Churches in the Slovak Republic,
4. Seventh-Day Adventist Church, Slovak Association,
5. Brethren Church in the Slovak Republic,
6. Czechoslovak Hussite Church in Slovakia,
7. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in the Slovak Republic,
8. Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia,
9. Evangelical Methodist Church, Slovak District,
10. Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia,
11. Christian Congregations in Slovakia,
12. The Religious Society of Jehovah's Witnesses in the Slovak Republic,
13. New Apostolic Church in the Slovak Republic,
14. Orthodox Church in Slovakia,
15. Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia,
16. Roman Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic,
17. Old Roman Catholic Church in Slovakia,
18. Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic.

According to the latest Population and Housing Census of January 1, 2021, Slovakia has 5,449,270 inhabitants (Inhabitants by Religion in the Slovak Republic as of January 1. 2021). Of these 3,799,331 inhabitants (69.72%) have a religious affiliation, 1,296,142 inhabitants (23.79%) do not have a religious affiliation, and 353,797 inhabitants (6.49%) have an unknown religious affiliation.

In terms of the structure of population according to religion, the situation is as follows:

- Roman Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic (Roman Catholic confession) – 3,038,511 inhabitants (55.76%),
- Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Slovakia (Lutheran confession) – 286,907 inhabitants (5.27%),
- Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia (Greek Catholic confession) – 218,235 inhabitants (4%),
- Reformed Christian Church in Slovakia (Calvinist confession) – 85,271 inhabitants (1.56%).
- Orthodox Church in Slovakia (Orthodox confession) – 50,677 inhabitants (0.93%),
- Religious Society Jehovah's Witnesses in the Slovak Republic – 16,416 inhabitants (0.3%),
- Others – 457,111 inhabitants (8.39 %),
- Without religious affiliation – 1,296,142 inhabitants (23.79%).

When comparing the results of the 2011 and 2021 census, we noted a general decrease in the number of believers (from 4,100,237 inhabitants - 75.97% to 3,799,331 inhabitants - 69.72%), increase in the population without a confession (from 725,362 - 13, 44% to 1,296,142 - 23.79%), decrease in the population in the “Unknown” category (from 571,437 - 10.59% to 353,797 - 6.49%) and increase in the number of inhabitants from 5,397,036 to 5,449,270 (Believers according to the Population and Housing Census in Slovakia).

Of the total number of 18 registered churches and religious societies in Slovakia, religious routes or pilgrimages concern the following three:

- Roman Catholic Church in the Slovak Republic,
- Greek Catholic Church in Slovakia,
- Orthodox Church in Slovakia.

In relation to the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in the Slovak Republic, we note that the most important monuments of Jewish culture are promoted by the Slovak Route of Jewish Cultural Heritage (2023), and therefore we do not address them in this article. Slovakia has no representation in the European Route of Jewish Heritage certified in 2004.

## Classification and characteristics of religious routes in Slovakia

Religious routes can be classified in different ways, e.g. according to:

- patronage/saint in its name, as it combines the most important monuments associated with the relevant saint – e.g. St. Cyril and Methodius, St. James, St. Mary, St. Elizabeth, St. Martin, St. Barbara,
- importance – certified by Europe, with Slovakia as member in the network (Cyril and Methodius Route, St. Martin of Tours), and others,
- space – international, national, regional, local,
- method of completion - on foot, by bicycle, by motorbike, by car,
- type/scale – linear, point.

We have currently identified eight religious routes in Slovakia (Fig.1) based on the patronages in their name.

### Barbora Route

The project of this route is institutionally covered by the civic association Terra Montanae, which was founded on March 19, 2014 in Kremnica (Gregorová 2014, 38). The Barbora Route was created by connecting the former mining towns in Central Slovakia. St. Barbara, the patron saint of miners, is the unifying symbol of the project. The Barbora Route is a tourist, pilgrimage and discovery route that connects the mining monuments and a number of other interesting places in Central Slovakia. The visitors can take it on foot or by bicycle. The route is strategically divided into sections between the individual villages. The pilgrimage route is 186.2 km long, it starts and ends in Banská Bystrica, and it can be completed in 9 days. It is divided into 9 stages and at the end of each stage there is a possibility for an overnight stay. The longer and shorter stages alternate regularly. There are 29 symbolic stopovers on the Barbora Route - these places are significant in terms of mining, history, nature, religion, culture and engineering (Barbora Route 2023).

