

# Idea Collection & Best Practices: Cross-Border Cooperation in the Christian-Social and Neighbourhood Context

*Inspiration for parishes, municipalities, associations and social organisations in the Com(p)AGE area – with proven examples from across Europe*

Parishes, church-based providers and neighbourhood initiatives are often the last reliable anchor points in villages and urban districts – places where generations meet. This collection shows what can grow from that across borders: first an idea collection for Austrian-Hungarian cooperation, then proven best practices from across Europe – from the parsonage library to the pilgrim route, from the chat-line against loneliness to the "church as the village living room". Each example contains the core of the model, why it is instructive, and a link for further reading.

## Part A · Idea collection for the AT-HU context

Six thematic fields in which Christian-social and neighbourhood cooperation works particularly well across the border – combinable with the funding and mobility instruments from Infosheets 2 and 3:

### Encounter & neighbourhood

- AT-HU parish and municipal partnerships with an annual encounter festival, alternating between the two sides of the border.
- Storytelling cafés and "living libraries": older people from both countries tell each other their (border) stories – with language mediation by young people.
- Joint festivals through the year (harvest, St Martin's Day, Advent) as low-threshold, recurring occasions for encounter.

### Caring communities

- Building "caring communities" in which parish, municipality, associations and neighbourhood jointly carry the accompaniment of older people – with AT-HU partner communities comparing their models.
- Visiting services and neighbourhood-help exchanges sharing methods and training across the border.
- Time-banking models (help now, credit for later) as an instrument transferable to both countries.

### Volunteering & qualification

- Tandem volunteers: one person each from AT and HU jointly accompany activities – language and culture travel along.
- Job shadowing between volunteer coordinators (see Infosheet 3) and joint training curricula modelled on the Com(p)AGE competence modules.
- Young volunteers (ESC) support programmes against loneliness in the other country.

## Re-using spaces: parsonages, churches, village centres

- The parsonage as the "village living room": library, village meeting place, repair café, community or herb garden – planned with citizen participation.
- Gentle, reversible re-use of sacred spaces for encounter, culture and social purposes – compatible with heritage protection and funding rules.
- Think cross-subsidy from the start: rented spaces or catering finance the social function permanently.

## Routes, pilgrimage & cultural heritage

- Cross-border pilgrim and themed routes as encounter formats – from the St Martin route to regional church trails; stages on both sides of the border, joint maps and hostels.
- Pilgrimage traditions as a bridge: joint pilgrimages and festivals at places meaningful for both countries (e.g. Hungary's traditional bond with Mariazell).
- A cross-border "Long Night of Churches": coordinated programmes and visiting trips.

## Digitally connected – personally carried

- The Com(p)AGE platform as a shared showcase: organisational profiles, events and volunteer calls from both countries.
- Hybrid formats: online networking meetings alternating with real visits; chat-line models against loneliness.
- Joint communication: bilingual testimonials, social-media series, a podcast of the partner communities.

## Part B · Best-practice examples

Proven models from across Europe – selected for their closeness to the Christian-social and neighbourhood context and their transferability to the AT-HU area.

### B1 · Re-using spaces: from parsonage to meeting place

#### Old Parsonage Sulzberg → Village House (Vorarlberg, AT)

A Baroque parsonage (1732/33), taken over by the municipality in 2018 via a building-rights contract after decades of vacancy and carefully converted: a library on the first floor, parish office and meeting room on the second (opened 2022). Instructive: parish-municipality partnership via building rights, minimal heritage-compatible intervention, local craftspeople, participatory process – a model for many village centres in the border area.

→ Pfarre Sulzberg: <https://www.pfarre-sulzberg.at>

#### DePetrus – the "living room of Vught" (NL)

A monumental church threatened with demolition, reopened in 2018 as a library, town museum, social shop and café; over 200,000 visitors a year, carried by many volunteers. Instructive: a citizens'/entrepreneurs' company as operator, cross-subsidy from four rented commercial units, ownership remaining with the parish via a long lease – generations and milieus under one roof.

→ DePetrus: <https://depetrus.nl>



### **Paulinenaue Church → Village Meeting Place (Brandenburg, DE · LEADER)**

Renovation and conversion of a village church into an intergenerational meeting place with 75 % EAFRD funding via the Local Action Group. Instructive: LEADER as a realistic route for small church-based providers – LEADER regions in Burgenland, Styria and Vas/Zala work with similar priorities.

