



Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Evaluation Cycle 2018-2019

Via Regia

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Cultural route
of the Council of Europe
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1.0 Executive Summary

The Cultural Route of the Via Regia (VR) is based on the historic 'royal route' that crossed Europe from East to West and allowed for trade, pilgrimage and migration and which was at its zenith in the medieval period. It is marked by a rich cultural heritage in the towns, cities and landscapes it passes through, but also by an intangible heritage of stories and folkways generated over centuries. As well as its historical dimension and perhaps more importantly, the VR is a Route of the recent past and the present, a testimony to the on-going flows of peoples, objects and ideas that cut across the breadth of the European continent. Its theme is of direct relevance to the European values that are at the basis of the Cultural Routes Programme.

The VR demonstrates numerous examples of good practice and genuine creativity in various fields of action. There are multiple examples of projects undertaken by its members in the field of cultural and artistic practice, as well as in the field of cultural and educational exchanges of young Europeans (though with potential with more of these). Research cooperation is evident, though there is room for wider engagement with universities and across the fullest extent of the Route. There are numerous strengths regarding the ways in which the VR demonstrates the enhancement of memory, history and European heritage, though there is a need to continue to widen the focus away from Germany and bring the whole of the Route into the realms of European consciousness. This is also connected to the development of cultural tourism which is highlighted by the Route as an area for growth and where there is considerable potential. The emphasis upon slow and sustainable tourism is recognised. With cultural tourism development in mind, building and promoting the brand of the VR becomes even more important. Moreover, tourism stakeholders could well form their own grouping based upon paid membership and benefit from the branding and the investment already made in the VR. On the ground communication through signposting and interpretation is very well developed, though mainly in Germany. The website of the VR, though rich in content, requires 'cleaning' and some wider focus.

The central issues for the VR relate to financial sustainability, succession planning and strategic development – the three are intimately connected. It is suggested that dealing with these issues will allow the Route to fulfil its undoubted potential as a major trans-European Route. This should involve developing the profile and activity of the Route along its full length and complementing the work that has been successfully undertaken, but mainly in Germany. It is recommended that attention be given to creating a structure for the Route that will still allow its extensive network of committed members to operate as a community of practice but within a more strategic association of core organisational partners at regional or city level representing the fullest range of countries along the route. Some core funding, provided from a small number of stakeholders, would increase the opportunity for more strategic developments. It would also help to ease pressure on the VR's extant single point of coordination and management, leverage extra resources, allow and enhance opportunities for large-scale, inter-regional, trans-national funding and help embed the VR Route into a wider European consciousness.

Summary of the Conclusions table

According to Annex 2 – Check list,

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

Therefore the certification Cultural Route of the Council of Europe

	Yes	No
Should be renewed	X	

The VR theme complies with the eligibility criteria I as set out CM/Res(2013)67.

The Cultural Route complies with the criteria listed in CM/Res(2013)67, II. It is to be noted that compliance was mainly observed amongst the German partners within the VT Network.

The Cultural Route does not at present have an association with legal status but it works successfully as a community of practice with democratic rules under a free membership scheme with agreed obligations on both sides and as such complies with the criteria for networks, as in CM/Res (2013)67, III.

2.0 Introduction

The Via Regia Cultural Route (hereafter VR) was incorporated as a Council of Europe European Cultural Route in 2005. It is based upon an ancient trading route (with various off-shoots and linked road systems) that connected the West and East of Europe from the time of the Holy Roman Empire. Its name - interpreted as ‘Royal’ or ‘King’s Road’ - derives from the legal protection it once received from monarchs, particularly during the medieval period. The Via Regia covering 4,500 kilometres is rooted in historical trading relations between Spain in the West and the Ukraine in the East (from ‘Galicia to Galicia’ – the appropriate title of an inaugural symposium that triggered the Council of Europe Cultural Route).

The detailed history of the VR has been well documented and is not repeated here, however, at the outset it is important to recognise several characteristics of the VR. First it is a genuinely a trans-continental route covering the outer-most West and East limits of Europe. Its claim to be the oldest and longest connection across Europe is well founded. The geographical extent covered by the VR provides many opportunities for engagement along its length but such dimensions offer challenges in its management and in terms of public comprehension on the Route.

Second, in the context of the CoE Cultural Routes family, the VR’s continuous linearity linking West-East is unique and importantly it provides a vital connection into the far East of Europe – an area generally less

engaged with the CR programme but in much need of economic development and wider integration with the values embodied in the Routes.

Third, the VR was officially recognised as a CoE Cultural Route previous to the articulation of changes in conditions for eligibility as directed in *CM/Res (2007)12* and has successfully renewed its certification based upon two former evaluations (2010-11 and 2014-15).

Fourth, though there are numerous physical manifestations through the heritage sites along the VR, the Route also speaks to more contemporary networks of cultural and economic links and physical transport links. This historical continuity – in part real and in part symbolic - provides the Via Regia with genuine historical depth.

Fifth and following on from the above point, the VR performed multiple functions across its parts over the past 2000 years. Its core function as route of commerce also overlaps with pilgrimage, military communications and migration. This provides the VR with wide appeal to different audiences which includes local communities, domestic and international tourists.

The following evaluation was based upon:

- A detailed analysis of the self-completion dossier and its appendices provided by the VR Cultural Route;
- The checklist provided by the VR;
- Extensive examination of the VR website(s) and its social media presence and links;
- Examination of associated / interested organisation websites;
- Fact finding and observational field visit to the headquarters of the VR in Erfurt, Germany and the experience of following a small section of the Route at one of its busiest points;
- Analysis of printed materials produced by the VR;
- Interviews and discussions with the Manager and President of the VR;
- Feedback provided from a questionnaire to the Route Manager;
- Discussion with independent cultural heritage experts who were previously not familiar with the VR.

This evaluation focuses upon the past three years of performance of the VR but is given context by its last evaluation conducted in 2014-2015. As with any evaluation, what is offered is a 'snap-shot' in time, though it is important to recognise the future ambitions and overall vision of the Route. The evaluation also recognises its limitations in terms of the complexity of the whole route and what is a very large and diverse series of engagements with its many stakeholders. Understanding the full extent of all projects and programmes undertaken by and in association with the VR is not possible within a limited time frame. Furthermore, and understandably, not all the material for evaluation is available in English.

