

2nd Conference of the University Network for Cultural Routes Studies

Advancing and Sharing Knowledge for a Better Programme of Cultural Routes

12-13 November 2026, Lugano, Switzerland

Aula Magna
Università della Svizzera italiana – USI
Via G. Buffi, 13
6900 Lugano

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Università della Svizzera italiana
unesco Chair
INSTITUT EUROPÉEN DES ITINÉRAIRES CULTURELS
EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL ROUTES
Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe
Itinéraires culturels du Conseil de l'Europe
COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is a long-standing programme that identifies and connects tangible and intangible heritage across borders to promote democracy, human rights, intercultural dialogue and access to culture for all. Through certified routes spanning multiple countries and themes – ranging from pilgrimage paths to craft traditions; from architecture to archaeology, from European figures to landscapes – the programme fosters cultural cooperation, cultural heritage interpretation and safeguarding, sustainable tourism, education, and local development. The routes are living networks of stakeholders committed to common values and shared European memory, aimed at strengthening social cohesion and mutual understanding; furthermore, they support sustainable, "slow" tourism, attracting visitors to lesser known, rural areas.

The University Network for Cultural Routes Studies brings together academic institutions and scholars engaged in research, education, and knowledge transfer on the cultural routes. Its goals are to:

- consolidate and advance scientific knowledge about the programme and its certified routes;
- support evidence-informed policies and practices, providing methodological rigor and usable knowledge to route managers, public authorities, and civil society;
- foster interdisciplinary collaboration among tourism, heritage, communication, digital humanities, geography, history, economics, and territorial studies;
- build capacity through shared data, comparative methods, and methodological standards that enable monitoring, evaluation, and innovation across the network.

The 1st International Conference on Universities and Cultural Routes took place on 13–14 November 2024 in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, co-hosted by the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) and the Compostela Group of Universities.

The 2nd International Conference is organized and hosted by the European Institute of Cultural Routes in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in ICT to develop and promote sustainable tourism in World Heritage Sites of USI – Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano (Switzerland). Building on the first edition, it aims at:

- highlighting and discussing research and academic activities related to cultural routes;
- strengthening the University Network for Cultural Routes Studies, providing a foundation for collective action;
- fostering collaboration between academics and practitioners, shaping future research agendas and offering scientific advice to the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme;
- disseminating scientific knowledge about cultural routes and their role in promoting a European identity.



12 November 2026

8:45 Aula Magna	Registration
9:30 Aula Magna	**Opening** - prof. Lorenzo Cantoni and dr. Silvia De Ascaniis, Conference chairs - prof. Claudio Bassetti, Rector of Università della Svizzera italiana – USI (video-message) - prof. Matthew Hibberd, Dean of the Faculty of Communication, Culture & Society, USI - Rui Gomes, Executive Secretary of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe – EPA - prof. Carla Martins, President of the Compostela Group of Universities, Chair of the University Network for Cultural Routes Studies (video-message) - David Vitali, Deputy Director of the Federal Office of Culture
10:00 Aula Magna	**Keynote speech** *Switzerland at the heart of Europe. Its role in shaping the European identity* prof. Antonio Loprieno, University of Basel, former Rector and and former President of the Rectors' Conference of the Swiss Universities (CRUS)
10:45 – 11:30 Aula Magna	**Roundtable** *The role of Switzerland in the Cultural Routes programme* - Julien Vuilleumier, Federal Office of Culture, EPA Governing Board representative for Switzerland - Catherine Hannequart, Via Francigena - Regula Wyss, European Route of Industrial Heritage - Florian Hitz, Huguenot and Waldensian Trail Moderator: Silvia De Ascaniis
11:30 – 12:00 Aula Magna Foyer	Coffee break and posters presentation
12:00 – 13:00 Aula Magna	Parallel sessions **Heritage** - Harriet Dixon, Patrick Holladay and Anthony Dixon. *From Static Markers to Cultural Routes: The Role of Historical Markers in Supporting Place-Based Heritage Connections* - Alessia Mariotti and Patrizia Battilani. *From Divisive Pasts to Shared Routes: Cultural Routes as Frameworks for Managing Dissonant Heritage in Europe* - Lorenzo Francisci. *Cultural Routes and Industrial Heritage: Stifone and the Proposal for Its Inclusion in the European Route of Industrial Heritage* Moderator: Silvia Beltramo
SI 007	**Storytelling and Cultural Mediation** - Alexander Dimitrov. *Tour Guides as Storytellers: Connecting Roman Heritage and Wine Culture on the Danube River* - Fabio Morotti. *"Bringing Aeneas Back Home": Myth, Heritage, and Cultural Mediation in the Aeneas Route* - Filareti Kotsi and Tatiana Iretskaia. *When heritage precedes the route: The case of Iter Vitis in Greece and Georgia* Moderator: Licia Calvi



13:00 – 14:30 Aula Magna Foyer	Lunch
14:30 – 16:00 Aula Magna	Parallel sessions **Rural Development, Sustainability & Accessibility** - Gianluca Bambi, Giuseppe Rossi, Leonardo Conti and Martina Elmi. *Cultural Routes as Tools for Sustainable Rural Development: Integrating Flow Monitoring and User Experience along the Via Francigena* - Elisabetta Doria, Maya Moussallieh, Claudia Lupi and Marco Morandotti. *Digital mapping for the sustainable management of Cultural Routes: documenting built heritage and infrastructural criticalities along the Via Francigena in Pavia* - Anna Trono. *The Via Francigena for All* - Leonardo Porcelloni. *Accessibility for All in the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: Learning from the Practices and Governance of Pilgrimage Networks* Moderator: Lorenzo Cantoni
SI 007	**Personal Growth and Education** - Frederike van Ouwerkerk. *Playing with Heritage* - Kamila Midor. *Walk with grief: How people talk about and process their grief on the Camino de Santiago based on their online posts* - Anna Kvitka. *St. Olav pilgrim badges* - Silvia Beltramo. *On and around the ECRs Programme: Reflecting on Research and Teaching Experiences* - Valbona Karakaci and Rrezarta Dracini. *Universities, Human Sciences, and Cultural Routes: An Albanian Case Study Supporting the Transhumance Trails Network* Moderator: Martin White
16:00 – 16:30 Aula Magna Foyer	Coffee break and posters presentation
16:30 – 17:45 Aula Magna	Parallel sessions **New routes** - Carmen Leo. *Via Francigena Schools of Southern Salento. An original experiment about a new Scholastic Cultural Route along the Via Francigena in the Salento* - Ágnes Sallay, Zsuzsanna Mikházi, Katalin Takács and Imola G. Tar. *Cultural trail planning as a tool for preserving Swabian traditions* - Philip Xie. *Reclaiming the Rust Belt: Proposing a Midwestern Route of Industrial Heritage (MRIH)* - Aikaterini Zografistou, Georges Stassinakis, Ioanna Spiliopoulou, Maria Kouri. *European Routes of Nikos Kazantzakis: A Journey through the Places, Art, Literature, and Values of Europe, Past and Present* Moderator: Valbona Karakaçi
SI 007	**Communication & Brand positioning** - Iuliia Eremenko. *Brand Positioning in a Transnational Serial World Heritage Site: Strategic Choices of the Great Spa Towns of Europe* - Dariusz Raś, Magdalena Niewczas-Dobrowolska and Anna Prusak. *Representation and communication of the Krakow Culinary Trail in media and tourism publications* - Lydia Jose. *Decoding the Silk Roads: Heritage Representation on Council of Europe Cultural Routes and the Reception Among Young Digital Audiences* Moderator: Miaotong Yuan



18:00 Red room, Executive Center, USI	**Meeting of the members of the University Network for Cultural Routes** (By invitation only)
From 20:00 Asilo Ciani, Lugano	**Gala dinner**

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9:00 – 10:30 Aula Magna	Parallel sessions **ICTs & Digitalization** - Beatrice Ghiringhelli Cavallo, Silvia De Ascaniis, Lorenzo Cantoni. *Online Communication of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. An analysis of the official websites* - Licia Calvi. *The digital transformation of European Cultural Routes professionals* - Gianluca Bambi, Francesca Pirillo, Leonardo Conti, Giuseppe Rossi and Sebastian Schweizer. *Cultural Routes as Landscape Reading Devices: GIS-Based Multisensory Indicators for Digital Interpretation* - Miaotong Yuan. *ICT-Enabled Resilience: Enhancing OUV Through Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Tourism on Transnational Linear Cultural Routes* Moderator: Philip Xie
SI 006	**Governance and Development** - Maja Jakimovska-Toshikj and Sonja Stojmenska-Elzeser. *Strategies for the development of the Cyril and Methodius Route on Macedonian soil: achievements and perspectives* - Maria João Moreira. *Empirical Analysis of the Governance of the Camino de Santiago Cultural Routes in Portugal* - Montserrat Crivillers Simon. *Taking Root – Humans and Plants in Exile: Cultural Route Governance in Practice on the Huguenot and Waldensian Trail* - Nataša Urošević and Matteo Legović. *Challenges of developing Cross-border Thematic Routes. Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in Croatia* Moderator: Ivan Bodrozic
10:30 – 11:00 Aula Magna Foyer	Coffee break and posters presentation
11:00 – 12:30 Aula Magna	Parallel sessions **Tourism** - Martin White. *From Biographical Trails to Ethical Mobility: A Dual-Axis Framework for Expanding Council of Europe Literary Routes* - Marzia Liuzza. *Between transnational and hyperlocal scales: the Røst Tourism Manifesto as a case study in participatory tourism governance within Via Querinissima, a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe* - Peter Ivanič, Hilda Kramáreková, Martin Hetényi and Jozef Filo. *The Cyril and Methodius Route in Slovakia: A Model of Sustainable Cultural Tourism and European Identity*



	- Donatella Privitera. *Walking Memory and Cultural Routes of Death: Cemetery Tourism, Digital narratives, and the Italian Experience* - Pedro Vaz Serra and Cláudia Seabra. *Cultural routes, heritage accommodation and tourist experiences* Moderator: Kadir Çakar
SI 006	**Spirituality & Universal values** - Giovanna Rech and Sabrina Meneghello. *Defining Spiritual Sustainability. From Theory to practice along the Romea Strata* - Ilaria Papa. *Monastic Networks in Knots: The Cluniac Sites in Europe ECR and the Architectural Heritage of Italian Cluniac Monasteries Reformed in the Early Modern Period* - Ivan Bodrozic. *The Religious Heritage of the Croatian People on the Path to European Unity* - Jack Shepherd and Dimitri Ioannides. *Pilgrim for Peace: Using Cultural Routes as Infrastructure for Peacebuilding* - Maria Laura Gasparini. *Pilgrimage Routes and Cultural Europeanization: The Saint James Way as the First European Cultural Route* Moderator: Leonardo Porcelloni
12:30 – 13:00 Aula Magna	Concluding remarks
13:00 – 14:30 Aula Magna Foyer	Lunch
14:30 – 18:30 Bellinzona	Guided visit to the Fortress of Bellinzona (UNESCO World Heritage Site)

POSTERS PRESENTATION

Slavia Barlieva and Elka Zlateva. *Digital Knowledge Infrastructures. Supporting the Development of the Cyril and Methodius Route.*

Anthony Dixon, Patrick Holladay and Harriet Dixon. *Perceived Contributions of Historical Markers to Heritage Learning, Tourism, and Place Attachment*

Lech Kościelak. *The Poděbrady Trail in the light of the idea of the Treaty on Pan-European Peace*

Hilda Kramáreková, Alfréd Krogmann, Jana Némethová, Magdaléna Nemčíková, Daša Oremusová, Lucia Petrikovičová, Peter Ivanič, Jozef Filo, Henrich Grežo, Marán Hodoši. *Spatial Dimensions of the Cyrillo-Methodian Heritage in Slovakia and Forms of Its Development*

Raffaela Gabriella Rizzo. *The territorial process of Cultural Route: a university research and training experience*

Jolit Shaker. *From the Gospel to a Transnational Heritage Route: The Holy Family Journey in Egypt as a Bridge between Egypt and Europe and the World*



Keynote speech

Switzerland at the heart of Europe. Its role in shaping the European identity

Antonio Loprieno



Antonio Loprieno is Professor emeritus of Egyptology and History of Institutions at the University of Basel, where he also served as Rector (2006–2015) and President of the Swiss Rectors' Conference (2008–2015). In his scholarly work, he has focused on Egyptian and Semitic linguistics (e.g., *Ancient Egyptian. A Linguistic Introduction*, Cambridge 1995) as well as Egyptian cultural history (e.g., *La pensée et l'écriture*, Paris 2001). Through his later service as President of Jacobs University Bremen (2019–2020), of the Austrian Science Council (2016–2021), and of the European Federation of Academies of Science (ALLEA, 2018–2024), he also developed an interest in the history of universities and in higher education studies (e.g. *Die entzauberte Universität*, Vienna 2020).



Heritage

Cultural Routes are instruments that connect heritage, territories, and communities. They foster new forms of heritage valorisation, promote dialogue among diverse memories and identities, and contribute to the sustainable development of territories through narratives capable of linking the local and the transnational. Moving across different scales, from distributed networks of historical markers to the landscapes of industrial archaeology, and through the role of Cultural Routes in managing contested heritage, the three contributions in this session highlight how the concept of a cultural route can be understood not only as a tourism infrastructure, but also as a mechanism for learning, governance, and the construction of shared meanings.

