Branding Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region

Analysis and Recommendations

Routes 4U | 19

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PREFACE

Welcome to the Branding Studies for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, a study carried out by Routes4U, a joint programme of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (EPA) and the European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO).

This report explores the comparative advantages that the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in the Adriatic-Ionian Region have that can help them support and promote cultural tourism, heritage protection and transnational co-operation. The routes themselves offer themes such as art and architecture, religious heritage, music and literature, landscape and gastronomy, that can all work harmoniously for successful and long-lasting promotion.

The Region can trace its enviable history by millennia for visitors seeking authentic experiences in the areas of culture, nature, and Mediterranean tradition. The region now looks to build on its strong track record in promoting new sustainable and diverse products an itineraries for visitors seeking authenticity, originality and unusual destinations alongside culture and the seaside.

Anyone interested in the process of branding in the Adriatic-Ionian Region is sure to find this study useful. The recommendations of this study are published in the Tourism Catalogue of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in the EU macro-regions.

Stefano Dominioni

Executive Secretary, Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes, Council of Europe
Director, European Institute of Cultural Routes

The Routes4U project's essence lays in its capacity to make the link between the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region and its cultural identity throughout the Cultural routes. Therefore, the following branding strategy will give some hints on the cultural identity of the Adriatic and Ionian Region, promoting its unique natural beauty but also its diversity of landscape along the sea basin.

I am confident that this study would provide important insight and contribution to enhance the cultural capacity of the EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region by encouraging all of the stakeholders to define the perception of this unique cultural area. The data and information collected on cultural tourism in the macro-region countries and the branding strategy will contribute to make the region even more attractive for investments and tourism activities. The European Territorial Cooperation plays a significant role in enhancing synergies amongst territorial actors in the Adriatic and Ionian Region and it will continue to encourage the promotion towards European citizens.

Marc Lemaître
Director-General for Regional and Urban Policy
DG REGIO, European Commission

INTRODUCTION

The present study on the development of a branding strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region was developed within the Routes4U framework. Routes4U is a Joint Programme of the Council of Europe (Directorate General of Democracy – EPA on Cultural Routes) and the European Union (European Commission – DG REGIO) that aims to foster regional development in the four EU macro-regions through the Cultural Routes. This mission is in line with the objectives of the EU macro-regional strategies in the Adriatic and Ionian, the Alpine, the Baltic Sea and the Danube regions (EUSAIR, EUSALP, EUSBSR and EUSDR, respectively). The macro-regional strategies can contribute to the work of the Cultural Routes, and vice versa, as both tackle common issues, make use of shared opportunities and develop activities at a transnational level.

Cultural Routes act as a driver of economic development, social cohesion and transnational co-operation in line with the objectives of the four EU macro-regional strategies (EUSAIR, EUSALP, EUSBSR and EUSDR[1]). This is why three objectives of Routes4U have been identified:

> ► Fostering cultural co-operation;
>
> ► strengthening social cohesion;
>
> ► contributing to regional development.

One of the main fields of action is the development of new Cultural Routes and the extension of certified Cultural Routes in the Adriatic and Ionian, the Alpine, the Baltic Sea and the Danube regions. Several priority themes were identified, such as the development of a Cultural Route on the theme of the Iron Age in the Danube, the theme of Alvar Aalto in the Baltic Sea, the theme of Via Claudia Augusta in the Alpine Region and the extension of the Routes of the Olive Tree in the Adriatic and Ionian Region. Routes4U also provides support to certified Cultural Routes to strengthen their presence in the Adriatic and Ionian, the Alpine, the Baltic Sea and the Danube regions.

It is in this context that the present set of studies on creating a branding and marketing strategy in the four macro-regions through Council of Europe Cultural Routes have been developed. Their purpose is to analyse the current image of Cultural Routes, while identifying needs, gaps and challenges, as well as formulating recommendations for the creation of a Cultural Routes brand in the macro-regions. This work can be seen in line with other actions that complement these studies, such as the awarding of mini-grants to ensure the production of tourism products and services, the development of a tourism catalogue, the launch of a

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[1] EUSAIR – EU Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region, EUSALP – EU Strategy for the Alpine Region, EUSBSR – EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, EUSDR – EU Strategy for the Danube Region

Cultural Routes Card, the creation of a trip-planner and the finalisation of an e-learning course including five modules with an extensive pool of data and information on Cultural Routes and macro-regional strategies.

Cultural Routes

The first Cultural Route of the Council of Europe was the Santiago de Compostela Route. Cultural Routes embody the core values of the Council of Europe, democracy and human rights as prerequisites for cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and mutual respect: "to travel along these routes in order to build a society founded on tolerance, respect for others, freedom and solidarity".[2] By definition, a Cultural Route is

> "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.[3]

For Cultural Routes, the following main fields of actions are implemented at local, national and international level:

1.   Co-operation in research and development: projects must play a unifying role around major European themes, showing how these themes are representative of European shared values.

2.   Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage: projects must enhance tangible and intangible heritage, especially in remote areas, and explain their historical significance throughout Europe.

3.   Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans: projects must organise activities with young people in order to promote the concept of European citizenship.

4.   Contemporary cultural and artistic practice: projects must encourage activities and artistic practice which explore the links between their European theme and contemporary culture.

5.   Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development: project must promote dialogue between urban and rural cultures, developed and disadvantaged regions, and between majority and minority. They must seek partnerships with tourism organisations to

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[2] Council of Europe (1987), Santiago de Compostela Declaration.

[3] Council of Europe, Resolution CM/Res(2013)66 confirming the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA).

draw attention on their European heritage and be part of the sustainable territorial development.

The concept of place branding

In the context of growing competition between destinations, it is crucial now for destination managers to understand how to distinguish a place among others and increase benefits for communities and territories. In this sense, the creation and dissemination of an attractive image of destination, branding, among different interested groups, from investors to qualified specialists and tourists, is becoming a powerful tool for regional development.

Although place branding seems closely related to product branding, place branding is not only commercial-oriented. Back in 1969, researchers Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy emphasized the need of an application of marketing mechanisms to non-business sectors.[4] In this sense place branding should be aimed at implementing long-term development strategies and contribute not only to the economic, but also social well-being of communities. The brand's goal is not only to give an impetus to the economic development of the city, but also to address existing social problems and build a "harmonious city" for everyone who is somehow involved in land use and management.[5]

Place branding is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that involves many actors with a variety of interests. Place branding should not be associated only with a visual embodiment of products' or services' features, although visual identity plays an important role in branding. Visual elements of a brand with their specific significance indeed can reflect brand's values and convey a message to an audience, thereby increasing the visibility and recognition of the territory. However, it is only part of the process of branding.[6]

"Rather than advertising per se, place promotion has sought to rebuild and re-construct the image of the city, allied to which has been a strategy of targeting specific types of activity which both reflect and bolster the image."[7]

Although there is no generally accepted definition of brand and branding, many researchers have attempted to contribute to the discussion about concepts. In particular, one of the pioneers in branding research Simon Anholt claims that "brand image is the set of beliefs or associations relating to that name or sign in the mind of the consumer", while a brand "is being within the domain of the product and consequently under the control of the producer".[8] He makes a distinction between these two concepts, trying to emphasise the dual

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[4] Kotler P. and Levy S. J. (1969), Broadening the concept of marketing, *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 10-15.

[5] Paddison P. (1993), City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration, *Urban Studies,* Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 340.

[6] Anholt S. (2010), Definitions of place branding – Working towards a resolution, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy,* Vol. 6, pp. 1-10, available at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/pb.2010.3, accessed 21 April 2020.

[7] Paddison P. (1993), City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration, *Urban Studies,* Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 340.

[8] Anholt S. (2010), Definitions of place branding – Working towards a resolution, *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy,* Vol. 6, pp. 1-10, available at https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/pb.2010.3, accessed 21 April 2020.

nature of branding. On the one hand, the branding process starts with self-identification and the articulation of the identity of the place. Branding should thus reflect a set of values that are relevant to local stakeholders and respond to their needs, expectations and concerns. On the other hand, brand image reflects the perception of a destination by target audiences. However, unlike the articulation of a brand, this takes place in a different external dimension.

The aim of place branding is thus to achieve a desired brand image thought defining brand identity. And if there is a gap between identity of the place and its image, branding will not achieve expected goals. In order to set up a link between brand image and identity, brand positioning is necessary. Brand positioning covers 4P aspects (price, product, promotion and place), which are also called marketing mix and which relate to activities and initiatives that companies (or destinations) implement in order to "determine their position in the consumer's mind".[9]

It is important that advertising does not prevail in brand positioning. Real changes and improvements in products and services are needed. Regarding place branding, it can be infrastructural projects, for example, the creation of green spaces and bicycle lanes in areas that promote themselves as eco-destinations, or events organisation in those places that want to be recognised as festival destinations. Without positioning activities that support a brand message a brand will be not convincing. Moreover, the gap between the promoted image of the territory and reality may cause a negative experience for both visitors and residents themselves. The undermining of trust between stakeholders is one of the main reasons for the failure of brand strategies.

It is also important to understand that place brand is dynamic and cannot be created once and for all. Numerous place identities expressed in the brand go through constant rethinking and reinterpretation. Place is a product of co-existence and co-operation of many communities. Each group has its practices related to land-use and a vision of territory's past, present and future and these interactions cannot be neglected. Since branding is a process of the narrative creation, all ideas about the place should be reflected in a brand; otherwise a brand will not represent all the characteristics of the place and due to that will likely to fail. *Consistency between the reality and a brand message is crucial for the whole branding process.*

Involvement of stakeholders in the branding process plays a significant role. To build a successful branding strategy, stakeholders should work together to provide mechanisms for inclusive discussion about the sense of the space. Maheshwari V., Lodorfos G. and Vandewalle I. (2014) agree that different stakeholders may have conflicting interests that "have seen to erode unity of purpose and decision-making", which could impede the development of a

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[9] Chaves E. (2017), Identity, positioning, brand image and brand equity comparison: a vision about quality in brand management, *Independent Journal of Management & Production,* Vol. 8, No. 4, p. 1249, www.researchgate.net/publication/321441454_Identity_Positioning_Brand_Image_and_Brand_Equity_Comparison, accessed 21 April 2020.

strong brand.[10] If a promoted image does not reflect the full range of existing place identities, it will not be relevant for some actors and will not reach the maximum audience.

Regarding the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the Cultural Routes aim at "raising awareness of the shared European heritage as a cornerstone of European citizenship, a means of improving the quality of life and a source of social, economic and cultural development" (CM/Res(2013)66).[11] Branding, as noted above, is recognized as a powerful tool for regional development, and in the context of the EU macro-regional strategies, the rich tangible and intangible cultural heritage represented in particular by the Cultural Routes can serve as a strong basis for the formation of unifying macro-regional brands and increase visibility of macro-regions as a single space.

On the example of the Adriatic and Ionian Region, what ideas can the region put at the core of its branding strategy to become relevant to wider audiences all over the world and contribute to the macro-regional strategy's objectives and local communities development?

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[10] Maheshwari V., Lodorfos G. and Vandewalle I. (2014), Exploring the role of stakeholders in place branding: a case analysis of the "City of Liverpool", *International Journal of Business and Globalisation,* Vol. 13, No. 1, p. 105, www.researchgate.net/publication/264812860_Exploring_the_role_of_stakeholders_in_place_branding_-_A_case_analysis_of_the_%27City_of_Liverpool%27

[11] Resolution CM/Res(2013)66 confirming the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA).

1. BRANDING STRATEGY: INTRODUCTION

Tourism is more important than ever for many countries and regions. Indeed, tourism can enhance a country's image, generate economic benefits, and create connections between cultures. Europe, in particular, continues to be the most-visited region in the world, with half of the world's international tourism arrivals (European Union Tourism Trends 2018; European Parliament 2011). For this reason, tourism is considered to be one of the most essential tools of the EU's strategy for jobs and inclusive growth.

Tourists worldwide flock to Europe more than anywhere else in the world because of its unique and diverse "culture". Therefore, European culture should be protected, respected and shared with different regions around the world. Many strategic EU initiatives promote and protect European culture.

Among these, the study reported here focuses on the Cultural Routes of the Adriatic and Ionian Region (AIR). The aim here is to achieve a deeper understanding of the potential offered by existing AIR Cultural Routes for the macro-region at large and its eight constituent countries, with a focus on transnational products. The next stage is the creation of and AIR brand handbook based on the results of this study, to guide interested parties in the subsequent steps to be taken. Furthermore, this study reviews the challenges to overcome in creating and implementing an AIR brand identity alongside existing brands and identities that are present across potential participating countries. Finally, it exposes potential solutions.

As a unique network of destinations linked by a common heritage, the AIR brand presents significant opportunities for collaborative marketing and promotional initiatives. In addition to the potential of individual countries participating in the project and the marketing and branding work already being carried out by the Council of Europe, the AIR brand is in a strong position to benefit from a change in the way people think about and approach travel.

Note: *Throughout this report, the term "AIR" is used as shorthand to refer either to the countries making up the Adriatic-Ionian Region as defined by the EU strategy for the macro-region, or the set of Cultural Routes within them. The term "CR" is short for "Cultural Routes".*

1.1   Background and overview

The AIR Cultural Routes initiative covers the considerable geographic area surrounding the Adriatic and Ionian Seas, which connect the countries in question. The region has the unique property of including coastal, marine and terrestrial areas (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of the Adriatic-Ionian countries

Moreover, the eight countries making up the AIR are inhabited by over 70 million people. A key feature of the region is its considerable linguistic and cultural diversity. As shown in Figure 2, there are four EU member states (Croatia, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) in the AIR.

Note: North Macedonia became the ninth country to join the EUSAIR in April 2020. The study presented here was carried out in 2019 and thus does not include North Macedonia.

Another important aspect of the region is the variety in countries' levels of development. Italy and Slovenia are considered "advanced". "Less advanced" are Croatia and Greece, while Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia are considered to be of "low development". This differentiation among AIR countries in terms of development presents a challenge to the implementation of macro-regional strategies.

The EU Strategy in the Adriatic and Ionian Region (EUSAIR) concerns the eight countries of the macro-region. The aim of the strategy is to enhance and improve transnational and interregional co-operation in the AIR, which may in turn lead to increased cohesion and competitiveness. The four pillars of the EUSAIR are Blue Growth, Connecting the Region, Environmental Quality and Sustainable Tourism, which will address the region's challenges and opportunities.

1.2 Cultural Routes in the AIR

The Cultural Routes are a Council of Europe initiative launched in 1987. The main aim of the routes is to provide a "voyage" in space and time, giving prominence to the diverse heritage of countries and cultures in Europe. The outcome is to communicate about people's shared and living cultural heritage, which should be accepted, respected and protected (Council of Europe 2019). The message that Cultural Routes seek to share is that the European continent is united through a common heritage and culture.

The Cultural Routes have always offered people the opportunity to travel and explore Europe's diverse heritage. The routes consolidate and implement the values of the Council of Europe, including human rights, cultural diversity, and intercultural communication and exchange. The routes offer a variety of themes to choose from, such as religion, gastronomy, architecture, landscape, intangible heritage, art, music and literature. The first route to obtain Council of Europe Cultural Route status was the Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes. Today, there are 33 transnational Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. These are composed of a total of more than 1600 members, which come in a variety of types, such as regional authorities, universities, museums and so son. They participate in the Cultural Routes initiative to foster mutual understanding between different countries and cultures.

In particular, the Cultural Routes of the Adriatic-Ionian Region aim to support heritage protection, cultural tourism and transnational co-operation. According to the Council of Europe (2018), the distribution of Cultural Routes in the AIR countries corresponds to their different levels of economic development. According to Figure 2, Italy has the most Cultural Routes (25), Croatia has 12 and Greece 7, followed by Slovenia (6) and Serbia (6). Albania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina have two, one and one Cultural Route(s), respectively.
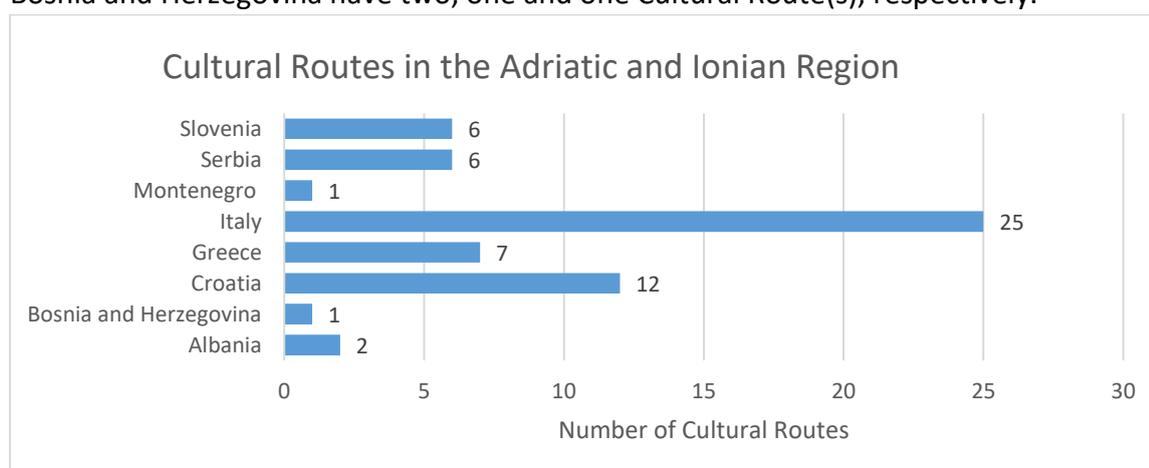
Figure 2: Number of Cultural Routes represented in the Adriatic-Ionian Region by country, January 2020
Source: Routes4U

There is also an important difference in the tourism infrastructure present in EU member states as opposed to non-EU countries. Except for Montenegro, non-EU countries lack accommodation infrastructure. It is also worth mentioning that tourist destinations in these countries are not adequately promoted, leading to a low level of tourism.

As shown in Figure 3, Italy is unique among AIR countries in containing members of 25 Cultural Routes. This further highlights the importance of developmental discrepancies across the AIR.
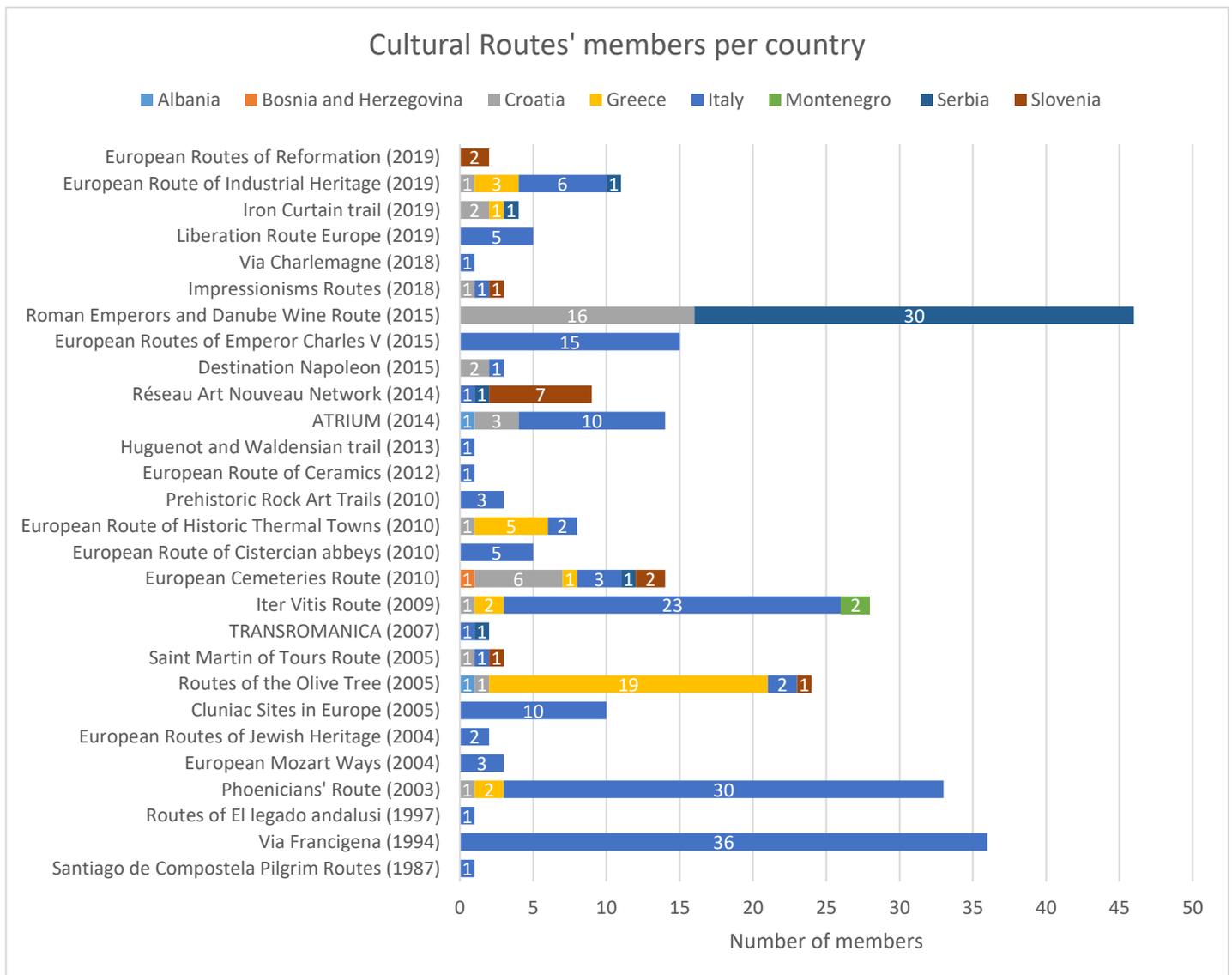
Figure 3: Cultural Route members per country of the Adriatic-Ionian Region, January 2020
Source: Routes4U

In general, Cultural Routes have substantial networks of members. In total, 876 are official members of Cultural Routes, 288 of which belong specifically to AIR Cultural Routes. The members can be stakeholders from cities or municipalities cultural and/or scientific organisations, sites, tourism stakeholders and associations (Figure 4). It is clear that most stakeholders are political (municipalities, associations) and cultural (sites, cultural organisations, and so on). There is also a lack of members that operate in the tourism

destination management sector, such as tourism operators, businesses, or agencies. For this reason, there should be an increase in participation of such members in order to provide sustainable solutions based on the AIR's needs and greater promotion and visibility of the area to tourists.
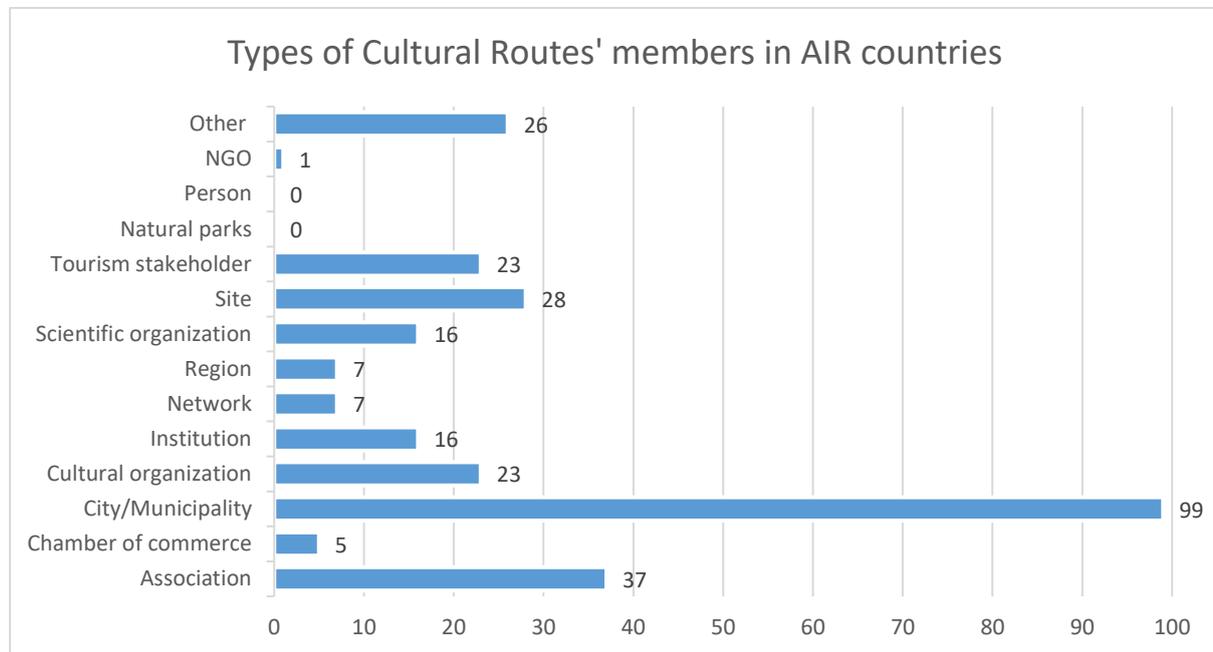
Figure 4: Member types of AIR Cultural Routes, January 2020
Source: Routes4U

The AIR brand objectives

As stated above, the main aim of the Cultural Routes is to provide a "voyage" in space and time, giving prominence to the diverse heritage of European countries and cultures. The outcome is to communicate about people's shared and living cultural heritage, which should be accepted, respected and protected (Council of Europe/ Cultural Routes, 2019). The message that Cultural Routes seek to share is that the European continent is united through a common heritage and culture.

