Branding Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

Analysis and Recommendations

ROUTES4U

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PREFACE

Welcome to the Branding Studies for the Baltic Sea Region, a report 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 branding study will assist development strategies to build on the region's natural, rich history and contribute not only to the economic, but also social well-being of communities. The Baltic Sea area was the first geographic area for which a EU macro-regional strategy was developed, in 2009.

The Baltic Sea Region has competitive advantages that can be utilised. Promotion of its highly innovative digital space; the practicality of its citizens, who live and work in famously harsh climate; its Viking and Hanseatic heritage, now "Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe", are but a few aspects that can highlight unique themes to attract tourism as well as business.

Anyone interested in the process of branding in the Baltic Sea Region and how the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe can play a crucial role 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 Baltic Sea Region and its cultural identity throughout the Cultural routes. Therefore, the following branding strategy will give some hints on the cultural identity of the Baltic Sea 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 Baltic Sea Region by encouraging all the stakeholders within the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region 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 Baltic Sea 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 Baltic Sea 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 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

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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

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

EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR)

The Baltic Sea area was the first geographic area for which a macro-regional strategy was developed. In 2009, the Council of the European Union confirmed the creation of the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region (EUSBSR) to respond to common challenges by joining capacities, co-ordinating activities and creating synergies. The Strategy focuses on the question of how to improve the region's competitiveness, create new transport and energy connections, protect the environment, promote knowledge based co-operation and contacts, and ensure safety for people and for the environment. The EUSBSR has three main goals:

1. Save the sea
   ► clear water in the sea;
   ► rich and healthy wildlife;
   ► clean and safe shipping;
   ► better co-operation.

2. Connect the region
   ► good transport conditions;
   ► reliable energy markets;
   ► connecting people in the region;
   ► better co-operation in fighting cross-border crime.

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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).

3. Increase prosperity
   ▶ the Baltic Sea Region as a frontrunner for deepening and fulfilling the single market;
   ▶ contributing to the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy;
   ▶ improved global competitiveness of the Baltic Sea Region;
   ▶ climate change adaptation, risk prevention and management.

The EUSBSR has three main goals that are implemented through different actions. These actions are being these actions are grouped within 13 Policy Areas of the Action Plan that was revised in March 2017. Two Policy Areas touch upon the area of sustainable cultural tourism and development of the Baltic Sea Region: Policy Area Tourism and Policy Area Culture are included under the overall goal to "increase prosperity". These Policy Areas were created to provide a platform for policy discussions and to facilitate the implementation of actions and flagships-projects in the Baltic Sea Region. Policy Area Culture In 2015, the EUSBSR recognised culture as one of 13 priorities of the strategy. The Policy Area Culture deals with questions related to the protection and promotion of cultural heritage and the impacts of culture and creativity on the economy in the region. This Policy Area is co-ordinated by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage of Poland and the Ministry of Justice, Culture and European Affairs of Land Schleswig-Holstein of Germany. The work of the Policy Area is monitored by a Steering Committee. The cultural network ARS Baltica and the Forum of the Nordic Council of Ministers support the work of the Steering Group. Furthermore, the Baltic Heritage Committee forms part of the Steering Committee. The Policy Area Culture mainly deals with questions related to culture and creative industries and their potential for economic growth in the Baltic Sea Region. It considers the area as one common cultural region. More specifically, the Policy Area addresses the protection and showcasing of cultural heritage, the strengthening of cultural co-operation as well as the promotion of the cultural and creative industries in the region.[4]

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.[5] 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.[6]

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

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[4] See www.eusbsrculture.eu, accessed 22 May 2020.
[5] Kotler P. and Levy S. J. (1969), Broadening the concept of marketing, *Journal of Marketing,* Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 10-15.
[6] Paddison P. (1993), City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration, *Urban Studies,* Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 340.

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.[7]

"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."[8]

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".[9] He makes a distinction between these two concepts, trying to emphasise the dual 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".[10]

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

[7] 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.

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

[9] 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.

[10] 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.

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 strong brand.[11] 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).[12] 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 Baltic Sea 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?

[11] 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

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

PART I – BRAND STRATEGY ANALYSIS

Executive summary

This document outlines how to plan a branding strategy for the EU macro-region of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR) by using the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. Furthermore, it explores how the Cultural Routes can serve as an umbrella brand to promote the BSR as a destination, to strengthen BSR identity and to provide a new way of working. The analysis is based on a literature review, an analysis of similar projects, desk research and a survey of the relevant stakeholders carried out in July–September 2019.

Branding the Baltic Sea Region is a time-consuming task, as place branding usually is. It is made all the more complex by the diversity – or fragmentation – of the region's countries, economies and tourism destinations. In the past there has been a lack of interest in greater co-operation in the region. The Baltic Sea may connect the countries, as is often noted, but it also divides them: 80 to 380 kilometres of sea between countries does not make co-operation easy.

However, there is a potential for creating a BSR brand on the basis of the following factors:

- The Baltic Sea Region regards itself as a highly innovative and digital space.
- Living in a harsh climate, the people of these countries see themselves as practical minded and as doers.
- The Viking era and the Hanseatic League, the two most widely known historical eras of this region, link the countries historically and culturally. This shared history and culture are also useful themes for attracting tourists.

The characteristics of the region can be used as building blocks for branding. The result would be the creation of a space for highly digital, smart tourism where:

- ➢ digital tools are used for better co-ordination between those involved in tourism;
- ➢ visitors' experiences are enhanced with the use of digital media.

Some of the effects that could be achieved are:

- ➢ motivating stakeholders to collaborate with each other, as they would receive digital help and be a part of a larger framework;
- ➢ making the places themselves more attractive, with better experiences for visitors;
- ➢ making the places relevant in the global world.

Place branding is about creating relevance (what does the place do for you?), otherwise why should anyone care about a place? As a sparsely populated region separated by a sea, the BSR could lead the way in digital tourism for the rest of the world.

We recommend testing the idea of using the Viking era and the Hansa League as themes to attract tourists, with a pilot project to explore the use of digital technology to achieve this. This can then be expanded to a broader cultural tourism identity.

The next step should be a broad, inclusive involvement of stakeholders to pursue the question of whether to create a common brand for the Baltic Sea Region, and if so how this can be done. No one document by a single organisation can make this happen: place branding has to involve all stakeholders.

This document provides:

➢ an overview of the Cultural Routes and their characteristics (and the values they promote), a geographic and thematic analysis and main considerations in branding;
➢ existing branding activities by the different Routes;
➢ challenges in branding the Macro-region;
➢ strategic recommendations.

# PART 2 - BRANDING STRATEGY FOR THE BALTIC SEA REGION

1. Place branding

The idea of branding the Baltic Sea Region can be traced back to the Baltic Development Forum Summit in 2001. In 2004 a number of organisations launched the Baltic Sea Initiative 2010 to stimulate growth and prosperity, bringing together regional and national stakeholders from business, government and research. One of its five priorities was to investigate the potential for building a brand for the region.

Can a place such as the BSR, which is composed of eight countries and at least as many national cultures and languages, really be branded? To what extent is the region ready to engage in trying to build a brand?

1.1 What is place branding?

A place brand is not a slogan or a logo, nor is it a process to create them.
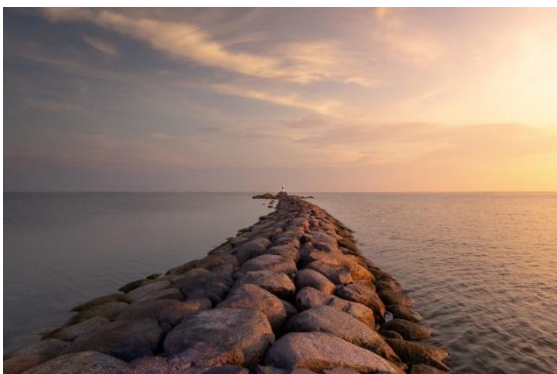
Pärnu, Estonia. ©Joakim Honkasalo/Unsplash.

Place branding is a process of differentiating a place with the aim of achieving greater economic benefits in terms of investment, talent attraction or tourism. Its main beneficiaries are local people and companies, but in the 21st century the global dimension – the external aspect – is also an important part of the picture. Place branding is about taking control of the narrative of a place. In determining and implementing a strategy, much of the practical work is about stakeholder management. Marketing and communication play a role, but only after a place has been developed as a product or a service. Some notable examples of places being developed as services include:

► Helsinki – City As A Service (CaaS): a marketing campaign from Autumn 2019, that invited tech professionals who wanted to relocate to Helsinki to send in their application.

► Estonia – Country As A Service: The country offers digital administrative and government services like e-residency that are available to all its citizens.

It is crucial to involve stakeholders and for it to be an open, democratic and inclusive process. Stakeholder involvement is not only a tool: it has critical value in itself. If quality is not an important component from the beginning of such a process, it is very likely that the strategy will be shelved, as it will not generate the necessary involvement from stakeholders during its creation.

A brand strategy consists of a brand vision and brand values. These elements need to be discussed and co-created with the relevant stakeholders.

1.2 Identity – positioning – image

Place branding is about doing something to achieve a desired brand image. It involves positioning (action), a brand identity (Who are we? What are we about?) and working towards the desired brand image. This is branding at its most basic and abstract. The steps are sequentially related to each other and form a temporal relationship.

The key in place branding is positioning. This is not done with marketing and communication so much as with action. It involves tangible physical changes, as well as policies that affect the place and define the user experience for its target groups (business owner, tenant, citizen, tourist, visitor, car owner, cyclist, pedestrian, family, etc.). For example, a city or tourist destination cannot call itself family friendly, green or contemporary without having proper bicycle lanes that comply with the 8–80 rule.[13]
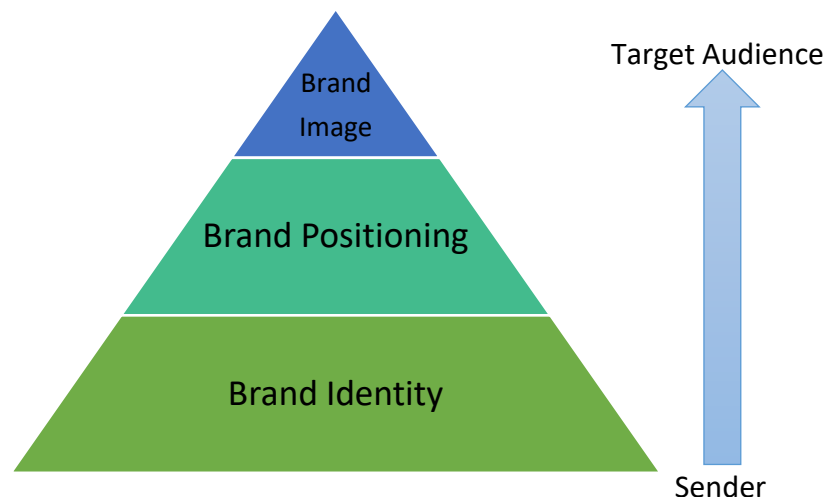
Figure 1   Basics of branding for companies, products, services and places.

