



## ЕКОНОМІЧНІ НАУКИ

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### PROSPECTS FOR GREEN PILGRIMAGE IN THE KHMELNYTSKYI REGION: THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CAMINO PODOLICO

#### **Abstract**

Religious tourism is one of the most dynamic areas of the tourism industry, combining spiritual experiences, cultural heritage and economic development of regions. One promising area is green pilgrimage, which involves environmentally responsible travel and digital technologies to improve the tourist experience. In this context, developing the Camino Podolico pilgrimage route in the Khmelnytskyi region is an important aspect that can contribute to preserving the natural environment, attracting international tourists and creating new opportunities for local communities. The study is based on an analysis of global practices in developing pilgrimage routes, particularly the experience of the Camino de Santiago in Spain. Digital technologies, such as mobile applications for navigation and booking, play a key role in increasing the route's accessibility and improving communication among pilgrims. To analyze the tourist attractiveness of the Camino Podolico in the Khmelnytskyi region, the method of assessing the tourist readiness of the region (TDI) was applied, which includes a comprehensive assessment of such parameters as infrastructure, resource base, socio-economic level and competitive position. Each indicator was evaluated on a 5-point scale, which made it possible to determine the region's generalized index of tourist attractiveness. The obtained TDI value of 3.12 indicates a moderate level of readiness of the Khmelnytskyi region to receive pilgrims and the need for further development of the route.

To transform the Camino Podolico into a powerful tool for attracting tourists, a set of measures has been proposed, including activating the involvement of local entrepreneurs and organizations to create a developed network of budget accommodation and food for pilgrims, expanding the advertising campaign, as well as strengthening cooperation with international pilgrimage associations to popularize the route among foreign tourists.

Thus, the study confirms that green pilgrimage tourism in the Khmelnytskyi region has significant potential, but its implementation requires an integrated approach, including infrastructure development, digital solutions and international cooperation. Camino Podolico can become essential for the region's cultural and spiritual development and economic growth.

**Key words:** Camino Podolico, Khmelnytskyi region, TDI, digital technologies, accommodation, advertising campaign

**Introduction.** Religious tourism is one of the most dynamic sectors of the tourism industry, combining spiritual experiences, cultural heritage and economic development of regions. One of the promising areas of this type of tourism is green pilgrimage tourism, which involves environmentally responsible travel and digital technologies to improve the tourist experience. In this context, developing the Camino Podolico pilgrimage route in the Khmelnytskyi region is of particular interest, as it can contribute to preserving the natural environment, attracting international tourists, and creating new opportunities for local communities. For example, the Green Pilgrimage (GP) project demonstrates that pilgrimage is one of the most dynamic tourism segments, with over 300 million pilgrims annually [6]. Well-known pilgrimage routes, such as the Way of St. James, record an annual 10% increase in the number of visitors, in particular among non-religious travellers. This indicates a growing interest in journeys that combine spirituality, culture and environmental sustainability. The Camino is not just a route but a unique experience. It is an opportunity to test your strength, find answers to important questions and feel the unique spirit of the pilgrim community. Having tried it once, many return again – after all, “Camino once, Camino forever”.

In this context, the Camino Podolico, which passes through the Khmelnytskyi region, becomes a powerful tool for the region’s development. The route contributes to the preservation of local traditions, job creation and the development of low-impact tourism. In addition, using mobile applications and digital platforms for route planning makes pilgrimage trips more accessible and comfortable.

Kunaeva (2012) examines the issue of sustainable tourism management along the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage routes. The work focuses on the impact of tourism activities on territorial resources and mechanisms for preserving cultural heritage [7]. Lois González (2013) explores the contemporary revival of pilgrimage on the Camino de Santiago, analyzing its impact on forming territorial identity [8]. The authors highlight the increasing commercialization of the route, which is changing its religious and cultural context. Campos et al. (2022) analyze the ecological footprint of the Camino de Lebañego pilgrimage route in Spain [5]. They use the Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) method to determine CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, emphasizing the need to introduce environmental certificates and the use of public transport. Meištė et al. (2019) explore the concept of green pilgrimage tourism, particularly in Lithuania, and point to the lack of research on this topic in the region [9]. They propose combining religious, spiritual, and eco-tourism, calling for conserving natural resources.