The website is regularly updated, it contains detailed information on all stages of the route (length, difficulty, altitude, accommodation and food), as well as a map with the marking of the

route and locations. A calendar of events is also included. The website also has e-mail and phone contact data and a satisfaction questionnaire. Information about the route can also be found on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube.

Souvenirs from the Barbora Route include a bedecker, pilgrim's passport with stamps, Barbora Route badge, certificate of completion and commemorative medal, which can be obtained at the designated places along the route.

### Way of St. Elizabeth

The Way of St. Elizabeth is the result of a cross-border cooperation program between Hungary and Slovakia in 2007-2013. St. Elizabeth of Hungary is the patron saint of beggars, widows and orphans, the sick, persecuted, needy and others (Biographies of Saints 2023). She was born in Bratislava or Sárospatak. The route that connects the city of Sárospatak in Hungary (in addition to Bratislava, Sárospatak is her other possible birthplace) and Košice in Slovakia (with the largest sacred building in Slovakia, St. Elizabeth's Cathedral in Košice, which is dedicated to her), it has 13 stages and a length of 120 km. The individual stages of the route are 12 to 15 km long. The Way of St. Elizabeth can be taken on foot (the whole pilgrimage takes about 5 days), by bicycle or by car.

The official website of the Way of St. Elizabeth (2023a) is in Hungarian. The website of the Way of St. Elizabeth (2023b), which was last updated in 2022, is marked as a partner site with relative information independence. Only this website has e-mail and phone contact details listed in the Contacts section. Information about the route can also be found on Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. The individual sections of both websites offer a range of information, e.g. maps of the stages of the route, list of monuments, list of places to eat and sleep, etc.

The information about the route in Slovak is also offered by the website of the Regional Association of Hornád Municipalities (2023), but it only contains a brief mention of the "Way of St. Elizabeth Sárospatak – Košice", so we can only assume its existence. This website lists the contact person, e-mail and telephone in the Contacts section. Additional information about the route is provided by the Way of St. Elizabeth (2023c) website.

### Cyril and Methodius Route

The Cyril and Methodius Route as a cultural route certified by the Council of Europe in 2021 represents a set of routes to walk in the footsteps of Saints Cyril and Methodius and their followers (Seven Holy Apostles - Septuagint). It connects the places, monuments, cultural institutions and tourist attractions in the interconnected countries of Central, Eastern and Southern Europe. The destinations and points of interest on the route represent rich and diverse cultural heritage in all forms: monuments of the sacred cult of the holy brothers, secular expressions of respect for and veneration of the brothers, reflections on their work in the modern world, stories and legends and others (Hetényi 2019, 141-154; Hetényi – Ivanič, 2013; Hetényi – Ivanič, 2021, 417; Ivanič, 2022, 106-126).

The Cyril and Methodius Route leads through a series of localities historically associated with the life and mission of St. Cyril and Methodius where the travelers can discover and learn not only about important relics, but also about places with a still alive Cyril and Methodius traditions. The first route is connected to the territory of Great Moravia – today's Czech and Slovak Republic – where Cyril and Methodius carried out their most important activities. The second route leads to the southeast (Hungary, Bulgaria, Serbia, Romania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Turkey, Greece and Ukraine), symbolizing the continuation

of the legacy the teachers bestowed upon their students. The third route leads to the southwest (Austria, Bavaria, Slovenia and Italy) and it symbolizes their journey to Rome where they tried to have the Christian liturgy recognized in Old Slavonic (Cyril and Methodius Route 2023a).

