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Many travellers whose main motivation is religious tourism (Catholic) have visited the major shrines such as the Holy Land, the Vatican, Lourdes (France) and Fatima (Portugal). After having been in those places / shrines, religious tourists seek to visit other sanctuaries but find that the offer is limited. With that in mind, in 2016, three researchers drove from Lisbon (Portugal) to Levoča (Slovakia) nearly always stopping at Marian midsize shrines and, in 2017, one researcher travelled by train from Nitra (Slovakia) to Lisbon also stopping along the way at Marian midsize shrines. The data collected by participant observation allowed the researchers to design three different itineraries that include the most important Marian midsize shrines and also towns / small cities along the way.

The objective of this paper is two-fold. First, it has a strong practical component in order to be used as a reflective tool by the travel agents / tour operators. Second, academics can use the programs as training material for student exercises, demonstrating that an itinerary is not simply linking a set of thematic resources but also requires knowledge of logistics to facilitate the visitors' decisions.

Key Words: Marian midsize shrines, thematic itineraries, Portugal, Slovakia

Introduction

Most scientific publications on thematic itineraries focus only on the available thematic resources. Even though itineraries tend to show a varied selection of resources, the concern is not about practical implementation, namely the cross management of time for the visits, time for travelling, places for eating and places for lodging, thereby increasing the likelihood of commercial difficulty.

Travel agents/tour operators are more interested in launching programs which include well-known destinations because those attract more customers and

generate more financial profit. That may have been the case, but current trends suggest that changes are taking place. First, the more well-known places are becoming overcrowded. Secondly, after having been at such shrines, religious tourists seek to visit other sanctuaries, but discover that it is difficult to find catalogue programs which offer them that possibility.

The research result is the design of three itineraries/ programs based on important Marian shrines and also towns / small cities between Portugal and Slovakia. All are planned taking into consideration market appeal and economic feasibility.

The first is a 10 day itinerary. It includes the most important Marian midsize shrines and also towns / small cities along the way; every overnight is spent at a different shrine.

The second is a 15 day itinerary, also with every overnight being spent at a different shrine and towns / small cities will be visited along the way. Apart from the visit to the midsize shrines, it also includes the two major European Marian shrines (Lourdes and Fátima).

The third is a 23 day itinerary, subdivided in three parts (8+8+7 days), meaning that it is possible to buy one, two or three parts, i.e. pilgrims / tourists can join or leave the group in Lisbon (Portugal), Toulouse (France), Zurich (Switzerland) or in Košice (Slovakia). In every shrine two overnights are scheduled. The day after the group's arrival it is given the option to stay the entire day at the shrine or to do a full-day visit (FD) to a city in the shrine's vicinity.

These itineraries can also be used by academics as training material for student exercises as the techniques for designing thematic tours are illustrated in the three case studies.

Literature Review

The literature review is based on two pillars: religious tourism travel programs from the travel agencies / tour operators which specialise in organising trips for this tourism segment, and scientific articles on itineraries. For the first pillar, it was concluded that either the programs focus on a certain shrine with half-day and full-day circular trips (departure and return to the shrine) or cultural programs which mix more than one shrine with the visit to nearby cities or important monuments. For the second pillar, the literature is somewhat limited on designing itineraries or on themed itineraries focusing on the religious resources.

According to The European Norm EN13809 (2003), touring constitutes a range of concepts. In the present article the following ones will be used :

- Itinerary – detailed plan of a journey usually setting out dates, times and places;
- Excursion – tour of leisure or sightseeing, which may include one visit or more, usually without an overnight stay;
- Route – itinerary defined by point of origin, point of destination and any stops and/or changes en route.

Considering itineraries design, Lew and McKercher (2006) show that in the structure of an itinerary a

minimum number of elements should be considered: to stimulate curiosity and to establish a *leitmotiv*; to combine diversified and complementary elements along the tour (urban and natural sceneries, visits to monuments, walks, activity, rest); to find quality connections between the components of the itinerary, including accommodation and restaurants, roads, etc.; i.e. an efficient support system for the tourist along the tour; to suggest different paths within the same itinerary, including timing and schedules for the different choices. Another important point is human resource management, education and training; the generated tourist information and interpretation must be accurate, interesting and appealing (Braga *et al.*, 2013).

The discussion about the differences between cultural routes, cultural itineraries and theme itineraries is quite explored by several authors such are Yepes (2000), ICOMOS (2008), Amendoeira (2011), Hernández (2011) and Arcila *et al.* (2015).

For Arcila *et al.* (2015), cultural itineraries and tourist-cultural routes have become one of the most touristic territorial resources of great growth. This translates into a confirmed concern of different public institutions, both national and international, regarding this issue. Proof of this is the emergence of institutional data recognizing the value of these resources and highlighting the value of heritage and the development of tourism (ICOMOS, 2008).

