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Regular evaluation:

VIKING ROUTE

Independent expert report

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Evaluation Cycle 2022-2023

Independent expert report

Viking Route

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FOLLOW THE
VIKINGS

Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel
du Conseil de l'Europe



**The opinions expressed in this independent expert report are those of the author, and do not engage the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.*

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1. Executive Summary

Follow the Vikings – the European Viking Route *Follow the Vikings* theme is based on the common heritage of the Vikings. *Follow the Vikings* is managed by the Destination Viking Association (DVA), an NGO registered under Swedish law, with headquarters in Stavanger, Norway. This is one of the oldest, biggest, diverse, active and overall, most successful Cultural Routes. And ambitious *Follow the Vikings* project, co-funded by Creative Europe and managed by the DVA, has profoundly transformed the network, catapulting it to another level of cooperation, professionalization, partnership and creative cross-pollination. *Follow the Vikings* project is still reverberating throughout the DVA’s activities and narratives and serves as a reference point and a platform for new projects and initiatives.

Follow the Vikings route has rapidly expanded during the last years, currently counting more than 60 members in 16 countries, which, however, is not without challenges. Major areas of improvement for the network lie in managing its large number of members, with their wide range in size, resources, expertise and experience, as well as in collecting and analysing information about their activities.

The evaluation period coincided with the COVID 19 pandemic. COVID19 had a major impact on the DVA operations since the majority of its members are directly reliant on tourism, which resulted in the cancellation of planned activities and the need to direct efforts on other priorities. At the same time, the pandemic has given the DVA much needed rest after the strenuous effort related to the *Follow the Vikings* project implementation. At the same time, the new norm of digital communication has brought many DVA members closer together online and shifted more attention to the digital presence of the network.

Overall, *Follow the Vikings* managed by the DVA is an impressive example of vibrant, active, and constantly evolving network, powered by Viking enthusiasts from all walks of life. All the interviewed members greatly appreciate being part of the network, pointing out international cooperation, networking, exchange of ideas as its main benefit. Therefore, it is a great asset to have them on board as a European Cultural Route.

Expert summary conclusions		
	Yes	No
The theme complies with criteria listed in Resolution CM/Res(2013)67, I. List of eligibility criteria for themes.	X	
The Cultural Route complies with the criteria for actions listed in Resolution CM/Res(2013)67, II. List of priority fields of action.	X	
The Cultural Route complies with the criteria for networks listed in Resolution CM/Res (2013)67, III. List of criteria for networks.	X	
The Cultural Route implements the Guidelines for the Use of the Logo “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe”	X	

2. Introduction

Follow the Vikings – the European Viking Route features the common European heritage of the Vikings. Even though their exact definition is still a subject of academic debates, there is a certain consensus that the term Vikings refers to seafaring people originally from Scandinavia (present day Denmark, Norway and Sweden), and who were especially active between 8th and 11th centuries, also known as The Viking Age (Birkett & Dale, 2019). During this time period, traditionally counted starting from the raid on Northumbria in 793AD, the Vikings were involved in large-scale raiding, plundering, pirating, trading, exploring, colonizing, and establishing settlements throughout Europe and beyond. Viking voyages spanned to even more remote destinations, from Canada and Greenland to Black Sea river routes, the whole area known as The Viking World (Birkett & Dale, 2019). The Scandinavian law and *Thing* judicial system was transplanted to many areas where the Vikings settled, and in some cases are still in operation, as e.g. on the Isle of Man, Shetland and Iceland. In short, throughout just three centuries the Vikings have profoundly transformed the cultural (and genetic, for that matter) fabric of Northern Europe and other communities they met, that is still felt today, passing down their heritage, both tangible and intangible, for generations to come (Price, 2020).

Follow the Vikings – the European Viking Route (hereafter *Follow the Vikings*, which is its brand name) is managed by the Destination Viking Association (DVA), an NGO registered under Swedish law, with headquarters in Stavanger, Norway (and is currently run from the home office of its secretary) (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1). According to the DVA's legal statute, its aim is 'the presentation of the historic and cultural heritage of the Vikings and the Viking Age in a European context and its impact on Scandinavian and European society at large. The presentation being primarily in educational, edutainment and touristic settings and based on academic research, pedagogic principles and with a focus on authenticity and accuracy' (FtV 2022-2023, Document a). DVA states that it 'exists to bring together diverse organisations promoting, researching, disseminating and demonstrating the widest Viking heritage, and to develop authentic and quality Viking Tourism experiences for local, regional, European and world-wide audiences' (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information).

Follow the Vikings is one of the largest Cultural Routes, currently spanning over 15 countries (Denmark including Faroe Islands, Estonia, Finland, France, Norway, Poland, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Canada). *Follow the Vikings* is also one of the oldest certified Cultural Routes of Europe, having received its certification in 1993. Its level of activity, however, has not been consistent throughout all these years. After the management of the network has been taken over by the DVA in 2012, the network has undergone a sort of 'rebirth', and its outputs have improved significantly, as documented by previous evaluations (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information).

In the period of 2015-2019 DVA was involved in development and implementation of a major project (*Follow the Vikings*) which was to be 50% funded by the EU under the Creative Europe project. This project has proven to be a major development step for the whole network, mobilizing its members and creating opportunities for new, innovative and creative outcomes. The project brought the DVA members together on a new level and truly mobilized their joint potential as a network. *Follow the Vikings* Creative Europe project is still reverberating throughout the DVA's activities and narratives, and serves as a reference point and a platform for new projects and initiatives. Finally, needless to say, COVID19 had a major impact on the DVA operations during this evaluation period, resulting in the cancellation of planned activities and the need to direct efforts on other priorities.

3. Main Body Evaluation

3.1. Cultural Route Theme

3.1.1 Definition of the theme of the route

Follow the Vikings theme is based on the common heritage of the Vikings. The term Viking, though of highly debatable etymology, can be defined as defined “Scandinavian adventurers who practised piracy at sea, and committed depredations on land, in northern and western Europe from the eighth to the eleventh century; sometimes in general use, a warlike pirate or sea-rover“(OED, 2022).

Follow the Vikings aims at presenting the Vikings and the Viking Age, featuring the impacts the Vikings had on the Scandinavian and European societies. *Follow the Vikings* wants to emphasize the transformative and multifaceted impacts the Viking voyages had on the societies they encountered. *Follow the Vikings* focuses on the Viking heritage, both material and immaterial, as a landscape, as a collection in a museum, as well as living crafts. The route is rich in reconstructed Viking villages with replicas/reconstructions of Viking Age buildings, museums, featuring artifacts, garments, as well as demonstrations of Viking handicrafts, shipbuilding and sailing, weapons, and socio-political relations among themselves and other nations (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1).

3.1.2 Historical and cultural context

Vikings are some of the most popularized historical figures in Europe and beyond, and arguably are as popular today as they have ever been (Sigurdsson, 2022). The current wave of Viking popularity is not a new phenomenon, as the interest towards this era of Scandinavian history has also experienced several peaks throughout the last centuries, where Viking images, narratives and iconography were adapted to the given cultural needs, and often political interests, while Vikings themselves were refashioned and reimagined accordingly. This most notably includes nationalist Romanticism movement, Victorian imperialism as well as the Nazi regime in Germany (Price, 2020). Already then Vikings were reduced to cliché representations of horn-helmeted warriors, and production of kitsch cultural artefacts ensued. Nevertheless, despite its ambiguity, misappropriations and sociopolitical abuse, the Viking heritage stands the test of time, and its powerful core continues to reinvent itself, remaining relevant and attractive to the modern-day Europeans and beyond. The Viking images and the Viking lore of today’s pop-culture, is, nevertheless, also a hodgepodge of (re)imagined, mythologized, demonized, romanticized as well as historically accurate components.