From Static Markers to Cultural Routes: The Role of Historical Markers in Supporting Place-Based Heritage Connections

Harriet Dixon[1], Patrick Holladay[2] and Anthony Dixon[1]
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Cultural routes are typically understood as large-scale, structured itineraries that connect heritage sites through shared narratives and themes (Iakovaki et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2024). However, less attention has been given to the localized interpretive systems that support these broader experiences (Shi et al., 2025). This study advances the perspective that historical marker systems can function as micro-level cultural routes, providing the connective infrastructure through which visitors and residents engage with place-based heritage learning and cultural exchange.

Drawing on qualitative research conducted on historical markers in the southeastern part of the United States, this study examines stakeholder perceptions of more than 250 historical markers distributed across a multi-county region. Interviews with heritage professionals, community leaders, and tourism stakeholders indicate that markers extend beyond isolated interpretive points; collectively, they operate as a distributed network linking diverse narratives across space. These include colonial histories, African American heritage, and Gullah Geechee traditions, which, when experienced sequentially, form emergent cultural routes that encourage immersive, place-based exploration (Echavarria et al., 2022).

Findings suggest that historical marker networks support multiple dimensions central to cultural routes, particularly heritage learning, social sharing of knowledge, tourism development, and place attachment. Stakeholders emphasized that markers serve as accessible educational resources for both residents and visitors, facilitating informal learning and encouraging the sharing of local history. In practice, markers are often integrated into structured and unstructured route experiences, such as local trolley tours that follow marker-based itineraries, as well as self-guided travel through rural



communities where visitors stop at markers along the way. These patterns of engagement illustrate how markers facilitate movement between sites, support exploratory behavior, and contribute to the development of route-based experiences.
Additionally, participants highlighted the importance of markers in dispersing visitors beyond primary destinations to lesser-known and rural areas, supporting more balanced tourism distribution and extended stays. Markers were also described as reinforcing community identity and strengthening place attachment by helping residents and visitors connect with local stories and cultural heritage.
At the same time, the study identifies challenges related to visibility, accessibility, and gaps in inclusive representation, which may limit the effectiveness of marker systems as cohesive cultural routes. Addressing these issues is critical to enhancing the role of localized heritage infrastructure in supporting broader tourism and community development goals.
By reframing historical markers as part of a broader, connected heritage system, this research contributes to cultural routes scholarship by shifting attention from formally designated, large-scale routes to smaller, place-based systems of connection. The findings highlight the potential for widely distributed, place-based interpretive resources to collectively function as cultural routes, shaping both visitor experiences and community outcomes while supporting sustainable and place-based tourism development.

From Divisive Pasts to Shared Routes: Cultural Routes as Frameworks for Managing Dissonant Heritage in Europe

Alessia Mariotti and Patrizia Battilani
University of Bologna, Italy

Heritage is frequently mobilised as a resource for identity-building, cultural participation, and social cohesion. However, critical heritage scholarship has consistently demonstrated that heritage is neither neutral nor inherently unifying. Rather, it is the outcome of selective processes through which societies identify and valorise specific elements of the past, often reflecting the values and perspectives of dominant groups. As argued by Ashworth and Tunbridge, heritage is intrinsically dissonant: it produces competing meanings among different communities and can reinforce divisions instead of resolving them. This tension is particularly evident in cases of contested or “difficult” heritage, where pasts associated with conflict, ideology, or socio-economic transformation remain politically and socially sensitive.
This paper examines how the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (CoE) may provide an alternative framework for engaging with the inherently divisive nature of heritage. While the CoE programme explicitly promotes democracy, human rights, and intercultural dialogue, many of its routes engage—implicitly or explicitly—with forms of



dissonant heritage. Building on existing research on the ATRIUM route, which addresses the architectural legacies of totalitarian regimes, the paper expands the analysis to a broader set of Cultural Routes, including those related to Napoleonic heritage and industrial heritage. These examples reveal different configurations of dissonance, ranging from politically sensitive historical narratives to conflicts embedded in processes of industrialisation and deindustrialisation.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a qualitative and comparative approach based on the analysis of route narratives, institutional documents, and interpretative practices. Particular attention is paid to how dissonance is reframed through transnational storytelling, stakeholder participation, and tourism development strategies. The paper explores how Cultural Routes displace heritage from local or national contexts—where conflicts are often most acute—into transnational interpretative frameworks that enable plural and potentially conflicting perspectives to coexist.

The paper argues that Cultural Routes function as governance tools that can transform heritage from a source of division into a platform for conflict management. Central to this process is the role of tourism, which acts not only as an economic driver but also as a mediating practice that fosters encounter, dialogue, and critical engagement with the past. Through participatory approaches, co-creation of narratives, and cross-border cooperation, Cultural Routes contribute to the construction of a shared—yet inherently plural—European memory aligned with democratic values.

At the same time, the paper critically reflects on the limits and risks of this approach. The transformation of dissonant heritage into a resource for tourism may reproduce asymmetries of power, simplify complex histories, or fail to fully address underlying conflicts. The effectiveness of Cultural Routes as instruments of conflict management, therefore, depends on governance structures, narrative framing, and the degree of stakeholder inclusion.

By positioning Cultural Routes as laboratories for heritage diplomacy and conflict transformation, this research contributes to ongoing debates on dissonant heritage and sustainable tourism, offering a conceptual framework for understanding how transnational cultural initiatives can mediate the contested nature of the past in contemporary Europe.

Cultural Routes and Industrial Heritage: Stifone and the Proposal for its Inclusion in the European Route of Industrial Heritage

Lorenzo Francisci
University of Perugia, Italy

The notion of heritage has shifted progressively from the protection of individual assets to the interpretation of the systems of relations that bind places to communities, and the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes are the most fully developed institutional expression of this shift. The European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH), certified in 2019, applies



this approach to industrial heritage. The literature has concentrated mainly on the governance and economic impact of such networks, whereas the effects that the inclusion of minor sites has on local equilibria remain comparatively understudied. Taking as its starting point the proposal that Stifone be admitted to the ERIH, this essay asks what Stifone, a village in the Nera Gorges selected here as a case study, can contribute to cultural routes and what it can in turn derive from them.

The analysis reconstructs the theoretical and institutional framework of cultural routes, from the ICOMOS Charter to the Council of Europe Programme, and examines the multilevel structure of the ERIH. On this basis it develops a case study grounded in the documentation of the 2023 industrial archaeology masterplan for the Nera Gorges and in the project currently promoted by the Cooperativa Parco Gole del Nera in 2026. What emerges is a stratified productive landscape in which water has for centuries shaped the location and transformation of economic activities, from mills to hydroelectric plants. The value of Stifone lies in the interdependence of its components and in the continuity between tangible and intangible heritage. The network can thus enrich its representation of European industrialisation with a small-scale case, while the site can place its history within a transnational narrative and make use of the ERIH's monitoring tools.

Given the standards required of Anchor Points, the most realistic goal is admission as a member site within a Regional Route linked to the thematic networks dedicated to energy and water. Such inclusion makes sense only if it is supported by a historically grounded narrative, since the label alone would not alter how the heritage is understood. Whether, and how, membership of the network affects the distinctiveness of the territory remains to be assessed over time.



Storytelling and Cultural Mediation

Cultural Routes transform heritage into meaningful narratives and visitor experiences. Focusing on storytelling, cultural mediation, and wine heritage, the three papers in this session examine the role of guides, myths, and local traditions in connecting places, communities, and shared European histories. Together, they highlight how Cultural Routes can enhance heritage interpretation, foster intercultural dialogue, and create bridges between local identities and broader transnational narratives, while promoting sustainable and engaging forms of cultural tourism.

Tour Guides as Storytellers: Connecting Roman Heritage and Wine Culture on the Danube River

Alexander Dimitrov
European Heritage Label Bureau, Bulgaria

The Roman Emperors and the Danube Wine Route, one of the certified cultural routes of the Council of Europe, combines a total of ten countries in Europe in which wine traditions and Roman history are intertwined. They are the following: Slovenia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The development of such a route presents a great opportunity for tour guides to interpret the cultural heritage of the region with a focus on archaeology, history and regional wine culture. It allows them to transform all of this into a meaningful cultural experience for visitors.

One of the most effective methods that can be used by tour guides in order to create a memorable experience is storytelling. It allows complex historical information to be transformed into engaging narratives that help visitors understand and reconstruct the historical environment. The experience can be further improved by transforming it from a mono to a multi-sensory tour by combining the five basic human senses: touch, sight, hearing, smell and taste.

It is important for the tour guide to adapt the experience to different audiences because international tourists have different levels of historical knowledge and cultural background. It can be done by connecting the local stories to European history and by making comparisons with places that the tourists already know. It is also helpful to use simple language and encourage questions and interaction to make sure that the stories are understandable and relatable.

From a tour guide's perspective, the route is a way to promote sustainable tourism through economic, environmental, social and cultural perspectives. Economically, it generates benefits for local communities and small businesses. Environmentally, it raises awareness about the preservation of Roman ruins and sustainable winery management. Socially, it creates opportunities for interaction between international tourists and local



communities. Last but not least, culturally, guides make Roman heritage and viticulture come to life by using storytelling techniques.
In conclusion, tour guides play a very important role in the successful implementation of the Roman Emperors and the Danube Wine Route. It has great potential for further regional cooperation and development of the region. The consequences are positive for everyone: higher economic growth and social engagement for the region and a rich and authentic visitor experience for the tourists.

"Bringing Aeneas Back Home": Myth, Heritage, and Cultural Mediation in the Aeneas Route

Fabio Morotti
IULM University, Milan, Italy

This case study examines the 2025 cultural strategy and dissemination activities of the Aeneas Route – Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, adopting transnational remembrance, heritage diplomacy, and mythopoetic identity construction as its main analytical lenses. Framed by the guiding idea of "bringing Aeneas back home," the contribution investigates how the myth of Aeneas can be reactivated as an instrument of cultural policy to foster intercultural dialogue between Europe and contemporary Turkey. Certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe in 2021, the Aeneas Route retraces Aeneas's legendary journey following the destruction of Troy, a trajectory narrated in Virgil's Aeneid and translated here into a transnational cultural itinerary. The route promotes shared European heritage by linking myth, history, archaeology, and contemporary cultural production across sites in Turkey, Greece, Albania, Tunisia, and Italy, each associated with key episodes of the journey and embedded in distinct local identities.
The Council of Europe's recognition of the Aeneas Route reflects the myth's paradigmatic value for transnational identity-making: Aeneas embodies migration, cultural transfer, resilience, and hybridity, themes that occupy a central place in contemporary European cultural policy (Ivic, 2022; 2024). In the Turkish context, however, Aeneas remains a marginal figure, overshadowed by Hector as a symbol of autochthonous resistance (Aslan, 2013; Corsaro, 2013). Against this background, the Aeneas Route Association pursues a cultural mediation strategy aimed at reconnecting Aeneas with local narratives of the Trojan past and situating his story within a broader intercultural framework. This approach draws on Fernand Braudel's (1947) conception of the Mediterranean as a broad matrix of European origins.
The 2025 programme translated these premises into practice through a series of interconnected initiatives. The AIneid, a digital humanities project developed by the International Research Centre on Collaborative Translation (IULM University) and Karma Lab (Koç University), explored the use of generative artificial intelligence in



literary adaptation, reimagining Virgil's epic through new modes of storytelling and audience engagement. The exhibition Aeneas Route: Myth, Journey, Art, and Cultural Heritage, curated by Giovanni Cafiero and Sandra Gatti and presented at the 62nd International Troy Festival in Çanakkale, symbolically reconnected the hero to the place of his mythic origins while opening a dialogue with local communities and visitors. Further dissemination at the Koç University Research Center for Anatolian Civilizations in Istanbul and at the 14th Annual Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (Cappadocia) situated these activities within debates on innovative and inclusive heritage interpretation.
Through a qualitative analysis of the programme's events, narrative strategies, and mediation practices, the study highlights the potential of cultural mediation to connect the Trojan past with contemporary creative production, offering insights into how cultural routes can translate the Council of Europe's core values into concrete initiatives.

When heritage precedes the route:
The case of Iter Vitis in Greece and Georgia Myth, Heritage, and Cultural

[1]Filareti Kotsi and [2]Tatiana Iretskaia
[1]Zayed University, United Arab Emirates, [2]Michingan State University, USA

The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe connect places through narratives of shared heritage, yet their meanings are shaped by distinct national, regional, and local contexts. This study examines how wine heritage is represented and interpreted through Iter Vitis in Greece and Georgia, two countries participating in the same certified Council Route but possessing different wine-tourism infrastructures and heritage narratives.
Adopting a qualitative, multi-source comparative approach, the study combines analysis of official route materials, national and regional tourism publications and promotional content with visual analysis, site visits and interviews. The Georgian case examines three contrasting wine-tourism sites: Mate's Marani, Akido Winery, and Tsinandali Estate, located in Kakheti and Imereti, two historically significant wine-producing regions of Georgia. The Greek case focuses on established wine networks, particularly the Wine Roads of Northern Greece and the Wine Route of the Lakes, alongside fieldwork at Maggel Winery, Abraham's Vineyards and Ktima Stergiou in the municipality of Kastoria. The shared analytical framework considers heritage scales, historical narratives, tangible and intangible heritage, landscapes, authenticity, local communities and practitioners, visitor experiences, and route connectivity and visibility.
The findings highlight different approaches to communicating wine heritage. In Georgia, narratives presenting the country as the birthplace of wine-making, qvevri traditions and hospitality underpin a prominent national wine identity. In Greece, classical antiquity, mythology, indigenous grape varieties and established wine routes provide existing interpretive frameworks. These differences raise questions about whether Iter Vitis



strengthens heritage interpretation and transnational connectivity or primarily provides institutional recognition to established narratives.

The study argues that the added value of Iter Vitis should be assessed beyond certification and promotional visibility, through its capacity to connect distinctive wine traditions, recognise local communities and practitioners, facilitate meaningful visitor engagement and support sustainable regional development. It contributes to understanding how transnational Cultural Routes can accommodate cultural diversity while communicating shared heritage across destinations.



