



Joint Tourism Strategy

Catholic Event Tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare County

INTERREG VI-A Romania – Hungary Program 2021–2027

ROHU00474 – *Catholic event tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare counties (CET)*

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october-december 2025.

Signature Sheet

Title: Joint Tourism Strategy

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Place and date of submission: Debrecen, January 19, 2026

Signature:



EXPERT DECLARATION

Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme

I, the undersigned, Dr. Csetnek Tünde Tímea, acting as Managing Director of Ideál Rendezvényszervező Bt., hereby declare within the framework of the ROHU00474 – *Catholic Event Tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties (CET)* project that the expert activity carried out under the “Joint Tourism Strategy” is unique and has not been claimed under any other project, support programme, or financing scheme, nor do I intend to claim it under any such scheme.

Furthermore, I declare that I have not received any other funding for the accounting of the above-mentioned activity, and that such accounting does not result in double financing.

I declare that this statement has been made in accordance with the truth.

Issued in Pécs, January 19, 2026.

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Executive Summary

The objective of the Joint Tourism Strategy prepared within the framework of the project ROHU00474 – Catholic event tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare counties (CET) is to strengthen the religious and cultural tourism position of the region through coordinated developments implemented by the three church partners operating on the two sides of the border: the Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare, the Diocese of Nyíregyháza, and the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza.

Project objective: the development of religious and cultural tourism through the cooperation of three church partners.

The fundamental aim of the strategy is to achieve, as shared objectives, the coordinated and sustainable development of religious values, built cultural heritage and tourism opportunities, thereby contributing to the strengthening of cross-border social, cultural and institutional relations. The partnership places particular emphasis on the modernisation of religious and cultural sites, the stimulation of event tourism, and the creation of a joint visual identity and shared communication platforms.

The situation analysis carried out during the strategic work highlighted that the region has significant tourism potential, characterised by diverse and valuable ecclesiastical heritage, an active religious life, tradition-preserving communities, and a cultural programme offer that is expanding year by year. At the same time, several areas require further development, particularly infrastructure, visitor-friendly services, and the use of modern digital communication tools. Investments implemented within the project – such as church renovations and the modernisation of community spaces on both sides of the border – directly contribute to improving the quality of the tourism offer.

The expected results of the strategy include the creation of a more attractive, thematic religious and cultural tourism offer; an increase in visitor numbers; the strengthening of community and cultural relations; and enhanced tourism visibility of the region through joint marketing activities. In addition, the strategy aims to establish a sustainable programme and service structure that is accessible to pilgrims, cultural tourists, local communities, young people and school groups alike.

The implementation of the Strategy supports, in the long term, the creation of a coherent cross-border religious and cultural tourism region that is capable of functioning as an attractive destination in its own right and of becoming one of the driving forces of the region's economic, social and cultural development.

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I. Analysis of the Tourism Product

I.1 Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare

• Tourism and cultural experience

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare is one of the most influential religious and cultural institutions in the region and has made a strong contribution over recent decades to shaping the tourism offer of Satu Mare County. The Diocese's rich historical heritage – in particular the Cathedral, the Episcopal Palace and the related artistic assets – represents a significant attraction for both domestic and international visitors.

The Diocese has implemented several successful heritage protection and tourism-oriented projects, among which the comprehensive renovation of the Satu Mare Cathedral stands out. The Cathedral is one of the city's most important cultural and religious attractions and receives approximately 8,000 visitors per month, including pilgrims, tourists, visitors with cultural interests and school groups. This high level of visitation clearly demonstrates the Diocese's key role in the regional religious tourism offer.

In organising and implementing tourism and cultural activities, the Diocese relies on designated professionals who are experienced in visitor management, guided tours, the organisation of cultural programmes and the implementation of religious tourism events. Traditionally, the Diocese maintains long-term cooperation with local, county-level and cross-border partners, including cultural institutions, local authorities, tourism offices and civil organisations.

One of the most important venues of cultural activities is the Episcopal Palace built in classical style, which, through its listed architectural values – including the unique Petőfi Altar – attracts not only ecclesiastical audiences but also a broader public interested in culture. In addition, the Cathedral's ecclesiastical art exhibition provides valuable insight into the Diocese's spiritual and historical heritage, further enriching the diversity of the tourism offer.

The Diocese plays an active role in tourism linked to religious events, serving as a regular venue for pilgrimages, church feasts, cultural festivals, concerts and exhibitions. These events attract large numbers of participants and have become increasingly important elements of the region's religious and cultural identity.

With regard to cross-border cooperation, the Diocese has a long tradition of collaboration, particularly with dioceses, cultural institutions and communities in Hungary. These

partnerships support the organisation of joint events, the development of thematic routes, cultural exchange programmes and project-based developments.

Overall, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare possesses significant tourism and cultural experience, providing a solid foundation for the joint strategic developments implemented within the framework of the ROHU00474 CET project. The Diocese's spiritual, built and community heritage guarantees that religious and cultural tourism in the region will continue to strengthen in the coming years and become attractive to new target groups.

• **Institutional capacity**

The institutional capacity of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare provides a stable basis for carrying out religious and cultural tourism tasks, as well as for implementing the developments planned within the framework of the ROHU00474 CET project. The Diocese's organisational structure, human resources, infrastructure and partnership system all support long-term, sustainable tourism activities.

Human resource capacity:

The coordination of tourism and cultural activities within the Diocese is carried out by two designated staff members who are responsible for receiving visitors, organising group visits and church-related cultural programmes, and conducting guided tours. These staff members have several years of experience in heritage tourism, church event organisation and visitor management, enabling them to professionally manage the tasks arising from increased visitor interest.

The Diocese has significant infrastructure, organisational and professional background:

Key statistical data:¹

- Area: 10,724 km²
- Population within the territory of the Diocese: 738,373 inhabitants
- Number of Catholic faithful: 62,657 persons
- Number of parishes and units: 59 parishes and 54 units
- Pastoral staff: 71 diocesan priests, 7 religious priests, 1 religious brother, 24 religious sisters, 3 deacons

¹ The information was provided by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare. Source of data: Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare (December 2025)

- Number of catechists: 35 persons

The central administration of the Diocese — the Episcopal Office — operates in Satu Mare (RO-440010 Satu Mare / Szatmárnémeti, Str. 1 Decembrie 1918, No. 2, Romania). The office supports the operation of the Diocese through several professional officers and organizational units, including the Pastoral Office, Youth Office, Office for the Laity, Diocesan Hospital Pastoral Care Office, Diocesan Economic Office, Project Office, Legal Office, Diocesan Media Office, and the Diocesan Chief Inspectorate for Education.

A total of 15 professionals work within the central administration, ensuring the operation of diocesan institutions as well as the implementation of development activities, project coordination, and communication tasks.

Educational and social institutional network²

The Diocese maintains two major school centers, located in Satu Mare and Carei. Both institutions provide general secondary education with both scientific and humanities profiles, ensuring comprehensive preparation and further education opportunities for students. The educational offer is complemented by two vocational schools in Satu Mare and one vocational school in Carei, which, through their practice-oriented training, contribute to improving young people's opportunities on the labour market. The school centre in Satu Mare also includes additional educational and social functions: two kindergartens, a nursery, and a boarding facility, providing comprehensive care and support for children and young people.

In addition to the educational system, the Diocese operates an extensive charitable and social care network that provides assistance to various groups within society. These institutions include child rehabilitation centres, facilities providing elderly care, healthcare services and support for persons with disabilities, as well as institutions ensuring social care for children. Furthermore, a family counselling centre and an institution supporting the treatment of addictions also operate under the maintenance of the Diocese, thus offering a wide range of services to those in need.

This extensive and multifaceted institutional network not only enables the high-quality provision of religious, educational and social services, but also provides a stable foundation for

² Ibidem

the organisation of cultural programmes and the long-term, sustainable development of religious and cultural tourism.

Infrastructure conditions:

The Diocese operates several institutions and locations that are suitable for tourism and cultural activities. These include the Satu Mare Cathedral, the Episcopal Palace, as well as the associated community and exhibition spaces. These venues function not only as religious centres but have also become suitable for hosting cultural programmes, guided exhibitions, events, and pilgrimages. The available built heritage provides an excellent foundation for the organised development and reception of religious tourism.

Organisational operation and experience:

The Diocese has a well-functioning communication and administrative background that supports the preparation and implementation of projects. Through its active online presence (website and social media platforms) and regular community and tourism-related communication, the Diocese strengthens its outreach, which is a key factor in modern religious tourism management.

Partnership network:

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare has an extensive network of cooperating partners. It maintains relationships with local and county-level municipalities, tourism offices, cultural institutions, pilgrimage centres, civil organisations, as well as ecclesiastical and tourism partners in Hungary. These partnerships enable regular information exchange, the organisation of joint events, and the preparation of cross-border projects.

Project management capacity:

The Diocese possesses the administrative and financial experience required for the implementation of cross-border projects. The designated contact person for the project—who has project management experience—ensures proper communication, data provision, and the coordination of professional activities.

- **Identification of gaps**

Although several churches have undergone significant renovation in recent years, many ecclesiastical buildings still require urgent conservation works or full-scale restoration. The delay of these interventions is primarily due to limited available resources and the unpredictability of funding cycles. At present, the region's religious tourism offer lacks a unified concept and a coordinated management structure. A joint strategy is currently being developed together with county-level tourism organisations and ecumenical partners, aiming to integrate local values into thematic routes and programme packages.

Communication is carried out through multiple channels; however, the absence of a unified visual identity and brand structure reduces the visibility and effectiveness of existing initiatives. To address this issue, the establishment of a coordinated communication framework is justified.

The region currently has limited international visibility; therefore, the Diocese's religious and cultural values are only marginally represented in the international tourism arena. The expansion of project-based and cross-border cooperation may contribute to making the region's diverse sacred heritage accessible to an international audience.

These shortcomings clearly justify the implementation of targeted developments as well as the strengthening of international and project-based cooperation.

Presentation of the project site

Project site: Krasznabéltek and the Saint Ladislaus Church

Krasznabéltek (Romanian: Beltiug) is one of the oldest and, from a religious and cultural perspective, most significant settlements in Satu Mare County, with more than 800 years of documented history. Its medieval origins and multi-ethnic community—marked by the coexistence of Hungarian, Swabian, and Romanian traditions—create a unique cultural environment, well suited to becoming a key location for cross-border religious and cultural tourism. The village's geographical position—between Satu Mare and Zalău, along a main transport route—ensures easy accessibility for both domestic and Hungarian visitors, making it an excellent fit within the sacred and cultural route concept of the CET project.

The cultural and community life of the settlement is diverse. Krasznabéltek is one of the centres of Swabian heritage preservation and is well known for its viticulture and rich gastronomic traditions, such as the “Beltiug strudel,” as well as the Nachbil, Hetei, and Leiher wineries.

The roots of Beltiug's grape-growing and wine-making traditions go back several centuries. Although written sources do not document every historical period clearly, tradition traces their origins back as far as 1085. According to a local legend, King Saint Ladislaus rested near the present-day settlement after one of his battles against the Pechenegs. His soldiers offered him a gourd filled with wine, to which the exhausted ruler jokingly asked: "What kind of gourd is this, filled with what?"—and legend has it that this is the origin of the name Beltiug.

A decisive turning point in the settlement's history occurred in 1723, when Count Sándor Károlyi purchased the entire estate from the Prépostváry family. During this period, Satu Mare County was often referred to as the seat of Bacchus due to the flourishing viticulture and wine production. This development was further strengthened in 1730 when, at the Count's initiative, Swabian settlers from Upper Swabia (Oberschwaben) arrived in Beltiug. They were granted vineyards and were exempt from paying tithes for the first two years, allowing viticulture to develop rapidly and in an organised manner.

Over the centuries, the composition of grape varieties changed continuously. Early plantings included Furmint, Bakator, Riesling, Günsnitz, and Chasselas, while after the phylloxera epidemic, direct-producing grape varieties also appeared.