One reason behind the Vikings’ popularity is that Viking heritage is incredibly rich. It is important to keep in mind that the Viking heritage includes not only the distinct mark they left in historical sources and archaeological artefacts, but that it is a whole material and immaterial cultural layer, a whole universe with its distinct mythology, authentic and imagined narratives, holistic belief system, poetry, sagas, runic script, easily recognizable style and aesthetics. This allows the Viking Age to continue being a source of inspiration and a fertile substrate, generating more and more new cultural content and maintain its ‘cult status’. The last half a century has seen countless films, shows, animations, novels, comic books etc., featuring Vikings in one form or another, with varying degree of historical accuracy. There are e.g., movies like *Erik the Viking*, *Valhalla Rising*, highly successful *The 13th Warrior* starring Antonio Banderas, *Pathfinder*, the more recent *The Northman* by widely acclaimed Robert Eggers; the

horror *Midsommar*, or TV shows like *Vikings*, *Norsemen*; or animations such as *How to Train Your Dragon* or *Vinland Saga*, just to name a few. The Vikings and Norse gods routinely appear in comics, manga, anime, fantasy literature, video games, board games and role-playing games, cosplay, and are heavily represented in the whole so-called 'nerd culture' in general. Vikings and Norse mythology have also been extremely influential for the whole heavy metal music genre, massively popular in the Nordic countries, even spawning their own *Viking metal* subgenre, with bands such as *Bathory*, *Enslaved* or *Burzum* (Hoad, 2021). There are countless Viking-themed theatrical plays, festivals, and re-enactments, such as the *Festival of Slavs and Vikings* in Wolin (Poland), the *Summer Festival* in Hedeby (Germany), or the *Moesgaard Viking Moot* (Denmark), where thousands of participants from different countries meet on a yearly basis (Karpińska, 2019). Vikings are also a ubiquitous marketing brand, e.g. Dale (2022) reports collecting a database of more than 4000 Viking-themed product brands. In short, there is no shortage of Viking-themed cultural content generated every year. It seems that the Viking heritage and its modern reiterations continues to maintain its appeal to very wide and diverse audiences, while almost every group in every generation manages to find something relevant in the Viking lore.

Today, public interests towards the Vikings is not waning, and the current cultural context define new foci of interest within Viking heritage. For example, there is a shift away from the unidimensional representation of Vikings as testosterone-oozing fur-clad berserker, towards stronger interest in the role of women in the Viking society. For example, Karpińska (2019) argues that starting from the 1990s the researchers "rediscovered" women in the Viking Age and began to highlight their importance. Monographs like *Old Norse Images of Women* by Jenny Jochens or *Women in the Viking Age* by Judith Jesch offered new perspectives on the roles of women in this period and were particularly influential (Karpińska, 2019). It has been noticed that up until early 2000s women were largely invisible in Viking festivals, and mainly active within the frames of traditional female roles (e.g. related to housekeeping), lacking opportunities to participate in any competitions showing off their skills. The current Viking reenactments however include more and more diverse female characters, such as sorceresses (*vǫlur*), warrior women, as well as skill-based competitions, where women can also participate (Karpińska, 2019). A survey among the Polish female Viking festival reenactors suggests that being a Viking woman is currently associated with being independent, free, and self-confident, specifically being able to manage the whole household, to have authority and knowledge concerning many spheres of daily life (e.g. herbs, healing, or handicrafts), as well as being able to fight and protect the house when the men are away (Karpińska, 2019). Additionally, since the beginning of the 2000s, reenactors and Viking festival attendees are becoming increasingly interested in aspects of the Viking culture beyond raids and combat, such as traditional handicrafts, daily routines, and the recreation of pre-Christian rituals. All this suggests diversification of Viking narrative and the shift away from the androcentric view on Viking culture.

Currently, more and more research appears highlighting the role of Viking women thus making Viking heritage relevant to the cultural fabric of the modern European societies and beyond (e.g. Gardęła, 2021; Friðriksdóttir, 2020). For example, a recent reassessment of a warrior grave in Birka, Sweden, has become highly influential in sparking debates regarding the existence of warrior women in the Viking age (Price et al., 2019). The found deceased individual, always assumed to be a male, was surrounded by a large number of weapons, a board game, and two horses – all items associated with high-status leaders (Price et al., 2019). This person not only was consistently interpreted as a high-status warrior, but was even held as an archetypical, 'ultimate Viking' of the tenth century (Price et al., 2019). However, the recent skeleton analysis suggested that the warrior was a biological female, who most likely lived as a professional warrior and was buried in a martial environment as an individual of high rank (Price et al., 2019). Such 'timely' findings offer a stereotype-bending perspective on the

Viking society and reinvent our view on traditional gender roles of the Viking Age. All this suggests high relevance, flexibility and malleability of Viking narratives, keeping them highly interesting, popular and appropriate for the modern European society.

3.1.3 Council of Europe values represented by the theme

Council of Europe aims to protect and promote fundamental values, i.e. human rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Council of Europe, 2022). In addition, with the Cultural Routes initiative, Council of Europe aims to 'to enhance the richness and the diversity of European cultures and countries and to render shared European cultural identities into a tangible reality, beyond political and ideological divergences (Council of Europe, 2022, p. 3). The theme of the Vikings contributes to this ambition in a number of ways.

In very general terms, the Vikings are an early example of internationalization and globalization, as 'a Viking' first and foremost was a 'job description' rather than an ethnic or cultural belonging (Curry, 2020). Social mobility was much more common in the Viking society than the majority of others around the world (Doughterty, 2014). The new data from massive research of the Viking DNA across Europe, suggests rather high diversity, including e.g. linked to dark hair, which goes against the stereotypical Viking image (Curry, 2020). Vikings were active agents of transboundary connectivity and international trade, establishing an extensive trade network, such as 'from the Varangians to the Greeks', and venturing into explorations across the seas. Up to this day, the Vikings in popular culture are remembered in positive terms, associated with adventure and explorations, strength and endurance, as well as joviality and feast (Dale, 2022).

Further, the Scandinavian law during the Viking age showed some interesting elements of early democracy and the rule of law. As the Vikings settled in new territories, they also introduced their customs and legal system to the local societies. An early example of judicial and administrative system is the Viking thing (*þing*) (www.thingsites.com), which is considered to be the cradle of Nordic democracy. Things were where political decisions were made, laws upheld and disputes settled through a representative system, rather than violence alone. At some things (Althings), any free man could cast a vote. Things acted as meeting places and were often the hot spots for trade and religious activity. During the Viking age, kings, for example, also had to be elected at a thing. Vikings exported this system throughout Northern Europe, and many thing sites up to this date remind us of their past by their name, e.g. Gulating (Norway), Tingwalla (Sweden), Þingvellir (Iceland), Tinganes (Faroe Islands), Tingwall (Shetland and Orkney), Dingwall (Scotland), Tynwald (Isle of Man) and Fingay Hill (England) (www.thingsites.com). Several things continue to be active up to today transformed into modern parliaments, namely the Icelandic parliament, which is still literally called the Althing, the Norwegian (the Storting), the Faroese (Løgting), the Manx (Tynwald). This shared heritage, therefore is an important part of European history of democracy and the rule of law.

3.2 Fields of Action

3.2.1 Co-operation in research and development

Viking heritage is very much supported by active scientific research in the Nordic countries and beyond. DVA network is very up-to-date when it comes to the 'news' regarding research of the Viking history, while its members update their exhibitions accordingly. DVA has education

institutions and/or conduct research among their members. Three University Departments are DVA members, Universities of Stavanger, University of Oslo in Norway, and the Centre for Nordic Studies, at the University of Highlands and Islands in Shetland. Further, many members of the network actively cooperate with research and education institutions. For example, Gulatinget collaborates with University of Bergen; Icelandic Saga & Heritage Association work on literature with Snorrastofa research centre in Reykholt; Roskilde Viking Ship Museum works with Universities of Copenhagen and Aarhus; Lejre Land of Legends on Denmark cooperates with Roskilde Museum, Borg (Lofoten, Norway), The National Museum of Denmark, University and Museum at Moesgaard, Denmark, Copenhagen University and others; University of Iceland Department of Museum Studies research informs Viking exhibitions in Iceland; The Institute for Northern Studies, Scotland, extensively researches Viking history and culture; Manx National Heritage works with Lancaster University on laser scanning of carved crosses and has funded research into excavations at Rushen Abbey where the Island's early Norse kings were buried; Dublinia museum in Ireland works with University College Dublin in the experimental archaeology and also has a member of the University on their board of trustees; Waterford collaborates with South East Technological University in Viking-themed virtual reality adventure; Birka, The Viking museum and Gunnes Gård in Sweden actively cooperate with Stockholm and Uppsala universities (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1; pers. comm.); Orkney Islands Council is working with the University of the Highlands and Islands, Scotland to research two Viking sites; JORVIK cooperated with at least 35 universities during the evaluation period (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information). In addition, DVA has developed close links with the Viking Congress which meets every four years.

