

**14th ADVISORY FORUM
ON CULTURAL ROUTES OF
THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**CULTURAL ROUTES AND LANDSCAPES:
ADVANCING HERITAGE PROTECTION THROUGH
CULTURAL AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM**



Cappadocia, TÜRKİYE
22-24 October 2025

**CONCLUSIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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Cultural Routes
of the Council of Europe
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REPUBLIC OF TÜRKİYE
MINISTRY OF CULTURE
AND TOURISM



CAPPADOCIA

THE LAND *of* FAIRYTALES

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CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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THE FORUM

The 14th Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe was held in the extraordinary cultural landscape of Cappadocia, Türkiye, from 22 to 24 October 2025. Organised by the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and the European Institute of Cultural Routes, in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the Republic of Türkiye and the Türkiye Tourism Promotion and Development Agency, the forum gathered around 300 participants representing member states, cultural routes, international organisations, local and regional authorities, non-governmental organisations, academia, and tourism bodies.

The event celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention, offering a timely opportunity to reflect on the role of cultural routes as instruments for heritage protection, landscape conservation, and sustainable tourism.

This document summarises the main conclusions and recommendations of the forum.

1. FURTHERING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

In an era when Europe's landscapes are increasingly threatened by climate change, environmental degradation and unsustainable tourism, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe — as transnational, collaborative heritage networks crossing Europe's diverse landscapes — have significant potential for conserving these landscapes, fostering sustainable and inclusive forms of tourism in the process.

The values and principles of the Council of Europe Landscape Convention should be fully integrated into the management and development of cultural routes. Applying the “landscape approach” means recognising landscapes as living, evolving entities that reflect the interaction between people and their environment.

This approach requires participatory, community-based governance, cross-sectoral collaboration, and the careful management of tourism to safeguard landscapes and the wellbeing of local communities. Cultural and sustainable tourism developed around landscape values creates important opportunities for communities.

Communities, as custodians of landscape heritage, must stand at the centre of any cultural route strategy. Their knowledge, values and aspirations must therefore form the foundation of any route's development. Collaborative and inclusive governance models are key to ensuring that heritage protection and tourism development are mutually reinforcing rather than in conflict.

Protecting and maintaining the authenticity and integrity of cultural landscapes, particularly those threatened by overtourism, requires careful, inclusive tourism management. The sector should build measures to calculate carrying capacities, assess the cumulative impacts of tourism, and monitor environmental and socio-cultural changes.

Routes are thus encouraged to improve their tourism intelligence, collect and share data on community needs and visitor flows, and develop targeted marketing strategies to attract appropriate audiences at suitable times and places. Research on the impact of tourism, both positive and negative, is needed to support decision-making and adaptive management.

Enhanced cooperation frameworks between the heritage and tourism sectors are needed to build stronger synergies and shared visibility. 'Acting together' was identified as a guiding principle to strengthen transnational collaboration and increase the impact of the Programme.

Participants emphasised that cultural routes should serve also as platforms for advocacy, promoting better public policies for landscape and heritage protection, environmental sustainability, and social justice. Businesses operating on cultural routes should be encouraged to adopt real green certification schemes and to invest directly in improving their surrounding environments and supporting community wellbeing.

2. INCLUSIVE HERITAGE INTERPRETATION

Innovative and inclusive heritage interpretation along cultural routes emerged as a cross-cutting priority for the Programme. Interpretation is not only a powerful means of communicating meaning but also a way to connect people, places, and values, fostering intercultural dialogue and empathy. Cross-cultural communication and collaboration along cultural routes is critical for interpreting the heritage of sites that relate to each other through transnational networks.

A shift towards values-based interpretation, bringing human values to life and providing holistic interpretive experiences that link tangible and intangible heritage to contemporary life is recommended. This approach ensures that cultural routes convey living, evolving stories that resonate with contemporary audiences, evoking emotion, stimulating curiosity and deepening understanding.

Equally important is inclusive interpretation of heritage, co-created with communities to present plural perspectives on heritage and to acknowledge diversity, conflicts, contested histories, and lived experiences. Community storytelling was highlighted as a means to rebuild the relationship between people and place and to help visitors understand the meaning and authenticity of what they encounter.

Shared interpretive frameworks across cultural routes are needed to support community participation and ensure quality and coherence, while allowing for local expression. Collaboration with professional guide associations and investment in training are strongly encouraged in fragile sites, together with initiatives that empower local residents to act as local guides and interpreters of their own heritage.

The creative and responsible use of digital technologies and the arts should be pursued where they add real value in enhancing interpretation, such as decoding ancient texts visualising past landscapes, or connecting dispersed sites.