Hernández (2011) analyses the proliferation of tourist routes and cultural itineraries as a global phenomenon, together with the consequences that these can trigger in the territories where they are introduced, discussing at the same time the controversial concept of Cultural Itinerary based on the proposals of the European Council and ICOMOS. Hernandez underlines the promotion of patrimonial assets, the growth of identity awareness and sustainable development based on the promotion and commercialisation of endogenous territorial resources.

Although Arcila *et al.* (2015) comment on the excessive rigidity of the definition offered by ICOMOS, they suggest that, to date, it is the one that best reflects the meaning of patrimony in an itinerary. In that definition there is a noticeable concern to collect the cultural and territorial aspects in the conceptualisation, showing, however, a lower interest in those factors that are related to tourism. Arcila *et al.* (2015: 464) add that:

it is necessary to distinguish between cultural itineraries that are based on historical processes . . . and tourist-cultural routes that can take advantage of these physical elements or be designed from the existence of a common cultural theme.

The difference between cultural elements and cultural tourist resources (which integrate a route or a theme itinerary) are also emphasized in the following quotation:

it is important to distinguish between tourist routes and cultural itineraries, although each of the notions makes its way with its own legitimacy and specificity. The coexistence with other types of proposals and approach of a tourist nature is not necessarily a contradiction, just a difference of approach, if there is a consistent rigor of the concepts and practices that enable the necessary clarification (Amendoeira, 2011: 154).

Following the notion of different concepts and practices, Yepes (2000), in a more pragmatic way, defends that the creation of new tourist products based on tourist routes or itineraries implies the application of strategies that, depending on the typology of the products in a tourist area, can favour differentiation

with respect to competing destinations. These lines of action must be based on the tourists' motivations i.e. relate to adequate supply and demand. Among the possible strategies could be mentioned (among others) that of specialisation, diversification, complementation, growth and launch of new tourist packages. However, for this to be possible a product capable of being marketed from the tourist point of view must be designed, having in mind that either routes or themed itineraries must be the result of a previous effort of study and planning that guarantees not only the functionality of an itinerary, but also its economic viability.

This is what the present article envisages, to demonstrate that a themed itinerary must always have in its base a *leitmotiv*, in this case European Catholic Marian shrines. Furthermore, the religious / cultural resources chosen constitute an important issue in the identity of those regions and of their inhabitants being the result of a common faith which, in a certain way, brought people from different countries together, along the centuries. In a more practical approach it will be shown that an itinerary must also be designed having in mind the cross management of time for the visits, time for travelling, places for eating and places for lodging.

Table 1- List of Marian midsize shrines

Country	City/Town Area	Shrine's Name
Austria	Mariazell	Mariazell
	Salzburg	Maria Plain
France	La Salette - Fallavaux	Our Lady of La Salette
	Le Puy en Velay	Our Lady of Le Puy
	Lourdes	Our Lady of Lourdes
	Lyon	Our Lady of Fourvière
	Rocamadour	Our Lady of Rocamadour
Germany	Altötting	Our Lady of Altötting
Italy	Turin	Our Lady Help of Christians
	Varese	Santa Maria del Monte
Portugal	Braga	Our Lady of Sameiro
	Chaves	Our Lady of Health
	Fátima	Our Lady of Fatima
	Lamego	Our Lady of Remedies
Slovakia	Levoča	Visitation of the Virgin Mary
	Marianka	Nativity of the Virgin Mary
	Rajecká Lesná	Nativity of the Virgin Mary
	Šaštín	Our Lady of Seven Sorrows
Spain	Arantzazu	Our Lady of Arantzazu
	Covadonga	Our Lady of Covadonga
Switzerland	Einsiedeln	Our Lady of Einsiedeln
	Lausanne	Our Lady (Basilica)
	Locarno	Our Lady of the Rock

Methodology

Under the auspices of a cooperative research agreement project between the Portuguese and the Slovakian Research and Development Agencies, in 2016 three researchers drove from Lisbon (Portugal) to Levoča (Slovakia) stopping along the way at Marian midsize shrines (Table 1). In 2017, one researcher travelled by train from Nitra (Slovakia) to Lisbon also stopping at Marian midsize shrines (influenced by train times and station locations). In both trips data were collected based on direct observation. Also known as observational study, direct observation is a method of collecting evaluative information in which the evaluator watches the subject in his or her usual environment without altering that environment. Unstructured direct observation looks at natural occurrences and provides qualitative data (Holmes, 2013).

The data collected combined with knowledge obtained and experiences undertaken during previous trips to religious sites permitted the researchers to design three different itineraries keeping in mind the geographic location of the observed shrines (road accesses and distance to lodgings etc.) and also the possibilities to provide services to organized groups (average of forty people), namely the lodging and restaurant capacities.