Supporting education and research to provide an authentic and informed understanding of the Vikings is among the key priorities for the DVA (FtV 2022-2023, Document c). Many employees of DVA member organizations have academic degrees in history, archaeology, education, Nordic studies, and related fields, and there is a growing professionalization in this field. Due to popularity of the Viking theme, this continues to be a vibrant field of research, and new insights regarding Viking history constantly emerge, which in turn, find their way into exhibitions, museums, heritage sites, publications, etc. (e.g. Curry, 2020). In general, there is a trend acknowledged by all the interviewed DVA members, that the representation of the Vikings at heritage sites becomes more historically accurate, diverse and scientifically informed, alongside with higher public demand for authenticity.

3.2.2 Enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage

The Viking theme is well suited for the advancement of the common European memory, history and heritage. The Vikings are an inherent part of shared history of Europe, especially Northern Europe, and left their mark in the memory of many nations throughout the continent and beyond. The Viking legacy lives on in the form of both tangible and intangible heritage, ranging from archaeological artifacts, to myths and sagas, to language, or even the runic symbols honouring King Harald Bluetooth everyone carries in their pockets (please see section 3.1.2 for more details). Vikings continue to inspire modern Europeans and be present in the modern pop-culture, not the least thanks to American interpretations in the form of comic books, animation and Hollywood movies. It can even be argued that there are, in fact, not many historical characters and historical periods that can compete with the Vikings in their influence, visibility and presence in the modern-day pop-culture. Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage is a natural outcome of the daily activities of each DVA members.

The DVA and its network members have put significant effort in a wide range of activities that encourage the enhancement of the shared memory, history and heritage. This is visible in the ongoing efforts each of the DVA network member invests in the presentation and interpretation

of the Viking heritage in their respective operations. Especially prominent this was in the *Follow the Vikings* Creative Europe project, which ran from 2015 till 2019 but the lessons learned, experience and new skills acquired from this project still reverberate throughout the network today and is a major reference point for the whole DVA operations. The aim of the project was to make the transnational Viking heritage accessible and understandable to worldwide audiences (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information). This included, inter alia, actively working with social media and influencers, and working with media, which is outside the scope of the 'normal' modus operandi of heritage organizations. This includes, first and foremost, the touring roadshow theatre production based on the story of Egil Skallagrimsson and the poem "Head Ransom". The show engaged local dancers, drummers, warriors and other animators, each time adding a new local dimension to the performance. The show highlighted Viking heritage, with a special focus on Viking art and its legacy (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information).

3.2.3 Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans

As in almost all other aspects of operations of the DVA network, COVID-19 pandemic has put on hiatus all physical exchanges, including cultural and educational youth exchanges, during the evaluation period. It is expected, however, that such exchanges will be more active in the future.

Supporting and encouraging education to provide an authentic and informed understanding of the Vikings is among the key priorities for the DVA (FtV 2022-2023, Document c). In general, the Viking theme is very appealing to children and youth, not the least due to the fairy tales and sagas, and the extensive popular culture content produced. Many of the DVA members have activities involving young participants and volunteers. Nearly every museum involving a Viking theme would also have some special information, activities, games, animations, etc. aimed at children and youth (see ANNEX 3). These are, for example, involvement of young staff and organization of family events in Dublinia, Ireland; schoolchildren programme and games at Birka, Sweden; schoolchildren programme and games at Viking Events on Faroese Islands; children's activities at the reconstructed Viking farm at Avaldsnes, Norway; educational programme for children at Asva Viking Village, Estonia; experiencing Viking life on a Viking farm in Gunnes Gård, Sweden, to name a few. In addition, Gunnes Gård also puts efforts to attract youth from vulnerable groups, such as refugees and asylum seekers. Lionheart Tours in Rouen, France participated in a Viking-themed school visit to show school children and also plans to create a Viking themed event with local school children for the 2023 Rouen Armada for the French village of Aizier; JORVIK organized 'Archaeology Live' online event, hosting live streamed schools week, for children across the globe, enjoyed by over 12,000 children (aged 5 to 12) each time this event is staged. Many of the aforementioned activities engage children and youth in multisensorial manner, giving them opportunities to interact with the heritage on many levels, such as trying 'living as a Viking' experience, trying the food of the Vikings, taking care of the animals on Viking farms, etc.

Many of these cultural institutions are also engaging youth from other countries. Birka Vikingastaden in Sweden, for example, takes in volunteers from all over the world, primarily young people that are interested in Vikings and their history. Concello de Catoira in Spain has contributed to the implementation of an Erasmus+ exchange programme in the school of Catoira, with students from secondary education, including exchanges with Ireland, France and Turkey. In the frames of the Creative Europe funded *Follow the Vikings* Project there have been multiple opportunities to bring together young Europeans (e.g. from Spain, Poland, Ireland, Denmark), especially those involved in arts, such as contemporary dancers, historical reenactors, drummers and musicians as well as costumiers, make-up artists and audio-visual

specialists. During the roadshow in JORVIK, Dublinia, and the National Museum of Denmark outreach programmes for young people were organized (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1).

Further, there are activities at the DVA which are aimed at increasing involvement of young people and improvement of educational components for them. In the frames of the Erasmus-funded project “Sharing knowledge – creating impact” JORVIK (UK), Dublinia (Ireland), Museum of Archaeology, University of Stavanger (Norway), and Museum Vestsjælland (Denmark) work together on a program for young people, also involving learning from each other’s best practice through staff exchanges (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1).

3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic practice

The Viking theme is very much alive and finds its relevance in contemporary culture. The DVA members, both on their websites as well as in their interviews, all admit that the narratives about Vikings have to be truthful but also need to correspond to the interests and values of the modern societies in order to stay relevant and exciting. This includes, inter alia, moving away from the unidimensional and stereotypical representations of Vikings, but rather extending the narrative to include broader discussions about other aspects of the Viking Age society. This implies inclusion of many diverse topics into exhibitions and activities around Viking heritage, such as the contacts of Vikings with other cultures, the role of women, everyday life on a Viking Age farm, the social realities of Viking slaves. In the Viking Museum in Stockholm, for example, an image of a Viking slave girl is projected on a wall, in an attempt to symbolically make the invisible agents of history visible.

Further, almost all DVA members actively use social media, websites and other online tools to promote their operations. Some members have developed gamification and virtual reality design in their exhibitions. For example, in collaboration with South East Technological University, Waterford recently developed *King of the Vikings* Virtual Reality Adventure, involving an authentic reproduction Waterford Viking Age house. COVID-19 has, of course, been a catalyst of digitalization, and some members have significantly activated their digital presence. Dublinia, for example, created a number of promotional videos, that were used by also by Tourism Ireland to promote Dublinia abroad. JORVIK has created virtual outreach offer, providing digital Viking experiences to all audiences.

Most notably, in February 2021 JORVIK created 'That JORVIK Viking Thing' - a new digital festival to replace the usual live festival which takes place every year attracting 40,000 visitors to the city of York, UK. This new digital Festival reached people across 60 countries worldwide who collectively watched over 378 hours of video. For this Festival they created 39 hours of brand-new content, including 26 hours of live-streamed video. One of the live streamed events was streamed from JORVIK and included live link ups with other DVA members Dublinia (Ireland), Stiftelsen Museum Nord, Lofotr (Norway) and Trelleborg Museum, National Museum of Denmark. Facebook streaming attracted a lot of viewers not only from Europe but also from Canada, Dubai, Singapore and Australia. In total they estimate to have reached over 3.6 million people throughout the event. The second 'That JORVIK Viking Thing' took place in February 2022 (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information).

