

2024/25 ENG

# Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Certification cycle 2024-2025

Candidate Route:

**ROMEA STRATA**

Independent expert report

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





## **Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Certification Cycle 2024-2025**

### **Independent Expert report**

#### *ROMEA STRATA*

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*\*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

The Romea Strata is a Pilgrimage Route to Rome, reaching it from the Baltic region – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – south through Poland, Czech Republic, Austria and Italy; such a route has been used before the Christian era as a commercial route (e.g.: to bring Amber to markets in the South) and has supported several other human mobilities across the centuries. It would complete the offer by the Council of Europe when it comes to the historical pilgrimage routes to Rome, together with the Via Francigena and the Romea Germanica, while covering the south to north-east direction, from Italy to the Baltic Sea, hence including seven countries.

A Romea Strata association has been established in 2018 to promote and manage the route, with a variety of members both in terms of geographical distribution as well as in terms of typology (public administration and NGOs being the two most represented categories). Furthermore, it has demonstrated an excellent capacity to secure project funding, an important competence to ensure economic sustainability and sustained growth. This second application synchronizing also with the Jubilee year 2025, a major Christian event that has already attracted a global interest (well beyond Europe) and is likely to bring to Rome millions of visitors (for religious/spiritual or cultural reasons).

Its activities and projects have been designed and conducted in line with the Council of Europe requirements, and major efforts have been taken to address and overcome the three concerns that lead to a rejection of the application I the previous certification cycle.

This document – fully aligned with the CoE template – sill provide a detailed view on the Romea Strata and of its fulfilling of CoE's requirements; it is based on the careful analysis of the current submission and on a comparison with the previous one in light of the feedback given by the CoE. Furthermore, it is based on a first-hand appreciation by the expert, thanks to a site visit that allowed to check individual elements and to secure further documentation.

The following table provides an overview of the expert's evaluation.

| Criteria                                                                                                                                   | Excellent | Very good | Satisfactory | Poor | Unsatisfactory | Assessment |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|--------------|------|----------------|------------|
| Compliance with the eligibility <b>criteria for themes</b> listed in Resolution CM/Res(2023)2, I. List of eligibility criteria for themes. |           | X         |              |      |                | Very good  |
| Compliance with the eligibility <b>criteria for actions</b> listed in Resolution CM/Res(2023)2, II. List of priority fields of action.     |           | X         |              |      |                | Very good  |

|                                                                                                                                      |   |  |  |  |  |           |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|-----------|
| Compliance with the eligibility <b>criteria for networks</b> listed in Resolution CM/Res(2023)2, III. List of criteria for networks. | X |  |  |  |  | Excellent |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--|--|--|--|-----------|

## 2. Introduction

The applicant Cultural Route “Romea Strata” presents itself as “an important European route, traveled by pilgrims from Central and Eastern Europe on their way to Rome: from the Baltic Sea they crossed Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic and Austria until they crossed the Alps and entered the north-east of Italy through the town of Tarvisio” (<https://www.romeastrata.org/en/>).

The “unifying” narrative – a Christian pilgrimage to Rome – is common with other routes: Via Francigena, Via Romea Germanica and Cyril and Methodius Route. However, its uniqueness stands in a different trajectory, that comes down (or goes up, if you like) to include Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania: by reaching up to the Baltic Sea, it stretches from North to South to cover a very extensive and varied space. Such variety is well mirrored by the variety of members, which currently include public administration (#21), NGOs (#21), religious bodies (#6), SMEs (#5), and academia (#3), well distributed along the whole route and among the different involved countries.

The association “Associazione Europea Romea Strata E.T.S.” (AERS) as e– established in 2018 – manages and promotes the route. It is legally headquartered in Aquileia (Italy), with operation offices in Vicenza (Italy).

The “Romea Strata” Route had already applied in the 2022-2023 Certification Cycle, but was rejected. This new application has been done after significant efforts to address the provided comments have been taken.

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This document is based on a thorough assessment of the provided dossier, including the output of the previous evaluation. Moreover, the expert was able to visit the route’s operation offices in Vicenza (Italy) and the place where it is legally headquartered: Aquileia, where all annual meetings are held; the expert was able to meet in person or online most of key stakeholders. Additional materials requested by him have furthermore been provided by the applicant.

The expert believes that the provided materials as well as the various and in-depth conversations he has had, are a solid base for this Report and ensure a rich information onto which a final, informed decision, can be made by the relevant bodies.

### 3. Main Body Evaluation

In the following sections, the different dimensions to be considered in a Cultural Route's evaluation are presented and discussed.

#### 3.1 Cultural Route Theme

In this paragraph, the cultural route theme, its historical and cultural context, as well as the Council of Europe values represented by the theme are addressed, discussed and assessed.

##### 3.1.1 Definition of the theme of the route

The Romea Strata connects the Baltic Sea to Rome (Italy) as a route going north-south (and vice versa) and crossing seven European countries – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, and Italy. While its origins are rooted in pre-Christian eras, as a commercial route connecting the Baltic with the Mediterranean Sea, it has been consolidated as a pilgrimage route travelled by people from northern and central European countries aiming to visit Rome, as the capital city of Christianity.

As such, and due to its very large span, it is a stratification of different itineraries, belonging to a number of trajectories – including some of those bringing to Santiago in Spain or arriving from the East, as in the case of its overlapping with the Cyril and Methodius route, entering Italy from Tarvisio.

Its main theme is then the connection of different countries and cultures, aiming at promoting a deeper mutual (inter)cultural understanding, aware of both deep common links – unified by the pilgrimage to/from Rome – as well as of differences due to a very rich and complex historical canvass.

If we consider CoE's definition of a Cultural Route: "a cultural, educational heritage and tourism co-operation project aiming at the development and promotion of an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with a transnational importance and significance for the understanding and respect of common European values"<sup>1</sup>. Romea Strata clearly embodies the "itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route" dimension.

According to the application, the mission of the Association managing the route "is to strengthen the Romea Strata by promoting the knowledge of its archaeological, artistic, architectural, literary and gastronomic heritage, raising awareness on this ancient way and encouraging, through the journey, a culture of gratuitousness, giving and hospitality that can generate and create encounter and fruitful cross-contamination between different people and cultures, aware of their religious diversities".

##### 3.1.2 Historical and cultural context

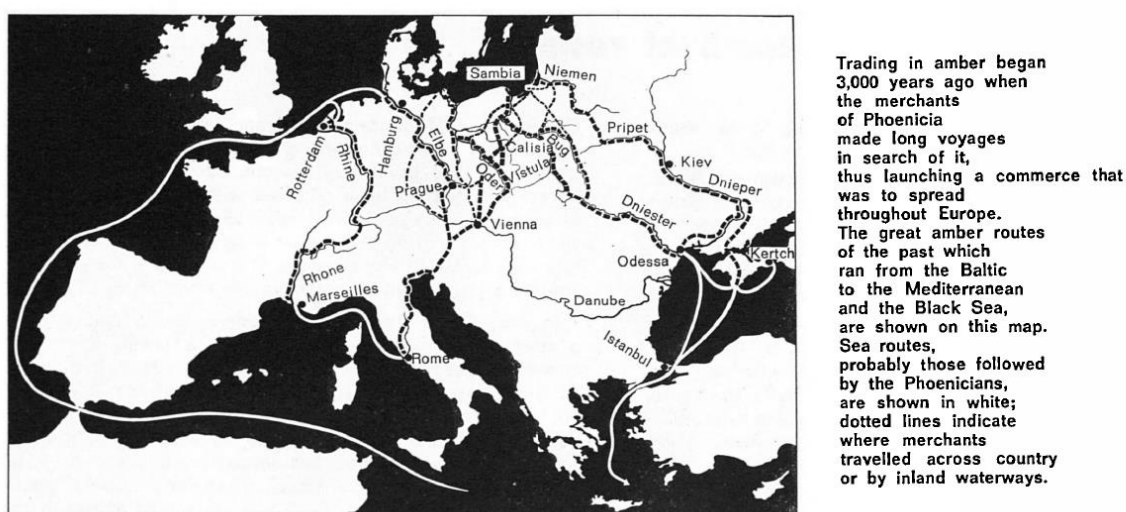
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<sup>1</sup> Resolution CM/Res(2013)66 confirming the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA), adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 18 December 2013 at the 1187bis meeting of the Ministers' Deputies.