Today, Beltiug's vineyards are highly diverse. Among white varieties, Riesling, Traminer, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, and Pinot Gris are present, while red varieties include Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Blaufränkisch, Pinot Noir, and Syrah.

Travellers along the Satu Mare–Zalău route can hardly overlook the distinctive atmosphere of the Beltiug hills: small wine cellars nestled among gentle slopes, an inviting landscape, and the disciplined order of vineyard rows. Today, Beltiug—according to its current classification—belongs to the Satu Mare Wine Region (Szatmár Hegyalja), and local residents firmly believe that the former glory of the settlement's wine-making heritage is coming back to life.

The village also has tourism assets such as the historic wine cellar row, as well as local event venues (the Csűr event hall and wine picnic locations), which regularly host cultural events, festivals, and community programmes. In the event of renovation, the spa maintained by the local municipality could become an additional major attraction, further strengthening the tourism identity of the area.

The religious centre of the settlement, the Saint Ladislaus Roman Catholic Church³, is the most significant element of the village's built heritage and its key spiritual symbol. The origins of the church date back to the 15th century, while its present form was shaped during the reconstruction carried out between 1913 and 1914, associated with the work of architect Ernő Foerk⁴. The size of the church (649 m²), the monumentality of its interior spaces and its seating capacity of 1,800 clearly indicate that it is one of the largest and most important ecclesiastical buildings in the region. In addition to serving the local community, the church is also a defining religious site for the surrounding settlements and, alongside liturgical functions, it regularly hosts cultural events as well.

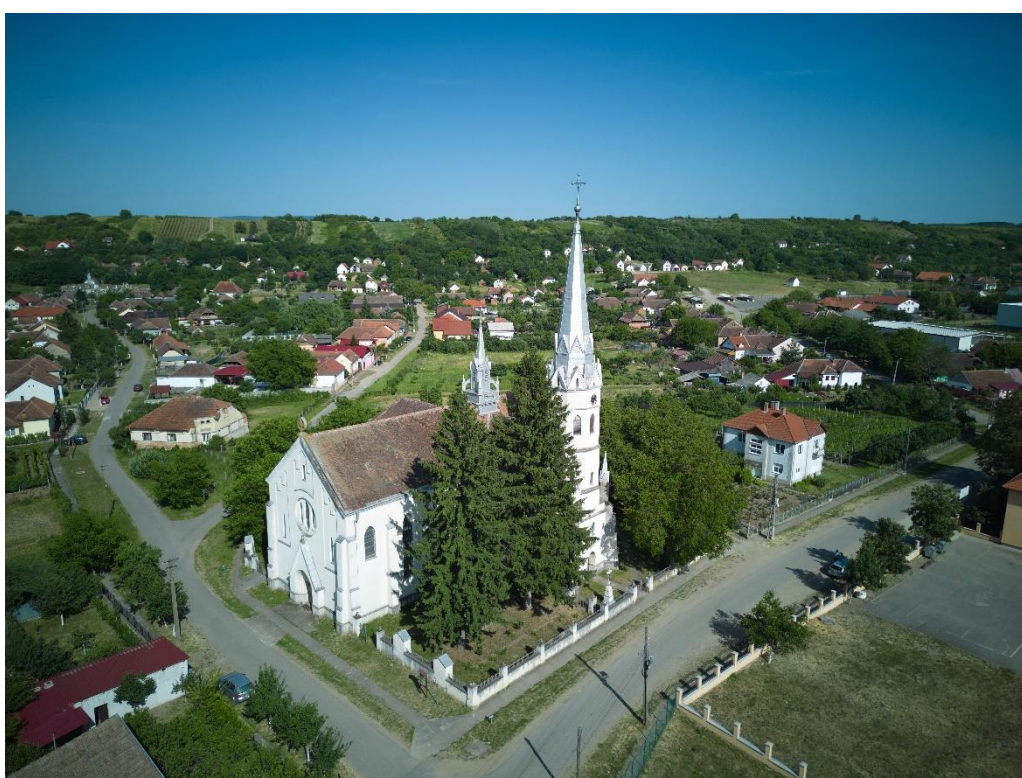


Figure 1: Saint Ladislaus Roman Catholic Church, Krasznabéltek⁵

Based on the current condition assessments, the external structures of the church — including the roof structure, the fence, the churchyard and the Stations of the Cross — have significantly deteriorated over the past decades. The aim of the investment is their comprehensive

³ Saint Ladislaus Roman Catholic Church: diocesan and local historical data.

⁴ Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare: Churches and Parishes in Satu Mare County, Satu Mare, 2015, pp. 98–100.

⁵ The image was provided by the Project Partner and its use was authorised (December 2025).

renovation, the preservation of the building's heritage values, and the strengthening of the church's cultural and tourism-related functions.

As part of the renovation, the church will also be equipped with modern technical facilities: the project includes the procurement of infrastructure required for cultural events (sound system, projection equipment, event technology) and the creation of a visitor-friendly environment. The investment also encompasses a digital development component: a virtual tour of the church will be created and made available on the official project website, enabling visitors to gain online access to the church's sacred and artistic values.



Figure 2: Saint Ladislaus Roman Catholic Church in Krasznabéltek – Interior views ⁶

As a result of the project, the Saint Ladislaus Church will not only continue to fulfil its religious function but will also be strengthened as a cultural centre, capable of hosting regular programmes, musical events, religious celebrations and community initiatives. The site will also serve as a strategic connection point to other religious and cultural attractions in the region: to the north, the medieval churches of Erdőd; to the south, the Árpád-era church of Ákos; and nearby, the Orthodox wooden church of Bolda together form a coherent sacred route into which the Krasznabéltek church is organically integrated.

Overall, Krasznabéltek possesses exceptional attributes to become one of the key religious-tourism locations of the CET project. The settlement's diverse cultural heritage, the living Swabian traditions, the tourism potential built on viticulture and community life, as well as the architectural values of the Saint Ladislaus Church, clearly justify the implementation of the investment in this location. The development contributes to strengthening local identity,

⁶ Ibidem

expanding the tourism offer, and enabling Krasznabéltek to become one of the region's prominent religious and cultural destinations.

I.2 Diocese of Nyíregyháza

- **Tourism and cultural experience**

The Diocese of Nyíregyháza is one of the youngest ecclesiastical institutions in Hungary, yet it is highly active from a cultural and tourism perspective. It was established by Pope Francis in 2015, creating an organisational framework that brings together the Byzantine-rite Greek Catholic communities of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County. The diocese comprises 9 deaneries, 86 parishes and 124 liturgical sites, serving more than one hundred thousand Greek Catholic faithful, and is therefore one of the most important religious and cultural actors in the region.

Religious tourism had already been present in the area decades before the establishment of the diocese, primarily due to the National Shrine of Máriapócs, one of Hungary's most visited pilgrimage destinations. The Diocese of Nyíregyháza has implemented several projects of outstanding tourism relevance in Máriapócs: within the framework of previous HURO and ÉAOP developments, the surroundings of the Shrine Church were renewed, the Pilgrims' House was established, and several visitor-friendly services were created. These developments have significantly contributed to the organisation of pilgrimages as structured, experience-based and continuously maintained cultural-tourism programmes in the region.

One of the greatest assets of the Diocese of Nyíregyháza is the development of museum-based and cultural presentation. In 2023, the modern and architecturally outstanding Greek Catholic Museum opened its doors, offering a unique presentation of the Greek Catholic Church's liturgical objects, icon art, church history and spiritual heritage. The museum and its associated community programmes have created a new cultural attraction in Nyíregyháza: the museum's striking contemporary architectural solutions, together with the permanent exhibition "Window to Eternity", have become one of the driving forces of cultural tourism in the city⁷.

⁷ Görögkatolikus Múzeum megnyitása és kiállításai: Nyíregyházi Egyházmegye, intézményi források.

The diocese also has strong project management and development capacities: it has operated its own project office since 2008, coordinating developments financed from national and European Union sources. Several large-scale tourism, heritage protection and community projects have been implemented, including pilgrimage tourism developments, church renovations, energy-efficiency modernisations and expansions of community infrastructure. This professional background strengthens the diocese's role within regional cultural networks and ensures the sustainability of long-term tourism investments.

Its tourism experience is further reinforced by regular event organisation. Parishes and the diocese organise numerous pilgrimages, walking and cycling routes, cultural days, charitable and community events each year. These events fulfil religious, cultural and community functions simultaneously and increasingly attract both domestic and international visitors. The programmes build on the distinctive musical and visual experience of Greek Catholic liturgy, which in itself represents a significant tourism value in the region.

The Diocese of Nyíregyháza is therefore an institution that makes religious heritage accessible in a modern, experience-based and visitor-friendly way, while its strong institutional background and decades of project management experience position it as a key actor in the development of cross-border cultural and religious tourism. Its activities centred on heritage preservation, pilgrimage tourism, cultural presentation and community engagement are organically integrated into the region's religious tourism network and provide a solid foundation for the long-term expansion of sustainable tourism.

• Institutional capacity

The Diocese of Nyíregyháza has a stable and well-organised institutional background that makes it suitable for the implementation of large-scale religious, cultural and tourism projects. The institution has several decades of experience in development and project management, coordinated through its own long-established project office. Since 2015, the Diocese has operated an independent Project Office responsible for project development, the submission of applications, the professional and financial administration of implementation, and the management of grant agreements. In its work, the Project Office cooperates closely with the Technical (Construction) Office and the Financial Office in order to ensure a high standard of technical and financial management of projects.

The organisation has well-developed project implementation capacity, having accumulated extensive experience in the delivery of EU- and nationally funded projects across several fields. Based on the JEMS data sheet⁸, the Diocese has participated in numerous EU-funded investments amounting to several hundred million HUF, including energy-efficiency modernisation projects (KEOP projects), public education infrastructure developments, the creation of new nursery places in several settlements of the diocese (TOP and RRF projects), as well as significant cultural heritage protection and tourism projects.

Project management is ensured by a highly qualified team of internal and external professionals. For project implementation, the Diocese establishes a dedicated management team consisting of a project manager, financial and technical managers, and activity coordinators. The selected staff members have the appropriate professional knowledge, previous project implementation experience and relevant professional backgrounds.

The Diocese's infrastructure and institutional network also provide significant capacity. The institutions under its maintenance – educational, social and cultural facilities – form an extensive system that ensures the long-term sustainability of cultural and tourism functions. The Diocese of Nyíregyháza operates an extensive educational and social institutional system with stable and well-prepared human resources.

In the field of religious tourism, the Diocese has particularly strong institutional experience. Within the territory of the Diocese of Nyíregyháza (which coincides with the administrative area of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County) lies the National Shrine of Máriapócs, and the regular organisation of pilgrimages and ecclesiastical events is an integral part of local church life.

The institutional background of cultural and tourism activities is further strengthened by the presence in Nyíregyháza—directly adjacent to the cathedral and the Diocesan Collection—of the Greek Catholic Museum, which has received national attention and, since its opening in 2023, has become a new cultural centre in the region, further enhancing the Diocese's cultural capacity.

The Diocese's long-term maintenance capacity is also well established. The operation and maintenance of the Religious Tourism Centre in Nyíregyháza and the related cultural attractions

⁸ A pályázati adatlapját a partnerek bocsájtották rendelkezésre és az abban található információk alapján készült a rövid pályázati leírás.

(including St Nicholas Cathedral) are ensured by the Diocese of Nyíregyháza, which has both the necessary financial resources and human capacities.

Overall, the Diocese of Nyíregyháza possesses significant infrastructure, an extensive institutional network, and a stable organisational and professional background, making it well suited to host and implement religious, cultural and tourism-oriented programmes.

Key statistical data:

- Area: 5,935.83 km²
- Total population: 529,381 persons
- Number of Greek Catholic faithful: 90,264 persons
- Number of parishes (church communities): 87
- Number of priests: 110
- Deacons / religious: 2
- Number of catechists: 119⁹

Central administration and organisational background

The central administration of the Diocese of Nyíregyháza operates within the Bishop's Office:

Address: 4400 Nyíregyháza, Bethlen Gábor Street 5.