Although the Marian shrines are the primary resources for the design of the itineraries, one has to also consider the complementary elements for instance mode of transport / bus, guide, hotels, restaurants, walks in the cities, stops at sightseeing points, visits to monuments, museums and others. All the attraction and service provision must interact efficiently to ensure customer satisfaction with the program. Costs of the service provisions were analysed in all three itineraries to reduce the risk of not being economically feasible.

The starting point for all three itineraries is Portugal (either at Lisbon or Oporto airport) and ends in Slovakia/Košice airport - or vice-versa - as these itineraries can be implemented for starting a new group / program when the previous one finishes. It is considered that the time of travel should never exceed two consecutive hours at any time and the plans incorporate at least one stop in the morning, another for lunch and a third one in the middle of the afternoon. Whenever possible, the stops should be combined with visits to attractions. Only when there is no service provisions and / or attractions along the way, are stops planned at highway service areas.

A further principle of the project is that the three itineraries must be presented in a way which will facilitate training for students when studying or designing thematic itineraries and should also serve as a reflective and planning tool for the travel agents / tour operators who work with this tourism market segment.

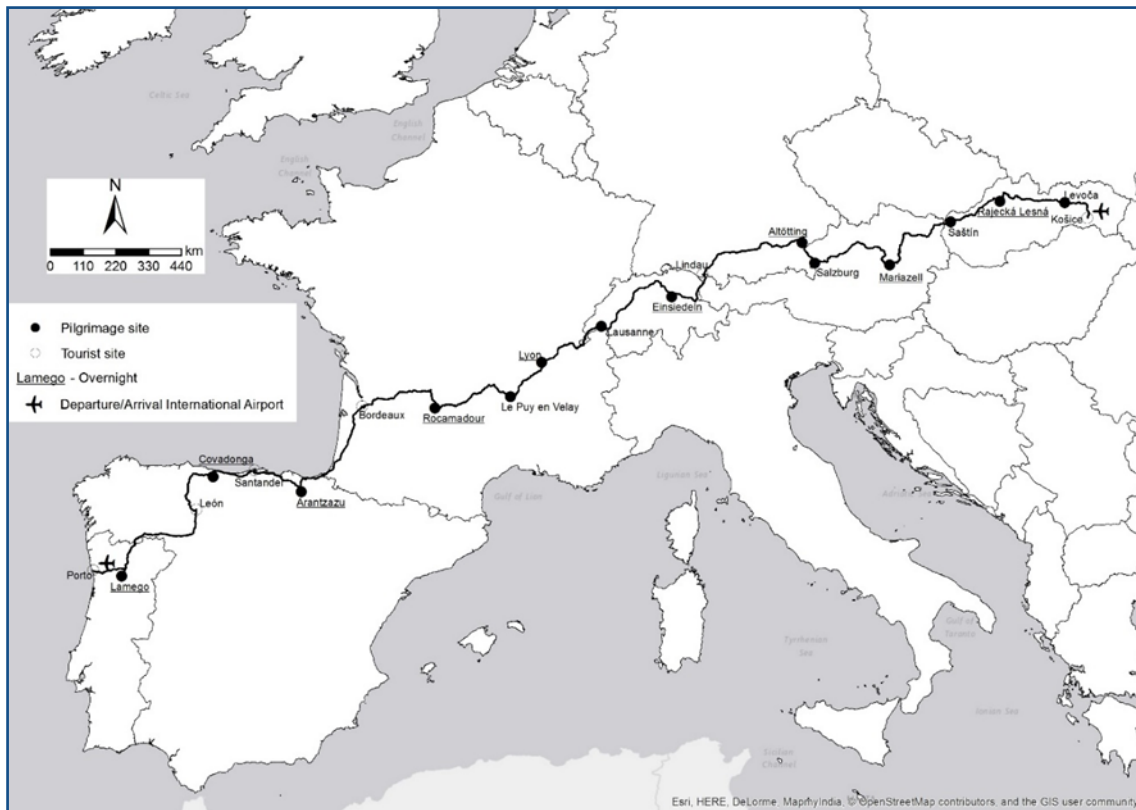
Results

Keeping in mind that tourists / pilgrims have different free-time / holiday possibilities and also different travel behaviours, the three itineraries were created taking those circumstances into consideration. For example, three different itineraries with varying durations and flexibility of starting and finishing point. Also, the time spent on the road was given careful thought. In the 10 day itinerary, the daily mode of transport is the bus (on average about four to five hours travelling per day); in the 15 day itinerary, the bus is also used every day but cutting down its use to about three to four hours travel per day; in the 23 day itinerary (8+8+7 days), although some days' travel time can reach six hours, this model offers the possibility of only using the bus every two days, i.e. in every shrine two overnights are scheduled - the day following the group's arrival, pilgrims / tourists have the option of staying the entire day at the shrine.