After the first submission, Romea Strata has made a major effort to further its analysis of the history of such a route. In particular, the newly appointed director of the Scientific Committee, dr. Giovanna Rech, has produced a paper on the topic, which convincingly outlines the state-of-the-art of research on this route<sup>2</sup>.

As in all other similar cases, Romea Strata should not be considered as something, designed and built as a single initiative, on the contrary, it is a network of routes created in different periods and used for different purposes, which has found its unifying dimension in the Christian pilgrimage to/from Rome, hence its name: Romea – aiming at Rome – and Strata – both a way built through different layers as well as a stratification of different itineraries and stories.

If we go back to the pre-Christian era, this route has been used to bring amber from the Baltic Sea to Rome, as presented in the next image.



Picture 1. Amber routes which ran from the Baltic to the Mediterranean (source: UNESCO<sup>3</sup>).

In Christian times, it has supported the connection between Rome and the new areas that were converting to the Christian religion; in particular, it has also served to connect Aquileia, one of the most important patriarchates, to its northern affiliated dioceses.

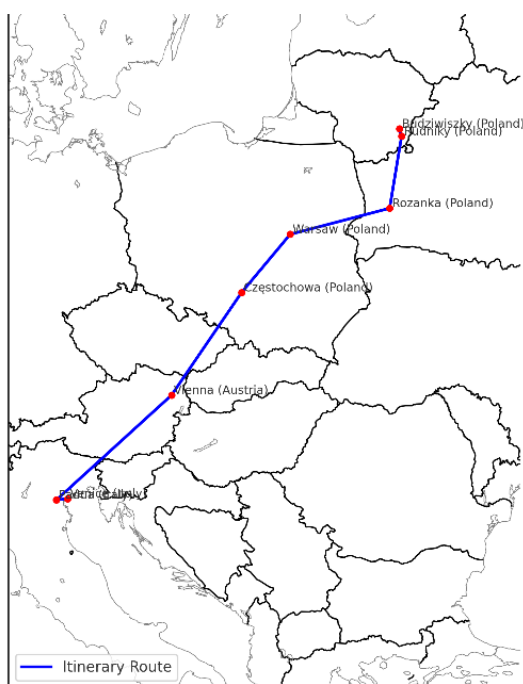
While there is abundant evidence of pilgrims, religious and political figures travelling from the Northern areas to Rome (and vice versa), to pray and to meet the Pope and the Roman curia, there is not a single, comprehensive account of this route, similar to the case of Sigericus' diary

<sup>2</sup> Rech, G. (2024). The Romea Strata Route Between History and Heritage. A Spiritual, Diverse, and Interreligious Project from the Baltics to Rome. Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202410.1648.v1>

<sup>3</sup> Grzedzielski, W. (1966). The Amber routes of antiquity. The UNESCO Courier: a window open on the world, XIX/3, 20-22. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000020890>; see also, more recently: Cellarosi, P. L. (Ed.). (2017). The Amber Roads: The Ancient Cultural and Commercial Communication Between the Peoples: Proceedings of the 1st International Conference about the Ancient Roads, Republic of San Marino, April 3-4, 2014. Museo Fiorentino di preistoria "Paolo Graziosi".

for the Via Francigena, where he detailed the 79 stages of his travel back from Rome to Canterbury<sup>4</sup>.

However, after the Reformation, in 1575 a Lithuanian noble person, Jurgis Radvilas, educated in Protestantism, who later on became Catholic and was elected Cardinal, provided a diary of his first trip to Italy in 1575<sup>5</sup>. He left on the 11th of October 1575 and crossed the Tarvisium pass to enter the actual Italian territories at the end of November. This document “shows several towns which are on the actual path of the Romea Strata”<sup>6</sup> and can be considered the most comprehensive and extensive account of the Romea Strata, stretching from Lithuania to Italy. Due to the fact that no map exists (yet) of such an itinerary, the expert has produced one through OpenAI (using GPT-4.o). The following image reconstructs the itinerary.



Picture 2. Itinerary of Jurgis Radvilas as reconstructed through his diary in Latin (OpenAI, GPT-4.o, prompts by L. Cantoni).

Based on the available historical evidence and current studies, the proposed itinerary of Romea Strata can be traced with confidence from Italy up to Lithuania. When it comes to its further extension to the North, from Lithuania to Latvia and Estonia (an area once called Livonia), there is clear evidence of many connections with Rome – a travel done by several members of the clergy as well as by pilgrims, members of the academia, merchants and members of military orders (just to name a few categories) – but, so far, no clear path documented in a diary style. The trajectory proposed by Romea Strada is then to be considered

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.viefrancigene.org/en/sigerics-itinerary/>

<sup>5</sup> Antanavičius, D. (2005). Jurgio Radvilo pirmosios kelionės į Italiją dienoraščio originalas. Senoji Lietuvos literatūra, 19, 201-241. <https://etalpykla.lituanistika.lt/fedora/objects/LT-LDB-0001:J.04~2005~1367155731307/datastreams/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC/content>

<sup>6</sup> Rech, G. (2004).

inferential, even if very likely because (i) it is constrained by physical and geographical boundaries that dramatically reduce possible alternatives, and (ii) it overlaps with local documented itineraries, recently rediscovered as leading also to Santiago – Camino Estonia, Latvia, and Lituano, paths that are not members of the Federation of Saint James Routes, but of AERS.

Due to its extension, this Route has been – partially – crossed also by major historical figures, among them, the application dossier mentions as examples Copernicus, Tiho Braha, Galileo Galilei, and Peter of Abano.

Furthermore, even if not interested in its pilgrimage nature, one should not forget the relevance of the Romea Strata involved regions when it comes to a major Jewish presence with its traditions, and recent tragic history due to Nazi ideology.

### 3.1.3 Council of Europe values represented by the theme

Considering the very wide area covered by the Romea Strata Route, it has linked – and still links and connects – several countries and cultures in space and in time. By doing so, and especially by reaching as far North as Estonia, it embodies the very goals of the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes program, in particular, it supports "an understanding of Europe's history on the basis of its physical, intangible and natural heritage, so as to bring out the links which unite its various cultures and regions"<sup>7</sup> and it can help achieve "the identification of European values and a common European cultural heritage [...] [by] [...] tracing the history of peoples, migrations, and the spread of the major European currents of civilisation in the fields of philosophy, religion, culture, the arts, science, technology and trade"<sup>8</sup>. In particular, Romea Strata can support a better understanding of religion, culture and trade, while widening the understanding of common European values from the Mediterranean to North-East, reaching up to the North Sea.