In particular, the Cultural Routes of the Adriatic-Ionian Region aim to support heritage protection, cultural tourism, and transnational co-operation. The routes offer a variety of different themes to choose from, such as religion, gastronomy, architecture, landscape, intangible heritage, art, music, and literature.

This report and the supporting appendices provide an initial analysis and guidance to be further developed into an AIR brand with perspectives on culture and tourism.

The new AIR Cultural Routes brand will increase the region's potential tourism offer new opportunities to reach new audiences and open up previously lesser-known destinations. This provides an exciting incentive for development of the AIR brand as a brand unto itself.

Overall, the aim of the new AIR brand strategy is to:

> Develop a new "umbrella" brand for AIR tourism and especially cultural tourism, merging the identity of the two stakeholders (the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe) in order to increase the visibility of the two.

The specific objectives of the brand strategy are as follows:

- Establish a co-operation between the AIR and the Cultural Routes to promote tourism.
- Co-ordinate marketing of both the AIR and Cultural Routes, to make it more effective and increase its reach.
- Improve the competitiveness of the AIR along the Cultural Routes in the European and global tourism marketplace.

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PART I - BRAND AUDIT OF THE ADRIATIC- IONIAN REGION BRAND

1.THE AIR BRAND AUDIT METHODOLOGY

The main aim of the Cultural Routes is to provide a "voyage" in space and time, giving prominence to the diverse heritage of European countries and cultures. The outcome is to communicate about people's shared and living cultural heritage, which should be accepted, respected and protected (Council of Europe 2019). The message that Cultural Routes seek to share is that the European continent is united through a common heritage and culture. In particular, the Cultural Routes of the Adriatic-Ionian Region aim to support heritage protection, cultural tourism and transnational co-operation.

This report focuses on the Cultural Routes of the Adriatic and Ionian Region (AIR). The aim here is to achieve a deeper understanding of the potential for the creation of an AIR brand, with a focus on cultural tourism and transnational co-operation. The new AIR Cultural Routes brand will increase the region's potential tourism offer new opportunities to reach new audiences and open up previously lesser-known attractions and destinations. This provides an exciting incentive for development of the AIR brand as a brand unto itself.

The specific objectives of the brand strategy are as follows:
- Establish a co-operation between the AIR and the Cultural Routes to promote tourism.
- Co-ordinate marketing of both the AIR and Cultural Routes, to make it more effective and increase its reach.
- Improve the competitiveness of the AIR along the Cultural Routes in the European and global tourism marketplace.

The first part of this report presents an audit of the AIR brand. Any destination branding process starts with an assessment of the destination's assets are and focuses on how best to present these to each customer group or market segment. This is done by undertaking a destination audit. This part presents the main points of the methodology used for the brand audit studies.

The next stage will be the development of an AIR brand strategy based on the outcomes of this audit report.

The goal of the brand audit phase was to identify current awareness of the AIR Cultural Routes, their tourism potential, and attitudes towards the creation of a new AIR brand. The research objectives were thus:

- assess the current AIR Cultural Routes in general;
- for each CR member, assess the Cultural Route to which they belong;
- assess the current AIR brand and its elements;
- make proposals for a new AIR brand;

- investigate the demo-socioeconomic profile of the research participants.

A destination's key stakeholders are people or organisations who have an interest in the way in which the destination presents itself. In our case, there are three main groups of stakeholders for the AIR CRs:

- Cultural Routes members: These are critical to the development of the AIR brand. Members of each of the 24 Cultural Routes in the AIR were invited to participate in the first study (for example, CR presidents, managers, members, and other type of employees). The members were then asked to cascade the online questionnaire to relevant stakeholders and visitors of each Cultural Route. As a result, every AIR Cultural Route was represented in the study.
- CR Stakeholders: Those with a direct interest in the performance of the destination, whether in relation to their business, professional or political role in the AIR (for example, local and regional businesses, organisations, and authorities in areas such as conservation, arts, culture and heritage).
- Visitors: tourists' attitudes and opinions have the most important role in branding research (Konecnik 2006)[12]. Thus, visitors to the AIR countries – four EU member states (Croatia, Greece, Italy, and Slovenia) and four non-EU countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, and Serbia) – constituted the sample of the visitor survey.

The next section presents the main points of methodology used in the brand audit – a structured process for evaluating the potential for a new AIR brand in a participative manner.

Because each set of key AIR stakeholders (CR members, CR stakeholders, AIR visitors) is unique, a multi-method approach was considered appropriate. The data collection methods were both quantitative and qualitative in nature, including both online surveys and semi-structured interviews. The contacted participants were carefully selected in terms of their relevance to AIR Cultural Route tourism.

The next sections present the methodology used for the online surveys and the semi-structured interviews.

ONLINE SURVEYS

Because of the study's unique characteristics and the lack of secondary data, it was decided that primary research would consist of three surveys and should be carried out to evaluate the potential for an AIR brand in a participative manner:

(a) one survey for CR members (presidents, managers, members, and other type of employees);

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[12] Based on Aaker's (1991) brand equity and Keller's (1993, 2001, 2003b) customer-based brand equity, Konecnik (2006) identified the major influencing factors of brand awareness, image, perceived quality, and brand loyalty in her evaluation model of customer-based brand equity for a tourism destination.

(b) one survey for CR stakeholders (businesses of the macro-region, organisations, local authorities and so on);

(c) one survey for AIR visitors.

Consequently, three separate survey questionnaires were developed:

(a) one questionnaire for CR members (presidents, managers, members, and other type of employees);

(b) one questionnaire for CR stakeholders (businesses of the macro- region, organisations, local authorities and so on);

(c) one questionnaire for AIR visitors.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The questionnaire design set out to identify the current participants' awareness of AIR Cultural Routes and their tourism potential, and participants' attitudes towards the creation of an AIR brand. Aiming to maximize effectiveness, the questionnaire was divided into five sections according to the research objectives.

A research methodology was developed following the guidelines taken from academic branding research (for instance, Aaker 1997; Anholt 2016), the ETC/UNWTO's *Handbook on Tourism Destination Branding* (2009) and the UNWTO's *Handbook on Marketing Transnational Tourism Themes and Routes* (2017).

In order to examine the AIR's current image, this study focuses on AIR's key stakeholders' (CR members, CR stakeholders, and AIR visitors) perceived destination image. Destination image was measured by four items drawn from three different prior studies and customised for this research (Baloglu & McCleary 1999; Sahin & Baloglu 2011; Zhang et al. 2014). All items were evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from very strongly disagree (1) to very strongly agree (5).

In order to investigate personality traits relevant to the AIR, Aaker's scale of brand personality in tourism contexts was employed. (Aaker 1997). Although marketing scholars have accepted Aaker's five dimensions of brand personality, it must be noted that the pattern and content of the dimensions in service contexts are not always identical to those found in the marketing field (see Kim et al. 2017 for detailed analysis). The measurement items used in this research were adapted from the existing literature with the wording modified for the present study's setting. Destination personality was measured with 16 items adapted from Ha (2016), Hosany, Ekinci and Uysal (2006), and Usakli and Baloglu (2011).

Finally, as the purpose of this survey is to discover how AIR Cultural Routes can use experiential branding to differentiate their brand from their competitors' brands, we now turn to theories on experiential branding. The best-known researchers in the field of experiential branding, Pine II & Gilmore (1998) found that there are four types of experiential branding that differ according to their degree of customer participation (active or passive) and how connected the customer is to the environment (absorption or immersion), i.e. where the experience is taking place. These include Escapist, Entertainment, Esthetic and Educational (ibid.). They can be understood as themes, or in the researcher's own words, "realms" that characterise a given brand experience. Brand experiences could, for instance, be educational, requiring active participation from customers, or they could be aesthetic, i.e. mainly consisting of observable elements that do not require active participation. Similarly, Schmitt and colleagues (2009) developed an experiential branding scale that includes the four elements Behavioural, Sensory, Affective and Intellectual. These elements roughly correspond to those of Pine II & Gilmore (1999). This suggests that there are different types of brand experiences that create experiences aiming to engage participants in active activities, stimulate the senses, appeal to the participants' intellect, or raise an emotional response in participants. The most memorable experiences include elements of all four experience realms (Pine II & Gilmore 1999).

The survey also included questions related to socio-demographics and aspects of the respondents' travel behaviours.

In addition, the three questionnaires aimed to collect mainly quantitative data, but some open-ended questions were also introduced to collect personalised responses from participants.

QUESTIONNAIRE COLLECTION

The survey lasted four months (15 February to 15 June 2019). The questionnaires were distributed online to selected participants and visitors (actual and potential) of the Cultural Routes under study. A professional account on the SurveyMonkey platform was used to distribute the surveys and collect the responses.

Although the survey was online, the research team decided select participants and not to distribute the questionnaire publicly. This resulted in 78 valid and complete responses being submitted by current AIR Cultural Routes members, stakeholders, and visitors.

1.1 Cultural Routes Questionnaire

While the questionnaires were a very good method to obtain quantitative data, limited input was expected in terms of creative approaches, case studies, and insights regarding co-operation between stakeholders in AIR Cultural Route tourism. Therefore, in addition to the online

surveys, an option was introduced for participants to request a semi-structured interview (by telephone or Skype) with the researcher.

Semi-structured interviews were selected as a method because they allow for a guided discussion aiming to extract information relevant to research question while remaining flexible enough to leave space for new themes to arise (Galletta 2013). The AIR Cultural Routes researcher contacted the stakeholders asking for a short interview. However, the response was limited and resulted in dependence on last-minute availability. Participants were given the option to remain anonymous should they wish to. Interviews lasted 15 minutes on average and the topics discussed, apart from the ones described above, included issues regarding each individual case.

1.1.1. Cultural Routes member survey

The goals of the primary research on the AIR Cultural Routes members were to identify their awareness regarding the AIR Cultural Routes, the CRs' tourism potential, and their attitudes towards the creation of a new AIR brand. The research objectives were thus:

- assess the current AIR Cultural Routes in general
- for each CR member, assess the Cultural Route to which they belong
- assess the current AIR brand and its elements
- make proposals for a new AIR brand
- investigate the respondents' demographic profiles

The survey results are presented in sections, following the order of the research objectives.

Air Thematic Routes Questions

Q1 Opinion about AIR cultural tourism

First, participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement or disagreement (5-point Likert scale) with a series of statements about AIR cultural tourism. The findings show that AIR is seen as an area that has rich cultural heritage (4.27) and is perceived as beautiful (4.27).

However, it is important to note that all statements received above the moderate mean, reaching more than three points out of five. This indicates that AIR is considered as an exciting, rich cultural heritage macro-region with beautiful nature and many attractions and routes.

Q2 AIR Cultural Routes' degree of achievement of theme interpretation goals

Participants were asked to rate the AIR Cultural Routes in general, according to the degree to which they achieved theme interpretation goals. The following three interpretation aspects stood out: (a) development of skills and competencies (3.2), (b) new cultural values, and (c) developing cultural sensibility and exchange.

Nonetheless, it is worth noting that survey respondents did not agree very strongly that AIR Cultural Routes achieve their theme interpretation goals, with values only slightly above average, that is between 2.7 and 3 points out of 5.

Overall, this indicates that the AIR Cultural Routes currently achieve their theme interpretation goals only moderately, with the exception of some aspects (skills and competences development, new cultural values, and developing cultural sensibility and exchange) that outperform – but not by much – the moderate assessment.

Q3 AIR Cultural Routes' degree of achievement of theme quality interpretation

Using the 5-point rating scale, respondents were asked to what extent they agreed that the AIR Cultural Routes, in general, have achieved several quality interpretations. It was shown that the AIR Cultural Routes have mostly achieved their historic and cultural function (3.5).

Q4 AIR Cultural Routes' success in general

AIR Cultural Routes – according to CR members – are successful in terms of relations between the partners: transboundary co-operation and collaborative destination marketing scored 3.6

Q5 The top 3 Cultural Routes associated with the AIR

1st: Phoenicians' Route; The Routes of the Olive Tree
2nd: Roman Emperors Route
3rd: ATRIUM

It was found that for CR members, the Phoenicians' Route and The Routes of the Olive Tree are the top Cultural Routes in the AIR. The Roman Emperors Route followed in second place, while ATRIUM came third.

Q6 Motivations for the AIR traveller

The survey results show that for the CR members, the main motivation for travellers to the AIR is culture (museums, music, artefacts, dances, festivals, and so on) (4.50).

Q7 CR members perceptions of visitors to the AIR as opposed to other macro-regions

According to CR members, visitors to the AIR seek authentic experiences in the domains of culture, nature, and Mediterranean tradition.

In detail, the phrases cited first to characterise an AIR visitor were the following:
- nice
- highly experiential in their approach

- focus on specific subjects
- like nature
- looking for originality and unusual destinations
- European culture
- seaside

The phrases cited second to characterise an AIR visitor were the following:

- tradition
- curious about traditions and Mediterranean cultures
- combination of culture and tourism
- leisure time
- desires authenticity
- people's daily life
- archaeology

Finally, the third phrases used to characterise an AIR visitor were the following:

- attractive
- cultural tolerance and inter-religious dialogue (type of destination)
- looking for paradigmatic heritage sites
- individual travellers
- loves simplicity
- value of sharing
- sport

2.1. FEEDBACK ABOUT RESPONDENTS' SPECIFIC CULTURAL ROUTE(S)

Q8-Q12 What are local products produced by and/or promoted through the Cultural Route, related to the specific theme of the Cultural Route?

For the first question in this section, CR Members were asked to describe the local products produced by and/or promoted through the Cultural Route, related to the specific theme of the Cultural Route. These products might be made for example by SMEs, local producers, craftspeople, or artists. Respondents were asked to list these products specifying the producer (name, address), the place where they were distributed/sold and the entity in charge of this (name, address) so that they can be catalogued. In five questions (8-12), CR members provided the local products produced by and/or promoted through the Cultural Route. Their answers were as follows:

Product name	Product description	Producer	Distribution
Olive Oil	Made for St. Martin Feast in November	Slovenia; Croatia	**very local products**
Olives	quality wine	Production linked with St. Martin Feast	**Italy; Slovenia; Croatia**
artworks that have the theme of the olive tree	autumn fruits	symbol of St Martin feast	**Italy; Slovenia; Croatia**
other traditional products from the olive tree area	High quality products		**Italy; Slovenia; Croatia**
geese foie gras			
cheese	local cheese		**Italy; Slovenia; Croatia**

Q13 Further local products produced by and/or promoted through the Cultural Route

CR members mentioned medals, plates, and glasses as additional local products produced by and/or promoted through their Cultural Route.

Q14 Cultural Routes' main assets in terms of visitor appeal

The main assets ascribed to Cultural Routes were culture, traditions, festivals, gastronomy (3.86) and their ecology, landscape and natural assets (3.86).

Q15 Importance of main assets.

Findings show that the main assets of the Cultural Routes of culture, traditions, festivals, gastronomy (3.86) and their ecology, landscape and natural assets (3.86) are found to be equally important in percentages: SLIGHTLY (28.57), VERY (28.57), and EXTREMELY IMPORTANT ASSET (28.57).

Q16-Q32 Evaluation of Cultural Route quality standards

In the next series of questions in this section, CR members were asked to evaluate their Cultural Route in terms of quality standards. The ratings available were 1= Poor quality, 2= Below average, 3= Average, 4= Good, 5= Excellent.
The results are presented in the table below. The best-rated aspects of Cultural Routes were cultural values and safety of the surroundings.

Cultural Route quality aspect	Rating
Tangible and intangible heritage – cultural contents	**4.17**
Number of heritage resources in relation to the route theme (focusing on key resources	**3.71**
Importance/uniqueness of resource / significance level - competitiveness	**3.57**
Spatial distribution, ambience, and setting	**3.57**
Capacity to group cultural or heritage resources	**3.29**
Physical condition of the resources: preservation, restoration	**3.57**
Preservation of resource integrity	**3.57**
Cultural values being evoked	**4.29**
Attractiveness – familiarity of the thematic route outside the region	**3.57**
Robustness	**3.43**
Resource size, capacity	**3.29**
Capacity to control visitor flow	**2.86**
Appeal and aesthetics of the surroundings	**4.00**
Safety of the surroundings	**4.29**
Market position of the destination (importance of cultural content in such a position)	**3.86**

Co-operation with international projects	**4.00**
Thematic tourism products	**3.86**

Q33-Q49 Evaluation of Cultural Routes' service content

 In the next series of questions in this section, CR members were asked to evaluate the service content of their Cultural Routes, using the same five-point rating scale as above.

The table below presents their main answers. Experience value ranked top of the aspects investigated, followed by type of accommodation facilities (hotels, hostels, camps, rural traditional accommodations), and tourist surroundings (active tourism destinations in the vicinity).

Cultural Route service aspect	Rating
Number of hospitality facilities included in the route	3.57
Type of included hospitality facilities (traditional, authentic restaurants, and such)	4.00
Thematically related hospitality facilities	3.71
Number of accommodation facilities included in the route	3.86
Type of accommodation facilities (hotels, hostels, camps, rural traditional accommodations)	4.00
Number of traditional crafts/workshops included in the Cultural Route	3.20
Other tourism services in the vicinity (thermal baths, swimming pools, wellness centres, tennis courts, golf courts and such)	3.43
Souvenir shops, shops with traditional and thematic products	3.17
Accessibility (types and frequency of public transport)	3.29
Number and type of tourist events along the route during the year	3.29
Tourist surroundings (active tourism destinations in the vicinity)	4.00
Suitability for bus groups	3.71
Suitability for specific tourist offer (for youth, families, women…)	3.86
Experience value	4.14
Organisation	3.57
Events and activities that support the theme	3.14

Traditional crafts	3.67

Q50 Main motivations for Cultural Route travellers

According to this survey, CR members believe that Cultural Route travellers are mainly attracted by AIR destinations' gastronomy.

Q51 How do CR members see a visitor to their Cultural Route as different from the travellers on other Cultural Routes?

Compared to visitors to CRs in other areas, AIR CR members see their own visitors as being more curious about conflicting past and history, more eclectic, placing high value on sharing, and highly educated.

Specifically, they used the following phrases first when characterising their visitors:

curious about conflicting past and history

eclectic

value of sharing

curious

highly educated

The second phrases use to characterise CR visitors in the AIR were the following:
- looking for untouched nature
- adventurous
- walking
- gourmet
- modern history amateur

When asked for a third phrase to characterise their CR visitor, AIR CR members mentioned:

- experiential tourism
- ecologist
- meeting people
- collector

Q52 Additional comments about their Cultural Route.

To end the section of the survey, CR members were given the opportunity to leave any additional comments they may have about their route. The answers received were:

- conscience of cultural roots

since it concerns dissonant heritage of totalitarian regimes, it is clearly not possible to have souvenirs or crafts on the theme. It is very poorly known even in the areas where the heritage is located

1.2. MARKETING ACTIONS ASSESSMENT OF YOUR CULTURAL ROUTE

Q53 Rate activities in terms of their importance to your CR in terms of marketing

For the first item in the second section, CR members were asked to rate several activities in terms of their importance to their CR in terms of marketing.

The marketing activities ranked top in terms of their importance for the CR were:
- Apps, geolocation maps (4.29)
- Public Relations (4.29)

When given the opportunity to specify, respondents mentioned:
- Public relations in particular with schools

Q54-Q60 Rate activities in terms of their performance to your CR's marketing

In contrast to the first question in this section, where CR members were asked to rate several activities in terms of their importance to CR in terms of marketing, the subsequent items asked the CR members to rate these activities in terms of their performance for their CR marketing. CR members rated their marketing activities' performance using the following scale: 1= Poor quality, 2 = Below average, 3 = Average, 4 = Good, 5 = Excellent.
According to their answers, the marketing activities ranked top in terms of their performance for respondents' CRs were:
- Events 3.43
- Public Relations 3.43

Other (please specify)

- Absence of geolocation maps or apps

Q61-Q67 Evaluation of relative importance in terms of requirements for CR visibility.

The next series of questions in this section asked CR members to evaluate their the importance of various items with respect to the visibility of their CR.

According to their answers (see table), to be visible, a Cultural Route should use new technologies that increase opportunities for innovation:

To be visible, a Cultural Route should:	Rating
— Be present and visible at travel trade industry events, to meet and talk to tour operators cruise operators, and other professionals	3.83
— Work with the media, using the existing resources of the project's partners	3.43
— Work in terms of communities of interest: successfully identify the organisations, media blogs, and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme	4.00
— Take advantage of high-speed networks and digital tools e.g. Google Translate to strengthen communication with customers, and build trade and media relations	3.29
— Use new technologies that increase opportunities for innovation	4.14
— Use augmented reality and virtual reality to help the visitor understand the links between attractions and assets, across frontiers	3.86
— Make full use of social networks and digital marketing	3.86

Q68-Q74 Evaluation of CRs' visibility

In contrast to the previous items in this section, where CR members were asked to evaluate the importance various of requirements for successful visibility, this question asked the CR members to evaluate their Cultural Route's performance on those items.

According to their answers (see table), for their Cultural Route's performance in terms of requirements for successful visibility, they work in terms of communities of interest: successfully identify the organisations, media, blogs and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme.

My Cultural Route's performance on these items:	Rating
— Be present and visible at travel trade industry events, to meet and talk to tour operators, cruise operators, and other professionals	2.80
— Work with the media, using the existing resources of the project's partners	3.00
— Work in terms of communities of interest: successfully identify the organisations, media, blogs, and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme	3.29
— Take advantage of high-speed networks and digital tools e.g. Google Translate to strengthen communication with customers, and build trade and media relations	3.14

— Use new technologies that increase opportunities for innovation	3.14
— Use augmented reality and virtual reality help the visitor understand the links between attractions and assets, across frontiers	3.00
— Make full use of social networks and digital marketing	3.00

Q75 Percentage of digital in overall CR marketing activity

In this question, CR members were asked to state what percentage of their overall marketing activity for their business is digital. According to most CR members, 51-70% of the overall marketing activity for their business is digital.

Q76 Rating CRs' online presence

CR members rated content reach (3.57) as the top performer when rating their CRs' online presence, among several criteria (e.g., sales, audience growth, leads, etc.).

Q77 Overall satisfaction with communications in their CR

When CR members were asked to state their overall satisfaction with the communications in their CR, most of them indicated that they are moderately satisfied (57.4%).

Q78 Additional comments for marketing & communications

The last question of the section gave space to CR members to freely make any additional comments regarding marketing & communications. Their answers were all about funding needs, as follows:

- Communication support and funding sources to improve the necessary actions
- Facilitating the use of on line [sic] tools
- We don't have funds and specific personnel.

1.3. CURRENT AIR BRAND QUESTIONS

Q79 Current AIR brand associations

For the first question in this section, CR members were asked to think about the term "AIR" and write down the first three words that came to their minds, in order. Thus, according to CR members, the AIR is associated with the sea, the sky (the blue element), and other common elements and intangible ideas such as dialogue, intercultural exchange, heritage and islands.

In detail, the phrases mentioned first to characterise the AIR brand were the following:

- sea
- dialogue
- sky

The second phrases used to characterise the AIR brand were the following:

- intercultural exchange
- common elements
- coast
- blue

In third position, the phrases that characterised the AIR brand were:

- heritage
- extension
- island
- wind

Q80 Describe the AIR as a person

The second question in this section asked CR members to think of the AIR is a person and describe them, by listing five different characteristics.

So, according to CR members, the AIR would be an **attractive, authentic, curious** and **tall** person, **smiling, happy, familiar** and **heartful**. They are also described as **well-educated**, **different** and **open-minded**, with an **interesting** personality.

Q81 The AIR's personality traits

Following the previous question, Q81 required the CR members to keep thinking of the AIR as a person and to describe its personality traits. According to their responses, the top personality traits of AIR as a person were:

- Natural (66.67% extremely descriptive)
- Lively (66.67% extremely descriptive)

So, according to its CR members, the AIR is a natural and lively person!

Q82 The AIR's character

Following the previous series of questions, Q82 asked the CR members to keep thinking of the AIR as a person and to select among the four aspects of experiences as proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) that the AIR might provide: sensory, intellectual, affective, and behavioural.

Thus, according to the CR members, the AIR is primarily an affective (aesthetic) area (3.83)!

Q83 The AIR's uniqueness

The next question was about what makes the AIR unique and almost all respondents highlighted its contribution to world heritage (4.29).

Q84 AIR in the eye of the average AIR tourist

According to CR members, the average AIR tourist believes that:
- The culture here is interesting (4.50)
- The people here are hospitable (4.50)

Q85 Current strength of the AIR brand

CR members currently consider the AIR brand to be slightly strong (50%). By "strong" we mean a brand that is easily recognisable and that generates feelings of confidence for AIR branded tourism products.

Q86-104 The image of the AIR brand

CR members believe that beautiful landscapes and local customs along with the pleasantness of the destination are what mainly characterise the image of the AIR.

Q105 The three main competitors to the AIR brand

In this question, CR members were asked to name the three main competitors of AIR. These could include other macro-regions or destinations.
According to CR members, the main competitors to the AIR are Spain, Malta, the Tyrrhenian Sea and Corsica, the Danube, and the Western parts of Italy.