Romanelli et al. (2021) examine the role of religious tourism routes in developing local communities [10]. Analyzing data on the Camino de Santiago and the Via Francigena, the authors highlight the importance of collaboration between local communities and tourism operators for sustainable development. Sharpley (2020) draws attention to the gap between theoretical approaches to sustainable development and its application in tourism [11]. The author emphasizes the need to review the concept of sustainable tourism, considering the industry’s specifics.

Religious tourism in Ukraine, particularly in the Carpathian and Ternopil regions, has significant potential for development due to its rich historical, cultural and sacred heritage. Studies show that although many sites are already included in tourist routes, a substantial part of the resources remains underutilized, which requires more active promotion and support from local authorities. For effective development, it is necessary to improve infrastructure and advertising strategies and focus on economic benefits, cultural authenticity and accessibility of tourism products [1; 2; 3; 4; 9]. Despite the growing interest in pilgrimage and religious tourism, scientific research is limited regionally, and there is a lack of scientific research on the prospects for further development of Camino Podolico in the Khmelnytskyi region. In addition, the topic of the introduction of digital platforms in the planning of pilgrimage routes has not been sufficiently researched.

**Aim of the paper.** This study aims to analyze the prospects of green pilgrimage in the Khmelnytskyi region and explore the role of digital technologies in route planning. Based on the results obtained, identify key success factors and develop recommendations for the further development of the Camino Podolico as a vital tourism product of the region.

**Results.** The Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago) is a pilgrimage route to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostela (Spain), where, according to legend, the relics of the apostle James rest. Its history dates back over a thousand years, and among the famous pilgrims were kings, saints and artists. In modern times, the Camino has gained popularity as a religious route and a path of self-discovery. Paulo Coelho’s book “Diary of a Magician” and the film “The Way” (2010) had a significant influence on the revival of the Camino. Today, several routes, including the French, the Northern, the Portuguese, and others, range from 100 to 3000 km. The Camino is not just a tourist hike but a unique experience. People here do not discuss everyday topics but talk about essential things. The atmosphere promotes internal changes, and chance meetings can become significant. Among the symbols of the Camino, it is worth noting the pilgrim’s passport – a document in which stamps are collected to confirm the route travelled, the Scallop Shell – a symbol of the Camino, which pilgrims wear and use to mark the path, the Yellow Arrows – the prominent landmark of the route and, of course, the phrase “Buen Camino!” – a traditional greeting and wish for a good journey.

The route is well marked with yellow arrows; for convenience, there are mobile applications (for example, Buen Camino). Pilgrims usually spend the night in albergues – shelters, which can be municipal (cheaper) or private (with more comfortable conditions). You can cook your food or take advantage of the “pilgrim’s lunch” in a cafe (6–15 euros). The average budget is about 30 euros per day, but expenses can be reduced by choosing economical options.

The Camino is within the power of most people, but beginners should practice before the journey. The optimal weight of the backpack is 7–8 kg. Required things: a comfortable backpack, a light sleeping bag, trekking shoes, a minimum of clothes, a first aid kit, a headlamp and a water bottle.

A detailed description of all routes, divided into stages, can be found in the aforementioned application (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Schematic map of all routes. Source: <https://www.gorgany.com/pro/camino/>

1. *Historical significance of the route.* The Way of St. James (Camino de Santiago) has over a thousand years of history. Its significance goes beyond the religious context – it is a cultural and spiritual path that kings, saints and famous artists have walked in different eras. Today, the Camino attracts not only believers but also those who seek self-knowledge and new experiences.

