

Routes4U meeting on Cultural Routes in the Danube Region and in the Adriatic and Ionian Region

“Fostering regional development through the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe”

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CREATING A BRAND

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I. INTRODUCTION

Routes4U currently develops a branding strategy regarding the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe for the four EU macro-regions (Adriatic-Ionian, Alpine, Baltic Sea and Danube Region). Branding is a vital element for Cultural Routes to increase their visibility, outreach and success.

The Routes4U branding strategy is implemented in three phases:

1. Audit phase

- Research on data and information on cultural tourism in the Macro-region countries, as provided from national tourism board institutions, EU strategies for the Macro-region and Chambers of Commerce operating in the same Macro-regions;
- Preparation of a survey to be submitted to the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe management board, in order to collect data and info in view of the analysis for the brand development and in order to list local products related to or produced by the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in the Macro-regions.

2. Brand development phase

- Creation of a brand vision; definition of brand identity and values;
- Identification of three Cultural Routes interested and ready to implement the pilot of the macro-regional cultural tourism branding, in the given Macro-region.

3. Recommendations on brand implementation

- Action-oriented and to-the-point recommendations concerning the creation and promotion of the brand, including recommendations on “Brand-personality” guidelines for the marketing material, distribution channels, communication channels, promotional slogans.

On the following pages, guidelines of the branding strategy are presented.

II. FIRST STEPS

One of the primary objectives of a branding strategy for a Macro-region or a Cultural Route should be the creation of a **brand identity** that (1) promotes the concept of the brand and that (2) links a range of appropriate and engaged actors within the macro-region or the Cultural Routes network. Brand identity encompasses all elements that form the visible aspects of a brand and that contribute to its distinctiveness.

A branding strategy involving Cultural Routes or macro-regions requires a brand audit that needs to be conducted before the development phase and needs to involve members of the Routes as well as the primary stakeholders. Furthermore, Tourists and visitors that are external to the network can also be valuable resources and provide recommendations for the further planning of the brand.

After the completion of the audit phase and the collection and analysis of the results, the brand development can be envisaged. The strategy development should be based on the acquired results of the audit phase. The aim of this phase is to capture the essence of the brand, which should work harmoniously with already present brands in the same framework. This establishes a need to identify existing brands and branding initiatives in the Macro-regions.

III. BRANDING OBJECTIVES

In the process of brand creation, it is crucial to define and develop branding objectives which will guide along the whole branding process. The objectives of branding are, according to the Handbook on Tourism destination branding by the UNTWO/ETC (2009):

- Differentiation from competitors
- Increase of awareness, recognition and memorability of the destination for future potential visitors
- Creation of a positive image
- Creation of a strong brand identity

Moreover, according to UNWTO/ETC's Handbook on Marketing Transnational Tourism Themes and Routes (2017), the brand should be constructed on the following principles:

- Clear formulation of the **brand essence**: what it represents, for whom and how;
- Agreement by all key stakeholders on the **values and key messages**;
- Development of a **brand strategy**, including how the brand will be expressed within the partnership and to the outside world, including through words and imagery;
- Progressive **rollout** of the brand through documents, meetings and other events.

Creating a brand for the Macro-regions should result in an increased visibility that is achieved through the creation of an umbrella brand. It should have a positive impact on cultural tourism in the Macro-regions or along the Cultural Routes.

In addition, the following objectives should be achieved through the branding strategy:

- Improving the competitiveness of a macro-regional brand with the Cultural Routes in the European and global tourism marketplace;
- Establishing a cooperation between the Macro-regions and the Cultural Routes on tourism promotion;
- Coordinating the marketing of both the Macro-regions and the Cultural Routes, to make it more effective and increase its outreach.

IV. ANALYSIS CONTENT

The audit phase should be initiated with a structured questionnaire **asking users about the perception they have on a brand or on a structure**. A **SWOT** analysis also needs to be implemented subsequently, in order to find out about **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats** regarding the brand.

Possible questions to include in the questionnaire:

- What kind of activities do visitors/tourists like to do in that region
- What do they associate with the brand: its characteristics, its values, its products, assets
- identify the brand's competitors
- identify strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis competitors, traits with which the brand outperforms its competitors

The feedback obtained through this type of study can facilitate setting a foundation for brand development. Nevertheless, a successful brand creation process will require further interaction with Cultural Route members, tourism specialists and marketing professionals, as well as with actual and potential visitors. Further research will be critical in developing a long-term and sustainable brand identity, and this is why it is important that the brand creation process is thorough and detailed.

V. KEY FACTORS IN MACRO-REGIONAL BRAND DEVELOPMENT

There are some key factors that are common for the creation of a successful brand and should be considered in the context of a cultural tourism brand. They were highlighted in the Council of Europe Cultural Routes Management Handbook, in guidance for creation of a brand for Cultural Routes.