In detail, the main AIR competitors according to the CM members are the following:
1st:

- Spain
- Malta
- Tyrrhenian Sea and Corsica
- Danube
- Western part of Italy

2nd:

- France (Cote d'Azur)
- Turkey
- Catalonia
- Baltic
- Mediterranean countries

3rd:

- Aegean Islands & Rhodes
- Portugal
- UK

Q106 Comparison of the AIR brand with its three main competitors

The next question saw respondents ranking the AIR brand compared its three main competitors in terms of each brand's strength. The ranking scale went from one for the strongest brand to four for the weakest brand. The question was answered by four CR members. Only one respondent (no. 3) placed the AIR as the strongest brand in relation to their competitors. In

detail, each respondent had a different view about the strength of AIR brand in relation to the competitors.

Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4
Spain	France	AIR	Turkey
Aegean Islands & Rhodes	AIR	Malta	Portugal
AIR	Tyrrhenian and Corsica Mediterranean countries	Catalunya	AIR
Western part of Italy		UK	

Q107 The personality traits of the AIR brand and its main competitors as people.

Respondents were asked to indicate which among the AIR and its top three competitors (named by the CR members themselves, see above) most strongly corresponded to a series of personality traits, using check-boxes.

The AIR outperformed its competitors on being: honest, sincere, down-to-earth, humane, natural, and dynamic.

The AIR shared first place with one of its competitors in the following cases: trendy, family oriented, authentic, and comfortable.

The AIR lagged behind its competitors when it came to being described as: up-to-date, successful, cool, refreshing, inquiring, and lively.

	AIR		COMPETITOR 1		COMPETITOR 2		COMPETITOR 3		Total
Up-to-date	0.00%	0	80.00%	4	60.00%	3	20.00%	1	5
Successful	0.00%	0	80.00%	4	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	5
Trendy	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	5

Cool	20.00%	1	60.00%	3	40.00%	2	20.00%	1	5
Honest	**40.00%**	2	20.00%	1	20.00%	1	20.00%	1	5
Unique	40.00%	2	60.00%	3	20.00%	1	20.00%	1	5
Family oriented	50.00%	2	50.00%	2	25.00%	1	25.00%	1	4
Sincere	**60.00%**	3	20.00%	1	0.00%	0	20.00%	1	5
Down-to- earth	**60.00%**	3	40.00%	2	20.00%	1	0.00%	0	5
Refreshing	0.00%	0	50.00%	2	50.00%	2	0.00%	0	4
Cultural	60.00%	3	80.00%	4	20.00%	1	20.00%	1	5
Humane	**80.00%**	4	40.00%	2	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	5
Authentic	60.00%	3	60.00%	3	20.00%	1	40.00%	2	5
Natural	**60.00%**	3	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	5
Comfortable	60.00%	3	60.00%	3	40.00%	2	20.00%	1	5
Dynamic	**60.00%**	3	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	20.00%	1	5
Experiential	40.00%	2	60.00%	3	20.00%	1	20.00%	1	5
Inquiring	0.00%	0	66.67%	2	0.00%	0	33.33%	1	3
Lively	40.00%	2	60.00%	3	40.00%	2	40.00%	2	5

Q108 The AIR's brand story

The final question of this section asked CR members to describe the AIR's brand story. People connect with stories. By weaving information into a story, people have an easier time recalling that information in the future. Crafting a unique and powerful narrative to tie to a brand is a great way to not only connect and resonate with the audience, but it also enables a brand to burrow into the audience's long-term memory. If a story is impactful enough, consumers will empathise and keep the brand at the top of their mind.

According the CR members, the AIR is a land of civilisations that connects people and cultures through the centuries.

CREATING AN AIR BRAND

Q109 Usefulness of the potential creation of an AIR brand

CR members rated the potential creation of an AIR brand as very useful for strengthening the macro-region's competitiveness (57.14%).

Q110 The AIR's three key strengths with respect to its development as tourism brand and identity

In this question, CR members were asked to give the top three strengths of the macro-region they see as key to developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity.

According to the CR members, the top-ranked strengths that are key to developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are: coherent actions, authenticity, culture, and heritage.

In detail, the top three strengths were the following:

1st strength:
- coherent actions
- Authenticity
- culture
- Heritage

2nd strength:
- Sustainability
- Cross-border
- links establishing
- Nature

3rd strength:
- tourism development
- 360R
- quality of services
- kindness
- gastronomy

Q111 The three main weaknesses facing the development of the AIR as a tourism brand and identity

In this question, CR members were asked to give the three key weaknesses of the AIR in terms of its development as a tourism brand and identity.

According to their survey submissions, the AIR's main weaknesses with respect to its development as a tourism brand and identity are: different stages of development of the countries, mass tourism, difficult access, bad connections, and geographical difficulty.

In detail, the three key weaknesses mentioned were as follows:

1st weakness:

- different stages of development of the countries
- mass tourism
- difficult access
- geographical difficulty
- Bad connections

2nd weakness:

- possible miscommunication
- poor information
- strong social diversity
- Low quality of services

3rd weakness:

- slow process
- weak networking
- opposition between well known and unknown
- Low accessibility of sites

Q112 The three key opportunities for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity

In this question, CR members were asked to give the three key opportunities they see as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity.

According to CR members, the top-ranked opportunities for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are: protect heritage, young people, untapped cultural resources, and maritime communications.

In detail, the three opportunities they listed as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity were:

1st opportunity:

- protect heritage
- young people
- untapped cultural resources
- maritime communications

2nd opportunity:

- develop slow tourism
- competitiveness
- unexplored nature
- ancient and medieval culture

3rd opportunity:

- connecting people and promoting European values
- jobs
- creating Cultural Routes

Q113 The three main threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity

Finally, in this question, CR members were asked to give the three main threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity.

According to CR members, the threats mentioned first were: countries' already existing tourism strategies/identity, deficient information, maritime distances, and fragmentation of the tourism offer.
In detail, the three principal threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity according to the CM members were the following:

1st threat:

- countries' already existing tourism strategies/identity
- deficient information
- maritime distances
- fragmentation of the tourism offer

2nd threat:

- same amount of efforts by all participants
- deficient of new suggestions for visitors
- geographical distances
- great differences in the tourism offer

3rd threat:

- lack of stakeholder networking
- too wide territory

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis

A SWOT analysis of the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity, according to the CR members' responses, is presented in the following table:

Strengths	Weaknesses
coherent actions	different stages of development of the countries
Authenticity	mass tourism
Heritage	difficult access
Culture	geographical difficulty
	Bad connections
Opportunities	**Threats**
protect heritage	countries' already existing tourism strategies/identity
young people	deficient information
untapped cultural resources	maritime distances
maritime communications	fragmentation of the tourism offer

Q114 Visibility activities that should be performed in common

In the last question of this section, CR members were asked to rate visibility activities that should have, in their opinion, been performed in common (e.g., information, interpretation signboard, Uniform information centres or stands, etc.).

The top-ranked visibility activities that ought to be performed in common were the following:
- Partnership with tour operators and tourist agents (4.33)
- Unique visual design: logo, graphic design of publications, etc. (4.33)

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Q116 Respondent profile

The final question of the CR members' questionnaire asked about their role within their Cultural Route. The majority of the respondents were managers of their Cultural Route (50%), followed by president, director and secretary (equally at 12.5%).

1.1.2. Cultural Routes stakeholder survey

The goals of the primary research on the AIR Cultural Routes stakeholders were to identify their awareness regarding the AIR Cultural Routes, the CRs' tourism potential, and their attitudes towards the creation of an AIR brand. The research objectives were thus to:

- assess the current AIR brand and its elements
- make proposals for a new AIR brand
- assess the current AIR thematic routes
- investigate the respondents' demographic profiles

The survey results are presented in sections, following the order of the research objectives.

CURRENT AIR BRAND QUESTIONS

Q1 Current AIR brand associations

For the first question in this section, the AIR stakeholders were asked to think about the word "AIR" and write down, in order, the first three words that came to their mind. They thus associated the AIR with the sea, the sky (the blue element), and other common elements and intangible ideas such as dialogue, intercultural exchange, heritage and islands.

The findings show that the first words that came to the mind of stakeholders were the following:

1st words:

- Greece
- Sea
- Sky

The words coming to stakeholders' mind second were the following:

2ⁿᵈ words:

- Italy
- boats
- culture

The words coming to stakeholders' minds in third position were the following:

3rd words:

- beauty
- beaches

- sea

Q2 Describing the AIR as a person

The second question in this section asked the AIR stakeholders to imagine the AIR as a person and to describe them using five characteristics.

According to the AIR stakeholders, the AIR would is an attractive, authentic, curious and tall person, smiling, happy, familiar and heartful. They are also described as well-educated, different, open-minded, with an interesting personality.

The characteristics used to describe the AIR by the CR stakeholders were the following:

1st characteristics:

2nd characteristics:

3rd characteristics:

4th characteristics:

5th characteristics:

Q3 AIR personality traits

Following on from the previous question, Q3 kept the AIR stakeholders thinking of the AIR as a person and asked them to rate the descriptiveness of various personality traits. According to their responses, the top personality traits of AIR as a person are:

- Unique (56.25% extremely descriptive)
- Cultural (56.25% extremely descriptive)
- Natural (56.25% extremely descriptive)
- Passionate (50% extremely descriptive)

So, the AIR as seen by AIR stakeholders is a unique, cultural, natural and passionate person!

Q4 The AIR's character

Following the previous series of questions, Q4 asked the CR stakeholders to keep thinking of the AIR as a person and to select among the four aspects of experiences as proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) that the AIR might provide: sensory, intellectual, affective, and behavioural.

Thus, according to the CR members, the AIR is primarily an affective (aesthetic) area (4.31).

Q5 The AIR's uniqueness

The next question was about what makes the AIR unique. Almost all respondents recognised its Cultural Routes (4.56) and its cuisine (4.63) as unique.

The Council of Europe should take note that the stakeholders of the macro-region believe that the AIR is unique because of its Cultural Routes!

Q6 The AIR in the eyes of the average AIR tourist

According to CR stakeholders surveyed, the average AIR tourist believes that

- [They] would recommend my friends/ relatives to visit AIR. (4.63)
- This region has a rich history. (4.56)
- The people here are hospitable. (4.44)
- [They] enjoy visiting AIR. (4.44)

So, according to the stakeholders, the average AIR tourist would recommend a visit to the AIR to their friends/relatives (4.63).

Q7 Current strength of the AIR brand

AIR stakeholders consider the AIR brand to be slightly strong (33.33%) to strong (33.33%). By "strong", we mean easily recognisable and generating feelings of confidence for AIR-branded tourism products.

Q8-Q27 The image of the AIR brand

AIR stakeholders believe that beautiful landscapes, sea and sun along with gastronomy are what mainly characterise the image of the AIR.

AIR stakeholders had to choose a number from 1 to 7, where 1=low/ poor, 7=high/ good)

Cultural Routes 4.47	Quality accommodation 5.06	Beautiful landscapes 6.73	Culturally Interesting 6.19
Good value for money 5.81	Selection of gastronomy **6.31**	Variety of fauna and flora **6.07**	Interesting local customs 6.13
Safe place 6.13	Quality of service **5.00**	Sea and sun **6.56**	Entertainment 5.69
Relaxing place 6.13	Peaceful place **6.06**	Place to rest **6.06**	Ease of getting around 5.19
Sports facilities 5.06	Pleasant destination **6.13**	Arousing destination **5.81**	Exciting destination 5.63

Q28 The three main competitors to the AIR brand

In this question, CR stakeholders were asked to name the AIR's three main competitors. These could include other macro-regions or destinations.

According to the AIR stakeholders the main competitors to the AIR are Spain, Malta, the Tyrrhenian Sea and Corsica, the Danube, and the Western part of Italy.

In detail, the main AIR competitors according to the CR stakeholders are the following:

1st competitors:

- Mediterranean
- Greece
- Spain

2nd competitors:

- France
- Turkey
- Italy

3rd competitors:

- Portugal
- Caribbean
- Malta

Q29 Comparison of the AIR brand with its three main competitors

The next question saw respondents ranking the AIR brand compared to its three main competitors in terms of each brand's strength. The ranking scale went from one for the strongest brand to four for the weakest brand. It was answered by 15 AIR stakeholders and only one respondent (no. 14) ranked the AIR as the strongest brand in relation to its competitors. In detail, one respondent considered the AIR as the second strongest brand, three stakeholders considered the AIR to be either the third or fourth strongest brand in relation to the competitors.

Finally, half of the respondents did not place AIR among the four strongest brands!

Responses	1 (the strongest brand)	2 (the 2nd strongest brand)	3 (the 3rd strongest brand)	4 (the least strong brand)
1	Paris	Mediterranean	**Air**	Spain
2	Spain	Turkey	**AIR**	Portugal
3	Greece	Spain	Turkey	**Air**
4	Croatia	Slovenia	Greece	Italy
5	culture	history	beaches	
6	LATIN AMERICA	IBERIAN	**AIR**	MIDDLE EAST
7	Spain	France	Italy	Greece
8	USA	**AIR**	China	Russia
9	Paris	Alpine Region	Azur Coast	**AIR**
10	South Spain	South Turkey	Black Sea basin	
11	Cyclades	South of France	Eastern Spain	**AIR**
12				
13	Crete	Chios		
14	**AIR**	Spanish Mediterranean Coast	Turkey/Asia Minor	Athens
15	Maghreb/North Africa			

CREATION OF AN AIR BRAND

Q30 Usefulness of the potential creation of an AIR brand

Creation of an AIR brand to strengthen the macro-region's competitiveness was deemed extremely useful by 40% of the CR stakeholders.

Q31 The AIR's three key strengths with respect to its development as tourism brand and identity

In this question, CR stakeholders were asked to give the top three strengths of the macro-region they see as key to developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity.

According to the CR stakeholders, the top-ranked strengths that are key to developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are: culture and heritage, coherent actions (co-ordination) and new model of economy empowerment and promotion.

In detail, the top three strengths were the following:

1st strength:

- local economy empowerment
- cultural heritage
- nature
- approaches people
- culture
- communication
- cultural heritage
- uniformity
- creative
- awareness of the natural history of AIR
- better cohesion between AIR countries
- diversity of landscapes
- new model
- co-ordination for tourist packages

2nd strength:

- brand awareness as a destination
- authentic local cuisine
- something new to discover
- improves the image
- climate
- services
- sea

- competitiveness
- cultural
- increased tourism (economic growth of the region)
- more job opportunities
- sea tourism, cruise, sailing etc.
- new tourist
- lowering of harmful competition of the countries

3rd strength:

- new business opportunities
- not just beaches
- authentic
- increases income
- clean seas
- self-motivation
- climate
- food destination
- awareness of cultural uniqueness of AIR even in relation to the rest of the respective countries—i.e. uniqueness of Ionian island's culture vs the rest of Greece, or Adriatic Italy vs o the parts of the country
- stinger identity
- Balkan identity/culture between east & west
- new opportunities
- interregional cultural programs

Q32 The three main weaknesses facing the development of the AIR as a tourism brand and identity

In this question, CR stakeholders were asked to give the three key weaknesses of the AIR in terms of its development as a tourism brand and identity.

According to their survey submissions, the AIR's main weaknesses with respect to its development as a tourism brand and identity are: different cultures between the countries, mass tourism, difficult access bad connections (borders and transportation connectivity), low marketing activities (e.g., information, communication, collaboration), and pollution.

In detail, the three key weaknesses mentioned were as follows:

1st weakness:

- maybe local culture will be decreased
- people only come for the weather
- poor transport connectivity

- understanding between the provinces
- BORDERS
- accommodation
- environmental hazards
- different cultures and history
- transport connections
- heightened tourism can spoil the precious natural resources here
- might lead to confusion from outside stakeholders
- national differences that would lead to dead ends concerning the strategies
- pollution
- lowering of income for small entrepreneurs

2nd weakness:

- people only know about beaches
- too much differences between the countries involved
- people who get angry soon
- ROAD NETWORK
- tourism information
- mass tourism
- different landscapes and climate conditions
- low visibility
- lack of infrastructure to properly deal with more tourism (build better roads before bringing in more guests). But again, this will destroy the nature that exists here
- languages are different (Benelux works as they speak similar if not the same language)
- disturb
- generalisation of cultural differences in the eyes of tourists

3rd weakness:

- tourists do not stay for very long
- lack of a common identity
- patriotism
- COLABORATION
- language
- infrastructural lacks
- low co-operation
- some villages in this region have been traditionally small, perhaps not equipped with more tourism
- the word AIR doesn't immediately make you think of those countries
- traffic

- less opportunities for local differentiation

Q33 The three key opportunities for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity

In this question, CR members were asked to give the three key opportunities they see as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity.

According to CR members, the top-ranked opportunities for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are: diversified tourism and cultural products can enrich the AIR brand although the national differences, nature and gastronomy, and common marketing and branding strategies.

In detail, the three opportunities they listed as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity were:

1st opportunity:

- culture
- to grow the economy
- nature
- going AIRound
- culture and history
- SAILING
- logo or wordmark
- employment increase
- diversified tourism products
- creative features
- unity
- national differences that might lead to dead ends, but also enriching the strategies
- activities
- use of name "Mediterranean"

2nd opportunity:

- nature
- to diversify the local economy away from just tourism
- sea
- loving AIRound
- attractive places
- GASTRONOMY

- a consistent style for images and content
- benefits for related sectors
- cultural places
- Don't
- Social cohesion
- photos
- use of pop culture references to the region i.e. "Game of Thrones"

3rd opportunity:

- amazing beaches
- to increase communication within the region so different countries can learn from others
- food
- best spots in AIR
- low prices
- HISTORY
- style guide
- increases in the overall income
- environment and food
- know
- more visitors to lesser-known countries
- colours
- unique appeal to non-European markets

Q34 The three main threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity

Finally, in this question, CR stakeholders were asked to give the three main threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity.

According to CR stakeholders, the threats mentioned first were: countries' policies, no co-operation, and lack of funding.

In detail, the three principal threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity according to the CM members were the following:

1st threat:

- Local authorities
- people currently do not see it as a region
- the countries involved are divided by the sea
- politics
- countries relationship
- competitiveness

- instability in the region
- Italian North Adriatic Region sea cannot be an option for summer tourism
- no co-operation between countries
- as above— spoiling what is now near-pristine nature
- lack of funding
- mobility (Visas between EU & non-EU countries)
- pollution
- opposition of localities and politicians

2nd threat:

- tourism professionals must be prepared accordingly
- corruption
- different languages of the countries
- borders
- different culture
- authenticity
- terrorism
- economic difficulties
- further harm and devastation to the sea and it's wild life
- lack of team work
- political differences
- dangerous
- distrust of "others" and neighbours

3rd threat:

- effective international communication can be difficult
- presence of Greece as main competitor
- considered
- education
- creativity
- overexploitation of the resources
- low participation of private sector
- must take care to develop protection for nature before we sell tickets to come see it. Let's think of responsible sustainability before we think of greater exposure
- elitism
- equipment
- underdeveloped culture of co-operation

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis of the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity, according to the CR stakeholders' responses, is presented in the following table:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Local Economy empowerment	Maybe local culture will be decreased
cultural heritage	People only come for the weather
Nature	Poor transport connectivity
approaches people	understanding between the provinces
CULTURE	BORDERS
Communication	Accommodation
Cultural heritage	Environmental hazards
Uniformity	different cultures and history
Creative	Transport connections
Awareness of the natural history of AIR	Heightened tourism can spoil the precious natural resources here
Better cohesion between AIR countries	Might lead to confusion from outside stakeholders
Diversity of landscapes	National differences that would lead to dead ends concerning the strategies
new model	pollution
Co-ordination for tourist packages	Lowering of income for small entrepreneurs
Opportunities	Threats
Culture	Local authorities
To grow the economy	People currently do not see it as a region
Nature	The countries involved are divided by the sea
going AIRound	politics
culture and history	countries relationship
SAILING	competitiveness
logo or wordmark	Instability in the region

Employment increase	**Italian North Adriatic Region sea cannot be an option for summer tourism**
Diversified tourism products	**No co-operation between countries**
Creative features	**As above— spoiling what is now near-pristine nature**
Unity	**Lack of funding**
National differences that might lead to dead ends, but also enriching the strategies	**Mobility (Visas between EU & non-EU countries)**
activities	**pollution**
Use of name "Mediterranean"	**Opposition of localities and politicians**

Q35 Visibility activities that should be performed in common

In the last question of this section, CR members were asked to rate visibility activities that should have, in their opinion, been performed in common (e.g., information, interpretation signboard, Uniform information centres or stands, etc.).

The top-ranked visibility activities that stakeholders thought ought to be performed in common were the following:
● Partnership with tour operators and tourist agents (4.53)
● Information, interpretation signboard, i.e. route summary at all key sites (4.47)

Q36 Rate activities in terms of their importance to your CR in terms of marketing

CR stakeholders were asked to rate several activities in terms of their importance to CR in terms of marketing.

According to the survey answers, the most important marketing activities are Social Media (4.73) and Apps, geolocation maps (4.73).

Q37 Evaluation of the visibility requirements of the new AIR brand's marketing activities.

 In this question, the CR stakeholders were asked to evaluate the requirements for ensuring the visibility of the new AIR brand's marketing activities.

According to stakeholders, for successful visibility the new AIR brand should use Social networks and Digital Marketing (4.73), followed by being present and visible at travel trade industry events, to meet and talk to tour operators, cruise operators (4.67), and work in terms of

communities of interest: successfully identify the organisations, media, blogs and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme (4.67).

— Be present and visible at travel trade industry events, to meet and talk to tour operators, cruise operators, and other professionals.	**4.67**
— Work with the media, using the existing resources of the project's partners.	**4.53**
— Work in terms of communities of interest: successfully identify the organisations, media, blogs and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme.	**4.67**
— Take advantage of high-speed networks and digital tools, e.g. Google Translate, to strengthen communication with customers, and build trade and media relations.	**4.27**
— Use New technologies that increase opportunities for innovation.	**4.33**
— Use Augmented reality and virtual reality to help the visitor understand the links between attractions and assets, across frontiers.	**4.00**
— Fully use Social networks and Digital Marketing.	**4.73**

Q38 The AIR brand's story

The final question of this section asked CR stakeholders to describe the AIR's brand story. People connect with stories. By weaving information into a story, people have an easier time recalling that information in the future. Crafting a unique and powerful narrative to tie to a brand is a great way to not only connect and resonate with the audience, but it also enables a brand to burrow into the audience's long-term memory. If a story is impactful enough, consumers will empathise and keep the brand at the top of their mind.

For the stakeholders, the AIR brand meant the following:
- Where alluring beaches meet rich history
- A historical story about a shared heritage that goes back for thousands of years including a history of seafaring and a common ancient Roman and Greek heritage
- AIR is a mixture of legendary lands fulfil of historical and cultural traditions but where you can feel at home anywhere in AIR
- History has to refer to the relationship of civilisations that have developed in the area since ancient times. The achievements of Greek and Romanticism must be the central point
- Backstory: "In fact, by conventional wisdom, it seems like a pretty dumb idea. Who would want to rent spare rooms to strangers from strange cities in their homes? And would you rent a room in someone's house, instead of a hotel?" Problem: A housing problem occurs when cities sell out during high demand periods. The idea came to me after Airbnb platform and my college buddy who had a couple of air mattresses to rent out when conventions put too much demand on hotels in Chalkida City. That grew to the idea of booking a room anywhere for as short as one night. Solution: "Live like a local," is the Airbnb platform story that I purchase to me for this

online service that matches people seeking vacation rentals and other short-term accommodation needs with hosts who have rooms, apartments, houses or other unique spaces to rent
- Separated by ground borders but connected through the sea
- The place where history unfolded, from the earliest European settlements to the newest cultural innovations. The place where stone, sea and human strength have shaped for millennia.

AIR THEMATIC ROUTES

Q39 Opinion about AIR cultural tourism

In this question, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed (5-point Likert scale) with a series of statements about AIR cultural tourism.

Respondents indicated that nature in the AIR is beautiful (4.71), the AIR has a unique atmosphere (4.5), and the AIR is an exciting region for cultural tourists (4.5).

It is important though to note that all statements reached more than four points out of five. This indicates that the AIR is also considered as an exciting, rich cultural heritage macro-region with beautiful nature and many attractions and routes.

Q40 Cultural Routes visited by CR stakeholders

According to the survey, most stakeholders (85.71%) had not visited any Cultural Routes in the AIR. Only three out of 14 stakeholders had visited even one Cultural Route in the AIR, which is a very small ratio.

For those who had not visited a CR, the questionnaire asked them to continue to section 4. So, the answers to Q41-44 apply only to the stakeholders who had visited an AIR CR.

Q41 Name the Cultural Route(s) you have visited.

Two stakeholders had visited the Routes of the Olive Tree (66.67%) and one had visited the European Route of Historical Thermal towns (33.33%).

Q42 AIR Cultural Routes' degree of achievement of theme interpretation goals

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the AIR Cultural Routes achieve their theme interpretation goals. According to the stakeholders, AIR Cultural Routes have achieved their goals as regards creating positive attitudes (4.00), inspirational (4.00), experiential (4.00) and developing cultural sensibility and exchange (4.00).

However, it is noteworthy that, with the exception of certain aspects (skills and competences development, new cultural values, and developing cultural sensibility and exchange),

participants considered the AIR Cultural Routes to have achieved their remaining theme interpretation goals at least slightly.

Q43 General degree of AIR Cultural Routes' success

According to stakeholders, AIR Cultural Routes are successful in terms of Customer Orientation (aspirational, shared story, experiences that people can relate to) (3.80) and in terms of relations between the partners (transboundary co-operation and collaborative destination marketing) (3.80).