Hereafter a first, positive assessment of the seven eligibility criteria for themes, according to the list updated in 2023 by the Council of Europe<sup>9</sup>; some elements supporting this assessment will be found in the following paragraphs.

- (1) the proposed route is representative of European values and more than three countries are involved (in fact, seven), and have been closely connected by the route as a Christian pilgrimage itinerary, as well as an economic and cultural exchange road;
- (2) the theme has been and is being researched and developed by several experts from different disciplines and regions of Europe, as demonstrated by the Scientific Committee of AERS and its outputs;
- (3) the theme is illustrative of European memory, history and heritage and contributes to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe; it also crosses several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as a testimony of the relevance and outstanding value of the itinerary;

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<sup>7</sup> Resolution CM/Res(2023)2 revising the rules for the award of the "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" certification. (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 5 April 2023 at the 1462nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies).

<sup>8</sup> Resolution CM/Res(2023)2.

<sup>9</sup> Resolution CM/Res(2023)2.

- (4) the theme lends itself to cultural and educational exchanges for young people and hence is in line with the Council of Europe's ideas and concerns in these fields; additionally, during the Jubilee year 2025, the presence of the youth on the Romea Strata is likely to dramatically increase, providing unlimited opportunities to meet, exchange and grow together;
- (5) the theme permits the development of initiatives and exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development, with a peculiar focus on sustainable development of concerned rural areas, where the majority of the Romea Strata unfolds itself;
- (6) the theme lends itself to the development of tourist products in partnership with tourist agencies and operators aimed at different publics, including school groups, as already well documented through several experiences;
- (7) the theme is clearly reflected in the name of the cultural route; is concise and easily understandable.

Romea Strata's theme and activities do embody and exemplify several dimensions underlined by the conventions of the Council of Europe and other international organizations. In particular, it highlights the European Human Rights convention through its Walk for Peace yearly initiative, aimed at promoting a culture of peace and mutual respect. The same can be said about the European Cultural Convention and the Faro Convention, through a promotion and celebration of diverse cultures and intercultural dialogues, moreover, it is focused on involving local communities in co-designing activities and co-managing the route itself. Furthermore, along the Romea Strata in Italy there are three FARO Heritage Communities: Faro Community Candiana, Faro Community Pontecasale and Faro Community Anguillara Veneta.

If we consider the European Landscape Convention, Romea Strata might support it through the promotion of sustainable practices and interactions with the environment, examples might include "forest signposting through birdhouses and the 'walk and pick up' project that promotes an environmentally friendly mentality by allowing pilgrims to collect small waste in special bags". Also the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue is relevant here, as the Romea Strata fosters intercultural encounters along the route, supporting meaningful interactions with locals and constant dialogue among those who walk it. The yearly initiative "Walk for Creation" aims at promoting a dialogue focused on the environment and ecology, supporting a dialogue among different perspectives on a theme that unites not only Protestant and Catholic, but also believers of all religions as well as non-believers.

As already mentioned, the Romea Strata encounters several UNESCO world heritage sites (up to forty just in Italy), among them, the one of Aquileia plays a major role for the network, which holds there its yearly general assemblies. Aquileia synthesizes somehow the nature of the Romea Strata: it has had a major role in pre-Christian era as well as for Christianity, where it has promoted the creation of several dioceses both toward North as well as toward South. The proposed Cultural Route is also very well focused on living – intangible – cultural heritages of the areas it crosses.

### 3.2 Fields of Action

In this paragraph, the five required fields of action are addressed, namely: (i) Co-operation in research and development; (ii) Enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage; (iii) Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans; (iv) Contemporary cultural and artistic practice; (v) Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development.

### 3.2.1 Co-operation in research and development

Romea Strata is supported by a Scientific Committee of 21 members, led by dr. Giovanna Rech. The members are coming from all seven countries, and cover a wide inter-disciplinary spectrum, including Archaeology, Architecture, Economy, Geography, History, Religious sciences, Theology and Tourism. Collectively, such group appears to be very well equipped to research the very complex texture of layers – or “strata”, in Latin – of the proposed route.

If we move from individual researchers to an institutional perspective, 18 academic centres are involved in researching the route, covering all the involved countries and the different mentioned disciplinary perspectives.

So far, Romea Strata has managed to secure relevant resources needed to support both research and development, especially through European Union project funds. During the visit, the expert was able to clarify why in several cases not the Associazione Europea Romea Strata E.T.S. has been the main beneficiary of said projects, but instead the Fondazione Homo Viator, which hosts its operational offices. On the one side, that was due to specific requirements for the main applicant body – solely or better fulfilled by the Foundation and not by an Association – on the other side, the link with the Romea Strata was explicit, and the application dossier has detailed the resources that directly contributed to the Romea Strata development. In fact, in some cases such calculation was erroneously missing: the applicant has then made available to the expert, upon his request, an updated table with all the missing data<sup>10</sup>.

Such data demonstrate an exceptional – way above average, based on the expert’s experience – capacity to submit and win competitive projects that can support the development of the route, an asset of great importance, which can ensure the sustainability of the Romea Strata along time.

### 3.2.2 Enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage

The above-mentioned paper by dr. Rech, the director of Romea Strata’s Scientific Committee, outlines a map for the current research on the route. It also indicates relevant research gaps, and reasons why the knowledge levels on various sections of the route are so different. In particular, areas that belonged to the former Soviet Union in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, have not focused their research on a past linked with pilgrimage and positive relations with western countries, due to biases against religion in general and against many values – especially linked with democracy and human rights – at the core of the Council of Europe<sup>11</sup>. This explains why research on those regions is particularly needed, and why its promotion, also supported by the above indicated funded projects, is of the utmost importance so to fill the current gaps and further enrich the understanding of this route. However, the next plenary workshop of the scientific committee has been planned in Riga (Latvia), in June 2025, to share the latest research on the Romea Strata: “Unveiling the unknown: latest discoveries on the Romea Strata” (see its tentative program among the additional documents).

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<sup>10</sup> All additional/updated documents requested by the expert during his site visit are available at the following link: <https://tinyurl.com/romeastrata>.

<sup>11</sup> According to Dzehtsiarou & Coffey (2019), in fact, even Russia, after it accessed CoE in 1996, has demonstrated “persistent and clear disregard of the values and aims of the CoE”. Dzehtsiarou, K., & Coffey, D. K. (2019). Suspension and Expulsion of Members of the Council of Europe: Difficult Decisions In Troubled Times. *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 68(2), 443-476. [www.doi.org/10.1017/S0020589319000101](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020589319000101)

In the application document, three main research lines are indicated: (i) religious, (ii) historical and (iii) cultural ones.

The first line explores the hagiography of relevant saints, religious practices and festivities; the second one aims at “a careful study of archives, testimonies, and diaries of pilgrims, the Scientific Committee explores themes related to the Amber, Salt, Iron, and Silk Roads, the Roman Roads, and the Longobard Ways heritage along the Romea Strata”; the last one, focused on culture, can explore historical figures not related with pilgrimage as well as all types of tangible and intangible heritage, including “gastronomic traditions, architecture, art and music”.

Those research lines are further detailed on the website, outlining nine research areas: “1. Routes of communication (routes of amber, salt, iron, silk, wool, Roman routes for the transit of goods [...]); 2. Holiness and popular devotion [...]; 3. Pilgrim testimonies and diaries [...]; 4. The welcoming places [...]; 5. The socio-cultural fabric (religious art and architecture along the way, shared religious rites and identity, crafts, sacred music, gastronomic traditions, the way of science and knowledge with Copernicus, Keplero and Galileo Galilei ...); 6. Religious dynamism in Central Europe [...]; 7. Rome, city of St. Peter and Paul [...]; 8. Daily sustainability and tourism product (local involvement, tourism enhancement processes of religious heritage, new marketing tools for local tourism systems ...); 9. The formal and informal pilgrim”.