The Office is responsible for the professional, financial and strategic coordination of the institutions of the Diocese. The administrative structure¹⁰ consists of the following units:

- Economic Office – financial planning, accounting, supervision of contracts (6 staff members)
- Project Office – grant administration, coordination of (public) procurement procedures (2 staff members)
- Education Office – professional coordination of kindergartens and schools (2 staff members)
- Catechetical Office – professional management of religious education (4 staff members)

⁹ Az információkat a Nyíregyházi Egyházmegye bocsájtotta rendelkezésre. Az adat forrása: Nyíregyházi Egyházmegye (2025. december)

¹⁰ A Nyíregyházi Egyházmegye által nyújtott információk alapján!

- Pastoral Office – pastoral activities, press relations, marketing, online communication (4 staff members)
- IT Office – operation and development of digital systems (2 staff members)
- Central Management – management, administrative and operational tasks (13 staff members)
- Construction Office – coordination of construction and renovation projects (3 staff members)

A total of 36 professionals work in the Bishop's Office, ensuring the high-quality implementation of complex project management, tourism and cultural development tasks.

Educational institution

- 10 kindergartens
- 10 primary and secondary schools

Social and charitable institutional system

- The Diocese of Nyíregyháza operates an extensive social and charitable network providing support for several thousand beneficiaries:
- St Nicholas Nursing and Care Home (Hodász) and its sites
- St Nicholas Integrated Service Centre and its institutions
- St Martha Greek Catholic Social Service Centre
- St Pope John Paul II Home for the Elderly
- St Helena Greek Catholic Integrated Service Centre
- Diocese of Nyíregyháza Basic Social Services Centre and its sites
- Diocese of Nyíregyháza Unified Nursery (with multiple locations)
- St Nicholas Child Protection Institution (11 residential homes + specialised services)
- Diocese of Nyíregyháza Tanoda Management Organisation
- Caritas of the Diocese of Nyíregyháza¹¹

¹¹ The information was provided by the Diocese of Nyíregyháza. Source of data: Diocese of Nyíregyháza.

This complex institutional system enables the implementation of long-term social, educational and religious tourism programmes.

Overall, the Diocese of Nyíregyháza has a high level of institutional capacity in the fields of religious, cultural and tourism development. Its organisational structure, extensive institutional network, significant project management experience, and the professional knowledge accumulated in the field of religious tourism provide a solid foundation for the successful implementation of national and cross-border development initiatives.

Identification of shortcomings

A significant proportion of the churches and ecclesiastical buildings located within the territory of the Diocese represent outstanding value from historical, heritage or local community perspectives. However, many of these buildings have undergone only partial maintenance over recent decades, making conservation works, energy modernisation and the development of visitor-friendly infrastructure increasingly necessary at several sites. These renovations not only serve the preservation of the built heritage but are also a prerequisite for enabling church sites to be safely and sustainably integrated into religious and cultural tourism in the long term.

The religious and cultural tourism offer is currently based on several valuable elements; however, these often appear in an isolated and fragmented manner. Therefore, further structuring of the offer is justified, including the development of thematic routes, unified programme packages and interpretative frameworks that support visitor orientation, enhance the visitor experience, and strengthen regional identity. A structured offer also creates opportunities for church sites to be more closely integrated into the wider regional tourism products.

The development of marketing and communication activities is likewise a key issue, particularly in order to reach younger and international target groups. At present, communication primarily operates at local and regional levels; therefore, the more conscious use of digital presence, multilingual content and professional tourism marketing tools is required. A unified visual identity and messaging framework can contribute to ensuring that ecclesiastical values and programmes appear as a clearly identifiable and attractive offer both nationally and internationally.

In addition, the further expansion of cross-border and project-based cooperation is justified, as these provide opportunities for knowledge exchange, the transfer of good practices and the

implementation of joint developments. Such collaborations not only strengthen professional capacities but also contribute to the deepening of regional and international networks, as well as to the creation of sustainable religious and cultural tourism in the long term.

Presentation of the project site

Nyíregyháza is the largest city of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and a regional cultural and tourism centre, where a new Religious Tourism Centre will be established within the framework of the project. The development site is located in the historic core of the city, on Bethlen Gábor Street, directly adjacent to the Greek Catholic Cathedral (cadastral number: 210).



Figure 3: Photograph of the future Religious Tourism Centre in its existing condition prior to renovation.¹²

The city's central location, well-developed transport connections and diverse cultural offer provide favourable conditions for the establishment of a religious tourism facility serving the wider region.

¹² The image was taken from the Technical Documentation provided by the Nyíregyháza Diocese (the documentation was made available in November 2025).

The building designated as the project site previously functioned as an educational institution (Saint Nicholas Greek Catholic Grammar School and Dormitory). In connection with the project, the Nyíregyháza Diocese is carrying out a comprehensive conversion and renovation of the building in order to make it suitable for tourism, cultural and community functions. According to the technical documentation, the development includes both exterior and interior reconstruction works: the unification of façade surfaces, the restoration of windows and doors, the functional reorganisation of interior spaces (exhibition areas, memorial room, guest rooms, ceremonial hall and community spaces), as well as the introduction of modern, visitor-friendly solutions (VR content and new exhibition infrastructure)¹³.



Figure 4: Visualisation provided within the framework of the design process ¹⁴

The significance of the Nyíregyháza project site is twofold. On the one hand, as the seat of the diocese, the city plays a prominent role in presenting Greek Catholic cultural heritage; thus, the Religious Tourism Centre will be integrated into the city's existing tourism network as a new attraction. On the other hand, as the only urban location within the project, it is well suited to reaching a broader audience, thereby contributing not only to the strengthening of local religious life but also to the contemporary presentation of religious and cultural values.

¹³Data and information partially taken from the technical documentation and reworded.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

The development directly enhances Nyíregyháza's cultural offer by providing a new venue for the implementation of Activities 2.2 and 2.3 of the project, and by attracting diverse visitor groups to the city through the experiential presentation of Greek Catholic ecclesiastical art and liturgical heritage. In the long term, the establishment of the centre will support Nyíregyháza's position as a regional hub for religious and cultural tourism.

I.3 Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese

• Tourism and cultural experience

The Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese is a key actor in the religious and cultural life of Eastern Hungary, covering two counties, Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. Its territory includes a significant number of churches, chapels and places of worship of historical value, which serve not only as centres of local religious life but also as outstanding elements of the region's cultural heritage. Many of these churches function as symbols of their respective settlements and are therefore naturally integrated into the rural cultural and tourism offer. The Diocese is particularly active in strengthening religious tourism, which has traditionally played an important role in the region and is still sustained today through pilgrimage routes, church feasts, events linked to the liturgical calendar, and community programmes.

The Diocese has several decades of experience in organising large-scale cultural and community events. Each year it implements numerous programmes that go beyond strictly religious frameworks and address a broader audience of local residents and visitors alike. These include youth meetings, pilgrimages, thematic spiritual days, community-building events, artistic performances and diocesan cultural programmes. Such events traditionally attract high numbers of participants, contribute to the Diocese's strong social embeddedness and reinforce its cultural role in the region. The organisation has developed internal structures, technical background and experienced staff to support the organisation of these events, enabling it to successfully implement larger projects, including those realised within international cooperation frameworks.

The Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese is one of the youngest Roman Catholic dioceses in Hungary, founded by Pope John Paul II in 1993¹⁵. It plays a significant role in the social and cultural life of the region and, alongside its pastoral mission, continuously strengthens its

¹⁵ Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese, founded in 1993 by Pope John Paul II; cf. *Hungarian Catholic Lexicon*.

community, cultural and tourism-related activities. Its rich built heritage—comprising listed churches, pilgrimage sites and ecclesiastical cultural programmes—represents a major attraction for both pilgrims and tourists visiting the region. The Diocese regularly organises church music concerts, festive liturgies, pilgrimages, youth and family programmes, as well as community and charitable events, which not only deepen spiritual life but also contribute to the development of cultural and religious tourism. Under the leadership of Bishop Ferenc Palánki, the Diocese's activities are guided by three strategic objectives: accessible and personal pastoral care, strong support for families, and the strengthening of ecumenical relations.

In recent years, the Diocese has participated in several significant cultural heritage and tourism development projects. Numerous church renovations and visitor-friendly tourism developments have been implemented using national and European Union funding, many of which have expanded the tourism offer of the Nyírség and Upper Tisza regions. These investments support not only the sustainable preservation of built heritage but also the strengthening of local communities and the enrichment of regional identity. Among the Diocese's projects are several complex developments that have also involved the surroundings of churches—such as courtyards, exhibition spaces, educational trails or smaller community areas—thus enabling an integrated implementation of cultural and tourism functions.

The Diocese's communication and branding activities have also contributed to making the buildings and programmes under its care visible to a wider audience. Religious heritage is increasingly positioned in tourism terms as well: news is regularly published about renovations, pilgrimages, cultural events and major church celebrations. Visual content—photographs of churches and documentation of community events—further reinforces the image of religious sites in the region as places with strong cultural and identity-forming roles.

Within the currently implemented cross-border cultural and tourism programme, the Diocese participates as a key partner. As part of the project, a major local monument, the Church of Saint Eleonóra in Tiszavasvári—one of the town's iconic buildings—will be renovated. In addition, the Diocese undertakes the organisation of cultural events, the involvement of local communities, and participation in the development of the joint tourism strategy.

Overall, the activities of the Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese are decisive not only from a religious perspective but also as a major shaping force of the region's cultural life and tourism offer. Church renovations, extensive community programmes, large-scale events and tourism projects together provide a complex body of experience that forms a solid basis for the successful implementation of cross-border cultural cooperation initiatives.

- **Institutional capacity**

The Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese has a stable, well-structured institutional background in the long term, which enables the high-quality implementation of investments, development activities and cultural programmes of various scales. Over several decades, the Diocese has established an internal structure that is equally prepared to carry out administrative, technical, financial and project management tasks. The operation of the Diocese is based on a coordinated team of experts, within which separate organisational units are responsible for the maintenance of built heritage, tendering and development activities, financial administration, and the implementation of community programmes.

One of the Diocese's key strengths is its own internal project management capacity. Project preparation, implementation and sustainability are ensured by staff members who have gained significant experience through previous national and international development programmes. In connection with the tendering office, experts are responsible for coordinating technical planning, preparing public procurement procedures, compiling financial reports and managing partner relations. As a result, the Diocese is capable of the transparent and efficient management of complex, multi-year projects, as well as the phased implementation of large-scale investments. The coordinated work of the existing organisational units – including the Financial Office, the Technical Office, the Communication Group and staff responsible for pastoral activities – ensures that administrative, technical and community-organising tasks are all carried out with an appropriate professional background.

Colleagues working in the technical field have participated in the preparation, permitting and implementation of several church renovation and heritage protection projects, and are familiar with monument protection requirements and the related legal framework. Financial staff are experienced in EU funding accounting systems, cost planning and monitoring tasks. This expertise is particularly important in project-based operations, as transparency and compliance with deadlines are key requirements for high-value investments.

The Diocese has significant infrastructure, organisational and professional capacity:

Key statistical data¹⁶:

- Area: 12,148.56 km²
- Population: 1,048,522 inhabitants
- Number of Roman Catholic faithful: 111,613 persons
- Number of parishes: 57
- Priests: 75 persons (of whom 60 are active)
- Religious education teachers: 109 persons
- Acolytes: 101 persons
- Lectors: 18 persons

The central administration of the Diocese – the Episcopal Office – operates in Debrecen. The office supports the functioning of the Diocese through several professional units and departments:

- Economic Office – financial planning and project management
- Legal and Procurement Department – supervision of public procurement procedures and contracts
- Pastoral and Educational Centre – professional coordination of schools and religious education
- Communication Office – press relations, marketing and online presence
- IT support – operation of modern digital systems

A professional staff of 20 employees works within the Episcopal Office, ensuring the professional implementation of tourism-related, cultural and project coordination tasks.