3.0 Evaluation

3.1 Cultural Route Theme

With the context of the CoE's programme of Cultural Routes, the Via Regia offers one of the most inclusive of routes. Its history speaks of an early form of globalisation built upon a trans-continental east-west / west-east passage of people and trade, the value of which was indicated through its royal protection at least until the fourteenth century. The VR was (and in many ways remains), a multi-functional line of communication which has witnessed flows of goods and skills, knowledge, beliefs and ideas, pilgrims, armies and migrants. It clearly illustrates wider European narratives of a shared culture built upon allowing cultural exchange across boundaries.

The different forms of the VR and its associated off-shoots, from sections of ancient road and associated protected heritage sites, to rural pathways and cycleways and to the present-day motorways, represent the hardware of European integration which has outlasted Empires and shifting borders. The function of the VR in bringing peoples and diverse sections of the community together is evident in the projects and activities of the cultural route. The VR is enjoyed and celebrated by a wide range of people. The Route is clearly illustrative of the history and heritage of **Europe as a continent**, engaging in its shifting position in the

wider world – linking to the ‘new world’ through the ports of the west and the ‘old world’ to the east. This wider narrative as being **a long-standing, living line of connection across the whole of Europe** could be presented more strongly than it presently is.

The VR through its members, has been particularly active in youth exchanges and educational links. Festivals (such as the Dubno International Festival of Children’s Folklore) and youth exchanges between regions (for instance, between Thuringia and Picardie) are long embedded in the activities of the VR. There is no doubt that there is scope for further youth exchange projects within the VR theme but this is a condition of access to funding. Further exchanges between the western and eastern margins of the VR would be particularly valuable.

The theme of the VR, in addition to its networks of sub-routes, definitely lends itself to the development of initiatives and innovative projects in the fields of cultural tourism and sustainable development. There is a strong ethos of sustainable tourism and the concept of ‘slow tourism’ and several examples exist. There is generally a positive, if as yet limited, use of ‘niche’ tour operators engaged with the VR theme but this domain of activity offers considerable potential, particularly in encouraging visitors to the eastern reaches of the VR where development of a sustainable tourism as an economic driver would be welcome.

To summarise, the VR remains a strong and pervasive theme for a European Cultural Route and with considerable potential. The trans-continental dimension of the Route is a great asset to the Council of Europe and particularly so member states in the East of Europe.

3.2 Fields of Action

3.2.1 Co-operation in Research and Development

There is a long history of research conducted on the VR. The concept of the Route is founded upon solid research relating to its history. Given that the VR crosses eight European countries over its length of 4,500 km, there is tremendous scope for research and development activities. The research and development conducted covers many disciplines and areas of activity from the humanities, the social sciences and computer sciences.

The VR contact point acts to ‘harvest’ research materials and therefore relies on other agencies and individuals to capture research. It is a significant task to know exactly what research is being carried out, particularly outside of the ‘host’ country/language, so there is a reliance on being kept informed.

A Scientific Committee exists and is made up of representatives from Germany, France and Ukraine. This meets virtually on a ‘needs’ basis. There appears to be no formal defined role or strategic programme for the Committee and no records are kept of the work of the Committee. There is continuous work by Committee members and it is very much focused on projects and outcomes.

There are Universities across 4 countries engaged in research relating to various aspects of the VR though this is not coordinated by the VR management and has emerged in a more organic way.

Many of the outputs of research relating to the VR, including historical studies, are included as part of a VR library available through the Route website. More recent work addresses issues of tourism and traffic planning. The VR library consists of a bibliography and available on-line resources. Scholars, but also artists and writers, are invited to submit texts relating to the VR – not only those of a historical nature but also those that explore future development. The on-line library is mainly in German but there is capacity to engage with translated work, possibly with the support of universities.

The on-line library is an extremely valuable asset for the VR and is very much an example of best practice that can be encouraged for use by other Cultural Routes. It is not perfect but no route management has the resources to wholly develop and maintain such a facility. However, by creating an open repository for others to deposit work, the VR has an important resource for its members and the wider public. With more active engagement with universities and perhaps with associated private sector sponsorship, the on-line library can be developed more fully.

Conferences and symposia provide occasions for scholars and researchers to meet and in 2019 an International Congress to be held in Leipzig, will provide a major opportunity for future academic engagement.

There is on-going press coverage relating to the VR, in the main stimulated through individual projects by members. The central office in Erfurt is usually made aware of this coverage (and is usually connected with projects) and is able to assemble it, though it relies on communication with members and this becomes more difficult with any projects that happen outside of Germany.

With regard to statistics about usage and engagement with the Route, these are incredibly difficult to gain and would represent a costly exercise with arguably limited use. This is a matter of lack of resources and coordination. However, this an area which could be better developed through harnessing the resources of a local university (perhaps University of Dresden TU), a VR university network and possibly with better engagement with the University Network of the CoE's EICR. The benefits of having benchmark statistical data should be thought of just as much as a resource for political (and economic) advocacy as well as for planning purposes.

3.2.2 Enhancement of the Memory, History and European Heritage

The Via Regia Cultural Route was founded on the very basis of enhancing the memory of how the east and west of Europe have long been connected by a major corridor for commerce and communication. The Route has continually been active in highlighting not only the visible cultural heritage of the VR but the values it embodies. The cultural legacy of the VR is represented in the built environment, the landscapes the Route passes through and the stories it has and continues to generate.

As far as can be ascertained, the heritage fabric associated with the VR – actual road sections, related historic buildings etc. – appears to well protected through statutory heritage conservation policies. The overall picture regarding conservation of historic properties associated with the VR outside of Germany is more problematic to assess.

The memory, history and heritage of the VR is enhanced and promoted through the VR website, a Facebook Site, on-the-ground interpretation, publications and associated touristic communication materials and through the various activities and events that take place along the Route. The publication – One Hundred Stories of the Via Regia – exemplifies the multi-layered interpretation of the Route. This publication features stories relating to the VR throughout history and highlights the multiple purposes of the Route. While the edition is in German and many of the contributions relate to the VR in Germany, there is scope to adapt the work in other languages and to substitute stories with those from other parts of the Route.