Rural Development, Sustainability & Accessibility

Cultural Routes represent an important opportunity to promote sustainable tourism, territorial development and cultural heritage enhancement. However, their long-term sustainability requires integrated approaches addressing visitor management, digital innovation, infrastructure and accessibility. The following contributions explore these challenges through the lens of the Via Francigena and other European pilgrimage networks, highlighting the role of technological tools, participatory practices and collaborative governance in fostering more sustainable, inclusive and accessible Cultural Routes.

Cultural Routes as Tools for Sustainable Rural Development: Integrating Visitor-Flow Monitoring and Walker Experience along the Via Francigena

Gianluca Bambi, Giuseppe Rossi, Leonardo Conti and Martina Elmi
Department of Agriculture, Food, Environment and Forestry, University of Florence, Italy

Cultural Routes can support sustainable tourism and rural development, but their management requires evidence on both the scale and spatial distribution of visitor use and the experiences that motivate walkers. This study develops an integrated framework for analysing visitor flows and walker experience along the Tuscan section of the Via Francigena. It addresses three questions: how use varies over time and between route sections; which motivations and experiences characterise contemporary walkers; and how complementary monitoring methods can strengthen the evidence available to route managers.

The framework combines self-administered questionnaires, camera-based observations and anonymised passive mobile-signal detection using the Flowy system. Questionnaires investigate motivations, behaviour and lived experiences; cameras provide direct observations at selected monitoring points; and passive detection supports continuous, large-scale measurement of movement patterns. Comparison of the three sources is used to examine the consistency of recorded temporal patterns and the strengths and limitations of each method. The analysis considers daily, weekly and seasonal variation, together with differences associated with route accessibility and service provision.

Preliminary findings show marked variation in flow intensity, including higher use at weekends and peaks associated with major events such as the Jubilee period. Observed flows also tend to concentrate in the more accessible and better-equipped sections. The three data sources show broadly consistent temporal patterns, suggesting that passive detection can complement site-specific counting, while questionnaires add information that sensors cannot provide. Survey responses indicate that well-being, contact with nature and cultural discovery are prominent motivations alongside religious and spiritual



reasons. These findings support the value of combining behavioural and experiential evidence rather than relying on a single monitoring technique.
The framework may be adapted to other cultural routes and can inform decisions on visitor distribution, infrastructure and service planning, and landscape conservation. By linking measures of use with walkers' reported experiences, it can help route managers assess pressures, improve visitor provision and strengthen the contribution of the Via Francigena to sustainable rural development.

Digital mapping for the sustainable management of Cultural Routes: documenting built heritage and infrastructural criticalities along the Via Francigena in Pavia

[1]Elisabetta Doria, [1]Maya Moussallieh, [2]Claudia Lupi and [1]Marco Morandotti
[1]Department of Civil Engineering and Architecture, University of Pavia, Italy,
[2]Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, University of Pavia, Italy

This paper presents a pilot initiative developed by the Municipality of Pavia in collaboration with the University of Pavia and several local organizations, aimed at exploring how digital technologies and participatory practices can support the sustainable enhancement and management of Cultural Routes. The project focuses on a portion of the historic Via Francigena crossing the city of Pavia and its surrounding natural landscape, an important segment of one of Europe's major pilgrimage routes. Cultural Routes represent complex territorial systems in which built heritage, pedestrian infrastructure, public spaces, and natural landscapes interact to define the accessibility, usability, and conservation of historic itineraries. Their sustainable management requires integrated knowledge of both their cultural significance and the physical and functional conditions of the built environment.
The initiative was implemented through an international multidisciplinary volunteer programme involving university students and local stakeholders. During an intensive week of fieldwork, participants documented heritage assets, pedestrian routes, public spaces, and service facilities, while identifying critical issues related to accessibility, path conditions, signage, and maintenance. These activities were complemented by small-scale interventions, including path maintenance.
The main outcome is a digital mapping system organised into two complementary information layers designed to enhance both the visitor experience and the management of the Via Francigena. The first supports public accessibility and heritage interpretation by providing georeferenced information on monuments, natural features, viewpoints, and services, enriched with descriptive content, images, and links to digital resources, including existing 3D reconstructions of selected architectural heritage assets. The second focuses on the physical and functional characteristics of the route, documenting accessibility constraints, infrastructural deficiencies, and maintenance-related criticalities. This management-oriented dataset provides an initial knowledge base that



can support local authorities in identifying potential interventions and informing future maintenance strategies. The map also include informative hotspots related to the natural aspects of the route and possible sustainability measures that can be implemented to enhance this Via Francigena portion and to disseminate the project in the schools educational field.

From an architectural technology perspective, the pilot explores the role of digital and participatory documentation in connecting the knowledge of existing built and infrastructural assets with their sustainable management. The project integrates digital heritage resources produced by research laboratories of the University of Pavia, including 3D reconstructions of key monuments located along the Via Francigena in the urban area. These digital models enrich the walking experience by providing additional interpretative content accessible through the mapping interface. Rather than replacing the physical experience of the pilgrimage route, digital tools are used to complement and expand it, enabling new forms of storytelling, accessibility, and engagement.

The experience highlights the opportunities and limitations of collaborative data collection as a preliminary step towards more structured and updatable information systems for the management of Cultural Routes. The project also contributes to broader processes of cultural heritage digitization and aligns with ongoing European initiatives focused on digital cultural heritage and regional cooperation.

The Via Francigena for All

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The research presents a case study of cultural routes for the disabled in Apulia, in the Italian Mezzogiorno, linked to the southern section of the European Via Francigena. With about 900 kilometres of history, traditions and locations, the “Southern Via Francigena” crosses the Italian regions of Lazio, Campania and Apulia. However, it is limited by the presence of architectural barriers and the lack of adequate facilities, services and guides who are sufficiently trained to accompany disabled visitors. In 2019, two cultural associations*, Mollare Mai* and *Via Francigena Pugliese*, started a project to map the route running from Brindisi to Santa Maria di Leuca at the tip of the Salento peninsula. The aim was to assess the potential for people with disabilities, indicating accessible variants and points of interest and building a network of interest among other cultural associations, stakeholders, local governments and local communities affected by the route. It is hoped that recent funding obtained through public calls for proposals will enable the implementation of a project that could represent best practice for other accessible cultural routes.



Accessibility for All in the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: Learning from the Practices and Governance of Pilgrimage Networks

Leonardo Porcelloni
University of Genoa, Italy

Accessibility for all has become a central principle within the European policy framework, grounded in a rights based approach to cultural participation and increasingly connected to the social dimensions of tourism. In this perspective, inclusive tourism is understood not only as a matter of leisure, but as a component of social wellbeing and participation, enabling people with diverse needs to experience cultural heritage and contribute to its interpretation and development. Within this context, the Cultural Routes (CRs) of the Council of Europe Programme provides a significant framework for connecting these principles with the practices of transnational heritage networks. Yet its commitment to inclusion raises questions about how accessibility is understood, supported and sustained across organisations operating at different territorial and institutional levels.

This paper examines these questions through the cluster of CRs associated with pilgrimage: the Saint James Way, Via Francigena, Saint Olav Ways, and Romea Strata. Rooted in an ethos of hospitality and inclusion, these networks also present particularly demanding accessibility challenges, as participation depends on the connections between information, mobility, the physical conditions of the paths, accommodation, and heritage interpretation. This combination makes them a particularly revealing context for examining accessibility as a condition of the wider cultural experience, while investigating the respective contributions of European organisations, public authorities, specialist associations and local actors.

The research combines documentary analysis at Programme and CR levels with 13 interviews involving 18 participants, selected purposively for their roles in route governance or their involvement in accessibility initiatives. Interviews bring together the perspectives of route managers and representatives, regional tourism authorities, disability organisations and practitioners, enabling comparison between strategic commitments and operational experiences. Complementary material from the participatory workshop on culture, accessibility and inclusion held at the 2026 Cultural Routes Advisory Forum in Yerevan broadens the discussion beyond the four cases. The analysis examines how accessibility is defined, how initiatives originate and develop, how responsibilities and expertise are distributed, and how practices are documented, shared and maintained. It also explores the challenges encountered and the opportunities identified for strengthening accessibility within and across the networks.

The material reveals diverse approaches, from accessibility mapping and information provision to adapted journeys, accompaniment and the active involvement of persons with disabilities in route activities. Reliable information emerges as an essential condition of autonomy, allowing individuals to assess actual conditions and shape experiences



according to their needs. Partnerships combine specialist knowledge with territorial expertise, although initiatives often depend on individuals, funding opportunities and organisational relationships. The comparison therefore highlights uneven connections between operational practices and their incorporation into continuing strategies at route level. It also shows why activities occurring along an itinerary cannot automatically be attributed to its European coordinating organisation.

These findings inform a discussion of how the Programme can support accessibility through clearer responsibilities, participation in planning, shared knowledge and stronger continuity between projects and ordinary practice. For CR organisations, public authorities and Programme bodies, the contribution identifies ways to strengthen accessibility as a transversal dimension of cultural participation while recognising the diversity of territories, organisational capacities and individual needs.



Personal Growth and Education

Cultural Routes are not only pathways connecting places and heritage sites, but also spaces for learning, participation, cultural memory and social interaction. Their development increasingly relies on innovative forms of heritage interpretation, the engagement of diverse audiences and the contribution of academic institutions and local communities. The following contributions explore these dimensions, addressing youth engagement through digital technologies, the personal and emotional meanings of pilgrimage, the material culture of religious journeys, and the role of universities in advancing research, education and the sustainable development of Cultural Routes.

Playing with Heritage

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One of the key challenges facing European Cultural Routes is how to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of their territories for younger audiences. This challenge is particularly acute for regions that lie outside well-established tourist circuits, where limited recognition can constrain both cultural participation and tourism potential.
Since 2016, Breda University of Applied Sciences has been actively involved in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme. Following a request from the Sint Maartensberaad Utrecht (NL), part of the European Cultural Network of Saint Martin organisations, an applied research project was undertaken to examine how younger audiences might be more effectively engaged with the Via Sancti Martini. Conducted in collaboration with undergraduate students, the project adopted a mixed-method, design-oriented research approach. This included desk research on youth engagement and heritage interpretation, an analysis of good practices within existing European Cultural Routes, and iterative concept development through co-creation workshops and prototyping sessions. Qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with the target group, stakeholder consultations, and informal user testing, enabling continuous refinement of the proposed concepts.
The research findings demonstrated that digitally mediated experiences—particularly location-based games incorporating mobile and immersive technologies—hold significant potential for increasing the appeal of European Cultural Routes for Generation Z and Generation Alpha. These insights were subsequently operationalised in the context of the Via Sancti Martini through the conceptual development of a mobile application employing augmented reality. The prototype focused on place-based storytelling by guiding users to Saint Martin–related sites in the city of Utrecht (NL), while overlaying digital narratives and visual content onto the physical environment.
Methodologically, the prototype was informed by principles of participatory heritage interpretation and experiential learning. A distinctive feature of the application design was



its API connection to Europeana, enabling users to contribute user-generated content such as photographs of objects and locations associated with Saint Martin. This functionality not only supported the enrichment of Europeana's digital heritage collections but also enhanced the sustainability of the platform by encouraging active reuse and reinterpretation of digitised content by contemporary audiences. Through this form of co-creation, audiences are encouraged to engage with cultural heritage in lived, organic, and responsive ways—conditions under which meaningful learning and enjoyment are most likely to occur. Such engagement can foster an empathetic understanding of the values of sharing, solidarity, and charity associated with Saint Martin, thereby contributing to the strengthening of a shared European identity.

Walk with grief: How people talk about and process their grief on the Camino de Santiago based on their online posts

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The Camino de Santiago, a historical pilgrimage route leading to Santiago de Compostela attracts individuals for various reasons, including spiritual reflection, cultural exploration, and health benefits. Among the diverse motivations for walking the Camino, grief – whether due to death or non-death related losses – emerges as a powerful catalyst for those seeking emotional healing. This project is an ongoing pilot study which explores the experiences of individuals walking the Camino de Santiago during their grieving process. The results will allow for a more informed study involving surveys and interviews.

"Grief is a journey" is a very common metaphor present in many cultures (Midor 2026). Sometimes grief indeed takes the form of a journey. When someone experiences a loss (death or non-death related), sometimes they feel the urge to travel. Grieving people could walk the Camino for the following reasons: dealing with their emotions and thoughts, clearing their heads, honoring their loved one if this is a death-related loss (maybe they did it together before, maybe they wanted to, but never had a chance), finding a new goal or direction (Brumec et al. 2023). Frequently, people in grief say that they have lost the sense of direction and they no longer know what their goal is. In case of the Camino, the goal is very clear, and the way to achieve it is clearly structured.

The project involves a qualitative study, consisting of two key components: immersing myself in the Camino experience through autoethnographic participation and conducting a discourse analysis of Facebook posts of members of Camino communities and groups (in English and Polish). This study did not seek formal ethics board approval because the data is open to public; therefore, it does not involve direct interaction with human subjects. However, privacy is protected by anonymizing the data. The data is analyzed using the methods of cognitive linguistics (especially the conceptual metaphor theory,



Lakoff & Johnson 2003) in order to understand the experience through the language people use to talk about their journeys.
In many cases, grief is still treated as a taboo, which does not help the bereaved. Although there are more and more publications, podcasts, programs, or even social media pages or channels discussing this topic, it still needs more attention.

