

Modern pilgrimage routes in Croatia

Projects and activities of the Institute for Tourism, Zagreb

The importance of pilgrimage routes for tourism development was studied at the Institute for Tourism more than 10 years ago, under the methodology of the evaluation of tourist attractions in the area, which includes the tourist trails, paths and roads. In this sense, Ivanec Romar's Path (1998) was the pilot project. Two other projects have been developed based on the findings of these studies - Stepinac Path, and the International Marian Path.

Pilgrimage routes are an unavoidable segment of attractiveness basis for religious tourism development. These are pedestrian pathways with functionally determined, marked and equipped routes, accompanied with the marketing materials, especially tourist map and guide, and control system. Declared pilgrimage routes are real tourism attractions, ready for the tourist market.

Pilgrimage routes, which link the Croatian shrines, are hundreds of years old. Although formally unmarked, they are deeply etched in the memory of older believers. Today, when the believers have a large number of passenger vehicles at their disposal, only few use the traditional pilgrimage routes for walking to the selected sanctuaries. These roads are mostly overgrown and forgotten. However, on the other side of Europe, in Spain, walking through the traditional pilgrimage routes leading to Santiago de Compostela is booming again. People walk for different reasons, for example religious reasons, because of conspiracy, for penance, but also because of curiosity, sport and recreation. Additionally, modern man again "asks himself," and occasionally tries to stay "with himself" as well.

Tourist routes, paths and roads, including the pilgrim routes, become an interesting tourist attraction and important *connective tissue* that complements and enriches the tourism destination product. They often assume, in remote rural areas with surrounding smaller attractions in their own gravitating areas, the function of basic rural tourism destination, without losing their religious characteristics and significance. In a broader sense, the pilgrim routes are also *cultural pathways*, from the standpoint of faith but also the cultural and economic i.e. tourism standpoints as well.

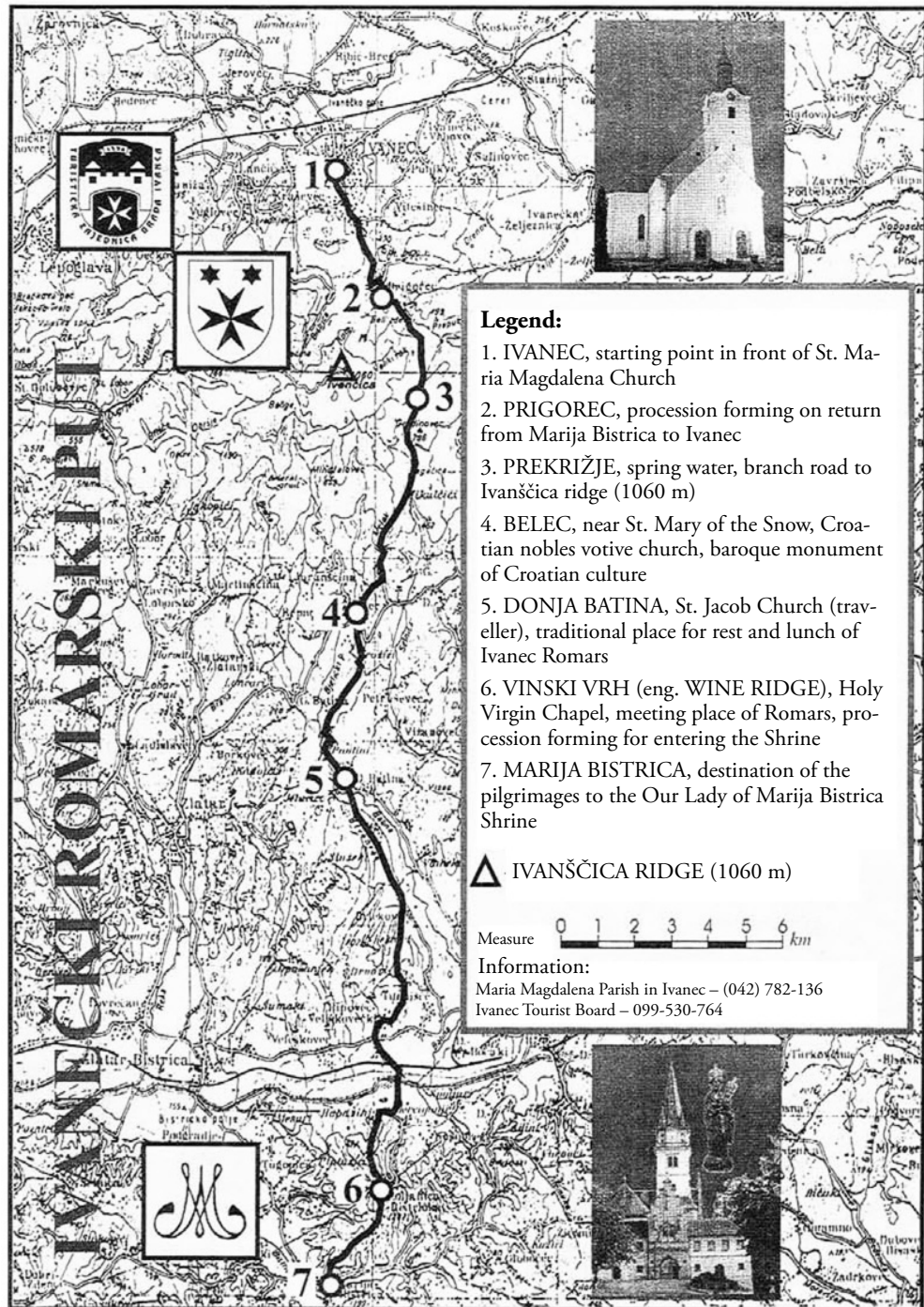
In this sense, a series of initiatives to revive the traditional pilgrim routes in Croatia has emerged, mainly related to the Marian shrines in Marija Bistrica, Trsat (Rijeka), Sinj, Voćin, Aljmaš, islands, etc. There are also initiatives for the establishment of new pilgrimage routes. In doing so, tourism structures show equal if not greater interest in the pilgrimage routes than religious structures.