1.3 Place leadership, innovation and marketing

Creating a place brand requires a special focus on the top tier of the pyramid in Figure 1. A place brand can never be owned – even with private properties. It is in the minds of the consumers, stakeholders, clients, citizens, etc. The brand can only be managed. How is that done with something as complex as a place, with its multitude of stakeholders with different interests? Three components are essential: leadership, innovation and marketing (see Figure 2).

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[13] The 8–80 rule means that a city, street or public place is, above all, safe and that it offers activities for 8- to 80-year-old people.

Figure 2   The anatomy of branding places (Source: Future Place Leadership: https://futureplaceleadership.com/).

1   **Place leadership**, like everything else, is about strategy, management, governance and leadership. Strategy and planning need to be sorted out before dealing with details such as time plans and websites. A solid foundation has to be prepared based on a common understanding of the brand identity (what a place is about and what it would like to be, that is, what values it should stand for), its direction (brand image – how a place wants to be perceived) and the way to achieve its aim (positioning, with the necessary changes to the product, service or place and how to market it). This strategic side rests on two important aspects:

   o   Defining the sense of the place: What are the characteristics and qualities of the place? What is its vision? What are its values? These are the most fundamental building blocks of creating a sense (soul, *genius loci*) of a place. These should be well defined through a robust process, by which they should be **anchored** with the relevant actors:

   > Anchoring
   >
   > Anchoring is a term often used in the Nordics and it broadly refers to ensuring together with your stakeholders that an idea or proposal becomes known and accepted by them, creating a shared understanding and to a degree a shared sense of ownership. It involves strategy and also leadership – defining visions and planning for them.

   o   Building a management and governance structure: How can stakeholders be involved on a regular basis? How can the management and governance of a brand be institutionalised? A place brand can never be owned, only managed. The brand of a place exists only in the minds of the target groups and of society at large. What managerial and governance structures – steering groups, focus groups, sounding boards, funding bodies, private–public partnerships, communication networks, project management teams, etc. – should be set up?

Place branding also involves place innovation and place marketing, in other words new ways of doing things (or new activities), and marketing communications. Without these it would be simply a strategy on a piece of paper.

2 **Place innovation** is all about substance and content: the actual changes and work done on the ground. What are the real changes that can be made in order to build a value proposition[14]? Placemaking (which includes organizing activities and services in a public space, such as exhibitions, sports and food trucks) plays an important role in tourism and in visiting or being at physical places. Substance deals with important questions such as:

Tallinn, Estonia. ©Tommi Selander/Unsplash

➢ How do we ensure that the visited location (a square, a street, etc.) will be filled with people?
How do we motivate them to visit a place? What will they have to do there?
➢ Who would we like to see walking, consuming, living and working there?
➢ What do the target groups value about an urban environment?
➢
➢ How should a place position itself to the desired target groups?
➢ How can we plan marketing and campaigns to address the target groups?

Creating substance depends on place leadership for co-ordination and coherence ("the glue"). Otherwise the message and branding of the place innovation (buildings, invited companies, opened shops and cafés, balance of parking space and bicycle ways, etc.) will be chaotic and random. Place marketing helps to communicate the work that has been done and the innovations that have been created.

3 **Place marketing** consists of marketing, communication and "symbolic actions" (S. Anholt). To gain people's attention should be a means to a goal, not a goal in itself. Marketing tactics and channels, a well-designed website and other such things should generate interest, of course, but they should be more of a taster, a sample of the rich content and value of the actual place. This needs good planning and execution. Sound and relevant place marketing depends on place leadership and place innovation, otherwise it risks being simply a one-off marketing stunt, with money and time spent to little effect.

1.4. What makes a good place brand?

The market is flooded, everyone is busy and there is too much noise. So how do we differentiate places?

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[14] A value proposition refers to a promise made by a company should the customer decide to buy its product: In this case, the value proposition would be linked to a place, e.g. a place with career or investment opportunities for talents.

An effective place brand is about relevance and purpose. What purpose does a place serve in the eyes of its target groups? Why should they care enough to come and visit it, invest in it or study or live there? How can a place have such a thing as a purpose?

For places to serve a purpose they have to be relevant to a global discussion or issue that gives them visibility and can help them to achieve status as a brand. Combine a place's existing assets and use these to position it in a way that matters to global audiences. Build on these assets. For example, a city, region, country, science park, cluster or business district can make use of it its economic, marketing and other assets to address challenges facing society, such as climate change, funding for cancer research or dealing with problems that matter to its audience. A place can then become a means of serving a higher purpose, part of another, more vital and interesting, discussion. It will no longer speak only of itself (how innovative, cosy, smart, green or friendly it is), but rather about the value it can bring to others.

Zug, Switzerland. Photo by Raphael Küttel/Unsplash.

Crypto Valley in Zug, Switzerland, is an example of how places can become relevant in an economic, societal or technological domain. With the growing interest in cryptocurrencies, Zug is now part of a very lively global discussion. Zug's primary value might have been innovation or entrepreneurship, but it has manifested itself in the concrete, tangible and, not least, differentiated Crypto Valley. Zug had the courage and vision to test the idea, and that made it stand out.
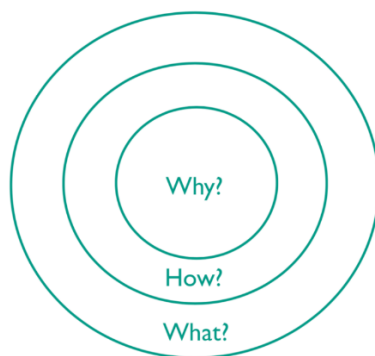
Figure 3   Simon Sinek's purpose model: start with the why question.

In order to be relevant to its target groups, a place needs to have a purpose and to play a role that is larger than itself. This helps to create interest and the desired brand associations.

What is the purpose and relevance of the Baltic Sea Region? Simon Sinek's purpose model (Figure 3) is useful here: Based on the core beliefs, values and drives of the place, it asks why, how and what. Why is the BSR relevant in a local and international context? Why should the BSR inspire and motivate its citizens and businesses, not to mention other people? How would I benefit from the BSR?

- The model highlights the assets and resources of a place by putting them in the context of the place's role in the local city, regional, national and international context.
- The idea of the model and its first application is to ask why or how the BSR or a location in it would be relevant, and what resources it can offer, to the rest of the world. Why should others care about or take notice of it? Which strategy and actions would enable the BSR to become a part of a particular discussion or issue?

Doing good is related to purpose and relevance. It does not mean philanthropy or a strict focus on corporate social responsibility or, its new form, creating shared value. Doing good with impact is an attempt to encapsulate what the BSR is already doing. It is not meant to be the brand or slogan of the BSR

2. Why create a brand for the BSR?

2.1. Fostering sustainable tourism

Increasing tourism in the Baltic Sea Region is putting pressure on natural resources, particularly the Baltic Sea and its coastal areas, which are already threatened by pollution. The Cultural Routes initiative can channel the shift towards sustainable tourism, protecting the region's natural amenities and ensuring fair economic development for the local population.

2.2. Diversifying the visitor experience and the tourism industry

In addition, the Baltic Sea Region is one of the most economically heterogeneous regions of Europe. The Nordic countries have a higher living standard than those on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, which were occupied and violently repressed by the Soviet Union for decades. Because the routes play a significant role in the distribution of tourists, particularly when it

Helsinki, Finland. Photo by Tapio Haaja/Unsplash.

comes to highlighting less well-known destinations, it could accelerate development in less attractive rural places. Connecting destinations in different countries with the seacoast can diversify the experience of visitors and thus bring economic benefits to such places and to those working in the tourism industry.

2.3. Strengthening unity and identity in the Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic Sea Region brand is very weak, if it exists at all. There are the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, and Sweden), the Baltic countries (of which only Latvia and Lithuania are Baltic, Estonia is Finno-Ugric, as is Finland), Poland and Germany – all separate entities in terms of brand image or how others perceive them. Efforts to initiate co-operation in this field have been restricted by various diplomatic and administrative factors.

On a positive note, the Cultural Routes have the potential to play a role in strengthening the identity of the Baltic Sea Region and its recognition in the region through:

➢ its ability to generate participation and co-operation;
➢ its rich cultural heritage, which brings together places in different countries and regions and their populations.

Looking forward, first, we might ask if there is enough co-operation throughout the region to make itself known for this (for example, the Nordic countries are one of the most integrated regions in the world). Second, its cultural heritage has been dominated by national narratives. The Cultural Routes represent an opportunity to go beyond this perspective, while increasing a sense of belonging to the BSR.

3. The Cultural Routes in the Baltic Sea Region

3.1. A heterogeneous geographical dispersion

The Baltic Sea Region is made of eight countries bordering the Baltic Sea: Sweden, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Germany, Finland, Estonia and Denmark. They account for 80 million people or 16% of the EU population. Sixteen routes are currently represented in the macro-region.

Some disparities should be noted between the BSR and the rest of the European Union, and between the countries of the BSR.

- The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe are under-represented in the BSR, with a higher concentration in the countries of western and southern Europe. Germany is represented in 5.2% of the Cultural Routes, while France, Italy, Spain and Portugal together account for 34.3% (cumulated) of the Cultural Routes.[15]

- Within the BSR, the continental countries (Germany, Poland) stand out. The west of the region (Denmark, Sweden), with several routes, contrast with the east (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland), which have a smaller number of routes.

These discrepancies were highlighted by the Council of Europe in *Roadmap for the Baltic Sea Region* (2019).[16] There were recommendations to realise a more homogeneous dispersion of the routes in the macro-region, with particular attention and support given to Estonia, Finland and Latvia.
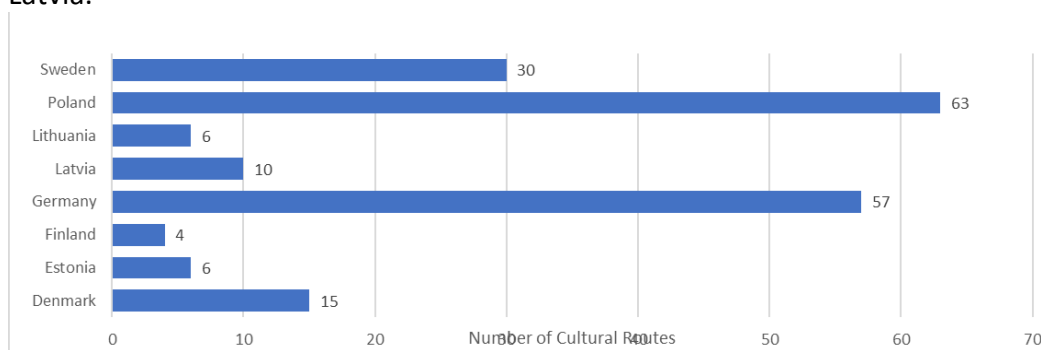
Figure 4   Number of Cultural Routes represented in the Baltic Sea macro-region, January 2020
Source: Routes4U

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[15] Council of Europe (September 2010), *Impact of European Cultural Routes on SMEs' innovation and competitiveness*.