It is important to note that many of the events and initiatives taken to highlight the VR, are undertaken unilaterally by municipalities, businesses and communities or, within smaller networks of such stakeholders. This represents **a sense of genuine ownership of the Route**, although this does pose an issue for the Route Manager in terms of knowing what is happening and entails a reliance on receiving information from a wide network.

There is no doubt that without the work of the VR Cultural Route over the past thirteen years the Via Regia would have far less prominence than it does. However, given the sheer length of the Route across the continent of Europe, its rich history and critically, its continuing contemporary resonance, it would seem that it **should have greater standing within the memory of wider European civil society**. Cross-over narratives, particularly the role of the VR as a route associated with the Protestant Reformation in shaping European modernity, can be drawn upon as a way to solidify its place in the European collective memory.

Not surprisingly, given the history of the Via Regia and far more recently the support provided by various German States and with the Head Quarters of the VR Route Secretariat in Erfurt, the VR is well promoted in Germany. There is increasing significant engagement from Ukraine, some limited activity in France and in Poland. It is the intention of the VR to engage with some 47 regions in 10 countries. A related ambition is

to position the VR alongside the Silk Route (Asia) and Route 66 (North America) as one of the great continental crossings. This is an important ambition which would draw considerable attention not only to the VR but also to the CoE Cultural Routes Programme and its values. This vision needs clearer articulation and trans-national political support but its starting point needs to be effective engagement with the rest of the countries that historically constituted the VR.

3.2.3 Cultural and Educational Exchanges of Young Europeans

As is the case with many of the cultural routes, the VR provides an important focus for cultural and educational exchanges of young Europeans. The theme of the VR allows for many educational activities focusing on school children and young adults and there are numerous examples to draw from including the International Festival of Children's Folklore, an organised 'Youth Day', children's exhibitions in the Museum of Cultural History in the Rivne Region of the Ukraine and organised student workshops on the VR in both the regions Thuringia and Picardy. Of particular note as an example of good practice and available in Erfurt with a focus on the Via Regia, are guided tours of the Route in the City which are specifically designed and professionally delivered for children.

The VR has a strong record in cultural and educational exchanges though these tend to be organised by VR route members individually rather than centrally organised. The scope for exchanges along the VR is considerable, particularly to allow important inter-cultural exchange between the far west and far east of the route. The route has a genuine pivotal role to allow for educational exchange between young people from very different parts of Europe but united historically and continuously by the VR. This function would seem to be reliant upon the actions of the members but there is a role for the Secretariat of the VR to encourage more exchanges, though it is recognised that there are resource limitations. As far as can be known there are no single and recurring youth exchange programme that operates as a regular way of experiencing the cultural differences that the VR continues to unite. This would be a worthy project and capable of animating west and east dimensions of the route and involving more countries.

3.2.4 Contemporary Cultural and Artistic Practice

The calendar of events of the VR's website is testimony to the extensive range of projects and initiatives that engage with contemporary cultural and artistic practice. Many such projects have been operating over a number of years act to 'build the brand' of the VR. These include: artist exchange programmes (a VR scholarship), regular exhibitions (photography, painting, glass sculpture etc.), the creation of public art (including the innovative open-air gallery along the 'old salt road' of the VR in Leipzig), concerts (music and dance) and festivals (High Road Festival in Frankfurt, Cultural Routes Festival in Fulda etc.). The richness of artistic activity is directed to many different audiences – young, old, the disabled, the cultural and creative sectors and to the general public.

The impetus for the cultural and artistic projects comes from members of the Network, with varying degrees of input and engagement from the VR central point. A number of these projects are not directly or solely related to the VR theme but embody values associated with the theme. An example would be the involvement of the VR in the Inspirative Iron Curtain Project involving six countries to support innovative use of cultural heritage and resources (outcome yet to be announced). Engagement with such projects is important as it also generates revenue finance for the VR Secretariat.

While not doubting the extent and vibrancy of the cultural and artistic practices that are associated with the VR the following observations can be made:

- The activities are generally organised and financed by members of the Network. This illustrates the degree of 'buy-in' and a sense of wider ownership of the VR route and the concept. There would be no possibility of so many activities taking place through a single route funding point.
- The extent to which these activities are focused upon the VR varies from having some aspect of the VR present as a theme to activities that are loosely or not directly connected to the VR but are taking place as a matter of course amongst VR Network members.

- Related to the above, the degree of branding of the VR varies. Some events and activities carry the VR brand and others do not. This is dependent upon the activity and the organising / funding body. While there would seem to be good cooperation in terms of common branding, there is a limited influence regarding the extent to which an activity is branded under the general Network Membership Rules.
- The majority of the activities and events listed take place in Germany, though increasingly in Ukraine. The cultural and artistic events taking place in France and Poland appear very limited indeed. This may be because of more limited lines of communication or a general lack of activity.
- The manager of the Route does a magnificent job in capturing the events that take place around the year but this entails a significant amount of work and a reliance upon a regular flow of information.

Within all cultural routes there is often a difficult balance to be achieved between projects that can communicate the whole route and the overall rationale of trans-nationality and that which is also important for the sense of place and the communities a route passes through. In the case of the VR and for funding purposes, there appears to have been a strong emphasis on the latter and with good reason. In the future a more strategic approach may consider cultural activities that emphasise the 'Europeaness' of the route.

3.2.5 Cultural Tourism Development

A finding of the 2014-15 evaluation of the VR highlighted the potential of the VR for the development of cultural tourism. This report echoes such a finding and emphasises the importance of developing tourism for the following reasons:

- The development of tourism is a prime motivating factor for municipalities and businesses to engage with the VR;
- Despite its historic 'royal' importance, the VR passes through some economically depressed and disadvantaged parts of Europe and the introduction of cultural tourism would be of great benefit to the future well-being of local communities;
- Along some parts of the route tourism is very poorly developed and the VR with its philosophy of **slow, sustainable cultural tourism** has an opportunity to shape development that is appropriate;
- At the macro-level, touristic routes that can connect Western Europe with the East perform an important task in stimulating inter-cultural dialogue between once very distant and different places;
- Related to the above, the communication mechanisms used by the tourism sector can raise the profile of the route to wider society and new audiences yet to hear of the VR;
- In terms of achieving financial stability for the management and sustainability of the route itself, engaging with the tourism sector offers opportunities for attracting investment. The VR has been operating successfully and has built a brand rooted in history and authenticity. This should not be openly given away to the tourism sector.