2. *Popularization and development of routes.* A significant contribution to the popularization of the route was made by Paulo Coelho's book "The Diary of a Magician" and the film "The Way" (2010). Thanks to them, thousands of people learned about this unique experience.

3. *Factors influencing the development of pilgrimage tourism.*

- Marked routes: yellow arrows and scallop shells are the prominent landmarks.

- Accommodation: development of the albergue network (pilgrim shelters), budget expansion and comfortable accommodation options.

- Food: availability of economical options (for example, a "pilgrim's lunch" for 6–15 euros).

- Additional services: mobile applications for orientation (Buen Camino, etc.) and luggage transportation services.

Analysis of the specifics of the implementation of the Camino in Spain, Portugal and France tells us that to develop such a powerful pilgrimage movement, it is necessary to improve the infrastructure in the region (development of the albergue network, creation of new routes), implement cultural initiatives through the organization of lectures, exhibitions and festivals on the Camino, advertise the Camino on social networks, cooperate with travel companies, develop interactive maps and mobile applications, and implement nature conservation programs along the routes. Therefore, developing pilgrimage tourism requires an integrated approach: improving logistics, active marketing, and creating comfortable travel conditions.

Khmelnitskyi region has a strong historical and cultural potential for developing pilgrimage tourism. One of the key factors is the passage through the area of the Camino Podolico – the Podillia Way of St. James. Kamianets-Podilskyi has become an essential node of the route, and since 2024, new sections of the route have been expanded to Zavalle and Panivtsi, where the Church of St. James is located.

In addition, the region has a rich sacred heritage:

- Churches and monasteries – Dominican and Franciscan monasteries in Kamianets-Podilskyi, the Church of the Most Holy Corpus Christi, etc.

- Orthodox shrines – Bakota Rock Monastery, Medzhybizh Fortress with Letychiv Church, the Church of the Intercession in Dunaivtsi.

Today, pilgrimage within the Camino Podolico is actively developing, in particular in the Khmelnytskyi region. According to the results of 2024:

- 247 pilgrims completed the route to Kamianets-Podilskyi, and 15 tried the new section to Zavallia and Panivtsi.

- Interest in the route is growing: Khmelnytskyi region is gradually becoming one of the centres of pilgrimage movement in Ukraine.

- Confirmed European status: Camino Podolico is recognized as part of the European network of the Ways of St. James, which opens up opportunities for international cooperation (Fig. 2).



Let's assess the Khmelnytskyi region's tourism readiness index (TDI) for pilgrimage tourism along the Camino Podolico route.

Formula TDI:

$$TDI = \frac{I + R + S + C}{4}$$

where:

- I – Infrastructure (hotels, roads, transport)
- R – Resource base (natural and cultural attractions)
- S – Socio-economic level (local business participation, economic impact)
- C – Competitive position (uniqueness of the route, international cooperation)

**Table 1. Calculation of the tourist attractiveness index**

Parameters	Evaluation	Justification
Infrastructure (I)	3	There are roads and budget manors but little specialized housing for pilgrims.
Resources (R)	4.5	Many historical monuments, monasteries, and cultural heritage.
Social and economic level (S)	3	Tourism is developing but still needs the support of local businesses.
Competitive position (C)	2	The route is unique for Ukraine but is still little known internationally.

$$TDI = \frac{3+4.5+3+2}{4} = \frac{12.5}{4} = 3.12$$

TDI 3.12 means that the Khmelnytskyi region has a moderate level of readiness for pilgrimage tourism. Improving the infrastructure (hostels, roads) and working on international route recognition is necessary.

The development of pilgrimage tourism in the Khmelnytskyi region, particularly the Camino Podolico route, requires an integrated approach and the involvement of various stakeholders. One of the main problems is the limited budget accommodation, which can be an obstacle for many potential pilgrims. Using private estates through partnership programs can significantly improve the situation while stimulating local businesses.

