



# 13<sup>th</sup> TRAINING ACADEMY

*ON CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE*

**PÉCS/HU/ & OSIJEK/HR/ | SHAPING CONFIDENCE  
2-5 JUNE 2026 | AND DIVERSITY**



## ***Cultural Routes: crossroads or bridges for European cultural identity?***

**The current-day meaning, relevance and challenges of routes in a changing Europe and global context**

**Karin Drda-Kühn - media k GmbH, Pécs - 03 June 2026**

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**Speaker**  
**Karin Drda-Kühn**



**Economic and European  
perspective**

- Art historian
- Entrepreneur: manager of a German-Austrian social enterprise
- Former network manager of a German cultural-touristic network and a non-profit organisation
- Currently partner in a project of the “Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route”, responsible for a Transnational Cultural Tourism Strategy
- “European Ambassador for Women Entrepreneurship of the European Commission”
- Role model woman entrepreneur of the initiative „Female Entrepreneurship” of the German Federal Ministry of Economy
- Chair, working group member of several EC initiatives in the creative industries and cultural tourism



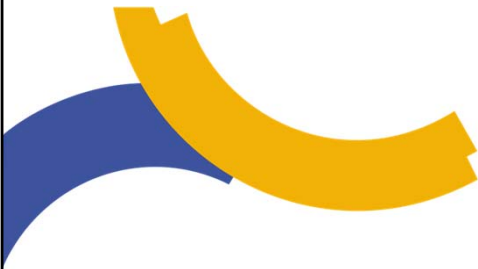
„Europe will be the touristic winner” – KURIER newspaper (Austria) from April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2026



## Reflection as an introduction to the Training Academy

- **Current-day meaning** of the Cultural Routes,
- **Relevance** of the Routes for our European cultural identity
- Internal and external **challenges**
- **Opportunities** linked to the challenges

**I started with a simple exercise for a holiday ...**



- As a culturally interested person I would like to explore a Cultural Route, **following the Route across several European countries**
- I would need **recommendations and booking options** for getting to the destinations, for accommodations (preferably thematically linked to the Route), for catering, offers along the Route, and mobility in rural areas
- I would like to **get in touch with locals** e.g. by booking a creative activity
- I would like to **bring something memorable home** that reminds me of a nice holiday

**I looked at about 20 CR  
websites and I liked:**

**Broad variety of European  
topics**

**Inspiration for holidays**

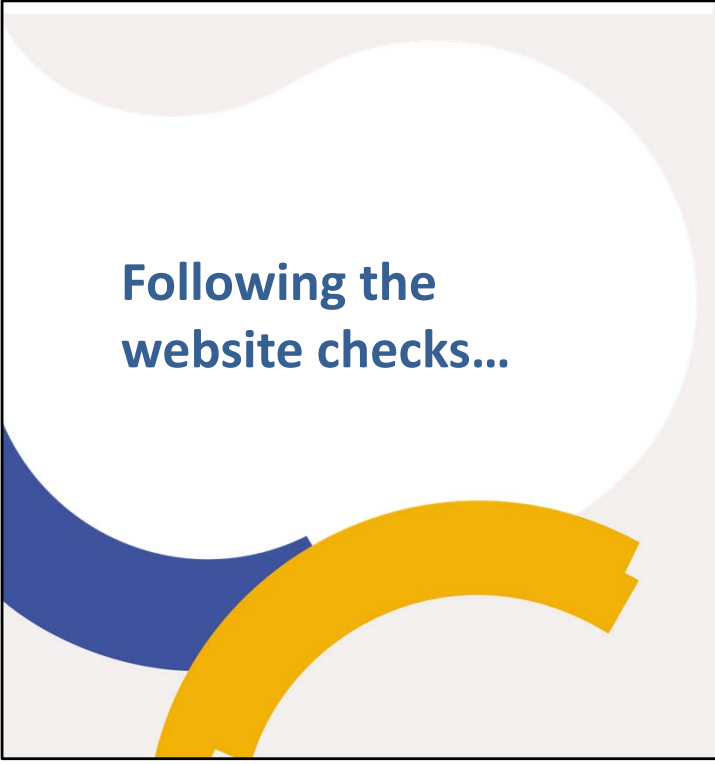
**Thematic information for  
enthusiasts**

**European ambassadorship**



## What I missed but would have expected:





**Following the  
website checks...**

**What exactly do the Cultural Routes  
like to be?**

**What is their Agreement on  
Understanding?**

To put it bluntly:

