

CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE 10TH ANNUAL ADVISORY FORUM

"Resilient and Sustainable Cultural Routes – Innovating Out of Crisis"

29 September - 1 October 2021
Online, live streaming from Kutaisi (Georgia)

CONCEPT NOTE

The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme

The [Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Programme](#), launched in 1987, provides a framework for the development of thematic routes that demonstrate how the heritage of the different countries and cultures of Europe can contribute to a shared cultural heritage. The Cultural Routes embody the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe: human rights, cultural democracy, cultural diversity and identity, dialogue, mutual exchange and enrichment across boundaries and centuries.

The [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe \(EPA\)](#), was established in 2010 (*Resolution CM/Res(2010)53*), to enable closer co-operation between states particularly interested in the development of Cultural Routes. The EPA on Cultural Routes reinforces the potential of Cultural Routes for their cultural co-operation, sustainable territorial development and social cohesion, with a particular focus on themes of symbolic importance for European unity, history, culture and values and the discovery of less well-known destinations.

Its headquarters are located at the European Institute of Cultural Routes in Luxembourg, the technical agency of the programme set up in 1998 as part of a political agreement between the Council of Europe and the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg.

Over the past 34 years, the programme has continuously grown, counting today 45 certified Cultural Routes and bringing together more than 3,000 network members in over 60 countries in Europe and beyond. Explore all the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe on our webpage at: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/by-theme>

Sustainability is an important dimension of the Cultural Routes Programme and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe are required to meet eligibility/certification criteria through the “development of initiatives and exemplary and innovative projects in the field of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development” ([Resolution CM/Res\(2013\)67](#)).

The promotion of cultural heritage and sustainable cultural development are priority fields of action for the Cultural Routes through which they must:

- Take account of local, regional, national and European identities;
- Promote dialogue between urban and rural cultures, between regions in the south, north, east and west of Europe, and between developed and disadvantaged regions;
- Promote dialogue and understanding between majority and minority, native and immigrant cultures;
- Open up possibilities for co-operation between Europe and other continents through the special affinities between certain regions;
- Concern themselves, in the field of cultural tourism, with raising public awareness, drawing decision makers' attention to the necessity of protecting heritage as part of sustainable development of the territory and seek to diversify both supply and demand, with a view to fostering the development of quality cultural heritage appreciation with a European dimension;
- Seek partnerships with public and private organisations active in the field of tourism in order to develop tourist products and tools targeting all potential publics.

Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe do not only act to propel the sustainable development of communities and regions across Europe but also act to promote cross-cultural understanding, inter-cultural dialogue and the development of partnerships and collaboration.

Background

We are experiencing unprecedented times as the impact of COVID-19 is felt across the world: the pandemic has undoubtedly altered every aspect of peoples' lives and transformed the way we travel. There are several challenges that Cultural Routes and the culture and heritage sector in general will need to address in the near future, including the need for sustainable and resilient development models and digital

transition (providing digital access to heritage and cultural destinations, new trends in heritage management, enhancement of visitor experience). Our responses to today's challenges are certainly going to reshape the cultural industry of tomorrow.

In order to assess the current impacts of the pandemic for the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the Secretariat of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes launched a series of initiatives:

- Cultural Routes' responses to Covid-19 – Survey
- Thematic report on "Major Risks and Resilience"
- Cycle of webinars: "Cultural Routes Dialogues: challenges and opportunities post Covid-19"
- The Training Academy 2022 taking place in Fontainebleau, France will address challenges and opportunities

The Annual Advisory Forum 2021 will be another occasion to exchange views on resilience opportunities for Cultural Routes and their relevance in the post pandemic scenario. Despite the difficulty to implement the activities planned for the last year and a half, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe have remained very active, showing a high innovative and resilient capacity to adapt to the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many Routes have launched a series of online activities such as webinars, conferences, virtual pilgrimages, digital exhibitions, digitalisation of contents, adaptation of existing cultural contents to new audiences among others.

More than ever, the importance of culture and creativity for society is clear: millions of people are turning to the appreciation of cultural heritage and "slow tourism" as a source of comfort, well-being and connection. Cultural Routes represent an ideal way to link the concepts of cultural heritage and sustainable cultural development, to maintain and thrive local employment and to protect the natural and cultural resources of a region.

