Online communication strategies of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

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Tourism and heritage in the Cultural Routes programme

The CR programme has two main **goals**:

1. to foster sustainable territorial development

2. to highlight the **educational role of travelling** in discovering the «rich and diverse heritage of Europe by bringing people and places together in networks of shared history and heritage» (Council of Europe)

   →throwback to the Grand Tour

   →CR as **a new form of heritage**

Tourism and heritage in the Cultural Routes programme

On the **demand** (visitor) **side**, CR offer a **holistic destination approach**, based on the enjoyment of culture. Cultural resources can be appreciated both

- for the meaning they have in in their specific context

- and for the personal meaning they might have for the visitor

  → CR provide a narrative

  → CR offer a more complete and deeper tourism experience

On the **supply side**, CR constitute a development tool for rural areas:

- stimulate **cooperation** between communities and tourism suppliers **VS competition** among destinations

- support **holistic idea of heritage protection**: the cooperation between different stakeholders as a driver for awareness raising, promotion and conservation of tangible and intangible cultural resources

ICTs for Cultural Routes

A. Can help to extend ACCESS

B. Can BETTER the experience of travellers

C. Help to CONNECT residents with their heritage and with visitors

D. Can DISINTERMEDIATE some relationships (e.g. between visitors and intermediaries)

E. Can be used to EDUCATE players

See: De Ascaniis S. & Cantoni L. (in press), *Handbook on heritage, sustainable tourism and digital media*, Edward Elgar Publishing.

Research design

AIM: to understand how the CR programme is communicated online through the websites of each route

→ what is communicated in the CRs' websites?

→ which contents and functionalities are provided by the CRs' websites?

with a FOCUS on the tourism dimension

→ if and which kind of support to the CRs' websites give to travellers?

RESEARCH METHOD: **benchmark analysis**

- bottom up technique
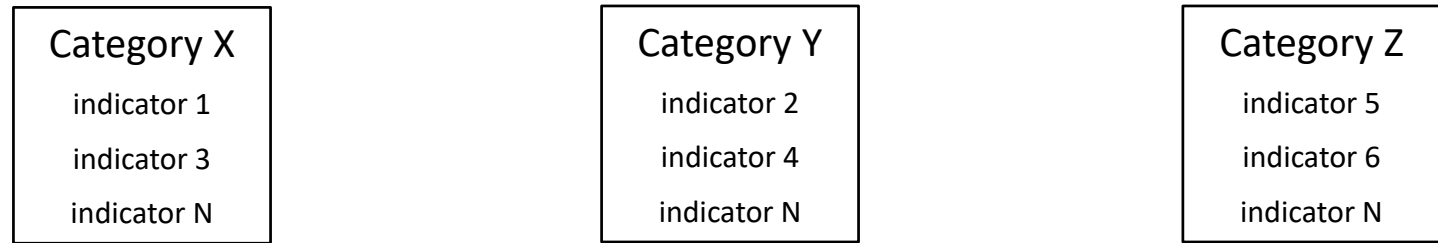
- allows a comparison among (specific aspects of) similar objects

- allows to measure own's performances and identify best practices

- helps to understand the dynamics, streghts and weaknesses of a certain sector

→ here, it was used to analyze and compare contents (i.e. given information) and functionalities (i.e. possibilities of action given to users) of CR's official websites.

Research design
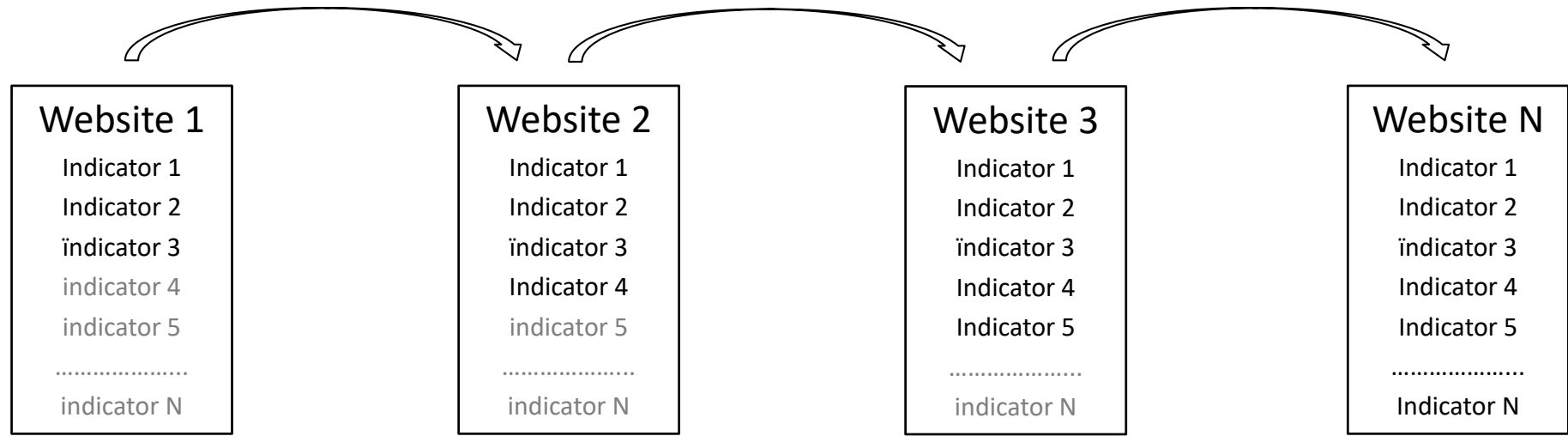
Benchmark analysis

- Iterative process per saturation
- 1 = indicator present
- 0 = indicator not present

