

## How Religious Tourism and Pilgrimages can be beneficial to communities

**Julian Zarb**

There are a number of common factors that tie pilgrimage experiences together and makes them such a unique opportunity for the traveller and the tourist alike. The topic of this paper concerns the common factor of *people*, as pilgrimages are not only about religion and culture but also about a strong sense of hospitality and service. This paper will present the historical background to pilgrimages and relate this chronological evidence to the impact this leaves on the social, cultural and environmental factors of the local communities. It will look at the economic factors, not simply as global figures that are tied to two key stakeholders, that is, the local authority and the local businesses, but as opportunities for the local community to benefit from and take ownership of as an activity that is based on their own culture and traditions. Pilgrimages are socio-cultural activities with a strong religious theme or belief, and offer the ideal basis for the implementation of community-based tourism that involves all the key stakeholders - the local authority, the local businesses and the local community - in a continuous and consistent dialogue and coordination to plan, develop and manage the pilgrim's experience.