Q44 The top three Cultural Routes associated with the AIR.

According to the survey, the top three Cultural Routes that stakeholders associate with the AIR are ATRIUM, the European route of Jewish heritage and the Phoenicians' route.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The final questions in the stakeholder's questionnaire asked about the respondents' profiles.

Q45 Country of origin
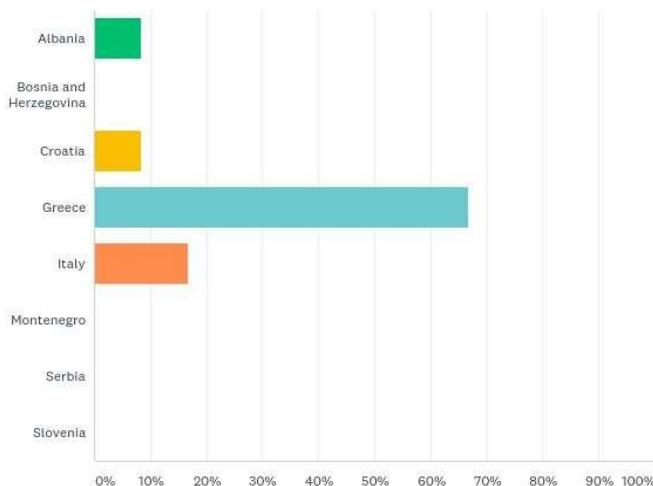
Most of the stakeholders were from Greece (66.67%), followed by Italy, Croatia and Albania.

Q46 Sex of the respondents

Half of the stakeholders that participated in this research were male (50.00%) and the other half female (50.00%).

Q47 Age of the respondents

The stakeholders were mainly (42.86%) between 40 and 49 years old.

Q48 Education level

The majority of the stakeholders (64.29%) have a Master's degree.

Q49 Type of organisation / company

The main industries where the stakeholders work are the accommodation sector (42.86% of stakeholders) as well as the tourism retail/trade sector (42.86%).
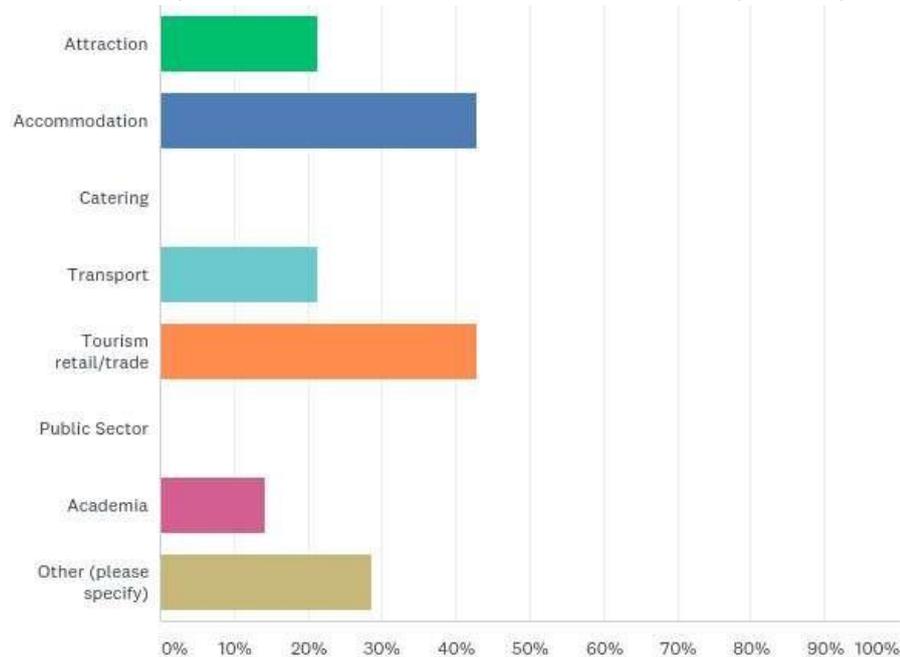
Q50 CR stakeholders' positions within their organisations

Most of the stakeholders work as employees (42.86%).

Q51 Country of operation

The majority of the stakeholders (61.54%) who participated in this research performed their activities in Greece.

Q53 Participation in the annual EUSAIR forum in Budva, Montenegro

The last question concerned respondents' participation at the annual EUSAIR forum that took place in Budva, Montenegro, 6-8 May 2019. The majority of stakeholders (90.91%) had not taken part.

1.3.3. Cultural Routes visitor survey

The goals of the primary research on AIR visitors were to identify their awareness regarding the AIR Cultural Routes, the CRs' tourism potential, and their attitudes towards creation of an AIR brand. The research objectives were thus to:

- assess the current AIR brand and its elements

- make proposals for a new AIR brand

- assess the current AIR thematic routes

- investigate the demographic profile of the respondents

The survey results are presented in sections, following the order of the research objectives.

SECTION 1 - CURRENT AIR BRAND QUESTIONS

Q1 Current AIR brand associations

For the first question in this section, the AIR visitors were asked to think about the word "AIR" and write down, in order, the first three words that came to their mind.

So, according to the AIR visitors, the AIR is associated with the sea, the sky (the blue element), tourism, the air element, the sun, and the islands.

These were the top 10 responses:
- Sea-blue-sky
- Air (airplane/ airlines)
- Tourism (vacations, holidays, travel)
- Sun
- Islands
- Fresh
- Nature
- Clear
- Oxygen
- History

The lists of top-ranked words coming to visitors' minds when thinking about the AIR were as follows:

1st word

- Sea
- Air
- Ionian
- Blue
- history

2nd word:

- sky
- sun
- wind
- islands
- Kefalonia

3rd word

- Fresh
- Culture
- Dalmatian Coast
- Travel
- Sailing

Q2 Describing the AIR as a person

The visitors were next asked to think of the AIR as a person and to give five terms to describe them.

According to the results, the AIR would be a beautiful, good-looking and attractive person who is nice, calm, classic, and elegant. They are also described as a friendly, sexy and unique person!

In detail, the top 10 human traits that characterise the AIR according to the visitors were the following:

- beautiful
- good looking
- attractive
- nice
- calm
- classic
- elegant

- friendly
- sexy
- unique

The top-ranked characteristics were:

1st characteristics:

- beautiful
- fresh
- amazing
- attractive
- calm
- classic - elegant

2nd characteristics:

- Good looking
- Adventurous
- Natural
- Nice
- Relaxed
- Warm
- Tall

3rd characteristics:

- passionate
- diverse-different
- caring
- positive
- strong

4th characteristics:

- unique
- calm
- happy
- clever
- clean
- nice

5th characteristics:

- Friendly
- Funny
- Old-fashioned
- Sexy
- Smiley

Q3 The AIR's personality traits

Following on from the previous question, Q3 asked the AIR visitors to keep thinking of AIR as a person and to rate the extent to which certain personality traits would be descriptive of this person. According to their responses the top personality traits of AIR as a person are:

- Natural (51.06% extremely descriptive)
- Authentic (45.83% extremely descriptive)
- Unique (42.86% extremely descriptive)
- Passionate (42.55% extremely descriptive)

So, visitors to the AIR see it as a natural, authentic, unique, and passionate person!

Q4 The AIR's character

Following the previous series of questions, Q4 asked the visitors to keep thinking of the AIR as a person and to select among the four aspects of experiences as proposed by Brakus et al. (2009) that the AIR might provide: sensory, intellectual, affective, and behavioural.

Thus, according to the visitors, the AIR is primarily an affective (aesthetic) area (3.85).

Q5 The AIR's uniqueness

According to the survey, the AIR is unique because of its traditions (4.30), followed by its cuisine (4.09) and its contribution to world heritage (4.07).

Q6 The AIR in the eye of AIR tourists

According to the visitors, the AIR as a region has a personality (4.27), it has rich history (4.25) and they enjoy visiting AIR (41.5).

Q7 Current strength of the AIR brand

AIR visitors consider the AIR brand to be to strong (35.42%). By "strong", we mean easily recognisable and generating feelings of confidence for AIR-branded tourism products.

Q8-Q27 The image of the AIR brand

AIR visitors believe that the sea and Sun (6.47) and beautiful landscapes are what mostly characterise the image of the AIR. For these items, AIR visitors were presented with a 7-point Likert scale.

Cultural Routes **4.7**	Quality accomodation **4.9**	**Beautiful landscapes 6.2**	**Culturally interesting 5.6**
Good value for money 5.3	**Selection of gastronomy** 5.6	**Variety of fauna and flora** 5.2	**Interesting local customs** 5.5
Safe place 5.1	**Quality of service** 5.1	**Sea and Sun** 6.4	**Entertainment** 5.7
Relaxing Place 5.9	**Peaceful place** 5.9	**Place to rest** 5.8	**Ease of getting around** 5.1
Sports 4.6 facilities	**Pleasant** 5.8 **destination**	**Arousing destination** 5.1	**Exciting destination** 5.3

Q28 The three main competitors to the AIR brand

In this question, AIR visitors were asked to name the AIR's three main competitors. These could include other macro-regions or destinations.

So, according to the AIR visitors, the AIR's main competitors are:

- Spain
- Aegean islands-Cyclades
- France
- Turkey
- Crete

In detail, the main AIR competitors according to the AIR visitors are the following:

1st competitors:

- Spain
- Aegean Islands
- Turkey
- Greece
- Cyclades

2nd competitors:

- Crete
- France
- Balearic Islands

- Italy

3ʳᵈ competitors:

- Malta
- Morocco
- Croatia
- Africa

Q29 Comparison of the AIR brand with its three main competitors

The next question saw respondents ranking the AIR brand compared to its three main competitors in terms of each brand's strength. The ranking scale went from one for the strongest brand to four for the weakest brand. It was answered by 37 AIR visitors, only two of whom rated the AIR as the strongest brand in relation to its competitors.

In detail, 13 respondents rated the AIR as the second strongest brand, 10 stakeholders rated it third, and eight as the fourth strongest brand in relation to its competitors.
Finally, four of the respondents did not place the AIR among the four strongest brands.

According to the visitors, the AIR is mostly the second strongest brand in comparison to the its competitors.

CREATING AN AIR BRAND

Q30 Usefulness of the potential creation of an AIR brand

Creation of an AIR brand to strengthen the macro-region's competitiveness was deemed very useful by AIR visitors (39.02%).

Q31 The AIR's main strengths with respect to its development as a tourism brand and identity

According to AIR visitors, the top-ranked strengths of the macro-region for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are: culture and heritage, the economic factor (rise of local economies, growth of the area), the sea and the sun.

The top 10
- Culture and heritage
- Economic factor
- Sea and sun

- Gastronomy - Food
- Increase of tourism level synergies
- Attractions-Facilities
- Awareness
- The countries share many cultural similarities
- Nature
- Local culture and traditions

In detail, the three strengths they listed as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity were:

1st strength:

- culture
- economic growth
- attraction
- increase of tourism level
- sea sun

2nd strength:

- gastronomy
- awareness
- local culture and traditions
- not so known place for tourists to visit
- the countries share many cultural similarities

3rd strength:

- unique collaboration
- Mediterranean landscape
- possibility to organise trips through several countries easier
- weather and geographical cohesion
- natural beauty

Q32 The three main weaknesses facing the development of the AIR as a tourism brand and identity

In this question, AIR visitors were asked to give the three key weaknesses of the AIR in terms of its development as a tourism brand and identity.

According to their survey submissions, the AIR's main weaknesses with respect to its development as a tourism brand and identity are: different countries (e.g. Hard to distinguish each country separately, each country has different tourism policy), lack of local focus and identity (e.g. danger of losing the authenticity and the local traditions, should keep their diversities and identities), difficult access, bad connections and lack of infrastructure (borders and transportation connectivity), pollution, and over tourism.

In detail, the three key weaknesses mentioned were as follows:

No.	Negative element
1	different countries and cultures
2	loss of the local focus
3	Lack of infrastructure
4	political issues
5	Tourism can destroy the local environment
6	RISK OF OVERTOURISM
7	Lack of synergies - marketing
8	Prices - Cost
9	Competition
10	Lack of tourism culture

1st weakness:

- different countries and cultures
- loss of the local focus
- lack of infrastructure
- political issues

2nd weakness:

- Tourism can destroy the local environment
- RISK OF OVERTOURISM
- Lack of synergies-marketing
- Prices - Cost

3rd weakness:

- Competition

- Lack of tourism culture
- Organisation of the brand, management

Q33 The three key opportunities for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity

In this question, AIR visitors were asked to give the three key opportunities they see as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity.

According to AIR visitors, the top-ranked opportunities for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are: common branding and marketing efforts can enrich the AIR brand, culture, nature and geography, and growth opportunities (e.g., new developing destinations, more jobs, better economic conditions).

In detail, the three opportunities they listed as key for developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity were:

- branding and marketing opportunities
- culture
- growth
- nature and geographical attributes (mountain, sea, rivers, etc.)
  alternative tourism (new experiences for tourists, niche markets,
- new products, routes, etc.)
- sea and sun
- gastronomy
- new destinations
- Europe
- creating synergies

1st opportunity:

- Branding and Marketing opportunities
- Culture
- Growth
- Nature and Geographical attributes (mountain, sea, rivers, etc.)
- Alternative tourism (e.g., wellness, extreme sports, niche, etc.)

2nd opportunity:

- sea and sun
- gastronomy
- new destinations (upcoming regions) Europe (is strong brand)
- creating synergies (collaboration)
- stable social and political environment in most AIR countries

3rd opportunity:

- fun
- attractive prices lower competition
- tourists stay within the air region

Q34 The three main threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity

Finally, in this question, AIR visitors were asked to give the three main threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity.

According to the visitors, the main threats mentioned first are: competition from other destinations, countries' policies and instability in the region (reputation of some areas, safety issues, etc.), bad management and marketing, and different cultures and customs.

In detail, the three principal threats to the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity according to the CM members were the following:

1. competition from other destinations
2. instability and politics of the region
3. the bad management and marketing
4. different culture
5. ECONOMIC CRISIS
6. difficulty in synergy
7. competitiveness among participating nations
8. Local stakeholders
9. Lack of variety in places for entertainment
10. POLLUTION

1st threats:
- competition from other destinations

- instability and politics of the region

- the bad management and marketing

- different culture
- ECONOMIC CRISIS

2nd threats:

- difficulty in synergy

- competitiveness among participating nations

- local stakeholders

3rd threats:

- lack of variety in places for entertainment

- POLUTION

- transport

- the lack of respect from the locals towards their place
- weather in winter

SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis of the AIR's development as a tourism brand and identity, according to the AIR visitors' responses, is presented in the following table:

Strengths	Weaknesses
Culture	different countries and cultures
Sea and sun	loss of the local focus
Nature	Lack of infrastructure
Gastronomy - Food	the bad management and marketing
local culture and traditions	Lack of synergies - co-operation
many cultural similarities	Lack of tourism culture from stakeholders
Awareness of some countries as established travel destinations	Prices - Cost
Opportunities	**Threats**
Branding and Marketing opportunities	competition from other destinations
Growth opportunities (economic, social, etc.)	instability and politics of the region
New tourism products and experiences (new experiences for tourists, niche markets, alternative tourism, new routes, etc.)	competitiveness among participating nations

New destinations (lesser known, evolving, unknown, etc.)	Economic Crisis
Europe is strong brand (and Mediterranean)	Pollution
creating synergies opportunities	Overtourism

Q35 Visibility activities that should be performed in common

In the last question of this section, CR members were asked to rate visibility activities that should have, in their opinion, been performed in common (e.g., information, interpretation signboard, Uniform information centres or stands, etc.).

The top-ranked visibility activities that stakeholders thought ought to be performed in common were the following:
- the partnership with tour operators and tourist agents (4.28)
- the common website (4.21).

Q36 The AIR brand's story
The final question of this section asked AIR visitors to describe the AIR's brand story. People connect with stories. By weaving information into a story, people have an easier time recalling that information in the future. Crafting a unique and powerful narrative to tie to a brand is a great way to not only connect and resonate with the audience, but it also enables a brand to burrow into the audience's long-term memory. If a story is impactful enough, consumers will empathise and keep the brand at the top of their mind.

Here are some of the responses of AIR visitors:

- The story, in my view, would need to be about the long history of the people in the region, their similarities, their similar customs, the scenery that looks the same, their connection through the sea routes that have been there since ancient times
- An interesting mixture of different cultures and civilisations combined together to give the tourist an unforgiven memory
- Tastes, hospitality and sea
- Culture and history of many nations inhabiting the soil of the region seasoned with great food, nature and hospitality
- Game of Thrones
- AIR means happiness, relaxation and wellness. What you need during your vacation is AIR. Live the unique experience and feel the AIR.
- The story should be connected with the history.
- It's very important and makes me want visit a place. It can change my choice of visiting a place or make a place my number one in my "travel list".
- The sailors who travel from Greece to Italy, passing from the intervening countries and finally reaching the beautiful Venice or the Mediterranean Sicily

- Traces of beauty
- It doesn't have a story brand. It's a large, hugely diverse region filled with people who live there, not a commodity to be packaged and sold
- A beautiful and warm place with hospitable people and great culture
- A folkloric destination with Greece as the fountain of History and the Ionian Sea as the 'Pacific Ocean' alike waters of Europe
- Traditional family-oriented destination with relax and culture
- AIR was always there. Created thousands of years ago and now still has his glory and freshness and is ready to share it with us.
- Holidays

AIR THEMATIC ROUTES

Q37 Opinion about AIR cultural tourism

In this question, participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed (on a 5-point Likert scale) with a series of statements about AIR cultural tourism.

They agreed that nature in the AIR is beautiful (4.62) and the macro-region has a rich cultural heritage (4.46).

It is worth noting that all the statements received ratings indicated strong agreement, reaching more than four points out of 5, with the except of the statement "AIR has exciting Cultural Routes", which only reached 3.89. This indicates that the AIR is also considered by visitors to be exciting, with a rich cultural heritage, beautiful nature, and many attractions.

Q38 AIR visitors' use of CRs.

According to the results, the majority of visitors (77.78%) have not visited any Cultural Routes within the AIR.

For those who had not visited a CR, the questionnaire had them skip to section 4. So, the answers to Q41-44 apply only to those AIR visitors who had visited a CR.

Q39 Cultural Route visited by AIR visitors.

Only 11 of the AIR visitors responding to this survey had visited a Cultural Route in the AIR, which is a very small ratio. Six of them had visited the Routes of the Olive Tree (54.55%) and one each had visited: European Mozart Ways, Destination Napoleon, Via Francigena, Cluniac Sites in Europe, Impressionism Route.

Q40 AIR Cultural Routes' degree of achievement of theme interpretation goals

Participants were asked to rate the extent to which the AIR Cultural Routes achieve their theme interpretation goals. According to the visitors, AIR Cultural Routes have achieved their goals as regards developing cultural sensibility and exchange (3.87) and the experiential element (3.73).

The AIR visitors generally rated the CRs positively in this question, with items achieving mean ratings about three out of 4.

Q41 General degree of AIR Cultural Routes' success

According to visitors, AIR Cultural Routes are successful in terms of sustainability (protect and promote the natural and cultural heritage) (3.67), followed by the economy (lengthen visit stay, attract a higher-yield visitor; etc.) and relations between the partners (transboundary co-operation and collaborative destination marketing), both at 3.47mean.

Q42 The top three Cultural Routes associated with the AIR.

According to the survey, the top 3 Cultural Routes that visitors associate with the AIR are the Olive Tree Route, the European route of Jewish heritage, and the Phoenicians route.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

The final questions in the visitors' questionnaire asked about the respondents' profiles.

Q43 Country of origin

Most of the visitors were from Greece (94.29%), one respondent was from Bosnia and Herzegovina, one from Serbia, and four respondents selected the other option without specifying their nationality. 15 respondents skipped this question.

Q44 Sex of the respondents

Most of the visitors that participated in this research were female (58.97%).

Q45 Age of the respondents

The biggest group of visitors by age was the 30-39-year-olds (42.11%).

Q46 Education level

The majority of the visitors (84.62%) have a Master's degree.

PART II - STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT OF THE ADRIATIC-IONIAN REGION BRAND

1. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT AIR BRAND

1.1   CREATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AN AIR BRAND

One of the primary objectives of this branding strategy is to create a brand identity that promotes the AIR and links a diverse range of appropriate and engaged Cultural Routes from the macro-region.

Part I of this strategy presented an audit of the AIR brand. Any destination branding process starts by assessing what the macro-region's assets are and focuses on how best to present these to each customer group or market segment. This was done by undertaking a destination audit and presenting the main points of methodology used for the brand audit.

Part II of this strategy document presents the development of the AIR brand, based on the results of the audit phase. The analysis here aims to capture the essence of the AIR brand that should work in harmony with the brands already in use by the Cultural Routes and the macro-region.

This report is divided into the following sections:

1. Current perception of the AIR brand: Interpretation of data gathered in the brand audit surveys of the AIR Cultural Routes .

2. Brand strategy development: using the scientific methodologies from marketing and branding academia, and following the guidelines of the Council of Europe, and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) / European Travel Commission (ETC) *Handbook on marketing transnational tourism themes and routes* (2017) and the ETC/UNWTO *Handbook on tourism destination branding* (2009) to capture the personality of the brand and define a draft identity.

3. Brand implementation recommendations: The final recommendations regarding the brand strategy development and moving towards the implementation phase of this project.

1.2   BRANDING OBJECTIVES

For the AIR brand to be strong and sustainable, it is important to bear in mind the objectives of defining a brand in the first place. This is a critical first step in the process of brand creation. This awareness should be shared by all those involved in creating and implementing the brand.

The UNWTO/ETC *Handbook on tourism destination branding* (2009) defines the objectives of branding as:

- To differentiate from its competitors

- To increase awareness and recognition, and therefore, memorability of the destination over time amongst potential visitors

- To create a positive image

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- To give the destination a strong and compelling brand identity

Moreover, according to UNWTO/ETC's *Handbook on marketing transnational tourism themes and routes* (2017), the brand should be developed by following certain principles:

- Clear formulation of the brand essence: what it represents, for whom and how

- Agreement by all key stakeholders on the values and key messages

- Development of a brand strategy, including how the brand will be expressed within the partnership and to the outside world, including through words and imagery

- Progressive rollout of the brand, through documents, meetings and other events

Given these considerations, the aim of the new AIR brand strategy is to:

> Develop a new "umbrella" brand for AIR tourism and especially cultural tourism, merging the identity of the two stakeholders (the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe) in order to increase the visibility of the two.

In particular, it is important for the AIR to meet the following branding objectives:
1. improving the competitiveness of AIR along with the Cultural Routes in the European and global tourism marketplace
2. establishing a co-operation between AIR and the Cultural Routes on tourism promotion

3.   co-ordinating the marketing of both AIR and Cultural Routes, to make them more effective and increase their reach

1.3   CURRENT PERCEPTION OF THE AIR BRAND

Comparing between the three sets of key players in the macro-region (CR managers, CR stakeholders and AIR visitors) reveals some common elements regarding their perceptions of the AIR brand.

First, all the participants in the research presented in Part I were asked to think about the word "AIR" and write down the first three words to came to mind. According to all parties, the AIR is associated primarily with the sea, the sky and secondarily with nature, history and tourism.
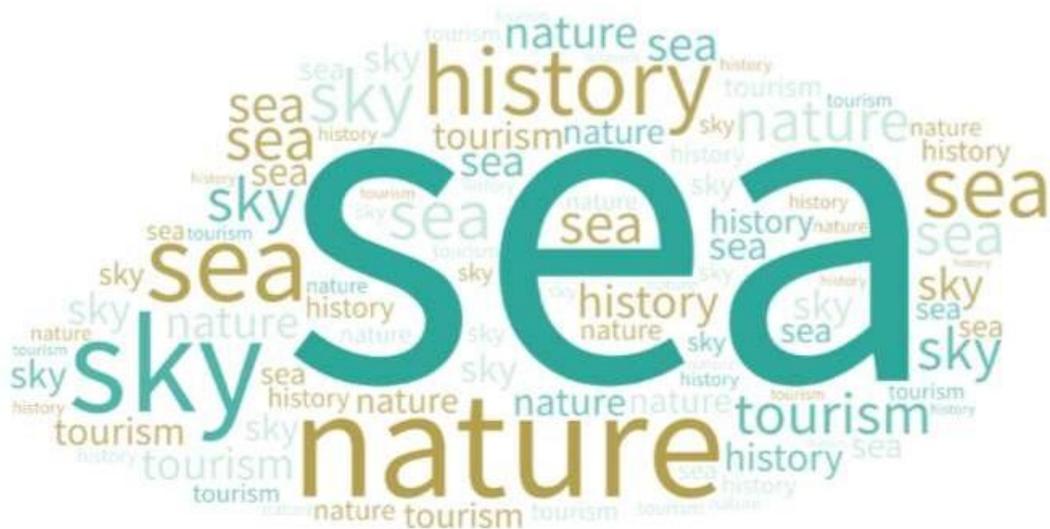
Second, the parties were asked to think of the AIR as a person and describe them with five characteristics. The managers, stakeholders and visitors agreed on the following characteristics:

- Beautiful
- Elegant
- Interesting
- diverse/ different
- cultural
- friendly
- sexy
- unique/authentic

Moreover, all participants agreed on the top personality traits of AIR as a person, which are:

- Natural
- Authentic

PassionateThe AIR's character was described by all parties as affective (Esthetic).

