

Routes4U Branding strategies in the four EU macro-regions through the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

Brand development for EUSAIR: Summary of the main findings of the audit phase

1. Audit phase

The report outlines the preparation and implementation of a branding strategy concerning the Adriatic-Ionian Region, henceforth referred to as AIR. One of the main objectives of the branding strategy is the promotion of the AIR concept, all the while connecting Cultural Routes of that same macro-region. The main objectives is the promotion of EUSAIR through the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe crossing the macro-region, the improvement of competitiveness of the macro-region in the European and global tourism market place, the development of cooperation and partnership between the Cultural Routes and the coordination of the marketing strategies for both EUSAIR and the Cultural Routes, in order to increase its outreach and effectiveness.

The report features an analysis of the current brand image of EUSAIR and the Cultural Routes crossing the macro-region: an online destination audit was conducted on the perception of the AIR brand, with participants (including Cultural Routes managers, stakeholders and visitors) being asked to characterize the EUSAIR brand from a customer's point of view and against its main competitors Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey and France.

The results of the research indicate the perception of the AIR brand is mainly focused on two different elements:

- Mixture of lands that are both connected but also unique in their rich culture, their traditions and their people
- These places are connected by the sea and other elements of nature such as the sky and diverse landscapes, as well as by culture

The study comes to the conclusion that the branding for the Adriatic and Ionian Region is easily recognizable, a fact which lends itself to the creation of AIR branded tourism products.

A few key factors that need to be considered for an effective brand development are an "awareness of the need for clear positioning and differentiation against the globally known Cultural Routes" and the choice of brand values that need to be in line with the values of the destinations and attractions that will be linked to the brand.

In order to further improve the visibility and the growth of the brand, the study proposed a tighter collaboration with tour operators and tourist agents and the creation of a unique visual design, encompassing all aspects of the branding process (creation of communication and marketing material, logos, graphic design of publications).

CR manager's survey results feature a more detailed account of what constitutes EUSAIR as a brand. Survey results include but are not limited to:

- The top 3 Cultural Routes that all participants associate with EUSAIR are 1. The Olive Tree Route, 2. The European Route of Jewish Heritage, and 3. The Phoenicians Route
- Anything that has to do with olives, such as food products or artworks as well as other foods (cheese, foie gras) are all viewed as products that are typical of the region and that can be found along the Cultural Routes
- Additional local products include medals, plates, and glasses
- The main assets of the region are culture, festivals, traditions, gastronomy, and landscapes

With regards to the Cultural Routes brand in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, its current perception is rather low. Nevertheless, there is a high willingness to acquire more knowledge about and make use of the AIR Cultural Routes with appropriate guidance and assistance.

Survey results indicate that participants agree on the success of transboundary cooperation and collaborative destination marketing

Routes4U Project



Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe provide the opportunity for promoting the brand of EUSAIR, as they represent an under-used resource for the promotion of the heritage and the cultural identity of the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

2. Brand pyramid

The results of the collected data were integrated into a brand pyramid, key instrument that helps assess different aspects of a brand. It is divided into 6 different sections:

-Attributes: which represent the measurable characteristics of EUSAIR. The main attributes are **sea, sky, nature** as well as **culture, heritage, coherent marketing actions, a new model of economy, and growth opportunities**. The Adriatic and Ionian Region is unique because of its contribution to world heritage and its cuisine.

-Rational benefits: which include what visitors want to see and do: the most important benefits are **cultural heritage, beauty, cuisine, nature, history, tourism, and tradition**.

-Emotional benefits: the emotional reactions a visitor feels: among the ones that were named most often are reactions such as: affective, enjoyable, refreshing, and warm.

-Brand personality: key traits that are communicated by the brand: **natural, passionate/sexy, beautiful, elegant, interesting, cultural, friendly, diverse/different but also unique/authentic**

-Brand values: what values does the destination instill? The analysis concludes that there are three main values that should subsequently appear in every marketing and branding activity.

- **Original**, with the Adriatic and Ionian Region being the place where the four (original) elements meet the Sea (water), sky (air), landscapes and heritage (earth), and the welcoming nature of the region which is warm and friendly (fire).
- **Synthesis:** The Adriatic and Ionian Region is unique but at the same time it is a melting pot of diverse cultures and traditions. Its interconnectedness is made possible through the people that live in the region and through the elements of nature, culture and affection.
- **Aesthetic:** as the macro-region is a place that is perceived positively and awakes a positive feeling among the visitors, a place where you can live unique experiences stemming from aesthetic appreciation. The appeal of its nature and culture creates a unique aesthetic.

-Brand essence: the essential nature and character of the destination in accordance with the three brand values we have the place which is linked to the original, a synthesis of diverse and common culture and experiences and the positive feelings that are induced by an aesthetic sentiment

A possible brand essence would be: there is no life without AIR; you need to explore AIR which is the breath of life



Figure 1, Brand pyramid

It has to be noted, however that "The content of the Brand Pyramid should ideally be reviewed and revised in the context of a COE workshop." As the amount of data that has been collected is considerably large, the produced information could not yet be reduced to its core essence, which could, during a further audit "enable refinement, consensus, and the finalization of this process and feed the brand Identity development process."

3. Way forward

The brand strategy that is suggested will be built upon these three key aspects that are prevalent in the responses to the brand image: original, synthesis and aesthetic. The brand values would have to be integrated into a brand strategy of which the strategic message should appear in all further marketing communication and should be reflected in all of the material that is created for the brand.

The study proposes a brand assets template to ensure the wider outreach and use of the brand values and essence by its stakeholders. The assets template "is a tool to help Cultural Routes members and other stakeholders to apply the brand values to their destinations, products and experiences."