There is already a substantive number of VR Network members engaged in the tourism sector. The VR Route has not engaged significantly in the development of cultural tourism in any strategic way, though its recognition of the type of tourism it wishes to see aligned to the wider principles of the Route is to be commended. Certainly, there is much that has been achieved over recent years. Of note is the development of the cycle route from Frankfurt am Main to Krakow, that has been developed and promoted by Network members along this path.

Slow, decelerated travel with a strong focus on individual cultural tourists is catered for in a number of municipalities associated with the VR. Guided tours are offered in some of the German cities and guide books to various sections of the VR have been produced. Interpretation, some infrastructure and signage in participating German cities has been generously provided. The VR cooperates with sustainable tourism

organisations such as the Association for the Promotion of Green Tourism in Ukraine and with several niche German tour operators. Walking, cycling, caravanning and camping are preferred touristic activities and promoted through the website. As with any Route the VR has the capacity to be 'de-constructed' into smaller routes along its length making this manageable for tourists and for promotion. Also, its multiple narratives are beginning to be utilised for specific touristic routes – pilgrimage, Route of the Reformation etc.

The website is a major platform for valuable and detailed information about the Via Regia, useful to any business or operator wishing to draw upon this. The library section is useful as a foundational resource. The website also hosts an interactive map which features thematic aspects of the Route, sights of interest, accommodation and tourist information centres in Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Belgium (not France). The majority of service sites listed are in Germany. The map has the architecture to develop further as a touristic resource but in general the website is not well geared up to the provision of information for tourists, though it does have links to external tourism sites providing national, regional and local tourist information - some less useful than others.

Unlike some cultural routes whose narrative encourages / allows complete traversal, the VR is long and is constituted by no singular coherent pathway. However, it does lend itself to exploration in sections. Examination of regional tourism sites in the other VR participating countries – France, Poland, Ukraine – reveals minimum recognition of the VR and the opportunities it affords. The English official tourism websites for the Regions of Thuringia and Saxony similarly reveals very little about the Via Regia and the historic role it has played in regional and European history. For future development of tourism and for the wider public recognition of the route it would seem vital to establish some form of cross-promotional linkages with those organisations responsible for regional and indeed national tourism.

There are opportunities to work with niche small scale travel companies within the private sector around the production of coherent geographical or thematic packages – e.g. the markets of the VR or the churches of the VR etc. Companies are unlikely to develop such packages themselves but useful groundwork could be undertaken (using local universities for instance) so as to open up opportunities for future partnership development.

There is no data relating to tourists visiting sites along the VR. Whereas on the one hand this reflects the major difficulties of disaggregating general touristic data on 'reasons to visit', on the other hand it need not be detailed or wholly accurate to be of use. More anecdotal data as to the wider 'value' of the Via Regia for those places it passes through would be valuable for advocacy purposes.

3.3 Cultural Route Network

3.3.1 Operations / Governance and Finance

In its first evaluation in 2010-11 the issue of eligibility of the VR Route was raised regarding its legal status. This issue was also raised in the evaluation of 2014-15. In 2011, the management of the VR, in line with the recommendation of the first evaluation conducted some research of its own.

With regard to the issue of eligibility against Criterion III, Resolution CM/Res(2013)67, the following points are worth making:

- The VR was officially established as a Cultural Route on the basis of meeting requirements of CM/Res(2007)12 and certainly prior to the adoption of the current rules of certification adopted in December 2013 and replacing CM/Res(2010)52. It was thus formally recognised as a CoE Cultural Route and has proceeded as such continuously for 11 years in view of two changes to the rules.
- Though issues have been raised regarding its legal status in two evaluations and recommendations made to examine this status, these have been made as recommendations only and not requirements. In terms of precedent, on both occasions the VR Route has been recommended continued certification by its evaluators and subsequently awarded continued certification through the Bureau of the Governing Board of the EPA.

- In all its evaluations, including this one, the VR Route has met all other criteria regarding eligibility and on several occasions has been commended for its initiatives and its endeavours in promoting the values of the CoE.
- Since the VR Route has continued to develop for 11 years, it would be concluded that the absence of the required legal status of the Route has not prevented its functioning.
- In matters relating to the other conditions set out in Article III of the Rule for Certification, the VR involves the required number of CoE member States, operates democratically and has delivered numerous projects that have been both financially and organisationally viable.
- Forms of 'association' have been looked at by the management of the VR Route (including in 2011 with the input of external experts) and have been rejected by the VR for largely understandable reasons of not wishing to engage with extra layers of bureaucracy, for the inclusivity and flexibility that a free open membership approach brings and a diffidence regarding what members would get for their fee.
- The VR acts as a 'community of practice' with considerable success. There are 'rules of procedure' in place for the members of the VR Network. These set out as a fairly robust set of procedures, rights and duties that members would seem generally adhere to.

At the time of this evaluation and in the light of the above there would seem no reason to deny continued certification of the VR on the grounds that it does not have a legal status. However, there are other issues of concern with regard to the operations and financial sustainability of the Route which intersect with its current organisational structure and which could be addressed through some form of association. In essence and after careful consideration through this evaluation process, the argument for the VR having a legal status just so it meets one of the criteria for certification is over-shadowed by a much greater need of the Route to have the best possible organisational structure in order that it can support the long-term financial sustainability of the Route and the attendant need to develop to its fullest potential.