In all situations, the tourists / pilgrims will be accompanied by a tourist guide, from their point of arrival to their departure. In fact, these kinds of groups almost always have two guides; a spiritual one, the priest (mainly when the trips are organised as formal pilgrimages) and a lay one for making all the logistical arrangements and for explaining the sites included in the program. One characteristic of Catholic tourism groups is that they are almost always organised within a parish and are accompanied by their own priest. That allows the daily celebration of mass to be included as part of the program.

Considering lodgings, the hotels chosen are mainly three star which tend to be the type most demanded by this tourist segment. Even if the tourists / pilgrims can afford more expensive hotels they do not feel spiritually comfortable when using deluxe services during a pilgrimage (but could do so as tourists). One of the daily main meals (either lunch or dinner) will be included in the final program price (half-board); the meal not included must be planned in towns / cities which offer a wide selection of choices (restaurants, snack-bars, cafés or even markets or supermarkets).

Map 1 – Religious Tourism - 10 days’ itinerary between Portugal and Slovakia (or vice-versa)



Source. Designed by the authors

To include the entrance fees to the sites visited in the program is quite common in this tourism segment. In the particular case of the 10 day and 15 day itineraries, most of the sites visited (churches and shrines) don't charge any entrance fee, meaning that this matter will not overburden the program's final price. In the case of the 23 day itinerary (8+8+7 days), the same can be said for the program included in the final price, but not for the optional tours, as those will focus on visiting the main attractions of the cities which are located close to the shrine where tourists / pilgrims spend two nights.

Itinerary 1 : 10 Day Itinerary

The first itinerary starts at Porto airport (Portugal) and ends at Košice airport (Slovakia) or vice-versa (see map 1). It is planned for 10 days and includes the most important Marian midsize shrines and also towns / small cities along the way - neither capital city nor major Marian Shrine are included. The accommodation is provided in three / four-star hotels, lunch is always purchased by the tourists / pilgrims themselves and dinner is always included in the program at the hotel where the group spends the night. This itinerary

Table 2: Portugal-Slovakia European Marian shrines - 10 day itinerary

Day	Distance travelled (km)	Starting point	City along the way	Shrine location
1	135	Porto airport		Lamego
2	530	Lamego	Léon	Covadonga
3	270	Covadonga	Santander	Arantzazu
4	550	Arantzazu	Bordeaux	Rocamadour
5	384	Rocamadour	Le Puy en Velay	Lyon
6	475	Lyon	Lausanne	Einsiedeln
7	430	Einsiedeln	Lindau	Altötting
8	330	Altötting	Salzburg	Mariazell
9	399	Mariazell	Šaštín	Rajecká Lesná
10	284	Rajecká Lesná	Levoča	Košice airport

includes a longer stop at lunch time for a meal and for a visit to local attractions and mass on arrival at the at the shrine. It is recommended that tourists / pilgrims should go to bed early. Comfort stops in the mornings are planned at restaurants / cafés along the way. Each day is planned to keep the distance travelled to a maximum of 550km and every overnight is spent at a different shrine (see underlined towns / cities in map 1) as illustrated below (Table 2).

Grouping the program characteristics by days, on the first day it might be possible to visit a town before getting to Lamego, depending on the time of flight arrival. In this small city, daily mass will take place at the shrine followed by a walking tour which ends at the hotel. On the last day, the time of the flight departure must be in the afternoon (preferably after 4:00 p.m.), as about three hours are needed for travel and an additional three for lunch, walking tour and mass in Levoča - the group also need to be at the airport about two hours before the flight departure.