Educational and social institution network¹⁷:

- 11 public education institutions (from kindergarten to secondary school level)
- Higher education college in Debrecen
- Social and charitable institutions (elderly care homes, homeless services, Caritas)

¹⁶ The data were provided by the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza (November 2025).

¹⁷ Ibidem

This extensive institutional system enables the reception of visitors and the organisation of a wide range of religious tourism programmes.

Identification of shortcomings

In the region, the restoration of several listed churches has become urgent, as the preservation of the built heritage is a fundamental prerequisite for the sustainable development of religious and cultural tourism. At present, the offer of religious tourism does not yet appear under a unified image and common brand, which reduces the visibility and competitiveness of the region. In addition, the further development of marketing and communication activities is justified, with particular emphasis on targeted, strategically planned visibility. In order to reach international target groups, it is also necessary to strengthen and better coordinate promotional activities.

These factors clearly justify project-based developments and cross-border cooperation.

Presentation of the project site

The Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza is one of the key ecclesiastical and cultural institutions in north-eastern Hungary, carrying out pastoral, community and cultural tasks in the counties of Hajdú-Bihar and Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg. The Diocese operates over an area of nearly 12,149 km², serving a population of approximately one million people, of whom more than 160,000 identify themselves as Roman Catholic. In many settlements of the area, the Roman Catholic church forms a central element of local life, simultaneously fulfilling pastoral, community, cultural and identity-shaping functions.

The project site is linked to one of the most important, townscape-defining sacred buildings of the region: the Saint Cross – Saint Eleanor Roman Catholic Church in Tiszavasvári. The church, “which was built in 1912 based on the plans of János Balogh, a master builder from Košice, is one of the most valuable elements of the built heritage of Tiszavasvári with its Neo-Gothic and late Romantic stylistic features. The comprehensive renovation of the building, which had significantly deteriorated over previous decades, began in the summer of 2025¹⁸. The Neo-

¹⁸ The text was taken in its entirety from the press release provided by the Project Partner.

Gothic church is one of the iconic buildings of the town, dominating the skyline of the historic centre both in height and mass. The renovation of the church is important not only from a heritage protection perspective, but also because of its cultural role: the building is one of the most important gathering points of the local community, while its deteriorated condition previously prevented it from fulfilling the cultural functions for which its architectural value and spatial structure would otherwise make it suitable.

The surroundings of the church are located in the town centre and are easily accessible both on foot and by road, which is favourable for tourism and cultural use. The church fits organically into the emerging new cultural axis of the historic core of the town: following the renovation, it may function as an event venue, a community space and a tourist attraction. The aim of the project is to equip the building with modern sound and lighting technology as well as visual presentation surfaces, making it suitable for hosting performing arts events, community programmes, exhibitions and religious tourism activities.

The cultural and community embeddedness of the project site is further strengthened by the local community groups operated by the Diocese. In the town, an active drama group, a brass band and various church communities regularly participate in diocesan and municipal events; thus, the functional expansion of the church directly supports the development of local cultural life. The planned renovation will bring a visible change for the entire population of the town: a renewed, aesthetically pleasing building will appear in the townscape, strengthening local identity and contributing to the growth of the town's cultural attractiveness.

The project site is also significant because it can be integrated into the tourism networks of the region, including historical, religious and cultural routes. Important elements of cultural tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County include historic churches, pilgrimage sites and religious centres, which together shape the region's religious tourism profile. The renovation of the Saint Eleanor Church will thus become part of a network that previously focused on sites such as Máriapócs, Nyírbátor or the churches of Nyírvásvári.

The project site is also of key importance in the cultural dimension of cross-border cooperation. The shared religious heritage of the two countries, denominational diversity, and the region's pilgrimage and cultural routes naturally connect the communities of the Hungarian–Romanian border area. Through the events, major programmes and cultural cooperations planned within the project, the church will gain not only local but also cross-border significance.



Figure 5: The Holy Cross – Saint Eleonora Church in Tiszavasvári ¹⁹

Within the framework of the CET project,²⁰ the main investment site of the Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese is the Saint Eleonora Roman Catholic Church in Tiszavasvári, which:

- was built in 1912 based on the plans of János Balogh,
- features Late Romantic and Neo-Gothic architectural elements,
- is under monument protection,
- is a defining element of the townscape of Tiszavasvári.

The church serves as the spiritual, cultural and social centre of the local Roman Catholic community. It is the venue for active Caritas activities, youth and family programmes, as well as cultural events. Owing to its excellent acoustics, the church is well suited to hosting musical programmes, making it an ideal site for religious and cultural tourism.

Prior to the renovation, the building showed signs of significant deterioration in several areas: the roof structure was leaking, plaster surfaces were damaged, and the internal technical systems were outdated. The project addresses these challenges in a comprehensive manner by integrating heritage conservation + the expansion of community functions + tourism development.

¹⁹ Image source: <https://www.haromhatar.hu/index.php/hirek/helyi-hirek/26938-jo-utemben-halad-a-tiszavasvari-romai-katolikus-templom-felujitasa.html> (viewed on 01 December 2025)

²⁰ ROHU00474 – *Catholic event tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare counties (CET)*



Figure 6: The Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Saint Eleanor in Tiszavasvári in its pre-renovation condition²¹

The development contributes to ensuring that the church becomes

- a living spiritual centre,
- a cultural meeting place,
- a prominent religious tourism attraction,

which in the long term strengthens regional communities and Hungarian–Romanian ecclesiastical cooperation.

²¹ További képek elérhetőek a [SAJTÓKÖZLEMÉNY - Neogótikus örökség új fényben – elindult a CET projekt Tiszavasváriban - Debrecen-Nyíregyházi Egyházmegye](#) linken.



Figure 7: Visualisation of the Church of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross – Saint Eleanor in Tiszavasvári²²

Overall, the project site of the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza represents a cultural and spiritual space that simultaneously serves the preservation of community identity, the revitalisation of cultural life, and the enhancement of the region’s touristic attractiveness. The renovation of the century-old listed monument will make it possible for the church to function in the future as a meeting point of religious life, culture, and tourism—a venue that represents the values of the region in a dignified manner on both sides of the border.

²² Ibidem.

II. Tourism Strategy

II.1 Target Group Analysis

The target groups of the project are diverse; however, they share a common link to the religious, cultural, or community life of the region. The renovated churches and the Religious Tourism Centre to be established represent a new cultural and tourism service that creates direct value for several social groups. Through the combination of religious and cultural content and the use of modern interpretative tools, the project is able to address traditional religious communities, the broader tourism audience, local residents, and the younger generation simultaneously.

Pilgrims and religious communities

For pilgrims living in the region and arriving from across the border, the project represents a significant attraction. The renovation of the churches and the contemporary yet authentic presentation of Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic liturgical heritage add new content to existing religious routes. Religious communities are involved in the project not only as visitors but also as active contributors: local congregations, choirs, brass bands, and drama groups participate in events and cultural programmes. The functional expansion of the churches strengthens community identity and supports the long-term presence of religious life at the local level.

Cultural tourists

The project also targets cultural tourists who are interested in the region's built heritage, historical assets, and artistic values. Renovated churches, organised events, and modern exhibition technologies – such as VR experiences, projected content, and digital interpretation – offer a new type of experience for visitors who do not necessarily arrive with religious motivation. For cultural tourists, the thematic network connecting the three project locations is of particular value, as it links historic buildings with other cultural attractions of the region, offering a comprehensive and coherent visitor experience.

Local population

For the local population, the project represents an intervention that improves everyday quality of life. The renewal of churches that serve as symbols of their settlements has positive aesthetic, community, and identity-building effects. The emergence of new cultural spaces enables the organisation of local events, family programmes, celebrations, and community gatherings, thereby expanding the cultural infrastructure of the settlements. Residents also benefit indirectly from the increased touristic attractiveness of their towns and villages: visitor numbers grow, the image of the settlement improves, and local pride is strengthened.

Young people and school groups

Young people and school groups appear as a priority target group, as the project places special emphasis on educational and experiential learning approaches. Presentations supported by modern technical tools – VR equipment, digital content, and interactive exhibitions – make religious and cultural heritage more accessible and engaging for students. The churches and the Religious Tourism Centre are suitable venues for religious education classes, thematic days, school excursions, and museum education activities. Involving young people contributes to ensuring that future generations develop a connection to the region's cultural values and community life.

II.2 Competitor Analysis

The project is implemented in a cultural and religious tourism environment where several well-known spiritual, heritage tourism, and pilgrimage sites already operate. The supply of religious tourism in the region is traditionally rich; however, the project introduces a modern, interactive, and multifunctional development that positions the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza as a distinctive actor within the region.

Other religious tourism sites in the region

Several prominent pilgrimage and cultural sites operate in the region that may be considered direct competitors or complementary actors to the project.

The most significant religious tourism attraction is Máriapócs, a nationally renowned Greek Catholic pilgrimage site. The shrine attracts tens of thousands of visitors annually and has

played a defining role in the region's religious identity for decades. The project, however, does not seek to compete with pilgrimage-based tourism; instead, it creates added value by expanding cultural and community functions.

The churches of Nyírbátor – particularly the Gothic listed monuments – also represent a major tourism attraction with a rich historical background and high visitor numbers. These sites, however, are at a relative disadvantage in that they are less connected to modern interpretative systems, and therefore offer fewer experience-based cultural contents for younger generations.

Smaller historic churches in the region – such as those in Tákos, Csaroda, Nyíracsd, and Lónya – also play an important role in cultural heritage tourism. However, these sites are primarily attractive due to their architectural and historical value and generally lack multifunctional spatial solutions of the type envisaged within the framework of the project.

A common characteristic of competing sites is their strong religious traditions and rich built heritage; however, they are less able to adapt to modern tourism expectations. The project differentiates itself precisely by complementing historical value with interactive, experience-based, mobile solutions that can function simultaneously as exhibition spaces and event venues. The development of the churches and the Religious Tourism Centre aligns well with current tourism trends that expand religious sites with community and cultural functions.

International Best Practices

The cultural use of religious heritage is a widespread practice across Europe, and international best practices demonstrate that the functional expansion of ecclesiastical buildings significantly increases tourist appeal and enhances visitor experience.

In Central European countries, numerous churches operate as multifunctional cultural spaces through modern interpretation tools such as projected content, sound and lighting technology, and interactive exhibitions. In Poland and Slovakia, many pilgrimage sites apply digital presentation systems that make historical and religious content particularly attractive for young people and school groups.

In Western Europe, the reinterpretation of religious buildings as cultural event venues is also common practice. Several churches in France and Italy provide dedicated spaces for modern exhibitions, concerts, and sacred art programmes. These examples demonstrate that it is

possible to create innovative cultural and tourism value while preserving the original religious function of ecclesiastical heritage.

International examples clearly show that religious tourism becomes competitive when traditions are complemented by modern, experience-based forms of interpretation. The development implemented by the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza follows precisely this approach by combining historical and spiritual values with interactive content, visitor-friendly services, and community functions.

Competitive Advantages of the Project

Compared to the region's existing religious tourism supply, the main strengths of the project are as follows:

- **Complex, multifunctional development (religious, cultural, tourism, community)**

One of the project's most important innovations is that it does not appear solely as a religious or tourism investment, but as an integrated development model that unites religious, cultural, and community functions within a single space. The renovation of the churches and their associated areas not only creates a dignified environment for religious life, but also enables their operation as event venues, exhibition spaces, and centres for cultural activities. This multifunctional approach significantly increases the utilisation of the buildings and ensures sustainable operation in the long term. Within the region's current tourism offer, there are few projects that simultaneously target local communities, pilgrims, tourists, and culturally interested visitors.

- **Application of modern interpretative and presentation tools**

A key element of the project is contemporary, experience-based interpretation, which makes traditional religious content more accessible through modern technologies. Digital guided tours, VR/AR elements, interactive exhibition solutions, and professional sound and lighting equipment together provide a toolkit that elevates visitor experience to a higher level. Religious tourism in the region has so far been dominated by traditional presentation methods; in contrast,

the project introduces an innovative and modern approach that is particularly important for engaging younger target groups.