[16] Council of Europe (February 2019), *Roadmap for the Baltic Sea Region*.

Implications for brand building of the Cultural Routes:

- There is no common theme. No route has been able to act as a link between Estonia and the Baltic countries to support a common identity. Consequently, to what extent are the routes representative of the BSR, and how should the Council of Europe act on the basis of that?
- Should a potential BSR branding strategy rely on using all the routes in the BSR or focus on the one or two routes that have the greatest potential to unite the macro-region?
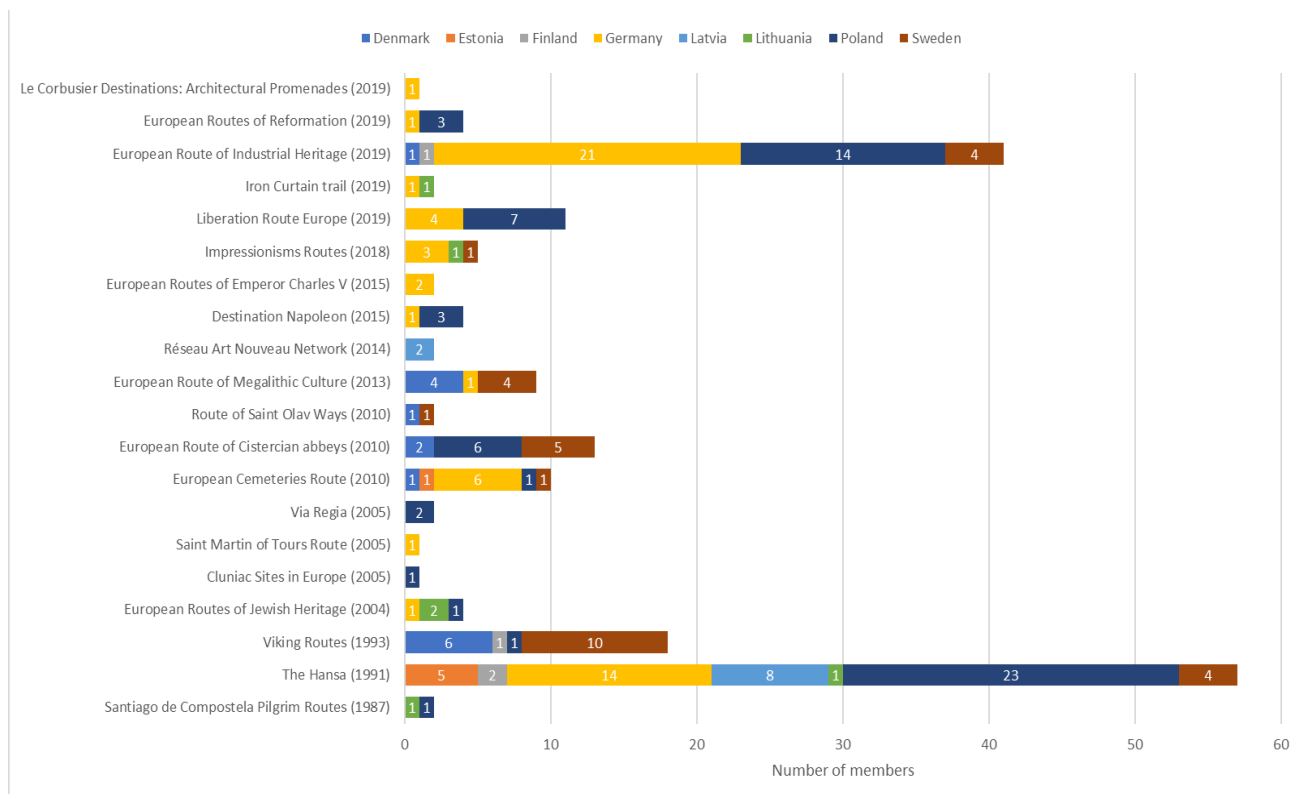
Figure 5   Cultural Routes' membership per country, January 2020
Source: Routes4U

3.2. Themes of the Cultural Routes

According to the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) classification used by the Council of Europe, some thematic clusters appear such as:

> ➢ spirituality: Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes, Cluniac Sites in Europe, European Cemeteries Route, European Route of Cistercian Abbeys, European Route of Jewish Heritage, and Saint Martin of Tours Route;
> ➢ the arts, especially architecture: European Route of Megalithic Culture, Impressionisms Routes, and Réseau Art Nouveau Network;
> ➢ the life and influence of famous European personalities: European Routes of Emperor Charles V, Destination Napoleon, and Route of Saint Olav Ways;
> ➢ society, such as the movement of people in Europe: the Hansa (which focuses on "former German seafaring merchants who joined together to lay the basis of what became the Hanseatic League as a way to pursue their shared economic interests"[17]), Viking Routes and Via Regia.

Given the diversity of the routes crossing the macro-region, only a few of them explore a theme that has the potential to represent the Baltic Sea Region.
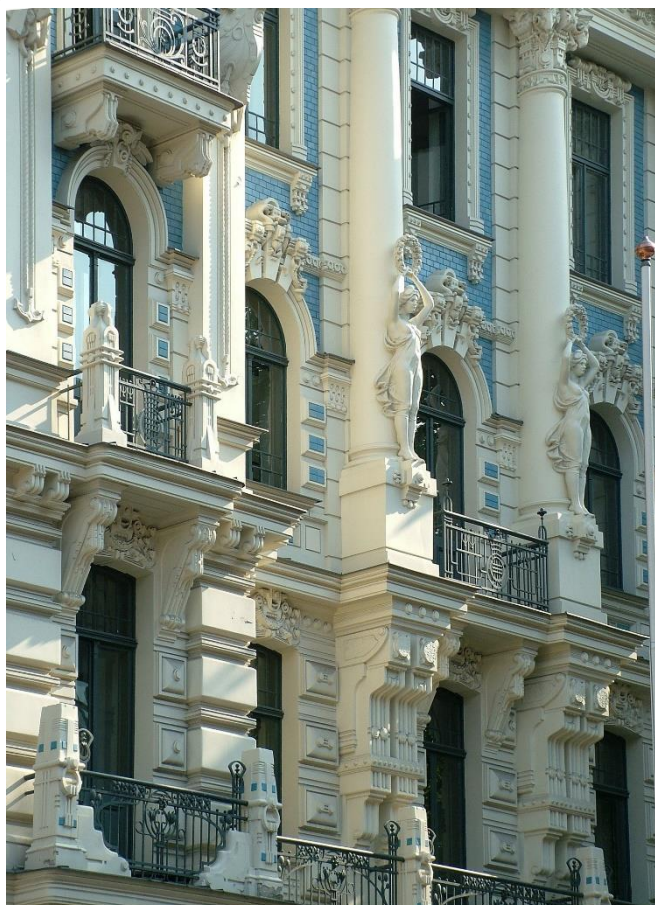
Riga, Latvia. ©Websi/Pixabay

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[17] Council of Europe (February 2019), *Roadmap for the Baltic Sea Region*.

3.3. Implications for branding

1   The Hansa and the Vikings still resonate. Only Viking Routes and the Hansa echo with the unique cultural and historical aspects of the entire region. They have the largest impact of any cultural narrative or historical aspect of the region. As was pointed out during the Eastern Viking Forum II,[18] the Viking brand and the Viking way of life still fascinate visitors, and its history is taught in many schools across the regions. The Hanseatic League disappeared in the 16th century, but has recently attracted more interest, especially within the political context of the European Union.[19] Both routes tap into very contemporary themes in line with EU values such as mobility and transnationality. A further analysis of the two routes will be presented in the next section.

2   Without a brand strategy, no common thread will emerge. The under-representation of a strong sense of the BSR in the Cultural Routes needs to be addressed, particularly by encouraging the development of routes that may support a Baltic identity and sense of belonging. Proposals for the development of new routes are stated in the Council of Europe's *Roadmap*, some of which present interesting ideas for a BSR branding strategy.

3   The Baltic Sea and its maritime and underwater heritage. Natural and landscape heritage are under-represented in the Cultural Routes. The natural features of the EU macro-region, including the Baltic Sea, play an important role in how the EU macro-region looks and what it is like to live in. From Pärnu to Rostock, populations see the same sea, which has marked the economic and social life of these countries for centuries. Not only is the Baltic Sea a feature that everybody in the region can relate to; it has also become one of the main concerns in the region. With a growing sense of urgency, the Baltic Sea has become a common challenge for the countries around it, and has the potential to become a unifying topic for communities across the region.[20] However, there has been little if any significant effort on the part of BSR countries to address this problem, reflecting the global indifference of governments to the climate crisis.

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[18] Maria Rossipal (ed.) (2017), *The 6th Baltic Sea Region Cultural Heritage Forum: From Postwar to Postmodern*, Swedish National Heritage Board, Stockholm, available at http://samla.raa.se/xmlui/handle/raa/10997, accessed 18 February 2020.

[19] "Northern member states unite on euro-zone reform" (8 December 2018), *The Economist*, available at www.economist.com/europe/2018/12/08/northern-member-states-unite-on-euro-zone-reform, accessed 18 February 2020.

[20] Adrian Solitander (2013), *Portfolio of Baltic Sea Region images and identities*, Tendensor, Stockholm.