It has to be emphasized, that the Vikings and their histories are by no means contained behind the glass walls of museum expositions, while Viking narratives are not limited to narrow preferences of curators. DVA members put a lot of effort into providing Viking-related experiences, which emphasize arts, crafts, music, cuisine as living heritage and interactive praxis (see ANNEX 3). There are multiple examples, to name a few, Birka in Sweden organizes dramatized guided tours, small concerts in their restaurant, invites artists who work in

reconstructed Viking houses; Lofotr in Norway organizes Viking feast with authentic food, music, storytelling and animators; Gunnes Gård in Sweden keeps farm animals in summer, with whom visitors can interact, as well as have their own arts and crafts workshop; Leire in Denmark incorporates music, singing and dancing in the Viking King's Hall; Trelleborg features Viking music and craftsmanship workshops; in Asva Viking Village on Saaremaa, Estonia, theatre, music, dance and storytelling are used to convey Viking heritage; Catoira in Spain organizes a massive annual festival *Romaría Vikinga* starting from the 1960s, with a re-enactment of Viking attacks, medieval market, parades, live folk music, wine and food tasting, popular festivals, etc. Overall, Viking heritage is very vibrant, interactive, multisensorial and multidimensional.

The massive *Follow the Vikings* project with its roadshow, where the actors and animators performed with a digital backdrop and attracted a lot of professional as well as unprofessional participants, opened new opportunities and explored new ways of linking the Viking heritage to contemporary culture. Within the Project Work Package *Presenting the Vikings*, the members looked at methods of presenting the Viking story in different ways in museums and centres across the partnership. The four components addressed didactic issues, exhibition techniques, oral presentations and quality standards and how the pan-European perspective is presented at each attraction and how it can be improved. The Work Package presented three seminars and produced a Best Practice Guide. Members stated that it has already resulted in improved interpretation across the network (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information). This project also was a catalyst not only for the new, modern and diverse cultural practices but also helped creating new and strengthening old connections among DVA network members and beyond.

3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development.

DVA has always focused on tourism development. In its statement of purpose, DVA states that 'The Destination Viking Association exists to bring together diverse organisations promoting, researching, disseminating and demonstrating the widest Viking heritage, and to develop authentic and quality Viking Tourism experiences for local, regional, European and world-wide audiences' (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1, p.5). DVA explicitly aims to gain international recognition as a key Viking Tourism body in Europe; contribute to more sustainable and better-quality Viking visitor attractions and tourism products; contribution to the recognition of the value of Viking Tourism by stakeholders and key audiences (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1). In other words, authentic and high-quality tourism experiences is one of the *raison d'être* of DVA.

Nearly all the DVA members are linked to cultural tourism in one way or another, and Viking theme is a strong tourism attraction in itself. There are around 100 sites on the route, e.g. forts, towns, farms, quarries, ships, museums, archaeological sites and reconstructed houses. There are also a variety of events, such as the Viking markets and festivals, aimed at both domestic and international tourists. Most of the network members have close cooperation with local, regional or national tourism bodies. *Follow the Vikings* project encouraged wider partnerships and shared experience to create new products and develop new links with incoming tour operators (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1). There is, however, a great diversity in terms of size and experience among the DVA members. Some members are large and well-established tourism destinations, while others are small and less experienced. For example, JORVIK is the key destination in York, Lofotr Museum in Norway closely cooperates with international cruise lines who send tourists to enjoy a Viking Banquet in the reconstructed Feasting Hall, while Asva Viking village in Estonia is a relatively new attraction (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1).

There are many examples, when DVA members cooperate with local tourism stakeholders and scientific institutions to benefit tourism development. For example, Trelleborg, Denmark, and National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen are by definition large multistakeholder entities, important for the national tourism; The Orkney Island Council in Scotland is itself responsible for Planning and Tourism development of the island, which is highly dependent on tourism; the Institute for Northern Studies, University of Highlands and Islands is working with various organizations to develop and promote Viking and Norse Heritage Tourism in Scotland; Museum of Archaeology in Stavanger participates in "Barnas Rogaland" (an initiative, which brings together museums, amusement parks, and hotels in one tourist package) as well as cooperate with Destination "Region Stavanger" and Visit Haugesund; Municipality of Catoira in Spain works closely with Galician Tourism Agency while Romaría Vikinga in is an important tourism event, twice recognized as Festival of National Tourist Interest; Lejre Land of Legends in Denmark is attracting around 50,000 visitors annually, etc.

Other DVA members, are directly tourism businesses themselves, e.g. the Viking Museum in Stockholm is a commercial organization primarily aiming at international tourists; Gunnes Gård primarily caters to the domestic tourists; Lionheart Tours is a small tour operator working with Viking heritage tourism in Normandy; The Viking Events on Faroe Islands is a company that was established specifically to promote this Viking heritage as part cruise ship tourism development. In short, regardless of the wide range, cultural tourism is an inherent part in DVA members' operations in one way or another (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information).

The *Follow the Vikings* project had a specific focus on sustainable tourism promotion. One of the main aims of the project was to contribute to maintaining and developing Europe as the No. 1 Global Heritage Tourism Destination. Within *Selling the Vikings* work package the project investigated and presented findings on the commercial opportunities for Viking heritage sites and centres. A seminar was held that identified travel industry needs, team building products, educational products, methods to identify and separate different target groups and product adaptation. A Best Practice Guide for business development and Retail Manual Guide was produced (FtV 2022-2023, Supporting Information). This project has brought the whole network together and spawned new cooperations among its members, also with the aim of sustainable tourism development. All the interviewed members confirmed that strengthened partnerships, new contacts and networking was the main outcome of the project. For example, Lofotr in Norway established close cooperation with two other DVA partners, one from Scotland and one from Iceland. The purpose of the network is sustainable tourism and sustainable running of our Viking sites. In the pre-COVID19 world, 'overtourism' has become a serious issue in Iceland, Norway and other destinations. Best practice guidelines have been commissioned, and a workshop has been organized on risk management in Norway, aimed to improve quality of cultural tourism products; outcomes were shared among DVA members (FtV 2022-2023, Document 1).

There are some aspects of sustainability and sustainable cultural tourism that are especially visible in the *Follow the Vikings* route. First, providing educational experiences to tourists in an engaging and entertaining way is an important part of sustainable cultural tourism. This is done achieved not only through conventional didactic means, such as unidirectional provision of information via social media, leaflets, signs in museums and archeological sites. What makes the Viking theme especially interesting in the context of cultural tourism, is that many of the route members are providing education in interactive and holistic way. Many of the network members recreate Viking farms, keep farm animals, organize re-enactments, arts and crafts workshops, etc. in the summer. Such activities also invite the visitors to pay attention to the landscape and imagine the connection the Vikings had with the nature around them. For example, Avaldnes in Norway offers a four-day Viking-school for children at their Viking farm, with about 5000 school pupils participating annually. Similarly, Gunnes Gård in Sweden

operates a Viking farm during the summer, where visitors can interact with the farm animals and learn about the farm life during the Viking times. The houses on the farm are reconstructed under the supervision or with direct participation of experts (pers. comm.). In addition, attention is paid towards sustainable sourcing of materials used on Viking sites, such as wood, wool, meat, honey, etc. Viking theme itself already encourages the network members to use local raw materials to provide tourist experiences as authentically as possible.

Accessibility and inclusion, as important parts of social sustainability, are also visible in the work of some of the DVA members. JORVIK Viking center in UK, for example, actively explores the themes of access, digital inclusion and adult participation in learning activity with the aim to share best practice and skills. Gunnes Gård in Sweden works with refugees and asylum seekers, using Viking farm experience, arts and crafts as a tool for integration and inclusion. The Viking Museum in Stockholm opens its doors for free for refugees. Archaeon historical theme park in the Netherlands works with people with special needs. JORVIK has focused on improving accessibility for the people with autism and dementia.

Much of Viking-related tourism would qualify as 'slow tourism' or 'slow adventure'. The core pillars of the 'slow adventure' include elements such as human-powered slow journeys, inspiring connectedness with nature, nature observation and interpretation, local, wild or slow food as well as storytelling, and honing of outdoor skills (Laven et al., 2019; Varley & Semple, 2015). This type of tourism is an inherent part of the Nordic culture, especially in its peripheries (also linked to the Nordic mode of outdoor recreation – *friluftsliv*), and the Viking theme fits naturally into this framework. On Viking heritage sites, especially on the farms and rural areas, the visitors are invited to slow down, take a walk exploring the surroundings, spend time connecting with the landscape around them, try Viking Age arts and crafts, try local food, listen to storytelling etc. All these aspects contribute to development of slow paced, low impact but meaningful tourist experiences, which are in line with sustainability principles.