Members of the Scientific Committee and others have contributed to enrich the available knowledge on the Romea Strata through several publications, they have also organized meetings and Conferences on the topic, as indicated among the projects; furthermore, the Route itself has published some scientific materials, available for download from its website<sup>12</sup>.

### 3.2.3 Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans

The consortium includes, among its members, entities that work directly with this segment, namely the Pedagogical University of Cracow as well as the Slow Tourism Schools Network, TGS (Youth and Social Tourism) Eurogroup and Italian. Thanks to them and to other players, several initiatives designed for young Europeans have been run.

Through various activities and experiences, the Romea Strata network aims to highlight the educational value of sustainable travel, and of pilgrimage/slow tourism in particular, so to raise awareness among young people and educational institutions.

Two initiatives, launched after the first application, have been designed particularly to attract young audiences; such events take place simultaneously in all countries, to ensure a wider coverage and higher understanding of the unity of the Route. They are the “Walk for Peace” and the “Walk for Creation”, which take place in March and in September, respectively. Such thematic initiatives, according to the expert, are particularly promising, and should be further promoted, so to become major unifying events for Romea Strata.

Furthermore, in view of the 2005 Jubilee, a great interest by young generations to walk the Route is to be expected, as documented, for instance, by the large participation to the World Youth Day 2023 in Portugal, which has attracted more than 350'000 young participants.

If we focus on some relevant projects, activities and experience dedicated to the youth, we can outline the following ones:

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.romeastrata.org/articoli-comitato-scientifico/>

- Young Pilgrims of Hope: Cultural Routes for Intercultural Dialogue.
  - an Erasmus+ project designed to lead to the 2025 Jubilee year. It “intends to carry out a reflection on pilgrimage routes as a means of involving young people and inviting them to return to their common European cultural roots, to experience cultural diversity within Europe, to discuss identity, active citizenship and European values”.
- Piccoli Romei in Cammino (Little “Romei” on the Way)
  - part of the projects: rurALLURE and Reconnecting With Your Culture. It “seeks to involve all schools, from kindergartens to high schools, so that they commit themselves to spreading awareness among pupils that they are the heirs of the heritage of their territory”.
- H.O.T. – Historical Overmountain Trail
  - An Interreg Italia-Austria project, “dedicated to the reenactment of the historical and cultural heritage of the Cramars (itinerant merchants of Italy) and the Samer (medieval freight forwarders and peddlers in Austria), also includes a gamification activity for young people”.
- Romea Strata Jubilee packages for youth
  - Packages of 3 to 4 days along the Romea Strata in Italy, designed for young people
- Publications on “schools on the road”
  - Three books outlining the experience of a teacher leading groups of students along Italian sections of the route.
- An international Youth Exchange project
  - financed by the Estonian National agency, within the frame of Erasmus+

### 3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic practice

While this dimension might be less relevant for Romea Strata, it has promoted, supported and included several relevant initiatives when it comes to contemporary cultural and artistic practices. Among them, photographic exhibitions as well as photographic and literary contests (Italy and Estonia), a show on the five largest world religions (Austria), public decorations (Latvia), several public events and conferences, a gastronomic contest (Italy), music festival (Lithuania), a concert (Austria), a theatrical show (Italy)

Among them, the Exhibition at the Niguliste Museum, “There and Back: The Pilgrimages of Livonians in Medieval Europe”<sup>13</sup>, where the Romea Strata participated with an event, appear to be of particular interest, especially to foster further research in the area.

### 3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development

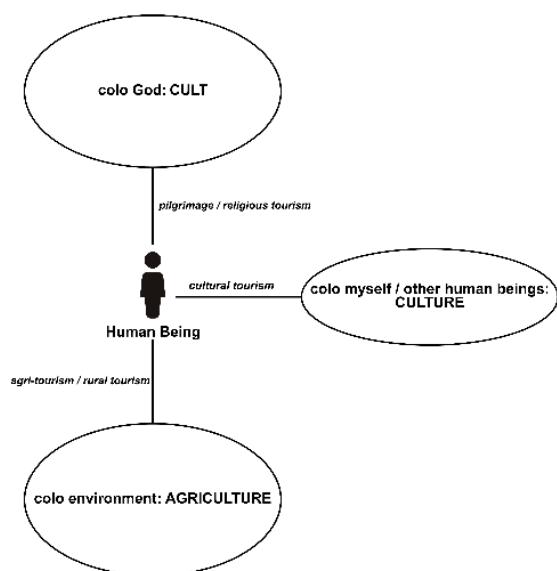
Romea Strata stands out for its focus on sustainable tourism, offering a detailed support to interested travellers. Several projects, well distributed along different member countries, are aimed at supporting travellers/pilgrims along the Route.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://nigulistemuuseum.ekm.ee/en/syndmus/there-and-back-the-pilgrimages-of-livonians-in-medieval-europe/>

On this topic, two considerations should be done: on the one hand about the capacity of integrating several elements within the Romea Strata theme, and on the other, about a careful support to contemporary travellers/pilgrims.

In recent times, a more integrated and systemic view is finding its space in the cultural debate, able to encompass many different dimensions of human experience and history. Such a process has been seen – for instance – in the emerging complementarity and integration between tangible and intangible heritage (which have found their space among the UNESCO Conventions), or in a further focus on the role of local communities in defining and interpreting their cultures and heritage – as highlighted by the Faro Convention of the Council of Europe. Such synthetic view can be presented through the very origin of the term Culture from the Latin verb “colo”, meaning to look after, to care for something. Such verb could be applied to three different domains of human experience: caring for the natural environment: agriculture, cultivating human beings (current and next generations): culture, articulating the relationship with God and cultivating the spiritual dimension: cult.



Picture 3. The three layers of Latin “colo” and their mirroring in tourism (Source: De Ascaniis & Cantoni<sup>14</sup>).

All of those elements, individually and collectively, can become drivers and attractors for travellers, who can explore and experience the different layers of culture according to different interests, perspectives and backgrounds.

This approach fits well within the current studies on the complex galaxy of religious tourism, moving from a quite oppositional paradigm emphasizing two opposite poles of the ‘pious

<sup>14</sup> Ascaniis, S. D., & Cantoni, L. (2022). “Introduction”. In Handbook on Heritage, Sustainable Tourism and Digital Media. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.  
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781788970082.00007>

pilgrim' vs. 'the secular tourist' toward a more nuanced continuum in-between them<sup>15</sup>, particularly characteristic of the (post-)modern traveller, always interested also in the spiritual dimension<sup>16</sup>.

| THE PILGRIM - TOURIST PATH |                 |                   |                 |                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Pilgrimage                 |                 | Religious Tourism | Tourism         |                 |
| A                          | B               | C                 | D               | E               |
| SACRED                     |                 | FAITH/PROFANE     | SECULAR         |                 |
| Pious Pilgrim              | Pilgrim>Tourist | Pilgrim=Tourism   | Pilgrim<Tourist | Secular Tourist |

Picture 4. Religious tourism (elaborated on: Smith, 1992).