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In this new context of profound changes, Cultural Routes can open up opportunities for rethinking the cultural industry for the future with the purpose of developing more resilient and sustainable approaches:

- The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe has become a prestigious quality label recognised across Europe and beyond by visitors and public authorities alike. Its successful methodology applied for more than 30 years, its rigorous evaluation procedure and its award by a renowned international organisation guarantee the excellence, innovation and

high-quality standards of the programme. This attracts an increasing number of travellers seeking to discover European heritage in a sustainable and innovative way.

- Cultural Routes stand out as promoters of proximity travelling, allowing visitors and inhabitants to discover local heritage and offering opportunities to reactivate local economies.
- Each Route is a transnational network of destinations acting together and mutually increasing their visibility vis-à-vis the general public. It is of paramount importance that 90% of the Routes cross rural areas, integrating off-the-beaten-track destinations into the main European cultural offer.
- Cultural Routes allow exploring alternative modalities such as rural and slow tourism, with a focus on exchanges with local populations, preservation of natural and cultural heritage and the use of sustainable means of transportation. They enable synergies and cooperative strategies between main regions and less developed areas.
- They can also encourage community participation, including young people, and support SMEs and local economies, engaging and empowering local populations and providing opportunities for economic recovery.
- Cultural heritage activities and contemporary artistic events along the routes can have a strong impact on heritage appropriation and enhancement, helping communities value their unique cultures and traditions.

The Council of Europe Cultural Routes 10th Annual Advisory Forum

In the context of the [Council of Europe Cultural Routes 10th Annual Advisory Forum, Kutaisi, Georgia](#), EPA member States, certified Cultural Routes, candidate networks, representatives of international organisations and other relevant stakeholders are able to virtually come together, share their experiences and learn from one another.

While recognising the resilience of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe vis-à-vis the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on cultural heritage management, the 10th Annual Advisory Forum will provide an important platform to discuss the challenges faced, the opportunities for the development of cultural heritage and cultural tourism management and the critical role that the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe play in this current scenario. The Forum will pay particular attention to the following themes:

- **Digital shift** – While having great potential for the development of digital cultural offers, there is still a need within some of the Routes to harness this potential through creative packaging of the Route's resources and to take this to a wider market. Finding time and identifying resources to enable this can be problematic. New tools are necessary to access new audiences and markets.

- **Sustainability** – Strategic management of the tourist flows along the Routes to ensure effective connectivity and long-term sustainability is an important challenge. Cultural Routes can truly act as catalyst for sustainable tourism as the world is turning to “slow tourism” and new approaches of tourism and cultural offers. Good practices and ways to reformulate strategies in the field of sustainable cultural heritage will be presented.
- **Resilience** – Facing the pandemic, new regulations and restrictions were imposed to Cultural Routes and the cultural sector in general, underlining the capacity of resilience as a crucial asset for Cultural Routes.
- **New patterns in cultural consumption:** explore new visitor behaviours, change in cultural heritage and cultural tourism demands, new niches and markets, alternative tourism modalities and transportation means, digital / remote access to cultural heritage and cultural facilities, slow tourism, less-known destinations, etc.

Through high-level interventions from international organisations and plenary discussions, the Forum will:

- Explore, in partnership with European and International organisations, new audiences for the Cultural Routes;
- Identify best practice from the Cultural Routes and the wider cultural heritage sectors and help develop new strategies to adapt to the changes the world is facing;
- Produce an **outcome Declaration** that will form a framework for on-going partnerships and initiatives relating to developing sustainable cultural approaches and digital strategies through the Cultural Routes Programme.

What is clear is that the rich diversity of the certified Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe has a tremendous capacity to develop a new model for the cultural heritage industry. Promising responses to the new conditions are forms of slow travelling built upon on the principles of sustainability, community involvement and the production of local goods and services; both physically and through digital tools, Cultural Routes are, by definition, platforms for cultural exchange and creative cultural expressions.

Contact information:

The Secretariat of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (culturalroutes@coe.int) remains available for any further information you may require.

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