**Are the Routes the “nice to have”  
for EU regions or active, visitor-  
oriented, enthusiastic, inspiring  
promoters of the European vision?**

**Following the  
Santiago  
Declaration of  
2017, the Cultural  
Routes should be  
a model for...**

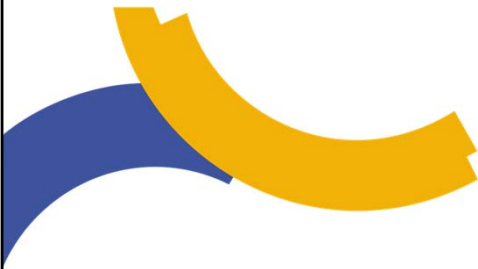


- “stimulating trans-border cooperation”, **but I did not find an example like a tourism package which included some or all destinations at the Route**
- “encouraging innovative approaches in the fields of cultural heritage”, **but I did not find projects, approaches e.g. for the protection of heritage as the most valuable asset of a Route**
- “intercultural dialogue”, **but I did not find activities e.g. with migrant communities**
- “sustainable local development”, **but I found no links to economic value chain creation and only a few examples of development activities with local stakeholders.**

Please see: Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the 30th anniversary of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe;  
<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/-/declaration-by-the-committee-of-ministers-on-the-30th-anniversary-of-the-cultural-routes-of-the-council-of-europe-1987-2017>; accessed May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2026

Actually, Cultural Routes could be the **pace makers, game changers and beneficiaries** for / from

- transnational cooperation
- regional development
- heritage protection
- cultural tourism
- securing and increasing employment
- economic valorisation and value chain creation
- social cohesion



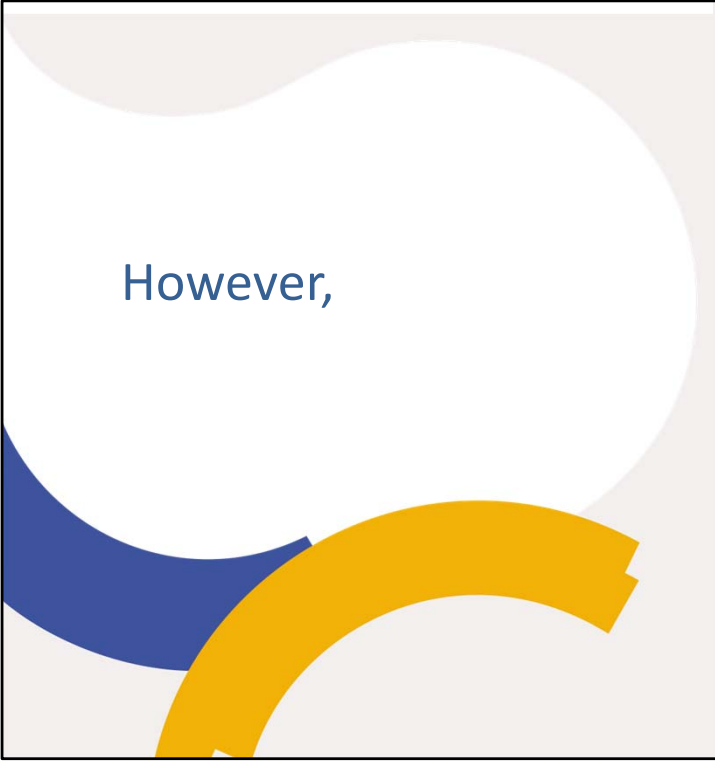
## Relevance

### Self-understanding of Routes linked to the values of the Council of Europe:

- human rights,
- cultural democracy and diversity,
- mutual understanding
- exchanges across boundaries
- channels for intercultural dialogue
- promoter of a better knowledge and understanding of European history

-> Routes as a **guarantee promise of the European vision**

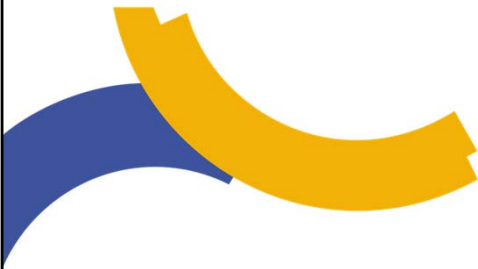
Website <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes>: “The Cultural Routes are grass-roots networks promoting the principles which underlie all the work and values of the Council of Europe: human rights, cultural democracy, cultural diversity, mutual understanding and exchanges across boundaries. They act as channels for intercultural dialogue and promote a better knowledge and understanding of European history.” Accessed May 22nd, 2026