In the last fifteen years, there have been different tourism initiatives to revive the Bistrica romar's hiking routes, both by pilgrims and tourists. The largest network of pilgrimage routes in Croatia was developed over the past 300 years in the wider environment of the Our Lady of Marija Bistrica Shrine. Those routes were used by the pilgrims to move from their parishes to Marija Bistrica, the most important Croatian Marian shrine.

In the meantime, parts of the network of traditional "Bistrica" routes have been investigated and partially labeled in the framework of various projects, such as,

Figure 1

IVANEC ROMAR'S PATH FLYER, PRINTED FOR THE VISIT OF POPE JOHN PAUL II TO MARIJA BISTRICA IN 1998
(Author: E. Kušen)



Ivanec Romar's Path (1998), *Stepinac Path*, which is labeled on the field, while its tourist map is in press, and *International Marian Path*, which is conducted in co-operation with Slovenia and financed by the EU pre-accession IPA fund.

One of the branches of the historic "Bistrica" pilgrim routes was first reconstructed 12 years ago on the route between Ivanec and Marija Bistrica, in the framework of a separate research by the Institute for Tourism. That same year, the Iva-

nec Tourist Board, in accordance with the results of these studies, supported and funded the project *Ivanec Romar's Path* (1998), which passes through the area of two counties. The project was completed in honor of the visit of Pope John Paul II to Marija Bistrica and the local declaration of Blessed Stepinac in 1998 (Figure 1). Religious and tourist use of Ivanec Romar's Path spontaneously began three years later. Today, after 12 years, it is necessary to fully restore the markings on this road.

This was the first modern Croatian pilgrimage path. For marking this pilgrimage path it was not possible, or not allowed, to use traditional hiking markings, so new signs were created. The path is marked by the original sign in papal colors, white cross on a yellow square. This sign was used for two other projects also, the Stepinac Path and the International Marian Path. In addition, a special promotional flyer was published with the route and general information for the Ivanec Romar's Path. There the first methodology experiences were gained to create not only the pilgrim routes, but generally thematic paths as well. The way of managing such roads remained open, especially if they pass the areas of various tourist boards, which is important for the next two projects.

The work on the Stepinac Path project began in early 2006. Its task was to link together the key positions in the life of the Blessed Aloysius Stepinac - four religious and tourist destinations. The Blessed was born and died in Krašić, in Zagreb (Kaptol) he acted as the Archbishop, in Lepoglava he spent years in prison, while the Pope beatified him in Marija Bistrica. The Stepinac Path is also open for joining other places directly related to its work (Sveti Ivan Zelina, Ludbreg or others).