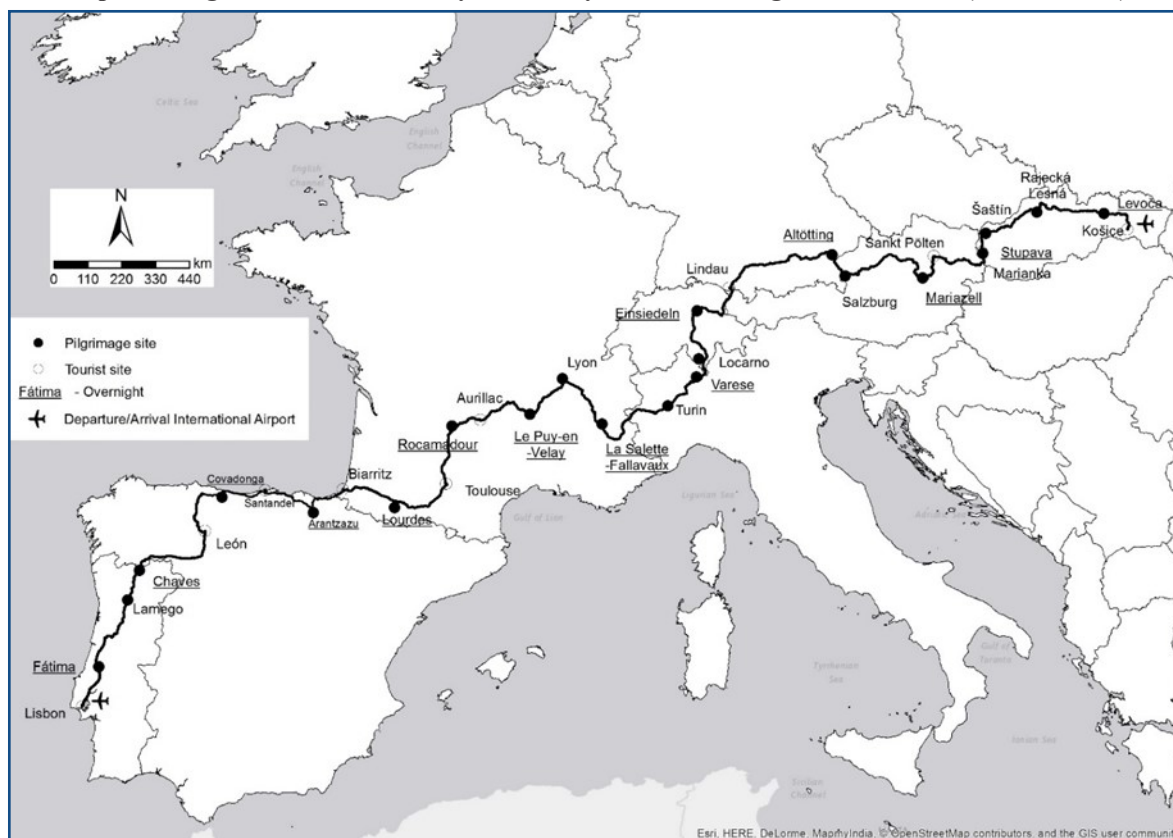
The second, fourth and sixth days are the longest of this program; the fifth and eighth days although shorter can also be included in this group because the average pace in the morning is quite low for the first and also

quite low for the latter in the afternoon. The departure must be early each morning to ensure that most kilometres are completed in the morning. Lunch intervals are planned separately from time for a meal, to also include a city walking tour and a visit to the cathedral; this applies in: León (second day); Bordeaux (fourth day); Le Puy en Velay (fifth day); Lausanne (sixth day) and; Salzburg (ninth day). In the last three locations, a visit to shrines dedicated to Our Lady are also included. At the end of the afternoon the tourists / pilgrims reach the towns / shrines - Covadonga, Rocamadour, Lyon, Einsiedeln and Mariazell, respectively - where they celebrate mass and do a walking tour on the way to their hotels.

The third, seventh and ninth days allow for a later departure or earlier arrival at the shrines where mass is celebrated. In the two first days, lunch stops and walking tours take place at tourist sites and do not include shrines or cathedrals, respectively Santander and Lindau; the third one, Šaštín, although including a shrine at lunch time does not include a walking tour due to the lack of attractions in the town.

This 10 day itinerary can be promoted either in Portuguese or Slovakian parishes and can also be

Map 2 – Religious Tourism – 15 days’ itinerary between Portugal and Slovakia (or vice-versa)



Source. Designed by the authors

Table 3: Portugal-Slovakia European Marian shrines - 15 days Itinerary

Day	Distance travelled (km)	Starting point	City along the way	Shrine location
1	125	Lisbon airport		Fátima
2	320	Fátima	Lamego	Chaves
3	425	Chaves	León	Covadonga
4	270	Covadonga	Santander	Arantzazu
5	300	Arantzazu	Biarritz	Lourdes
6	340	Lourdes	Toulouse	Rocamadour
7	250	Rocamadour	Aurillac	Le Puy en Velay
8	315	Le Puy en Velay	Lyon	La Salette-Fallavaux
9	370	Fallavaux	Turin	Varese
10	250	Varese	Locarno	Einsiedeln
11	430	Einsiedeln	Lindau	Altötting
12	330	Altötting	Salzburg	Mariazell
13	240	Mariazell	Sankt Polten	Marianka-Stupava
14	410	Stupava	Šaštín – Rajecká Lesná	Levoča
15	110	Levoča	Košice airport	

targeted at pilgrims / tourists coming from other countries, who have already visited the major Marian Shrines like Lourdes and Fátima, as well as big European capitals, and seek additional religious tourism experiences at lesser known shrines situated in the proximity of mid-sized European cities. In both cases, this itinerary is mainly conceived for tourists / pilgrims who want a full time program and who want to see / visit the maximum possible in each day of the trip.