The history of the today's Cyril and Methodius Route dates back to 2008 when the first integrated offer (product) of church tourism (Pilgrimage Route of Eastern Moravia) was formed. Since 2013, the development of the route has been managed by the interest association of legal entities under the name "European Cultural Route of St. Cyril and Methodius" with a Permanent Secretariat in Zlín, Czech Republic. Currently, this association has 19 members and 3 observers from 7 countries (CZ, SK, GR, SI, HU, BG, SRB), and is looking for additional members and partners. The route is being developed as a series of linear routes and an atomized network of points of interest. The association is responsible for its management and marketing and it also supports the research of cultural heritage and thematic events. The Cyril and Methodius Route is an umbrella brand for the various activities of the EKSCM association, e.g. transnational tourism such as the marked Cyril and Methodius routes (European Cultural Route of St. Cyril and Methodius 2023).

In the Czech and Slovak Republic, stickers with the symbol of the Cyril and Methodius Route are placed on the signposts of the Club of Czech Tourists and Club of Slovak Tourists.

The activities related to the development of the Cyril and Methodius Route were also implemented by the Žilina Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church prior to 2013 independently of the EKSCM association in Zlín. The results included the website "Cyrilometodská cesta pútnika: Nitra – Velehrad – Žilina" (2013a) with the latest information from 2013 and the publication "Cyrilometodská cesta pútnika" for traveling along the three routes (Cyrilometodská cesta pútnika: Nitra – Velehrad – Žilina 2013b).

All routes make use of the marked hiking trails and cycling paths, but also dirt trails without hiking markings, and less frequented Class III roads. They only intersect the main traffic arteries at the intersections or in short sections. It is possible to collect tourist stamps along the way, which earn the tourists a Pilgrim Certificate of the Cyril and Methodius Route. The website is currently no longer updated.

Since the beginning of July 2020, the Tourist Information Center in Nitra has become the key information point of the Cyril and Methodius Route in Slovakia. It provides detailed information about the attractions along the route and also a stamp for the Pilgrim's Passport (Cyril and Methodius Route 2023b).

The appointment of Regional Tourism Organization of the Nitra Region (2023) as a national coordinator of the European Cultural Path of St. Cyril and Methodius on 1.5. 2022 was an important milestone in the development of the Cyril and Methodius Route in Slovakia. Its current tasks also include the expansion of the route markings along the Cyril and Methodius Route and the creation of a national strategic document for the development of the route. Currently, it only provides basic information about the route on its website, and it links to the Czech website (Kulturní stezka Rady Evropy – Cyrilometodějská stezka 2023). This website is information-rich, constantly updated and it provides complex information for all.

## Two Marian route projects

Numerous Marian churches and chapels testify to the veneration of St. Mary in Slovakia. Of the 5,925 known patronages of churches and chapels (also defunct) in Slovakia, 1,762 are dedicated to the Virgin Mary (Judák – Poláčik 2009, 76). National pilgrimage sites include Levoča, Lutina, Staré Hory, Nitra, Marianka and Šaštín.

All pilgrimage sites of national significance are also part of the following international pilgrimage routes (Judák – Petrikovičová – Akimjak 2022, 615): Central European Marian Route (Levoča, Šaštín, Marianka, Staré Hory, Lutina, Nitra), European Cultural Route of St. Cyril and Methodius (Šaštín, Marianka, Nitra), St. James's Way (Levoča, Šaštín, Marianka, Staré Hory, Nitra) and the national Barbora Route (Staré Hory).

Two Marian route projects are currently being implemented in Slovakia.

### 1. Slovak Marian Way

Information about the history of this project is not listed on the Slovak Marian Way (2023) website. The route stretches from the pilgrimage center of Gaboltov near Bardejov to Šaštín in Western Slovakia and has two branches – the northern (665 km) and southern (804 km) route. The routes can be taken on foot or by bicycle.