St. Olav pilgrim badges

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Pilgrim badges are a characteristic category of medieval material culture, typically produced in inexpensive lead–tin alloy and worn visibly on clothing, bags, or hats by returning pilgrims. At a basic level, they functioned as souvenirs marking a completed journey to a holy site. However, this research argues that pilgrim badges are more accurately understood as contact relics - objects whose significance derived not from material value, but from their physical and symbolic proximity to sacred places, saints, and relic cults.
Closely associated with specific shrines, such as those of St. Olav, these badges were believed to retain an extension of the sanctity of the pilgrimage destination. Through touch, wearing, and ritual use, the object could become charged with meaning, enabling the pilgrim to carry an aspect of the sacred back into everyday life. In this sense, pilgrim badges did not simply represent pilgrimage - they actively mediated a continuing relationship between the pilgrim and the holy site.
As contact relics, badges acted as lasting physical links that went beyond the time and place of the pilgrimage. Worn on the body, they made this connection visible both to the wearer and to surrounding observers. They could serve protective functions, express personal devotion, and act as constant sensory reminders of a transformative spiritual experience. Importantly, this study emphasizes the role of iconography: the motif chosen for the saint—in this case St. Olav—was carefully curated to construct and reinforce a specific narrative of the saint, rather than serving as mere illustration.
The study is grounded in a comprehensive catalogue of all known surviving pilgrim badges associated with St. Olav. Each object is systematically documented and categorized according to material properties, iconography, and find context. This structured approach enables comparative analysis across regions and chronological spans, revealing broader patterns in production, circulation, and use.
Through close analysis of recurring motifs and visual strategies, the catalogue further illuminates how St. Olav was represented, and which aspects of his cult were emphasized in different contexts. Rather than treating the badges as isolated artifacts, this paper situates them within a wider visual and devotional system connected to pilgrimage networks and the dissemination of the St. Olav cult across medieval Europe.



Finally, pilgrim badges are considered as key evidence within cultural route heritage studies. As tangible traces of movement, devotion, and shared ritual practice, they attest to pilgrimage routes as lived and continuously activated networks rather than abstract pathways. In doing so, they allow for a partial reconstruction of the medieval pilgrimage landscape and offer insight into how sacred geographies were experienced, maintained, and communicated.
In short, this study shows that pilgrim badges were more than simple souvenirs - they acted as objects that kept a real connection between pilgrims and holy places alive. By focusing on badges linked to St. Olav, it explains how these objects show patterns of belief, travel, and visual culture. It also shows why they matter for cultural heritage, helping us understand pilgrimage routes as active, connected experiences.

On and around the ECRs Programme: Reflecting on Research and Teaching Experiences

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This contribution builds on the Politecnico di Torino – DIST's involvement in the EICR University Network for Cultural Routes Studies, formally established in 2020 (scientific coordinator: Silvia Beltramo), which marked a significant step in consolidating research and teaching activities related to the ECRs. It develops at the intersection of Cultural Routes studies, cultural and architectural heritage research, and academic training.
The author's work in this field is grounded in long-term engagement with Cultural Routes (CRs), including her role as an expert evaluator for the programme since 2012, and in extensive research on cultural itineraries – including those not formally recognised by the Council of Europe – with particular attention to pilgrimage routes and transnational dynamics. These themes have been explored through both international cooperation projects, such as "Per Viam – Pilgrims' Routes in Action" (2012), and research on the Via Francigena and regional itineraries in Piedmont (2011), as well as the development of new Cultural Routes. In particular, the feasibility study for the Alpine Region (ALP), focusing on Via Alpina and Mountaineering Villages within the "Routes4U" programme (2019, 2024), has addressed the relationship between cultural and natural heritage in mountain contexts, highlighting their potential in supporting sustainable tourism and local development. These activities have been complemented by participation in scientific committees on Cultural Routes and heritage, including the recent "Via Querinissima" Cultural Route project (2023).
Within this framework, the involvement in the University Network has fostered new research synergies and collaborative environments, leading to the development of a research group involving early-career scholars and contributing to ongoing studies on specific Cultural Routes, such as the European Route of Cistercian Abbeys, the European Route of Significant Cemeteries, and the Via Francigena. At the same time,



these research trajectories have directly informed an interdisciplinary teaching project launched in 2020, “Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: Cultural Heritage, Landscape and Tourism”. Conceived as a space of interaction between research and teaching, the programme has involved multiple universities within the Network and has been structured around lectures, study visits, and design workshops, engaging stakeholders, institutions, and local administrations. These activities have been extended through dissemination and public engagement initiatives, as well as Master’s theses (De Giovanni, 2022) and an ongoing PhD research project (Melda Kaplan – PhD in Architectural Heritage), contributing to the training of researchers capable of addressing complex cultural heritage-related issues through interdisciplinary and multi-scalar approaches.

This contribution offers a reflection on an articulated research and educational trajectory, addressing two complementary perspectives: research and teaching. On the one hand, it discusses key issues emerging from the study of Cultural Routes and other cultural itineraries, particularly in relation to their transnational dimension and historical interconnectedness; on the other hand, it explores the role of academic programmes and research training in fostering interdisciplinary approaches, raising awareness, and developing new competencies in the interpretation and management of cultural and historical heritage.

Universities, Human Sciences, and Cultural Routes: An Albanian Case Study Supporting the Transhumance Trails Network

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The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe increasingly depend on collaboration with universities to generate evidence, foster stakeholder dialogue, and support sustainable territorial development. This paper examines the emerging role of the University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi” in documenting and promoting Albania's transhumance heritage and explores how academic engagement can contribute to future participation in the Transhumance Trails Cultural Route. Rather than presenting universities as inherent mediators between communities and route governance structures, the paper investigates the specific conditions under which universities may facilitate knowledge exchange and institutional cooperation.

The study is based on the Albanian experience developed through the international scientific conference Transhumance and Pastoral Heritage: Culture, Identity, and Sustainable Futures (2026), complemented by an analysis of ongoing university research, field-based engagement with pastoral communities, and collaboration with national and international heritage stakeholders. The conference contributions are not treated as evidence in themselves but as a starting point for examining how scientific knowledge can be mobilized in support of Cultural Routes development.



Drawing on perspectives from ethnography, cultural anthropology, linguistics, geography, heritage studies, and sustainable tourism, the paper identifies the principal cultural, social, and territorial values embodied in Albanian transhumance practices. Particular attention is paid to how research activities contribute to documenting mobility corridors, pastoral knowledge systems, landscape stewardship practices, and local narratives linked to seasonal migration. The analysis further examines how these findings can be translated into resources relevant to the Transhumance Trails network, including heritage interpretation, cultural mapping, stakeholder engagement, and evidence-based policy dialogue.

As a case study, the paper discusses the opportunities and limitations of university involvement in Cultural Routes development. It argues that universities can contribute not only through knowledge production but also through capacity-building, international networking, and the creation of platforms that connect researchers, practitioners, public authorities, and local communities. The Albanian experience highlights how academic institutions may support the preparation of territories seeking stronger engagement with Cultural Routes initiatives while ensuring that local knowledge and community perspectives remain central to heritage governance processes.

By focusing on transhumance heritage in Albania, the paper contributes to current debates on university-route collaboration and offers a practical example of how human sciences research can support the Cultural Routes Programme's objectives of intercultural dialogue, community participation, sustainable development, and the safeguarding of living cultural heritage.



New Routes

Cultural Routes offer valuable opportunities to preserve and reinterpret local heritage, strengthen community identities and foster intergenerational knowledge exchange. Their development can take different forms, from educational initiatives and the safeguarding of minority traditions to the regeneration of post-industrial territories and the exploration of literary and intellectual legacies. The following contributions examine how cultural itineraries can connect local histories with broader European narratives, highlighting the role of education, landscape, industrial heritage and literature in promoting cultural participation and sustainable territorial development.

Via Francigena Schools of Southern Salento. An original experiment about a new Scholastic Cultural Route along the Via Francigena in the Salento

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In the last two decades we have witnessed a strong and renewed interest in pilgrimages on the European Francigena Way which has a strong symbolic value and it is of great significance at the European level: a bridge between the continent's two most iconic routes, both recognized as Cultural Routes by the Council of Europe.
This synergy strengthens a dialogue between Peoples of different nations, a shared spirituality, and the vision of a Europe connected through its historical routes.
Starting in Canterbury, the Francigena Way passes through five countries such as the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Italy and the Vatican City, ending at the southernmost tip of the Salento peninsula, in Santa Maria di Leuca, where Pilgrims from the North, during the Middle Ages, embarked for the Holy Land.
Over the centuries, the pilgrimage has become a mass phenomenon, enhancing the role of the Francigena, which is now considered a sort of "European cultural corridor."
The official route of the Francigena Way, accessible on foot, by bicycle, and partially on horseback, is safe, easy, and free of technical difficulties. It has been carefully designed to be accessible to everyone, regardless of age.
A particularly significant date for this physical and cultural route was April 14th 2016, when the Francigena Way in the South of Italy was officially recognized and it has been included in a project for the integrated valorization of the cultural, landscape, and environmental heritage called "South Cultural Routes."
Thanks to a particular interest in the ancient historical and religious tradition concerning the valorization of the Francigena Way, a project proposal has been created by the Provincial School Office in Lecce, that is called "*Music_Andando per la Via Francigena - Music, Art, and Folklore Itineraries along the Via Francigena in Salento*".



The Project aims to create a new experiment that can combine a deep knowledge of Cultural Routes with the creation of spaces for reflection on the extremely high educational and didactic value of Music, considered as a universal language and a tool for inclusion, integration, and aggregation among peers and between different school levels, as well as to valorise all forms of artistic expression practiced in the schools.
From this idea, a provincial Festival was born in May 2024, with the aim of combining the previous cultural aspects with the discovery of Salento's great artistic and landscape heritage.
This Festival stands out from other similarly oriented events by designing an innovative and captivating itinerary of Music, Art, Culture, and Folklore taking place in several villages along the Francigena Way in Salento, a historical, geographical, and cultural Route that is part of the paths traveled for centuries by Pilgrims from all over Europe.
The true innovation of this project lies in our desire to establish a new route that unites all the schools in the Salento community that have expressed interest in participating in the Festival in a unique network of Schools that follows an original artistic and cultural path along the Via Francigena in Salento, which we have decided to call the "Via Francigena Route's Schools of Southern Salento".
After several years of study and research on European school systems, which revealed that in none of the countries crossed by the Francigena Way a similar experiment implemented by a Network of Schools has ever been carried out, the Provincial School Office in Lecce has obtained for this initiative an important official recognition as a "Project of Excellence" from the National Committee for the Practical Learning of Music for all Students, as well as the prestigious Certification issued by the Francigena Way Association of Puglia, and the approval of the European Association of the Francigena Ways, as a "unique, original and innovative project idea of its kind and, above all, never before implemented by a network of schools operating on a Francigena Way in any European nation and Italian region".
The "Music_Andando per la Via Francigena Festival" involved numerous schools which, during the last week of May 2024 and 2025, just as will be done in the third edition in May 2026, staged a series of choral, dance, orchestral, and dramatic performances based on themes and musical traditions ranging from classical and contemporary repertoires to Italian and international works. The Festival also featured historical parades in which students wore medieval costumes, as well as performances and games involving flag-wavers, tambourine players, and archers, showcasing the artistic and musical talents of children and young people of school age.
Each edition of the Festival has involved institutional authorities, music conservatories, fine arts academies, public and private associations, and the civil, military, and religious communities of the territories participating in the provincial events.



Cultural trail planning as a tool for preserving Swabian traditions

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Budapest has had a large German population since the Middle Ages, which has left its mark on the landscape and the urban fabric in numerous ways. During the 18th century, approximately 500,000 people of German ethnicity settled in Hungary following the expulsion of the Turks, with the aim of repopulating the regions that had been left vacant: this was the so-called Schwabenzug. Around Budapest, the so-called Swabian Ring was formed also in the 18th century, in whose settlements the proportion of the German-speaking population exceeded 90%.

The population of the Swabian settlements that had developed around Budapest preserved its identity until World War II, despite efforts to be Magyarized. After World War II,nearly half of the Germans in Hungary were resettled to the territories of West and East Germany. The Germans who remained did not dare to openly embrace their traditions, so a significant number of them assimilated into the Hungarian majority. When Greater Budapest was established (1950), the formerly Swabian-majority settlements near the capital were annexed to the capital, and as a result, their population began to grow rapidly, leading to a further decline in the proportion of Germans. The National German Minority Self-Government supports the creation of 1–2 cultural trails each year, which serve to present and preserve Swabian traditions. Information about existing trails is available at https://lehrpfad.hu. Of the former Swabian settlements in the Budapest area, Budafok is the only one that already has a completed educational trail.

In our previous research, we studied the cemeteries used by the Swabians, which gave us a basic understanding of the current Swabian communities. In the spring of 2026, together with third-year university students majoring in landscape planning, we surveyed the Swabian-related landscape values in nine formerly independent settlements in order to present these values along specific routes. We found Swabian landscape values with varying degrees of success in the examined settlements: in those settlements where people with a Swabian identity still live in relatively large numbers (e.g., Pesthidegkút) and where development has not accelerated as rapidly, we found numerous values. In those settlements where the process of merging with the capital had already begun in the early 20th century — and where the Swabians had thus been in the minority for more than a century (e.g., Albertfalva), our task was significantly more difficult; we found hardly any landscape features associated with the Swabians, despite the fact that a German Ethnic Self-Government operates in the settlement. The planned routes present the Swabian history and the intangible and tangible cultural heritage of the former settlements at the local level. At the same time, based on our past and current research, we see that the history of the “Danube Swabians” is a shared and living cultural heritage



of Europe, affecting several countries, and may be worthy of inclusion in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme in the future.