Itinerary 2 : 15 Day Itinerary

The second itinerary starts at Lisbon airport (Portugal) and ends at Košice airport (Slovakia) or vice-versa (see map 2). It is planned for 15 days and includes the most important Marian midsize shrines and also the two major Marian shrines in Europe (Fátima and Lourdes). No capital city is included; only towns / small cities along the way. The accommodation is provided in three / four-star hotels, lunch is always at the tourist/pilgrim's discretion and dinner is always included in the hotel where the group spends the night. In this itinerary, a longer stop is provided at lunch time for a meal and for a visit to the town / small city and as the arrival at the shrine for mass and for the overnight should not be late, comfort stops in the mornings will be planned at restaurants / cafés along the way.

Each day is planned so as to keep the distance travelled to a maximum of 430km and every overnight is spent at a different shrine (see underlined towns / cities in map 2) as displayed below (Table 3). In any of the sites where the tourists / pilgrims stop, a walking tour is scheduled.

Grouping the program characteristics by days it is possible to observe that on the first day the group should land early to facilitate having more time in one of the two biggest European Marian shrines. In Fátima, daily mass is planned, in addition to the shrine visit and participation in the candlelight procession - which takes place after dinner. On the last day, the time of the flight departure must be in the afternoon (preferably after 3:00 p.m.) as about one hour is necessary for travel, and an additional three hours for lunch, walking tour and mass in Levoča, in order to be at the airport about two hours before the flight departure.

The second, eighth, ninth, tenth and twelfth days have their lunch stop at towns / cities where shrines dedicated to Our Lady are included in the program, respectively; Lamego, Lyon, Turin, Locarno and Salzburg, allowing the group to celebrate mass either in one of these shrines or at the end of the day when the tourists / pilgrims get to Chaves, La Salette, Varese, Einsiedeln or Mariazell, respectively. On the fourteenth day two shrine visits (Šaštín and Rajecká Lesná) can be included for the group. In one of the two, mass should be celebrated, instead of at Levoča (end of the day) as the following day, it is the only shrine where mass can take place.

On the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eleventh and thirteenth days the lunch stop is planned nearby to tourist sites / attractions, respectively León, Santander, Biarritz, Toulouse, Aurillac, Lindau and Sankt Polten. In those towns / cities, the visits include main attractions independently of being religious resources or not. At the end of the day the group celebrates mass and does a walking tour of the sites where they have

dinner and spend the night; in Covadonga, Arantzazu, Lourdes, Rocamadour, Le Put en Velay, Altötting and Marianka-Stupava, respectively. On the fifth day, arrival in Lourdes should be early, allowing more time in the biggest European Marian shrine; that will not be difficult because the journey on one side is not many kilometres, and on the other, Biarritz is quite a small town.

This 15 day itinerary can be promoted either in Portuguese or Slovakian parishes, mainly to segments which have never been in the major European Marian shrines. It can also be targeted at pilgrims / tourists coming from overseas who have visited big European capitals but come for the first time to visit major Marian Shrines like Lourdes and Fátima and seek additional religious tourism experiences at lesser known shrines situated in the proximity of mid-sized European cities. In both cases, this itinerary, as the 10 day one, is mainly thought for tourists / pilgrims who want a full-time program and who want to see / visit the maximum possible sites / attractions in each day of the itinerary.