Although the website is not sufficiently updated, it provides the guide for pilgrims on the main page and, paradoxically, the most current Pilgrim's Letter published by the Association of Pilgrim Organizations is at the bottom. The Pilgrimage Stages section contains detailed information on both routes (length, elevation, accommodation options, dates of religious services), as well as their map and a photo gallery. It also provides information on the connections to neighboring countries. The Events Calendar is not updated. In the Downloads section, you can also find a memorial document and a journey logbook to Šaštín. In the Our Team section, there are contact names and technical support e-mails, and contact details of the pilgrimage leader and the site administrator.

### 2. Central European Marian Way

The civic association Via Mariae launched the Central European Marian Way project in 2012 – 2018, and the project is being developed successfully.

The bilingual (Slovak-Hungarian) website *Marianska cesta* (Marian Way 2023) is updated only sporadically, with the latest information about pilgrimage from 2021. Although the website content is not structured into individual sections, we can find the contact person and their phone number.

The cooperation agreement between the civic association and the representatives of Comenius University in Bratislava who participate in the solution of the international project *ruAllure* (Promotion of rural museums and heritage sites in the vicinity of European pilgrimage routes 2023) from the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and Horizon 2020, is an opportunity for change. Its goal is to create an app and a digital map of pilgrimage routes in Europe. The Slovak section of the Via Mariae pilgrimage route, which crosses Slovakia in a north-south direction on the Trstená – Banská Bystrica – Zvolen – Šahy route, will be added to the important European pilgrimage routes. It will offer the pilgrims and tourists well- and lesser-known places representing the spiritual, natural and cultural attractions of the country.

### St. James's Way

St. James's Way is the oldest cultural route certified by the Council of Europe since 1987. According to the information sent by Jorge Martínez-Cava, President of *Asociaciones de Amigos del Camino de Santiago*, which we received by e-mail on 13/04/2023, "the Council of Europe declared the St. James's Way as the first European Cultural Itinerary in 1987 without specifying any route.

The Spanish Federation of Associations of Friends of the Way of St. James began to work on the cataloguing of all the Ways of St. James in Europe. The work was done in collaboration with the Jacobean associations of Europe from 2016. In 2017 there were about 280 Ways of St. James, with more than 80,000 km. That same year was published with the National Geographic Institute of Spain a commemorative map of the 30th anniversary of the declaration of the Council of Europe. Thus, the Ways of St. James in Europe as a European Cultural Itinerary have been listed since 2017, not before.” Slovakia is not part of the network of its members.

The pilgrimage route follows the medieval pilgrimage corridors, it passes through the towns consecrated to St. James and other natural, church and cultural sites and locations. It connects the two largest Slovak cities – Košice and Bratislava. The natural direction of travel is from east to west where the route joins the Austrian Jakobsweg in the town of Wolfstahl. In Bratislava, it also connects with the Hungarian Szent Jakab út, which passes through the village of Rajka in Hungary and enters the capital of Slovakia alongside the Danube. The entire route is approximately 650 km long and it is divided into nine sections. The sections are composed of several stages, each of which takes approximately one day of walking. The information-rich website (St. James’s Way in Slovakia – Camino de Santiago 2023) contains information about the route in Slovakia and how to prepare for it. In the online store, you can purchase guide books (with practical information about the routes – description of specific routes, route profile, accommodation options and attractions in the respective locations), the official Slovak credential (registered at the pilgrimage office in Santiago de Compostela, valid for the issue of the “Compostela”, a decree on completing the pilgrimage, which is fully accepted in Slovakia and throughout Europe) and the scallop shell as a symbol of the pilgrimage.

St. James’s Way in Slovakia is managed by the civic association Friends of the St. James’s Way in Slovakia. Contact information is comprehensive and up-to-date.

### **Saint Martin of Tours Route**

Saint Martin of Tours Route is a certified cultural route of the Council of Europe from 2005. At that time, a route was announced to explore the life of this saint between the Hungarian city of Szombathely where he was born and the French city of Tours where he died. St. Martin is the patron of soldiers, horsemen, blacksmiths, armorers, tailors, belt, glove and hat makers, hoteliers and innkeepers, travelers, the poor, refugees, prisoners, shepherds, coopers, vinedressers, millers, abstainers, geese (Biographies of Saints 2023), and also the patron of many churches, cities, parishes, dioceses and states. Today, the name of this route shelters a large number of routes with a length of more than 5,000 km. The route connects large European cities with a significant architectural and cultural heritage associated with the cult of St. Martin of Tours in 12 European countries. Slovakia is part of the network of its members (Saint Martin of Tours Route 2023).