The office of the VR, based in Erfurt is largely supported through project funds and is highly dependent upon the drive and dedication of a limited number of people. There can be nothing but praise given for the work that has been carried out. However, it is recommended that issues of succession planning, financial sustainability and strategic planning are looked at. The following observations and reflections are made with regard to the operations and finances:

- Development of the Route could be said to have been organic more than strategic, led by opportune projects and the activities of its many members. This demonstrates the dedication and commitment of the membership community. There is no reason that this should not continue.
- With no fees attached to membership of the VR Network there is no core funding to support its administration nor to invest in its development. Funding for projects, publications and events has been forthcoming to date. For example, recently the City of Leipzig has offered to provide 30,000 Euros to host an International Via Regia Congress. Again, there is no reason that this project by project approach should not continue.
- The VR is overly focused upon the activities of its members with Germany. This is understandable as its core membership is present in Germany. One of the great strengths of the VR is its cross-continental dimensions and work to develop this would be of tremendous benefit. Having core organisational partners in as many of the countries the VR passes through as possible, preferably regional or city level stakeholders, would allow the Route to develop further, relieve some of the pressures of the existing central office and induce further activity and wider recognition along the full extent of its course. Having a stake in the development of the VR – being part of one of the World's great continental cultural routes – would be of interest to the regions and cities in other countries. A simple association (based on the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation) of a limited number of core members as advocates/champions in each State would help to spread the load, encourage

geographical reach and engagement and provide some security for the Route. This would not impinge upon the wider network as a community of practice and indeed could widen the network.

- In terms of governance such an association could be focused on the strategic aspects of the VR's development while projects at ground/community level continue. In line with the ambitions of VR – enlargement, developing its tourism potential, building partnerships, increasing profile and market exposure, highlighting the whole route and realising its trans-continental potential – having economic and political advocates on side is important. The lack of presence of the VR in some of the countries it passes through can be addressed by having the right advocates at the right level.
- Introducing a membership fee need not impact upon all the members of the VR Network. A tiered membership fee structure can be operated focusing upon those organisations that stand to gain most. In particular this relates to the tourism sector who are able to package and develop products and sub-routes etc based on the VR brand and the access gained to the information and wider networks, events and authenticity relating to the VR. The brand of the VR has a value for commercial activity. This needs to be given greater value through wider promotion of the CoE CR branding.

The above reflections are intended to be constructive. The level and extent of the VR's activity as a community of practice is impressive but for the future there needs to be some thought given to the management structure to ease existing burdens and create space and resource for development.

3.4 Communication Tools

3.4.1 Website

The VR's website is the main access point for a European public and for any audience outside of Europe. The website bears the logos of the VR and of the CoE's Cultural Routes Programme. It also explains the concept of the VR, its history and is full of useful information. In a google search it comes second after the Wikipedia entry and there is a link to the VR website from the Wikipedia page. The library with references to a wide range of materials is a very helpful feature. There is a link to a VR Facebook site which bears the logos of the VR and CoE. The Facebook site has little in the way of wider public engagement with the Route but is not that well established.

The whole course of the Route is graphically represented and there is an interactive map. The news section is kept upto date though this tends to focus on events that have happened as opposed to a forthcoming events section that announces events to come. The website is offered in five languages. This is to be commended and represents a great deal of work however, there are many parts of the website that default into the German language, even from other language sites.

This is not intended to be an appraisal of the VR website but it is worth pointing out some issues that reflect some of the more substantive issues relating to the organisational structure:

- The site is content / text heavy in parts and there is a lot to take in and in places it is difficult to navigate.
- There are many outdated links which do not give the best impression. On English landing page under the heading News Overview the link takes you to a 2015 project in Ukranian language. Again, on the English Site, under the heading of 'latest' the text in German refers to projects as far back as 2010.
- With external links given as part of the interactive map sections, a number of these are now 'dead' or have no mention of the Via Regia.
- The interactive map in English, comes up with Ukranian information. Generally, the search facility for accommodation, tourist information, sites of interest is not helpful. The sites are not clear and in some cases are not shown.

- On the interactive map when a region is clicked – say for example in the Centre of France – while there are standard external links provided there is no explanation provided as to how this relates to the Via Regia – how is it related, what specifically is there to see and do etc.
- For the tourism/travel component of the website there is remarkably little that shows how a visitor can experience a journey along the VR.

The above represent issues that affect many large and complex websites with the issues amplified when there is interactivity. Appreciating that the website is still in development, overall it reflects the German centredness of the VR, the limited engagement of the other States along the VR, the problems of communicating in several languages, the problems of coordinating a lot of material and keeping things up to date and relevant and ultimately the pressures put upon the existing secretariat with limited resources. In the density of material contained within the website arguably some of the fundamental messages of the Route are lost. Consideration should be given to a review of content and structure and to who the audiences are.

The website seems to get a reasonable amount of traffic. Google analytics can reveal some useful information as to the audience and the areas of the site visited. Though this in itself can take up time and resources it may be a project for an intern or through the local university.

The VR is featured on a number of other websites – mainly German – but with no reference to the Cultural Route. This is to be expected as the VR exists as a historical route. There is an opportunity to develop partnerships with extant organisations – mainly tourism ones – with reciprocal web-links.

3.4.6 Printed Materials

There is a wide variety of printed materials produced by or involving the VR ranging from leaflets and brochures to books and reports with some available to be downloaded. The majority are in German and reflect levels of activity. It is hard to judge the uptake and useage of the printed materials, particularly in other countries. The VR is active in attending promotional events and the printed materials are distributed there. As work continues to develop with regard to the cultural tourism potential of the VR, effective materials that suggest to potential visitors where to go, what see and do and how to experience the VR – as a cross-European Route become increasingly important. As with all promotional materials, effective distribution is critical. A tourist in Gornitz or Erfurt will be able to access the Route but the extent to which this is possible in the Ukraine, France or Poland is not known.

3.4.7 Press Releases/Press Coverage

The VR through its many members and many initiatives generates considerable press coverage. The VR Secretariat acts as the hub for press intervention and the website has a compendium of news stories across several years. The press coverage is, as expected, strongest in the German language. The VR Route relies upon the communication of coverage from its membership.

3.4.8 Branding

As within the terms of membership used by the VR Network has the right and duty to use the VR logo in connection with the CoE logo in connection with the VR. Whether this works across all members and particularly in France, Ukraine and Poland is not known.