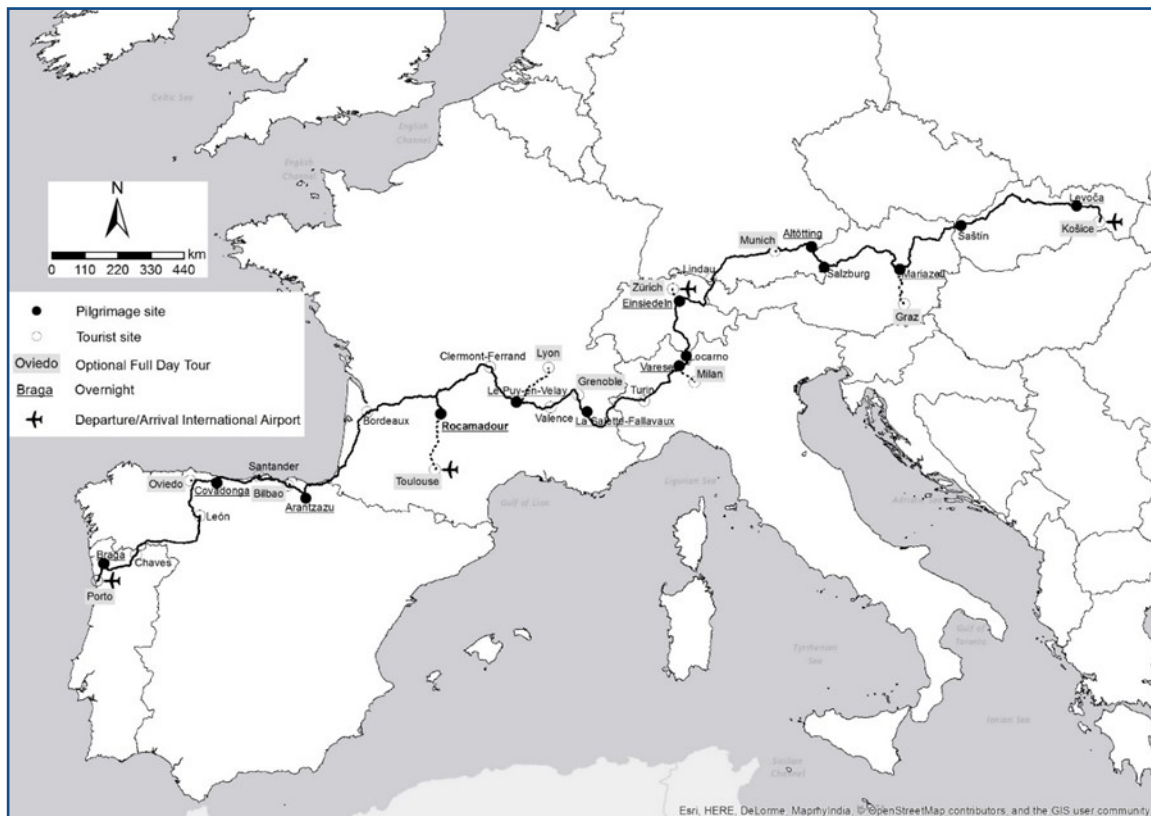
Itinerary 3 : 23 Day Itinerary

The third itinerary starts at Porto airport (Portugal) and ends at Košice airport (Slovakia) or vice-versa (see map 3). It is planned for 23 days and includes the most important Marian midsize shrines and better known small cities along the route - but includes neither capital cities nor major Marian shrines. This Itinerary is back-to back (when the first trip finishes, the next one starts in that same city – Lisbon or Košice) and it can be subdivided into three parts (8+8+7 days), meaning that it is possible to buy one, two or three segments, i.e. pilgrims / tourists can join or leave the group in Lisbon (Portugal), Toulouse (France), Zurich (Switzerland) or in Košice (Slovakia).

Lodgings are provided in three / four-star hotels, lunch is always arranged by the tourists / pilgrims themselves and dinner is always included at the hotel where the group spends the two nights.

Each day is planned to cover no more than 600km and in every shrine two overnights are scheduled (see underlined towns / cities in map 3) as displayed below (Table 4). The day following the group's arrival,

Map 3 – Religious Tourism – 23 (8+8+7) days’ Itinerary between Portugal and Slovakia (or vice-versa)



Source. Designed by the authors

Table 4: Portugal-Slovakia European Marian Midsized shrines – 23 days Itinerary

Day	Distance travelled (km)	Starting point	Cities along the way	Shrine location
1	62	Porto airport		Braga
2		FD in Braga or FD Porto (c. 60km far from Braga)		
3	545	Braga	Chaves – León	Covadonga
4		FD in Covadonga or FD Oviedo (c. 85km far from Covadonga)		
5	250	Covadonga	Santander	Arantzazu
6		FD Arantzazu or FD Bilbao (c. 35km far from Arantzazu)		
7	550	Arantzazu	Bordeaux	Rocamadour
8		FD Rocamadour or FD Toulouse (c. 165km far from Rocamadour)		
Arrival/Departure				
9	380	Rocamadour	Clermont-Ferrand	Le Puy-en-Velay
10		FD Le Puy-en Velay or FD Lyon (c. 135km far from Le Puy-en-Velay)		
11	260	Le Puy-en-Velay	Valence	La Salette-Fallavaux
12		FD La Salette or FD Grenoble (c. 70km far from La Salette)		
13	370	La Salette-Fallavaux	Turin	Varese
14		FD Varese or FD Milan (c. 70km far from Varese)		
15	230	Varese	Locarno	Einsiedeln
16		FD Einsiedeln or FD Zurich (c. 45km far from Einsiedeln)		
Arrival/Departure				
17	430	Einsiedeln	Lindau	Altötting
18		FD Altötting or FD Munich (c. 100km far from Altötting)		
19	330	Altötting	Salzburg	Mariazell
20		FD Mariazell or FD Graz (c. 115km far from Mariazell)		
21	575	Mariazell	Šaštín	Levoča
22		FD Levoča or FD Košice (c. 95km far from Levoča)		
23	110	Levoča	Košice	Košice airport
Arrival/Departure				

pilgrims / tourists have the option of staying the entire day at the shrine or to do an optional full-day visit to an important nearby city. In any of the sites where the tourists / pilgrims stop, a walking tour is scheduled.

The optional full day tours are planned mainly for the travellers who are accompanying the pilgrims but who are not so fervent religious practitioners. It happens quite often in these groups, for instance that only one member of the couple comes as a pilgrim and the other more as a tourist or a non religious practitioner - for example a grandson escorting his grandmother who is undertaking the pilgrimage .