3.3 Cultural Route Network

3.3.1 Overview of institutional /legal structure of the network

The network constituting Viking Cultural Route is Destination Viking Association's (DVA), established in 2007 and registered in the official Swedish register of associations under the Swedish law (FtV 2022-2023, Document a). Bylaws of the DVA have been approved in 2022, and are legally binding (Translation of Swedish statutes can be found in FtV 2022-2023, Document a). The official language of DVA is English. The aim of DVA is 'the presentation of the historic and cultural heritage of the Vikings and the Viking Age in a European context and its impact on Scandinavian and European society at large. The presentation being primarily in educational, edutainment and touristic settings and based on academic research, pedagogic principles and with a focus on authenticity and accuracy' (FtV 2022-2023, Document a, p1). DVA uses the trade name *Follow the Vikings* for the Viking Route. Partly as a result of COVID19 in 2021 the Shetland Amenity Trust withdrew their support for the Secretariat of DVA. This was taken up by the University of Stavanger, where the new Chair is located.

DVA has an active and well-structured Board, consisting of a Chair, a Vice-Chair and up to eight voting members. The Board is the executive body of the Association and is elected at the Annual General Assembly. The Board elects from amongst its members the Treasurer, the Secretary and the Membership Secretary, and other functional officers as agreed in the Standing Orders. The Board is responsible for running the Association but may delegate

authority to the officers in line with a formal scheme of delegation. The quorum for Board meetings is at least five members, including the Chair or one of the Vice-Chairs (FtV 2022-2023, Document a).

The Board has the power to make or delegate any decisions on behalf of the DVA, except those issues that are exclusively reserved for the Annual General Assembly and are specifically mentioned in the bylaws. Board meetings need not be in person and can be held electronically (which has especially become normalized after COVID-19). Official records of the meetings are made. The Chair and the Vice-Chairs have delegated authority to act on behalf of the Board and the Association and to execute decisions of the Board. Any decisions made by the Chair and Vice-Chair are communicated to the Board and ratified by them. Board members act for a period of 2 years and can be re-elected. The selection committee elects Board members at the Annual General Assembly. The selection committee prior to an Annual General Assembly asks members for nominations to the Board and the auditors. At the Annual General Assembly Board members are elected and auditors are appointed. The activities of the Board and the accounts of the DVA are scrutinized by auditors, elected at ordinary Annual General Assemblies. The DVA convenes at the Annual General Assembly before June every year (in 2022 it was on June 17th). The Annual General Assembly can be ordinary or extraordinary (FtV 2022-2023, Document a).

3.3.1 Overview of the financial situation of the network

Financial situation of the network has been greatly influenced by the large-scale *Follow the Vikings* project co-funded by Creative Europe. After the finalization of the project, the network returned to dependence on membership fees. The budget for the 2022 (approved in the latest meeting) is the following (FtV 2022-2023, Document d): (i) Social media, Hugin & Munin, and follow-up of Council of Europe activities (€8.000); (ii) Web site maintenance and smaller update work (€4.000); (iii) DVA Secretariat (€2.000). Currently DVA seeks to secure more financial stability, possibly through finding synergies with other projects and programmes (e.g. National Tourist Route in Norway).

3.3.2 Current composition of the network by country and type of member

The DVA reports 63 members in 13 countries of EU/EEA and UK (FtV 2022-2023, Document a). These include Norway (16), Sweden (12), UK (10), Denmark (7), Ireland (4), Netherlands (4), Spain (2), France (2), Finland (1), Poland (1), Latvia (1), Estonia (1), Iceland (1), and Italy (1). According to the *Follow the Vikings* website, the Association also includes members, associate members and partners outside of Europe, making it total of 16 countries (www.followthevikings.com). Apart from the Nordic homelands of the Vikings, there are members and partners from the rest of Europe, including the UK, Isle of Man, Ireland, Germany, Spain and Italy (which joined in 2022); from the North Atlantic (Faroe, Iceland, Greenland and Newfoundland); and from the Baltic Sea region, including Finland, Latvia, Poland, Estonia and Russia (www.followthevikings.com). The DVA did not take any decision regarding the Russian partner following the cessation of membership of the Russian Federation from the Council of Europe.



Figure 1 Word cloud of the organization types of the DVA members

Follow the Vikings is a highly diverse route and DVA is similarly a diverse network. It includes museums, heritage sites, local and regional authorities, non-governmental and non-profit organizations, tourism businesses, universities and research institutes (Figure 1). Most of the members simultaneously combine multiple of the aforementioned profiles. All members are highly relevant to the Follow the Vikings theme and mission.

DVA membership is open to legal entities like public authorities, academic and research institutions, museums, businesses, and non-profit organizations whose activities correspond to the aim of the DVA, from the countries in the geographical area of interest. Applications for membership are sent to the Board for approval by a simple majority. Unsuccessful applicants are informed of the reason and can re-apply if they can subsequently demonstrate correspondence to DVA's membership requirements. Members are expected to adhere to the bylaws of the DVA and the Code of Conduct for members. Members have the following responsibilities: to abide by the statutes and standing orders of the organization; to share and promote the statement of purpose; to pay subscriptions and other charges as agreed by the organization in a timely fashion; to use the logos, brands and identifications of the organization and its partners appropriately and in line with guidelines; to maintain the highest standards of activity, interpretation and service delivery; to refrain from activity which will bring the organization into disrepute (<http://www.followthevikings.com/>). Members who are found to work against the aim of the DVA can be excluded. DVA is also open to partnerships with businesses that supply goods and services and derive income from the Visitor Experience and Attractions sector. Qualifying businesses must submit an expression of interest of becoming a partner of the DVA. Partnership status is by invitation only from the Board (FtV 2022-2023, Document a).

DVA members are required to pay an annual fee proportionate to their turnover (individual membership – €100; organizations with turnover under €500k – €125; with turnover between €500k and €999k – €350; with turnover over €1m – €1250); failure to pay the fee results in the loss of member status (FtV 2022-2023, Document a). As a result of COVID19, DVA suspended members subscriptions for one year. For 2023, the following membership rates have been suggested: for members with turnover under €500.000 – €100; with turnover €500.000-1.000.000 – €250; with turnover over €1.000.000 – €500. However, the membership fee model is likely to be further revised (FtV 2022-2023, Document c).

3.3.3 Network extension since last evaluation

The network has expanded quite rapidly, especially during and after the *Follow the Vikings* Creative Europe project up till the COVID19 pandemic. Starting from 2018 onwards, 19 new members have joined the network. These are Vikingvalley/Gudvangen Utvikling, Oseberg Viking Heritage, Vestfold & Telemark County Council, Kaupang Project, Midgard Center, Viking House, Viking Ship Tyra (Norway); Birka The Viking City, Gotlands Museum, Gotland Archaeological Field School (Sweden); Viking Events (Faroe Islands/Denmark); Kyle & Lochalsh Community Trust, Adventure Shetland, Vikings of Man (UK); Irish National Heritage Park (Ireland); Asva Viking Village (Estonia); Lionheart Tours (France); Tourism Club OGA (Latvia) ; Sepino nel Cuore ApS (Italy). These are mostly museums and heritage sites, but also NGOs and tourism businesses.

The new members are of great value to the network. For example, Birka The Viking City (Birka Vikingastaden) is located in the UNESCO heritage site on the island of Björkö in Lake Mälaren. The site is based on the historical location of Birka – considered to be the oldest city of Sweden, and one of the most important Viking trading centers of the time, active for 200 years. Birka has been the source of major archaeological finds, sometimes revolutionizing our imaginary of the whole Viking age society, as in the case of the female warrior tomb (Price at al., 2019). Similarly, the pre-Viking era ships found on Saaremaa island in Estonia, where Asva Viking Village is located, are considered to be the most significant recent archaeological finds of Viking history. Some argue that it has rewritten Viking history and brought new information about Viking raids (www.visitsaaremaa.ee). In addition, with its new members, DVA has expanded its geography, now also including Estonia, Latvia, and Italy.

3.3.4 Strategy for the network extension in the three years to come

Increasing the number of members, widening the scale and scope of membership, as well as increasing the value of the network for members and associate members are some of the key priorities for the DVA (FtV 2022-2023, Document c; Document e). For 2023, DVA has set key performance indicators related to membership, which are (i) gain 20 new members of which 5 to be paying the top level of subscription; (ii) to have at least 4 communications with members annually; (iii) to have least two physical networking or study opportunities annually; (iv) to have one new partnership or initiative annually (FtV 2022-2023, Document c; Document e).