Regarding AIR's uniqueness, its cuisine and contribution to the world heritage are what make it unique and different.

Moreover, according to all participants, the average tourist in the AIR believes that the macro-region has a rich history and they enjoy visiting AIR.

The AIR brand was seen as relatively strong by all participants in the research. By "strong", we mean easily recognisable and generating feelings of confidence for AIR-branded tourism products.

All parties agreed that the AIR offers beautiful landscapes.

Survey participants were then asked about the AIR brand's story. Many common elements were found. According to the survey results, the AIR is a mixture of legendary lands full of historical and cultural traditions but where you can feel at home anywhere in the AIR. Importance was also given to the similarities among AIR countries, their similar customs and scenery, their connections through sea routes that have been there since ancient times, separated by ground borders but connected through the sea. Indeed, the AIR encompasses an interesting mixture of different cultures and civilisations combined. Finally, AIR was seen by survey respondents as a land of civilisations that connects people and cultures through the centuries.

In conclusion, the research has shown clearly that the current perception of the AIR Cultural Routes is focused on two main elements:

- A mixture of lands with both common and diverse cultures, customs and people.

- Connected by the sea, air, sky (elements of nature), and culture.

The above results present a clear indication of the perceived characteristics of the AIR Cultural Routes among the participants of the online survey. They provide a baseline for considering how to develop the identity of the AIR brand.

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1.4 CURRENT PERCEPTION OF THE AIR CULTURAL ROUTES BRAND

The next part of the survey looked into the current attitudes towards the marketing of AIR Cultural Routes. According to both the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the participants, among the AIR's strongest assets are its beautiful nature and rich cultural heritage.

Survey participants were also asked to rate the extent to which the AIR Cultural Routes achieve their theme interpretation goals. The outcome was that they have been successful so far with respect to developing cultural sensibility and exchange.

Participants agreed that AIR Cultural Routes have established successful relationships between partners (transboundary co-operation and collaborative destination marketing).

Finally, the top three Cultural Routes that all participants associate with the AIR are:

- Olive Tree Route
- European route of Jewish heritage
- Phoenicians route

The results above indicate that, while current awareness of the AIR Cultural Routes is low, there is high interest and willingness to make greater use of the AIR Cultural Routes, should appropriate support and guidance be forthcoming. It could be argued that the low level of product development in alignment with the routes is not negative per se, as it provides a blank slate for a new brand and product development, as opposed to rebranding existing products.

Moreover, the assessment of the Cultural Routes by the CR managers led to the following outcomes:
- AIR travellers are thought primarily to seek to enjoy the AIR's culture (museums, music, artefacts, dances, festivals, etc.) .
- The first phrases used to characterise AIR visitors were: nice; highly experiential in their approach; focus on specific subjects; like nature; looking for originality and unusual destinations; European culture; seaside.
- Typical products from AIR include Olive Oil, Olives, artworks that have the theme of the olive tree, other traditional products from the olive tree area, geese foie gras, cheese.
- CR members mentioned medals, plates, and glasses as additional local products produced by and/or promoted through their Cultural Route.
- The main assets of the Cultural Routes are culture, traditions, festivals, gastronomy on the one hand and ecology, landscape and natural assets on the other.
- These main assets are seen as equally important.

- Cultural values and safety of the surroundings also ranked among the top CR aspects, as did experience value, the type of accommodation facilities (hotels, hostels, camps, rural traditional accommodations), and tourist surroundings (active tourism destinations in the vicinity) .
- The AIR's gastronomy is the most influential motivation for Cultural Route travellers.

1.5 BRAND POSITIONING AMONGST COMPETITORS

Survey participants showed broad agreement in terms of the regions that compete with the AIR:

In general, respondents ranked the AIR as the 2nd or 3rd strongest brand among its competitors.

The personality traits more strongly associated with the AIR than with its competitors were the following:

- honest
- sincere
- down-to-earth
- humane
- natural
- dynamic

1.6 THE AIR BRAND – SWOT ANALYSIS

In order to better understand the AIR brand, a SWOT analysis was carried out with each of the three sets of research participants: CR members, CR stakeholders and AIR visitors. The SWOT analyses from each group are presented separately, below. Subsequently, we turn to the common emergent themes.

SWOT ANALYSIS: CR MEMBERS

According to the CR members' responses (see Table 1), the AIR's strengths are the coherent actions, authenticity, culture and heritage. Its weaknesses are the different stages of development of the countries, mass tourism, difficult access, geographical difficulty and bad connections. Opportunities include the protection of heritage, the existence of young people, untapped cultural resources and maritime communications. The threats present in AIR are countries' already existing tourism strategies/identity, deficient information, maritime distances and the fragmentation of the tourism offer.

Strengths	Weaknesses
coherent actions	different stages of development of the countries
Authenticity	mass tourism
Authenticity	difficult access
Culture	geographical difficulty
Heritage	Bad connections
Opportunities	Threats
protect heritage	countries' already existing tourism strategies/identity
young people	deficient information
untapped cultural resources	maritime distances
maritime communications	fragmentation of the tourism offer

Table 1. SWOT analysis: CR members

SWOT ANALYSIS: CR STAKEHOLDERS

According to CR stakeholders (see Table 2), the strengths of AIR include local economy empowerment, cultural heritage, nature, approaching people, culture, communication, cultural heritage, uniformity, creativity, awareness of the natural history of AIR, better cohesion between AIR countries, diversity of landscapes, a new model and co-ordination for tourist packages. The AIR's perceived weaknesses are that maybe local culture will be decreased, that people only come for the weather, the poor transport connectivity, understanding between the provinces, borders, accommodation, environmental hazards, different cultures and history, transport connections, that heightened tourism can spoil the precious natural resources there, that might lead to confusion from outside stakeholders, national differences that would lead to dead ends concerning the strategies, pollution and lowering of income for small entrepreneurs.

As for opportunities, CR stakeholders brought up the following: AIR can offer culture, growth of the economy, nature, going AIRound, culture and history, sailing, logo or wordmark, employment increase, diversified tourism products, creative features, unity, national differences that might lead to dead ends, but also enriching the strategies, activities and the use of name "Mediterranean". Threats mentioned were local authorities, that people currently do not see it as a region, that the countries involved are divided by the sea, politics, countries' relationship, competitiveness, instability in the region, that Italian North Adriatic Region sea cannot be an option for summer tourism, no co-operation between countries, spoiling what is now near-pristine nature, Lack of funding, mobility (Visas between EU & non-EU countries), pollution and opposition of localities and politicians.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Local Economy empowerment	Maybe local culture will be decreased
Cultural heritage	People only come for the weather
Nature	Poor transport connectivity
Approaches people	Understanding between the provinces
CULTURE	BORDERS
Communication	Accommodation
Cultural heritage	Environmental hazards
Uniformity	Different cultures and history
Creative	Transport connections
Awareness of the natural history of AIR	Heightened tourism can spoil the precious natural resources here
Better cohesion between AIR countries	Might lead to confusion from outside stakeholders
Diversity of landscapes	National differences that would lead to dead ends concerning the strategies

New model	Pollution
Co-ordination for tourist packages	Lowering of income for small entrepreneurs
Opportunities	**Threats**
Culture	Local authorities
To grow the economy	People currently do not see it as a region
Nature	The countries involved are divided by the sea
Going airound	Politics
Culture and history	Countries relationship
SAILING	Competitiveness
Logo or wordmark	Instability in the region
Employment increase	Italian North Adriatic Region sea cannot be an option for summer tourism
Diversified tourism products	No co-operation between countries
Creative features	As above— spoiling what is now near-pristine nature
Unity	Lack of funding
National differences that might lead to dead Ends, but also enriching the strategies	Mobility (Visas between EU & non-EU Countries)
Activities	Pollution
Use of name "Mediterranean"	Opposition of localities and politicians

Table 2. SWOT analysis: CR stakeholders

SWOT ANALYSIS: AIR VISITORS

According to the AIR visitors surveyed (see Table 3), the AIR's strengths are culture, sea and sun, nature, gastronomy – food, local culture and traditions, many cultural similarities and the awareness of some countries as established travel destinations. The weaknesses they listed are the different countries and cultures, the loss of the local focus, the lack of infrastructure, the bad management and marketing, the lack of synergies – co-operation, the lack of tourism culture from stakeholders and prices – cost.

In terms of opportunities, the visitors mentioned: AIR offers many such as branding and marketing opportunities, growth opportunities (economic, social, etc.), new tourism products and experiences (new experiences for tourists, niche markets, alternative tourism, new routes, etc.), new destinations (lesser known, evolving, unknown, etc.), Europe is a strong brand (and Mediterranean) and creating synergy opportunities. They identified the following threats: the competition from other destinations, the instability and politics of the region, the competitiveness among participating nations, the economic crisis, pollution and over tourism.

Strengths	Weaknesses
Culture	Different countries and cultures
sea and sun	loss of the local focus
Nature	Lack of infrastructure
Gastronomy - Food	the bad management and marketing
local culture and traditions	Lack of synergies - co-operation
many cultural similarities	Lack of tourism culture from stakeholders
Awareness of some countries as established travel destinations	Prices - Cost

Opportunities	Threats
Branding and Marketing opportunities	competition from other destinations
Growth opportunities (economic, social, etc.)	instability and politics of the region
New tourism products and experiences (new experiences for tourists, niche markets, alternative tourism, new routes, etc.)	competitiveness among participating nations
New destinations (lesser known, evolving, unknown, etc.)	Economic Crisis
Europe is strong brand (and Mediterranean)	Pollution
creating synergies opportunities	Overtourism

Table 3. SWOT OF VISITORS

1.7 COMMON ELEMENTS FROM SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis for the AIR indicates that there are distinct advantages but also certain difficulties and limitations for the AIR brand. The latter are primarily due to concerns regarding the capacity for effective co-ordination of brand implementation.

In particular, the main strengths of AIR are culture, sea and sun, nature, gastronomy – food, local culture and traditions, many cultural similarities and the awareness of some countries as established travel destinations.

Moreover, the top three positive attributes all participants see as key aspects of developing the AIR as a tourism brand and identity are culture and heritage, coherent marketing actions (co-ordination), and a new model of economy empowerment and promotion. Further positive attributes mentioned were common branding and marketing efforts and culture and growth opportunities (e.g., new developing destinations, marine connections, better economic conditions).

In terms of the visibility activities that ought to be performed together, all participants agree on starting a partnership with tour operators and tourist agents and creating a unique visual design identity.

The creation and successful implementation of the AIR brand requires a clear understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the creation of a brand faces and upon which it can build.

2. CREATING AN AIR BRAND - BRAND STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

2.1 THE AIR BRAND – UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCES, STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

Overall, the survey results show very positive support for the development of an AIR brand. According to all sets of participants, the creation of an AIR brand would be very useful to make the macro-region more competitive. The mean value of responses to the relevant item reached 7.48 out of 10, suggesting that all three types of survey participants were favourable to the creation of an AIR brand.

The survey considered the point of view of the main CR stakeholders (e.g. CR members, tourists and tourism professionals from various AIR countries) with a potential link to the AIR brand, having first focused on a review of consumers' perceptions.

The feedback obtained through the survey paves the way for brand development. Nevertheless, a successful brand creation process will require further interaction with CR members, tourism specialists and marketing professionals, as well as with current and potential visitors. This type of further research will be critical in developing a long-term and sustainable brand identity. For this reason, it is important that the brand creation process be thorough and detailed.

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2.2 KEY FACTORS IN BRAND DEVELOPMENT

There are some factors that are key to the successful creation of a brand. These should therefore be considered in the context of an AIR brand. They were highlighted in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes management handbook, to be used as guidance for the creation of a brand for Cultural Routes (Council of Europe *Cultural Routes management: from theory to practice*, 2015, pp. 84-85).

First, we turn to brand values. These are the strengths and qualities that underpin all of a brand's aspects – its unique selling points. Brand values are closely tied to the concept of authenticity. This is linked to the type and the quality of an experience. A close examination of the existing tourism offers and their corresponding qualities will be required to ensure that the AIR brand's values are compatible with the destinations and attractions wishing to engage with said brand.

Next are uniqueness and differentiation. In developing an AIR brand identity, it is very important to maintain an awareness of the need for clear positioning and differentiation from the globally-known Cultural Routes. This means that in developing a successful AIR brand it will be critical to create an identity that builds on the overall concept of the AIR Cultural Routes as the original place that brought and still brings life to the world, while at the same time presenting the concept of a new and unique experience.

2.3 THE AIR BRAND PYRAMID

To provide recommendations for the creation of an AIR tourism brand, the data collected by the study combined with advice from tourism marketing academia and the UNWTO guidelines contained in the *Handbook on tourism destination branding*. The "brand pyramid" was used to develop an initial brand concept in a structured manner.

To integrate brand equity among different target groups (visitors, Cultural Routes, media, tourism stakeholders), we apply the six-stage brand pyramid model (UNWTO & ETC, 2009). The brand pyramid is a standardised model defining the key elements to assess prior to the brand development phase.

As outlined by the UNWTO, the key elements to define are:

- Attributes: What are the destination's tangible, verifiable, objective, measurable characteristics?

- Rational benefits: What benefits for the tourist result from the destination's features?

- Emotional benefits: What psychological rewards or emotional benefits do tourists receive by visiting the destination? How does the tourist feel?

- Brand personality: Which of the destination's characteristics should be communicated by the brand?

- Brand values: What values does the destination instil?

- Brand essence: What is the essential nature and character of the destination?

  Based on the outputs of the brand audit, the following AIR brand pyramid was developed:

  Attributes: the tangible, verifiable, objective, measurable characteristics of the AIR. The following key points can be considered the main attributes of the AIR:

  - Sea, sky, nature

  - (From the SWOT analysis) Culture, heritage, coherent marketing actions, new model of economy, empowerment and promotion, growth opportunities

  Rational benefits: These are the main tourism assets of the AIR brand; that is, what visitors want to see and do. The following key points can be considered rational attributes:

  - Cuisine, beauty, contribution to world heritage, cultural heritage, nature, history, tourism, tradition

  Emotional benefits: After assessing the rational attributes, the next step is to explore the "emotional take-away"; that is, what emotional reactions a visitor feels:

  - Affective
  - Enjoy visiting
  - Refreshing
  - Warm

  Brand personality: The brand personality focuses on what is unique about the AIR brand compared to other competing brands. Major components of the brand personality would be:
  - natural, passionate/sexy, beautiful, elegant, interesting, cultural, friendly, diverse/different but also unique/authentic

  Brand values: The destination brand values are what the brand stands for. The AIR destination must count upon these three brand values that will guide and appear in all marketing and other activities within the destination:

- Original: this brand value captures the significance of the AIR region for the world, by analogy of what the four classical elements of earth, water, air, and fire mean for the universe. The latter constituted the cornerstone of philosophy, science, humanity and medicine for more than two-thousand years. The AIR is – according to the answers common to all the survey respondents- the place where all these four elements naturally meet: the sea (water), sky (air), landscape and heritage (land), warm and friendly (fire). Other terms that could be used for this value are: Essential, Existential, Cosmic, Unique, Universal, Prime, Pure, Grandeur.

- Synthesis: this brand value represents the cultural mixture of AIR lands with simultaneously common and diverse culture, traditions, customs and people, that are magically connected – according to the majority of survey responses – by the elements of nature, culture (intercultural experiences and dialogue, and Cultural Routes), and affection (love, people). Other words that could be used are: Shared, Amalgamation, Mosaic, Unity.

- Aesthetic: this brand value encompasses the emotional delight from integrating one's self with the AIR, as a visitor, as a resident and as a stakeholder. According to most responses, the AIR is a warm and friendly place that awakens an amalgam of positive emotions through unique experiences. Such positive emotions arising from the appreciation of various aesthetic experiences throughout nature and culture are defined as aesthetic emotions[13].

Accordingly, an aesthetic experience can be defined as a special state of mind that is qualitatively different from everyday experiences. These are the sentiments and emotions that the majority of visitors and stakeholders mention when it comes to their integration with the AIR as a places. Other words that could be used are: Arousing, Awakening, Refreshing, Breathless, Emotional.

> These three brand values best characterise the AIR: nature (the original), culture (synthesis), and people (emotions)!

Brand essence: The brand essence, together with the brand values, make up the "DNA" of the AIR brand. A brand's essence answers the question "What are the essential nature and character of the destination?".

Given the three main brand values established above…
1. Original: the place (the AIR is the origin of the universe and life)

---

[13] Aesthetic emotions (Menninghaus, et al., 2019) are emotions that include an aesthetic evaluation/appreciation of an object, and are linked to specific aesthetic appeals.

2. Synthesis: the relationship with the place (through both diverse and common culture, experiences and routes)
3. Aesthetic: the visitor benefit (the AIR brand induces positive feelings and emotions)

… the following can be considered the brand essence of the AIR:

- There is no life without AIR.
- You can't live without AIR.
- Explore AIR, explore the breath of life.
- The different elements of nature, culture and experiential emotions that uniquely connect the world.
- Separation of civilisations that get connected through unique and authentic nature, culture and emotions.

Figure 5 is the graphic description of the brand pyramid that visualises the components above.

Figure 5: AIR Brand Pyramid

Adapted from UNWTO/ETC, *Handbook on Tourism Destination Branding* 2009, p.45

Note: The content of the brand pyramid should ideally be reviewed and revised in the context of a Council of Europe workshop. The brand audit covered a range of participants, providing a huge amount of data. This resulted in an in-depth insight into potential components of the AIR brand, but also an overload that restricts one's ability to distil the essence of the AIR brand. A facilitated, face-to-face workshop focused on the whole rather than the parts will enable refinement, consensus, and the finalisation of the brand identity development process**.**

2.4 DISCUSSION ON THE PROPOSED BRAND DEVELOPMENT

The survey results lead to the notion of the four elements of nature, culture, and positive emotions (aesthetic or affective), as many responses about the AIR's image were about:

● the four classical elements of Nature (the original elements of the Universe and life): beautiful landscape and attractions/ heritage (earth), the sea (water), the sky (air), and warmth, friendliness (fire)

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● all combined (synthesised) by culture, and

● positive (aesthetic) experiences and emotions!

This leads us back to the cosmogonic theory of the four classical elements (the original brand value of the AIR). The ancient Greeks believed that there were four elements composing everything: earth, water, air, and fire. This theory was suggested around 450 BCE by Empedocles.

It is striking that Empedocles was a Greek philosopher who lived in Akragas in Sicily (Italy). What a great combination! So, Empedocles, the father of the notion of the four elements, comes from the AIR!

Empedocles also proposed forces he called love and strife (the aesthetic brand value of the AIR) which would mix and separate the elements, respectively. This theory was later supported and added to by Aristotle.

Aristotle also suggested that there was a fifth element, aether (ancient Greek: $\alpha\iota\vartheta\eta\rho$, "aither" or "air"), the material that fills the region of the universe above the terrestrial sphere. The word $\alpha\iota\vartheta\eta\rho$ (aither) in Homeric Greek means "upper air" or "pure, fresh air". In Greek mythology, it was thought to be the pure essence that the gods breathed, filling the space where they lived, analogous to the air breathed by mortals. It is also personified as a deity, Aether, the son of Erebus and Nyx in traditional Greek mythology. In the Greek cosmogonies, Aether (or Air) was considered to be one of the elementary substances from which the universe was formed and connected (corresponding to the synthesis brand value of the AIR).

This theory of luminiferous aether would influence the wave theory of light proposed by Christiaan Huygens, and subsequent theories proposed by Maxwell, Einstein and de Broglie.

Aether has also been used in various gravitational theories as a medium to help explain gravitation and what causes it. It was used in one of Sir Isaac Newton's first published theories of gravitation, and by modern scientists like René Descartes and Nikola Tesla.

In conclusion, the AIR brand could not be anything other than the original element that led to the existence of the world and life through its nature, culture and emotions. It is the origin of the universe and life – the air that brings life to all existence.

The fifth Orphic hymn to Aether describes the aether (air) substance as "the high- reigning, ever indestructible power of Zeus," "the best element," and "the life-spark of all creature". So it is the AIR!

Ultimately

As Aether is the unique essence that flows through all of existence, so the AIR is to the world!

The AIR is the unique essence that flows through our existence and life!

3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTEGRATING THE BRAND INTO MARKETING ACTIVITIES

The aim of the new AIR brand strategy is to develop a new "umbrella" brand for AIR tourism and especially cultural tourism, merging the identity of the two stakeholders (the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe) in order to increase the visibility of the two.

Following the extensive literature review and surveys above, we see that the AIR stands for these three fundamental brand values:

● Original*:* this brand value represents the significance of the AIR region to the world. (Other words that could be used are: Essential, Existential, Cosmic, Unique, Universal, Prime, Pure, Grandeur).

● Synthesis*:* this brand value represents the cultural mixture of AIR lands with simultaneously common and diverse culture, traditions, customs and people, that are magically connected. (Other words that could be used are: Shared, Amalgam, Mosaic, Unity).

- Aesthetic*:* this brand value represents the emotional delight arising from integrating one's self with the AIR, as a visitor, as a resident and as a stakeholder. (Other words that could be used are: Arousing, Awakening, Refreshing, Breathless, Emotional).

Thus, the following can be considered the brand essence of AIR:

- There is no life without AIR.
- You can't live without AIR.
- Explore AIR, explore the breath of life.
- The different elements of nature, culture and experiential emotions that uniquely connect the world.
- Separation of civilisations that get connected through unique and authentic nature, culture and emotions.

These brand values and essence points are the AIR's strategic message and should appear in all marketing communications (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006; Morgan et al., 2004; Can-Seng Ooi, 2004; UNWTO & EUTC, 2009). They must be reflected in the all imagery used to describe the destination (for example, in websites, brochures, etc.) and be followed by all AIR stakeholders and institutions.

Finally, a key to ensure a wide range of appropriate stakeholders' usage of the brand values and essence to increase awareness and visibility is the brand assets template (Table 4). The brand assets template is a tool to help Cultural Routes members and other stakeholders apply the brand values to their destinations, products and experiences. It is a reference checklist to match products and experiences against each of the brand values. The tool can also be used to check that they have used the relevant brand values in the text and imagery of promotional materials.

AIR products and experiences	AIR brand values		
	Original	**Synthesis**	Aesthetic
Products			
Experiences			

Table 4: The AIR Brand assets template

4. CONCLUSION

An extensive literature review and primary surveys undertaken in the macro-region have provided the foundation for drafting the brand. However, to ensure the success of an AIR brand, a further participative approach and involvement of stakeholders is needed. The brand values and essence should be further reviewed and finalised by the working group in conjunction with the designer developing the visual identity. It is important for long-term success that the AIR brand develops with stakeholder ownership and the support of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

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PART III - IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AIR BRAND

1. AIR BRAND HANDBOOK

The need for a common and consistent communication strategy was highlighted in the different focus groups and surveys. When asked, most macro-region participants across all types (CR members, CR stakeholders, AIR visitors) would find the creation of an AIR brand extremely useful. Brands are a "promise of value" which determines customer satisfaction (Almeyda-Ibáñez, 2017). Destination branding is about how to project the essence of a destination consistently through brand language and audio-visuals, and to protect it through management of the customer's experience.

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This strengthens the argument that development of the AIR brand handbook will be a critical step. It is important to create a usable toolkit to guide destinations in using the AIR brand identity.

The brand handbook should be an organic resource that can evolve as the AIR brand grows stronger and applies best practices. The final structure and management approach should be developed to create a strong brand and tourist product.

The brand handbook should be a clear toolkit and set of guidelines that explains to all stakeholders how to use the AIR brand in their marketing communications. The brand handbook should contain clear advice on two main subjects:

1. Brand personality guidelines –specifications on how to integrate the AIR brand values into the destination or product marketing communications. This will ensure a consistency of approach by all stakeholders who make use of the brand.
2. Technical design guidelines –specifications on how to use the logo, visual imagery, and colour palette in all materials. They should give clear design instructions on consistent logo positioning, its application in different formats, the specific font and an approved colour palette. It should assist both in aligning the brand identity alongside existing identities without conflicts of interest and in using it in its entirety where appropriate.

The following paragraphs elaborate these two main subjects of the AIR brand handbook.

2. BRAND PERSONALITY GUIDELINES

2.1 AIR BRAND STORY

The aim of the new AIR brand strategy is to develop a new "umbrella" brand for AIR tourism and especially cultural tourism, merging the identity of the two stakeholders (the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe) in order to increase the visibility of the two.

The new AIR brand will support the Council of Europe in achieving the macro-region's priorities which are centred on: developing the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe; cultural tourism; visibility of the Adriatic and Ionian Region and the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

The brand audit surveys led to the four classical elements of nature, culture, and positive emotions (aesthetic or affective), since most responses about the AIR's image concerned:
- the four elements of nature (the original elements of the universe and life): beautiful landscape and attractions/ heritage (earth), sea (water), sky (air), and warmth/friendliness (fire)
- all combined (synthesised) by Culture and
- positive (aesthetic) experiences and emotions!

This leads us back to the cosmogonic theory of the four classical elements (the original brand value of the AIR). The ancient Greeks believed that there were four elements composing everything: earth, water, air, and fire. This theory was suggested around 450 BCE by Empedocles. It is striking that Empedocles was a Greek philosopher who lived in Akragas in Sicily (Italy). What a great combination! So, Empedocles, the father of the notion of the four elements, comes from the AIR!