4   Contemporary achievements: The Baltic Sea Region has a lot to showcase in its past and its contemporary industries. Industrial heritage could be highlighted and compared to developing digital industries. The industrial and post-war architectural heritage is also a cause for concern, as it has become increasingly challenging to maintain.[21] It may be interesting to draw on "difficult heritage",[22] which is linked to conflict and post-war heritage. In describing experiences of transborder co-operation, Nilsson, Eskilsson and Ek describe remaining distrust between Polish and German people across the borders, demonstrating that historical conflict is still a source of misunderstanding between populations and an obstacle to co-operation and the creation of a sense of belonging in the EU macro-region.[23] At the centre of the Cultural Routes project is the idea of democracy and dialogue, which could lead to better mutual understanding. Attention was drawn to this at the Baltic Sea Forum, to "the need to deal in a transparent and holistic way with the cultural and historical legacy related to conflict, oppression and human rights abuses. The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, as a platform for transnational cultural co-operation, can promote constructive

Visby, Sweden. ©Michael Odelberth/Unsplash.

dialogue on these critical heritage elements[24]." Reflecting the relevance of its industrial heritage for the BSR, the Baltic Region Heritage Committee has been organised into three working groups on underwater cultural heritage, coastal cultural heritage and 20th-century built heritage.[25]

5   Ethnic diversity: It may be interesting to explore the cultural heritage of cross-border regions. The Baltic Sea Region is populated by a diversity of ethnicities and minorities scattered across national borders. Highlighting this diversity would support international co-operation, which is promoted by the Council of Europe and the Council of the Baltic Sea States, while showing the multiple dimensions that bring together the peoples of the Baltic Sea such as the Sami in Sweden and Finland, Swedish-speaking Finns in the south-western coast of Finland and Swedes who populate the Estonian islands in the north-west. Once the Council of Europe and the Council of the Baltic Sea States have decided on a direction for their brand, they can decide on the priorities for the thematic expansion of the Cultural Routes.

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[21] Rossipal (ed.) (2017), *The 6th Baltic Sea Region Cultural Heritage Forum*.

[22] Rossipal (ed.) (2017), *The 6th Baltic Sea Region Cultural Heritage Forum*.

[23] Jan Henrik Nilsson, Lena Eskilsson and Richard Ek (2010), "Creating cross-border destinations: Interreg programmes and regionalisation in the Baltic Sea area", *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, 10:2, pp. 153–72, doi:10.1080/15022250903561978.

[24] Routes4U, Roadmap for the Baltic Sea Region, 2019. Available at: https://rm.coe.int/168093415b

[25] Available at www.cbss.org/regional-identity/cultural-heritage, accessed 18 February, 2020.

4. Good practices: Existing branding initiatives

This analysis highlights current good practices for cultural heritage and tourism destination branding. It gives an account of the existing situation as a basis for a branding strategy.

The analysis focuses on a selected number of routes: the Hansa and the Viking Routes (which are deeply rooted in BSR culture and territory), as well as the Route of Saint Olav Ways, the European Cemetery Route, the Impressionisms Routes and finally the European Route of Cistercian Abbeys. These present different levels of branding of their routes and destinations. This work is based on desk research and a survey conducted among key stakeholders in the EU macro-region of the Baltic Sea Region, with the help of the Council of Europe.
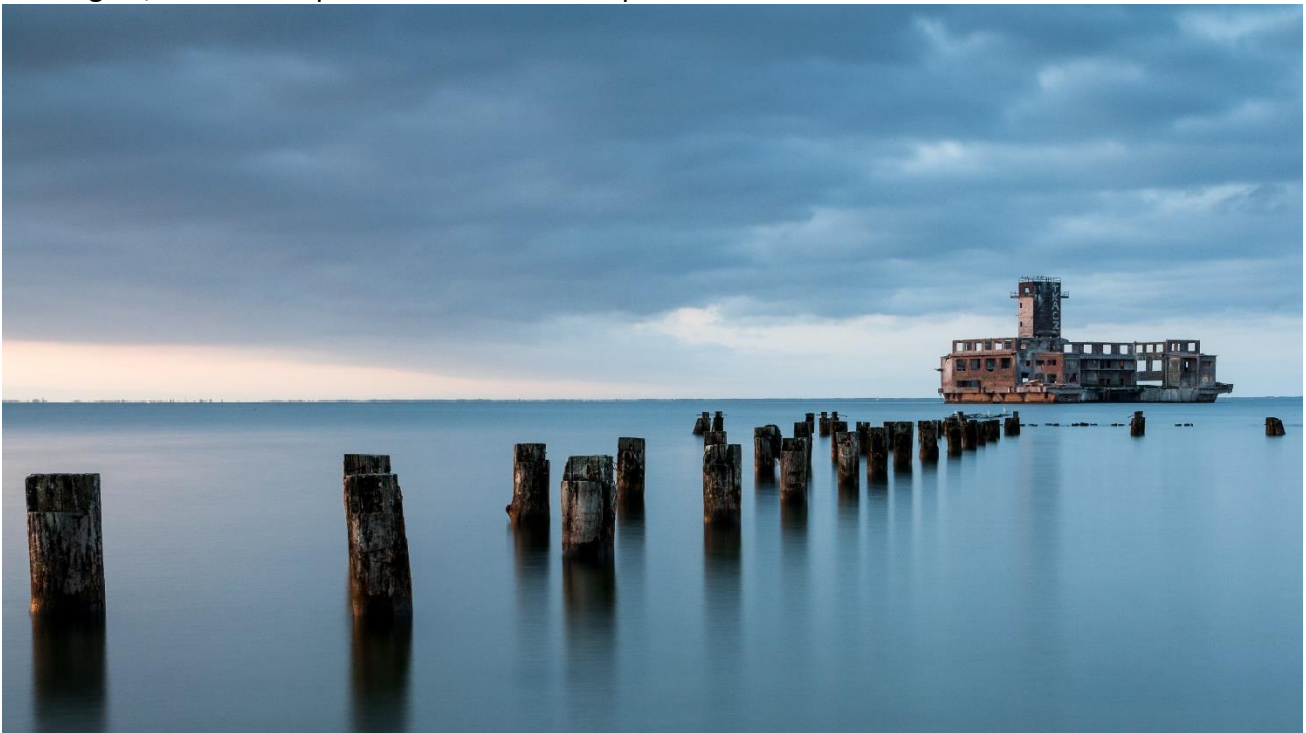
Gdynia, Poland. © Dawid Zawiła/ Unsplash.

4.1. Heritage branding initiatives

The Cultural Routes in this analysis present various elements and experiences of European cultural heritage. The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe cover Europe as a whole and are not limited to the context and geography of a given macro-region.[26]

The heritage that is highlighted tends to be dominated by architectural components such as buildings or towns. Some routes, such as the Impressionisms Routes, focus on painting and landscape, or the Route of Saint Olav Ways, which is composed largely of natural features. The routes vary, with the narrative mediated by storytelling or interconnections with the contemporary context.

The Hansa

This route consists of 190 towns and cities in 16 countries that are notable for their architectural heritage. They are characterised by brick building, and many of the towns and cities are designated World Heritage sites (Lübeck, Wismar, Visby, etc.). Museums such as the Europäisches Hansemuseum in Lübeck, Germany, or the Pärnu Muuseum in Estonia present the history of the Hanseatic League and its cities,[27] placing the evolution of Hanseatic trade and craftsmanship in its historical context. The Hansa route showcases the Hanseatic "spirit" of its particular landscapes, shops, etc.

Explore Hansa

Explore Hansa is an interregional cooperation project that involves 11 partner cities. The main aim of this project is to enhance the values of the historical Hanseatic League through cooperation, research and development of new tourism products. The outcomes of the project are new walking, biking and hiking routes. Another focus is culinary aspects, both in terms of locally produced food and a quality label for restaurants "Hansa culinary". The aims are to transfer these products to other Hanseatic cities to strengthen the transnational aspects and to increase the number of incoming tourists throughout the year.

Viking Routes

This displays different elements of the Viking legacy such as archaeological sites (farms, rune carvings), as well as a great number of objects. Many sites within the network are also reconstructions. As these sites rely heavily on storytelling and on visitor experience there are more opportunities to share Viking traditions and ways of life.

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[26] An example is a Cultural Route called Route of Saint Olav Ways, which covers pilgrim paths that cross Germany, Denmark and Sweden and ends at Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, Norway.

[27] Available at www.hanse.org/en/news/museums-exhibitions, accessed 18 February, 2020.

Impressionisms Routes

These routes rely on the interrelation of artworks, the history of a cultural movement and the life stories of artists to tell the story of impressionism in Europe. It showcases "the sites that have inspired the European impressionists and plein air painters from the mid-19th century until the mid-20th century, the places where they lived, the places where they established artists' colonies and the towns which today display their works inside their museums or their cultural venues".[28] Visitors can see the contexts in which artists' works were originally produced (see Figure 6).

Figure 6   Schwaan in Germany, painted by the impressionist artist Franz Bunke. Schwaan and its museum are parts of the Bunke Impressionism Route.

European Route of Cistercian Abbeys

Covering a network of almost 200 abbeys in 12 countries, this route provides an insight into the heritage of Cistercian abbeys in Europe.

Route of Saint Olav Ways

This is probably the route that displays the natural landscapes most widely. It is composed of eight pilgrim paths, including 3 000 kilometres of "tranquil scenery and picturesque villages".[29] Visitors hike through Norwegian fjords and mountains on their way to Trondheim, before reaching Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, where the remains of Saint Olav lie. The route is marketed as being European, Nordic and Norwegian, reflecting a strong multicultural and diverse identity. The Route of Saint Olav Ways invokes historical precedence by harnessing the pilgrim paths to Trondheim that

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[28] Available at https://impressionismsroutes.com, accessed 18 February, 2020.

[29] Available at www.visitnorway.com/things-to-do/great-outdoors/hiking/st-olav-ways, accessed 18 February 2020.

have been used by travellers since 1032. These allow visitors an insight into pilgrims' and local people's experiences through spending the night in different villages along the way and sampling the local food.

> **Saint Olav Ways – Plan your trip online**
>
> On the Saint Olav Ways website, you can find recommended walks, pilgrim packages, packing list and print maps. But one of the most interesting features is the trip planner: It allows you to personalize and save your trips along the Saint Olav Ways, choose points of interests and find recommended accommodations.
>
> For more info, visit: https://pilegrimsleden.no/en/map/plan

European Cemeteries Route

This route displays both the tangible heritage (sculpture, engraving, urban planning) of different "significant cemeteries in Europe", and their intangible heritage, "providing a framework surrounding habits and practices related to death".[30]

5. Branding the BSR: Identity and branding elements

This section outlines the brand values that may serve as building blocks for branding the Baltic Sea Region as a whole.

In 2013, Future Place Leadership[31] took part of a project called ONE BSR where we highlighted some particular elements that could be used in conceptualising and potentially creating a Baltic Sea Region brand.
On the basis of our 2013 work,[32] we suggest that the following cultural elements be considered for branding. These are presented as narratives that emphasise commonality between people in the Baltic Sea Region, or contribute to something constructive, unifying, cross-border, transnational or distinctly macro-regional. These were developed using cultural mapping and interviews.
The following sections have been adapted from the "Portfolio of Baltic Sea Region Images and Identities", which is available at: https://www.hel.fi/static/kanslia/onebsr/bsr_final.pdf

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[30] Available at www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-european-cemeteries-route, accessed 18 February 2020.

[31] Future Place Leadership AB used to be called Tendensor International AB until 2017. The study under question was done by Tendensor AB, a sister company.
[32] Solitander (2013), *Portfolio of Baltic Sea Region images and identities*.