Logistics also plays a key role in the convenience of following the route. The lack of proper marking and insufficient integration into digital platforms can make navigation difficult for travellers. Improving the signage and developing a mobile application can contribute to greater popularization of the route.

Another vital aspect is promotion and attracting new tourists. Organizing thematic festivals, creating active content on social networks and involving bloggers and influencers can help spread information about the Camino Podolico. In addition, educational initiatives such as lectures, youth programs and pilgrimages for church communities will contribute to developing a conscious attitude towards the route and its historical value.

Equally important is the cooperation with tourist agencies and religious organizations, which will allow the expansion of the tour network and attract international partners. Integrating the Camino Podolico with European pilgrimage routes could take this tourist destination to a new level.

**Conclusions.** Khmelnytskyi region has significant potential for developing pilgrimage tourism thanks to the Camino Podolico and its rich historical and cultural heritage. Expanding the budget accommodation network, improving logistical conditions, creating convenient digital navigation tools, and actively promoting the route through modern media are necessary to attract more pilgrims. A critical component is the support of local businesses and integrating the route with other regional tourist attractions. Thanks to an integrated approach and international cooperation, the Camino Podolico can become one of the leading pilgrimage routes in Ukraine.

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## ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ ЗЕЛЕНОГО ПАЛОМНИЦТВА НА ХМЕЛЬНИЧЧИНІ: РОЛЬ ЦИФРОВИХ ТЕХНОЛОГІЙ У РОЗВИТКУ CAMINO PODOLICO

#### Анотація

Релігійний туризм є одним із найбільш динамічних напрямів туристичної індустрії, що поєднує духовні переживання, культурну спадщину та економічний розвиток регіонів. Одним із перспективних напрямів є зелене паломництво, що передбачає екологічно відповідальні подорожі та використання цифрових технологій для покращення туристичного досвіду. У цьому контексті розвиток паломницького маршруту Camino Podolico у Хмельницькій області є важливим аспектом, який може сприяти збереженню природного середовища, залученню міжнародних туристів і створенню нових можливостей для місцевих громад.

Дослідження ґрунтується на аналізі світових практик розвитку паломницьких маршрутів, зокрема досвіду Каміно де Сантьяго в Іспанії, та враховує основні екологічні та інфраструктурні виклики. Використання цифрових технологій, таких

як мобільні додатки для навігації та бронювання, відіграє ключову роль у підвищенні доступності маршруту та покращенні комунікації серед паломників. Для аналізу туристичної привабливості *Camino Podolico* у Хмельницькій області застосовано метод оцінки туристичної готовності регіону (TDI), що включає комплексну оцінку таких параметрів, як інфраструктура, ресурсна база, соціально-економічний рівень та конкурентна позиція. Кожен із показників оцінювався за 5-бальною шкалою, що дозволило визначити узагальнений індекс туристичної привабливості регіону. Отримане значення ІТП на рівні 3,12 свідчить про помірний рівень готовності Хмельниччини до прийому паломників та необхідність подальшого розвитку маршруту.

Для трансформації *Camino Podolico* у потужний інструмент залучення туристів запропоновано комплекс заходів, серед яких – активізація залучення місцевих підприємців та організацій для створення розвиненої мережі бюджетного житла та харчування для паломників, розширення рекламної кампанії, а також посилення співпраці з міжнародними паломницькими асоціаціями для популяризації маршруту серед іноземних туристів.

Таким чином, дослідження підтверджує, що зелений паломницький туризм у Хмельницькій області має значний потенціал, проте його реалізація вимагає комплексного підходу, включаючи розвиток інфраструктури, цифрових рішень та міжнародного співробітництва. *Camino Podolico* може стати важливим інструментом не лише для культурного та духовного розвитку регіону, а й для його економічного зростання.

**Ключові слова:** *Camino Podolico*, Хмельницька область, ІТП, цифрові технології, проживання, рекламна кампанія.

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