In conclusion, the AIR brand could not be anything other than the original element that led to the existence of the world and life through its nature, culture and emotions.

It is the origin of the Universe and life – the air that brings life to all existence!

2.2 AIR BRAND VALUES AND IDENTITY

As seen in the analysis above, the AIR's brand identity represents a personality that is natural, beautiful, elegant, interesting, cultural, friendly, diverse/different but also with unique/authentic characteristics.

The AIR brand has three core elements which let it connect with its customers and stand out as a destination. The introduction of the unique AIR personality to the brand has helped it evolve its brand foundation and set itself apart.

So, the AIR stands for these three fundamental brand values (Figure 6):

● Original: this brand value represents the significance of the AIR region to the world. (Other words that could be used are: Essential, Existential, Cosmic, Unique, Universal, Prime, Pure, Grandeur).

● Synthesis: this brand value represents the cultural mixture of AIR lands with simultaneously common and diverse culture, traditions, customs and people, that are magically connected (Other words that could be used are: Shared, Amalgam, Mosaic, Unity).

● Aesthetic: this brand value represents the emotional delight and enlightenment of the integration of self with the AIR place, as a visitor, as a resident and as a stakeholder (Other words that could be used are: Arousing, Awakening, Refreshing, Breathless, Emotional).


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                         ┌──────────────────────┐
                         │   AIR Brand Values   │
                         └──────────┬───────────┘
              ┌─────────────────────┼─────────────────────┐
        ┌──────────┐          ┌──────────┐          ┌──────────┐
        │ Original │          │ Synthesis│          │ Aesthetic│
        └─────┬────┘          └─────┬────┘          └─────┬────┘
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Four elements of nature: sea (water), sky (air), landscape and heritage (land), warmth and friendliness (fire). Other words that could be used are: Essential/Existential/Cosmic/Unique/Universal/Prime/Pure/Grandeur	AIR lands with simultaneously common and diverse culture, traditions, customs and people, that are magically connected – according to the majority of survey responses – by the elements of nature, culture (intercultural experiences and dialogue and Cultural Routes), and affection (love, people). Other words that could be used are: Shared/Amalgam/Mosaic	AIR is a warm and friendly place that awakes an amalgam of positive emotions through unique experiences. And these are the sentiments and emotions that most of the visitors and stakeholders mention as their feelings toward their integration with the AIR and its experiences.

Figure 6: AIR brand values

These brand values are the AIR's strategic message and should appear in all marketing communications (Jaffe & Nebenzahl, 2006; Morgan et al., 2004; Can-Seng Ooi, 2004; UNWTO & EUTC, 2009). They must be reflected in the all imagery used to describe the destination (for example, in websites, brochures, etc.) and be followed by all AIR stakeholders and institutions.

2.2 AIR BRAND PROMISE AND VALUE PRPOSITION

A brand is more than just a logo – it is about an organisation's values and beliefs and how it wishes to be thought of and perceived.

The AIR brand reflects the macro-region's core values and provides a common base for clear, consistent, unified, credible and effective communication. It is focused on its nature, culture and emotions through people.

The AIR brand promises that when people travel in the AIR, there will be a synthesis of unique, original, refreshing and moving experiences that will make them thrive.

The AIR value proposition (Figure 7) is the statement of the functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits delivered by the brand which provides value to the target market: (a) a benefit based on a product attribute that provides functional utility to the customer, (b) a benefit that adds emotional richness and depth to the experience of owning and using the brand, and (c) a benefit through which the brand helps fulfil the need for self-expression.