5.1. Inventory of elements of BSR identity

1. **Respect of fairness**
   The Baltic States are known for their high level of respect of fairness, not only in their daily lives, but also concerning official issues, such as labour markets and higher education. This respect of fairness and equality can be connected to honesty, an essential quality that defines the people of the region.

2. **Respect of personal space**
   People from the BSR are quiet and reserved: That is one of the most common (mis)conceptions that tourists and expats have about the people from the Baltics. Nevertheless, since the region is so heterogeneous, there are varying degrees of introversion and once a foreigner gets to know someone from the BSR, they usually find a really good friend. Frankness and tolerance are traits that characterize the Baltic nations.

3. **Proven willingness to co-operate**
   There are several different issues that connect the Baltic Sea region and that require the sense of a shared responsibility, such as sustainable development, mobility, and the shared heritage of the Baltic Sea. The EUSBSR[33] is one of many examples that involves co-operation between member states.

©tpsdave/Pixabay

4.   **Environmental awareness**
   Nature is diverse and abundant in the Baltic Sea Region: The nations of the BSR often find themselves close to and appreciative of nature and natural landscapes. The necessity to respect and preserve nature is very important to them. This mindset of a respectful and harmonious relationship with nature is reflected in the concept of eco-cities in the BSR.

5.   **A unique ICT community**
   A strong and skilled ICT community is one of the strengths that characterizes the BSR. Foreign investors recognize the growing importance of ICT skills, which vary from country to country but are complementary and "form a critical mass for the region in the ICT sector."

6. **Creativity in attractive places**
   Creativity and innovation are undeniable assets: services such as Soundcloud and Spotify were created in the BSR, which continues to invest in the creative industries, making it attractive for young talents, entrepreneurs and investors. The goal of self-realisation can be achieved through creative and new opportunities all throughout the BSR.

7. **Multicultural diversity**
   Multiculturalism and diversity are keywords when it comes to the BSR: the Baltic Sea connects many different cultures, regions and languages. The region in itself is "a cultural crossing point where East and West meet each other." The BSR also counts around 30

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[33] EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region

different ethnic minorities, among them the indigenous people of the Saami which live in the northern parts of Norway, Sweden and Finland.

8. An accessible maritime heritage

The Baltic Sea is the central element connecting all of the countries that belong to the BSR. It is also representative of the region's rich and diverse maritime heritage. Cultural Routes such as the Viking Routes or the Hansa illustrate this heritage by shedding light on the importance of the sea as a means of communication.

9. Fish from the Baltic Sea prepared in different ways

Fish is one of the main traditional sources of food in every BSR country. The fish **are** caught in the same sea, but each country has its specific way of preparing them. Herring is for example a popular dish, but it can be served hot or cold, salted, marinated, pickled, smoked, or baked, depending on the country.

©Carlos-Grury-Santos/ Unsplash.

10. The Baltic Sea

The connection that people feel to the Sea should not be underestimated: many cultural aspects revolve around the Sea, such as the fish-based cuisine, the maritime heritage and the natural landscapes. However, there is a need to protect this Sea that connects the people: it is indeed the most polluted Sea in the world[34], which is why strategies such as the EUSBSR promote objectives such as "Save the Sea" that involve clearing the Sea waters, supporting the marine ecosystem, improving the shipping conditions as well as enhancing communication and co-operation between partners.

11. Accessible green spaces

Accessibility to green spaces and natural landscapes is an important asset: vast remote areas and spacious natural landscapes are much more common in the Baltic Sea Region than in the rest of Europe. Seas, lakes, rivers and large forests are accessible to everyone, even to

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[34] https://www.blastic.eu/baltic-sea-lets-fix-damage-caused/

those living in larger cities. The Nordic concept of "*allemansrätt*" or "freedom to roam" is the general population's right to access public or privately owned natural areas, such as mountains, rivers and lakes, and forests.

12. Complementary markets

The vast array of different elements of the market chain that are located in the Baltic Sea Region present an opportunity for companies that wish to invest in several complementary markets. Furthermore, the cost differences, depending on where the companies are located, allow for different company functions to be established in different countries: for example, a company's headquarters could be located in a more mature market and its production in a less mature one.

13. Better growth than the rest of Europe

Economically speaking, on a global scale, the Baltic Sea Region is doing well. While the Nordic countries are among the wealthiest in the world, the Baltic States are in "a transitory phase towards becoming welfare states". As mentioned in the European Commission's Economic Brief of 2017, "the Baltic countries have a similar economic structure, and, despite their gradual convergence with Western European countries, are still specialised in the production of low-tech goods."[35]

Lithuania. ©Skaistė Vancevičiūtė/Pixabay.

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[35] Poissionier Aurélien, European Commission "Economic Brief 024", April 2017

5.2. Narratives that help to construct the BSR brand

These are narratives about the Baltic Sea Region that have the potential to serve as a basis for developing BSR brand values. These have been taken from the same document as the "Inventory of elements of Baltic Sea Region identity", which is available at: https://www.hel.fi/static/kanslia/onebsr/bsr_final.pdf

Saving the Baltic Sea

The Baltic Sea is one of the most polluted in the world, and it is facing many problems, including marine litter (especially plastic), damage to the seafloor and shores, proliferation of blue-green algae, the negative consequences of overfishing and heavy ship traffic.[36] Different local and intergovernmental initiatives and strategies focus on saving the Baltic Sea and its environment. The EUSBSR falls under this same category, one of its objectives being "Save the Sea". This aim connects the people from the BSR who are aware of the environmental problems the region faces. Saving the Sea is the responsibility of all the coastal states of the BSR. If they manage to salvage it, not only will they be able to enjoy the natural environment for generations to come, but they will also have the opportunity of developing 'blue' and 'green' industries in support of saving the sea, which will contribute to the prosperity of the affected countries.

. Elements used:
- Environmental Awareness
- Accessible Maritime Heritage
- Fish from the Baltic Sea
- The Baltic Sea
- Accessible Green Spaces
- Better Growth than the Rest of Europe
- Creativity in Attractive Locations

Celebrating light and nature

Midsummer is celebrated in much of the Baltic Sea Region: it encompasses the period of time around the summer solstice and is usually celebrated through the symbolic burning of a bonfire. The midsummer celebrations vary again from country to country: In Sweden for example, Midsummer is celebrated by decorating a pole (called "maypole") with greenery and flowers. Midsummer symbolizes the changing of the seasons, the arrival of summer and the celebration of the blooming nature. Nevertheless, nature has a big impact on people in the BSR all year round: whether they are city dwellers or live in the countryside, they can observe the changing of the seasons in the surrounding nature. Activities related to the natural landscape are abundant: they demonstrate how cities, nature and culture come together.

Elements used:
- Respect of Personal Space
- Multicultural Diversity
- Accessible Green Spaces

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[36] European Commission, European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, Action Plan

Best available opportunities for self-realisation

Since the Cold War, the BSR has developed into a globalized region. Fair labour markets and equal opportunities at universities have become the norm, as well as a diligent work ethic, with men and women being highly involved in work life. The post-cold War generation generally has better opportunities for self-realization than the previous generations. Nowadays, the Baltic Sea Region is the "land of opportunities", especially for young people, who can enjoy access to a good education and economic safety.

Nida, Lithuania. ©Pixabay

Elements used:
• Creativity in Attractive Locations
• Respect of Fairness
• Unique ICT Community
• Better Growth than the Rest of Europe

Being split, then emerging stronger than ever

Before being broken in half by communism and the oppressing Soviet rule that was forced on most of the States on the Eastern shore of the sea, the Baltic Sea Region was united by the Hanseatic trade union. Today, the region has managed to transition into a globalized economy, coming out of the economic crisis better than any other part of Europe. The development continues to deepen, with countries such as Estonia and Latvia joining the eurozone as recently as 2015. The relative economic strength of the Baltic Sea Region shows that, through "intensive trade relations across the Baltic Sea", the region has been able to return to its former glory and become as strong as before it was split apart.

Elements used:
• Proven Willingness to cooperate
• Better Growth than the Rest of Europe
• Complementary Markets
• Global Mindsets

The sea that connects and separates different cultures

The Baltic Sea is the central element that both connects and separates people from different cultures. The different countries' influence on each other is evident in the similar architectural styles that can be found throughout the cities. Hanseatic cities take pride in their heritage from the *Hansa* days, the style being intimately connected to the history of trade in the region. More recently, there has been a Nordic or Scandinavian design movement, which is based on simplicity, minimalism and functionality and is now present throughout much of the Baltic Sea Region.

Elements used:
• Multicultural Diversity
• Creativity in Attractive Locations

- An Accessible Maritime Heritage
- Proven willingness to cooperate

Exploring a unique ICT community

The ICT community is quite strong and unique in the Baltic Sea Region: the "value chains between ICT clusters in the region are important and call for further exploration." This can be linked directly to the complementarity of the markets present in the BSR. Different elements of the value chain are present in different countries, calling for a stronger cooperation between them. In the ICT sector, these elements include research and development, contact centres and sales functions. Due to the short distances, people can easily relocate within the region and share their skills and experiences. One of the regional strengths is" the pace of development towards solution convergence and connectivity."

Elements used:
- Proven Willingness to Cooperate
- Unique ICT Community
- Creativity in Attractive Locations
- Complementary Markets

5.3. Two BSR-established Cultural Route brands

The Hansa and the Viking "brands" could be described as well established, as they are locally and globally recognised. Both the Hansa and the Vikings were related to the sea, were adventurous and mobile, reflected a spirit of competition and trade and engaged in economic alliance and plain warfare. The Hansa seems more rooted in our contemporary world, with a modern Hanseatic League being developed and the brand still invoked to describe international co-operation, EU voting alliances, etc.

The alliance and name are known, as is the Hansa brand. The local governments of Lübeck, Hamburg and Bremen still describe their cities as free and Hanseatic cities. Many local firms, including hotels, clubs and ships, have "Hansa" in their names, and the Hanseatic spirit of trade is still present through business alliances. The first and largest bank founded in Estonia, after the restoration of independence in 1991, was called Hansapank; it was later acquired by Swedbank of Sweden. As stated in the *Portfolio of Baltic Sea Region images and identities*, much could be made of the best available opportunities for self-realisation, based on the history of a common region that became violently separated and then united again; the sea which connects and separates the different cultures in the region.

5.4. Flagship brands and services

Follow the Vikings

The Viking Routes and its managing organisation, Viking Destination Association, use the brand Follow the Viking (www.followthevikings.com). Follow the Viking was the result of a four-year-long transnational project funded by Creative Europe to strengthen the network of actors working in Viking heritage and to "make transnational Viking heritage accessible and understandable to a world-wide audience". Even though it goes beyond the Cultural Route and its presence in the Baltic Sea Region, it communicates the Cultural Route brand by dedicating its first page to this initiative and its itineraries. Short introductions to the different sites and destinations, together with details of accessibility and contacts, are very user friendly. The Cultural Route is used to explain the relationships between the different sites, and Viking history.