Reclaiming the Rust Belt: Proposing a Midwestern Route of Industrial Heritage

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The American Midwest possesses a dense, globally significant concentration of industrial history that shaped the economic and cultural landscape of the United States. However, the transition to a post-industrial economy has left many historic manufacturing sites underutilized, facing demolition, or disconnected from regional tourism networks. This proposal advocates for the establishment of the Midwestern Route of Industrial Heritage (MRIH), a regional tourism and preservation network modeled after the highly successful European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH).

By linking historic manufacturing hubs, mining districts, transport canals, and rail corridors across states like Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania, the MRIH aims to transform fragmented local landmarks into a cohesive, cross-border cultural itinerary. Following the ERIH framework, the proposed route will utilize a tiered system of "Anchor Points" , highly accessible, structurally sound flagship museums and preserved complexes, complemented by regional thematic routes focusing on specific industries such as automotive manufacturing, steel production, and maritime logistics.

This abstract outlines the strategic framework for the MRIH, highlighting how a unified industrial heritage network can stimulate regional economic revitalization through sustainable heritage tourism. Furthermore, it addresses the project's capacity to foster regional identity, preserve architectural legacies, and educate the public on the labor and technological innovations of the American working class. By adopting Europe's proven regional branding and digital integration strategies, the MRIH offers a scalable blueprint for cross-state collaboration, turning the legacy of the Rust Belt into a dynamic driver of cultural and economic renewal.

European Routes of Nikos Kazantzakis: A Journey through the Places, Art, Literature, and Values of Europe, Past and Present

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Nikos Kazantzakis (1883–1957), the internationally acclaimed Greek writer, intellectual, and poet, was shaped by the spirit of European culture. An avid traveller, he journeyed to almost every part of the world, but Europe remained central to his travels. His journeys were a continuous experiential and intellectual exploration of the distinctive tangible and



intangible elements shaping different cultures. These rich experiences nourished his literary creativity and contributed to his philosophical approach. His writings also reflect the historical, intellectual, and ideological dimensions of his era. Today, his widely translated work continues to inspire artistic creation in visual arts, cinema, theatre, and music, addressing great questions and universal themes about humanity throughout the ages.

In this paper, we will present the main findings of our research, focusing on:

A. The author's travels across Europe: Greece (the Peloponnese), Italy (Assisi), Eastern and Italian-speaking Switzerland (Zurich, Lugano, Cantemario), France (Paris, Antibes), Germany (Berlin), Austria (Vienna), Czechia (Boží Dar), and Spain (Toledo). He visited monuments, museums, archaeological sites, cities, and churches that inspired him. The contribution of his travel experiences to the development of his thought and work: We focus on emblematic travel writings and literary works where he expresses his interest in ancient monuments (Travelling: Morea) and his religious concerns (God's Pauper: St. Francis of Assisi). We explore his encounter with Henri Bergson's philosophy and his theory of the élan vital, which appears in Zorba the Greek, as well as his intellectual engagement with Nietzsche's thought, the subject of his doctoral dissertation. We also examine his deep appreciation of artistic creation, especially in Travelling: Spain through his encounter with El Greco's art, and in Report to Greco.

The ecumenical and diachronic human values running through his work: freedom, peace, solidarity, respect for diversity, justice, the essence of human existence, emphasis on duty and responsibility, continuous struggle towards higher spiritual values, the search for God, and a profound love of nature.

B. We will connect the first part of our paper:

With contemporary Europe, highlighting the convergence of ideals promoted in Kazantzakis's work with the fundamental values that constitute the statutory aims of the Council of Europe, underscoring his work's enduring relevance.

With the establishment of the International Association "European Routes of Nikos Kazantzakis", which serves as a platform for academic research, knowledge dissemination, cultural activities, and collaborations that contribute substantially to the promotion of a shared European identity, using Kazantzakis's world-acclaimed work and universal values as a vehicle for promoting European integration. To this end, the Association organises international scientific events, workshops, and other academic events, educational and literary tours following Kazantzakis's footsteps, and public cultural events. It also seeks to develop collaborations with Greek and European universities, as well as partnerships with thematically related certified Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

C. We will present the main conclusions of the International Scientific Conference entitled the "European Routes of Nikos Kazantzakis: From Yesterday's Heraklion to the Europe of Today and Tomorrow", Heraklion, Crete, Greece, 22–25 October 2026.



Communication & Brand positioning

The promotion and communication of cultural heritage play a crucial role in shaping destination identities, strengthening territorial visibility and fostering intercultural dialogue. In an increasingly interconnected tourism and digital landscape, Cultural Routes face the challenge of developing coherent narratives while engaging diverse audiences and balancing local identities with broader transnational heritage frameworks. The following contributions explore these issues through destination branding, the communication of culinary heritage and the representation and reception of shared European heritage among younger digital audiences.

Brand Positioning in a Transnational Serial World Heritage Site: Strategic Choices ofthe Great Spa Towns of Europe

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The World Heritage site Great Spa Towns of Europe is a serial World Heritage property in which 11 spa towns share a collective transnational inscription while maintaining distinct local identities and tourism markets. Within this multi-site configuration, each town must position itself not only in relation to non-listed spa destinations but also vis-à-vis other towns within the same World Heritage property. This study examines how inter-site relations within the serial property influence branding strategy choices between two positioning frameworks: local city-site branding and transnational serial World Heritage positioning.

Empirically, the study analyses destination branding materials across selected component towns to identify how these relational factors influence the choice between World Heritage-led, city-led, or hybrid positioning strategies. The research combines qualitative analysis of destination marketing materials (including official tourism websites, visual branding elements, and narrative positioning) with participant observation conducted at the Great Spa Towns of Europe Association General Assembly, providing insight into governance processes and strategic planning related to the development of a shared umbrella brand and individual city brands.

The analysis argues that positioning choices are shaped by multiple factors, including differing governance systems and hierarchical decision-making structures. These conditions may produce spa-town branding strategies that conflict with one another and, in turn, affect the overall image of the World Heritage property, with potential implications for the related European Cultural Route.



Representation and communication of the Krakow Culinary Trail in media and tourism publications

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Kraków promotes many culinary trails. The newest is the Krakow Culinary Trail, presented in December 2025, which revives forgotten recipes along nine historic sites of the city centre. It joins regional gourmet and wine routes, a two-star Michelin restaurant, commercial food tours and a tradition reaching back to the legendary feast of an emperor and four kings at Wierzynek in 1364. The presentation asks how these offers are communicated in media and tourism publications, and whether they present food as a menu or as an invitation to discover a place. The study combines a chronological review of culinary heritage initiatives with a qualitative content analysis of 17 key communications. They were selected from a wider search by three criteria, namely the authority of the sender, the originality of the source data and the reuse of these data by other texts. The key case is the Ojców trout. It is served in Kraków restaurants, including Bottiglieria 1881, and sold at the Kleparz market. Its source lies about 18 km away in a straight line, in trout ponds founded in 1935 and revived in 2014 by Magdalena Węgiel and Agnieszka Sendor in the Ojców National Park. The analysis reveals a split. Texts about the city show food at the table. Texts about the valley show landscape without food. The producers' story is repeated in up to five sources, while practical information on how to reach the ponds appears in single sources only. This gap defines the communication reserves of the case. The presentation per proposes the Ojców Trout Trail, a five-stage route from pond to table, and four communication principles for culinary routes in the spirit of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

Decoding the Silk Roads: Heritage Representation on Council of Europe Cultural Routes and the Reception Among Young Digital Audiences

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The Silk Roads are one of the most significant networks of trans-cultural exchange in world history, facilitating the movement of goods, technologies, beliefs and knowledge across Eurasia. They are recognised by UNESCO's Silk Roads Programme and by the World Heritage listing of the Chang'an–Tianshan corridor (Jamburia, 2022; Lin et al., 2024). However, they are not currently a certified Cultural Route of the Council of Europe and are traditionally described as an Asian and Middle Eastern route (Jamburia, 2022). This paper advances a European reading of the Silk Roads. The western section of the Silk Roads passes through at least three European countries (Brown and O'Brien, 2025;



Council of Europe Venice Office, n.d.). The European dimension of the Silk Roads has been relatively neglected in the research to date. This paper offers a European reading of the Silk Roads as a supplement to other regional readings and in line with the themes of the programme (De Ascaniis et al., 2020; Paquette, 2025), namely shared European memory, intercultural dialogue and cultural tourism and education. It contends that the Silk Roads should be a certified Cultural Route of the Council of Europe and that their absence from the programme is a lacuna in the Cultural Routes literature and in the institutional representation of European heritage.

As proof of the case, the study looks at seven officially certified Cultural Routes whose itineraries run through the historic corridors of the Silk Roads (the Route of El Legado Andalusí, the Phoenician Route, the Via Regia, the Cyril and Methodius Route, Romea Strata, the Iter Vitis and the Aeneas Route; Lin et al., 2024) and reads them as a distributed embodiment of the European Silk Roads: heritage that is already encoded, curated and communicated through the network of certified routes (Martens, 2022; Paquette, 2025). Their official Facebook and Instagram pages are sites of institutional encoding (De Ascaniis et al., 2020; Latvytė, 2025), and so the way these routes present the common heritage is indicative of what a certified Silk Roads route would inherit.

This study encompasses two phases. Phase one is a multimodal discourse analysis of 82 images drawn from 75 posts, using Kress and van Leeuwen's visual grammar and Barthes' concepts of anchorage and relay. The analysis is coded for identity, mobility, materiality and heritage ownership. The preferred readings are largely secured through the institutional paratext (the text outside the image), with ownership signalled by the presence of partners, ministries, municipalities and EU funding (Martens, 2022). In three of the routes there is an EU or Council of Europe mark embedded in the image itself. The routes differ in terms of modality (some are people-led, some object-led, and some are based around meetings and credentials).

Phase two is a reception study. Focus groups with European and Indian/South Asian participants aged 18-25 will respond to ten images (one or two per route) drawn from the Phase One corpus. Using Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model (Latvytė, 2025), the readings will be classified as dominant/hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional and compared across the cultural positions.

The paper presents a methodology for the analysis of the institutional encoding of heritage on social media, a case study in the certification of the Silk Roads as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, and a test of whether the preferred interpretations of European Cultural Routes are decoded differently by those positioned within and those positioned outside the European heritage framework (Latvytė, 2025).



ICTs and Digitalization

Digital transformation is changing how heritage is communicated, experienced, managed and protected. Focusing on websites, professional skills, landscape data, visitor monitoring and ICT-enabled governance, the five contributions in this section show how Cultural Routes can leverage technological innovation to improve accessibility, foster stakeholder engagement, enhance heritage interpretation and strengthen route management. Together, they highlight that digital transformation is not only a matter of tools, but of competences, evidence and shared frameworks that help Cultural Routes remain relevant, engaging and sustainable.

Online Communication of Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. An analysis of the official websites

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According to Resolution CM/Res(2023)2, which outlines the rules for the award of the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification, each Cultural Route (CR) must pertain to five priority fields of action, while fullfilling the criteria enumerated for each of them. While each CR addresses these fields of action through its distinctive structure and specific activities, all communicate their identity and initiatives primarily through their website. This paper examines how the CRs present themselves online and assesses whether, and how visibly, the five priority fields of action are reflected on their websites.
We conducted a benchmark of contents and functionalities based on the criteria enumerated in the resolution. An element scored 1 if it appeared in the menu or interface as a clickable label opening a dedicated section, or if it was displayed prominently even without such lable, while it scored 0 if it was not present or scarcely visible. Results vary by field as well as by CR. In the field Co-operation in research and development about half of the Routes name their scientific committee and list its members, while fewer present academic publications or collaborations. The fields Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage and Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development show the highest occurrence of dedicated contents: almost all Routes present their heritage thoroughly, together with maps and attractions that facilitate visits. In the field Contemporary cultural and artistic practice, more than half of the Routes promote events dedicated to different forms of contemporary artistic practice. Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans is the least represented field, with the lowest scores, although the examples identified show innovative and varied ways of approaching this theme.
We conclude that communicating only some of the five fields risks reducing a certified network to look like a conventional tourist itinerary, and that routes could benefit from



learning from one another to better convey what it means to be a Council of Europe Cultural Route.

The digital transformation of European Cultural Routes professionals

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For heritage professionals working in the context of the European Cultural Routes (CRs), continuous professional development through upskilling and reskilling is essential, particularly in digital and creative competencies. Tourists now discover, plan and share their visits to heritage sites online, and increasingly expect interactive, immersive ways to experience them: from digital experiences and social media interactions to augmented reality reconstructions and virtual tours. Cultural Routes professionals who want to reach these audiences, and meet their needs and expectations, need strong creative and digital competencies. This pressure does not come from tourists alone: European cultural and tourism policies, from the European Agenda for Culture to the digital transition priorities of the EU, call on heritage operators to adopt innovative, people-centred and sustainable digital practices. This makes Cultural Routes key test environments for putting these agendas in practice.

The Erasmus+ NEXT ROUTES project[1] identified and assessed the current skills gaps and future skills needs of Cultural Routes professionals, to support the digital transition of the sector.

The project consortium consisted of 5 Cultural Routes certified by the Council of Europe[2], which differ widely in staffing levels and in digital literacy and maturity. To assess and develop a tailored digital strategy, the project applied a three-tier research methodology: interviews with the director of each route, a skills assessment survey and focus groups, the last two held within each route. This made it possible to identify the most recurrent skill and competency gaps among the Cultural Routes professionals and, on that basis, to develop tailored training modules. This exercise resulted in 4 modules: digital marketing and promotion, engagement and participation, cultural heritage promotion, and gamification. Each of these 4 training modules tackles one specific skill gap that emerged through the competency mapping.