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                          ┌─────────────────────────┐
                          │   AIR Value proposition  │
                          └─────────────────────────┘
            ┌───────────────────────┼───────────────────────┐
  ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────────────┐
  │Functional benefits│   │ Emotional benefits│   │Self-expression benefits│
  └──────────────────┘    └──────────────────┘    └──────────────────────┘
```

Functional benefits

Contact with unique elements of nature, *Culture, heritage, Cuisine, Beauty, nature, history, tourism, tradition*

Variety of diverse tourism activities and culture

Richness of contribution to world heritage

Emotional benefits

The AIR is a warm and friendly place that awakes an amalgam of positive emotions through unique experiences (intercultural experiences, dialogue and Cultural Routes), and affection (love, people)

Feeling of emotional richness and depth

Affective Enjoy visiting Refreshing Warm

Self-expression benefits

The AIR visitor launches him/herself into a journey of self-discovery; s/he develops and transforms the 'self' by learning about other people and cultures or by having experiences that help him/her become more: *natural, passionate, cultural, friendly, different but also unique/authentic*

Figure 7. AIR value proposition

3. TECHNICAL DESIGN GUIDELINES

The AIR brand should join the Council of Europe's joint branding initiative to raise its visibility within the EU community and beyond.

The visual identity consists of three key components:

3.1 LOGO

A logo is a visual expression of a brand. Choosing logo is extremely important in establishing a brand in a market, especially when many competing brands exist.

The AIR's logo should be a symbol that will be recognised widely as representing the AIR brand, and it should be an appropriate vehicle for differentiation, brand awareness and loyalty.

The AIR logo should be an abstract type of logo that would represent the AIR brand's three values and provide an association of the products and experiences that can be consumed in the macro-region. Thus, it is proposed that the AIR logo be created according to the following value representation's guidelines:

● based on the four elements of nature (the original elements of the universe and life): beautiful landscape and attractions/heritage (earth), sea (water), sky (air), and warmth/friendliness (fire)

● all combined (synthesised) by Culture and

● positive (aesthetic) experiences and emotions!

According to history and physics, the combination of the four elements is aether, so a visual representation of aether could be the AIR's logo!

Guidelines for the AIR logo

▪ The four elements could be abstractly combined, or replaced by a visual representation of aether. The AIR logo should be abstract, with no obvious relation to the brand, but easily associated with the name and slogan. Such logos reflect a brand's values. The abstract visualisation of the four elements, or the most relevant one could be a base for the creation of the AIR brand's logo.

- Maybe it can be a circular logo because, as Empedocles said, when all four elements coexist in harmony, all things tend towards unity. He named this harmony *sphira* ("cycle", (Montanari 2008,p. 312))

- Filled with colour (see section 3.3)

- In dynamic but clean lines
- With a sense of freshness (awakening) and emotion (warmth, love)

- Moreover, there are some essential qualities of a good logo that must be taken into consideration in its design:

  - Simple/Clean/Light –to ensure it is distinctive, memorable and has a strong impact. Best practice shows that ideally no more than four components should be incorporated. A lean geometrical or a very abstract and light visual design might serve the purpose.
  - Attractive – while attraction is subjective, the testing of possible designs should be carried out and a consensus decided on.
  - Adaptivity - The AIR brand logo must be adaptable to CR products. For instance, alternative versions of the logo can be used if one of the elements of nature is prominent in one product. For example, if a sea sport experience is the product of a CR to be branded, then the water element could be highlighted in the original logo (See section 4.3.2 for detailed analysis of CR products).

In all the material produced, the logo must have a prominent position.

The logo should adapt to different situations where it could be seen:
- On websites

- On printed stationery

- On promotional items and marketing materials

- In email signatures

- Across social platforms

- On exterior shop signage

- Etc.

On websites, online and smartphone applications, social media and other digital platforms, the logo should placed such that it is visible without scrolling or clicking. A responsive logo should be created to adapt to various screen sizes.

If other logos are displayed in addition to the AIR logo, the AIR logo should be placed on the same page (or surface) as the other logos. In this case, no logo displayed on a same page (or surface) can be bigger than the European Union flag emblem.

The AIR logo should be used by all AIR bodies in all materials and events created or organised by CRs.

3.2 SLOGAN

A primary slogan and an alternative slogan for AIR brand are proposed:

Primary proposed slogan: Go AIRound

- Suggested tagline or second suggested slogan: Explore AIR, explore the breath of life
- "AIRness your life" could be an additional promotional tag
- Alternative uses could "play" with the word "air" inserted into relevant promotional sentences and tags, e.g. "f**AIR**y Tales -be the narrator of your own story"

The use of a descriptive and evocative slogan alongside the logo can help to reinforce the AIR brand. It should be short and succinct and capture the essence of the brand. As opposed to the logo, the slogan can change over time or might be customised to suit the context.

The AIR wordmark is the embodiment of the AIR brand and unites all that we say and do. It can be a reminder to take a break and return to the origin of the universe, or even to refresh one's self as the visitor moves from one great experience to another. "Go AIRound" is an invitation for the traveller to be active, to experience the region and form a connection to the AIR.

"Go AIRound" is a personal invitation to visitors to explore the diversity and quality of the AIR experience – to discover themselves, other people and the place itself through life-changing, authentic experiences in the place that brought life to the universe.

The AIR aims to position itself as a place where visitors can create and live original, integrated and life-changing experiences through the slogans:

- There is no life without AIR.
- You can't live without AIR.
- Explore AIR, explore the breath of life.
- The different elements of nature, culture and experiential emotions that uniquely connect the world.
- Separation of civilisations that get connected through unique and authentic nature, culture and emotions.

Continually reinforcing and keeping brand communications consistent with these values will help AIR parties build a powerful brand in consumers' minds – a rewarding goal for everyone who brings AIR experiences to life.

Alternative slogan: The EtheReal You

The meaning of the word "ethereal" fits perfectly with the AIR brand personality and values, as it means[14]:

- almost as light as air; very light; airy; delicate
- not earthly; heavenly; celestial or spiritual
- extremely delicate or refined; exquisite

The word "ethereal" comes from the AIR itself as it derives from the Latin word *aethereus*, and from the Greek word *aitherios* (from *aithēr*, meaning "aether").
Its derived forms arethe nouns "ethereality" and "etherealness" as well as the adverb "ethereally".

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"The EtheReal You" puts the aether (which includes the four elements) within visitors and motivates them to externalise and express it by going to the AIR. It prompts them to feel part of the places to visit as a whole without lodging in their minds a single element, experience or route.

Through this brand slogan, the AIR aims to position itself as a place where visitors can create and live original, integrated and life-changing experiences.

The main slogan can be adjusted to adapt to specific AIR tourism products or communication objectives through the variant slogans:

- (Be/ Explore/ Create/ Celebrate/…) the ethereal you
- (Be/ Explore/ Create/ Celebrate/ …) your ethereal self

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[14] Source: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company: Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fifth Edition, https://www.dictionary.com/browse/ethereal

For example, if the objective of a CR is to promote a spiritual experience or product (e.g. a yoga retreat in an ancient temple) then the slogan could be adapted as e.g.: "Connect to your ethereal self!"

Continually reinforcing and keeping brand communications consistent with these values will help the AIR to build a powerful brand in consumers' minds – a rewarding goal for everyone who brings AIR experiences to life.

A comparison of the two proposed slogans, achieved through personal interviews with graduates of an MSc Cultural Management course, follows:

	1. Go AIRound	2. The EtheReal you
Positive Aspects	It refers to the movement of ether Motivates the potential traveller to do something new that has action It is easy for the visitor to remember The words are clear and the customer will not be distracted by the concepts of the slogan	It's rare, special It is nice to hear as it is spoken ● Refers to all the features mentioned in section 2.2 ● It is not easy to forget because it is different in listening ● Does not refer to any pre-existing tourist product
Negative Aspects	● **It may be something common to hear so it is not clear the image of the "product" that the visitor should have** ● **It may refer to an airline or similar enterprises**	● it's a not known word, although it's Latin (originated by a Greek word) ● ether concept must be made clear to the general public

An extensive literature review and primary surveys undertaken in the macro-region have provided the foundation for drafting the brand slogan. However, to ensure the success of an AIR brand, a further participative approach and involvement of stakeholders is needed. The brand values and essence should be further reviewed and finalised by the working group in conjunction with the designer developing the visual identity.

3.3 FONTS AND COLOURS

The strongest brands are recognisable without the inclusion of their logo. An appropriate font should be selected that visually compliments the logo and is consistently used in materials under the AIR brand.

Sans-serif typography is mostly used in heritage and tourism logos targeting the most intellectual yet modern individuals. Another example is Trebuchet MS that was chosen as the primary font for the ADRION programme because of its wide availability. The typeface has been released for free with Microsoft Office since the year 2000. It is also available in other operating systems' office software. Such fonts that target the most intellectual yet modern individuals are consistent with the AIR brand's target markets.

Fonts for use in the AIR brand project should be clear, natural and elegant. They should say, "We're respected, natural and friendly. We make original, natural and unique things for you."

The use of colour should be carefully considered by the designer to create a defined palette. Research has shown that colour is a powerful tool: different colours instil different emotional reactions. For example, primary colours appear confident and self-assured, while pastel shades convey trustworthiness. Green is associated with harmony, freshness, fertility and nature but black is associated with power, elegance, and formality but also death, evil and mystery (Council of Europe *Cultural Routes management handbook* 2015 p.86). Other colour associations within different cultures should also be reviewed as part of the consultation process.

Colour – perceived meanings

Red: exciting, hot, passionate, strong

Green: secure, calm, natural

Blue: authority, commands respect

Black: sophisticated, mystery, power

Yellow: warmth, novelty, caution.

The most relevant colours for the AIR brand are as follows:

● Blue and orange to make the audience feel excited about the AIR brand while instilling trust. This complementary colour duo is a classic yet powerful pairing. Blue represent the air, sea, and sky elements found in the responses survey results, as well as the sense of freshness or awakening, while orange represents the cultural element and the emotion (warmth, love) of the three brand values.

● An alternative can be a mix of Ionian blue (https://www.rughdesign.com/color-wheel/ionian/) and Adriatic blue (https://www.rughdesign.com/color-wheel/Adriatic-Sea/) that may form an aerial cyan or turquoise (eg. a cyan colour palette https://gr.pinterest.com/pin/791085490778176678/) that can be used to give a sense of intelligence, lightness and freshness or purity. The combination of these two colours also expresses the geographical interaction.

Finally, the visual elements of the AIR brand should follow the colours of the EUSAIR (as in the case of www.adriatic-ionian.eu/) and the Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 821/2014 of 28 July 2014 laying down rules for the application of Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013

of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards detailed technical characteristics of information and communication measures.

3.4 IMAGES

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Images of the four spectacular elements of nature, uniquely combined, should be the most powerful tool in communicating the AIR brand. The images must convey that the AIR has nature, culture and people (emotions), that it is a place for simultaneously achieving self-fulfilment, social integrations and life-changing experiences through active participation.

The general guidelines for the images of the AIR are the following:
- Images must reflect the brand values, using original, fresh, emotional, integrated and diverse elements.
- The colours should be clean and fresh, showing the contrasts in the AIR's four elements of nature.
- Stand-alone images should create a "wow effect", evoke emotions and convey that this could only be the AIR. There should be a focus on original images.
- Focusing on moving, refreshing experiences can turn the expected into the
- irresistible.

- There should be a focus on spectacular cultural and sea landscapes and selected natural treasures.
- Images should combine nature and culture with active situations, and feature emotions and social interaction between people.
- Where there is more than one image, there should be variation in the topic that reflects the unique aspects of AIR i.e. in a brochure, show nature and culture, food and activities.
- Use images of local people or tourists as appropriate for the context.
- Show interactions and emotion developed between tourists and local people.
- In typical/traditional settings, reinforce "AIRness" by featuring local people.
- Show all seasons to highlight great variation and unique experiences all year round.
- Show a variety of customs (e.g. food, local events) and other traditions in natural and social settings.

In developing the visual identity package, variations should be created that encourage a differentiation between product categories such as destination, gastronomy, cultural attraction and experiences. Building in this subtle differentiation will strengthen the brand by promoting the diversity of experiences offered by the AIR.

The resulting visual identity package should be properly communicated to stakeholders and integrated both into destination and product marketing materials.

3.5 TONE OF VOICE

The AIR brand should have a consistent and a distinctive tone of voice that should come across in all communication. The tone of voice should:

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- Be fresh, emotional, and informal – with an edge or depth that engages.
- Structure communication from the tourist perspective, not according to internal organisation or geography.

3.6 BRAND GUIDELINES SUMMARY

1 Type –clear, attractive typefaces

Typefaces have personality! Fonts used for the AIR brand should be clear, natural and elegant. They should say, "We're respected, fresh, light and friendly. We make original, natural and unique things for you."

2 Photography –moments of unique, original and high emotions

When producing materials for the AIR brand, one should choose simple, spontaneous-looking pictures of people in action, showing real emotion and delight. Images must reflect the brand values: original, fresh, emotional, integrated, and diverse elements. Stand-alone images should create a "wow effect", evoke emotions and convey that this could only be the AIR.

3 Colour –a diverse palette

The colour palette should reflect the spectrum of the AIR's diverse experiences. The colours should be clean and fresh, showing the contrasts in AIR's four elements of nature. The most relevant colours for the AIR brand are: blue, green, and red.

4 Logo

The AIR's logo is the embodiment of the AIR brand and unites all that we say and do. It can be a reminder to take a break and return to the origin of the universe, or even to refresh one's self as visitors move from one great experience to another. The slogan "Go AIRound" is a personal invitation to visitors to explore the diversity and quality of the AIR experience – to discover themselves, other people and the place itself through life-changing authentic experiences in the place that brought life to the universe.

4. AIR BRAND PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

The assessment of the Cultural Routes by the CR managers (see Part I) highlighted the following products associated with their CRs: olive oil, olives, olive tree themed artworks, other traditional products from the olive tree area, goose foie gras, cheese, medals, plates, and glasses.

The CR member indicated that the main assets of the Cultural Routes are their culture, traditions, festivals, gastronomy (degree of agreement: 3.86) and their ecology, landscape and natural assets (3.86). Cultural values (4.29), safety of the surroundings (4.29), experience value (4.14) type of accommodation facilities (hotels, hostels, camps, rural traditional accommodations) (4.00), and tourist surroundings (active tourism destinations in the vicinity)

(4.00) also ranked highly. However, gastronomy was found to be the most influential motivation for Cultural Route travellers.

The CR managers surveyed highlighted the following about of AIR vistors:
- The first phrases used to that characterise an AIR visitor are the following: nice; highly experiential in their approach; focus on specific subjects; like nature ; looking for originality and unusual destinations ; European culture; seaside; eclectic ; value of sharing; curious; highly educated; conscience of cultural roots.
- AIR travellers, according to CR members, seek to enjoy the AIR culture (museums, music, artefacts, dances, festivals, etc) (4.50) as their main motivation.
-

4.1 PREREQUISITES FOR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

A tourism product is defined as a tourism sector product which is a necessity for the tourist during their travel. It can be seen as an amalgamation of different types of services. Examples of tourism products include package tours, a visit to a heritage site, an accommodation or transportation service, guiding and shopping etc. Cultural tourism products in particular include a variety of cultural forms, such as museums, galleries, festivals, architecture, historic site visits and guided tours, artistic performances, as well as any product or experience that brings one culture in contact with another for the specific purpose of that contact, in a touring situation.

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Nowadays, experiences are increasingly at the heart of the tourism and cultural offer. Organisations and destinations are increasingly focused on the needs of their visitors, on understanding who their audiences are, and on building experiences around their needs and interests. Those experiences may exist within physical buildings interacting with physical objects, or within the digital realm interacting with virtual objects and experiences.

The AIR tourism brand identity gives us the opportunity to do much more: to focus on tourism and cultural products and experiences that have a unique element, integrated by culture and an emotional pull. AIR places exist in the mind, AIR experiences in the heart.

AIR experiences should be built around heritage, Cultural Routes content, nature, customs, traditions, people, and knowledge. So, in order to be memorable, engaging and inspirational, AIR-branded products and experiences should be aligned with the considerations above.

Most of all, CRs should do the following:
Understand the entire customer journey: The customer journey is the complete sum of experiences that customers go through when interacting with a company or brand, before,

during and after the consumption of a service or the purchase of a product. This is incredibly useful for CRs.

Google[15] breaks it down into four stages:

Dreaming
During the initial phase, prospective visitors are open to all possibilities. They have not made a firm decision about where to go or what to do, and they are looking for ideas, mostly online and via digital sources.

Planning
At this stage, travellers have pinned down a destination, but they are still flexible about dates, hotels, and activities. Again, they use mostly online and digital sources.

Booking
Dates, flight times, and accommodation preferences are all confirmed. It's time for travellers to make reservations! Again, they use mostly online and digital and mobile sources.

Experiencing

Travellers are on their trip and sharing their adventures online. At this stage, they may still be searching for *ad hoc* activities and experiences while in- destination or on-site (in the case of a cultural attraction).

CRs must create products, services and experiences that target potential customers at each stage. Every part of the process holds the potential to guide visitors into the sales funnel. Again, one must always target the right people on the right step and platforms at the right time.

Following on from point 1, CRs must create "micro-moments" during the entire customer journey. Micro-moments are "moments when we turn to a device – often a smartphone – to take action on whatever we need or want right now."

To take advantage of micro-moments in 2020, one needs to be where consumers are searching for information in the moment – or, as Google[16] puts it, marketers have to "be there, be useful, be quick."

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[15] https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/micro-moments/micro-moments-understand-new-consumer-behavior/

[16] https://www.thinkwithgoogle.com/marketing-resources/micro-moments/how-micro-moments-influence-consumers/

So, one must rethink the linear buyer funnel that follows a set path: awareness, consideration and decision. Nowadays, the customer journey is becoming more of a whirling dervish type of funnel wherein people think of, see or talk about something and *presto!* they need to learn about it, watch it, buy it, etc. right now. This makes the quality, relevance and usefulness of marketing more important than ever. To get the most out of micro-moments, CRs should:

- Be there in these moments of need
- Deliver relevant products, experiences and content
- Make it easy for customers to make a purchase

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4.2 REACHING DIVERSE AUDIENCES

CRs need to engage with and serve their visitors whether they are online or on the premises (digital visitors or physical visitors), and whether they are actual or potential visitors.

To do this effectively, it is important to understand the interests and desires of target visitors and the communications channels that they prefer.

According to the 2018 *Audience Report*, based on a sample of 39 318 visitors from 105 varied museums, museum visitors fall into the following four categories:

- -Young Creatives: 16-24 year-old, independent young adults and thinkers who want to learn, create and curate their experiences. Other artforms are dominated by highly culturally-engaged Experience Seekers, but museums appeal as much to Facebook Families and Trips and Treats millennials.

- -Families: visitors attending museums with children, wanting to be entertained and educated together. Dormitory Dependables and Trips and Treats dominate family attendance to museums, making up 38% of all family audiences.

- -Older Learners Museum visitors aged 55 and above who want to be active, social and connected. For most artforms, older audiences tend to be "Commuterland Culturebuffs". In museum audiences however, the older ngaged groups of Home and Heritage and Dormitory Dependables are equally significant.

- -Cultural Tourists: Predominantly affluent adults; these cultural enthusiasts will frequently invest time and money to travel more than 60 minutes for new experiences and knowledge. 47% of "Commuterland Culturebuffs" travel substantial distances to visit museums either with specific collections or in areas of interest.

The digital audience must be added to the above categories, along with other special groups (e.g. university students and researchers, schools, and a destination's local residents).

The AIR brand must reach and engage with all these diverse audiences. The basis of all audience development initiatives should be market research. Knowing one's audience is key to identifying different needs, but also to developing niche markets and convincing more visitors to become repeat visitors to the CRs and the macro-region.

4.3 PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT GUIDELINES

Following on from the considerations above, CR products must be understood as ideas or offers capable of providing CRs with a competitive edge via the development of unique and authentic themes, stories, and products bringing the identified characteristics to life. Again, the main driver for success is for all products and experiences to embody the AIR brand values:

1. Original: the place (the AIR is the origin of the universe and life through its resources and assets)
2. Synthesis: the relationship with the place (through both diverse and common culture, experiences and routes)
3. Aesthetic: the visitor benefit (the AIR brand induces positive feelings)

So, all CR products should integrate the four classical elements of nature: beautiful landscapes and heritage attractions (earth), the sea (water), the sky (air), and warmth and friendliness (fire), combined (synthesised) by integrated culture, experiences and routes, in a way to awake positive (aesthetic) emotions!

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Given the considerations above, AIR CRs should use experiential and active, rather than passive, approaches to developing cultural products and experiences. To do so, they should make use of both traditional and modern means of communication to generate unique experiences and connectivity. AIR products should integrate knowledge creation procedures and involve visitors so they have a more participative attitude. It is hugely important to focus narratives not only on heritage assets themselves, but also on how they are part of the lives of the people and communities that coexist with them.

In detail, the main considerations for the creation of new AIR products and experiences are[17]:

- Creating original/authentic experiences, not just products — current literature on experience branding is focused on why retailers and destinations should develop experiences (Foster & McLelland, 2015). However, several researchers identified the following as key elements of brand experiences: service branding, differentiation through memorable experiences, physical evidence and co-creation. For a brand

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[17] Adapted from the Skift Travel Trends Report (2014), p.30 and the Council of Europe Call: Routes4U Grant for tourism products and services EUSAIR (source: https://www.euro-access.eu/calls/routes4u_grant_%7C_call_for_eusair_1)

experience to be differentiated and memorable, it must be emotional, as consumers engage with brands that they feel are part of their self-image.

- Add value by building connectivity — Travel brands that connect consumers with people, especially non-tourism industry people, in a destination are opening up the experience to be more spontaneous and surprising. When travellers engage with locals, they're creating their own personal experience leading to new discoveries. Our most cherished travel memories often revolve around the people we meet and moments of serendipitous fortune.

- Social media is a conversation platform, so engagement is key — While it might seem like old news by now, many travel brands are still not dedicating the people and resources required to effectively curate two-way discussion with their clients. Social media is much more than a marketing tool. It is a wholly integrated part of the travel experience, with infinite possibilities to engage consumers and locals, and create unexpected moments along the journey.

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- Variety equals value — With one-size-fits-all package travel dying a long-deserved death, tour operators providing scheduled itineraries should build in time or a variety of activity options so travellers can customise their experience. Increased options to explore a destination and its local culture impact the overall sense of discovery, which for many is the most important aspect of travel.

- Jointly promote cultural and creative tourism (what we call "orange tourism") – AIR as an orange destination should have a portfolio of products based on local community creativity or its interaction with tourists. It consists of a destination with imagery, one or more icons, a brand, price and position in the market, and a hands-on, welcoming community with a strong identity.

- The AIR products and services that should display heritage along the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe or priority Cultural Routes projects and promote the macro-regional identity must be in line with the EUSAIR-objectives to diversify tourism products and services in the macro-region, to tackle seasonality, and to improve the quality and innovation of tourism offers for strengthening tourism capacities.

- Projects may include tourism products that are representative of macro-regional heritage and thus contribute to macro-regional cultural identity in the form of cultural or hand-made resources, and any other tourism product that contributes to the promotion of the heritage of the Adriatic and Ionian Region.

- The tourism products must be produced by local SMEs based in the Adriatic and Ionian Region, they must be priced and sold through distribution channels in at least three countries of the Adriatic and Ionian Region.
- The tourism products and the SMEs producing them must attain specific high-quality standards.
- The tourism products must be in line with the recommendations on the implementation of the branding strategy for EUSAIR that is currently being developed in the framework of Routes4U. The tourism products must comply with the visibility clauses and the requirements on the use of the logo "Cultural Route of the Council of Europe" and the logo of EUSAIR.

The right way to fulfil the AIR product development objectives above is to train CR members and stakeholders to work as "product and route interpreters". They are the true ambassadors of a route. They must be the main contributors, or else visitors will not receive the full knowledge or experience the route has to offer. For this reason, all ongoing training strategies for CR members and local stakeholders must be viewed as highly profitable investments for the AIR brand.

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Before turning to a product development case study (the Routes of the Olive Tree), we first turn to the most fundamental product for the AIR brand: the development of a Cultural Route card.

4.3.1 Development of a Cultural Card for the AIR brand

The structure of the city tourism product is heterogeneous, with a variety of elements influencing tourists' final including public transport, hotels, bars and restaurants, tourist offices, local attractions, and events. Each of these elements is usually managed and produced by individual players that are most often in competition with each other (Buhalis 2000). On the other hand, tourists perceive the destination as a brand, or as an integrated product (Buhalis 2000). The more services and products that tourists experience, the more likely they are to return to the destination (Pechlaner & Abfalter 2006). Consensus and co-operation among the stakeholders involved are therefore required in order to develop joint strategies. One possibility for destinations to market and manage their products as an integrated package is to set up a

"destination card" (or "city card" or "tourist pass") with the use of modern ICT. The destiantion card is defined as a destination marketing tool which integrates a variety of tourism services provided by several operators at a discounted inclusive price (Ispas et al. 2015).

Their main objective of the AIR Cultural Card will be to bundle the products and services available without the need for booking and buying in advance and to foster higher participation in cultural activities and public transport usage. In this way, less visited Cultural Routes or attractions can increase in value and tourist flows can be spread through the macro-region. The AIR card will give the holders a series of benefits and advantages in terms of time and cost savings, and it is also a very efficient information medium addressing tourist flows to minor sites and attractions. The combined effect is therefore a better tourist experience, valorising the destination and improving the AIR's image; for destination management the card ensures, instead, a control over tourist flows, data collection, and the integration of scattered actors (Ispas et al. 2015).

The potential benefits of an AIR cultural card for tourists could include:
● free admission or discounts at Cultural Routes and attractions, monuments, local attractions
● free use of public transportation
● a guidebook with a map
● discounts in restaurants, shops, leisure parks, guided tours, events, car rental, bike rental, urban parking, etc.
● a "money back guarantee" to refund any cancelled online purchases within a certain time
● a "skip the queue" feature for peak attraction times , particularly in the summer months or at weekends
● additional discounts for special groups, such as seniors, students or visitors with disabilities

A fundamental strategy for consolidating a Cultural Route and ensuring social enjoyment is to generate synergies aimed at increasing the number of visitors by enhancing several heritage points along the route. For example, a region's must-see attractions can be used to promote the entire Cultural Route. In this way, other points on the CR will benefit from increased visibility and performance. The Cultural Routes card will also be made available through mobile applications and services that could apply many marketing tactics, e.g. by providing information about a visitor's journey to the CR (car parks, rest areas). Tourists' attention can be drawn through gift packages, prizes and interactive marketing campaigns, motivating them to visit more destinations and Cultural Routes. Finally, other promotional tools include targeted advertising in magazines, guidebooks, leaflets, and cultural events and tourism fairs. As suggested by Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk and Preciado (2013), the AIR should also create travel forums and communities of travellers who have visited the destination (in this case, following the Cultural Routes) in order to provide pride for the members, encouraging outside observers to develop and enhance positive images about the AIR.

Ultimately, potential visitors are likely to identify themselves with the groups of travellers who visit the AIR and create additional positive word-of-mouth associations.

In conclusion, an AIR cultural card designed as above will be an incentive to travel along the Cultural Routes of the AIR, and will successfully address the priorities of the macro-regional brand strategy.

4.4 AIR PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CASE STUDY– THE ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE

Due to time constraints, this report does not go into detail on all the products and experiences on offer from the 24 CRs in the AIR. Instead, it provides a theoretically and methodologically robust case study of one CR, the Routes of the Olive Tree. Nonetheless, the specific guidelines, methodologies and concrete steps for implementation given could be applied to all CRs.
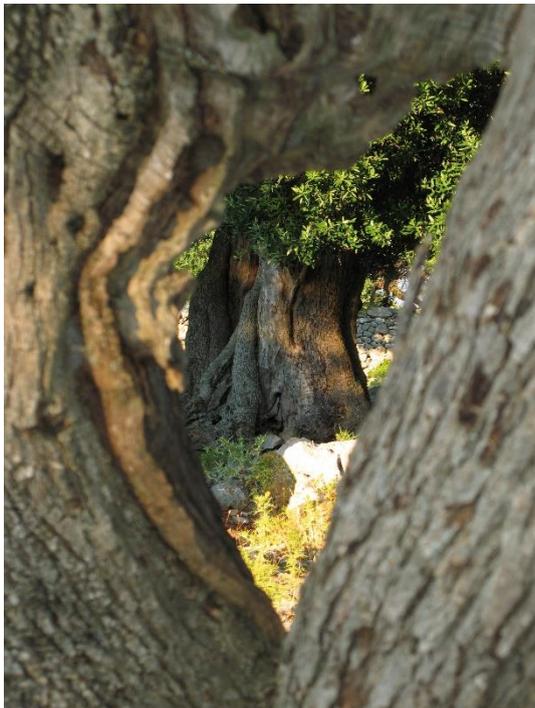
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ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE - BASIC INFORMATION

Summary of the route:
- *Countries participating in the of the Routes of the Olive Tree network: 12*
- *Members/partners of the Routes of the Olive Tree network: 103*
- *Universities and research institutions: 17*
- *Length of «intercultural dialogue»: 165 000 km*
- *The Routes of the Olive Tree have traveled through: 39 countries*
- *Points of interest concerning the culture and the sceneries of the olive tree: 200*
- *12 proposed Cultural Routes «Routes of the Olive Tree» in 10 countries*

The Routes of the Olive Tree (2005) are itineraries of intercultural dialogue framed with cultural events and other activities around the themes of the olive tree and the Mediterranean. They comprise many olive oil-producing regions and landscapes as well as various cultural events depicting everyday lives of Mediterranean peoples, myths about the olive tree as a sacred tree, and an ancient civilisation, the "olive tree civilisation".

These activities are implemented by the network and the cultural foundation "Routes of the Olive Tree", a non-profit NGO which, since 1998, had been putting forward innovative concepts of civilisation and alternative proposals of sustainable development across the olive growing regions. Participants in the Routes of the Olive Tree have so far travelled 160 000 kilometres of

intercultural dialogue across more than 25 countries, recording, discovering and enhancing the olive tree civilisation, a time-old cultural asset and an integral part of the Mediterranean civilisation.

Several routes for the discovery of olive tree culture have been established in the oil-producing regions of the Mediterranean, and for the promotion of traditional products in non-oil-producing countries. Moreover, more than 200 points of interest have been located and proposed in 10 countries, as well as digital routes in six countries.

All the actions are organised and co-ordinated by the homonymous cultural organisation and network of the Routes of the Olive Tree.

The Cultural Routes, "Routes of the Olive Tree", are land routes connecting points of interest around the Mediterranean that all share a link with the cultural heritage of the olive tree and its products. These points of interest are: museums, traditional or modern oil presses, traditional farms, remarkable sites, soap-making units, arts and crafts, places of gastronomy, local artists, festivals and customs, etc.

The Routes of Olive Tree are, thus, a Cultural Route with a variety of offers seeking to encourage sustainable development in oil-producing regions. This is to be achieved through intercultural dialogue and innovative promotion of a broadly unknown yet invaluable cultural inventory: the culture of the olive tree.

The Routes of the Olive Tree was officially recognised as Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in 2005. Subsequently, the first aim mentioned above was enriched with other aims:
● Encouragement of cultural co-operation among participating countries (research to showcase and protect oil's intangible and tangible cultural heritage, creation of local Cultural Routes, etc.)
● Development of a sustainable thematic tourism model
● Development of the primary and tertiary sectors and of the medium- sized enterprises.
● Promotion of traditional products and their nutritional value, within the context of the adoption of the Mediterranean Diet as an item of intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO.
● Awareness though targeted actions of the importance of the audience and especially of young people for the culture of the oil tree.

Thus, development through cultural tourism at a local and regional level is one of Routes of the Olive Tree's main axes.

An important recent project is the "AGORA" of the Routes of the Olive Tree, which aims to promote the Mediterranean, its products and culture in Europe and around the world.

The Routes of the Olive Tree also offers the organisation of routes in non-oil-producing countries, under the name AGORA of the Routes of the Olive Tree, which refers to the ancient Greek *agora*. This location encourages communication, dialogue and the transmission of

knowledge, information and products from different regions – in the case of the Routes of the Olive Tree, from oil-producing regions. It is a route with stops in certain European cities where a Celebration of the Routes of Olive Tree takes place. Open to the public, the celebration promotes of the culture and locations of the olive tree.

AGORA is not just another food exhibition. It is an innovative celebration of Mediterranean culture and tastes in selected European cities, where the products are presented as cultural goods along with their traditions, history and culture. Through AGORA events, European citizens, consumers and entrepreneurs can discover unexplored aspects of Greece and other Mediterranean countries, new tastes, high-quality, authentic, natural products, and works of art from the Routes of the Olive Tree.

The cultural organisation Routes of the Olive Tree maintains the following aims for AGORA:
● To promote and encourage small producers, companies that remake products, rural Mediterranean artisans and artists to gain autonomy and to withstand the power of big distribution networks.
● To protect the historic continuity of tangible and intangible traditions and of a valuable European cultural inventory that is in danger of extinction.
● To promote unknown or less favoured areas of the Euro-Mediterranean region through opportunities that enable them to respond positively and stand out in an increasingly competitive environment.

The AGORA of the Routes of the Olive Tree is an action of solidarity and extroversion, a beneficial action for commerce and culture, an innovative initiative at the other end of the economic scale from the supermarkets, an escape for the "anonymous" producers of quality products and for "small" family companies in the global markets.

Briefly, the Routes of the Olive Tree's most important actions are the following:

● Development of thematic (tourist) routes that allow visitors to get closer to biodiversity, culture, scenery, products and cuisine.

● Emphasize regions which are underdeveloped in terms of tourism

In their research on experiential marketing and the Routes of the Olive Tree, Conti and Pechlivanidou (2016) found evidence that the Routes of the Olive Tree constitute an extraordinary yet authentic experience, related with being healthy, valuable, beneficial, meaningful and connected with local cultural roots. This stands in clear opposition to images of mass tourism and mass production, such as big hotels, classic souvenir shops, and mass-produced products enriched with chemicals. It is also opposed to local competitors who present similar offers under aesthetic and escapist aspects, but not under the educational aspect. The setting of the attraction is considered particularly powerful in triggering sensorial engagement and educational outcomes, which is in line with Fiore et al. (2007). The Routes of

the Olive Tree counts on the local community to introduce visitors to differentiated combinations of experiential realms of education, aesthetics, and escapism (Williams, 2006), and to confer validity to the route experience (Hayes and MacLeod 2006).

ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT METHODOLOGY

The Routes of the Olive Tree's product development strategy should be based on an analysis of the existing portfolio, i.e. on products and other tourism resources, infrastructures, facilities and services (accessibility, tourism amenities, available packages, activities and events, auxiliary services), but it should also take into account the AIR brand values identified (original, synthesis and aesthetic). So, the analysis should focus on existing CR products, services and visitor experiences (see 4.3.1), along with the overall brand strategy of the AIR (as set out in Parts I and II).

The methodology for the development of Routes of the Olive Tree products, services and experiences should follow two steps:

Step 1. The CR must divide their products, services and experiences in two categories:
1. Pre-visit products
2. On-site or mid- visit products, further divided into: (a) physical products and (b) digital ones.

Step 2. Each of the products identified in Step 1 must position itself in relation to the three brand values.