There is very good visibility of the required logo on electronic and printed media. On the website there is the suggested standard paragraph which highlights the values of the Council of Europe. The logo is also present on a number of examples of signage and interpretation though mainly along associated sites in Germany. The extent of the visibility of the logo in the other countries is not known.

The CoE logo itself does not lend itself well to incorporation, particularly on signage. Consideration should be given to a more flexible version of the logo that can be used for branding purposes.

4.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

The Via Regia is an important Cultural Route for the whole of Europe and its present-day symbolism based upon the historical realities of inter-connectivity between States and between the West and East of Europe has particular resonance. The ability to link the history of the VR with more contemporary manifestations of trade, travel, tourism, migration and continued pilgrimage is potentially very powerful indeed and exemplified the values of democracy at the heart of the Council of Europe. It makes an ideal, trans-national cultural route with opportunities for links, tangible and intangible. However, while accepting that the development of the Route is still in progress, the VR is overly dominated by Germany, in terms of its wider profile and indeed its activities and funding. While there is growing activity in Ukraine, activity in France and Poland is limited. This is not to deny the efforts of those members but it would benefit the Route to engage with more strategic development through partners to increase the visibility and activity in existing partner countries. Moreover, it would also be of benefit to develop the Route in other States - particularly Belgium and Spain - to reflect its historic connections as well as promote the trans-Europeaness of the VR and help build capacity. Reflection and consultation regarding the overall strategic trajectory of the VR would be worthwhile particularly with regard to issues of sustainability and fulfilling its potential, already recognised, as being one of the world's great continental Routes.

In terms of the priority fields of action and taking into account the normative problems of trying to evaluate a Route of 4,500km, the VR continues to comply with the criteria listed in CM/Res(2013)67 II, though is active in some fields more than others.

4.1 Co-operation in Research and Development

There is on-going research taking place relating to the history of the Via Regia. Previous research has greatly assisted in gaining a better understanding of the importance of this Route. The library of resources reflecting some of this research is to be commended.

With a view to developing the Route geographically in the future and to identify additional narratives for the VR it is recommended that the Scientific Committee takes a more strategic role and widens its membership to include scholars and researchers from Belgium and Spain. The 2019 International VR Congress will provide an opportunity to re-vitalise a Scientific Committee tasked with supporting strategic developments. Related to this it is recommended that the potential of the local universities, in each of the Route's co-opering countries be more fully harnessed, not only for historical research but in terms of supporting the on-going management and development of the Route. Simple tasks such as analysing web usage would be beneficial and building benchmark data on the impact of the Route would help to build political support amongst the public and private sector.

4.2 Enhancement of Memory, History and European Heritage

The Via Regia is truly a pan-European Cultural Route and much work has been achieved to install it in the collective memory of Europe. Arguably however, it should be more firmly embedded in European memory than it is. This cannot be a task of the VR Secretariat on its own. It needs strategic partners across all the countries it crosses to assist. In parts of Germany it is increasingly known and celebrated but beyond this there is scope for highlighting its visibility. On one level the VR is easy to comprehend but on another level its complexity and abstractness needs some translation for a wider public as it is not always based in heritage sites. The materials produced, the website and the guided tours are all valuable vehicles for interpretation but these need to be coordinated across the fullest extent across the VR. The CoE Cultural Routes Programme has a role to play in this too in its promotion of all the Routes and the Europeaness of the values that they embody.

In the light of its own vision to engage with some 47 regions in 10 countries it is recommended that the VR develop a strategy that will provide a plan and a structure to deliver this.

4.3 Cultural and Educational Exchanges of Young Europeans

The VR, through its members, continues to engage in events and activities that benefit young Europeans; many of these are project based. There are several examples of good practice that can be recognised. One recommendation would be to encourage more inter-state exchanges, particularly between the West and East extremes of the Route.

4.4 Contemporary Cultural and Artistic Practice

The membership of the VR delivers a wide range of cultural and artistic projects. The encouragement that is given to artistic interpretations of the Route is worthy of note. There does seem to be an issue of coordinating and monitoring the many activities that take place and the extent to which they connect to and promote the concept of the VR but overall this is strong area of the Route's work. Again, the majority of the projects, or at least those identified, are mainly within Germany and the Ukraine. Encouragement of more projects within other countries and involving a number of countries across the whole of the Route would be very valuable, though it is acknowledged that the impetus needs to arise from the members.

4.5 Cultural Tourism and Sustainable Cultural Development

The development of tourism has not been the core concern over the life of the VR Route. This is not to say that there has been no touristic activity. Niche tour operators and small tourism businesses have picked up on the Via Regia as a cultural product, though the degree of success is hard to estimate since this is an 'arms-length' activity from the VR coordination. The VR has adopted an appropriate and thoughtful philosophy for tourism development though this remains to be substantively tested. However, the management acknowledge that the development of cultural tourism offers opportunities for local economic development and for building membership.

There is good touristic infrastructure in place with good signposting, interpretation and supporting printed materials, though this is primarily in Germany. While the commercial tourism sector can be left to develop creative and nice cultural tourism packages it will benefit from the groundwork undertaken by the VR and its members. Branding should be an important consideration so that the symbolic value of the VR is not treated as a 'free good'. This will involve stronger guidelines. Indeed, it is suggested that the tourism sector can operate through a membership fee as it will benefit from the investment put into the route, the scientific data gathered and profile that the validated VR Route can bring. Setting up a fee-paying membership scheme for the tourism interests that articulates clear benefits and the VR philosophy of slow, sustainable tourism would not only assist the VR Secretariat in terms of funding, it would assist in stimulating local economies, raise the profile of the Route and enable new audiences to enjoy the Route. Working with the tourism sector in other countries is important too so as to encourage a wider experience of the VR.

The website is an essential tool for the independent tourist but at present the site does not function well and clearly for the those wishing to engage in exploring discrete sections of the Route and certainly not extended sections into other countries. It would appear that there is much in the way of data available, along with GIS informed architecture within the website ,but for touristic purposes there needs to be a re-appraisal from the user's/tourist's perspective.