Website 1
Indicator 1
Indicator 2
ïndicator 3
indicator 4
indicator 5
....
indicator N

Website 2
Indicator 1
Indicator 2
ïndicator 3
Indicator 4
indicator 5
....
indicator N

Website 3
Indicator 1
Indicator 2
ïndicator 3
Indicator 4
Indicator 5
....
indicator N

Website N
Indicator 1
Indicator 2
ïndicator 3
Indicator 4
Indicator 5
....
Indicator N

Category X
indicator 1
indicator 3
indicator N

Category Y
indicator 2
indicator 4
indicator N

Category Z
indicator 5
indicator 6
indicator N

NARRATIVE

Results

SAMPLE

45 Cultural Routes (7.12.2021):

- **43 official** (working) **websites**
- 38 Facebook pages
- 23 Instangram accounts
- 6 Linkedin accounts
- 11 Youtube channels
- 12 Twitter accounts

BENCHMARK ANALYSIS:

- **47 indicators** of contents and functionalities
- grouped into **6 categories**:
  - Information about the route
  - News, events, projects
  - Tourism
  - Social media channels
 - Services and functionalities
  - Credits

Cultural routes have both a historical and transnational dimension. They pass accross and network several destinations in Europe, which share an ideal.

Information about the route	
Indicator	**N°**
List of cities along the route	41
Map of the route stages/hotspots	41
History of the route/theme	41
Photo gallery of hotspots/attractions	37
Goals of the route/association	35
Presentation of the route stages/hotspots	35
Rules to become a member of the route	25
Promotional content	24
Description of art and architecture	20
Video gallery of hotspots/attractions	20
Notorious figures who travelled the route	14
Mention of UNESCO WHS	14
Audio-guides	6

The type of information and contents structure depend on the **typology of route**.

An example of a non-interactive map from the 'Impressionisms Routes'.
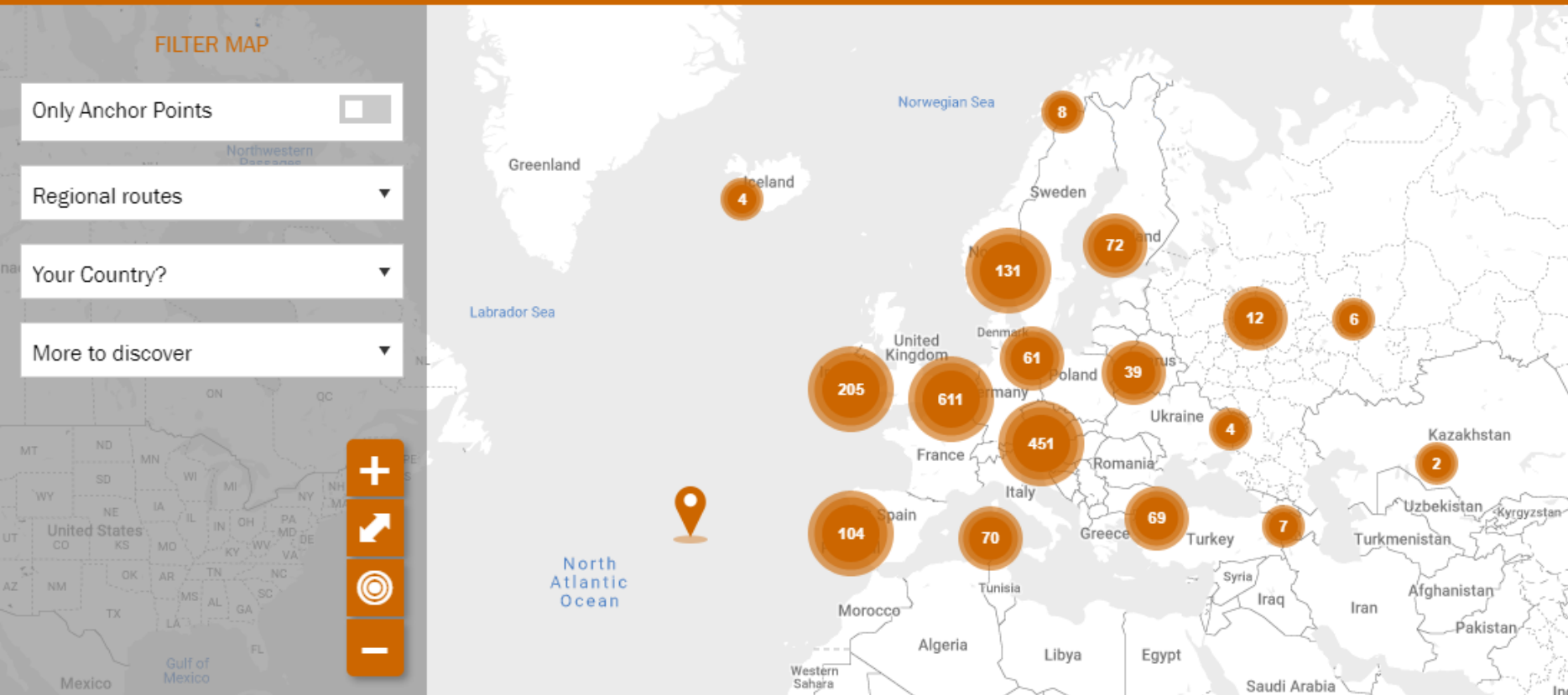
An example of an interactive map from the 'European route of industrial heritage' (the orange dots are clickable and the map zooms in).