In detail, products should position themselves in relation to the three brand values as follows:

● Original: each product or experience should ideally combine all four classical elements of nature, but the most prominent one should be highlighted and characterise the whole product positioning. For instance, landscape and heritage attractions (earth), the sea (water), the sky (air), and people and emotions (fire). In the case of the product example, a gastronomic experience related to olive oil, the earth element is prominent. So, earth characterises the product! Other types of businesses could be included, such as: other tourism businesses (accommodation, attractions, tours, events), other services (transport, parking), food and beverage outlets, educational organisations, clubs and groups (sports, hobbies), etc.

● Synthesis: this means that several other products, services and experiences should be combined in order to create an integrated product. The tourism product could be combined with other experiences, e.g. cooking, walking and cycling, making natural olive oil soap, visiting local artisan producers, participation in an olive harvest, in order to offer visitors an integrated product!

- Aesthetic: Products should create positive emotions, related to sensations. Taste is prominent and contact with local people helps create positive emotions!

This procedure should be carried out for all Routes of the Olive Tree products, services and experiences.

All products, services and experiences should tell historical, mythological or iconic stories based on the basic element that is prominent in their nature and composition. The local history and traditions of the AIR locations involved should also feature so as to capture the mind, soul and heart of the target markets.

In all cases, the themes should provide the framework for developing and recounting stories that allow travellers to connect with tradition, local culture, history and the natural world of the AIR.

All products, services and experiences should provide the following to the AIR visitors:

The functional utility for the customer should be:
- Contact with unique elements of nature, culture, heritage, cuisine, beauty, nature, history, tourism, and traditions
- Diverse tourism activities and culture
- A rich contribution to world heritage
- The functional utility to the customer should be a benefit that adds emotional richness and depth to the experience of owning and using the brand:
- The AIR is a warm and friendly place that awakens an amalgam of positive emotions through unique experiences (intercultural experiences, dialogue and Cultural Routes), and affection (love, people).
- Feeling of emotional richness and depth
- Affective
- Enjoy visiting
- Refreshing
- Warm

The self-expression utility to the customer should be a benefit through which the brand helps fulfil the need for self-expression:

- The AIR visitor launches themselves into a journey of self-discovery, self-fulfilment, self-enlightenment and self-actualisation; they develop and transform the "self" by learning about other people and cultures, or by having challenging experiences that help them become more:

- natural, passionate, cultural, friendly, different but also unique/authentic

PRODUCTS FOR THE ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE

The AIR can provide the visitor with unique, appealing and life-changing experiences, products and services. The aim of all products, services and experiences (e.g. travel packages, cultural city tours, experiential activities, concerts, street fairs, art festivals, etc.) is to bring out the AIR brand essence and the importance of historical and cultural heritage in modern and interactive ways. The goal is to create cutting-edge products and experiences to connect all kinds of people with a civilisation's traditions, roots, and heritage.

As seen in Table 4, examples of physical products, services and experiences for the Routes of the Olive Tree could be:

1. Labelling locally-themed physical products under a Routes of the Olive Tree label and the AIR brand:
   - Agricultural products, such as olive oil
   - Natural products, such as amber
   - Creative products, such as pottery

2. Organising themed tourism packages (by integrating services or activities, experiences and products):

   - Create new integrated packages including transfers, accommodation, meals, museum fees, wine tasting etc.

   - Organise "Live like a local" packages: add traditional local activities for visitors who stay in domestic households (e.g. making domestic olive oil products, telling interesting stories, etc.).

   - Engage visitors in constructing the experience of a destination through active exploration, participation and experiential learning.

   - Provide summer schools and other educational tourism-related packages.

   - Offer programmes for specific target groups e.g. seniors, children, youth, families, academic researchers and educational tour groups.

   - Network with tour operators in order to include the tours in their packages.
3. Setting up new experiences:

   - Integrate outdoor activities, such as hiking, boat trips, etc.

   - Organise wellness activities, such as yoga and meditation classes on specific days: new moon, full moon, etc.

- o Combine culture with cruises on the Adriatic and Ionian Seas.

- o Maintain a balance between nature, culture, and experiences.

- o Co-operate with local organisations (LTOs[18], parks, chambers of commerce, etc.) and private accommodation owners to organise various short thematic routes or activities (e.g. cultural night walks with open attractions and local businesses).

- o Create new guided tours and other services as additional assets for cultural tourism product development in the region. Services can be offered directly to visitors or included in tour operators' itineraries.

- o Create conditions for self-guided tours – provide tourists with cultural "information packs" (model itinerary, insurance, "insider" tips, GPS coordinates, maps, guidebooks, information on accommodation, transport etc.)

4. Introducing local and cross-border events:
   - Musical, artistic, wine, gastronomic, traditional dance, street art, etc.
   - Running events such as marathons or half-marathons

5. Setting up physical and digital exhibition centres about The Routes of the Olive Tree's themes and attractions

6. Creating informative products such as information centres, information boxes, books, guides, etc.

7. Creating a special quality label for olive cuisine with assessment criteria for local businesses (e.g. offer a satisfactory level of olive cuisine following or based on AIR gastronomic tradition, with emphasis on local cuisine where appropriate, or use AIR products, with emphasis on local products and PDO[19] products, or promote AIR gastronomic and wine traditions and products as a whole, etc.)

8. Offering additional cultural services (equipment, guidebooks, maps, information on trails and sights, guided tours, etc.)

9. Creating specialised programmes for children and families (including educational components related to natural and cultural heritage)

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[18] Local Tourism Organisations

[19] Protected designation of origin

10. Creating new cross-border products from existing routes in countries neighbouring the AIR.

11. Creating new cross-border routes certified by Routes of the Olive Tree.

In the case of the Routes of the Olive Tree, the above could be achieved, for example, by organising:

A. experiential tours specially designed for inquisitive travellers and lifelong learners from all over the world. Experienced academics, artists, and tour guides will become the visitors' mentors as they explore pre-eminent archaeological sites, museums, historic monuments, and cultural venues along the Routes of the Olive Tree and the destinations involved. These tours may arrange transfers, provide a licensed guide, prepare the context of the tour, and design an interactive, fun and memorable experience for visitors.

B. gastronomic events & olive tree inspired events. The goal is to connect the "ancient" and the "modern" by bringing old habits and traditions to life, by creating modern alternatives and memorable experiences. Food is known to bring people together - friends, families, and foreigners, to connect with each other and to find unexpected commonalities, regardless of cultural differences and beliefs. The network of participating regions may connect with each other under a gastronomic theme. People will intertwine with their local roots and heritage, while being educated and gaining knowledge from their nutrition. This is similar to the Routes of the Olive Tree's AGORA project: a feast based on the Mediterranean diet, inspired by olive oil and the olive tree.

The feast could complement AGORA's activities with experiences such as:

- DIY olive oil using a stone press kit, resembling the ancient press: a way to present an ancient method in a modern environment as a hands-on practical session
- Children's cooking session on Mediterranean diet
- Talks on the history, benefits, and cultivation of the Mediterranean diet
- DIY Mediterranean inspired home garden
- Selection of folklore music and local dancing with influences from the Adriatic and Ionian regions, to be performed live

C. music festivals, where the past meets the present. Another experience that the Routes of the Olive Tree can offer is live concerts and music sessions where folkl musicians play along with electronic music DJs and producers in or near cultural points of interest.

D. summer schools & other educational products: the AIR is a cultural destination, so it should provide intriguing thematic educational routes throughout the macro-region. These should be combined with thought-provoking workshops and seminars led by experts in their fields, established academics, scientists and artists who will afford participants life-changing experiences as they study and become familiar with the AIR and especially the Routes of the Olive Tree's tangible and intangible cultural assets. To create these experiences, the Routes of the Olive Tree should co-operate with licensed tour operators, arrange transfers to/from locations as well as meals and accommodation, and provide the respective premises, and any relevant local information and resources. Common regional themes for which an educational programme could be implemented for the Routes of the Olive Tree include:

- The Mediterranean diet
- Visual arts
- Fine arts focused on the influences of the Olive Tree
- Poetry on the influences of the Olive Tree
- Hospitality & tourism management in the AIR

Digital products, being of pivotal importance for Cultural Routes' implementation of the AIR brand (in this case, the Routes of the Olive Tree CR), deserve special attention. Thus, we turn to them in the next sub-section.

THE ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE DIGITAL PRODUCTS

Today museums live a very interesting phase, characterised by the transformation of their visitors from physical to virtual. To understand the extent of this change, one need only to think that the number of our website visitors is double the number of people that visit our rooms: 6 million in the first case, three in the second. And every year the number of visitors continues to grow.

(Javier Pantoja Chief Digital Officer, Head of technology, Prado Museum, http://www.project-musa.eu/wp- content/uploads/2017/03/MuSA-Museum-of-the-future.pdf, p.39)

Digital products are of equal importance to physical ones. Creating digital AIR products and experiences can make visits more interesting by giving visitors immediate and intuitive access to information that brings them closer to cultural and heritage attractions and crafts. The challenge for cultural organisations in the 21st century is to redefine their existence within the tangled web of tangible and intangible objects, digital technologies and social media (Falk & Dierking 2013). The online experience will form an increasingly central part of any visit, whether before, during or after.

The CR experience should therefore be delivered in both a physical space and online, using several channels and formats. This makes mapping the cultural ecosystem an important first step.

In detail, the Routes of the Olive Tree digital ecosystem consists of the following:

- Online collections or exhibitions: The CR can innovate by being the first in the macro-region to upload collections or exhibitions online without any restraints, for free, that anybody can access. Were the Routes of the Olive Tree to do this, it would gain relevance and reach a large audience, including non-visitors, digital and scientific audiences.

- Audio-visual content production: The real challenge is to transfer the information contained within Routes of the Olive Tree's into intuitive and tangible products. The development of digital technologies has made this possible.

- Augmented reality (AR): The Routes of the Olive Tree can use AR technology to improve both the educational and practical aspects of visiting its Cultural Routes and destinations. By pointing a device at certain attractions, sculptures, paintings and artefacts, a visitor can learn more about them. Pop-up snippets of information, detailed descriptions and additional photographs of the item (and related items) are just a few of the AR features available to aid further learning. An immersive experience using AR on a grand scale will be a great way to engage visitors and give them a memory tied to the AIR brand and the macro-region.

- Interactive creative spaces: This could be a room containing a variety of screen-based activities operated by physical movement of the body. Throughout the room, visitors could participate in several activities, such as:

  o virtual painting
  o virtual collaging with items found in the gallery collections (to create new artwork)
  o researching and learning about various featured artists and disciplines using both static and portable devices
  o front-facing camera self-portraiture with the with artistic effect editing
  o virtual pottery
  o drawing shapes and matching them (using Artificial Intelligence) to items in the gallery database

  By involving the movement of the body as a means of control, this technology is far removed from the use of outdated, static touchscreen displays. Not only is this method more immersive for the user, but it is also a more social and collaborative way of learning more about collections.

- Virtual exhibitions and virtual reality tours: Immersive exhibitions can certainly make the whole experience more surprising upon entering. The Routes of the Olive Tree could benefit from the Google Arts and Culture app, available on iOS and Android which is similar to Google StreetView for places of cultural interest, in order to provide a wide audience with a virtual reality tour. It can be implemented on mobile devices allows the user to explore highlights or entire AIR attractions or heritage sites in virtual reality.

- User-based navigation application with local narratives: A navigation application based on user input (comparable to Waze, for example), where locals will input their own stories, narrating their life experiences related to their people's historical or cultural importance. On the other end, visitors will be able to navigate through the town/city/region and click on user stories to listen to. By using a digital map-like product, tourists will be able to experience several locations like a true local, and the application will resemble a collective cultural biography. The main advantages of such a product are:

  - Interactive cross-cultural connections among all kinds of people
  - Gaining first-hand, local and experiential knowledge
  - No age restrictions for target groups
  - Subject-based story filters (architecture, religion, art, music, etc.)
  - Remote areas may trigger interest and attract visitors thanks to local input
  - Stories may be downloadable as podcasts

- Gaming: Game design can have a revolutionary role in the Routes of the Olive Tree's product portfolio. By giving life to works of art in a totally new and unique way, it offers many opportunities that are still to be explored. In designing immersive environments and applied games, one should remember that the museum is a place where a visitor looks for both evasion and cognitive development. Gaming also promotes active participation, interaction among users and loyalty, before and after a visit.

- Audio guides and GPS self-navigation: The mobile solution has gone from being "an amenity to a necessity of the travel process" and the functionality that it provides is useful throughout the entire travel lifecycle (Langelund, 2007, p. 284; Wang, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2012). In the pre-trip phase, travellers use the web, smartphones and tablets to plan and book their travel, at the airport they use mobile technology to check in and purchase ancillary services. On board an airplane they can use Wi-Fi technology to further plan their journey or for entertainment purposes. Once they have arrived at their destination, they use their smartphone or tablet to connect with friends and family, share their experience or further explore their destination. Post trip, travellers use their devices to share their experiences or to give feedback to suppliers. An audio

guide is thus seen as a crucial part of the museum experience and one that combines both the digital and physical spaces within the Routes of the Olive Tree.

- Rentals of tablets or wearables: Modern smart tablets could be made available for rent for self-guided tours in the Routes of the Olive Tree. These tablets could offer (see www.actiontourguide.com for analysis):

  - Multimedia - photos, audio, videos, maps and text

  - Multiple types of content

  - Route flexibility - visitors follow a path or jump to specific area

  - Multiple languages, multiple tours, usage statistics

  - Generate new revenue - mobile ticketing, gift stores, donations and sponsors

  - Parental control – to ensure only the relevant applications work and all other applications and settings are disabled

- Digital Mapping of the Routes: Accurate representations of the areas crossed by the Routes of the Olive Tree would detail major points of interest. This technology also allows the calculation of distances from one place to another.

- Downloadable material e.g. podcasts: Visitors to the Routes of the Olive Tree could download podcasts onto their personal devices and bring them on-site.

5. AIR BRAND COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES & TOOLS

Once the AIR brand identity and product portfolio have been created, the next step will be to promote them so that they become recognisable. This process involves launching the brand onto the consumer market as well as among all key destinations and stakeholders to ensure their understanding and support. This chapter will discuss the brand communication activities and tools necessary to implement the AIR brand strategy by CRs, using the example of the Routes of Olive Tree.

5.1   RESEARCH-BASED PROMOTION OF THE AIR BRAND

Based on the AIR brand research presented above, an assessment of Cultural Route marketing was carried out. First, CR stakeholders were asked to rate marketing activities in terms of their importance to their specific CR. The findings show that the most important marketing activities are social media and apps, geolocation maps, and public relations (degree of agreement: 4.29), with public relations with schools standing out as well.

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Second, the stakeholders were asked to evaluate the importance of various modes of visibility for their Cultural Routes. Based on their responses, for successful visibility the new AIR brand should use social networks and digital marketing (4.73), new technologies that increase opportunities for innovation (4.14) followed by being present and visible at travel trade industry events, to meet and talk to tour operators, cruise operators (4.67), and work in terms of communities of interest: successfully identify the organisations, media, blogs and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme (4.67).

Third, the stakeholders were asked to evaluate their Cultural Route's performance in terms of the same modes of visibility. The main area identified for improvement was thus communities of interest: the organisations, media, blogs and all those who will be naturally drawn to the theme (3.29).

Notably, according to most CR stakeholders, 51-70% of the overall marketing activity for their business is digital.

Moreover, CR stakeholders rated content reach (3.57) the top performer in terms of their CR's online presence, among various criteria (e.g. sales, audience growth, leads, etc.).
When CR members were asked to state the overall satisfaction with communications in their CR, most confessed to being only moderately satisfied (57.4%).

Finally, the stakeholders were asked to provide additional comments that they would like to see taken into account for their next marketing & communications project. Their answers were all about funding, as follows:

●communication support and funding sources to improve the necessary actions

●facilitating the use of online tools

●lack of funding and specific personnel.

5.2   CURRENT ROUTES OF THE OLIVE TREE MARKETING STRATEGY

The main aim of the Routes of the Olive Tree's marketing is the presentation of rural products and cultural events in every country, thereby raising awareness of the Mediterranean diet among target groups. Aside from being a diet combining high-quality, rural products, recipes and cooking techniques from a variety of regions, it also represents a healthy lifestyle for people living in big, modern cities.

- The marketing objectives are:
    - Differentiation from the thematic tourist supply and adjustment to the changing expectations of the market.
    - Encouragement of co-operation and dialogue. This is to be achieved by narration around the olive tree, olive oil, and pharmaceutical aromatic plants as common European heritage capable of encouraging competitiveness and sustainability of the tourist supply.
    - Catching the attention of new visitors throughout the year, with the aim to make them aware of the cultural heritage connected with local products, sustainability and unexplored locations.
    - New entrepreneurial opportunities to increase local salary levels.

- The benefits of a Cultural Route for the regions it crosses are the following:
    - Marketing of a different tourism experience
    - Strengthening of regions
    - Encouragement of employment
    - Decrease of tourism seasonality and encouragement of its constant existence in every region
    - Use of smaller units of production
- The basic tools for the promotion of the Routes of the Olive Tree are:
    - Road signs at points of interest along the route
    - The website www.olivetreeroute.gr
    - Facebook, Instagram
    - Newsletters
    - Presence and active participation in global news, etc.

5.3   GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES AND TOOLS

Results from the AIR brand research, show that to be visible, the AIR brand should use social networks and digital marketing, new technologies that increase opportunities for innovation, followed by being present and visible at travel trade industry events, to meet and talk to tour operators, cruise operators, and work in terms of communities of interest (e.g. media, etc.).

Table 5 presents the main communication means for the implementation of the AIR brand.

Advertising	Events/Experiences
Print and broadcast ads	**Sports**
Packaging inserts	**Entertainment**
Motion pictures, Videos	**Festivals**
Brochures and booklets	**Art**
Posters	**Causes**
Billboards	**Guided tours**
POP displays	**Company museums**
Logos	**Street activities**
Digital Marketing	
Sales Promotion	Public Relations
Contests, games, sweepstakes	**Press kits**
Premiums	**Influencers/ Bloggers / Fam trips**
Sampling	**Seminars**
Trade shows, exhibits	**Annual reports**
Coupons	**Charitable donations**
Continuity programmes	**Publications**
	Community relations
	Lobbying

Table 5. The pillars of AIR brand communications

The message to be transmitted in all brand communication activities should be based on the results of the brand audit surveys.

Therefore, all communication activities should focus on transmitting the following elements, as found in the research:

- The four classical elements of nature (the original elements of the Universe and life): beautiful landscape and attractions/ heritage (earth), the sea (water), the sky (air), and warmth, friendliness (fire)

- all combined (synthesis**ed**) by culture and

- positive (aesthetic) experiences and emotions!

Overall, CRs such us the Routes of the Olive Tree should focus on and prepare the ground for further such opportunities for "real experience revealed by real people" through user-generated content platforms.

Of course, the elements and values can be communicated through the visual technical design guidelines, which were mentioned in section 3. Therefore, the logo, slogan, fonts, colours, and images should follow the guidelines and thus communicate the elements and brand values in all brand communication activities.

To ensure the success of common marketing activities for the whole of the AIR, the NTOs[20] in each AIR country should support the marketing strategy and the AIR brand.

5.4 DIGITAL MARKETING ACTIONS AND TOOLS

According to the AIR brand research, the most important marketing activities are social media and apps, geolocation maps. Generally AIR stakeholders recognise that for successful visibility, the new AIR brand should use social networks and digital marketing, and new technologies that increase opportunities for innovation.

The main guidelines for the digital marketing of the AIR brand and CRs are (adapted from World Tourism Organization and the European Travel Commission, 2008):

- Develop an online version of the destination's brand toolkit and encourage industry partners to use it as well.
- Ensure that offline and online marketing strategies are consistent.
- Use rich media to achieve a high-involvement experience for customers.
- Make two-way use of user-generated content.
- Control the domain names that affect the brand.
- Create online communities where target customers and partner organisations get involved in the composition of the brand story.
- Create immersive experiences through interactive television or web TV. An added benefit here is that you can value-match the audiences.

- Enter or create virtual worlds such as Second Life for the AIR region and CRs.
- Test, and go on testing, the online performance of all your brand language and visuals.

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[20] National Tourist Organisations

- Use videos created by visitors; these become the most important element of destination marketing.
- Apply sophisticated work with existing digital data (geo-marketing and localisation), expanding the scale of its collection, analysis and evaluation.
- Consider gradual transformation from e-commerce to m-commerce (i.e. mobile commerce) and to v-commerce (i.e. video commerce).
- Produce and use of short films and clips about the AIR and CRs.
- Invite bloggers and organise FAM[21] trips to bring potential customers in touch with AIR brand ambassadors.
- Use a unified hashtag, such as #GoAIRound, when stakeholders and travellers post photos and articles on social media. The use of an additional hashtag per CR could also be studied (eg. #GoAIRoundOliveTreeRoute)

The following subsections analyse the digital marketing actions and tools for the implementation of the AIR brand.

5.5 AIR CONTENT AND MESSAGE

Rich online and offline information can fundamentally change an experience. Websites, newsletters, blogs, and travel brochures can place the traveller in a given context and provide a sense of continuity before, during and after the journey.

Content is key. Some can come from route managers, some from associated cultural groups or tour operators. But the bulk must be user-generated (UGC) and come from the travellers themselves. Project leaders should encourage and help publish journals and blogs, be active on social media and encourage the posting of photos and commentary. For example, Tourism Australia encouraged their fans to share their vacation photos with the hashtag), a campaign that attracted a lot of social shares. When Tourism Australia noticed the success of that campaign, they launched a series of UGC campaigns targeting different users, and in one campaign, they saw a 30% increase in site engagement.

Some forms of content could be:

(a) Video

Not only does video drive stronger engagement on social media than do link or image posts, it also enables brands to better build an emotional connection with their viewer. Most of all, video is going to account for almost 80% of all internet traffic by 2020 (Cisco, 2019). Travel is a subjective experience. Not every person is going to experience the same vacation in the same

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[21] Familiarization trips

way. Whether in search of unique food, comfort and relaxation, or adventure, we all value different aspects of a tourist destination. For the AIR, video should also play an important part in communicating those experiences to the would-be visitor. The AIR brand seeks to create emotions, experiences, passion, and self-fulfilment. Video marketing is the best way to show these emotions and put forward the experience that tourists can expect. Thanks to audio-visual content, experiences, feelings and emotion can be communicated. This environment offers endless options to attract and differentiate. Video becomes a key element to attract a demanding customer. Its application is essential when it comes to generating engagement with customers, sharing product information and proposing a scenario in terms of prior expectations. Ultimately, it is the art of telling a story, creating a magical atmosphere and emotionally connecting with AIR visitors.

(b) Printed publications and branded material

Printed publications (e.g. flyers, studies, high-quality maps) and branded material (e.g. flyers, pens, notepads) can play a complementary role, giving a more permanent record of messages, and in a form that can be filed for future reference. Publications can be translated into the national languages of the AIR countries and the countries of origin of the main AIR target markets. For example, a brochure titled "Go AIRound" should be produced. This brochure will give an overview of the AIR region and highlight the routes, history, sights, culture, cuisine, nature, access, transport, and accommodation. It will serve as a teaser for the AIR region and to raise awareness of the AIR's being a rich cultural and emotion generating region. The brochure should not only address current or potential visitors, but also NTOs[22], DMOs[23], tour operators, cultural associations, journalists and other potential partners and stakeholders, to motivate them to promote tourism in the region. The brochure should be distributed by the Go AIRound partners and by ministries and NTOs of AIR countries.

In their communications, AIR brand managers should transmit the key messages – exactly what they want to say about AIR CR activities, events and attractions, so that they can present these messages consistently across all their communication channels. The questions to be answered are mainly: What is the most important, interesting, distinctive, or exciting feature of what each CR/ or tourism product offers? Why would people want to access or experience it? These steps should be aim to transmit the message, focusing on the original, emotional and cultural aspects of the AIR.

Finally, measures to determine the successful implementation of the content strategy could be:

- Open content platform established

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[22] National Tourism organisations

[23] Destination management organisations

- Priority target market segments with personas identified, and reviewed annually

- All key product topics identified against CRM[24] customer interests, and covered

- Video and picture libraries cover all destination topics, with tags

- Hard and soft data and editorial quality standards met

- National, regional and local partners engaged

- Accessible information programme deployed

5.6 AIR WEBSITE

Websites are an excellent form of supporting material for visitors, particularly as information providers. They are also a valuable tool to exploit at the pre-experience stage of experience consumption. The AIR website will be the primary source of information on the CRs and the area. It will be regularly updated, providing information on products, experiences and activities.

The AIR website should be a tool to personalise the visitor experience and to deliver an engaging sensorial experience, featuring videos, virtual tours and other innovative ways to transmit information in different forms, including images, stories and augmented reality. The main dimensions of the AIR brand, which emerged from the research, should be emphasised. On the website, it is imperative that the three brand values – original, synthesis, aesthetic – should be present.

From a technical perspective, the AIR website will be all about delivering the user experience better and faster. Web design trends prioritise speed and mobile use, ensuring fast loading times and high search engine rank, using simple, eye-catching designs combined with asymmetrical layouts, immersive video backgrounds, and more. These data-light, fast-loading designs make page speed and optimisation much faster. This is in turn rewarded by search engines such as Google and Bing. According to a study by Akamai and Gomez (2009), 50% of users expect that when they click on a site, it should load in two seconds or less, and that they will abandon a site if it takes three or more seconds to load. Moreover, the days of gigantic photos, uncompressed videos, and bloated Javascript are over. While large pictures and videos are not gone from web design, in the years to come they will be incorporated in such a way that they no longer slow download times. Clean, minimalist designs, or flat designs, are characterised by quick loading. They are currently trendy and desirable for two important reasons. First, both mobile users and desktop browsers can experience quick-loading websites.

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[24] Customer Relationship Management

Second, they can hold high search engine optimisation value. Flat design helps a site fulfil many speed requirements that search engines are starting to require. This is why flat design has started to become popular and will continue to be in the next years (edhotels, "Web design trends for 2019").

Given the considerations above, the AIR website should make use of flat, fast, asymmetrical minimalist design. This will best represent the fresh, striking look and essence of the AIR brand. The social action marketplace Sweet could serve as an example of these principles. It has an incredibly engaging website that features a number of organic, colourful shapes that highlight information about the brand (see Figure 8). Geometric shapes, such as Euclidean triangles, hexagons, and circles, could serve to visualise the essence and values of the AIR brand. Moreover, shapes are like colours in that they are naturally associated with certain thoughts and emotions. Circles are unity, while triangles and rhombuses are dynamic. Creative use of certain shapes or combinations of shapes could be used to represent the emotions or feelings that the website visitors should feel.

Figure 8: Sample website template for AIR and CRs website
Source: https://econsultancy.com/six-visual-web-design-trends-set-to-be-big-in-2019/

The AIR brand website should promote interconnected CRs and destinations. It will give access to the powerful stories behind the AIR brand, information about the destinations, and links to national and local sites, updated stories and images of modern-day AIR Cultural Route travellers. Additionally, offering users the option to interact and communicate with bots or chatbots could be a plus, as this would support micro-interactions across digital media. Moreover, the website should be responsive and mobile-friendly. The same guidelines apply and should be followed by all CR websites. The Routes of Olive Tree serves as the case study for this report.

Finally, the website should include links to relevant institutional websites, e.g. the European Commission (relevant thematic Directions General and Regional and Urban Policy). Co-operation with a private sector partner such as TripAdvisor and with public sector and international organisations operating in the area, other ETC programmes, and links to the Routes4U and EUSAIR websites should also feature.

5.7 SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media represent an effective and free-of-charge way to communicate directly with wider target audiences in a more interactive and dynamic way. Social media will be used to reinforce links with current and potential visitors, stakeholders, and the wider public, using easy-to-understand language.

©Phoenicians' Route

With the goal of making the AIR's brand and culture much more approachable such that the present meets the past in a creative and innovative context, the AIR should design and implement tailor-made communication and marketing strategies as a whole and as separate CRs. These should be set within cultural contexts, according to the needs of each CR, location, event, or experience. These social media marketing campaigns should be based on the specificities of each case (target groups, demographics, goal, etc.).

The AIR and its CRs should also monitor the relevance of the social media platforms (mainly through Instagram and Facebook) and consider their potentials in accordance with their brand needs. The most suitable social media should be selected in accordance with the brand strategy goals, the type of news to be spread, the services to be offered, and the synergies with users.

Facebook, with more than two billion users worldwide, can effectively increase awareness of the AIR brand and boost CRs with both organic posts and promoted content. Organic content

on Facebook has a conversion rate of up to 30 percent, while advertisements clock in close to 20 percent, notes social media marketer Jeff Bullas (see www.jeffbullas.com/20-ways-to-increase-your-facebook-likes-and-engagement). When it comes to Facebook, Bullas suggests:

- o Rotating advertisements daily

- o Running competitions

- o Cross-posting content from a blog or website

- o Using good photos and great written content

- o Integrating Facebook content with content from the website, Instagram, and Twitter pages

Meanwhile, Instagram is one of the most popular social networking sites on the planet, with over 200 million active monthly members sharing 60 million images and 1.6 billion likes per day. The average Instagram engagement rate for brands in a 2014 Forrester study (2014) was 58 times higher than on Facebook.

Some guidelines for the AIR and CRs Instagram Marketing follows (adapted from www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2016/10/19/get-more-instagram-followers):

- o Promote the AIR's dedicated hashtag on other AIR social profiles, on the AIR website, and in AIR email blasts.
- o Get creative with AIR hashtags. Be original, creative, or emotional – but never boring!

- o Watch topically relevant and trending hashtags. Join these conversations to get in front of more people.

- o Use the AIR's biography section to drive traffic to the newest or most popular AIR content.

- o Write descriptive captions. Storytelling will help generate engagement and sharing.

- o Interact with top influencers in the AIR and try to become one of their favourite brands.

- o Don't want a tagged photo of CRs' products or AIR brand on the AIR's profile? Edit tags to hide images from AIR profile.

- o Adjust settings so any potentially embarrassing tagged photos won't show without AIR approval.

- o Develop the AIR's own unique, recognisable visual style. Figure out how you want to stand out and make it so!

- o Visit the Places tab to see what's happening locally in AIR locations, neighbourhoods, and points of interests that the account will target with advertisements or events.

- o Use a call to action to tell people what you want them to do with AIR posts. Find clever ways to get people to share AIR content.

Finally, the AIR could co-operate with specific travel reviews portals, i.e. TripAdvisor, to promote AIR CR initiatives on a dedicated AIR CR traveller page.

5.8 EVENTS AND CONFERENCES

The AIR should organise at least one major information activity –such as an "AIR Day"– per year, to promote the strategies pursued and present its achievements, including examples where possible. Such events could take the form of information days, technical workshops, or networking conferences. Depending on the topics covered, they shall be addressed to a wide audience or to project beneficiaries. Additionally, the AIR should take part in events organised by other institutions and programmes to promote its activities and outcomes, and increase its visibility.

AIR Cultural Routes should also organise such events on a local, national and international level. One idea is to create a "Cultural Routes day" which could be connected to the "AIR Day", which would be celebrated every in all countries in the AIR with various activities and festivals. Several cultural events in different locations across the AIR could therefore take place on the same day. All these activities could be linked in some way (via internet etc.).

Information shared on the occasion of these events would also then be uploaded on the AIR and CR websites.

5.9 PUBLIC RELATIONS

According to the AIR image analysis, further regional and international press activities are desirable to ensure effective publicity for the AIR brand. A corporate design should be created as well and used consistently in all publications. A central point of contact for the media would

be desirable in order to deliver consistent press releases, organise press conferences, press trips, and represent the AIR region at international fairs (e.g. ITB[25] in Berlin), etc.

Other initiatives within the area of public relations could be developed:
- Twinning partnerships for AIR cities
- Transmission of know-how through city partnerships, joint projects, etc.

5.10 TRAINING SESSIONS

The AIR could organise targeted training sessions, addressed to beneficiaries of approved operations related to specific project cycle topics (e.g. project start-up, validation of expenditure, project implementation, etc.). Training sessions could also be spread as webinars to ensure a wider audience and optimise costs; the relevant outcomes (presentations, summary notes, etc.) would be published on the programme website too.

Other strategies to raise awareness of the AIR brand and build capacity building are:
- To work towards including the AIR CRs in the university tourism course curricula
- To train new tour guides on practical skills and guiding techniques, as well as train-the-trainer programmes.

5.11 MEDIA COVERAGE AND USE OF EXTERNAL RESOURCES

Broad coverage can be obtained through the promotion of stories, programme news etc. through thematic web portals or through the websites of relevant organisations operating in the programme area or linked to EU institutions.

The AIR should examine the feasibility of this option through the identification of the relevant actors and institutions to whom to spread the information produced.

Similarly, media coverage can also have a strong impact, albeit with short-lived effects and a lack of control over content. The AIR should provide material to support interviews or press conferences to national contact points.

DISPLAYING THE UNION EMBLEM AT THE PREMISES OF THE MANAGING AUTHORITY

The Union emblem will be displayed (potentially accompanied by the AIR programme logo) at the premises of the managing authority and of the national contact points.

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[25] Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin

CONCLUSION

This report has provided an audit, strategy development and implementation plan for a new Adriatic-Ionian Region brand, based on an extensive literature review and primary surveys undertaken in the macro-region. However, for the future AIR brand to be successful, a further participative approach and involvement of stakeholders are needed. The brand values and essence should be further reviewed and finalised by the working group in conjunction with the designer developing the visual identity. It is important for long-term success that the AIR brand be developed with stakeholder ownership and the support of the Council of Europe and the European Union.
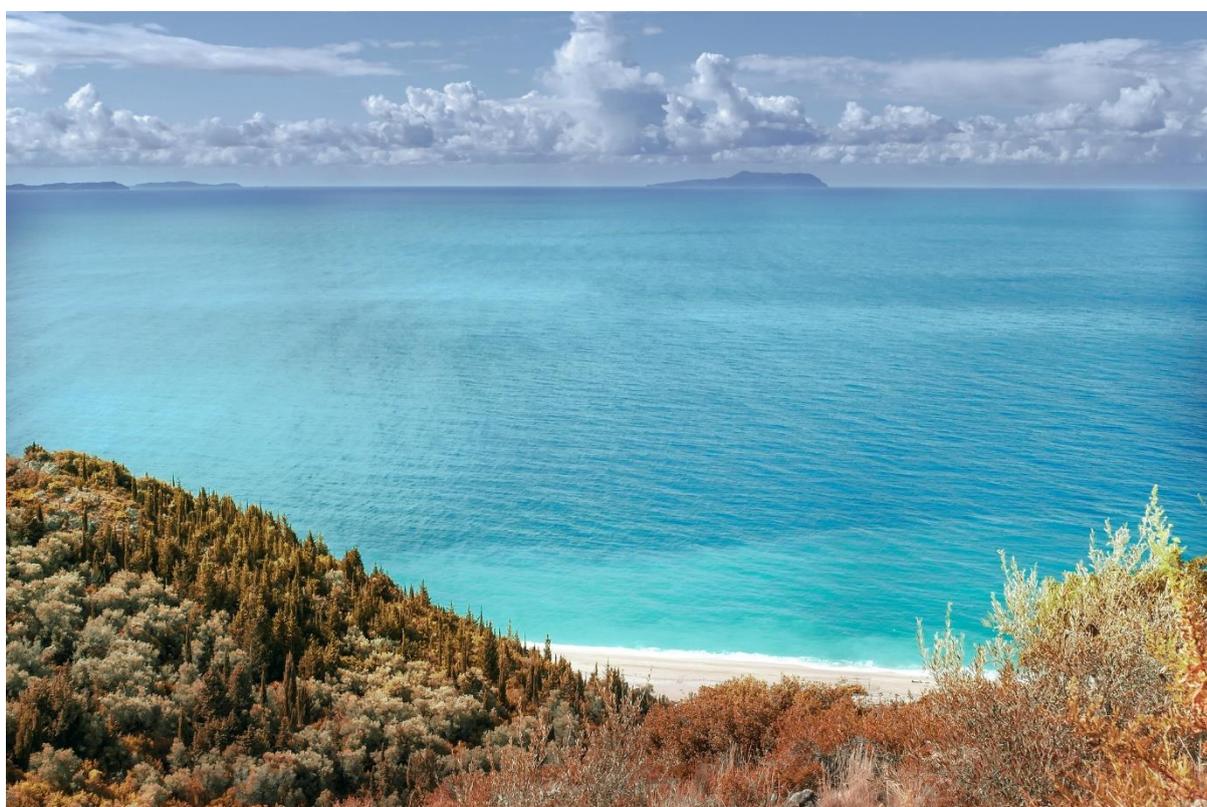
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List of abbreviations

CRM	Customer Relationship Management
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
EUSAIR	European Union Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region
EUSALP	European Union Strategy for the Alpine Region
EUSBSR	European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region
EUSDR	European Union Strategy for the Danube Region
FAM trip	Familiarization trip
ITB	Internationale Tourismus-Börse Berlin
LTO	Local Tourism Organisation
NTO	National Tourism Organisation
PDO	Protected designation of origin
R4U	Routes4U

The Member States of the European Union have decided to link together their knowhow, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.