Among the many initiatives taken by the Romea Strata and its members along the Route, one is worth of a special mention here: the “Pilgrimage promotion tour”, which is structured as a relay race. Unfolded along different years, it encourages participants to walk part of the Route and to meet different people at the border. It started in 2021, involving 300 participants in Poland, Czech Republic, Austria, and Italy; it continued in 2022, covering all the way from Aquileia to Rome, involving 600 participants; in 2024 it has been run in Poland, with 40 participants.

Romea Strata includes several tourism-related entities among its members, and has developed dedicated offers in several countries. In consideration of its directionality to Rome, it has elaborated in a particular way the welcoming of travellers/pilgrims to this city, leading to a carefully designed welcoming service, of particular interest also in view of the 2025 Jubilee year. Such activities have been recently recognized and endorsed by the Holy See. In a letter dated 12.12.2024 and signed by the Vatican Secretary of State, one can read “Your commendable efforts have ensured that the Romea Strata is now an easily accessible itinerary for all those who wish to set out on their way to Rome. The project acquires a special significance in view of the now imminent Ordinary Jubilee of the year 2025 and will benefit the many faithful who, even from those countries of North Eastern Europe, will want to take an active part in this great event. In fact, the presence of your Association is already visible in Rome, thanks to its many volunteers who, since May 2024, have made themselves available to welcome and orient pilgrims who, arriving on foot and by bicycle *ad limina Santi Petri*, wish to receive the well-deserved *Testimonium peractae peregrinationis* in the Vatican Basilica”.

Several projects and initiatives have taken place also to support the welcoming of travellers in more remote and rural areas, so to contribute to sustainability in tourism and to sustainable development of rural areas. In the Austrian leg of the Route, due to a commendable experience of the partners (and an extensive focus of Austrian tourism bodies on pilgrimages), some packages on Romea Strata have been awarded the Austrian Ecolabel.

<sup>15</sup> See, for instance, Raj, R., & Griffin, K. (Eds.) (2018). *Conflicts, Religion and Culture in Tourism*. Wallingford & Boston: CABI. <https://www.cabidigitallibrary.org/doi/book/10.1079/9781786390646.0000>

<sup>16</sup> De Ascaniis, S. & Cantoni, L. (2016). “Pilgrims in the Digital Age: a research manifesto”. *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 4/3, n. 3. <https://doi.org/10.21427/D7Z120>

A number of projects have been funded to improve the touristic offer and infrastructures of Romea Strata, for instance the Ruralities and rurAllure projects, which belong to the Horizon Europe program (the second project being aimed at fostering “symbiosis between the rural environment and the pilgrimage routes”). A project is also focused on the Baltic region: Baltic Heritage Routes – Development of Heritage Tourism Infrastructure in the South Baltic Area.

Furthermore, information about the Romea Strata is already available on official tourism websites of several regions in Austria and Italy, in this last country it is also listed by the Ministry of Tourism<sup>17</sup>.

### 3.3 Cultural Route Network

#### 3.3.1 Overview of institutional /legal structure of the network

The Romea Strata has been established as a legal entity as an association: Associazione Europea Romea Strata E.T.S. in November 2018, headquartered in Aquileia (Italy), Via Giulia Augusta 18, but with operational offices in Vicenza.

Hereafter its purpose, as indicated in article 1.2 of the Statute: “The primary purpose of Associazione Europea Romea Strata is to rediscover ancient European pilgrimage routes and to make them walkable today for the pilgrims of the third millennium. Through this experience, pilgrims will rediscover the ancient roots of Europe, and through them they will nourish their human experience with new blood, thus directing their steps towards a new future. In particular, the Association intends to rediscover the routes traveled by those pilgrims who departed from Central-Eastern Europe, from the Baltic Sea (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), and who made their way across the countries of Central Europe (Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, Slovenia) to then cross the Alps and to reach the North-East of Italy. From there, in Venice, they could sail off to Jerusalem, or they could reach Tuscany and then head west towards Santiago de Compostela or head south to go to Rome, the Eternal City”.

The association is fully democratic – one member one vote – and all major decisions are taken by the General Assembly. Executive tasks are delegated to the Board of Directors, composed by three to nine members with a four-year mandate (with the possibility to be re-elected). The association is led and represented by a President and a Vice-President, elected by the General Assembly. The official working languages, as set in article 18, are Italian and English.

Minutes of all meetings are fully available and well taken.

#### 3.3.2 Overview of the financial situation of the network

The network, for its operations, can count on the membership fees – which are set to be at a minimum of 150 euros per partner, with an average of 200 euros in the years 2018-2024 – on EU and other projects, as well as on in-kind support.

Due to an exceptional capacity to get project funding, and thanks to a very professional workforce, AERS seems to be well equipped to continue its operations in a sustainable way. Considering the coming Jubilee year, the expert would expect even and increase in available resources.

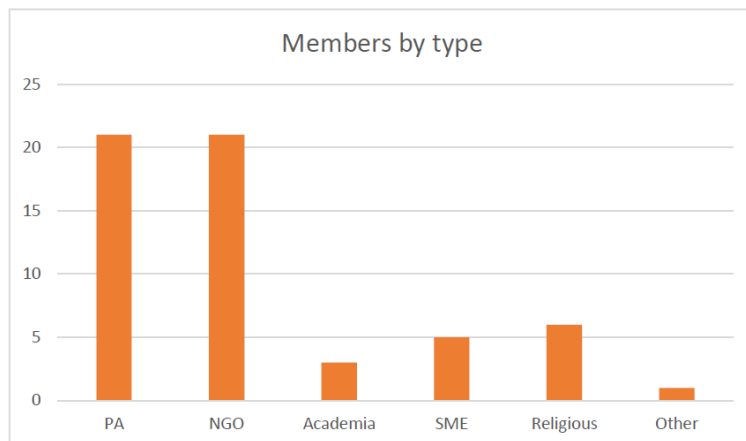
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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ministeroturismo.gov.it/catalogo-dei-cammini-religiosi-italiani/>

### 3.3.3 Current composition of the network by country and type of member

The expert has requested an updated list of members, divided by countries and typologies, which is available among the updated documents; it shows a well balance distribution among the countries and the different categories. Hereafter a graph repre

senting the members according to their category, which shows a perfect equilibrium between Public Administration and Non-Governmental Organizations, followed by Religious entities, Small and Medium Enterprises, Academic Institutions and others. In the last years, new members have joined the association, indicating its vitality and capacity to attract new partners.



Picture 5. Members by type (source: AERS, November 2024).

The expert has met in person the President, Raimondo Sinibaldi, as well as Grazia Viola Gaudiano (Project developer) and Beatrice Vencato (Social media and communication). He has also had several interactions with the association manager, Aleksandra Grbic, who at the time of the visit was on maternal leave. The expert has met online the board of directors, composed by members from each involved country: Austria (2), Czech Republic, Estonia, Italy (2), Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. He has also met in person the director of the Scientific Committee, Giovanna Rech, as well as several partners from Austria, who joined him while in Aquileia as well as the partners from Aquileia, including the mayor of the city, the president of the site managing body of the UNESCO site as well as the president of the body managing the Basilica. While in Aquileia, he has also met a representative of the tourism office of that Italian Region.

No member from Russia is present among the members.

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

In the submitted application, a strategy is outlined to enlarge the network along the five main types of members:

- public bodies (municipalities, regions)
- civil society organizations (culture, education, ...)
- tourism stakeholders
- universities and research centers
- religious and ecclesiastical bodies

An updated list has been compiled of members to be contacted and invited: there is evidence of a constant onboarding of new members.