→ LAG Havelland: <https://www.lag-havelland.de>

### **Trinitatis Cemetery Meeting Centre (Dresden, DE · ERDF)**

A former funeral hall, reopened in 2024 as a low-threshold neighbourhood and cultural venue – book exchange, exhibitions, kitchen, accessibility. Instructive: ERDF logic (accessibility, energy refurbishment, culture) applied to a sacral-adjacent place; even "quiet" places can become meeting places.

→ Johannstadt district portal: <https://www.johannstadt.de>

## **B2 · Networks against loneliness & caring communities**

### **Plaudernetz / chat tables (Caritas, AT)**

A telephone network against loneliness: callers are connected with volunteer "chat partners"; complemented by chat tables in public places. Instructive: extremely low-threshold, scalable, strongly communicated – a model that could be adapted bilingually for the border region.

→ Plaudernetz: <https://www.plaudernetz.at>

### **Zeitpolster – time provision for neighbourhood help (AT)**

Volunteers support older people in everyday life and earn time credits for their own future care. Instructive: a viable organisational model for neighbourhood help with insurance and coordination – conceivable as a franchise logic for Hungarian municipalities as well.

→ Zeitpolster: <https://www.zeitpolster.com>

### **Jelenlét ("Presence") – Hungarian Maltese Charity Service (HU)**

Long-term, presence-based community work in disadvantaged settlements: social work, education, health services and community building from one source, on site. Instructive: impact grows from lasting presence and trust rather than one-off projects – a strong Hungarian model of Christian-social work with lessons for both sides of the border.

→ Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat: <https://maltai.hu>

### **Sorgenetz & the caring-community movement (AT)**

A network promoting "caring communities" in which municipality, civil society, church and professionals jointly carry care tasks. Instructive: methods, events and materials for building local care networks – compatible with parish structures and the Com(p)AGE target groups.

→ Sorgenetz: <https://www.sorgenetz.at>

## **B3 · Routes & cultural heritage as encounter formats**



## Via Sancti Martini / St Martin Routes (HU-AT-EU)

A Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in the footsteps of St Martin – from his birthplace Szombathely (Savaria) to Tours; St Martin is also the patron saint of Burgenland and of the Diocese of Eisenstadt. Instructive: a genuinely Austrian-Hungarian narrative and route network that parishes, municipalities and tourism partners can dock onto directly with stages, hostels and St Martin's festivals.

→ Via Sancti Martini: <https://www.viasanctimartini.eu>

## LOOK UP - mountain pilgrim route "Hoch und Heilig" (Interreg IT-AT)

Cross-border valorisation of sacred cultural heritage: nine stages, around 200 km between East Tyrol, Upper Carinthia, South Tyrol and Veneto/Friuli, with a booking platform and joint products. Instructive: sacred places are networked and made narratable without construction work – a blueprint for an AT-HU church and chapel route in the Com(p)AGE area.

→ Osttirol funded projects: <https://www.osttirol.com>

## Success factors - what the successful examples have in common

- Operator and participation decide: citizens' companies, support associations, parish-municipality partnerships and volunteers carry the most robust models.
- Common-good use is fundable: library, village meeting place, encounter centre fit LEADER, ERDF and Interreg – and secure local acceptance.
- Cross-subsidy secures operation: rented spaces, catering or long leases finance the social function beyond the end of the project.
- Build reversibly: removable installations are heritage- and funding-compatible and keep future options open.
- Thinking cross-border means: people first. Language mediation, personal encounter and reliable contact persons turn projects into lasting neighbourliness.
- Use the docking points: funding routes (Infosheet 2) and mobility formats such as job shadowing or ESC volunteers (Infosheet 3) make each of these ideas financeable.

## Further resources

- Zukunft Kirchen Räume – re-use project catalogue (Baukultur NRW): <https://www.zukunft-kirchen-raeume.de>
- Herbestemming.nl – Dutch re-use database: <https://www.herbestemming.nl>
- Wüstenrot Stiftung – "Die Kirche in unserem Dorf": <https://wuestenrot-stiftung.de>
- Com(p)AGE platform: <https://www.compage.eu>
- Interreg Austria-Hungary: <https://www.interreg-athu.eu>
- Austrian rural network / LEADER contact point: <https://www.netzwerk-zukunftsraum-land.at>

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