- **Active involvement of local communities**

The project places strong emphasis on ensuring that development represents not only physical renewal but also the revitalisation of local community life. Planned programmes – such as musical evenings, thematic religious and cultural events, community days, and youth activities – are based on the active participation of local residents. Community involvement not only increases the project’s social embeddedness but also strengthens local identity and cultural self-organisation. This approach represents a significant difference compared to purely infrastructural developments.

- **Networking of multiple locations**

One of the project’s strategic strengths is that it does not implement isolated investments but operates within a complex regional network logic. The churches and religious sites involved in the project are integrated into thematic routes that enhance tourism connectivity on both sides of the border. Locations such as Satu Mare, Krasznabéltek, Máriapócs, Nyíregyháza, and Tiszavasvári form a coherent, mutually reinforcing religious and cultural destination. This network-based approach fills a significant gap in the region, where previous developments were scattered and weakly coordinated.

- **High cultural added value**

The project addresses built and intangible heritage that is a defining element of the region’s identity. The renovation of listed churches, the presentation of sacred art, and the modern interpretation of historical and spiritual heritage all contribute to making the region’s cultural offer more valuable, higher in quality, and competitive at international level. The presentation of classical, Neo-Gothic, and Byzantine architectural values offers unique cultural content that extends beyond a purely ecclesiastical audience.

- **Technology-based content attractive to younger generations**

One of the challenges of religious tourism is the difficulty of engaging younger age groups. The project responds by applying interactive, digital, and visually rich solutions that reflect the media awareness and technological orientation of young people. VR tours, digital content, smart-device-based guiding elements, and the creation of modern community spaces ensure that the project is not only culturally and religiously relevant but also provides an engaging and inspiring meeting point for new generations.

The project is not merely a new participant in the religious tourism market; it represents an **innovation-driven qualitative leap** that fundamentally reshapes the region's tourism, cultural, and community profile. The combination of multifunctional development, modern presentation technologies, community involvement, and network-based operation creates a complex value proposition that fills a long-standing gap by linking the region's religious heritage with contemporary cultural and tourism expectations. As a result, the project establishes a new quality within the regional offer and implements a sustainable tourism model that is attractive to a wide range of target groups in the long term.

II.3 Market Positioning and Common Objectives

Presentation of the Region as a Cross-Border Religious–Cultural Tourism Area

The region interpreted as a cross-border religious and cultural tourism area derives its unique character from the fact that it simultaneously embodies the historical identity of **Szatmár, Szabolcs, and Bereg**, as well as the diversity of cultural spaces defined by contemporary administrative and ecclesiastical structures. From an ecclesiastical perspective, the area is shaped by three major organisational units: the **Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare**, whose historical roots extend into present-day Romania; the **Diocese of Nyíregyháza**, operating in Hungary primarily in the Nyírség region; and the **Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza**, encompassing broader areas of the Great Hungarian Plain. These three ecclesiastical presences do not exist in isolation; rather, through historical continuity, cultural connections, and shared heritage, they together form a coherent yet diverse region upon which the development of religious and cultural tourism can be built.

The geographical character of the region is shaped by the flat lowland landscape of the Great Plain, river valleys—particularly those of the **Tisza, Szamos, and Kraszna rivers**—and the sandy dunes of the Nyírség. These natural features not only influenced settlement patterns but also determined the spatial distribution of religious and cultural centres. Along the rivers, historical ecclesiastical centres, parishes, and monasteries became concentrated, many of which continue to preserve the region's spiritual and community traditions to this day. In contrast, settlements in the Nyírség are more dispersed, where the dynamic development of Greek Catholic and Roman Catholic communities already resulted in significant religious and cultural diversity during the 18th and 19th centuries.²³.

The cross-border dimension became particularly significant following the Treaty of Trianon, when the ecclesiastical structures of historical Szatmár were divided between two countries. This division, however, did not sever regional ties; rather, it reinforced cultural networks within a new framework. Communities operating today in Hungary and Romania continue to nurture a shared spiritual heritage: their churches, pilgrimage sites, ecclesiastical feasts, musical traditions, and crafts serve as enduring links that connect the region as a unified religious and cultural space even today.

From the perspective of religious tourism, the area possesses exceptionally rich assets. Baroque and Classical church architecture of the 18th and 19th centuries, traditions of Greek Catholic icon painting, the simple vernacular architectural solutions of rural churches, and major pilgrimage sites—such as **Máriapócs**—all contribute to making the region an increasingly attractive destination for visitors seeking spiritual experiences, cultural heritage, and historical identity.

The territories of the **Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare**, the **Diocese of Nyíregyháza**, and the **Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza** together form a region with several centuries of religious and cultural heritage, whose communities, built environment, and spiritual traditions are organically interconnected. Along the Hungarian–Romanian border, cultural and religious identity is highly permeable: churches, pilgrimage sites, community events, and the denominational communities living here have strengthened one another for centuries. The

²³ **Own compilation:** Summary prepared on the basis of the region's physical geographical and settlement-historical characteristics, as well as the development of the ecclesiastical network, with particular emphasis on the settlement-structuring role of the **Tisza–Szamos–Kraszna river valleys** and the **religious and cultural development of the Nyírség**, based on regional geographical and church-historical scholarly literature.

project provides a new framework for this historical and cultural unity by positioning the participating dioceses as an **integrated, network-based tourism area**.

The religious heritage of the region is particularly rich:

- The St. Anne Cathedral in Debrecen, which from the 18th century onwards has been one of the most important centres of Catholic renewal in eastern Hungary, featuring Baroque and Classical stylistic elements and outstanding artistic values. The St. Ladislaus Dominican Church in Debrecen and its associated monastic heritage preserve a rare ecclesiastical presence in the city dating back to the Middle Ages. In addition, the Debrecen Rock Church (Sziklatemplom), as a contemporary religious site, uniquely connects modern architecture with spiritual space and represents a new attraction within urban religious tourism.
- The Classical-style cathedral and episcopal palace of Satu Mare, the centuries-old architectural values of the St. Ladislaus Church in Krasznabéltek (Beltiug), the Árpád-period church of Ákosfalva, which has stood since the 12th–13th centuries and is one of the most valuable Romanesque architectural monuments of the Diocese of Satu Mare, as well as the Church of St. Joseph Calasanz in Carei (Nagykároly) and the city's historic Catholic heritage, which represents an outstanding legacy of the Baroque period.
- The nationally significant pilgrimage site of Máriapócs, the Greek Catholic Cathedral and Museum of Nyíregyháza, and the St. Eleonora Church in Tiszavasvári, an iconic sacral site of monument value.

These locations are today intensively visited religious and cultural destinations; however, in the absence of cooperation and network-based thinking, they operate largely in isolation. The objective of the project is precisely to overcome this fragmentation and to create tourism and cultural cohesion among the sites.

The “Sacred Places – Shared Heritage” concept provides a communicational, professional and tourism framework for this regional identity. The events and activities of the *Spiritual Routes* programme (pilgrimages, cultural programmes, the creation of networked presentation sites) clearly demonstrate that the project is developing a shared religious–cultural ecosystem: routes, contents and spatial design solutions that, in a coordinated manner, make the region's heritage accessible and experiential for visitors.

The project therefore does not aim merely at the renovation of individual sites, but at creating the market presence of a cross-border tourism region. A central element of this approach is the recognition that religious and cultural heritage in itself already represents an attraction, but it can only become a true tourism asset if attractions are presented in a coordinated, thematic and experience-based form.

The interconnected world of tradition and modern community programmes in the region

The Szatmár–Nyírség–Northern Great Plain region embodies a religious and cultural heritage that has shaped the identity of local communities for centuries. Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic and other denominational traditions live on not only in their built heritage — churches, pilgrimage sites and community spaces — but also in the everyday rhythms, celebrations and shared experiences of local society. The ecclesiastical actors of the region, including the Diocese of Satu Mare, the Diocese of Nyíregyháza and the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza, are establishing a framework of cooperation that connects traditional sacred values with contemporary community-building initiatives.

One of the most important common features of the developments taking place in the region is that the preservation of religious heritage is not an end in itself. The renovated churches, renewed community spaces and newly established visitor centres are all sites that simultaneously preserve the values of the past and respond to the needs of the present. The restoration of churches — whether the St. Ladislaus Church in Krasznabéltek or the St. Eleonora Church in Tiszavasvári — is not only architectural conservation, but also the creation of new functions: living spaces capable of hosting community programmes, cultural events, pilgrimages, youth and family gatherings.



Figure 8: From left to right: St. Ladislaus Church (Krasznabéltek), St. Eleonora Church (Tiszavasvári), and the visual design of the Religious Tourism Centre of the Diocese of Nyíregyháza ²⁴

²⁴ **Source of images:** Images provided by the project partners, as well as images available on the internet.

One of the region's outstanding examples of integrating tradition with modern community needs is the Religious Tourism Centre being established in Nyíregyháza. The adaptive reuse of a historic Greek Catholic school building with a new function clearly demonstrates that the region does not merely preserve its past, but actively reinterprets it: the site will host cultural programmes, thematic exhibitions, pilgrimage route information points, and interactive community events. This form of reuse represents innovation rooted in respect for tradition and helps younger generations to connect with their own cultural and spiritual heritage.

The renewal of churches and ecclesiastical institutions also creates new opportunities for local communities. These spaces can host village days, value-creating workshops, religious music festivals, and cultural gatherings—programmes that bring together local residents and visitors alike. Alongside traditional feasts, pilgrimages, and religious celebrations, interactive experiences and community events tailored to contemporary needs are also emerging, contributing to the strengthening of the region's tourism appeal.

This interconnection—community life that is modern and inclusive while firmly grounded in the values of the past—makes the region particularly well suited to function as a cross-border cultural and religious tourism area. Historical links stretching from Upper Hungary to Transylvania, complementary cultural traditions, and programmes that remain relevant to contemporary society together create a sustainable development model that strengthens local identity, supports the resilience of communities, and offers meaningful experiences for visitors.

In this way, the region looks both backward and forward at the same time: it preserves what has been entrusted to it by previous generations, while building a future in which tradition and modern community life are not opposites, but mutually enriching values.

II.4 Product Development and Pricing

The renewal and expansion of the region's religious-cultural tourism offer requires a product development process that builds on traditional values while integrating them into the framework of modern tourism demands. Development focuses on three main areas: event-based products, thematic tourism routes, and infrastructure modernisation. Together, these elements strengthen the competitiveness of the region as a cross-border religious-cultural area and support sustainable tourism growth.

Events (concerts, exhibitions, pilgrimages)

One of the most important tools for bringing religious heritage to life is the development of events that are capable of linking tradition with modern community experiences. Within the region, several initiatives can be created that may become recurring, brand-value programmes and stable elements of the tourism offer on an annual basis.

For example, a *Pilgrimage Route and Cultural Festival Weekend* could function as a complex event in which participants complete guided pilgrimage sections towards Nyíregyháza, Máriapócs, Tiszavasvári and Krasznabéltek, while encountering local stories, tasting the region's gastronomic specialities, and taking part in church or open-air concerts at the end of each day. A key element of the event is its experience-based approach: icon-painting or candle-making workshops, community discussions, and night-time church tours with light installations all contribute to making traditional religious events attractive to younger generations as well.

Another type of event linked to the renovated churches is the “*Living Churches Day*”, during which churches welcome visitors with all-day openness, interactive presentations, and community programmes. The aim of this initiative is to involve local residents and tourists alike as active participants in the reinterpretation of heritage. Evening concert programmes, community events organised in church gardens, and exhibitions created from photographs taken by visitors all contribute to transforming churches into cultural meeting places.