### 3.4 Communication tools

Hereafter, the state-of-the-art of the Route communication tools and practices.

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

Romea Strata appears to be fully compliant with the requirements. In particular, it has a logo and it has developed signposting on the route, as follows, South to Nord: (i) Italy: completed; (ii) Austria: signposting through stickers on the various sections; (iii) Czech Republic: same as Austria; (iv) Poland: signposting under way, directional arrows placed on part of the route, in November 2024 media have announced that signposting had been placed in the Municipality of Wadowice; (v, vi, and vii) Baltic republics: due to the fact that Romea Strata overlaps with three 'Caminos', already signalled, the logo of Romea Strata is going to be integrated on the already existing signposts.

The operational headquarter is fully visible and provides a number of publications and digital information – through QR codes – to its visitors.



Pictures 6 & 7. Romea Strata operational headquarter signs (source: pictures by the expert).

Furthermore, the Route manages a website in English and Italian as well as channels on the following social media: Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

According to the expert, the website is functional, well designed and visited (digital analytics have been made available upon request). The same can be said about the Instagram channel – which even registered a peek of more than 71k views on a reel – and about Facebook. Further reflections and efforts should be made when it comes to YouTube and LinkedIn – whose discontinuation might be considered to ensure an optimal effort/benefit relation.

A special mention requires the availability of the GPS and KML tracks of every stage of the itinerary in all involved countries. Such service is offered through Outdooractive, a leading European developer of tourism technology and cartography.

Guides and leaflets are available, especially for the Italian and Austrian part of the route, which are the most walked ones. Further materials is available in English, German, Italian and other languages.

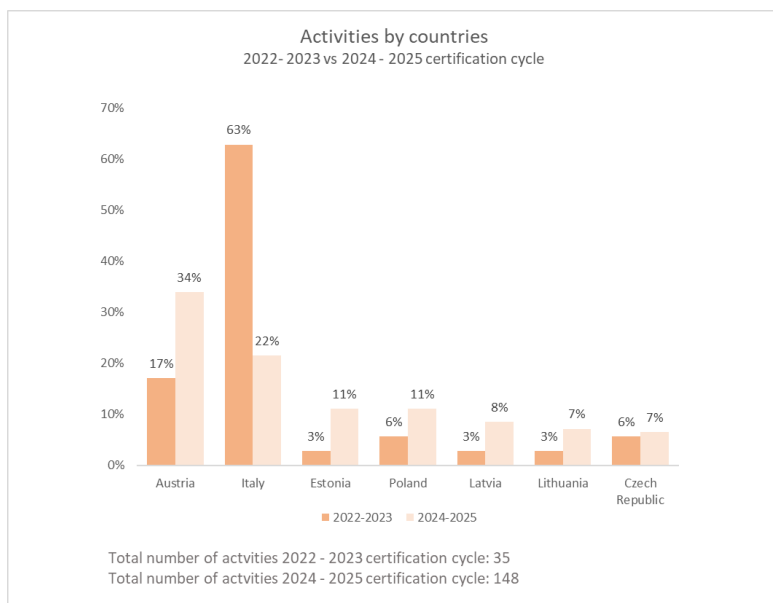
## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

While the Report so far has followed the ordinary structure, it is now time to directly address the issues that were pointed out in the previous certification cycle, when the application of Romea Strata was not accepted. Let's tackle them one by one.

The first issue was that the “geographic and historic narrative does not demonstrate having a solid scientific justification as a cohesive and authentic route”. To address such comment, the Scientific Committee has prepared a state-of-the-art document, which summarizes the main sources and scientific studies on the topic. Based on the current scientific state-of-the-art, one can say that the Romea Strata existed as a pilgrimage route to Rome (and beforehand already as a commercial route). Its trajectory is well established and documented from Poland to Rome – hence including four countries: Poland, Czech Republic, Austria and Italy. North of Poland, hence for the three Baltic countries, while the existence of a route leading to Rome is not at all in doubt, its trajectory is still partially inferential, even if quite likely due to the existence of national routes and of clear geographical and physical constraints. Such inferentiality is mainly due to a lack of research on the topic because of the biases of the Communist period. The expert is confident that, due to the current competences and composition of the Scientific Committee, the missing pieces of the puzzle can be found and integrated. While the Council of Europe might consider to temporarily exclude the Baltic countries from the Romea Strata, including only the four best documented countries, according to the expert that might penalize them further, in an historical moment in which the links with the western and southern Europe appear to be of the utmost importance for them. Such desire to nurture those links emerged very clearly, even vividly, during the online meeting the expert had with the Board of Directors.

The second concern had been that activities “implemented by the network do not provide enough evidence to demonstrate compliance with the following fields of action: ‘Cultural And Educational Exchanges for Young Europeans’”. In the resubmission dossier as well as in the ad-hoc follow-up document, AERS has provided evidence of activities and projects in this domain, as above detailed. Furthermore, based on the trend seen with the World Youth Days in this beginning of Millenium, the Romea Strata is very likely to attract a great number of youth willing to visit Rome in the Jubilee year 2025, who might also learn about the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe while walking to Rome.

The third concern was about “a predominance of activities in one country (Italy) and is therefore not sufficient to demonstrate the association’s capacity to pian and implement activities as a cohesive transnational network”. On the one side, being a directional route to Rome, the closer a country is to the destination, the more it is likely to be affected by such route (the same can be said not only of other pilgrimage routes, but also of routes with specific polarity/ies, e.g.: the Leonardo Da Vinci one). However, the Romea Strata management has taken this comment very seriously, up to the point that in the new submission, the activities have not only increased dramatically in numbers, but have been fully rebalanced in favour of Austria, as represented in the following graph. Such rebalancing was quite clear during the meeting the expert had in Aquileia with the Austrian delegation that demonstrated a major commitment as well as great competence and energy.



Picture 8. Activities by country (source: AERS).

From a systemic viewpoint, the Romea Strata would complete the network of pilgrimage routes leading to Rome certified as Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: East of the Via Francigena and the Via Romea Germanica (and West of the Cyril and Methodius route). It goes much further North, beyond Poland, so to include Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