In the Action Plan for 2023, the DVA aims to continue attracting new members primarily through improving digital communication through the website and on social media, strengthening the status of Viking Cultural Route, and developing it further with key partnerships (FtV 2022-2023, Document c; Document e). It is stated that the most important thing for DVA is to develop the *Follow the Vikings* Route together with the members attracting more visitors and improving the digital communication with the public (FtV 2022-2023, Document c; Document e). Recently, thanks to the *Follow the Vikings* Creative Europe project, the visibility of the Viking Cultural Route has increased, and so has the use of the official identity. The project also served as a catalyst for collaboration between members and transnational contacts, and has created more opportunities to promote the route and attract new members.

3.4 Communication tools

3.4.1 Current state of communication tools developed by the network (graphic charter, communication materials, logo, communication channels, signposting, maps, etc.)

DVA has put significant effort to improve its communication over the last years. Communication and visibility were galvanized by the *Follow the Vikings project*, not only for the network but for individual members. Most of the network members actively use social media, websites and other online tools. COVID19 pandemic has pushed many of the DVA members to put extra effort into their digital presence and develop digital experiences for their visitors. Especially active and successful examples are JORVIK Viking Center (reaching out to more than 3,6 million online visitors with their digital festival), Waterford Treasures and Dublinia in Ireland, Concello de Catoira in Spain, to name a few. Paradoxically, some interviewed network members even mentioned that COVID19 and the normalization of online communication has in fact brought the DVA members closer together than ever before.

DVA has paid specific attention to increasing visibility of the Viking Route of CoE and Follow the Vikings logo. This has been done in three key ways: (i) using the identity in the many and various outputs delivered through the Follow the Vikings project; (ii) encouraging members to use the formal identity in their domestic and individual activity; (iii) embedding this use formally in a Code of Practice for members which formed a key part of new Standing Orders for members adopted at the Annual General Meeting in Stockholm in 2018 (FtV 2022-23 Certification Supporting information). DVA Board also decided to capitalize on the success of the Follow the Vikings project, and change the title of the route to *Follow the Vikings – European Viking Route*.

Within the Follow the Vikings project work package titled *Discover the Vikings* the main focus was to market the Vikings and make the Viking world accessible to a wide audience. A new visual identity for the project was developed and used for its outputs. This identity has been made available to the membership and has established some traction. Follow the Viking Route has a new logo (see Figure 2). According to the Code of Conduct for the DVA members, each member has to use the logos, brands and identifications of the organisation and its partners appropriately and in line with guidelines. Since Follow the Vikings is not really a physical route but rather a network of Viking-related sites and organizations, such issues as signposting or other route-related infrastructure, is not applicable.



Figure 2 Follow the Vikings logo. Source www.followthevikings.com



Figure 3 DVA logo on publications. Source : *Hugin & Munin* magazine www.followthevikings.com

Follow the Viking Route has its own website www.followthevikings.com which is available in English. This is a new website that merged previously separate DVA and project websites. The website, which is very slick, user-friendly and up-to-date, contains a wide variety of comprehensive information for the general public, which includes information about the Viking Cultural Route with a detailed interactive map of Viking sites and their historical descriptions; detailed information about the Viking history, including the culture, everyday life, ships, raids etc., information about the main geographical regions of Viking sites; information about the DVA, its members and information for potential members; a library with a links to various media; contact information. Starting from the 2017, DVA network produces its own magazine called *Hugin & Munin*, as part of the Follow the Vikings project. The issues are available online and cover a wide variety of stories and articles on the topic of Vikings from around the world, ranging from recent archaeological finds to the TV-shows and other pop-culture. The magazine is also available on the website. In other words, the website successfully combines a number of different functions, such as education of the general population about the Viking history, updating the Viking enthusiasts on the news from the 'Viking world', promoting the Cultural Routes of the CoE, solidifying the legacy of the *Follow the Vikings* project, etc.

DVA also started to work more actively with social media, especially Facebook and Instagram. Follow the Vikings Facebook page as of 08.12.2022 has 8,637 liked subscribers and 9,371 followers. The page is regularly updated and is used to promote DVA members, inform subscribers about the upcoming events, promote the *Hugin & Munin* magazine, etc. Follow the Vikings project has established Instagram page which has been inactive since 2019, still with around 25.5 thousand followers, where it focused on posting Viking- and Nordic-themed photos. DVA also plans to create a Twitter account. The outputs from the *Follow the Vikings* project included an extensive image library based on the sites and activities of members, as well as local promotional materials to promote the DVA and the Viking Cultural Route. The image library is accessible on the website. As one outcome of the project, DVA has also published a graphic novel *Lore of the Hávamál* (Mihos et al., 2019). The expenses on social media and website maintenance as well as *Hugin & Munin* magazine are well reflected in the DVA budget.

3.4.2 Compliance with the Guidelines for the Use of the Logo “Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe”

DVA's use of logo is in line with the Guidelines for the Use of Logo of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (CoE, 2016). The logo is prominently displayed on the DVA website next to the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe own logo. It is also displayed on all information material produced, in accordance with the general requirements on the use of the Council of Europe logo. Colour and black-and-white versions are also in use. Usage of the logo are also prescribed in the DVA members' Code of Conduct.

In preparation to the evaluation, DVA has sent out a survey among its members, where one of the questions asked was 'How have you used the Council of Europe's logos on your outputs?'. Some of the respondents (Lofotr Viking Museum, Concello de Catoira; JORVIK Viking Centre) explicitly state that they use the logo in their outputs, while other respondents did not give a clear answer. Visiting DVA member websites suggests that usage of logo is visible but is not omnipresent. While it was impossible to verify if, when and how all the DVA members use CoE and *Follow the Vikings* logo, it is safe to state that the adoption has been successful to some extent. DVA explain that Vikings are already an existing "brand" and many of the DVA networks members are well established destinations with their own strong brands and identities, which might explain the difficulties of adding the CoE and *Follow the Vikings* logo. Personal communication with the interviewed DVA members engaged in tourism also suggest that they consider it a matter of prestige to be associated with CoE, but have difficulty estimating whether the usage of logo had or could have had any impact on the number of visitors. Nevertheless, after the *Follow the Vikings* project the logo has gained significantly more traction.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this report it is recommended that *Follow the Vikings – the European Viking Route* maintains its certification as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. This is one of the oldest, biggest, diverse, active and overall, most successful Cultural Routes. And ambitious *Follow the Vikings* project, co-funded by Creative Europe and managed by the DVA, has profoundly transformed the network, catapulting it to another level of cooperation, professionalization, partnership and creative cross-pollination.

The **Cultural route theme** of the Vikings is a perfect fit to the CoE requirements of consistency, clarity, comprehensiveness, geographical delineation, presence of tangible and intangible heritage, narrative and storytelling, pertinence, and appeal to the youth. The Vikings enjoy popularity, interest and enthusiasm that very few other historical figures and cultures do. The majority of general population, young and old, in Europe and beyond, has at least heard of them. Vikings are omnipresent in pop-culture and diverse cultural content, in the form of books, animation, movies, gaming, theatre etc., is generated every year. This is quite remarkable, given that Vikings were active for just around three centuries more than a millennium ago, but they managed to transform the northern world in ways that are still felt today. Beyond the clichés of raiding and pillaging (which of course indeed took place) the Vikings also exported new ideas, technologies, social and cultural practices to the peoples they encountered, including the proto-democratic form of governance. In the process they themselves altered. In a way, they continue to do so until today, changing according to the needs and requirements of the modern world.

Follow the Vikings route complies with all the key requirements of the **Priority fields of action**, which will be discussed below in further detail. First, the Route demonstrates strong commitment to **Cooperation in research and development**. Viking heritage in general is very much supported by active scientific research, especially in the Nordic countries. DVA network is very up-to-date when it comes to the ‘news’ regarding research of the Viking history, while its members update their exhibitions accordingly. The DVA itself is also contributes to awareness raising through popular science by publishing *Hugin & Munin* magazine and Facebook page. DVA has education and research institutions among their members, and/or actively cooperate with research and education institutions. Many employees of DVA member organizations have academic degrees in relevant fields of science. As evidenced by the DVA members, the representation of the Vikings at heritage sites becomes more historically accurate, diverse and scientifically informed. The Route does not have a formalized Scientific Committee yet, but the steps are already being taken towards its establishment. It is, therefore, recommended that DVA continues its efforts in this direction.