Stepinac religious-tourist destinations include many attractions associated with the life of the Blessed. In Krašić, there are two memorial rooms in the parish office, with many genuine cases, rooms in which the cardinal spent his last years. In Zagreb, there are, inter alia, the Stepinac tomb and museum. In Marija Bistrica there is the authentic place where Pope John Paul II declared him Blessed, as well as the sculpture of the Pope and the complete national shrine. Unfortunately, in the Lepoglava prison, the Stepinac cell is still inaccessible to visitors, but there are other details illustrating the imprisonment of Stepinac, as well as the famous Pauline monastery and baroque church.

Stepinac Path goes mostly by the traditional Marian paths of Our Lady of Marija Bistrica Shrine, and only a small part, near Krašić, by new Krašić pilgrimage routes (Figure 2). In addition to these four religious-tourist destinations, the Stepinac Path connects many other famous religious and cultural buildings and sites as well. Its marking is in the final phase. It will be partly put down in Zagreb till the Cathedral and the Stone Gate.

This pilgrimage route passes through three counties (Krapina-Zagorje, Varaždin and Zagreb) and the City of Zagreb, and at a lower level, through several areas of Tourist Boards of cities and municipalities. Thus, its implementation and management is very complex, especially while destination management organizations or companies do not yet operate in the field.

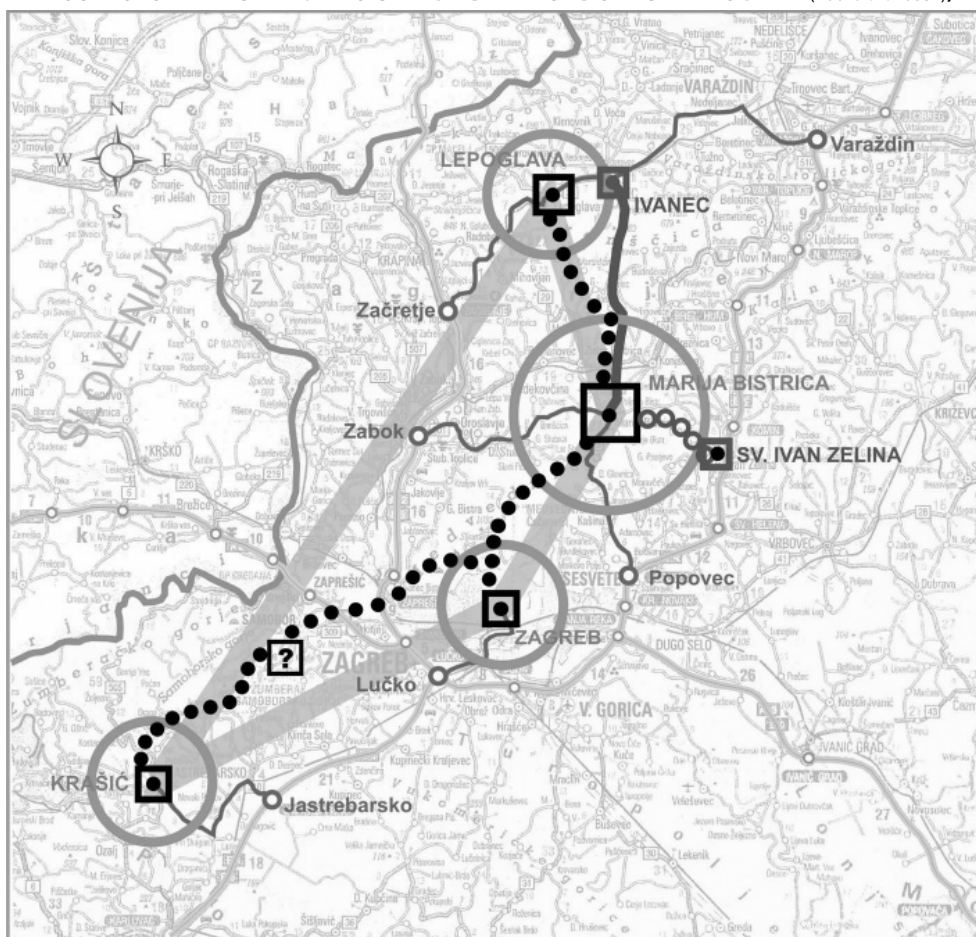
Initial funding for this project was provided by the Ministry of Tourism. The project is being implemented in accordance with the tapping of funds, in coordination with TB Marija Bistrica.

Currently, the Stepinac Path tourist map is being prepared for printing, with route marked in detail. With this map, the tourists, hikers and pilgrims will be able to move independently. The back side of the ticket will contain some key information about the Blessed, destination, the sights along the way, the technique of walking and movement.