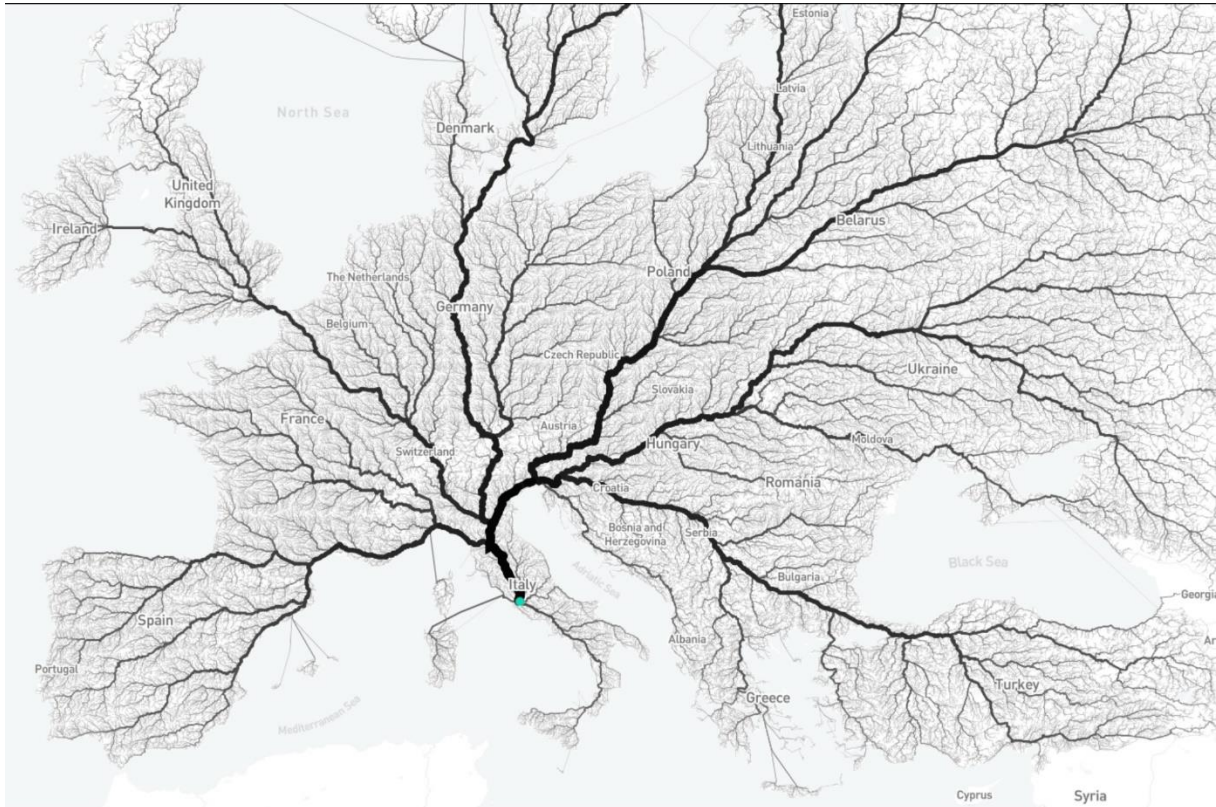
According to the Swiss-born Protestant theologian and historian Philip Schaff (1819-1893), “All roads pointed towards the Imperial City [Rome], and started from its Milliarium Aureum”<sup>18</sup>. Such point is the very root of the ancient proverb “All roads lead to Rome”, found the first time in 1175 within the *Liber Parabolarum* by the French poet Alain de Lille: “mille viae ducunt homines per saecula Romam” (a thousand roads lead men forever to Rome).

While the itinerary North of Poland has been mainly inferentially traced (for the above seen reasons), the proposed itinerary superposes quite well also to a recent automatic reconstruction of the “All the roads lead to Rome” proverb, as created in 2018 by the Moovel Lab<sup>19</sup> in Germany: “From a grid of 26,503,452 square kilometers covering all of Europe, the researchers defined 486,713 starting points that were superimposed on the continent’s street map. Then an algorithm was developed for the project that calculated the shortest route between each of the points and the Italian capital. The resulting cartography reveals a route map that, in fact, leads to Rome. The thicker lines represent the most used routes and are the roads where the smaller routes converge”<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Schaff, P. (1867/1886). Ante-nicene fathers: The Apostolic fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus [Roberts, A. & Donaldson, J, Eds]. [Electronic reprint] Grand Rapids, MI, USA: CCEL. 1886, v.1 p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20210125021250/https://www.move-lab.com/project/roadstorome/>.

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.archdaily.com/893076/apparently-all-roads-do-lead-to-rome>.



Picture 9. “All roads lead to Rome”, by Moovel Lab (source: ArchDaily; arrow added).

Hereafter the synoptic image proposed by Romea Strata, which highlights its belonging to the main pilgrimage routes leading to Rome.



Picture 10. Map of the major routes to Rome (source Romea Strata<sup>21</sup>).

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.romeastrata.org/materiali/>

While the three main concerns have been duly addressed, according to the expert, the remaining requirements are (still) met or exceeded, when it comes to Cooperation in research and development, Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage, Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans, Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Cultural development, with an emerging relevance for the Contemporary cultural and artistic practices. In particular, a focus on sustainable tourism and on sustainable development of rural areas are to be underlined and appreciated.

The Cultural Route network appears to be large, diversified and well balanced both country-wise as well as considering the different typologies of members. It has a clear democratic structure, and is well managed thanks to availability of needed resources and the competence and passion of its members. Also the economic sustainability of the Romea Strata does not raise any concern because of the availability of project funding and of competences to design and submit further projects.

From the viewpoint of communication, Romea Strata runs a quite extensive, updated and well-designed website, as well as four social media channels, two of them very active (a reflection is needed whether or not to maintain and further promote the others, or to discontinue them because not needed).

| CRITERIA |                                         | Fulfilment of certification criteria by the candidate network                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I.       | Cultural route theme                    | The proposed route is representative of European values and more than three countries are involved (in fact, seven), and have been closely connected by the route as a Christian pilgrimage itinerary, as well as an economic and cultural exchange road. The theme has been and is being researched and developed by several experts from different disciplines and regions of Europe, as demonstrated by the Scientific Committee of AERS and its outputs. It is illustrative of European memory, history and heritage and contributes to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe; it also crosses several UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as a testimony of the relevance and outstanding value of the itinerary. The theme lends itself to cultural and educational exchanges for young people; it also permits the development of initiatives and exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development. Furthermore, it lends itself to the development of tourist products in partnership with tourist agencies and operators aimed at different publics, including school groups, as already well documented through several experiences. |
|          | Cooperation in research and development | The Scientific Committee covers several disciplines as well as encompasses all the involved countries. Its scientific production is extensive, and – based on a clear state-of-the-art document and of a roadmap for further research, is working toward further explorations of Romea Strata and its several dimensions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|          | Enhancement of memory, history and      | The theme is definitely apt to this goal, ensuring a large coverage – in space and time – of Europe and its history and cultures. The                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

|                               |                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| II. Priority fields of action | European heritage                                      | continuity between being an ancient merchant route and becoming later on a Christian pilgrimage (while not omitting many other dimensions) ensures that the Romea Strata can provide an added value to the comprehension of European Heritage, its complexity and interdependency. Furthermore, its stretching from the Mediterranean up to the Baltic Sea (and vice versa) ensures a – very much needed – focus on the many links between Northern and Central Europe with the Mediterranean. |
|                               | Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans | Many activities and projects have been launched and done in this domain. Furthermore, the way Romea Strata is managed and communicated appears to be well in line with the contemporary young traveller and might even see a major increase in interest during the 2025 Jubilee year.                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|                               | Contemporary cultural and artistic practice            | Several cultural-related initiatives have taken place, ranging from photographic exhibitions to theatre and music, just to name a few. Further reflections on its links with cultural and creative industries might be done in the future.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                               | Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Cultural development  | In this area, Romea Strata excels, with several projects and initiatives on sustainable tourism and sustainable development of remote and rural areas.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| III. Cultural Route Network   |                                                        | The Network is organized as an international association. Its functioning and decision-making processes are fully democratic. It is economically sustainable and exceptionally able to secure needed resources also through competitive project funding.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| IV. Communication Tools       |                                                        | Communication is well managed at all levels, from the signalling of the operational offices to signposting (which need however to be competed), from website to social media communication. Also GPS traces are made available, so to ensure a constant support of all travellers along the whole route.                                                                                                                                                                                       |

## 5. List of references

All documents required for the evaluation had been duly submitted by the candidate route.

Hereafter a list of all provided files as distributed in a file system.