Finally, in an age of increased vulnerability, the potential of action-oriented heritage interpretation to foster awareness and inspire change was emphasised, linking interpretation to pressing contemporary issues such as climate change, migration, rising inequalities, and environmental degradation.

3. REIMAGINING CULTURAL TOURISM

Greater efforts are needed to strengthen cultural routes as catalysts for sustainable cultural tourism. The Programme of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe can align closely with the ICOMOS Charter for Cultural Heritage Tourism, which advocates for a transformative shift away from exploitative, growth-driven, short-term models and towards regenerative, inclusive and participatory approaches.

The visibility and market position of cultural routes need to be strengthened through targeted marketing campaigns and digital promotion strategies. Improved cooperation between routes and tourism stakeholders can help reach broader audiences and reinforce the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe brand.

Participants encouraged building sustainable tourism products based on local resources. Partnerships between cultural routes, tour operators, craftspeople, farmers, food producers and small businesses can generate high-quality, place-based experiences that help revitalise traditional crafts and energise rural economies.

Cultural routes offer a cooperative model of cultural tourism by dispersing visitor flows and countering the concentration of tourism in major sites. By promoting lesser-known villages, rural areas and peripheral landscapes, the routes can reduce pressures on historic city centres while supporting regional development.

Participants also stressed the need to enhance the slow tourism potential of cultural routes by encouraging the creation of replicable, small-scale, local itineraries co-created with communities, such as cycling routes, “eco-itineraries”, or “gastro-routes”. These can encourage visitors to engage more deeply with local heritage, simultaneously promoting local producers and small businesses. Such approaches extend visitor stays, promote authenticity, and align with global goals for sustainable tourism.

4. THE LIVING HERITAGE OF LANDSCAPES

Across Europe, landscapes embody the deep and enduring relationship between people, culture, and the environment. Recognised by the Council of Europe Landscape Convention and the Faro Convention as living heritage, they represent dynamic, community-centred resources shaped through centuries of human interaction with the land. Yet this living heritage is under increasing pressure, undermining the wellbeing of local communities. Strengthening resilience, and enhancing both adaptive and transformative capacities, is essential.



Participants stressed that sustaining the dynamic equilibrium of landscapes, continually shaped by interactions between nature and community, requires the integration of intangible cultural heritage, crafts, and creative industries into tourism and local development strategies.

Cultural routes are invited to collaborate across their networks to revitalise traditional arts and crafts, foster knowledge exchange, and support innovative projects that combine creativity and sustainability. Examples include the upcycling of certain waste materials for the production of traditional crafts to musical instrument making.

The need for youth engagement remains important. Encouraging young people to remain in or return to their villages by participating in creative and entrepreneurial projects can safeguard traditional knowledge while opening new livelihood opportunities. Supporting youth-led storytelling, digital heritage documentation, and local festivals can reinforce community pride and ensure the intergenerational transmission of heritage values.

Investing in community storytelling and bottom-up initiatives aimed at developing local intangible cultural heritage is essential to keeping cultural routes vibrant and relevant. Partnerships between cultural route members, municipalities, and non-governmental organisations can amplify these initiatives and connect them to wider networks.

5. REVITALISING LOCAL FOOD TRADITIONS

The Forum reaffirmed food as a powerful means of expressing cultural identity and a gateway to understanding landscapes. Protecting landscapes is fundamental to safeguarding traditional food production and ensuring the sustainability of local food systems.

Cultural routes have an important role in promoting principles of slow food, agroecology, and sustainable farming practices that conserve biodiversity, preserve traditional crops, and maintain the character of rural landscapes. Supporting local producers and cooperatives that adhere to these principles can contribute to both environmental sustainability and community resilience.

Telling the stories behind food, from cultivation and harvesting to preparation and celebration, and reconnecting younger generations with their regional food heritage are highly recommended. Initiatives such as thematic itineraries, festivals, and cross-route collaborations centred on gastronomy can extend visitor stays, strengthen local economies, and enhance cultural exchange. Likewise, revitalising ancient culinary traditions and showcasing them through cultural events can reinforce the cultural dimension of food and its role in sustainable tourism.



CONCLUSION

The Cappadocia Forum reaffirmed that the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe embody a vision of Europe united through its landscapes and shared values. By placing people, heritage and sustainability at the heart of tourism, they illustrate how cultural cooperation can generate tangible benefits for communities and the environment alike.

Participants expressed their appreciation to the organisers and committed to advancing the Forum's recommendations. The Forum concluded with a shared conviction that safeguarding Europe's landscapes through cultural and sustainable tourism is an opportunity to build a more inclusive, resilient and beautiful Europe for future generations.



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