Route of Saint Olav Ways

Another great example of a visitor-friendly and useful website is that for the Saint Olav Ways (https://pilegrimsleden.no/en). It provides all the information necessary to discover the Saint Olav pilgrim paths, providing recommended journeys (including distances and days needed, as well as accommodation) and a trip planner (a customisable map where one can add one's chosen start and finish points, stages, accommodation, places to eat, heritage sites, etc.), as well as many maps of the paths. There are also testimonies and blog posts from visitors.

The only downside is that the website focuses on Norwegian paths, with a separate website for the Swedish paths (www.stolavsleden.com/sv).

Hansa League

The website of the Hansa League (www.hanse.org/en) provides information about the Hanseatic League and events such as Hanseatic Day, and promotes the member cities as a whole, but not from the perspective of tourism. ExploreHansa is focused on tourism.[37]

The Hansa League has invested in labels, certification and a guarantee of quality. A simple way to strengthen the impact of a brand is to make sure that it is used by its members, which imparts legitimacy to the destinations or products, and also helps to establish it by making it recognisable to visitors. A great example of that is the Cultural Routes. The

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[37] Available at www.hanse.org/en/projects/explore-hansa/hansa-tourism-offers, accessed 18 February 2020.

designated logo used by the different Cultural Routes helps potential visitors to track the products and to understand what they relate to.

Thus, the easily recognisable logo of the Route of Saint Olav Ways is physically present along the pilgrim paths. Of course, there is more at stake than branding since hikers rely on signage to guide them on the paths, but it helps to associate the destination with the route. For instance, many people associate the scallop shell with Santiago de Compostela and its pilgrims. Similarly, the European Cemeteries Route has its insignia installed at the entrance to each cemetery along the route.[38] Guides are also certified to accompany visitors at these sites.

Saint Olav Ways milestone.

The Hansa route has worked with labels to develop its authenticity. The Hansa Culinary Label was created to highlight the culinary aspects of the region, and to draw attention to locally produced food and good local restaurants. It resonates with the history of the Hanseatic League, as "the food supply was mainly dependent on local produce", with merchants bringing spices from abroad.[39]

Figure 7   The Hanseatic League.

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[38] Available at https://cemeteriesroute.eu/about-cemeteries-route/marketing-materials/insignia.aspx, accessed 18 February 2020.

[39] Available at www.hanse.org/en/projects/explore-hansa/local-culinary-specialties, accessed 18 February 2020.

The Hansa League today

"Baltic Sea Region cities could form a Digital Hansa to promote innovation, entrepreneurship and growth through the flow of information, ideas and human capital between urban economies. Together, they have many of the components of what would be a formidable tech cluster. By being connected to each other, these cities could also become more attractive to global cities outside the network."[40]

European Hansa museum in Lübeck, Germany. ©BS Hochschulstadtteil/ Wikimedia commons

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[40] Joakim Wernberg and Martin Andersson (2016), *State of the digital region 2016: Cities connecting the digital economy in the Baltic Sea Region*, Baltic Development Forum, Copenhagen, p. 5, available at http://topofdigital.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/2016_StateOfDigital.pdf, accessed 18 February 2020.

5.5. Narratives that help to construct the BSR

Events

The Cultural Routes have been very successful in creating major events that foster a sense of community between collaborating cities and organisations, and draw attention to their destinations.

The Hanseatic Days are probably the most well known of these events. The Hansa is celebrated once a year with a festival hosted by a member city. In addition, many cities also have their own festivals. In 2018 the Hanseatic Day was held in Rostock, at the 800th anniversary of the city, to which some 450 000 visitors came.

Foteviken, Sweden. CC by Sven Rosborn/Wikimedia commons

The sites of the Viking Routes also hold several events of their own. In February each year the Jorvik Viking Festival takes place in York, England.[41] The Viking Market is held at Foteviken in Sweden each year,[42] while the Slavic and Viking Re-enactment festival takes place in Wolin, Poland, every year.[43]

Cultural Routes and tourism destination: different approaches

While most of the Cultural Routes are not itineraries, but rather a set of individual destinations that can be visited in any order, they have led to the successful development of products such as tours that allow visitors to discover several destinations.

Best practice example

In the Hansa project nine cities on the Hansa Cultural Route (Visby, Pärnu, Viljandi, Limbazi, Valmeria, Cesis, Straupe, Koknese, Kuldiga) co-operated to develop tourism products. These included the Hansa Culinary Label, walking and biking tours, biking packages, trekking packages, culinary city breaks and city tours focused on Hanseatic heritage.

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[41] Available at www.followthevikings.com/events/jorvik-fire-festival, accessed 18 February 2020.

[42] Available at www.fotevikensmuseum.se/d/en/aktiviteter/vikingamarknaden, accessed 18 February 2020.

[43] For more information about the festival, you can visit the official website: http://jomsborg-vineta.com/#festiwal

In an innovative move, the European Cemeteries Route and the Saint Martin of Tours Route mapping a crossroad of their routes in the city of Maribor, Slovenia. It highlights the richness and diversity of Maribor, as well as their respective cultural heritages in perspective.[44] This shows that, apart from its own brand and identity, each Cultural Route can promote the multifaceted and rich identity of a given area if it engages in a joint venture with another route. In Maribor's case the crossroad is a city, but the same can be done with a macro-region.

Books and other printed materials

Since 2013 *Eau et Lumière*, which manages the Impressionisms Routes, has published several books in association with *Les Itinéraires*, including one devoted to the network of 12 routes developed by the association.[45]

In the tradition of pilgrims' credentials, the Route of Saint Olav Ways provides a passport to pilgrims who can use it to record stamps from the places visited. At the end of the route, in Trondheim, pilgrims receive the Olav Letter, a certificate to verify the completion of the last stage of the pilgrimage.[46]

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[44] Available at http://ar-tour.com/guides/maribor-crossroad-of-cultural-routes-1.aspx, accessed 18 February 2020.

[45] Available at www.impressionismsroutes.com/bookshop, accessed 18 February 2020.

[46] Available at https://pilegrimsleden.no/en/pilegrimspass-og-olavsbrevet, accessed 18 February 2020.

6. Challenges

Some of the main challenges that have been identified are as follows.

6.1. Representativeness and structure of the brand

This document lays the foundations for a branding strategy for the Baltic Sea Region that makes use of the Cultural Routes. Asking the right questions can help strengthen the strategy. Some of the important questions are:

- To what extent do the Cultural Routes embody the local and regional cultural heritage or the identity of the local people?
- Should a BSR brand tap into all the routes that cross the BSR macro-region or focus more on the iconic ones, such as the Hansa and the Viking Routes?
- How does a BSR brand take into account of the fact that no route "belongs" to the BSR, but that all routes are broadly European since they traverse a wider territory?

6.2. Competition

The Cultural Route as a cultural and tourism brand competes with other brands in the BSR. This has implications for the BSR Cultural Routes.

- Cultural Routes may lack visibility compared to cities, which also offer other attractions, although smaller destinations can capitalise on taking tourists off the beaten track.
- Cultural Routes may also face internal competition. Although they are marketed as "routes", they are not itineraries per se, but rather a network of sites and destination that can be visited independently. Sites themselves may have greater visibility than the route.

6.3. Lack of Resources

The study published by the Council of Europe in 2011, *Impact of European Cultural Routes on SMEs' innovation and competitiveness*, highlighted a lack of "resource capacity" in relation to branding and marketing activities. It notes that the Cultural Routes are driven by highly committed individuals, but that "their involvement in this capacity means that their work excels in bringing a strong academic underpinning of the Route theme, for which they are passionate, but they are often under-resourced in other areas where experience is lacking, such as marketing. Pan-European marketing activities are therefore often limited to annual events."[47]

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[47] Council of Europe, *Impact of European Cultural Routes*, p. 84.

The development of the Cultural Routes brand continues to reflect these issues, with the different routes' websites focusing on scientific knowledge and institutional information (the institutions behind the routes, the presentation of previous and current projects, etc.) rather than being tourist-friendly platforms that provide a good digital user experience.

7.Conclusions

In the above analysis, we discussed which elements of the Cultural Routes could be used in a macro-regional brand. The following are our conclusions:

- The region needs to work together more and in better ways to promote tourism and trade, to foster co-operation and to save the Baltic Sea. A branding strategy that addresses this would be welcome.
- While there is much that binds the region together, the Baltic Sea Region has no brand identity (self-image) or brand image (others' perception of it). Instead, there are the Nordic countries, the Baltic countries (Estonia identifies itself as Nordic, even though Estonian is not a Baltic language), Poland and Germany.
- To build a brand strategy, those living in the BSR must be convinced that they have a rich and diverse cultural heritage and that they have a lot in common across the region. Demonstrating the benefits and the opportunities available may be the best approach to motivating the BSR.

The brand identity of the BSR consists of:
- culture;
- democracy and diversity;
- trade and co-operation.

Culture

In terms of values and brand identity, the Cultural Routes programme as a whole can represent and drive this EU macro-region, since culture and history are a potential unifying factor (Viking culture, the Hansa).

Democracy and diversity

Democracy and co-operation should drive the establishment of a BSR brand, given that these European values are held in high regard, and that half of the region had its democratic rights violently removed for several decades during the 20th century. Another element that characterises the region is its diversity. All the routes together, with their territorial and thematic overlaps, represent the region. Focusing on the diversity of the macro-region serves to demonstrate how much its various regions have in common, whether it is across a border or on two edges of the macro-region.

Trade and co-operation

The region has been about trade in all senses of the word, whether violently stealing from one another during Viking times or by trade, as warring eased up to the point of the creation of the Hansa League. This is a cold and dark region, whose people have had to contend not only with their enemies but also with the climate. This has led to their being pragmatic and practical. Trade and co-operation are held in high regard.

Sellin, Germany. Photo by Alexander Gernhardt/Pixabay

Digital tourism

However, the BSR's digital presence as a whole lags behind that of other regions in the tourism sector as a whole, even though the BSR regards itself as a highly digitalised EU macro-region. The BSR needs to highlight the diversity of its shared cultural heritage across the region.

Most of the Cultural Routes present maps on their websites but there are also mono-routes. In other words, the Cultural Routes fail to represent the crossovers or to present a more unified picture of the region.

PART 3 - IMPLEMENTATION GUIDELINES

This section provides guidelines on activities and communications to implement a branding strategy. Two case studies are included, so that we can learn from their experience. These are followed by recommendations.

1.   Case studies

Place branding Luxembourg

Luxembourg. Photo by Waldo Miguez/Pixabay.