Follow the Vikings route is well suited for the **Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage**, to which DVA members contribute ‘by default’ through the very nature of member organizations and their quotidian operations, being i.e. museums, heritage sites (including UNESCO heritage sites), research institutions, tour operators focusing on storytelling and educational tours, etc. Through close links with scientific institutions DVA members strive for objectivity and authenticity when it comes to preservation and presentation of the Viking heritage, both tangible and intangible. Many of the Viking-related destinations are in rural areas, which contributes to tourism promotion and heritage preservation in less developed destinations. With their swords the Vikings have carved an important niche for themselves in history, which is worth preserving, not the least for better understanding the evolution of European societies, their culture, history, values and form of governance.

Viking theme is very attractive to children and youth, making it highly relevant for the **Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans**. Many of the DVA members have activities involving young participants and volunteers. Nearly every museum involving a Viking theme would also have some special information, activities, games, animations, etc. aimed at children and youth. Follow the Vikings project has provided multiple opportunities for youth exchanges, focusing on theatre and art. As in almost all other aspects of operations of the DVA network, COVID-19 pandemic has put on hiatus all physical exchanges, including cultural and educational youth exchanges, during the evaluation period. With the reactivation of travel and tourism, it is recommended that DVA members explore more opportunities for youth exchanges through Erasmus+, North2North and other similar programmes. It is also recommended to provide opportunities for student internships and develop closer links with university programmes focusing on history, tourism, culture and relevant fields. It is also needed to keep better track of these activities for future reporting.

Follow the Vikings are keeping up with **Contemporary cultural and artistic practice**, not the least due to the general popularity of this theme. Digital technologies and multimedia experiences are widely embraced among the DVA members. *Follow the Vikings* project with its roadshow also largely focused on contemporary theatre and street performances with a digital backdrop. The DVA also published a comic book where the Norse god Odin is transported into the modern world. A lot of DVA members also focus on keep the Viking heritage alive through animators, games, arts and crafts, and offer participatory experiences where visitors can learn about and try various practices for themselves.

Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Cultural development are an intrinsic part of the DVA and its members. Nearly all the DVA members are linked to cultural tourism in one way or another, and Viking theme is a strong tourism attraction in itself. Most of the network members have close cooperation with local, regional or national tourism bodies. Some of the members are themselves the local authorities responsible for tourism planning and development. There is, however, a great diversity in terms of size and experience among the DVA members. Some members are large and well-established tourism destinations, while others are small and less experienced. It is therefore important that all the DVA members have an opportunity to benefit from the tourism-related competence and expertise accumulated in the network. Additionally, while it is clear that sustainability is inherently present in operations of DVA members, it is recommended to keep better track of such aspects of sustainable tourism as e.g. benefits to the local communities, educating and 'nudging' tourists towards sustainable consumption choices, conservation of heritage sites, working with vulnerable groups, etc.

The network constituting **Cultural Route Network**, i.e. the DVA, is largely responsible for the success of the Viking Cultural Route, since it took over the management of the route in 2011. *Follow the Vikings* project funded by the Creative Europe has been a massive achievement for the network, elevating it to an unprecedented level of ambition, cooperation and creativity, and brought more visibility to the Viking route. During the project period (2015-2019) the network expanded rapidly, acquiring more members and expanding its geography. However, the project also had its challenges. It, for example, introduced a certain inequality among the members, between those 15 who participated and those who did not. It was also challenging to manage the project on limited resources, some DVA members lacking understanding how to work with EU projects and could not secure co-funding. Finally, the project has in a way drained the efforts of the managing members, and the COVID19 was in a way a welcomed opportunity to rest. It is, therefore, recommended to: make sure that all DVA members feel equally involved in DVA activities; search for new project opportunities, also including ones that could benefit smaller members; make sure that there is a correct information regarding the number and geography of all DVA members/partners/associate members on all the websites.

DVA has put significant effort to improve its communication and **communication tools** over the last years. Communication and visibility were especially active during *Follow the Vikings project*, not only for the network but for individual members. Most of the network members actively use social media, websites and other online tools. COVID19 pandemic has pushed DVA members to invest more in their digital presence. DVA ‘rebranded’ the route to *Follow the Vikings* and redesigned its logo after the success of the *Follow the Vikings Creative Europe* project. DVA has paid specific attention to increasing visibility of the Viking Route of CoE and *Follow the Vikings* logo, and also required its use in the Code of Practice for members. Usage of logo is in compliance with the Guidelines for the Use of the Logo “Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe”. DVA has updated its website and uses social media (Facebook). There are plans to reactivate Instagram and start Twitter. Improving digital communication through the website and on social media is stated among the key priorities for the future development of the DVA. It is recommended to continue efforts in this direction. Further, it is rather unclear to what extent DVA members are using the logo and how. It could also be interested to gain a better understanding into whether the use of logo has an impact on visibility and attractiveness of tourist destinations.

Overall, *Follow the Vikings* managed by the DVA is an impressive example of vibrant, active, and constantly evolving network, powered by Viking enthusiasts from all walks of life. All the interviewed members greatly appreciate being part of the network, pointing out international cooperation, networking, exchange of ideas as its main benefit. Therefore, it is a great asset to have them on board as a European Cultural Route.

CRITERIA		Recommendation s previous evaluation 2018-2019	Has the route addressed the recommendation since the last evaluation?		Recommendation s current evaluation 2022-2023
			YES	NO	
I. Cultural route theme			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
II. Priority fields of action	Cooperation in research and development	Establish a scientific committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The DVA already concrete plans to establish a scientific committee. It is recommended to continue these efforts.
		Compile a list of research experts that new and smaller members with less established academic links might particularly find useful	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The DVA already concrete plans to establish a scientific committee. It is recommended to continue these efforts.
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

	Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Harness the interest of youth in the Vikings and get more active with attracting international students, interns, etc.
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Contemporary cultural and artistic practice		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Cultural development		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep better track of DVA member activities and efforts in relation to sustainability principles
III. Cultural Route Network			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Make sure all DVA members feel treated equally regardless of size
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Develop more projects where more members could contribute regardless of their size and available resources
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep better track of all the members and their activities in relation to the Cultural Route and beyond
Communication Tools			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Continue efforts towards greater digital presence
			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Keep better track of the logo use among members

5. List of references

Documents submitted by the *Follow the Vikings Cultural Route* (as per requirements)

- a) Certification form completed (Document 1);
- b) Self-assessment grid completed (Document 2);
- c) Updated legal statutes of the network;
- d) Updated list of members of the network (in excel format; following the template provided on section 2.2 "Network Governance");
- e) Ordinary and extraordinary General Assembly meeting reports of the past three-years;
- f) Financial information (Current operational budget, financial information of the past three years; 3-year Budget forecast; Extra-budgetary funding);
- g) Forecast 3-year Programme of Activities.