However,

- The European vision is subject to **threats, hostility, and the shaking of its values.**
- We are in the midst of a new process of **negotiating European values**, driven by new demands arising from threats and requests for enlargement.
- The **uncertainty in our lives** does not stop short of the European idea.
- **New roles and responsibilities** are taking shape.
- We may **need a new understanding of the Routes** as guarantors of the European idea and of lived transnational cooperation.

**Let's have a look  
at the challenges:**



The World Economic Forum's \*Global Risks Report\* identifies the risks annually.

During the last years, the report has focused on **climate-related, geopolitical, and social risks.**

**All these risks are linked to cultural heritage, tourism, regional development one way or other...**

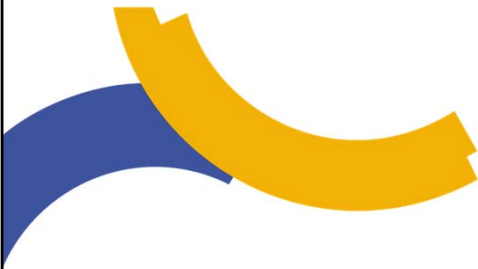
World Economic Forum.2026. Global Risks Report.

<https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2026/> , accessed May 22nd, 2026

**Turning tourism into development: Mitigating risks and leveraging heritage assets:**

<https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/02/turning-tourism-into-development/>  
(as of Feb 15, 2024, accessed May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026)

## Challenge 1: climate change



- Cultural heritage is the greatest **treasure** for the Cultural Routes.
- Extreme weather events and gradual deterioration processes **threaten** our heritage in a hitherto unknown manner.
- The EC OMC report “**Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change - Where the European Green Deal meets cultural heritage**” has, for the first time, documented the impacts of climate change on cultural heritage; the conclusion remains that this threat will have wide-ranging consequences.

**Are the Cultural Routes prepared to handle these threats?**

European Commission: Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, *Strengthening cultural heritage resilience for climate change – Where the European Green Deal meets cultural heritage*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/44688>; accessed May 22nd, 2026

## Challenge 2: armed conflicts

Ukraine:

- European border regions (in Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland) adjacent to Ukraine record declines in visitor numbers for four consecutive years.
- E. g. VIA REGIA and ITER VITIS are impaired.
- This affects transnational activities but also opens doors for new experiences.

**Are the Cultural Routes prepared to support Route members in crises and learn from them?**

Please see: World Tourism Barometer by UN Tourism: “While positive prospects for the global economy and lower oil prices could favour tourism performance in 2026, uncertainty derived from geopolitical risks and ongoing conflicts, trade tensions and climate events could weigh on travel confidence.”

(<https://www.untourism.int/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data>);  
accessed May 22nd, 2026

## Challenge 2: armed conflicts

### War in the Middle East:

- The war is driving up the cost of summer vacations. Rising oil prices are making jet fuel scarce and expensive. Travellers are seeking to avoid flights routing over the Middle East.
- The result: Popular **European destinations—particularly those perceived as stable—are seeing a surge in demand. Trips to European cities are booming, and rural regions are also seeing increased interest.**
- The "European travel experience" is poised for a foreseeable boom.

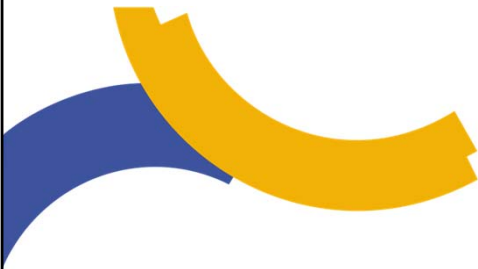
**Are the Cultural Routes prepared to benefit from this shift?**

Please see: World Tourism Barometer by UN Tourism: “While positive prospects for the global economy and lower oil prices could favour tourism performance in 2026, uncertainty derived from geopolitical risks and ongoing conflicts, trade tensions and climate events could weigh on travel confidence.” (<https://www.untourism.int/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data>); accessed May 22nd, 2026

### **Challenge 3: Artificial Intelligence**

- AI creates uncertainty, disrupts planning, and makes skills gaps painfully visible.
- AI accelerates processes, opens up infinite new possibilities, and helps to reallocate and optimise budgets.