Pricing for such events can be differentiated: smaller, shorter programmes (e.g. guided church tours) may require a favourable, low entry fee, while larger-scale events—such as festival-type weekends or thematic concerts—can operate with higher-value ticket prices. In the case of pilgrimages, pricing is primarily based on the combination of services provided (accommodation, catering, guiding). The annual programme offer also allows for package pricing options.

Thematic Tourism Routes

A key strength of the region lies in the fact that its religious and cultural heritage, although geographically dispersed, forms a coherent thematic whole: a network of pilgrimage sites, historic churches, community spaces, pilgrimage routes, and sacred cultural monuments. On this basis, thematic routes can be developed that offer visitors a logical, experience-oriented travel product.

One outstanding opportunity is the creation of a cross-border religious–cultural circuit linking the ecclesiastical sites of the three partner dioceses. Participants visit several churches and

church centres while professional guides present the region's shared historical and religious heritage. As part of the programme, choir meetings, demonstrations of local crafts, and cultural activities for children can further enhance the sense of community and shared experience.

The thematic weekly programmes of the Religious Tourism Centre being established in Nyíregyháza can also be transformed into route-based products. Examples include a thematic week focusing on icons and digital art, presentations of modern pilgrimage experiences using VR technology, or family-oriented programmes introducing local legends and the stories of saints. These routes—also available in self-guided formats—provide opportunities for visitors to spend a longer period in the region, thereby increasing tourism revenues.

Pricing for the routes can be flexible: some routes may be freely accessible (with the help of an app or printed map), while guided, paid versions offering higher experiential value can also be made available. For multi-day programmes, package pricing is recommended.

Infrastructure Development

Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare – Development of the Saint Ladislaus Roman Catholic Church in Krasznabéltek

The development of the Saint Ladislaus Roman Catholic Church in Krasznabéltek is one of the project's key heritage conservation components. The church is a sacred site with more than 800 years of religious history, having undergone several reconstructions and extensions over the centuries. The aim of the renovation is the comprehensive restoration of the church's external structures and the creation of a safe, dignified, and visitor-friendly environment.

Main elements of the development include:

- renovation of the roof structure, including replacement of the roofing and repair of the timber structure (replacement of damaged elements and structural reinforcement),
- restoration of the external façades, with particular attention to the uniform repair of historic plasterwork and the preservation of the building's stylistic values,
- complete renovation of the fence and church garden, including the Stations of the Cross, which are important pilgrimage and tourism elements,
- landscaping of the churchyard, the creation of pedestrian circulation routes and green areas, and the establishment of an environment suitable for hosting events.

Through this investment, the church will become one of the most important religious tourism sites in the region, providing a safe environment for pilgrims and cultural visitors alike, and serving as a worthy venue for the religious and cultural events regularly held in Krasznabéltek.

Nyíregyháza Diocese – Establishment of the Religious Tourism Centre

The Nyíregyháza Diocese is transforming a historic, monument-type building into a Religious Tourism Centre. The building can be divided into two parts: an older, original wing and a newer building block added at a later stage. The aim of the renovation is to create a modern complex that nevertheless complies with heritage protection principles and is suitable for hosting exhibitions, conferences, cultural programmes and visitors.

Interior developments

A complete functional reorganisation of the building will be implemented:

- **Ground floor:** exhibition space, memorial room, office spaces, modern sanitary facilities, dining area and kitchenette,
- **First floor:** guest rooms, suite, library, reading room, ceremonial hall and service rooms,
- **Second floor:** archive, records storage, office, restroom facilities, and a new steel-structure staircase replacing the former staircase that no longer met current regulations.

Exterior renovation

The renovation aims to restore the original character of the building and to unify the two building wings:

- plaster repairs and façade colouring in accordance with the colour scheme of the cathedral,
- renovation of doors and windows with a unified new colour,
- installation of new windows in the “new wing” to improve lighting conditions,
- new roofing and cladding elements, including standing-seam metal roofing on roof superstructures,
- renovation of the plinth: cleaning and impregnation of stone plinths, and re-plastering of painted plinth sections.

Taken together, these developments will enable the Religious Tourism Centre established in Nyíregyháza to serve the cultural, pilgrimage and community-related needs of visitors arriving from both sides of the border at a high professional standard.

Debrecen–Nyíregyháza Diocese – Renovation of the Saint Eleonóra Church in Tiszavasvári

The Saint Eleonóra Church in Tiszavasvári is the central element of the Hungarian heritage protection development within the project. Due to the severe deterioration of the church's technical condition, comprehensive intervention has become necessary, which also allows for the strengthening of cultural and tourism-related functions.

Main technical tasks:

- Complete renovation and partial reconstruction of the roof structure, as timber protection assessments revealed that the original structure posed a safety risk. The tower structure of the Romantic–Neo-Gothic church is particularly severely damaged, therefore its complete reconstruction is required.
- Restoration of the façade, repair of damaged and damp areas, replacement of plaster, and reconstruction of decorative elements,
- Renovation of the interior spaces: wall repairs, painting works, and partial restoration of the liturgical space,
- Repair and restoration of doors and windows,
- Landscaping and environmental improvements, including the creation of a pedestrian-friendly space in front of the church.

As a result of the renovation, the church will become safe for use while preserving and presenting its architectural heritage in a dignified manner. The development will enable the building to regularly host cultural and tourism-related programmes, thereby contributing to the strengthening of religious tourism in the region.

The three planned developments together safeguard heritage values, expand cultural and tourism functions, and create a new, sustainable religious tourism offer. This contributes to the deepening of cooperation between the three dioceses and supports the establishment of a

common religious–cultural route that will strengthen the region’s identity and attractiveness in the long term.

The investments are in line with the objectives of the Interreg VI-A RO–HU Programme: economic revitalisation, social inclusion and the sustainable use of cultural heritage.

The sustainable operation of events and thematic routes is fundamentally dependent on infrastructure development. In the region, the renewal of several buildings and cultural sites is underway or planned, including church renovations, the modernisation of community spaces, and the establishment of the visitor centre in Nyíregyháza. Beyond preserving religious heritage, these developments also expand tourism functions, as churches and community buildings thus become suitable for hosting a wider range of events.

In addition, physical infrastructure that supports the visitor experience and logistical operation is required: the installation of information points, the creation of rest areas and restrooms, the development of cycling and pedestrian connections, and the organisation of parking facilities. Digital infrastructure (interactive panels, QR-code-based information, mobile application routes) is now a basic requirement and significantly enhances the accessibility of tourism services.

The pricing of infrastructure elements becomes part of the service package: rental fees for renovated spaces, entrance fees to the visitor centre, or the price of guided tours are all incorporated into the tourism product. The objective is to ensure sustainable operation: fees must cover operating costs while remaining affordable for residents and tourists alike.

The combination of the three areas creates a comprehensive tourism product system that simultaneously attracts pilgrims, cultural visitors, families and young people. Events provide experiences, thematic routes offer a coherent framework for exploring the region, and infrastructure ensures the conditions for high-quality visitor reception. All three elements contribute to the region’s tourism stability and income-generating capacity.

Pricing

The pricing of the region’s religious and cultural tourism products is based on a differentiated system that takes into account the purchasing power of different visitor groups, the nature of the services provided, seasonal fluctuations and the requirements of sustainable operation. The pricing strategy has a dual objective: on the one hand, to ensure the economic sustainability of

operation, and on the other hand, to remain attractive for both domestic visitors and cross-border tourists. The model is developed along three main product categories.

Pricing of event-based tourism products

In the case of event-based tourism products, pricing is primarily determined by the scale of the event, its level of exclusivity and the range of associated services provided.

Pilgrimage Festival Weekend

This is a complex, multi-location tourism product in which some programme elements are offered free of charge, while others require prior registration and payment. The core concept of the event is based on a **tiered pricing model**, whereby the basic experience is available at an affordable price, while value-added services are offered for an additional fee.

For the weekend programme, the following ticket types may be introduced:

- a **basic ticket**, including participation in the guided pilgrimage section and a programme booklet;
- a **combined ticket**, granting access to concerts, craft workshops or special evening programmes;
- a **family ticket**, offering discounted access for multiple participants;
- a **VIP or supporter ticket**, including premium content such as special guided tours and a local gift package.

“Living Churches Day”

This event can operate as a free basic experience, complemented by donation-based or symbolic-fee supplementary programmes. Evening concerts and special guided tours are offered as ticketed activities. This model supports broad public engagement while ensuring coverage of organisational costs.

Small-scale concert programmes and chamber exhibitions

These can operate with uniform, moderate ticket prices. For local residents, discounted or donation-based participation may be introduced, strengthening community involvement and local ownership.

2. Pricing of thematic tourism routes

Pricing of thematic routes requires a flexible model, as visitors have diverse needs and financial capacities. Accordingly, the following pricing logic can be applied:

Free self-guided routes

Routes available in map-based or mobile application formats may be accessed free of charge, while supplementary services – such as audio guides, interactive content, thematic badges or stamp booklets – can be offered for a small, affordable fee.

Guided tours and circuits

Prices for guided thematic tours (e.g. cross-border religious circuits) may include:

- guiding services,
- entrance fees to churches and exhibitions,
- transportation (where required),
- and additional programme elements.

For multi-day tours, a package pricing model is recommended, including accommodation and meals. Prices may be seasonally differentiated, with higher rates during peak season and discounted offers in spring and autumn.

Thematic weeks (Nyíregyháza Religious Tourism Centre)

Programmes forming part of thematic weeks may operate with a single-price system or combined daily tickets. Discounts may be offered to students, young people and large families, encouraging active participation of younger generations.

3. Pricing related to infrastructure development

Pricing of services created through infrastructure development is based on **long-term sustainability considerations**.

Visitor centre entrance fees

The core services are offered at a **moderate, affordable price**, while premium experiences (such as VR exhibitions, interactive installations and thematic exhibitions) may require higher-value ticket categories. Group visits may benefit from discounted pricing schemes.

Space rental fees

Renovated churches and community spaces may be rented for concerts, small conferences and community events. Pricing is differentiated as follows:

- lower rates for local civil and church organisations,

- higher rates for external, commercially oriented events.

Pricing of additional comfort services

These may include:

- use of restrooms and rest areas (free of charge or for a symbolic fee),
- luggage storage,
- bicycle rental,
- information packages.

Fees are determined by taking into account both **maintenance costs** and the **financial capacity of visitors**.

Proposal for the operating principles of the overall pricing system

When developing the region's tourism pricing system, it is recommended to apply a value-based and widely accessible pricing structure that is aligned with the nature of the religious and cultural heritage and with the region's long-term tourism objectives. The core principle of pricing is that services should offer added value, while at the same time avoiding the creation of access barriers for local communities, domestic visitors or cross-border tourists.

The main objectives of the proposed pricing system are as follows:

- **maximising visitor experience** through the development of programmes and services that present the region's religious and cultural values in an engaging and experiential manner;
- **ensuring economically sustainable operation**, enabling long-term coverage of maintenance costs and the generation of resources needed for further development;
- **strengthening local communities**, for whom cultural and religious sites are not only tourist attractions but also living community spaces;
- **encouraging repeat visits and longer stays**, thereby increasing the region's economic and tourism performance.

A key message of the proposed model is that the region's religious and cultural heritage is not a luxury product, but a shared community value that should remain accessible to all. At the same time, pricing should support a sustainable revenue structure that ensures the operation of programmes and facilities and provides a stable foundation for future developments.

This dual approach—balancing accessibility and sustainability—creates a tourism model that is viable in the long term and capable of generating lasting value for the region.

Pricing Model Matrix²⁵

In our view, the development of the region's pricing system should clearly be based on a **value-based approach**. This perspective ensures that tourism offerings remain accessible to a wide range of audiences, while at the same time enabling the economic sustainability of programme operations.

Value-based pricing also contributes to strengthening community participation, as it does not exclude local residents from cultural and religious events and supports the long-term maintenance of service quality. As a result, the region is able to represent community values while building the future of its tourism offer on stable economic foundations. The application of the pricing matrix allows each product type to operate according to its own logic, while remaining within a coherent and unified strategic framework.