Other sources

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6. Annex 1: Expert field visit and interviews with the network management and members

Interviews

Name	Role, Organization	Country	Date
Geir Sør-Reime	Secretary of DVA	Norway	15.11.2022
Edmund Southworth	Former Chair of DVA	Isle of Man, UK	21.11.2022
Eskil Vagn Olsen	Board member, Museum Vestsjælland	Denmark	17.11.2022
Anna-Liisa Öispuu	Asva Viking Village	Estonia	15.11.2022
Ben Baillie	Board member, Lionheart Tours	France	15.11.2022
Jack Veldman	Board member, Archaeon	Netherlands	14.11.2022
Alberto García	Mayor, Concello de Catoira	Spain	23.11.2022
Anne Charlotte Ytter	Director, The Viking Museum	Sweden	29.11.2022
Anna Töräng, Anders Klintholm Lilliehöök and colleagues	Director, managers, Gunnes Gård	Sweden	28.11.2022
Sarah Maltby	Board member, JORVIK Viking Centre	UK	21.11.2022

Field Visits

Organization	Location	Date
Gunnes Gård	Upplands Väsby, Sweden	28.11.2022
The Viking Museum	Stockholm, Sweden	29.11.2022

7. Annex 2: Expert assessment checklist

		QUESTIONS	Yes	No		
3.1 THEME		1	Does the theme of the Route represent a common value (historical, cultural, or heritage) to several European countries?	1		
		2	Does the theme of the route offer a solid basis for youth cultural and educational exchanges?	1		
		3	Does the theme of the route offer a solid basis for innovative activities?	1		
		4	Does the theme of the route offer a solid basis for cultural tourism products development?	1		
		5	Has the theme been researched/developed by academics/experts from different regions of Europe?	1		
3.2 FIELDS OF ACTION	3.2.1 Co-operation in research and development	6	Does the Route offer a platform for co-operation in research and development of European cultural themes/values?	1		
		7	Does the Route play a unifying role around major European themes, enabling dispersed knowledge to be brought together?	1		
		8	Does the Route show how these themes are representative of European values shared by several European countries?	1		
		9	Does the Route illustrate the development of these values and the variety of forms they may take in Europe?	1		
		10	Does the Route have a network of universities and research center working on its theme at the European level?	1		
		11	Does the Route have a multidisciplinary Scientific Committee?		1	
		12	Does the Scientific Committee work on its theme at the European level?		1	
		13	Does the Scientific Committee carry out research and analysis of the issues relevant to its theme and/or activities on the theoretical level?		1	
		14	Does the Scientific Committee carry out research and analysis of the issues relevant to its theme and/or activities on the practical level?		1	
		3.2.2 Enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage	15	Do the Route activities take into account and explain the historical significance of tangible and intangible European heritage ?	1	
			16	Do the Route activities promote the values of the Council of Europe?	1	
			17	Do the Route activities promote the brand of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe?	1	
			18	Does the route work in conformity with international charters and conventions on cultural heritage preservation?	1	
			19	Do the Route activities identify, preserve and develop European heritage sites in rural destinations?	1	
	20		Do the Route activities identify, preserve and develop European heritage sites in industrial areas in the process of economic restructuring?		1	
	21		Do the Route activities valorize the heritage of ethnic or social minorities in Europe?		1	
	22		Do the Route activities contribute to a better understanding of the concept of cultural heritage, the importance of its preservation and sustainable development?	1		
	23		Do the Route activities enhance physical and intangible heritage, explain its historical significance and highlight its similarities in the different regions of Europe?	1		
	24		Do the Route activities take account of and promote the charters, conventions, recommendations and work of the Council of Europe, UNESCO and ICOMOS relating to heritage restoration, protection and enhancement, landscape and spatial planning (European Cultural Convention, Faro convention, European Landscape Convention, World Heritage Convention, ...)?	1		
	3.2.3 Cultural and educational exchanges of young Europeans	25	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to develop a better understanding of the concept of European citizenship?		1	
		26	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to emphasize the value of new personal experience through visiting diverse places?		1	
		27	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to encourage social integration and exchanges of young people from different social backgrounds and regions of Europe?		1	
		28	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to offer collaborative opportunities for educational institutions at various levels?	1		
		29	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to place the emphasis on personal and real experiences through the use of places and contacts?	1		
		30	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to set up pilot schemes with several participating countries?	1		
		31	Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to give rise to co-operation activities which involve educational institutions at various levels?	1		
		3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic practice	32	Do the Route's cultural activities promote intercultural dialogue and multidisciplinary exchange between various artistic expressions in European countries?	1	
			33	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage artistic projects that establish links between cultural heritage and contemporary culture?	1	
			34	Do the Route's cultural activities encourage innovative cultural and contemporary art practices* connecting them with the history of skills development?	1	
	35		Do the Route's cultural activities encourage collaboration between culture amateurs and professionals via relevant activities and networks creation?*	1		
	36		Do the Route's cultural activities encourage debate and exchange - in a multidisciplinary and intercultural perspective - between various cultural and artistic expressions in different countries of Europe?	1		
	37		Do the Route's cultural activities encourage activities and artistic projects which explore the links between heritage and contemporary culture?	1		
	38		Do the Route's cultural activities highlight the most innovative and creative practices?	1		
	39		Do the Route's cultural activities link these innovative and creative practices with the history of skills development?***	1		
	3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development		40	Do the Route's activities (relevant to sustainable cultural tourism development) assist in local, regional, national and/ or European identity formation?	1	
		41	Do the Route's activities (relevant to sustainable cultural tourism development) actively involve 3 major means to raise awareness of their cultural projects: print, broadcast and social media?	1		
		42	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between urban and rural communities and cultures?	1		
		43	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between developed and disadvantaged regions?		1	
		44	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between different regions (south, north, east, west) of Europe?	1		
		45	Do the Route's activities promote dialogue between majority and minority (or native and immigrant) cultures?	1		
		46	Do the Route's activities open possibilities for co-operation between Europe and other continents?	1		
		47	Do the Route's activities draw decision makers' attention to the necessity of protecting heritage as part of the sustainable development of the territory?	1		
		48	Do the Route's activities aim to diversify cultural product, service and activities offers?	1		
		49	Do the Route's activities develop and offer quality cultural tourism products, services or activities transnationally?	1		
		50	Do the Route's activities develop partnerships with public and private organisations active in the field of tourism?	1		
		51	Did the network prepare and use tools along the route to raise the number of visitors and the economic impacts of the route on the territories crossed?		1	

3.3 NETWORK	52	Does the Route represent a network involving at least three Council of Europe's member states?	1	
	53	Was the theme of the route chosen and accepted by the network members?	1	
	54	Was the conceptual framework of the route founded on a scientific basis?	1	
	55	Does the network involve several Council of Europe member states in all or part of its projects?	1	
	56	Is the network financially sustainable?	1	
	57	Does the network have a legal status (association, federation of associations, EEIG,...)?	1	
	58	Does the network operate democratically?	1	
	59	Does the network specify its objectives and working methods?	1	
	60	Does the network specify the regions concerned by the project?	1	
	61	Does the network specify its partners and participating countries?	1	
	62	Does the network specify the fields of action involved?	1	
	63	Does the network specify its overall strategy in the short and long term?	1	
	64	Does the network identify potential participants and partners in Council of Europe member states and/or other world countries?	1	
	65	Does the network provide details of its financing (financial reports and/or activity budgets)?	1	
	66	Does the network provide details of its operational plan?	1	
	67	Does the network append the basic text(s) confirming its legal status?	1	
	3.4 COMMUNICATION TOOLS	68	Does the Route have its own logo?	1
69		Do all partners of the network use the logo on their communication tools?	1	
70		Does the Route have its own dedicated website ?	1	
71		Is it the website available in English and French?		1
72		Is it the website available in other languages?		1
73		Does the network use effectively social networks and web 2.0?	1	
74		Does the network publish brochures on the Route?	1	
75		If yes, are the brochures available in English?	1	
76		If yes, are the brochures available in French?		1
77		Is the title of "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" present on all communication materials (including press releases, webpages, publications, etc.)?	1	
78		Is the certification logo present on all communication materials?	1	
79		Is the certification logo used in accordance to the guidelines for its use (size and position,...)?	1	
80		Are the logos (Cultural Route + certification logo) provided to all the members of the Route?	1	
81		Does the Council of Europe certification logo appear on road signs/ boards indicating the cultural route?		1
SCORE			66	15

8. Annex 3: List of acronyms, figures and tables

List of Figures

Figure 1. Word cloud of the organization types of the DVA members

Figure 2. Follow the Vikings logo. Source www.followthevikings.com

Figure 3. DVA logo on publications. Source : Hugin & Munin magazine
www.followthevikings.com

List of acronyms

DVA Destination Viking Association

CoE Council of Europe

Photo documentation from the field visits



The Viking Museum in Stockholm, Sweden



Animators welcome the visitors at The Viking Museum in Stockholm, Sweden



Reconstructed Viking houses at Gunnes Gård, Upplands Väsby, Sweden



Management of Gunnes Gård Viking open air museum



Books for children and adults at The Viking Museum, Stockholm



Viking-themed souvenirs at The Viking Museum, Stockholm



Arts and crafts workshop at Gunnes Gård



Animator sitting on a replica of a Viking ship at The Viking Museum in Stockholm



Employee of the Viking Museum in Stockholm demonstrating necklace made from replicas of authentic Viking jewellery



Animator at Viking Museum in Stockholm during storytelling for the visitors