In this itinerary, there are two ways of grouping the program characteristics: one is separating it into three parts (for the pilgrims / tourists who just buy one or two parts of the program); another is putting together what there is in common in the different days of the program (for the pilgrims / tourists who do the full 23 day program).

In the first case, the first week, from Porto to Toulouse, is dedicated to the shrines and towns / cities of the Iberian Peninsula and of part of Southern France. The second week, from Toulouse to Zurich, explores the shrines and towns / cities in Central Europe i.e. Eastern France, North Italy and Switzerland. The third week, from Zurich to Košice, is planned for the discovery of the shrines and towns / cities of Eastern Central Europe, i.e. Austria and Slovakia.

Grouping by days, it possible to visit Braga on the first day, if the flight arrival is early. Braga is a city with many tourist and religious resources. On the last day, the time of the flight departure will not allow any adaptation to the program as the pilgrims / tourists already have undertaken the walking tour on the 21st day and the ones who didn't buy the optional tour to Košice (22nd day) spent the whole day either at the shrine or in the town.

On the eighth and sixteenth days, the tourists / pilgrims who are finishing or starting a part of the program will

be provided with a transfer to or from the airport (Toulouse and Zurich, respectively). Whenever possible, the bus used for the entire tour, should be utilised for the transfer, while the tourists / pilgrims who have bought the optional full day tours are visiting those cities.

On all even days (from the second until the twenty second) there are two possibilities, either to spend the entire day at the visited shrine (praying and other religious activities) or to buy an optional full day tour to a nearby town / city (mainly for cultural visits): Porto, Oviedo, Bilbao, Toulouse, Lyon, Grenoble, Milan, Zurich, Munich, Graz, Košice.

On the odd days (from the third until the twenty first) the time of visits must be matched with the time for travelling. In the days when over 500 kilometres are planned for travelling (about six hours on the road), the departure must be early and the comfort stops in the morning and in the afternoon must be in restaurants / cafés along the way. In the days when less than four hours of travelling is planned (up to 300 kilometres), it is possible to spend more time at the sites to be visited on the way or to have more sites included in the program.

As mentioned earlier, this itinerary is planned for mixed groups: some elements being more religious (for the ones who will spend the full days in the shrines in prayer activities) others more cultural (the ones who will visit the cultural sites in the shrine's proximity). In fact, it could be marketed to organised closed groups (i.e. to a particular parish group) or to open groups, meaning that anyone (from any country) could buy the program and join the group. In this case, the official language must be English. Also for the open groups, mass would not be celebrated every day, only on the even days (when the tourists / pilgrims spend the entire day at the shrine), in which case it would not be compulsory to have a priest in the group as in any of the included shrines it is possible to find priests who celebrate mass in English.

Concerning the budget, although it is not possible to present a final price per itinerary it is possible to consider an average price for the main variables / services i.e. the bus, the guide, the restaurants and the hotels. To reduce the costs of the bus and the guide, all itineraries should be planned back-to-back.

The price of the bus and of the guide becomes lower as more tourists / pilgrims constitute the group. Setting thirty people as a minimum to accomplish the trip and

considering that the bus costs is on average €600 per day and the guide €150 per day, means that for those two items, €25 per day per person should be budgeted. The accommodation price differs from country to country but lower prices compensate the higher ones. Having in mind the bargaining power of the tour operators, it is possible to book a double room in a three star hotel for €70,00 (on average), meaning €35,00/day, per person. As all programs are planned on the basis of half-board and as the dinner will always be included at the hotel where groups spend the night, it is conceivable to cost it at €15,00 per person. Although there are not many visits / entrance fees planned, it is better to budget €50,00 extra per person.

In the 10 day itinerary (nine nights and nine meals) the services cost about €750,00 per person; to that amount it is necessary to add the flights and the tour operator commission, meaning that it might cost around €1,500 per person which is lower than the average price of a 10 day program offered by tour operators. In the 15 day itinerary one may follow the same reasoning. For the 23 day itinerary, it is possible to bring the costs down in the even days if the amount of money to be charged for the optional tours pay the expenses of the bus and tour guide on those days.

Conclusion and Discussion

This paper shows how scientific work can be at the same time used as a tool for academics and also for private stakeholders, given its practical nature in designing thematic itineraries. In this particular case, three religious itineraries are designed for crossing Western and Central Europe. To design an itinerary is not only a practical exercise of connections between the constituent components, but is also a reflective effort trying to find a *leitmotiv* which can represent both for pilgrims and tourists an enjoyable and fulfilling experience while simultaneously reinforcing cultural and religious interests / beliefs.

Academics interested in thematic itineraries will find that apart from their important contribution in inventorying, mapping and selecting resources, it is also important to combine them as feasible programs for tourists or as economically interesting programs for travel agents / tour operators. Industry can benefit from the ideas which academia can provide, with the provision and diversification of their programs / packages, possibly extending the life span of products at those destinations.

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