The Council of the European Cultural Route of St. Martin in Slovakia is a civic association founded in the village of Dolný Štál with the aim to achieve goals in the field of culture and tourism by carrying out its activities in the field of charity, volunteering, development of self-awareness and personality, development of the village and larger region, development of tourism, art and culture, free time, education, upbringing and environment. It is the result of civic and religious activism.

The leading and most renowned project of this association is the construction of the Slovak part of the pilgrimage routes linked to the international tourist and cultural project Cultural Route of St. Martin of Tours. The association received the authorization to extend the St. Martin Cultural Route on the territory of Slovakia in September 2016 by becoming member of the

European Federation of Saint Martin Cultural Centers, which promotes international dialog and cooperation in the expansion and development of this pilgrimage route, as well as awareness and knowledge of St. Martin (*Via Sancti Martini* 2023a). This website is generally updated only in the News section. There is no information about the Slovak locations on the website. The civic association can only be contacted through the contact form and Facebook.

There are two points of interest on the route in Slovakia. The first one is Bratislava with the Cathedral of St. Martin from the 13th-19th century. Although it is considered the largest and most important sacral monument, which was also used as a coronation temple in the past, there is no information about the cathedral as part of the European cultural route on the website of the parish of St. Martin in Bratislava. Likewise, there is no information about pilgrimages, but there is a possibility to take a pilgrimage mass. Paradoxically, the Hungarian site *Via Sancti Martini* (2023b) offers the possibility for walking and cycling pilgrimages, which also marginally affects Slovakia.

The second location is the city of Martin. In 2021, the local civic association “For the Statue of St. Martin” received a certificate of participation in the Saint Martin Route program for the city as a registered cultural destination. People can admire the life-size statue of St. Martin as a bishop and his precious relic in the Roman Catholic Church of St. Martin. The name of St. Martin and the metal relief sculpture above the entrance door to VÚB Banka close to the church (Kalmanová 2022).

## Conclusion

It can be generally stated that the religious routes in Slovakia have great potential for development. The fact that they were created from the bottom up at the initiative of civil associations is their great advantage. The Church provides them with great help in their development, mobilizing the believers through physical contact in the parishes, churches and also through the websites and social networks. An example of such support is e.g. the Association of Pilgrim Organizations (2023), which was founded in 2015 as a civil association of natural and legal persons. Its goal is the development of pilgrimage, spiritual and religious tourism, support and development of pilgrimage sites and routes, development of infrastructure and services for the pilgrimage routes and pilgrims, spreading and improving the awareness of pilgrimage sites in Slovakia, support and development of spiritual guidance, creation of projects, and editorial and publication activities. The association spreads the news about pilgrimage tourism in Slovakia through the “Pilgrim Letter” (ISSN 2644-4526), which is published on a monthly basis at the Parish Office in Skalka nad Váhom. Although it is not for sale and it is freely distributed, it can only be found sporadically on the web. The website of the Slovak House Centrope (2023) also contributes to the visibility of cultural routes, which also include religious routes. Cultural routes are currently a great challenge and potential for regional tourism organizations and local governments. However, the fundamental problem in the vast majority of cases is the up-to-dateness of their information, or a lack thereof, which derives not so much from the lack of human resources for their development and preparation, but rather from the limited access to financial resources through projects and, above all, insufficient institutional and financial support from the state, specifically the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, where the religious routes materially belong. Even the National Tourism Portal of Slovakia (2023) pays very little attention to the routes around Slovakia because the section “Thematic Routes” in “What to See and Do” and “Sports and Active Recreation” was defunct at the time of writing. However, experience with the international certification of the Cyril and Methodius Route testifies to the fact that state support is essential in maintaining and developing the activities of this type of sustainable tourism.