In the near future, we are preparing a more detailed guide, which would further facilitate movement along the *Stepinac Path*.

As a result of the analysis of the Bistrica traditional pilgrim routes for *Stepinac Path*, it is shown also the prospective *International Marian Path* between Mari-

Figure 2
THE ROUTE OF STEPINAC PATH: KRAŠIĆ - ZAGREB - MARIJA BISTRICA - LEPOGLAVA (Author: E. Kušen)

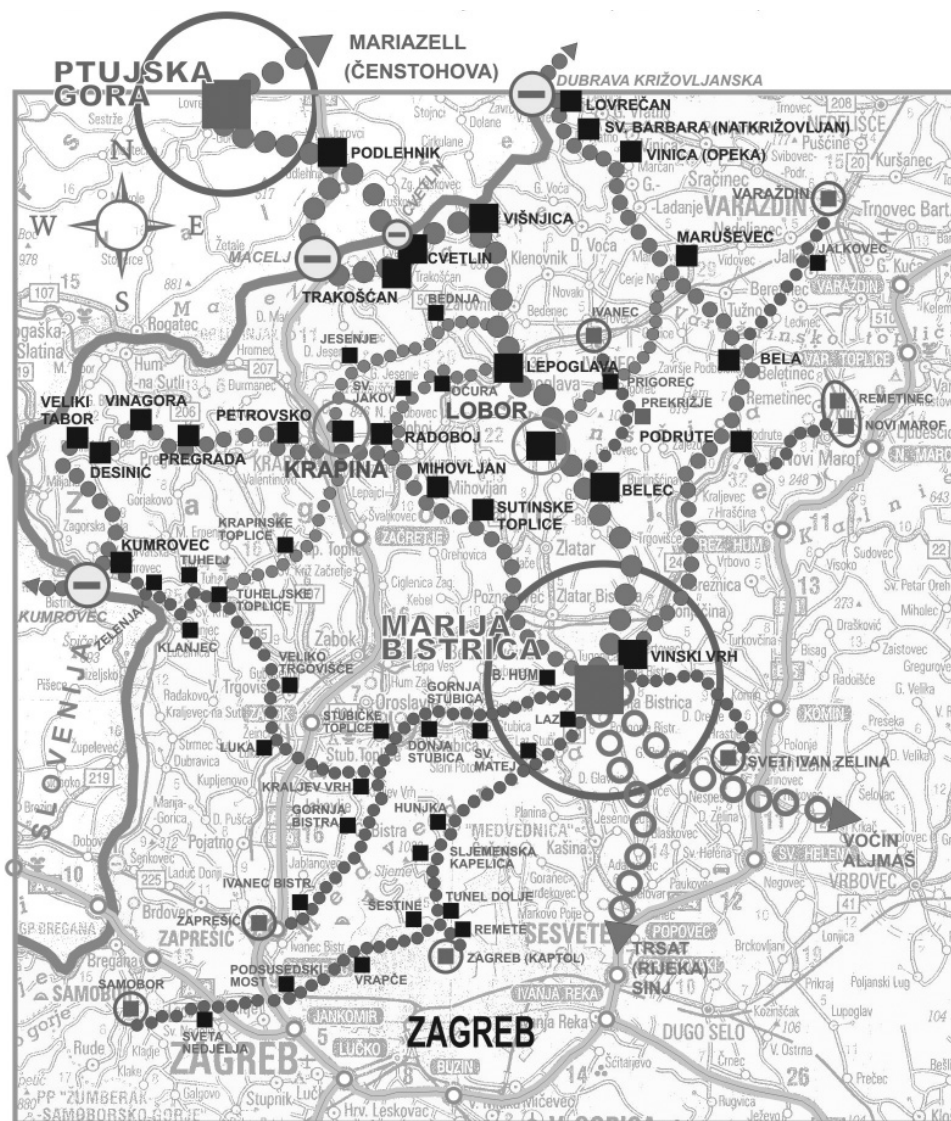


Legend

- Borderline
- Highways
- Highway junction starting points
- Access roads
- Stepinac Croatian square
- KRAŠIĆ** Main places on pilgrimage trails
- IVANEC ROMAR TRAIL
- STEPINAC PILGRIMAGE TRAIL
- ZELINA ROMAR TRAIL