**Are the Cultural Routes prepared to benefit from this technological innovation?**

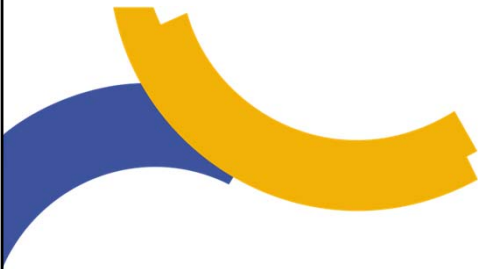


## **Challenge 4:**

### **The use of technology- supported instruments**

- Audiences —such as young people, international guests, migrant groups, or disadvantaged individuals — require technology-supported applications.
- This necessitates e.g. additional qualifications, flexible planning, real-time actions, ad hoc translation services, and personalised services.

**Are the Cultural Routes prepared to offer technology-driven products and services?**

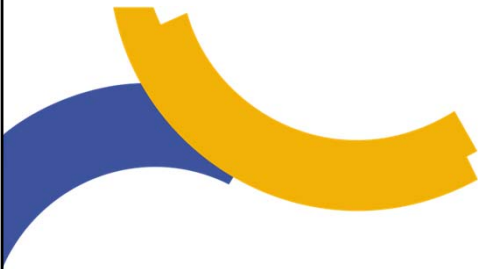


## Challenge 5:

### Trained staff

- Finding qualified staff already poses a **major challenge** today, given the **complex requirements involved in the management and implementation** of Routes.
- In particular, staff with **interdisciplinary qualifications** are becoming a prerequisite for success.
- Academic education is playing an increasingly minor role, while **vocational training** pursued alongside the job is becoming far more important.

**Are the Cultural Routes prepared for qualification planning and vocational training of staff?**



## Challenge 6:

### A rapidly changing (cultural) tourism market

- It is no longer about the silver-haired, well-educated, well-off culture enthusiast, staying weeks at one place
- Booking preferences e.g. for cultural packages have changed from long-term planning to **on-the-spot decisions**
- **Digital marketing and storytelling** have gained ground
- **Collaborating with local communities** is requested

Are the Cultural Routes prepared to cope with these visitors' expectations?

## Challenge 8:

### Expectations of new audiences from fast growing segments

- **Digital nomads** (age 25 – 40; up to 8% of the travel market) expect conditions for their lifestyle like high-speed internet, immersive experiences, and spontaneous bookings; they are looking for opportunities to engage with locals, local traditions, arts, and lifestyles
- **Conscious and Purpose-Driven Travellers** seek to minimize their environmental footprint and positively impact local host communities. They actively choose off-season travel and favor lesser-known destinations over traditional, overcrowded hotspots
- **People with a migrant background** appreciate offers in their languages and activities that show respect for their culture
- **People with disabilities** (demographic change!) need a support infrastructure like barrier-free access to sites, accommodation, mobility

Are the Cultural Routes prepared to cope with new audiences?

**Data on digital nomads** (the data situation is not fully clear, depending on sources):

<https://www.untourism.int/un-tourism-world-tourism-barometer-data>: Digital nomads make up approximately 2.3% to 2.6% of the global travel population. With worldwide [International Tourist Arrivals](#) averaging about 1.52 billion trips annually and an estimated 35 to 40 million people identifying as digital nomads, this highly mobile demographic represents a specialised, yet growing slice of the travel market.

Please also see this source, which estimates the number of digital nomads differently, with up to 8% of the travel market:

<https://blog.nomadstays.com/how-much-business-can-you-generate-from-digital-nomads/>

**Data on conscious travellers:**

<https://transition-pathways.europa.eu/tourism/knowledge-documents/understanding-rise-conscious-travellers-new-insights-shaping-european>

(all links accessed May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026)

## Challenge 9:

### Accessibility and mobility issues

- Visitors attempt to **escape the effects of overtourism**
- They are looking for alternatives like **remote, though culturally interesting destinations**
- Getting there can be expensive and **logistically challenging**, limiting accessibility for visitors
- The organisation of **mobility is becoming a factor of acceptance**
- Provision of public infrastructure often does not work.
- However, more and more **creative private solutions emerge**

**Are the Cultural Routes prepared to cope with mobility issues along the Routes?**





**Enough about challenges...**

**What about the  
opportunities?**

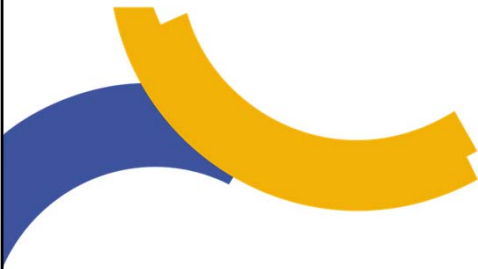
**Preliminary  
remark 1:**

„Yes, we can!“

We talk too much about our crises and challenges, and about why this or that won't work.