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Appendix

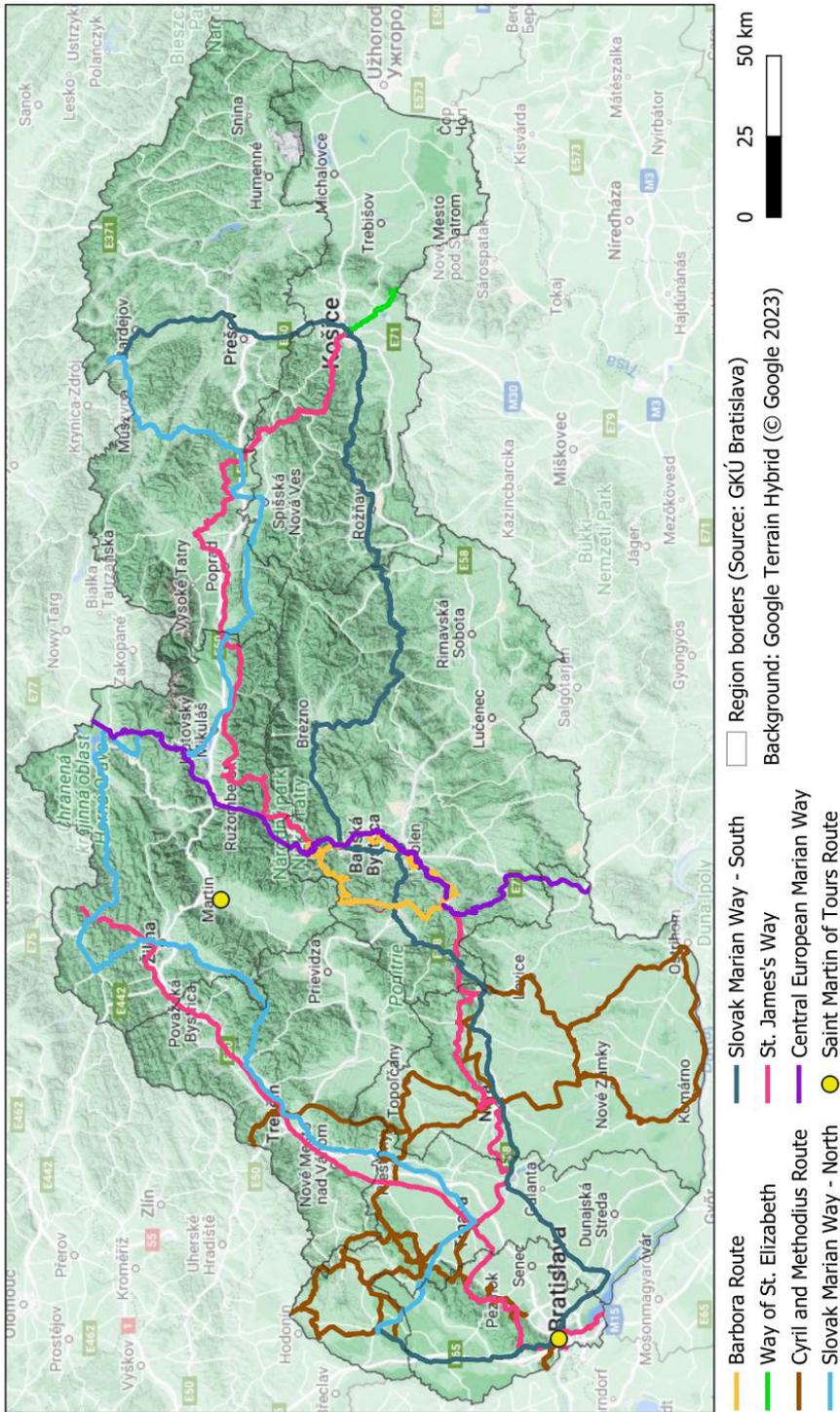


Fig. 1. Religious Routes in Slovakia. Author: Henrich Grežo.