Type of the products	Nature of the pricing structure
Events	optional experience-based add-ons
Thematic routes	Flexible base price + package-based add-ons
Infrastructure	Basic entrance fee + premium service charges

Table 1: Pricing structure by product type²⁶

When developing the region's tourism offer, it is important that the pricing system can **flexibly adapt to the specific characteristics of different product types and the diversity of visitor needs**. To this end, it is advisable to apply pricing tools that simultaneously support **sustainable operation**, enable the **increase of revenue potential**, and ensure that programmes remain accessible to a broad audience.

The matrix below presents pricing techniques that can be effectively integrated into the region's religious and cultural tourism products and that are well aligned with the objectives of the development strategy.

²⁵The **pricing matrix** is a tool designed to support the planning and transparent presentation of differentiated pricing according to services and target groups. It takes into account operational costs, visitor needs, market conditions and sustainability considerations. Its application facilitates the development of a coherent yet flexible pricing policy for cultural and religious tourism services.

²⁶ Author's own work

Tool	Applicable product types	Advantage
Package pricing	Thematic routes, festival weekends	Increased revenue per visitor
Seasonal pricing	Multi-day tours, events	Optimisation of peak season and season extension
Dynamic ticket pricing	Concerts, flagship events	Flexible revenue maximisation
Donation-based participation	Church open days, community events	Broad social inclusion
VIP / supporter packages	Festivals, concert programmes	Higher revenue category

Table 2.: Applicable pricing tools²⁷

The conscious and coordinated application of pricing tools enables the region's religious and cultural tourism offer to be simultaneously competitive, experience-oriented and sustainable. Different pricing strategies address different target groups, yet together they form a system capable of managing seasonal fluctuations, increasing participation levels and strengthening community involvement. The implementation of the methods presented in the matrix contributes in the long term to ensuring that the region's tourism products generate a **stable revenue base**, while continuing to preserve their core value: the broad accessibility of religious and cultural heritage. This well-considered and flexible pricing system therefore represents a key element of the region's development not only in economic terms, but also from a community and cultural perspective.

²⁷ Author's own work

II.5 Marketing, Promotion and Communication

The objective of the CET project's²⁸ communication and marketing strategy is to jointly present the religious and cultural values of the three dioceses and to increase their tourism attractiveness through a consistent visual identity and coordinated online and offline communication. The project significantly strengthens the visibility and accessibility of the religious tourism offer by using both digital and traditional communication channels.

Unified visual identity and logo

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare committed to developing a common website, visual identity and logo, which are applied consistently across all project communication elements, including:

- printed publications,
- websites and social media platforms,
- events (roll-ups, banners and information materials),
- media appearances.



Figure 9: Project logo adopted by the partners²⁹

This ensures that the project is presented as a **single, coherent brand**, strengthening the visibility of cross-border cooperation.

²⁸ ROHU00474 – *Catholic event tourism in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare counties (CET)*

²⁹ The logo was made available by the project partners.

Online communication

The partners jointly operate a project website:

<https://spiritualroutes.eu>

Functions and tasks of the website include:

- continuous upload of tourism and religious programmes by the three partners;
- publication of up-to-date news and progress updates on renovation activities;
- articles, photo galleries and event reports;
- presentation of religious tourism offers and pilgrimage routes.

Each partner displays the project website as a **banner on its own website**, ensuring the widest possible outreach.

Press and offline communication

The project engages with the public through:

- press releases;
- appearances in local and church-related media;
- information materials displayed in churches and community spaces.

The Diocese of Nyíregyháza has undertaken the preparation of a **joint project publication** that follows the content structure of the website. The publication:

- presents the locations and their key strengths;
- offers tourism packages for pilgrims and visitors;
- serves as a tangible source of information supporting the positioning of the region as a religious tourism destination.

Promotion of joint events

Within the project, **four major cross-border joint events** will be organised and promoted.

Location	Date	Event
Beltiug	16–17 August 2025	Wine Festival in Krasznabéltek – implemented
Nyíregyháza	6–7 December 2025	Feast of Saint Nicholas and church fair – implemented
Beltiug	27 June 2026	Church fair on the Feast of Saint Ladislaus

Location	Date	Event
Tiszavasvári	12–13 September 2026	Church fair at the Saint Eleonora Church

Table: Joint events to be implemented within the project³⁰

In addition to the joint programmes, each partner also organises its **own local events** within the framework of the project, which are likewise featured on the **common promotional platforms**.

Communication tools used for events include:

- project-branded roll-ups and information displays;
- event communication on websites and social media platforms;
- church announcements and community notices;
- press coverage and photo documentation.

For the successful implementation of the project, it is particularly important that the newly created **religious and cultural routes**, the **renovated churches** and the **Religious Tourism Centre** receive **consistent, visible and coherent communication**. This includes coordinated press appearances, the aligned production of printed and digital publications, and the effective promotion of joint events. The primary objective of marketing activities is to ensure that the three locations are presented to the public not as isolated “islands”, but as parts of a **single, cross-border tourism network**.

The new infrastructure developed within the project—such as the renovated churches, spaces enhanced with modern cultural functions, and the Religious Tourism Centre established in Nyíregyháza—represents a **communicable asset** for all partners that can be easily integrated into regional and national tourism offers. When preparing press materials, it is advisable to highlight innovative elements such as **VR sets, digital content, virtual tours of church interiors, and modern auditorium functions**. These elements effectively illustrate the project’s innovative character and convey the message that religious tourism is capable of engaging contemporary visitors through modern tools.

When producing printed publications, brochures, leaflets and maps, it is recommended to apply a **unified visual identity system** that visually connects the three dioceses and project locations. The role of these publications is twofold: on the one hand, they provide visitors with

³⁰ Author’s own work

information about the renovated buildings and events; on the other hand, they strengthen the region's religious and cultural identity. Distribution of the publications should not be limited to project sites only; they should also be available in **tourism offices, municipal information points, cultural institutions, pilgrimage sites, accommodation providers and gastronomic service establishments**.

One of the key elements in promoting joint events is **cross-marketing**: each partner communicates the programmes, developments and recommendations of the other two locations. This is particularly important in a cross-border project, where the objective is to increase the visibility of the region as a whole. Within cross-marketing activities, partners are encouraged to share each other's content on their own websites, social media platforms and event calendars. In addition, it is advisable to include recommendations on all communication channels for related service providers and locations, such as:

- nearby tourist attractions and religious routes;
- museums, cultural institutions and community spaces;
- local service providers, such as wineries, craft workshops, restaurants and accommodation providers;
- official tourism platforms (county-level TDM organisations, city tourism portals, etc.).

The aim of joint promotion is to ensure that visitors do not select only a single site, but rather perceive a **complex experience package**, where routes, renovated buildings, cultural programmes and local services reinforce one another. This integrated communication approach ensures the project's long-term visibility, increases visitor numbers and helps position the region clearly on the map of religious and cultural tourism.

Content and design recommendations for printed publications

Printed publications—such as leaflets, brochures, maps and booklets—play a key role in informing visitors and strengthening the project's identity. These materials should apply **unified visual elements** that visually connect the participating dioceses and the infrastructure developed within the project.

The content of the publications should include:

- the new infrastructure created within the project (renovated churches, the Religious Tourism Centre, visitor-friendly solutions);
- map-based presentation of thematic routes;
- an overview of the programme offer (events, concerts, community activities);

- QR codes linking to digital content, virtual tours and videos;
- contact information and additional related tourism offers.

Distribution of publications should not be limited to project sites only. They should also be available in tourism offices, municipal customer service points, museums, cultural institutions, restaurants, accommodation facilities, and across the border, particularly in the Satu Mare region.

Promotional protocol for joint events

One of the project's greatest strengths is the cooperation between the three ecclesiastical partners and across the two countries. To fully utilise this potential for tourism development, joint events require **coordinated and professional communication**.

During promotion, it is recommended to:

- develop a unified visual campaign for each event (posters, banners, digital advertisements);
- maintain a joint event calendar featuring programmes from all partners;
- promote events through a multi-channel approach, including social media, websites, church announcements and press coverage;
- share photo and video materials from events in a coordinated manner.

Special attention should be given to the **“tourism narrative”** of the events: communication should emphasise that visitors are invited into a new, modern experience space where **tradition and innovation come together**.

Cross-marketing³¹-proporsals for the partners

To ensure the **long-term sustainability of the project** and to increase visitor numbers, the application of **cross-marketing among the partner organisations** is essential. This means that each partner actively promotes the offers and services of the other two implementing organisations through its own communication channels.

Recommended elements of cross-marketing include:

³¹ Cross-marketing is a cooperation-based marketing approach in which multiple complementary service providers or locations strengthen each other's visibility and reach through coordinated communication and joint offers. Its application is particularly effective in cultural and religious tourism, as it supports the development of route-based tourism products, increases visitor length of stay, and enhances cooperation among regional stakeholders.

- **Promotion of nearby tourist attractions:** all communication materials should highlight additional points of interest located in the project area (e.g. Máriapócs, historic town centres, nearby museums).
- **Involvement of cultural institutions:** placement of recommendations in libraries, museums, concert venues and other cultural spaces.
- **Linking local service providers:** promotion of wineries, craft workshops, restaurants and accommodation providers that complement the religious tourism experience.
- **Use of official tourism platforms:** regular joint visibility on the platforms of county and city-level TDM organisations, including the upload of events and routes to tourism calendars.

The advantage of cross-marketing is that it presents visitors with a **coherent tourism offer**, which increases the attractiveness of routes, strengthens regional identity and encourages longer stays.



Figure 1.: “The project’s communication and marketing process”³²

³² Figure: Author’s own work

The objective of the marketing strategy is to strengthen the project's brand through a unified visual identity, enhance the tourism appeal of the partner dioceses, reach a broad target audience through online and offline presence, and create a sustainable religious tourism network.

Through joint communication, the region's sacred routes and religious events will become significantly more visible and accessible to both local and international visitors.

II.6 Cooperation opportunities

One of the greatest added values of the CET project is that church institutions operating in different countries and representing different denominations establish genuine, substantive cooperation with one another. The tourism utilization of religious heritage can only become sustainable in the long term if institutionalized partnerships are created that extend beyond the scope of the current development.

Area of Cooperation	Specific Activities	Tools / Infrastructure Created within the Project	Expected Impact / Added Value
1. Exchange of experience among partners	– professional workshops and training days– site visits to renovated churches– development of joint operational and tourism methodologies– presentation of the use of digital and VR tools	– renovated churches and community spaces– Religious Tourism Centre (Nyíregyháza)– VR equipment and digital content– project website and knowledge repository	– unified professional methodology– more efficient operation and management– long-term professional partnership– establishment of a shared knowledge platform
2. Preparation of future joint projects	– planning of new cross-border thematic routes– preparation of a joint religious–cultural festival– expansion of digital	– strengthened partnership structure– new tourism infrastructure (church renovations, visitor	– access to new funding opportunities– expansion of tourism offerings– strengthening of the

Area of Cooperation	Specific Activities	Tools / Infrastructure Created within the Project	Expected Impact / Added Value
	developments (app, VR)– preparation of joint funding applications (EU, Interreg)	spaces)– unified visual identity and communication system	cross-border tourism network– long-term sustainable development
3. Transfer of good practices to other regions	– preparation and dissemination of methodological materials– hosting of study visits– presentation of adaptable event models– transfer of digital and VR technologies	– project website as a knowledge-sharing platform– pilot projects (church renovation, event models)– digital toolset and route system	– wider dissemination of project impacts– the region positioned as an innovative heritage tourism model– support for the development of other communities

Within the framework of the project, the renovated buildings, innovative presentation methods (virtual tours, VR tools), and the cultural connections built around events provide a stable foundation on which further professional and tourism-related cooperation can be developed.

Cooperation opportunities unfold in three main areas: exchange of experience, preparation of future joint projects, and the transfer of good practices to other regions.