- STEPINAC RELIGIOUS-TOURISM DESTINATIONS
- ST. IVAN ZELINA STARTING POINT OF ZELINA ROMAR TRAIL
- IVANEC - STARTING POINT OF IVANEC ROMAR TRAIL
- POTENTIAL OVERNIGHTS AREA

Figure 3
INTERNATIONAL MARIAN PATH (MAIN, EAST AND WEST ROUTE) IN THE SYSTEM OF BISTRICA PILGRIMAGE ROUTES IN CROATIA (Author: E. Kušen)



Legend

- BORDERLINE
- HIGHWAYS
- MAIN PLACES ON PILGRIMAGE TRAIL

- INTERNATIONAL MARIAN PILGRIMAGE TRAIL**
- CENTRAL ROUTE
- EAST AND WEST ROUTE
- POTENTIAL PROLONGATION OF INTERNATIONAL TRAIL
- OTHER BISTRICA PILGRIMAGE TRAILS
- CONJUNCTIVE PILGRIMAGE TRAILS

- INTERNATIONAL CROSSING BORDER: MACELJ, KUMROVEC AND DUBRAVA KRIŽOVLJANSKA
- INTERSTATE BORDER CROSSING CVETLIN
- PARISH FETE SITES
KRAPINA – TRŠKI VRH AND
LOBOR MAJKA BOŽJA GORSKA
- STARTING POINTS OF BISTRICA
ZAGREB, VARAZDIN, IVANEC,
SVETI IVAN ZELINA, ZAPRESIĆ,
SAMOBOR AND REMETINEC/NOVI MAROF
- RELIGIOUS-TOURISM
DESTINATIONS:
MARIJA BISTRICA AND PTUJSKA GORA

azell and Marija Bistrica, which would link Marija Bistrica to other important Marian shrines in north-western Croatia (Belec, Lobar, Lepoglava, Bednja), with Slovenia (Ptujška Gora) and the Austrian Habsburg shrine (Mariazell).

An initiative to link two cross-border famous shrines, Marija Bistrica in Croatia and Ptujška Gora in Slovenia came from the Slovenian side back in 2005. It concerns areas where Croats and Slovenes traditionally crossed the border from a common pilgrimage impetus (Marija Bistrica, Ptujška Gora). However, real cooperation began in 2008, when the realization of the Stepinac Path was in full swing and when the TB Marija Bistrica created a new program *Marian Pilgrimage Routes* originating from the Shrine of Our Lady of Marija Bistrica. Besides the Stepinac Path, it included all other routes traditionally or thematically related to Our Lady of Bistrica. This program was initially funded by the Ministry of the Sea, Tourism, Transport and Development.

Based on these preliminary activities, Croatian and Slovenia jointly appeared under the project "Tourist infrastructure and promotion of selected religious centers," abbreviated as *International Marian Path*, at the competition for EU pre-accession funds of EU IPA CBC Slovenia-Croatia 2007-2013. This project mainly relies on the idea of international pilgrimage that links Marija Bistrica (Croatia), Ptujška Gora (Slovenia) and Mariazell (Austria). In August 2009, after a number of demanding administrative procedures, the notification was received that the project went to tender and that it was awarded 720 000 euros.

During 2009, the Austrian side joined the cooperation first to prepare the aforementioned contest and later in the Marian pilgrimage project realization. The Austrian side has already implemented the project Pilgerwege (pilgrimage routes in the Austrian Styria). After that, the Croatian and Slovenian sides were informed on the already implemented project of the International Marian Path which has been completed from its origin in Čenstehova (Poland) to Mariazell (Austria) and about the ongoing preparations for its extension to Ptujška Gora (Slovenia). It was agreed that the International Marian Path would be extended to Marija Bistrica (Croatia) with the following framework of its formation: Čenstehova - Levoca - Mariazell - Graz - Mureck - Ptujška Gora - Marija Bistrica, with the possibility of its extension to Trsat and Sinj (including Medjugorje) or to Voćin and Aljma.

The proposal is raised to extend in Croatia not only the central route from Slovenia but east and west routes of the International Marian Path as well. These routes are designed as part of the "Bistrica" pilgrim routes network (Figure 3). The central route would enter Croatia via the border crossing Macelj (Cvetlin) to Marija Bistrica via Lepoglava while the west route would go through Kumrovec via Krapina, and the eastern route through Dubrava Križovljanska via Vinice (Opeka).

This project is particularly complex because in Croatia it passes through the area of three counties (Krapina-Zagorje, Varaždin and Zagreb) and the territory of several European countries.

E. Kušen