„Wir schaffen das!“

We should talk much more about what will work, and have faith in our abilities and new opportunities.



Barack Obama (former U.S. president): „Yes, we can!“

Angela Merkel (Former German cancellor): „Wir schaffen das!“

## Preliminary remark 2:

The basic requirement for seizing the following opportunities is a smart management plan!



Illustration by [Gerd Altmann](https://pixabay.com/de/illustrations/gesch%C3%A4ft-idee-wachstum-3189797/) on [Pixabay](https://pixabay.com/de/illustrations/gesch%C3%A4ft-idee-wachstum-3189797/)

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License summary: <https://pixabay.com/de/service/license-summary/>

(accessed May 21st, 2026)

## Opportunity 1:

Creating value  
with diversity

Inspirational practice:  
MULTAKA project



- Our European societies get more and more diverse.
- This gives rise to **new audiences and special interest groups**: migrants, national and international family history explorers, patchwork families...

The Multaka project is a role model for diversity management: The project bridges different historical periods as well as old and new places by creating a dialogue through guided encounters between exhibits and diverse audiences:  
<https://multaka.de/en/startsite-en/>

Picture credit: Staatliche Museen Berlin, Museum für islamische Kunst, Tabita Hub

(accessed May 22nd, 2026)

## Opportunity 2:

### Emerging Destinations

- People refrain from holiday in destinations which need aircraft flyover of the Middle East or stop at respective airports
- According to data by providers like AirBnB, **rural regions with rich cultural heritage are gaining attention as new tourism hotspots** due to geopolitical circumstances.

Technavio Report “The travel Industry 2026”

<https://www.technavio.com/report/travel-market-industry-analysis>

<https://www.euronews.com/travel/2026/04/17/these-are-the-top-trending-rural-destinations-in-europe>

(accessed May 21st, 2026)

### Opportunity 3:

#### Integration of new technologies



- New technologies like **AI are enhancing cultural experiences** by providing interactive and immersive storytelling.
- Cultural Routes can use AI not just for **demand forecasting but also for real-time decisions** to optimise Routes, enhancing operational efficiency.
- **Satellite data analysis** of visitors' streams, weather forecasts and traffic density can improve travelling along the Routes.
- **Traveller behaviour analytics** can craft personalised travel itineraries, promoting visitor dispersal strategies, guiding tourists to lesser-known historical sites, thereby enhancing visitor experience management.

Technavio Report "The travel Industry 2026"

<https://www.technavio.com/report/travel-market-industry-analysis>

<https://www.euronews.com/travel/2026/04/17/these-are-the-top-trending-rural-destinations-in-europe>

(accessed May 21st, 2026)

## Opportunity 4: Reaching young people

Research done by the big travel supporting agencies reveal surprising facts e.g. on Gen Z linked to cultural travel experiences



NEWS.AIRBNB.COM

**Airbnb and Duolingo team up to inspire Gen Z language travel**

Generations are generally classified by specific birth years (demographic cohorts), with Millennials born from 1981 to 1996 and Generation Z born from 1997 – 2012, succeeding the Millennials.

See: <https://news.airbnb.com/en-uk/bilingualbreaks/>  
[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/molly-babbington-427491b\\_airbnb-and-duolingo-team-up-to-inspire-gen-share-7448297380237447168-LKA1/](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/molly-babbington-427491b_airbnb-and-duolingo-team-up-to-inspire-gen-share-7448297380237447168-LKA1/)

(accessed May 21st, 2026)

## Opportunity 5:

### Involving local economy



There are strong arguments to cooperate with the local economy:

- The cultural heritage sector is a significant economic driver in Europe, with over **300,000 direct jobs** and approximately **7.8 million jobs indirectly created in related sectors** like tourism, construction, hospitality, security, and interpretation.
- It contributes 1.6% to the total business economy and 3.4% to the services economy (in 11 countries/regions of the 2020 EPSON study).
- The **market for heritage conservation is estimated at roughly 5 billion EUR per year.**
- **Every €1 invested from public funds can generate up to €10 in the local economic cycle.**

ESPON 2020. WORKING PAPER Measuring economic impact of cultural heritage at territorial level. Approaches and challenges.