4.6 Cultural Route Network

The Route has come a long way as a community of practice and has achieved remarkable results. However, the long-term sustainability of the VR, the pressures on the Secretariat, the reliance on project funding leaving little space for more strategic development in addition to a worthy and bold vision would indicate that the Route needs resources and a stronger structure. This is not a matter of the VR having a legal status *per se* but rather the development of an association that will provide outreach and commitment in other countries including ones that are not yet engaged with the VR. As previously mentioned, working with a small manageable association of core organisational partners at regional or city level would allow the Route to develop further. This would not impinge upon the wider network as a community of practice and indeed could widen the network. The association could be focused on the strategic aspects of the VR's development while projects at ground/community level continue. Clearly though needs to be given to the right partners at the right level who would be prepared to 'buy-in' to the future of one of Europe's great cultural routes and work to a European-wide strategy.

4.7 Communication Tools

As far as can be ascertained during the evaluation period, in terms of website, publications, public signage, interpretation panels, projects and events, the Via Regia Route complies with the CoE visibility / logo guidelines as set out in the June 2016. In the main these were observed in Germany. The VR has its own logo but this is employed with the CoE logo. The wider use of the logo amongst the VR's many members was not assessed but it is assumed as per the rules of membership that it is used correctly.

5.0 References

All printed materials submitted by the manager of the Cultural Route were consulted, along with supplementary examples of VR brochures and leaflets provided in the VR Office. Websites consulted are given below.

<https://www.via-regia.org/>
<https://us.france.fr/en/northern-france/article/picardy>
<https://www.visit-thuringia.com/travel-hotel-holiday-tour/index.html>
<http://saxonytourism.com/>
<https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Via_Regia
<https://poland.pl/tourism/>
<https://www.poland.travel/en>
<http://www.travelukraine.org/>
<http://ee.france.fr/>
<https://www.gcb.de/discover-germany/tourism.html>
<https://www.erfurt-tourismus.de/en/>
<https://www.hessen-tourismus.de/en/home/>
<http://www.germany.travel/en/leisure-and-recreation/scenic-routes/via-regia-cultural-route.html>
<https://www.mygermancity.com/via-regia>
<http://viaregia.guide/>
<http://on-historic-routes.com/featured-routes/via-regia/>
<http://lviv.travel/en/~1554/via-regia>

6.0 Field Visit and Discussion

I visited Erfurt, Germany, in December 2018. The purpose of the visit was to meet the VR Route Manager, the President of the Route and others involved in the operations of the route and the VR Headquarters. The visit was short but allowed me to gain some limited experience of a fraction of the route as it is developed and interpreted in Germany. The visit was dominated by an intense discussion regarding questions raised during the evaluation and listening to the ambitions and issues relating to the future of the VR.

I was given a guided tour following the route of the Via Regia through the City of Erfurt. This was delivered by a professional guide who operates tours designed especially for children. This provided a dual lesson in experiencing the physical heritage of the VR and the way that it is interpreted to an important audience. Dressed in the cloaks of royalty and aided by a 'puppet king', through which the guide communicated, I was given a tour of the major sites that lie upon the VR. The guide provided great insight regarding the VR and I could see how this is made exciting and interesting for children.

In addition to the guide, I was able to assess the well-positioned signage and interpretation boards provided along the Route – mainly in German reflecting the dominance of domestic tourists – but some also provided in both German and English. The various heritage structures visited were put into context of the medieval route.

The highlight of the tour and indeed, one of the highlights of the Via Regia, is the medieval Merchant's Bridge, the Kramerbrücke, that carries the route over the river and also carries a street of former

merchant's houses which are still inhabited. The named Via Regia is given to the cobbled street that crosses the bridge and is a highlight for tourists.

Further sites visited along the route included a church, the old synagogue, a medieval Mikveh and inside of one of the pillars of the medieval bridge. All of these sites were explained as to how they related to the Via Regia as a trading route, a route of pilgrimage and now a route for tourists.

There is no doubt that the history of Erfurt is bound to the history of the Via Regia. If the level of interpretation and communication given to the VR in Erfurt is replicated by the other cities it passes through – in Germany and in other countries - then it easy to see how potent the narrative of the VR is, particularly for tourism.

7. Checklist

COE CULTURAL ROUTES EVALUATION CHECK-LIST				
		Yes	No	Note
3.1 THEME	Does the theme of the Route			
	- represent a common value - historical, cultural, or heritage -to several European countries?	x		Yes but with an over-emphasis on Germany and the need to develop and link more fully with other countries of the VR
	- offer a solid basis for			
	youth cultural and educational exchanges?	x		
	innovative activities?	x		
	cultural tourism products development?	x		
	Has the theme been researched/developed by academics/experts from different regions of Europe?	x		
3.2 FIELDS OF ACTION	3.2.1 Co-operation in research and development			
	Does the Route			
	- offer a platform for co-operation in research and development of European cultural themes/values?	x		
	- play a unifying role around major European themes, enabling dispersed knowledge to be brought together?	x		Though this can be developed to a much greater extent
	- show how these themes are representative of European values shared by several European countries?	x		
	- illustrate the development of these values and the variety of forms they may take in Europe?	x		
	- have a network of universities and research center working on its theme at the European level?	x		Yes but to a limited extent - a need to develop the Europeanness of the Route
	- have a multidisciplinary scientific committee?	x		Yes though a stronger more structured approach would assist
	Does the scientific Committee			
	work on its theme at the European level?	x		further work would be welcome and valuable
	carry out research and analysis of the issues relevant to its theme and/or activities on:			
	- theoretical level?	x		
	- practical level?	x		particularly on how to develop the route in more strategic ways
	3.2.2 Enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage			