Exchange of experience among partners

The three dioceses – the Roman Catholic Diocese of Satu Mare, the Diocese of Nyíregyháza, and the Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza – operate in different historical, cultural, and tourism contexts; therefore, each possesses a distinct type of professional expertise. This diversity becomes a shared resource when experiences are exchanged in an organized manner. Several structured forms of experience exchange can be established:

- **Professional workshops:** where experiences from renovation works, event organization methods, and solutions for involving local communities are presented and shared.

- **Joint site visits:** for example, on-site presentations of newly implemented sound systems, exhibition installations, or liturgical technologies.
- **Sharing of tourism operation know-how:** including how to operate a religious tourism attraction sustainably, how local groups can be involved, and how visitor satisfaction can be measured.

The complete body of project materials – strategies, route plans, visual identity elements, and event calendars – creates a shared knowledge base that can be used in the future as well. The project website and database serve as a digital framework for this knowledge sharing.

The long-term value of this process lies in the fact that stakeholders not only adopt each other's good practices but also develop a culture of cooperation that, even after the project's completion, can continue to strengthen the professional quality and community foundations of religious tourism in the region.

Preparation of Future Joint Projects

The dioceses participating in the project have significant experience in investment, tourism development, and community organization, which is further strengthened by the current development. This provides an ideal starting point for the creation of new projects based on cooperation.

In the future, joint development may proceed in several directions:

Expansion of cross-border thematic routes: linking to existing church routes, religious sites, the pilgrimage destination of Máriapócs, or tourism programs related to cathedrals.

Development of a joint religious–cultural festival: organized annually at rotating locations, featuring cultural events aimed at a broad audience, music programs, and workshops with a sacred theme.

Further development of digital solutions: including additional virtual tours, a shared regional database, a digital ticketing system, or the creation of an interactive application.

Development of religious tourism service packages: involving accommodation providers, local service providers, and tourism offices—particularly TDM and tourism partners already engaged in the project.

The cooperation established within the project creates a foundation upon which future projects financed by European Union or national funding schemes may be built (direct EU funding sources such as Interreg and heritage conservation programmes).

Transfer of Good Practices to Other Regions

The innovative elements of the CET project—such as the integration of modern cultural functions into religious spaces, the use of VR tools, community-based event models, and the development of thematic religious tourism routes—represent adaptable models for other settlements.

Their transfer is particularly feasible in three main directions:

For other dioceses: the combination of renovation, tourism value creation, and community involvement constitutes a methodology that can be adapted by many church authorities in Hungary and Romania.

For local governments: the “placemaking” approach reflected in the project—the community- and tourism-oriented use of built heritage—can serve as a model for other small and medium-sized towns.

For tourism networks and professional organizations: the shared database, coordinated communication of events, and the integration of marketing strategies can also be implemented in other regions.

The project website and the shared document repository established after the project provide a long-term platform for the transfer of good practices.

The CET project not only renews infrastructure but also creates a regional cooperation model that ensures the long-term development of cross-border religious tourism. The exchange of experience among partners, the establishment of foundations for future joint projects, and the wide dissemination of good practices together guarantee that the project’s results extend well beyond the current development period.

III. Action Programme (Action Plan)

The tourism and cultural developments established through the cooperation of the three dioceses can only become sustainable if they are implemented along a clear, well-scheduled, and coordinated action plan. The action programme defines the necessary steps, communication tasks, the development of joint tourism products, and the framework for long-term cooperation for the entire duration of the project—and beyond.

III. 1. Short-term actions (0–12 months)

Objective: to ensure the smooth launch of the developments and the visibility of the project.

1.1. Planning and preparation

- Preparation and approval of detailed design documentation for restoration, renovation, and conversion works.
- Finalization of implementation contracts and approval of schedules.
- Planning of publicity and visibility requirements related to the investments.

1.2. Launch of renovation works

- Commencement of construction and restoration works at the three sites (Krasznabéltek, Tiszavasvári, Nyíregyháza).
- Documentation of the progress of works (photo documentation, construction logs, reports).

1.3. Ensuring publicity and communication

- Application of project visibility elements (roll-ups, temporary information boards, joint logo, visual identity) at all sites.
- Continuous updating of the joint website with:
 - ongoing works,
 - events,
 - reports and news.
- Placement of banners on the partners' own websites linking to the joint project site.
- Joint Facebook communication and the introduction of unified visual elements.

III. 2. Medium-term actions (12–24 months)

Objective: to launch the religious tourism offer, reach target audiences, and strengthen the partnership.

2.1. Launch and coordination of events

- Organization of the four major joint events committed within the framework of the project:
 - **Krasznabéltek:** church feast and wine festival,
 - **Nyíregyháza:** St. Nicholas Courtyard, church feast, Epiphany procession (Three Kings' Walk),
 - **Krasznabéltek:** St. Ladislaus feast,
 - **Tiszavasvári:** church feast and project closing event.
- Coordination of the partners' own annual religious and cultural events and their publication in the joint calendar.

2.2. Development of a joint tourism offer

- Preparation of package offers for visitors to the three sites, for example: *"Route of the Three Dioceses," "From St. Ladislaus to St. Eleanor," "Sacred Heritage Route," "Sacred Places – Shared Heritage,"* etc.
- Each partner prepares a recommended visit package linked to its own programmes, which:
 - presents additional religious and cultural assets of the region,
 - promotes the other two project sites,
 - provides supplementary information on accommodation, local wineries, and attractions.
- The packages will be prepared based on a unified template (*Annex 1*).

2.3. Cross-marketing and online presence

- On the joint website, each partner is provided with a dedicated subpage, with events and attractions continuously updated.
- Mutual linking and content sharing between the three partners' websites and Facebook pages.
- Use of a shared, unified brand: logo, colour palette, and visual identity elements.

- Joint press releases and media appearances in regional and church-related media.

III. 3. Long-term objectives (from month 24)

Objective: to establish sustainable religious and cultural tourism, ensure the long-term operation of the joint brand, and further strengthen the partnership.

3.1. Long-term use and expansion of the joint brand name

The joint brand name created within the project, “**CET – Catholic Event Tourism,**” will be used consistently by all dioceses. The brand will become effective in the long term if it gradually encompasses not only the sites renovated within the project, but also other tourism attractions of the dioceses, such as:

- additional churches, chapels, and pilgrimage sites,
- cultural events, feasts, and festivals,
- church museums and exhibitions,
- community spaces and cultural programmes of educational institutions.

This will allow the CET brand to evolve over time into a large, cross-border sacred and cultural tourism network that is sustainable in the long term.

Regular promotion of each other’s attractions by the three partners

In practice, this means:

- On their own websites, a dedicated menu item titled “*Recommended attractions in partner dioceses.*”
- Promotion of the other two partners’ offers on event posters and in publications.
- Mutual sharing of each other’s programmes on Facebook pages at least once a month.
- On the joint website, each event page will include a “*We also recommend nearby*” section presenting 3–5 additional attractions from the other two areas.

Development of joint offer packages based on a unified template (e.g. “*Route of the Three Dioceses,*” “*In the Footsteps of St. Ladislaus and St. Eleanor,*” “*Sacred Places – Shared Heritage*”).

The template may be attached as an annex, and each partner prepares its own offers based on it.

Brand presence across all online and offline platforms

- joint logo on websites, publications, and roll-ups,
- unified colour scheme and visual appearance,
- identical newsletter structure,

- use of shared photo and video materials.

3.2. Operation of sustainable religious and cultural tourism

The renovated churches will function in the long term as active religious and cultural spaces, hosting:

- regular concerts,
- church music programmes,
- handicraft, church history, and thematic exhibitions,
- youth and family days,
- guided church history tours,
- reception of pilgrimage groups at pre-arranged times.

An annual calendar of events will be jointly compiled each year and published on:

- the joint website,
- the websites of the three dioceses,
- social media platforms,
- printed tourism publications.

3.3. Building international relations

In the long term, the project partners intend to cooperate with:

- managers of European religious tourism routes (e.g. the Way of Mary, the St. Ladislaus Route),
- cross-border church communities,
- cultural and pilgrimage tourism organizations.

The objective is to join an international sacred tourism network that will increase visitor numbers and enhance the visibility of the region in the long term.

3.4. Joint brand building and unified communication

A key element of long-term cooperation is the operation of a joint communication system, comprising the following practical steps:

- Maintenance of the joint website with regular updates on:
 - events,
 - reports,
 - photo galleries,
 - tourism routes,

- news and results.
- Coordinated management of Facebook pages:
 - regular sharing of each other's programmes,
 - joint campaigns ahead of major events,
 - use of unified visual graphics.
- Regular updating of printed publications:
 - expansion of routes, packages, and attractions,
 - without QR codes, but with a unified Interreg and church-related design.
- Use of unified roll-ups and information displays at all events.

3.5. Monitoring and feedback

To ensure sustainable operation, the following activities are required annually:

- collection and analysis of visitor statistics,
- evaluation of the impact of events,
- updating of tourism packages,
- processing of online and in-person feedback.

This ensures that the CET brand becomes a genuine, viable, and continuously developing tourism product.

Within the CET project, the religious, cultural, and tourism assets of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg County and Satu Mare County are presented in a new light. The renovation of churches, the strengthening of communities, and the unfolding of cooperation create a spiritual and cultural network that transcends borders. This strategy is not merely a development document, but an invitation to discover a new, shared religious tourism space, where the heritage of faith, cultural richness, and the tradition of hospitality are woven into a single, unified experience.

The three partner organizations remain firmly committed to continuing work that:

- preserves the region's built heritage,
- strengthens local communities,
- invites visitors on experience-rich, value-creating journeys,
- and connects the region's religious tourism sites in a sustainable, long-term manner.

Together, we build the appeal of the future on the values of the past.

The CET project brand serves as a compass, guiding the three dioceses to gradually involve additional sacred sites and cultural attractions, and—by mutually reinforcing each other's

values—present a unified message to visitors through joint communication and cross-marketing.

“This document was prepared with the support of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme, within the framework of the CET project, identification number ROHU00474.”

TOURISM PACKAGE OFFER – UNIFIED TEMPLATE (CET)

CET – Catholic Event Tourism

Tourism Package Offer

Sacred Routes of Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg and Satu Mare Counties

LOGO PLACE 1 – CET logo

LOGO PLACE 2 – Interreg VI-A logo

LOGO PLACE 3 – Partner Diocese logo

1. Package Name

2. Short Description

Two–three sentence description of the package.

E.g.: The programme presents the most important sacred and cultural sites of the region, with special emphasis on renovated churches and religious traditions.

3. Duration

☐ 1 day ☐ 2 days ☐ 3 days ☐ Individual schedule

4. Recommended Route

4.1. First Stop

Location: _____

Short description: _____

Accessibility / special features: _____

4.2. Second Stop

Location: _____

Short description: _____

4.3. Third Stop

Location: _____

Short description: _____

5. Related Programmes

 Concert / organ concert

 Exhibition / guided tour

 Pilgrimage / thematic walk

 Cultural presentation

 Gastronomic experience (e.g. wine tasting)

The partner specifies its own package elements here.

6. Additional Recommended Attractions (cross-promotion)

Diocese of Debrecen–Nyíregyháza

Diocese of Nyíregyháza

Diocese of Satu Mare

Each partner recommends at least three attractions belonging to other partners.

7. Related Services

- ☐ Parking
- ☐ Catering options
- ☐ Accommodation
- ☐ Guided tours
- ☐ Accessibility information

8. Practical Information

Opening hours: _____

Group visit coordination: _____

Entrance fee / donation: _____

9. Contact Details

Organisation / parish: _____

Contact person: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Website: _____

10. Image Placement

IMAGE PLACE 1 – church / site

Source: _____

IMAGE PLACE 2 – event / community

Source: _____

11. Visual Identity and Mandatory Communication Elements

At the bottom of the document, the following must always appear:

Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary logo

EU funding statement:

“This document was prepared with the support of the Interreg VI-A Romania–Hungary Programme, within the framework of the CET project, identification number ROHU00474.”

CET project logo

Romania - Hungary

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