News, events, projects	
Indicator	**N°**
News	36
Events	30
Projects	20
Press releases, external links to news about the route	20
Exhibitions	17

They federates several local communities, which are very active in promoting the routes' heritage.

Social media channels	
Indicator	**N°**
Link to Facebook	35
Link to Instagram	18
Link to Youtube	12
Link to Twitter	11
Content sharing on Facebook	10
Content sharing on Twitter	8
Link to Pinterest	7
Link to Linkedin	4
Content pinning on Pinterest	3
Video sharing	2
Content sharing on Linkedin	1

Goal of the website is neither to establish links with social media nor to allow user generated contents.

Services and functionalities	
Indicator	**N°**
Language choice	31
Interactive map of the route	30
Form to ask for information	21
Newsletter/online magazine	19
Link t a mobile app	7
Support us	6
My route	1

Websites address local users as well as the international public.

Credits	
Indicator	**N°**
General contacts	38
List of members	28
List of partners	23
Personal contacts of route's staff	16
FAQ	4
Logo download and rules to use it	2

The routes are open to meet people and welcome new members.

Tourism		
Indicator	**Description**	**N°**
Attractions to visit along the route	Presentation of attractions to be visited along the route or in its hotspots.	28
Educational/training services	Material and/or programmes that can be used for education purposes (e.g. in schools, as guidelines for exploring the route).	13
Travel packages	Suggested trips along the route with itinerary and accommodation.	11
Accommodations	Suggestions for accommodations along the route or on the route hotspots.	6
Instructions to get pilgrim credentials	Guidelines for visitors along 'linear' or 'territorial' routes to recognise their journey along the route.	4

The websites of the CR do not lie their focus on giving tourism information to visitors, but rather on presenting the route itself and its stages/destinations.

Some examples

ATRIUM Plus Training Course2018
How to deal with dissonant heritage
Three-day seminar for tourist operators and teachers organised by ATRIUM Forlì with the scientific support of the CAST (Centre for Advanced Studies in Tourism, University of Bologna)
Download the Atrium Plus Toolkit

Example of 'educational/training services' (ATRIUM)

Example of 'Instructions to get pilgrim credentials' (Via Romea Germanica)

Results

| N° indicators (out of 47)	N° routes (out of 43)
>30	4
25-29	7
20-24	15
15-19	10
10-14	4
<9	3

In general, **information richness** suggests a more careful design and is likely to better serve different users' needs.

Cultural route website	N° of indicators	Year of certification
European Route of Industrial Heritage	33	2019
Liberation Route Europe	33	2019
Via Romea Germanica	31	2020
Via Francigena	30	1994
Iron Curtain Trail	28	2019
European Routes of Emperor Charles V	27	2015
Routes of Reformation	27	2019
European Route of Historic Thermal Towns	26	2010
European Route of Historic Gardens	26	2020
Iron Age Danube Route	25	2021
Transromanica	25	2007

Conclusions

Often a visitor's experience starts from the website. Those of the CRs …

➢ face the challenge of representing the route as a whole while at the same time presenting its parts

➢ even though CRs aim at being an invitation to travel and one goal of the programme is to offer a holistic destination approach, tourism practices are not extensively covered

➢ clearly show the commitment of the different stakeholders to stimulate cooperation and promote active involvement

➢ Websites of the newest routes provide several, constantly updated and easy-to-find information about current activities and future events, and about how to take part in their organization + constitute a tool for users to create personal experience
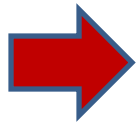
It is advisable that this direction of an **active involvement of users and of providing more tourism related information** is taken by all the routes, in order to take advantage of the opportunities given by ICTs to reach the ambitious goals of the Cultural Routes programme.