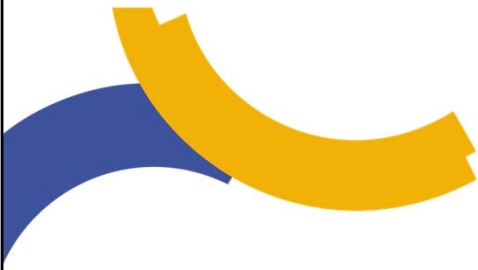
<https://archive.espon.eu/sites/default/files/attachments/Working%20Paper%2C%20Cultural%20heritage.pdf>

"Only" 11 countries/regions were examined here, because ESPON was funded by the European Regional Development Fund.

(accessed May 21st, 2026)

### Opportunity 6:

#### Interdisciplinary cooperation and fundraising



- Interdisciplinary cooperation will be **key in the future** – in research, in application – and in tourism
- Therefore: **Leave the culture bubble!** Join economic networks, attend conferences which present new technologies, reach out to sector organisations not necessarily linked to culture: gardening, sports, energy supply, resources management of all kind.
- This opens up new sources of funding!

**The “missing money” argument is not accepted here, as it is a killer argument!**

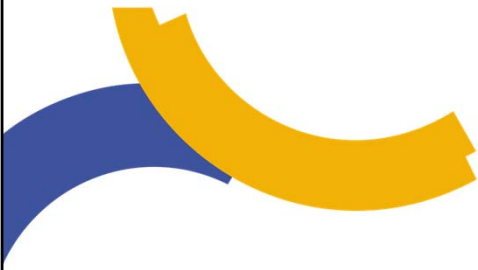


**Use funding opportunities from other sectors than culture or heritage:**

- from **economy** -> the Routes are an economic factor!
- from **technology transfer** -> the Routes can be pilot cases for innovative technologies
- from **environment** -> the Routes have to react to climate-related restrictions and are looking for solutions
- from **space technologies** -> the Routes can build tourism offers on space data analysis
- from the **recycling sector** -> the heritage assets along the Routes are role models for recycling of materials
- From **employment funds** -> the Routes are creating sustainable jobs

## Opportunity 7:

**The European vision as a guarantee for the ability of building bridges**



- Currently, too many bridges are being destroyed, and too few are being built – both literally and figuratively
- The Routes are a **powerful model for transnational European cooperation** beyond the cultural aspects
- They stand for **European values** articulated in the founding documents of the European Council and the European Union
- These values have guaranteed **seven decades of peace**, an unprecedented time span so far

**Who would be better suited than the Cultural Routes to communicate these values through events in every location?**



## The crossroad

The crossroads for Cultural Routes will lie in whether the **opportunities** are seized through **networking and cooperation**, namely:

- The **power of a shared European identity**,
- The enhancement of cultural heritage through **intelligent conservation and sustainable tourism**
- A **model for a transnational economic area**
- The equal **involvement of citizens** in decisions regarding the development of their living environment
- Societies whose citizens have learnt and continue to learn how to use **democratic instruments**.

**Back to the leitmotif:**

**Europe is the winner.**

**Cultural Routes can be the beneficiaries by**

- **Highlighting the Cultural Routes as a European privilege**
- Addressing **young people as the beneficiaries of this valuable privilege**, supporting their interests
- Encouraging **stakeholders to take an active role** and involving them in decision-making
- Developing **Cultural Routes as an economic asset** for a region
- Actively **supporting the democratic development** of the societies





**For our own  
travel experience  
to Pécs...**

I wish us all to grab the opportunity of

- Taking home the charisma of this **truly historic place**, enjoying the pleasure of beauty,
- Learning how the entrepreneur Zsolnay combined **sophisticated craftsmanship with technology-driven industrial production** and
- having met people who still have **trust in the power of diverse societies and have confidence in European values.**

**Thank you  
and have a fruitful Training Academy!**

Karin Drda-Kühn – [info@media-k.eu](mailto:info@media-k.eu)



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