As digital technologies continue to reshape how heritage is documented, presented and shared, professionals need to know how to create and manage digital content, and what digital platforms and tools to use to increase public engagement. They also need to treat storytelling not only as a means to communicate and interpret heritage, but also as an inclusive and responsible practice. Games and gamification can strengthen it by creating fresh, innovative experiences for younger audiences in which enjoyment, fun, inspiration and knowledge transfer in a playful way are core to the heritage experience.

The training modules form a transnational Training Framework, which also includes a digital toolkit and guidelines with practical tools on how to use them. The modules are



designed to move smoothly from understanding to doing: theory, practice, reflection, and real-world application.
This presentation shows how the framework came about and how it can help address the complexity inherent in Cultural Routes: their transnational character and the need to bridge diverse cultural identities and realities across multiple countries, with a shared heritage to preserve as the common goal. As digital and creative landscapes evolve, the professionals working within these routes must evolve with them. Strengthening their skills ensures that Cultural Routes remain relevant, engaging, and sustainable in a rapidly changing environment. By aligning the NEXT ROUTES Training Framework with EU strategies on digital skills, cultural heritage and sustainable tourism, the project generated insights that can inform future European policy measures on Cultural Routes and transnational heritage cooperation.

[1] ERASMUS+ Programme – KA220-VET: Cooperation partnerships in vocational education and training, Agreement Number: 2023–165158.
[2] Notably, the Phoenicians' Route, European Route of Jewish Heritage (AEPJ), European Mozart Ways, Routes of the Olive Tree, ATRIUM – Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th Century in Europe's Urban Memory, and Iron Age Danube Route.

Cultural Routes as Landscape Reading Devices: GIS-Based Multisensory Indicators for Digital Interpretation

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Cultural routes are experienced through a sequence of visual and acoustic environments. Quantifying the landscape features that shape this experience can provide spatial evidence for sustainable trail planning and for the digital interpretation of landscape variation. This study develops and tests a GIS-based framework that integrates land-use data with field-based visual and acoustic indicators to assess landscape quality along a selected section of a rural walking trail in Tuscany, Italy. The study area is characterised by a transition from peri-urban settings to agricultural and forested landscapes.
Land use was analysed using CORINE Land Cover data within a 40 m buffer along the trail. The analysis included ecotope frequency, Shannon diversity and evenness indices, a land-use sustainability index, and the Use and Coverage GIS Perception Index. Multisensory field surveys documented visual conditions through panoramic photography and measurements of visual openness. Acoustic conditions were recorded using AudioMoth passive acoustic recorders, allowing biological, geophysical and anthropogenic sound components to be distinguished. The spatial and field data were



then integrated into composite GIS-based indices of visual quality and acoustic composition.
The derived indices indicate medium to high landscape quality along the analysed section. The highest values occur in forest-agricultural mosaics, while lower values in specific areas coincide with localised anthropogenic pressures. The framework translates visual and acoustic observations into comparable, spatially explicit indicators and identifies how multisensory landscape quality varies along the route.
These georeferenced outputs can support rural trail planning, landscape management and visitor-experience design. They may also inform map-based interpretation, location-sensitive storytelling, wayfinding and digital visitor information by showing where landscape quality changes and which sensory components characterise individual route sections. The framework therefore provides a measurable basis for communicating the multisensory dimensions of cultural routes without reducing landscape experience to visual qualities alone.

ICT-Enabled Resilience: Enhancing OUV Through Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Tourism on Transnational Linear Cultural Routes

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Against the backdrop of intensifying mass tourism pressures on transnational linear cultural heritage routes, this study addresses the inherent conflicts between heritage conservation and unsustainable tourism development, while exploring digital-driven solutions for heritage protection and long-term resilience. This study constructs a fully layered analytical framework for its research design. As its foundation, it is grounded in sustainable tourism theory (Butler, 1980) and upholds the core principle of heritage conservation set out in the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972). From this theoretical base, it adopts ecological resilience theory (Holling, 1973; Walker et al., 2004) as its core analytical perspective to evaluate adaptation and long-term stability in cultural route tourism systems. For operational analysis, it employs socio-technical systems (STS) theory (Bijker et al., 1987; Latour, 1987) to examine how ICT systems function within integrated socio-technical arrangements, rather than as standalone technical tools. To finalize and validate the framework, it aligns all analysis with UNESCO's standards for authenticity and integrity in digital heritage (UNESCO, 2003, 2019), ensuring consistency with global heritage governance norms.
This study centers on one core research question: What evidence-based, transferable digital empowerment paradigm supported by ICT can be developed to enhance the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) and support the long-term resilient development of transnational linear cultural routes?
Within the UNESCO cultural route and heritage tourism system, the ICT scope targeted in this study covers four policy-aligned core dimensions: digital cultural preservation,



transboundary governance digitalization, sustainable tourism digital empowerment, and integrated digital mechanism design for long-term resilience.

Employing a mixed research design, this study integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches to systematically analyze the ICT-enabled framework for transnational linear cultural routes. The design centers on a comparative dimension between two designated case studies: the Via Francigena and the Digital Silk Road. It systematically compares institutional governance structures, digital heritage implementation practices, and sustainable tourism operation models across these two transnational cultural routes, with analyses anchored in UNESCO World Heritage Standards and European Cultural Route Policy Benchmarks (Council of Europe, 2021). The study further combines empirical case analysis with policy-aligned interpretive inquiry, drawing on policy documents, project reports, and academic literature to validate the proposed digital empowerment paradigm.

By employing this research design, the study clarifies the interactive synergistic mechanism between comprehensive ICT infrastructure, cultural heritage conservation, and resilient sustainable tourism. It verifies that a standardized transnational digital cultural backbone can balance rigorous heritage protection and responsible tourism sustainability, without compromising core heritage values. The expected findings consist of two key contributions: a set of measurable heritage-centered indicators for digital empowerment along cultural routes, and a complete, cross-continental, transferable governance paradigm. This research delivers targeted, rigorous academic support and practical references for enhancing the Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) of European cultural routes, and offers a theoretically grounded, policy-compliant digital governance model for the Council of Europe's cultural routes strategy. It further advances integrated theoretical exploration at the intersection of digital humanities, heritage science, and sustainable tourism, supporting targeted, systematic inquiry into the conservation and development of transnational linear cultural routes.



Governance and Development

Digital transformation is increasingly reshaping every field of human activity. Information adn Communication Technologies offer Cultural Routes new opportunities to enhance heritage accessibility, visitor engagement and sustainable territorial development. At the same time, they provide valuable tools for understanding landscapes, monitoring visitor flows and strengthening the resilience of transnational heritage networks. The following contributions explore these developments, addressing online communication strategies, professional digital skills, GIS-based landscape interpretation, visitor monitoring and ICT-enabled approaches to heritage conservation and sustainable tourism.

Strategies for the development of the Cyril and Methodius Route on Macedonian soil: achievements and perspectives

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The Cyril and Methodius Route, as a part of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes programme, offers a model for scientific research and development, affirmation of European cultural heritage, cultural and educational exchange of young people in Europe, development of management in cultural tourism, etc. Ss. Cyril and Methodius' cultural heritage has a long and deep tradition on the territory of R.N. Macedonia, evident in both tangible and intangible cultural forms. The new perspectives in cultural tourism related to the Cyril and Methodius cultural heritage on Macedonian territory can be treated as both a cultural and an economic activity related to events and organized trips, aimed at exploring cultural forms such as: historical monuments, architectural complexes, as well as artistic, religious, educational and informative events of an academic nature. Tracing the trajectory of Saints Cyril and Methodius provides not only historical research, but also monitoring of their lasting presence in the Macedonian cultural memory and cultural heritage, and at the same time opens up the possibility of sharing it, as part of the wider European cultural space. The European Cultural Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius as a pan-European tourist product and as multi-level academic research strengthens European identity and shares common cultural heritage and values.

In the presentation, we highlight as particularly significant the strategies in the implementation of new practices in the development activities of the European Cultural Route of Saints Cyril and Methodius on Macedonian soil, consistent with the practices in other member countries of the Route itself. The main points of interest of our presentation are:

1. Historical and Cultural Significance of C&M Route
2. Ohrid as a potential for cultural tourism in the frame of C&M Route



3. C&M Route in the educational process of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje
4. C&M Route as a research topic in the Institute of Macedonian Literature
5. Contemporary challenges of C&M Route in North Macedonia (tourism, celebrations, cultural events)

Empirical Analysis of the Governance of the Camino de Santiago Cultural Routes in Portugal

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The certification of the Camino de Santiago Cultural Routes in Portugal, established under Decreto-Lei nº. 51/2019, of April 17, represents a significant step to the institutionalization and valorisation of those cultural routes. However, empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of this legal and governance framework in practice remains limited. The territorial governance of cultural routes raises specific challenges, particularly when these itineraries extend across multiple territories and involve different institutional levels of decision-making. In the portuguese context, the certification process requires the submission of Management Plans designed to structure actions of protection, promotion and valorisation. However, the legal framework does not specify a governance model or set forth effective coordination mechanisms among the relevant stakeholders, which leads to important concerns regarding territorial cohesion and governance capacity. These challenges are particularly relevant when considering the ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes (2008), which emphasizes integrated, participatory and transnational governance models.

This study presents the results of a qualitative empirical analysis of the certification process of the Camino de Santiago Cultural Routes in Portugal. It received financial support from the Institutional Chair of the Camino de Santiago and Pilgrimages at the University of Santiago de Compostela and was conducted between october and december 2024. The research combines documentary analysis of certification processes and the Management Plans of the five certified routes with semi-structured interviews conducted with managing entities and municipalities encountered along those routes.

The findings reveal significant governance challenges. First, there is a fragmentation among stakeholders, reflected in limited coordination between managing entities and municipalities, despite the latter being primarily responsible for implementing the Management Plans. Second, the study identifies a limited operationalization of governance instruments, with Management Plans often functioning as formal requirements rather than as effective mechanisms of territorial management. Third, the research highlights the marginal role of local communities, whose participation remains largely passive and indirect throughout both the certification and implementation phases. Empirical evidence further indicates that actions developed under the Management Plans are predominantly oriented towards tourism promotion, route identification and



cultural heritage valorisation, while key dimensions such as education, capacity building and community engagement remain significantly underdeveloped. This reflects a broader policy orientation in which certification operates primarily as an economic and tourism-driven instrument, rather than as a comprehensive and territorially cohesive cultural governance model.

Drawing on the contemporary debate on territorial dignity, the paper argues that these findings reveal structural limitations in the current legal framework, particularly in its capacity to ensure coordinated governance, meaningful community participation and balanced territorial development. It therefore proposes the adoption of a more integrated and inclusive governance model, based on the clarification of responsibilities, the introduction of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the active inclusion of local communities throughout the governance cycle.

Taking Root – Humans and Plants in Exile: Cultural Route Governance in Practice on the Huguenot and Waldensian Trail

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This paper analyses the travelling exhibition Taking Root – Humans and Plants in Exile as a case study within the Cultural Route Huguenot and Waldensian Trail, certified by the Council of Europe in 2013. The route retraces the forced migrations of Protestant communities following the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685) and subsequent persecutions, connecting territories across France, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany through a shared narrative of exile, integration, and cultural exchange.

Building on interdisciplinary research combining history, botany, cultural studies, and heritage interpretation, the exhibition offers an innovative approach to the interpretation of transnational memory. It explores the circulation of plants, agricultural knowledge, and culinary traditions alongside human displacement, thus framing migration as a vector of socio-economic and cultural enrichment. By linking historical exile to contemporary debates on migration, identity, and sustainability, the exhibition contributes to the reinterpretation of European heritage as a dynamic and living process.

Methodologically, this article adopts a qualitative case study approach grounded in governance analysis, drawing on project documentation, exhibition content analysis, and stakeholder collaboration frameworks. Particular attention is paid to the multilevel governance model underpinning the initiative, which is based on transnational cooperation among route members, including researchers, cultural practitioners, local authorities, and heritage institutions. This collaborative structure enables the co-creation of interpretative tools and reinforces the role of cultural routes as platforms for knowledge exchange and capacity building.

The findings highlight three key contributions. First, the exhibition demonstrates how cultural routes can operationalize the core values of the Council of Europe, namely



human rights, intercultural dialogue, and democratic participation, through accessible and multi-layered heritage interpretation. Second, it illustrates the potential of integrating natural and cultural heritage (e.g., plant migration and agricultural practices) to foster innovative narratives that resonate with contemporary sustainability agendas, including slow tourism and territorial development. Third, it underscores the importance of network-based governance in enabling scalable and replicable cultural projects across borders.
The case study ultimately shows that the Taking Root – Humans and Plants in Exile exhibition functions not only as a tool for heritage dissemination but also as a mechanism for strengthening European identity through shared memory and collaborative practices. By highlighting the positive impacts of historical migrations on host societies, it contributes to reframing migration as a process of mutual enrichment, aligning with current policy priorities and societal challenges.
This research contributes to the growing body of scientific knowledge on Cultural Routes governance by providing empirical evidence of how transnational networks can generate innovative, interdisciplinary, and socially relevant heritage initiatives. It also offers transferable insights for practitioners and policymakers seeking to strengthen governance structures, participatory processes, and the socio-economic impacts of Cultural Routes within the broader framework of sustainable tourism and European cooperation.