Luxembourg embarked on a country branding project in 2016-2017 in order to strengthen the country's international position. It began with a sense of urgency and a realisation of the problem: an absence of a coherent message that reflects what the country represents to its target groups. Among the first key steps was to uncover the values and identity of the country . This was done by inviting different stakeholders to workshops. As a next step, the uncovered values – open, dynamic and reliable – had to be articulated into short and concise phrases. What is more, Luxembourg wished to have a visual brand identity was well. This is a risky way to go based on numerous failed branding initiatives: logos and slogans do not matter in place branding. However, they can help to get people and companies onboard, if the first part – the stakeholder involvement – has been carried out the way it should be. The entire process began with a public conference that explored the question of whether the country needed to brand and market itself. Naturally, there was considerable interest and many opinions. This open and transparent approach made the strategy as good as it is today. At the core of any branding strategy lie brand values. These were uncovered through a participatory approach which included the general public and key actors, using surveys, individual interviews, discussion groups and public debate. This collaborative process led to a common denominator to which both public- and private-sector stakeholders responded. The new

communication platform (www.inspiringluxembourg.lu) provides a toolbox with useful promotional material like pictures, videos, publications, data, etc.

In the early phase, a broad survey was launched among three categories of the population: Luxembourg nationals, foreign residents and those who wished to serve as brand ambassadors for the country. They were asked about the key strengths and weaknesses of Luxembourg and to attribute their answers to core characteristics. Next, there were workshops with actors from a wide array of public and private sectors, including the economy, finance and culture. Those who were interested and motivated gave of their time and energy: business people, artists, historians, politicians, citizens, young and old, Luxembourg and foreign nationals.

Place branding the Nordic countries

This description has been taken in part from strategic documents, academic journals and first-hand knowledge, as Future Place Leadership has been working with the strategy document and the Nordic Council of Ministers.

Lofoten, Norway. Photo by monicore/Pïxabay.

This analysis shows how the Nordic countries brand themselves together,[48] as a benchmark for the Council of Europe in seeking to brand the Baltic Sea Region. Branding the Nordic Region,[49] or the updated *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region 2019–2021*,[50] is a strategic branding and marketing initiative of the Nordic countries. It is a case of best practice in macro-

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[48] Available at www.norden.org/en/publication/strategy-international-branding-nordic-region-2019-2021, accessed 18 February 2020.

[49]Magnus, J. International branding of the Nordic region. Place Brand Public Dipl 12, 195–200 (2016).

https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-016-0015-9

[50] *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region, 2019–2021* (2019), Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen, available at

http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1279355/FULLTEXT01.pdf, accessed 18 February 2020.

regional branding, as it was carefully built on value that reflect the societies it represents and is well structured and innovative. This is one of the most integrated regions on the planet, the Nordic Council of Ministers having engaged in regional co-operation since 1971.

Having a clear idea: why brand the Nordics?

In 2013, the ministers tasked Secretariat to the Council of Ministers to research a possible common international branding strategy. Among other things, over 60 people were interviewed. Two years later the next step was taken with a common vision, which has grown into the Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region. It is designed to address societal, business, innovation issues, quality of life and much more. In short, they market a certain Nordic concept, a sum of the economic, political and social achievements that set the region apart from the rest of the world. "The strategy for branding the Nordic region will increase the visibility of the Nordic region and its influence in the world, and improve the region's competitiveness."[51]

The Nordic region is often seen as a single entity by the outside world, certainly in export markets that matter to the Nordics: China, India and North America.[52] As target groups regard this region as one Scandinavian landmass – as reflected in anecdotal reports from diplomats that Copenhagen is the Swedish capital and IKEA comes from Finland – there was a clear need to address the issue. More importantly, the Nordic countries make up the twelfth largest economy in the world, with a population of approximately 25 million. The countries are stronger together, and co-operating on political, economic, social and branding matters strengthens them individually too.

In general, a place can never market itself or create a brand; a place can only *earn* a reputation by *doing* things: changing policies, fighting climate change, improving services, building, etc. The branding strategy will help to attract international attention as well as and empower different current and potential branding actors in the Nordic countries. For example, funding is provided for projects that help carry out the strategy either by events, projects, videos, exhibitions or other.

A key success factor for this branding strategy has been a clear understanding of why this was to be done and what the benefits might be. As a rule, a common solution can match a common understanding of a challenge. This was reflected in another crucial factor: the greatest possible political buy-in. The prime ministers of the Nordic countries had, on several occasions, expressed an ambition to brand Nordic co-operation internationally.

How did they do it?

The Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region was developed in response to an explicit request from the Nordic prime ministers and the Nordic ministers for co-operation. The aim was to showcase the Nordic region globally, and thereby increase the competitiveness and international influence of the Nordic countries. The Nordic ministers for co-operation approved the strategy at their meeting in October 2014, and the first strategy ran until the end of 2018. Today, it is the Secretariat of the Nordic Council of Ministers who is responsible for the management of the strategy. Among other things, they are trying to raise awareness of the branding project among key

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[51] *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region, 2019–2021* (2019), p. 9.

[52] *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region, 2019–2021* (2019).

public and private stakeholders, maintain the website TheNordics.com, publishing the submitted stories (so-called Traces of the North), sponsorships to projects and so on. The target groups of the strategy are Nordic embassies, investment promotion agencies, companies big and small, creative industry and various associations. Best practices were researched and others' success factors as well as mistakes were analysed. It became clear that successful place branding for nations and macro-regions must involve society as a whole. This would generate buy-in and serve as proof that the branding strategy is relevant and useful and reflects the society. The branding strategy would enable the Nordic region to influence or even better control their narratives, meaning steering the conversations that others are having of the region by actively working with fulfilling the strategy and consistently communicating coherent and clear messages.

No logo, no tagline
Place branding is not about creating logos, visuals or taglines. Place branding is about effecting actual change that helps to earn a place a reputation. For example, CO_2 neutrality or an effective smart city strategy is place branding, because it affects the situation on the ground and how others will, with some marketing help, start perceiving the place. The Nordic branding strategy does not involve designing a new Nordic label or investing in advertising campaigns. What it does is set up strategic guidelines for the stakeholders involved in international branding of the Nordic region. This is a first step in a long-term initiative to systematise and to ensure consistency in branding of the Nordic region, and to support the ability to work together towards a common goal when this leads to added value for each player.[53]

Study
The strategy grew out of a comprehensive pilot study carried out in the winter of 2013–14. The Nordic ministers for co-operation had commissioned the secretariat to the Council of Ministers to explore the idea of setting up a joint Nordic strategy for international branding of the Nordic region. The pilot study included interviews with over 60 people, from both the Nordic region and other parts of the world, to reflect on the brand identity (How do we see ourselves?) and brand image (How do others perceive us?).

The study quite simply asked "What is Nordic?" There were many recurring answers such as nature, sustainability, innovation, design and technology, gender equality, diversity. These were synthesized into a brand values, as they already can be observed as values enshrined in policies and honoured in public debate. In other words, these were no artificial values, but already existing elements that needed to be articulated and translated into a brand strategy. As it happens, these universal values inspire the international community. In other words, the region can give something back to the world. That helps to explain its success, too: we are interested in knowing how to achieve a highly developed such society such as the Nordics.

The pilot study produced key findings that helped to shape the strategy. These are:
- "Joint global branding of the Nordic region can offer a range of benefits, such as more resources for marketing and benefits for image and awareness, especially in relation to distant markets.
- The outside world already regards the Nordic region as a unit, the more so the further away they are geographically.

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[53] Available at https://placebrandobserver.com/international-branding-strategy-nordic-region, accessed 18 February 2020.

- The outside world has shown increasing interest in the Nordic region and the Nordic model. The region's standing has risen because of the way in which it has tackled the financial crisis of 2008, its solutions to welfare issues and its successes in the cultural, creative and innovative arenas.
- There is great interest in joint branding activities that generate added value in both public and private sectors in the Nordic region.
- There is great interest and a desire among both private and public players in Nordic countries to be part of a joint branding platform."[54]

Inclusive by nature

Good place-branding examples tend to follow a pattern, which is characterised by having a process that includes stakeholders so that they are a part of the creation of the strategy. This was the case in the Nordic countries too. While there was not a similar open public discussion as in Luxembourg, the purpose of a joint Nordic platform supplements and strengthens each country's individual brand by helping to create a clearer and more consistent branding of the common region. All Nordic countries have rather national branding elaborate strategies. The aim with this project was to synthesize the strategies and achieve more together as a region. The main actors involved in making the strategy into reality are destination management organisations, investment promotion agencies, ministries and others.

Approach: innovation

The underlying concept is "Traces of North", which involves showing the Nordic countries in (not to) the world as the best, most innovative, friendly, green, etc. region. Too many places have already done that, and it is not innovative, nor is it a strategy that works. Instead, the Nordic countries show how they have been useful to the rest of the world, how others have benefited from what they have done and why anyone should take the slightest interest in them. It involves building relationships between Nordic actors and the world around them and creating a dialogue between them.

To support the many positive forces engaged in the everyday work of branding the Nordic countries, a website and a toolbox filled with stories and materials[55] have been developed. These are all actions that help to strengthen the Nordic narrative and differentiate the Nordic countries in the international arena. The branding project has actively contributed to the UN climate negotiations at the Conference of Parties (COP) since 2017 and, through Open Calls, has provided support, both financially and in terms of content, to 82 projects in 34 different countries. The projects, which have involved more than 300 Nordic actors, including 100 embassies and consulates, have ranged from gender equality and green solutions to tourism and cuisine.

At the core lie the brand values that determine the strategy: trust, equality, sustainability, innovation and openness. At the heart of the philosophy and approach are two questions that drive engagement with external audiences and make the brand relevant to others:
- What can the Nordic region offer the rest of the world?
- How can relationships with the rest of the world benefit the Nordic region?

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[54] Available at https://pilegrimsleden.no/en/pilegrimspass-og-olavsbrevet, accessed 18 February 2020.

[55] www.thenordics.com

The strategy that sums up the branding model is simple: "We will not be showing the Nordics to the world. We will be showing the Nordics in the world."

A decent brand structure has been put into place in order manage such a large project. It is important to identify and coordinate the Nordic brand structure, i.e., how all sub-concepts, such as "New Nordic Food", "Nordic Noir" in films and "Nordic Design", are interrelated. Having a clear approach in the identification of an overarching theme (Nordics or BSR) in a diverse region of national narratives, and sub areas (food, film, culture etc) can help to make use of the larger narrative without conflicting any of the sub-concepts or create confusion between them.

The strategy in a nutshell
"Why? We want to inspire other people to see life from a Nordic perspective, based on the values of openness, trust, creativity, sustainability and equality.