Four key aspects or "pillars" are mentioned in the Handbook for the successful implementation of a branding strategy:

a. Consistency

Consistency and coherence are aspects that characterize every successful brand. Not only does a brand need to have a consistent visual identity (including typeface, colors, and logos), but it also needs to be coherent and in the things it would like to communicate to its customers. This also means sticking to the previously identified and established branding guidelines. The more consistent a brand is, the more trustworthy it will be to its customers.

b. Authenticity and brand values

Authenticity is especially important when developing a destination brand such as a macro-regional brand or a Cultural Routes brand. Tourists and visitors are drawn in by authentic experiences and people, the "human aspect" or side of a brand: authenticity which needs to be reflected in the brand values.

Those are the core values that are going to define the brand – the key aspects that can be seen as qualities or strengths of the brand. They span across every activity

and aspect of the brand as they are essentially the core definition of the brand. Those values will also be what the customers will connect to.

c. Uniqueness and differentiation

Uniqueness is essentially what sets a brand apart from its competitors. What makes one's brand unique is one of the fundamental questions that have to be addressed when attempting to create a branding strategy. There needs to be the awareness and willingness to position one's brand among its competitors. Successful brands do so by creating something new and unique, something which will attract customers and make them want to stay loyal to the brand.

d. Recognizable visual identity

A strong visual identity is another key factor that needs to be taken into account when creating a brand. In order to ensure the success of a brand, it should be consistent (see point a.) in its style choices so that customers will recognize it even without seeing the logo. Special attention also needs to be paid to the use of colors, which need to be in line with the aforementioned brand values because different colors can have a significance or connotation of their own.

VI. BRAND PYRAMID

With the aim of creating a basic brand concept in a structured manner, a brand pyramid is a helpful tool that enumerates the key aspects of a brand that need to be assessed before the brand development phase. The structure and content of this brand pyramid is being outlined by UNTWO. It is divided into 6 different categories:

| Attributes

What are the tangible, verifiable, objective, measurable characteristics of a destination?

| Rational Benefits

What benefits for the tourist result from the destination's features?

| Emotional Benefits

What psychological rewards or emotional benefits do tourists receive by visiting the destination? How does the tourist feel?

| Brand Personality

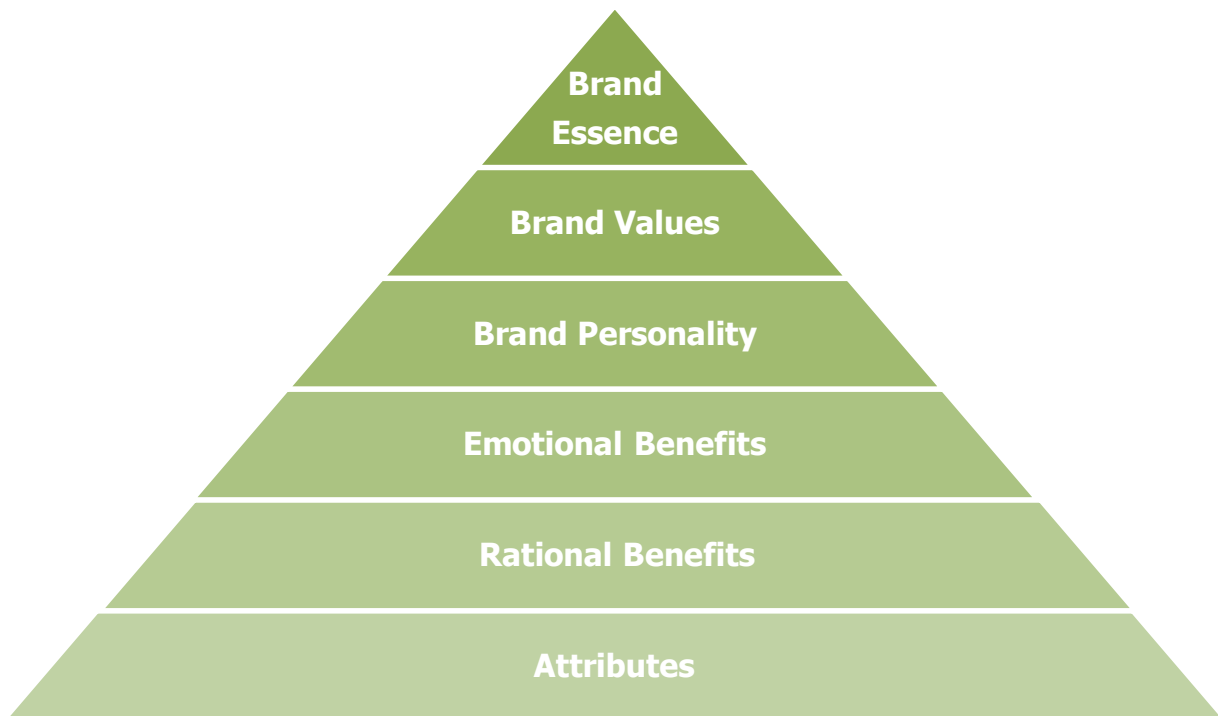
What key traits and characteristics of the destination should be communicated by the brand?

| Brand Values

What values does the destination instill?

| Brand Essence

What is the essential nature and character of the destination?



Once the brand values and essence have been found, it is crucial to include them in every marketing and communication material that is being put out by the brand.

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