Challenges of developing cross-border thematic routes. Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in Croatia

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This paper presents the key challenges of developing Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, using the Croatian region of Istria as a case study. In the framework of the programme 52 cultural routes have been certified, of which 20 pass through Croatia, with the aim of promoting common European values, heritage, and identity. The Republic of Croatia has been a full member of the Council of Europe since 1996, and acceded to the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes in 2016. Croatian cultural heritage, shaped by centuries of interaction with neighbouring cultures, reflects unique transnational and multicultural dimensions, bridging Mediterranean, Central European and Balkan influences.
The main goal of this research is to elaborate on the current state and development perspectives of Croatian sections of European cultural routes, focusing on Istria County, a cross-border and multicultural region with seven certified routes. To answer the research question: “What are the key challenges of developing Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe in Croatia/Istria region” the authors employed qualitative methodology, combining desk and field research, available statistics and policy documents, and semi-structured interviews with representatives of key stakeholders. The research focuses on



selected successful examples of European cultural routes in Istria County (such as ATRIUM), alongside routes with significant potential for further development (The Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route and ERIH). The research results indicate several key findings related to the issues of fragmented governance systems, limited institutional capacity, weak stakeholders collaboration, and dependence on short-term project funding, particularly due to tourism monoculture and sectoral policy silos which dominate development strategies. This research contributes to discussions on the challenges of translating transnational cultural policy objectives into regional practice. The case of Istria highlights the importance of sustained institutional commitment, collaborative stakeholder arrangements, and the integration of cultural heritage into long-term cultural development strategies.



Tourism

Cultural Routes are increasingly important drivers of tourism development, offering opportunities to create distinctive visitor experiences while enhancing the value of cultural heritage and local territories. Their success depends on the ability to develop tourism models that respect the identity and specific characteristics of places, encourage local participation and promote sustainable forms of mobility and visitation. The following contributions examine how literary landscapes, local governance initiatives, transnational heritage networks, cemeteries and historic accommodation can contribute to the diversification and enrichment of cultural tourism, while fostering a more responsible and place-based approach to destination development.

From Biographical Trails to Ethical Mobility: A Dual-Axis Framework for Expanding Council of Europe Literary Routes

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Literary Cultural Routes frequently derive their legitimacy from documented relationships between authors and particular places. Such biographical anchoring provides an important basis for authenticity, but it can also constrain the geographical and interpretive development of literary heritage. This paper develops a framework for addressing that tension through the concept of ethical mobility, understood as a form of secular pilgrimage: movement through landscape understood as a potentially formative practice involving embodied experience, narrative interpretation, perceptual attention and ethical reflection.

The framework begins with the question, Where did he go? This establishes documentary traceability and protects the historical integrity of a literary route. It then asks, How did he perceive? This shifts attention from an author's geographical itinerary towards recurring modes of attention, encounter, movement and interpretation apparent in literary and biographical material, without claiming direct access to authorial psychology. A third question follows: What might that way of perceiving make possible for a contemporary traveller? This provides the bridge between historical-literary interpretation and contemporary route design.

The paper develops a Dual-Axis Framework comprising an experiential axis of physical, narrative and ethical engagement, and a designed axis distinguishing historical, resonant, geopoetic/attentional and participatory relationships between places, texts and travellers. These categories describe different grounds for inclusion rather than a hierarchy of authenticity.

Robert Louis Stevenson provides the case through which the framework is developed and demonstrated. Four contrasting landscapes are examined: the Cévennes/GR70 as a historical-biographical landscape; the Scottish Highlands associated with Kidnapped



as a narratively resonant landscape; Monaco as a documented biographical and attentional landscape; and Colinton Dell as an integrated landscape combining literary memory, geological time, industrial heritage, ecological processes and contemporary mobility.

The paper distinguishes an interpretive Essence of Stevenson, concerning how the world is encountered, from a Spirit of Stevenson, concerning how others and the world are approached. Neither is presented as a definitive statement of Stevenson's philosophy or psychology. Equally, contemporary concepts such as ethical mobility, geopoetics, sustainability or participatory heritage are not retrospectively attributed to Stevenson. Rather, established features of his literary and geographical legacy are brought into dialogue with contemporary concepts for route design.

The paper further proposes a spiral model of departure, encounter, perception, reflection, reorientation and renewed departure. The model suggests cumulative experiential possibility without claiming predetermined visitor transformation. The resulting framework delivers a transparent and transferable approach to expanding literary Cultural Routes beyond strict biographical cartography while continuing to maintain distinctions between historical evidence, literary representation, contemporary interpretation and participation.

Between transnational and hyperlocal scales: The Røst Tourism Manifesto as a case-study in participatory tourism governance within Via Querinissima, a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe

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This proposal examines the development of the Tourism Manifesto for the island of Røst. Located at the southernmost tip of the Lofoten archipelago, Røst represents a territory (Massey, 2005) that, despite being off the beaten track of conventional tourism, plays a strategic role as a node within the Via Querinissima, a European Cultural Route of the Council of Europe.

The analysis of the Røst case is not intended as an isolated report; rather, it proposes a methodological model with potential for application in other territories. The objective is to provide a concrete framework for reflection for other territories within the Cultural Routes network, demonstrating how the regenerative approach and the theoretical principles of sustainability can be translated into operational tools for local governance.

The Manifesto emerged within this network context from a practical question: how can local cultural heritage linked to the Via Querinissima be promoted without triggering tourism growth dynamics that are incompatible with the island’s socio-ecological balance?

The project thus fits directly into the debate on the role of Cultural Routes as instruments for territorial development. If Cultural Routes aim to promote tourism that is both sustainable and rooted in the territory, it becomes crucial to equip local nodes with



operational tools capable of translating such principles into concrete decision-making criteria.

The Manifesto was conceived to define limits, priorities and values established at the local level for tourism development. It complementarily integrates the paradigms of sustainable tourism, regenerative tourism and community-based tourism. The theoretical framework assumes that these paradigms are not alternatives but integrable conceptual tools: sustainability provides the horizon of environmental and socio-economic responsibility; community-based tourism ensures participatory anchoring and local self-determination; and regenerative tourism acts as a critical extension of sustainability, introducing the issue of qualitative limits, relational responsibility and territorial balance in small-scale contexts. Building on this theoretical framework, data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews with residents and a participatory workshop.

The Røst Manifesto approach translates this theory into a hyper-local operational model, considered crucial for the sustainable governance of Cultural Routes. Its fundamental contribution lies in redefining sustainability not as growth management, but as the articulation of social and ecological thresholds defined at the local level. In this perspective, carrying capacity is reinterpreted in qualitative and relational terms, encompassing compatibility with existing economic structures, cultural continuity and the contribution of tourism to collective well-being.

Although hyper-local, the Røst Manifesto represents a model of active European citizenship, where a small Norwegian community engages with a transnational network, the Via Querinissima, contributing to a vision of Europe composed of resilient territories rather than mere tourist flows.

In relation to Cultural Routes, the Røst Tourism Manifesto represents a case study that offers insights into how the principles of sustainability and regeneration can be translated into participatory governance practices, allowing territories to define their own "conditions of acceptability" for tourism development. In doing so, it aligns the promotion of European cultural heritage with community resilience, ecological limits, and long-term territorial balance, supporting a shift from the rhetoric of sustainability toward governance based on locally defined thresholds and responsibilities.

The Cyril and Methodius Route in Slovakia: A Model of Sustainable Cultural Tourism and European Identity

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The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme provides an important framework for linking cultural heritage, fostering intercultural dialogue, and supporting sustainable regional development. The Cyril and Methodius Route (C&M Route) is a unique transnational network focused on Slavic cultural heritage and a shared European



identity. It connects tangible heritage – such as sacred architecture and archaeological sites – with intangible elements, including liturgical traditions and the Glagolitic script.

This paper presents the Slovak branch of the C&M Route as a case study of strategic, sustainable, and participatory cultural route development. It explores how the route can be effectively supported, how it contributes to the core values of the Council of Europe, and how it helps stakeholders achieve goals related to cultural participation, human rights awareness, social inclusion, sustainable development, and cross-border cooperation. It also highlights the C&M Route's expanding networking activities and institutional framework across local, national, and international levels.

A key instrument for its development is the national strategic document "Concept for the Development of the Cyril and Methodius Route in Slovakia until 2030". This document emphasises the integration of cultural-historical heritage with regional development policies and tourism strategies, promoting a systematic and innovative approach to cultural route management. It was created through active stakeholder participation and is grounded in interdisciplinary research conducted by universities in fields such as history, geography, culture, tourism, and sustainable development.

The concept pays particular attention to multi-level governance, involving cooperation among the national coordinator, regional authorities, academia, church institutions, local communities, and the private sector. It also outlines key priorities of the 2026 – 2028 action plan, including the further development of walking, cycling, and motoring routes, the diversification of activities, and the implementation of digital tools to enhance the visitor experience. At the same time, it underlines the role of cultural routes in supporting local economies, promoting less-visited regions, and contributing to education.

The strategic importance of the C&M Route is reinforced by international projects that reflect its evolution into a comprehensive tourism product. The project "Hiking on Foot for All along Cultural Routes" (ERASMUS+ Sport) promotes inclusive tourism by encouraging physical activity and social interaction among disadvantaged groups, including people with disabilities, seniors, and women in rural areas. Its outputs include participatory events integrating the C&M Route into wider European networks such as the Via Francigena and St. Olav Ways.

Another initiative, the Interreg SK–CZ project "Cyril and Methodius Route – Tourist Guides Training", focuses on training certified guides specialising in Cyrillo-Methodian heritage in the Czech-Slovak border region. By developing methodological materials and demonstration routes, it enhances the quality of guiding services and supports sustainable tourism development.

The paper also addresses how this heritage – rooted in the cultural, religious, and linguistic foundations of Slavic identity – can be interpreted through modern approaches such as digitalisation, storytelling, and experiential tourism.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of the C&M Route depends on its transformation from an awareness-raising initiative into a comprehensive tourism product supported by a strong international brand.



Walking Memory and Cultural Routes of Death
Cemetery Tourism, Digital narratives, and the Italian Experience

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Cemetery visitation is increasingly recognized as a meaningful spatial practice through which individuals engage with memory, identity, tourism and emotional well-being in both difficult and celebratory life moments. This study conceptualizes cemeteries as complex cultural landscapes and interprets them within the theoretical framework of cultural routes, as defined by the Council of Europe. In this perspective, cemeteries are not isolated heritage sites but nodes within broader transnational networks that connect histories, artistic and cultural expressions, and shared European values.

Traditionally associated with religiosity, mourning, and commemoration, cemeteries are undergoing processes of reinterpretation shaped by contemporary tourism dynamics, particularly within the domains of dark tourism, also ancestral tourism to connect or reconnect with an individual's ancestral past. At the same time, they are increasingly perceived as restorative environments, where practices such as walking and slow exploration contribute to therapeutic and affective experiences. These evolving uses reinforce their role as cultural landscapes in which material heritage, symbolic meanings, and embodied practices intersect.

The Italian context provides a particularly significant case study, given the density and cultural stratification of its monumental cemeteries, which often operate as open-air museums integrating artistic, architectural, and historical heritage. Methodologically, the research adopts a mixed qualitative approach combining bibliographic review, field visits, and semi-structured interviews with visitors, alongside a systematic analysis of cemetery-related websites. In particular, the study applies qualitative content analysis using NVivo 12, where units of analysis consist of recurring words identified through frequency counts and co-occurrence networks. This approach enables the identification of dominant themes and interpretative patterns within digital narratives, revealing how online representations contribute to the construction of cemeteries as tourism destinations and potential cultural routes.

By integrating digital and spatial analyses, the study highlights how heritage communication and online visibility play a crucial role in shaping visitor perceptions and experiences. This research advances the understanding of cemeteries as dynamic and relational heritage systems, also ancestral tourism. It argues that their integration into structured cultural itineraries can enhance both their visibility and their interpretative depth, fostering new forms of cultural tourism and participatory heritage consumption.

Ultimately, the study contributes to ongoing debates in cultural geography and heritage tourism by positioning cemeteries as evolving cultural routes that mediate between space, memory, and mobility in a rapidly transforming socio-cultural and digital landscape.



Cultural routes, heritage accommodation, and tourist experiences

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Cultural heritage, with its uses and meanings, does not result from rigid or formatted processes, but, on the contrary, arises from the dynamics of the time and circumstances in which it is inserted and involved, that is, it arises from how and where it is interpreted (Richards, 2021).

By implicitly incorporating the idea of cultural routes, the Heritage Cycle (Thurley, 2005), which is based on the connection between understanding, appreciation, protection, and experience, creates positive cause-and-effect relationships that enable individuals to engage with heritage in a comprehensive, coherent, and balanced manner (Zhou et al., 2025).

If, in the early 2000s, the appeal of the cultural product itself constituted the main motivational factor for visiting, by the end of that same decade it was the imperative of a cultural itinerary, which highlights the resources, their conservation and the networked offer, that was identified with the underlying purpose of the behavioral variables of cultural tourists (Yu and Xu, 2019).

Within this context, heritage accommodation units also emerge, known and recognized for the distinctive features of their architecture, but also for the high value-added tourism experiences they provide, in relation to which it is essential to adopt a holistic view and consider their multifaceted nature, capable of contributing to the competitiveness and sustainability of accommodations and destinations (Elshaer et al., 2022).

Studying and concluding the impact of the historical and cultural value of these accommodation units in relation to the influence they exert on tourists' decision-making process is, therefore, an approach that, in addition to being timely due to the concepts it encompasses, seems strategic for the design, communication, and facilitation of the tourist experience and for the robustness of cultural itineraries.

The following research question is posed: To what extent does the historical and heritage value of accommodation influence tourists' decision-making?

Using an online questionnaire administered to tourists with experience in heritage accommodation, which yielded 581 responses, a corresponding statistical analysis was performed, with results of great relevance to science and management. The data were collected in Portugal, between April 16 and June 16, 2024, through personal contacts, with a snowball effect that led to new contacts, resulting in significant participation.