In the folder ...\\CoE\\7\_ADDITIONAL INFORMATION\\requested\_received\_by\_the\_expert\\ the additional documents submitted after the application are listed (see the link provided above).

| Name                                                                        | Extension | Folder Path                                                                                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1_CERTIFICATION_REPORT_FORMAT_EN_2024-2025_cantoni_Romea_Strata_202412.docx | .docx     | ...\\CoE\\                                                                                                                      |
| 2024_FIELD VISIT_expert_lorenzo_cantoni.docx                                | .docx     | ...\\CoE\\                                                                                                                      |
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| Romea Strata Field Visit_Final Agenda_19.10.24.docx                         | .docx     | ...\\CoE\\                                                                                                                      |
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| Annex 1.0_Jurgis Radvila Diary of travelling to Rome.pdf                    | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°1 GENERAL INFORMATION\\                   |
| Annex 1.1_Patronage of the Romea Strata_Poland.pdf                          | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°1 GENERAL INFORMATION\\                   |
| Annex 1.2_Cyril and Methodius & AERS agreement signed.pdf                   | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°1 GENERAL INFORMATION\\                   |
| Annex 2.1_2.2 c)_List of potential partners.xlsx                            | .xlsx     | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°2 RESPONSIBLE NETWORK\\                   |
| Annex 4.1_New approach to Rome_Project_17.01.2022.pdf                       | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°4 ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE NETWORK\\ |
| Annex 5.1_Romea Strata MAP 2024_route only.pdf                              | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°5 VISIBILITY\\                            |
| Annex 5.2_Romea Strata MAP 2024_data and pictures.pdf                       | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\1_APPLICATION FORM\\Annexes to the Certification Form (Document 1)\\Annex N°5 VISIBILITY\\                            |
| AERS Statute.pdf                                                            | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\2_STATUTES\\                                                                                                          |
| 2.2 a) List of network members 2024.xlsx                                    | .xlsx     | ...\\CoE\\3_MEMBERS\\                                                                                                           |
| 2021 AERS General Assembly_CONVOCATION and AGENDA.pdf                       | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Convocation and Agenda\\                                                 |
| Annex1 President Report and AERS members.pdf                                | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Convocation and Agenda\\                                                 |
| Annex2 Fields of Action.pdf                                                 | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Convocation and Agenda\\                                                 |
| Annex3 The Scientific Committee.pdf                                         | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Convocation and Agenda\\                                                 |
| Annex4 AERS Budget 2020.pdf                                                 | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Convocation and Agenda\\                                                 |
| 2021 AERS General Assembly_MINUTES.pdf                                      | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Minutes\\                                                                |
| Annex1_President Report.pdf                                                 | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Minutes\\                                                                |
| Annex2_Draft Agreement.pdf                                                  | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Minutes\\                                                                |
| Annex3_Fiorella Dallari Slide Presentation.pdf                              | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Minutes\\                                                                |
| Annex4_The Scientific Committee.pdf                                         | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Minutes\\                                                                |
| Annex5_slide presentation_Romea Strata in Poland.pdf                        | .pdf      | ...\\CoE\\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\\General Assembly 2021\\Minutes\\                                                                |
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| 2023 AERS General Assembly AGENDA.pdf                 | .pdf  | ...\CoE\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\General Assembly 2023\Convocation and Agenda\ |
| Annex1_President 4 year Report.pdf                    | .pdf  | ...\CoE\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\General Assembly 2023\Convocation and Agenda\ |
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| Annex6_Budget 2023.pdf                                | .pdf  | ...\CoE\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\General Assembly 2023\Convocation and Agenda\ |
| Annex7_Statute proposed amendment.pdf                 | .pdf  | ...\CoE\4_GENERAL ASSEMBLIES\General Assembly 2023\Convocation and Agenda\ |
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## **6. Annex 1: Expert field visit and interviews with the network management and members**

Hereafter the program of the site visit.

### **Friday, 15 November 2025**

Arrival in Vicenza

Meeting with Raimondo Sinibaldi, President of the European Association Romea Strata, Grazia Viola Gaudiano (Project developer) and Beatrice Vencato, social media and communication manager)

### **Saturday, 16 November 2025**

To the Romea Strata operational Headquarter, Corso Fogazzaro 254 Vicenza

Online Meeting with the AERS board of directors (President, Vice-president and all representatives from each country)

Meeting with Giovanna Rech, Chair of the AERS Scientific Committee (in presence) and Fiorella Dallari (online), AERS honorary member and former chairman of the Scientific Committee

Meeting with the AERS secretariat on Project Development and Financial Sustainability (President and project developer)

Lunch with AERS management and then transfer Vicenza > Aquileia and further discussion with the President and the project developer

Tour in the Aquileia city along the Romea Strata route and visit of archeological site, museum and Basilica (Romea Strata Miliarium for 2025 Holy Year)

Meeting with some AERS members (PromoturismoFVG, Municipality of Aquileia, Fondazione Aquileia, Fondazione So.Co.Ba)

Dinner with the AERS members

### **Sunday, 17 November 2025**

Meeting with Austrian AERS members (Benedikt be-WEG-t, ARGE Pilgern in Kärnten, Tourism Agency Mittelkärnten, Diocese of Gurk, municipality Vordernberg, regional tourist promotion agency of Styria, representative of the Monastery St. Lambrecht)

## 7. Annex 2: Expert assessment checklist

| EXPERT ASSESSMENT CHECK-LIST |                                                |                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                      |                      |              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| QUESTIONS                    |                                                |                                                                                                                         | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | No                                                                                                                                   | Comments<br>(if any) |              |
| 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                    | Not relevant |
|                              | 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                                 |                                                                                                                         | 25                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to develop a better understanding of the concept of European citizenship? | 1                    |              |

|                        |                                                             |    |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |   |   |  |
|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| 3.3<br>NET<br>WO<br>RK | 3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic practice           | 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 |   |  |
|                        |                                                             | 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 |  |
|                        | 3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development | 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 |  |
|                        |                                                             | 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 |   |  |
|                        |                                                             | 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  |   | In English |
|                         | 72 | Is it the website available in other languages?                                                                                                            | 1  |   | In Italian |
|                         | 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.)? |    |   |            |
|                         | 78 | Is the certification logo present on all communication materials?                                                                                          |    |   |            |
|                         | 79 | Is the certification logo used in accordance to the guidelines for its use (size and position,...)?                                                        |    |   |            |
|                         | 80 | Are the logos (Cultural Route + certification logo) provided to all the members of the Route?                                                              |    |   |            |
|                         | 81 | Does the Council of Europe certification logo appear on road signs/ boards indicating the cultural route?                                                  |    |   |            |
| SCORE                   |    |                                                                                                                                                            | 70 | 6 |            |

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

Hereafter the list of pictures.

- Picture 1. Amber routes which ran from the Baltic to the Mediterranean (source: UNESCO).
- Picture 2. Itinerary of Jurgis Radvilas as reconstructed through his diary in Latin (OpenAI, GPT-4.o, prompts by L. Cantoni).
- Picture 3. The three layers of Latin “colo” and their mirroring in tourism (Source: De Ascaniis & Cantoni).
- Picture 4. Religious tourism (elaborated on: Smith, 1992).
- Picture 5. Members by type (source: AERS, November 2024).
- Pictures 6 & 7. Romea Strata operational headquarter signs (source: pictures by the expert).
- Picture 8. Activities by country (source: AERS).
- Picture 9. “All roads lead to Rome”, by Moovel Lab (source: ArchDaily; arrow added).
- Picture 10. Map of the major routes to Rome (source Romea Strata).

Acronyms.

- AERS: Associazione Europea Romea Strata
- CoE: Council of Europe