How? Our products, services, culture, mindset and politics are rooted in the Nordic perspective. They are the physical and mental manifestations of the Nordic brand – they are our values. Some of these can be found throughout the world as Traces of North.

What? We want to start conversations based on Traces of North, using stories, videos, facts, Open Calls, creative collaborations, SoMe and a toolbox that can be employed by all those who are interested in the Nordic countries."[56]

Pilot with a project
In December 2015 a pilot project tested the branding co-operation at the UN Climate Change Conference in Paris. A project group in the Nordic Council of Ministers was tasked with co-ordinating the promotion of both the Nordic and national climate projects. The strategy used by the national brand communicators was to promote the projects through a "Nordic perspective" rather than as a Finnish or as a Norwegian solution.

In selecting the projects on which to focus and how these should be communicated, the group had to reflect on exactly how each project would contribute to the Nordic values of sustainable management of the environment and development of natural resources, and of new ways of thinking that focus on creativity and innovation. These two values were designated to be reinforced in everything communicated. The branding strategy was to permeate all brand communication and to stimulate all actors involved to consider telling the Nordic narrative when appropriate. Instead of speaking about a project in a national discourse, the climate spokespersons were encouraged to speak on behalf of a broader region with a deeper footprint in the climate negotiations.

This was done, for example, by coordinating key messages from the national actors involved in communicating the climate negotiations, by encouraging and promoting common climate declarations from Nordic ministers, by promoting Nordic talking points for speeches, by having a common public relations and social media strategy for the Nordic region, by a shared visual identity and joint physical presence (for example, a Nordic pavilion at the climate negotiations in Paris).

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[56] *Strategy for International Branding of the Nordic Region, 2019–2021* (2019), Nordic Council of Ministers, Copenhagen, available at

http://norden.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1279355/FULLTEXT01.pdf, accessed 18 February 2020.

2. Recommendations

2.1. Stakeholder engagement in brand strategy

This phase can give rise to a commonly defined and co-created brand vision, a definition of brand identity and brand values. These cannot be created by a single organisation but need to be the result of an inclusive process both online and offline.

1   Start a discussion and process with stakeholders and get them interested in the project

The first step is to introduce, discuss and devise the place-branding strategy with the most relevant stakeholders. This document will serve as a basis for creating the structural capital with stakeholders. This means creating a branding strategy. Stakeholders' agreement, cooperation and support for the initial idea is a critical precondition for any successful place-branding endeavour. It is crucial that stakeholders feel that they are involved in planning and implementing the strategy. Without stakeholders' interest, belief and sense of shared ownership of a place-branding strategy, nothing will happen.

Place branding is not about organisations implementing a management document or marketing guidelines. Since a place brand is "owned" by the people who live there, a place-branding strategy is best regarded as recommendations to be discussed.

2   Discussing a place-branding strategy with stakeholders

Given the fragmentation of the BSR identity, it is important to bring together the stakeholders of the Cultural Routes and other relevant organisations to discuss the opportunities for and ways of creating a BSR branding initiative.

The BSR is a region that values horizontal, inclusive management as a way of conducting business. In place branding, failure is often defined by top-down initiatives and success by inclusive, democratic processes.

Copenhagen, Denmark. ©Rolands Varsbergs/Pixabay.

Start with a conference or a roadshow of focus groups in the region. Complement that with online social networking tools, starting with a common Slack channel or using more

elaborate change leadership platforms like Howspace. Avoid digital noise with too many different tools.

3   Discuss whether the regional BSR brand should complement more individual initiatives

There needs to be a discussion as to whether the future strategy of the Baltic Sea Region should stand on its own as a collection of the values and characteristics shared by all countries, or should complement national, regional or city branding initiatives. Discussing this question with the relevant stakeholders may unlock new possibilities for branding initiatives.

Take the Nordic branding case, which highlights the region as a whole and is built on shared values. It does not exclude or end up in conflict with national branding initiatives. The brand is built on values that are not unique to the region (though perhaps the mixture of it may be) and that are inviting and inclusive – they hinting at the possibility of acquiring these values, of being a part of them and of life being a bit more "Nordic". Where appropriate, "Nordicness" is emphasised and, more importantly, the region speaks with one voice at events such as climate crisis summits. On such occasions, management and co-ordination convey the effect that a group of countries is larger than the sum of its parts.

4   Use the brand narratives as stepping stones

Brand narratives can be made use of in considering further action. For example, if it emerges from stakeholder discussions that innovation is a trait that characterizes the region, it may be linked to these narratives. These narratives can also serve as a springboard in thematic discussion groups on the economy, culture, etc.

5   Innovate: involve locals in and embrace the change in the tourism paradigm

The Baltic Sea Region is about innovation. Tourism is dead, declared *Wonderful Copenhagen* in 2018. Increasingly, visiting places is not only about authenticity and the local experience – people attract people and the local people themselves are a big part of the attraction. The framework needs to involve not only the immediate tourism stakeholders but also other local actors who can contribute to a visitor's experience and who should also be motivated to collaborate. A comprehensive experience of a place depends on local people more than it used to. This will also open the door to sustainable tourism.

2.2. Management of the brand

Following the first phase, management of the brand is key. Once the brand vision and identity have been developed, it is time to invest in marketing materials.

6   **Developing marketing materials: invest in quality**

Marketing materials should be commissioned through a high-profile, well-publicised public tender from a consortium of BSR design agencies. The judges in the selection procedure

should consist for the most part of marketing and branding experts who are trained in design and who as a group should be balanced in terms of gender and geography. A high-profile campaign would entail investing time and resources in generating a tender document to attract the most talented professionals in the industry to participate and to ensure a high-quality outcome.

Communication is crucial to reaching different professional communities across the region. National design associations may serve as a first point of contact. One of the key features in such a tender would be the need to form a consortium of all or most of the eight BSR countries. For example, Nordic Innovation and the Nordic Council of Ministers often require a minimum of three different Nordic countries to be represented as a team when applying for project funding. This would boost co-operation, ensure diversity and be true to the spirit of co-operation and coming together as a region.

The production of any marketing material should be put on hold until the phase 1 recommendations have been carried out.

7 Avoid promotional slogans and work with marketing once the strategy is ready

We strongly advise against creating a slogan, logo, tagline or motto. Place branding is not about creating slogans or logos. Investing time and resources in creating a website and other materials that market the regions as "innovative", for example, will not work unless the content and substance of the brand are first managed and co-ordinated.

All marketing and promotion materials should be developed on the basis of stakeholder involvement in phase 1. Once that is done, a professional marketing agency should be involved.

8 Use social media to reach people and to show that the BSR is a digital region

Social media should be used as the main tool for reaching people. The region is highly digitalised and should convey an image of itself as such.

The impact of social media on place brands is huge. Denmark and Sweden engaged in a Twitter war in 2016, and their exchange of courtesies generated millions of views. The famous Curators of Sweden social media campaign was much copied. Look at the great work that Finland is doing with social media by using the the hashtags #FinlandWorks and #TalentBoost, achieving high visibility by having and using good content, and by encouraging professionals to use the hashtags. Finland Emojis (https://finland.fi/emoji) is one of the best SoMe initiatives we have seen. The content put out by thisisFINLAND is active, diverse, interesting and contemporary. Finnish Tingles is a brilliant series of videos that attempt to impart Finnish calm to very stressed Swedish youth, using autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR). These examples are quirky, innovative and fun.

9 Learn from the best Cultural Routes

The Maribor project carried out jointly by the Saint Martin of Tours and the European Cemeteries routes could be replicated with Routes in the Baltic Sea Region, to represent crossovers, and thus provide a broader and deeper picture of the region.

10 Use smart tourism to connect the Baltic Sea Region

The Baltic Sea Region is a diverse place, but while the sea is said to connect its peoples, it also separates them. Put differently, the BSR can be described as fragmented between sparsely populated countries with a sea between them. This is challenging, as is the status quo, in which context it has been difficult to initiate BSR branding. In addition, the BSR's Cultural Routes may lack visibility compared to cities, which also offer other attractions, although smaller destinations can capitalise on taking tourists off the beaten track.

Digital tools can be used to connect the different tourism actors, citizens and visitors. *My Helsinki* has done a great job with what is called smart tourism, where digital tools and the digital user experience are an integral part of the tourist experience (www.myhelsinki.fi/en). This would help to overcome the geographic challenges and motivate collaboration between dispersed actors (by providing digital tools for this purpose). It would also improve visitors' experience. Digital platforms would allow information to be added to and expanded on. For example, most of the routes have used dots to represent the different sites. Why not use lines to symbolise the routes and connections between people and places? Why not use a hashtag or other means to highlight moments and build relationships across the entire region?

Author

Pärtel-Peeter Pere
Co-founder and Chief Operating Officer at Future Place Leadership

Pärtel is a management consultant and urbanist who works with the attractiveness of places. He is one of the leading experts in how countries, cities and regions can attract and retain international talent and investment, and work with digitalisation and place branding. He has worked with and advised all the Nordic capitals, as well as cities such as Basel, Berlin, Brussels, Bilbao, Cork, Dubai, Eindhoven, Montreal, The Hague and Singapore.

He is the organiser of the annual Nordic Place Branding Conference, the largest annual regional economic development event in the Nordics. He has a Master in Management from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Before joining the company, he was an adviser at the European Parliament in Brussels, focusing on foreign and defence policy as well as regional development.
More info: https://www.linkedin.com/in/paertel

About Future Place Leadership

Future Place Leadership is present in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Sweden, Norway and Estonia, and works with a number of collaboration partners in Europe and North America.

Projects have also been undertaken in the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Spain in recent years, and with Singapore's National Population and Talent Division and National Marketing Office, Invest in Dubai, Scottish Enterprise and Enterprise Ireland.

Focus area and services

Future Place Leadership is a Nordic management consultancy specialising in the development, innovation and marketing of places. We offer four types of services: inspiration to start new place-based initiatives (seminars, workshop, keynotes), analysis and audits, strategy formation and execution (including training).

Investment promotion, place branding, cluster development and talent attraction are our core services.

We help our clients become more sustainable and connected, to benefit people and business. Places – cities, regions, countries and innovation arenas – are faced with decisions regarding attractiveness and urban regeneration, rural economic development, innovation, sustainability and climate change, integration and internationalisation. We help clients deal with these opportunities.

How? By directing your focus and efforts on strategy, vision and change leadership processes. Being an attractive place is about exercising dynamic leadership and sound management in a multiple stakeholder ecosystem.

Our mission: We make places more attractive, connected and sustainable for people and business by helping them to turn the grand challenges of our time into opportunities. We are motivated by nothing other than making places great.

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List of abbreviations

ASMR	Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response
DG REGIO	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, European Commission
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
ICOMOS	International Council on Monuments and Sites
R4U	Routes4U
SME	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SoMe	Social Media

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.

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