Among the findings, the historical and cultural dimension stands out, along with its impact on sensory impressions, nostalgia, and the co-creation of value within the context of smart tourism experiences. The appeal of history, architecture, and landscape setting also figures among the most influential factors in tourists' decision-making process.



Spirituality & Universal values

Spirituality and the pursuit of shared values are essential dimensions of the cultural and human experience embodied by Cultural Routes. Beyond their religious origins, these pathways can foster reflection, intercultural understanding and a sense of belonging, providing spaces in which diverse traditions and communities engage with universal principles such as peace, solidarity, hospitality and mutual respect. The following contributions explore how spiritual heritage, monastic traditions and pilgrimage practices can contribute to the preservation of cultural memory, the development of a shared European identity and the promotion of dialogue and peace across borders.

Defining Spiritual Sustainability. From Theory to practice along the Romea Strata

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Over the last years a growing number of international scholars has been considering the need to integrate spirituality in the reflections about sustainability and its well-known pillars, the environmental, the social and the economic ones (Zarate-Torres et al, 2025; Luetz, Nunn, 2023). In particular, Aulet and Duda conceptualize “spiritual sustainability” in their reflection on tourism accessibility and its impact on sacred sites (2020). According to their definition “spiritual sustainability” mainly refers to “the preservation of the spirit of a place, the original use, and the sacredness of the site”. According to them “spiritual sustainability” means “preservation of spiritual values of sacred places by offering services to pilgrims and devotees, by avoiding excessive transformation of the site to adapt to tourism needs, and by making visitors aware of the spiritual values of the places”.

Starting from these insights, the study aims to enrich the definition of “spiritual sustainability” by investigating how the concept is used in the literature. From a methodological standpoint, a bibliometric analysis is conducted on a corpus of scientific publications addressing the concept. The aim is to understand which disciplines mobilize this concept, how it has evolved over time, and mostly what recurring themes and issues are associated with it.

This analysis intends to develop a definition of “spiritual sustainability” that captures its complexity, and describes specificities or connections with respect to the three abovementioned dimensions of sustainability—environmental, social, and economic—and also with respect to the cultural dimension of sustainability.

The second part of the analysis then aims to operationalize the concept of “spiritual sustainability” by attempting to verify to what extent the proposed definition can be applied to concrete case studies.



To do this, the ancient historical-religious itinerary known as the Romea Strata has been selected. Extending over 4,000 kilometres from the Baltic Sea to Rome and certified in 2025 as Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, the Romea Strata traverses seven countries, different landscapes, meets various communities, and sacred sites belonging to multiple religious and cultural traditions. It is a representative case of living social system where the intersection of religion, spirituality, intercultural dialogue, and values diversity define the tourism experience though the multiple dimensions of sustainability, including the spiritual one (Gasparini, 2022; Shinde, Olsen, 2023; Meneghello, 2024; Trono et al., 2024).

The representatives of the seven European managing authorities of the Route have been interviewed to understand their personal definitions of “spiritual sustainability” and how well these align with the proposed definition deriving from the research analysis. Moreover, some questions explored how “spiritual sustainability” is manifested along the different areas of the Romea Strata in Europe and whether it connects to the concept of a religious pilgrimage route with Rome as its destination.

The study’s findings contribute to the scholarly debate on sustainability by seeking to expand the scientific definition of “spiritual sustainability” beyond the sphere of sacred heritage and religious values preservation toward a broader horizon that includes environmental and ethical concerns. The research offers a new lens for interpreting the causes and effects of modern pilgrimages and religious tourism, hopefully providing innovative tools for impact assessment on spaces and communities as well as the quality of visitors’ experiences.

Monastic Networks in Knots: The Cluniac Sites in Europe ECR and the Architectural Heritage of Italian Cluniac Monasteries Reformed in the Early Modern Period

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Certified in 2005, the “Cluniac Sites in Europe” represents an ECR rooted in the historical and enduring cultural influence of the Cluniac reform of the Benedictine order (10th century). It spans several European regions, including the Italian peninsula, a key context for understanding the early modern reconfiguration of medieval Cluniac monastic sites. Here, indeed, many Cluniac monasteries underwent further reformation in the early modern period, joining the Benedictine Cassinese Congregation. By 1582, over 100 monasteries, most of them former Cluniac, had been incorporated into the congregational system.

An examination of “Clunypedia”, the CR’s atlas – which includes sites already inserted in the CR as well as others across Europe – shows that, out of this considerable number of Italian Cluniac-later Cassinese sites, only 5 have so far been mapped, with just one (San Benedetto Po) currently included in the CR.



The architectural transformations of the Cluniac monasteries that occurred after the incorporation into the Cassinese network have been the focus of the author's PhD research project, conducted in collaboration with the project "CoenoBIuM". Combining comparative architectural-historical analysis with digital/computational humanities methodologies, the research examined the transformations of monastic complexes in relation to their changing institutional context, while also investigating the persistence and reconfiguration of their medieval architectural fabric. In particular, a relational database, integrating chronological, institutional, and architectural data – including the phases of Cluniac foundation, the transitions to the Congregation, the analysis of surviving medieval material sources, and the abbatial sequences – has been developed and served as a basis for the construction of the Cassinese digital atlas, as well as a multi-scalar data model to support data collection, sharing and comparisons.

Grounded in the results of the aforementioned research, the present contribution proposes a study that explores how the "Cluniac Sites in Europe" CR could be further extended, linked, and cross-referenced to other historically related monastic systems. Italian Cluniac monasteries reformed in the early modern period can be critically understood as an expansion node within the wider European Cluniac framework, since the Cassinese Congregation may also be considered a network of reformed Cluniac foundations. In relation to this, the investigation explores how this conceptual expansion could inform the further development of "Clunypedia", through the transfer, scaling, and adaptation of the digital and methodological approaches developed, together with the data collected and analysed. The proposed approach thus seeks to draw attention to the possibility of integrating and enriching the CR's digital atlas, which exhibits differentiated levels of data coverage, including areas, such as the Italian context, where further development – through the mapping of additional sites and the progressive completion of catalogue entries – would contribute to a more robust dataset and a more comprehensive and analytical understanding of the concept of Cluniac cultural network.

Beyond extending the atlas's geographical and documentary coverage, this approach also offers an opportunity to explore how digital representations of Cluniac heritage can account for the historical stratification of monastic networks, including the changing institutional affiliations and architectural transformations of individual sites. More widely, the proposal aims to contribute to a broader reflection on ECRs, critically exploring the potential to establish connections with other historically grounded cultural systems, fostering the cross-fertilisation of research methodologies, knowledge frameworks, and digital infrastructures, and promoting processes of reciprocal enhancement and valorisation.



The Religious Heritage of the Croatian People on the Path to European Unity

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The Croatian people had an interesting history of their integration into the community of European nations. Arriving on the shores of the Adriatic Sea during the great migration of peoples in the 7th century, they found the shattered civilization of the Western Roman Empire, which was already on its last legs due to barbarian incursions dating back to the end of the 4th century. For its part, the Croatian people had neither developed literacy nor culture, except that they brought with them the customs and beliefs of Slavic religiosity, which at that time was regarded as pagan. But little by little, it came into contact not only with the local Christian population but also with other surrounding peoples who were already traditionally Christian, such as the Byzantine Empire, or who had since become Christian, such as the Franks. Of particular importance was contact with the Roman Apostolic See, with which the Croats began to establish good relations. All of these were good prerequisites for mutual acceptance and the exchange of values. This led to an opening up to the process of inculturation, whereby peoples of the Christian denomination offered the Croatian people not only new religious content, but also a greater cultural fellowship in accordance with the ancient culture that began to awaken among the peoples of Europe, who, especially during the Carolingian era, began to feel like one unified whole, that is, the new Western Roman Empire. On that path of inculturation of the Croatian people into the European cultural unity, the figure of St. Jerome the Dalmatian was significant, serving not only in the process of the people's Christianization but also as a cultural model that enabled the Croatian people to integrate into the European unity even with their own distinct language. To this end, the legend also spread that Saint Jerome was the author of the Slavic alphabet, Glagolica, and thus the Croatian people, while accepting the common features of Western (Latin) culture that marked other European peoples, yet preserved the distinctiveness of its language (Old Slavonic) and script (Glagolitic), which was used not only in everyday life but also in continuous liturgical use from the 9th century until the most recent times.

The importance of the figure and name of Saint Jerome for the Croatian people is great, and in his honor many individuals, monastic communities, and localities bear his name. Furthermore, there is a significant number of churches, monasteries, and altars dedicated to him, which opens up the idea that a whole network of Jerome-related cultural routes could be created in Southern Croatia, enabling a better understanding of the processes that helped the Croatian people, after their migrations, become one of the nations of Western European cultural unity.



Pilgrim for Peace: Using Cultural Routes as Infrastructure for Peacebuilding

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This paper explores a question that touches many of the priority fields of action of the European Cultural Routes (ECRs) Programme: how can ECRs be infrastructure for cross-cultural understanding and peacebuilding? To explore this question, we present an innovative project called Pilgrim for Peace, which first emerged as the brainchild of Norwegian university students at NTNU Trondheim in 2022 (then called Pilgrim4Peace). In 2023, it became a pilot walking conference involving pilgrimage stakeholders, academics and students, and in 2024, it became a successful Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) ran by Mid Sweden University in Östersund, Sweden. Shepherd, who joined the project for its inaugural pilot walk and has led the BIP courses in 2024 and 2026, seeks to continue developing the project as a model of peace pedagogy along Europe's many cultural routes.

Pilgrim for Peace came to life at a time of desperation in Europe. The war in Ukraine – and concurrent processes of re-bordering in Europe -, led those working with the St Olavs Ways cultural route to see a stark dissonance between the bordering ambitions of nation-states and the map of medieval pilgrimage routes that showed strong connections across the continent. How could, they wondered, these pilgrimage trails, and their associated heritage of hospitality and cross-cultural communion, be used once more as places for building understanding and devotion to a greater ideal.

In this paper, we tell the story of how this project developed from a classroom brainstorm to a successful university course. To date, this course has attracted students form over 17 countries, scholars from different backgrounds from the USA to Finland, international peace activists like Maoz Inon, and local stakeholders working for greater cross-cultural harmony, such as indigenous leaders and integration specialists.

In addition to simply telling this story, we will extrapolate the conceptual foundation upon which it rests. This foundation builds upon four core understandings of critical peace studies: 1 – that peace is means different things to different people; 2 – that peace is processual; 3 – that peace is an everyday praxis that so-called ordinary people can contribute to; and 4 – that peace is formed in and is formed by the spaces within which it is made.

The intention with this work is to inspire practioners (civil society leaders, tourism stakeholders etc.) and educators about how ECRs can be conducive spaces for cross-cultural exchange, solidarity, and appreciating a shared heritage. Our story shows how many of the priority fields of action required by ECRs (e.g. Resolution CM/Res(2023)2), such as cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans, or encouraging dialogue between young people of different social backgrounds, regions, and minority vs. majority / native vs. immigrant cultures, can be achieved through collaborative



educational initiatives like Pilgrim for Peace; a project that remains full of potential and open for collaboration.

Pilgrimage Routes and Cultural Europeanization: The Saint James Way as the First European Cultural Route

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The Way of Saint James was designated the first European Cultural Route by the Council of Europe (CoE) in 1987. The Santiago de Compostela Declaration presented the route as a symbol of European unification, invoking tolerance, respect for others, freedom and solidarity as foundations for a shared European society. This designation was particularly symbolic during the final years of the Cold War, amid political transformations and renewed aspirations for European unity.

Since the adoption of the European Cultural Convention in 1954, the CoE has actively fostered cultural cooperation among European countries. The concept of cultural Europeanization refers to the construction and promotion of a shared European identity, rooted in common cultural heritage and historical experiences. Beyond a shared past, this identity can be understood as forward-looking and continuously evolving, anchored in core values such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which have been central to the CoE's mission since its foundation. European identity is thus conceived as a process of becoming rather than being European (Sassatelli, 2009), shaped not only by European institutions but also by the active engagement of citizens through their everyday practices (Littoz-Monnet, 2013).

Within this framework, cultural routes have been identified as strategic instruments for promoting intercultural dialogue, exchanges across borders and mutual understanding, helping to overcome political divisions and contributing to the practical expression of the ideal of "unity in diversity" promoted in European institutional discourse. However, this ambition has also attracted criticism, particularly regarding the instrumentalisation of culture for identity-building purposes. Scholars have questioned the emphasis on medieval Christian heritage as a foundation for European identity, arguing that it may not fully reflect the pluralistic and multicultural character of contemporary European societies (Bowman et al., 2020; Chemin, 2016; Grabow, 2010).

Against this background, the proposed research takes the Way of Saint James as a case study to explore the relationship between pilgrimage heritage, cultural Europeanization and the construction of a shared European identity. Particular attention is given to the voluntary Associations of Friends of the Way, considering their potential role in preserving, interpreting and transmitting traditional pilgrimage values and the ways in which these may intersect with contemporary European values. The research envisages an exploratory qualitative approach focusing on the perspectives of key actors involved



in the Camino. Semi-structured interviews with secular and religious stakeholders at different geographical levels are considered as a possible means of exploring how these actors understand and enact pilgrimage values, how they perceive their transformation over time, and whether their activities and interactions may contribute to fostering a sense of European belonging.

As a work in progress, the paper introduces the conceptual framework, preliminary research questions and possible methodological approaches, inviting discussion on the potential contribution of grassroots pilgrimage associations to cultural Europeanization. It also situates this inquiry within broader reflections on the Cultural Routes programme as it approaches its 40th anniversary in 2027, a year that will also mark a Holy Year in Santiago de Compostela.