Do the Route activities (according with the theme)			
- take into account and explain the historical significance of tangible and intangible European heritage ?	x		
- promote the CoE values?	x		very well indeed
- promote the CoE CRs brand?	x		
- work in conformity with international charters and conventions on cultural heritage preservation?	x		
- identify, preserve, and develop European heritage sites in rural destinations?	x		
- identify, preserve, and develop European heritage sites in industrial areas in the process of economic restructuring?		x	no but this could be a role as the VR engages with other EU regions
- valorize the heritage of ethnic or social minorities in Europe?	x		
- contribute to a better understanding of the concept of cultural heritage, the importance of its preservation and sustainable development?	x		
- enhance physical and intangible heritage, explain its historical significance and highlight its similarities in the different regions of Europe?	x		
- take account of and promote the charters, conventions, recommendations and work of the Council of Europe, UNESCO and ICOMOS relating to heritage restoration, protection and enhancement, landscape and spatial planning (European Cultural Convention, Faro convention, European Landscape Convention, World Heritage Convention, ...)?	x		
3.2.3 Cultural and educational exchanges of young Europeans			
Are the youth exchanges (cultural and educational) planned to			
- develop a better understanding of the concept of European citizenship?	x		
- emphasize the value of new personal experience through visiting diverse places?	x		
- encourage social integration and exchanges of young people from different social backgrounds and regions of Europe?	x		more west-east exchanges would be valuable
- offer collaborative opportunities for educational institutions at various levels?	x		
- place the emphasis on personal and real experiences through the use of places and contacts?	x		
- set up pilot schemes with several participating countries?	x		this can be developed far more than it is at present
- give rise to co-operation activities which involve educational institutions at various levels?	x		increased working with universities would be helpful
3.2.4 Contemporary cultural and artistic practice			

	Do the Route's cultural activities (contemporary cultural and artistic practice related)			
	- promote intercultural dialogue and multidisciplinary exchange between various artistic expressions in European countries?	x		more countries need to be engaged
	- encourage artistic projects that establish the links between cultural heritage and contemporary culture?	x		
	- encourage innovative cultural and contemporary art practices* connecting them with the history of skills development?		x	not really a focus for the route
	- encourage collaboration between culture amateurs and professionals via relevant activities and networks creation?**	x		
	-encourage debate and exchange - in a multidisciplinary and intercultural perspective - between various cultural and artistic expressions in different countries of Europe?		x	developing this could be a real opportunity
	- encourage activities and artistic projects which explore the links between heritage and contemporary culture?	x		very strongly
	- highlight the most innovative and creative practices?		x	only indirectly
	- link these innovative and creative practices with the history of skills development?***		x	
3.2 FIELDS OF ACTION				
	3.2.5 Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development			
	Do the Route's activities (relevant to sustainable cultural tourism development)			
	- assist in local, regional, national and/ or European identity formation?	x		More focus on European identity would be positive
	- actively involve 3 major means to raise awareness of their cultural projects: print, broadcast and social media?	x		
	- promote dialogue between			
	urban and rural communities and cultures?	x		
	developed and disadvantaged regions?	x		potentially a strong point
	different parts (south, north, east, west) of Europe?	x		focus on linking the East with the West of Europe needs more attention
	majority and minority (or native and immigrant) cultures?		x	but this could be an important action given the history of the VR
	- open possibilities for co-operation between Europe and other continents?	x		potential for linking with the Silk Route
	- draw decision makers' attention to the necessity of protecting heritage as part of sustainable development of the territory?	x		
- aim to diversify of cultural product, service and activities offers?	x		diversification particularly outside of	

				Germany
	- develop and offer quality cultural tourism products, services or activities transnationally?	x		beginning but much needed
	- develop partnerships with public and private organisations active in the field of tourism?	x		beginning but much needed
	Did the network prepare and use tools all along the route to raise the number of visitors and the economic impacts of the route on the territories crossed?		x	some better measure needs to be developed for the future
	Does the Route represent a network involving at least three Council of Europe's member states?	x		yes but the bulk of activity is within Germany and there is a need to work more with States in the West of Europe
	Was the theme of the network chosen and accepted by its members?	x		
	Was the conceptual framework for this network founded on a scientific basis?	x		
	Does the network involve several Council of Europe member states in all or part of its project(s)?	x		but a strong need to involve more
	Is the network financially sustainable?	x		but over-reliance on project by project funding which limits strategic planning
	Does the network have a legal status (association, federation of associations, EEIG,...)?		x	but works well as a community of practice. However, needs to be addressed for financial sustainability and to implement a more strategic vision
	Does the network operate democratically?	x		
	Does the network			
	- specify			
	its objectives and working methods?	x		
	the regions concerned by the project?	x		
	its partners and participating countries?	x		
	the fields of action involved?	x		
	the overall strategy of the network in the short- and long term?	x		but needs a more long term strategic plan to work to and share
	- identify potential participants and partners in CoE member states and/or other world countries?	x		
	- provide details of its financing (financial reports and/or activity budgets)?	x		project budgets
	- provide details of its operational plan?		x	this would be a valuable exercise to carry out
	- append the basic text(s) confirming its legal status?		x	no but rules of membership are helpful

3.3 NETWORK

3.4 COMMUNICATION TOOLS	Does the Route have its own logo?	x		
	Do all partners of the network use the logo on their communication tools?		x	work in progress
	Does the Route have its own dedicated website ?	x		
	Is it the website translated into English and French?	x		
	Is it the website translated into other languages?	x		comprehensive though some glitches
	Does the network use effectively social networks and web 2.0?	x		
	Does the network publish brochures on the Route?	x		
	if yes, are the brochures translated in English?	x		limited
	if yes, are the brochures translated in French?	x		limited but German more appropriate at present
	Is the title of “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” present on all communication materials (including press releases, webpages, publications, etc.)?	x		as far as can be assessed
	Is the logo of the Council of Europe present on all communication materials ?	x		as far as can be assessed
	Is the CoE logo used in accordance to the guidelines for its use (size and position,...)?	x		as far as can be assessed
	Are the logos (Cultural Route + CoE) provided for all the members of the Route?	x		as far as can be assessed
Does the Council of Europe logo appears on road signs/ boards indicating the cultural route?		x	some not all	
	SCORE	69	0	
Note:	Please insert 1 for every positive answer and 0 for a negative one. See your total score at the bottom of the column.			
	* E.g. visual arts, the performing arts, creative crafts, architecture, music, literature, poetry or any other form of cultural expression			
	**Particularly in terms of instruction for young Europeans in the relevant fields			
	***Whether these fields include visual arts, performing arts, creative crafts, architecture, music, literature or any other field			