

## **The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe**

### **A new category of cultural good**

In recent years the idea of a ‘cultural good’ has evolved from a particular item or monument to be protected and developed, to include the cultural and geographical context in which the item or monument should be placed for it to be fully appreciated. This project of contextualisation is above all an intellectual project which is essential to understanding the significance, history and value of a cultural good within a particular culture and society, and which has resulted in a broadening of the definition of a ‘cultural good’, from the ‘material’ to the ‘immaterial’, and an understanding that, together, monuments and traditions, fine arts and popular arts, typical products and landscapes all form the numerous languages of one community.

This revised vision of cultural heritage has led to the adoption of new typologies of cultural goods, as for example in the case of industrial and technological heritage, which now have new purpose. The content of heritage is now wider and more inclusive, and diachronic and more complex interpretations have been accepted which enable a greater understanding of the origins and development of a culture. One particular concept that is essential to the idea of a wider and more complex cultural good at a regional level falls within this new framework for interpreting heritage: the cultural route.

The programme of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe was created from 1984-1987, at a time when it was realised that Europe needed to reflect on the roots of identity, as the foundation for a shared citizenship. The hope was to encourage Europeans to re-explore their roots in their leisure time by practising cultural tourism in a ‘Europe’ which they tended to view as the symbol of a technocratic tool rather than as a geographical area; a functional common market on a global economic level rather than the source of individual and shared roots.

The European cross-border routes, promoting artistic, cultural, commercial and political links, were viewed by the Council of Europe as special tools of cultural initiative and exchanges of knowledge and ideas which transcend the cultural and political barriers which had marked Europe during and after the great conflicts of the twentieth century. Similarly, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe have been and continue to be considered tools suitable for the development and promotion of a cultural, sustainable and ethical form of tourism which is respectful of the regions travelled through and which provides a concrete demonstration of the founding values of Europe: human rights, the rule of law, cultural democracy, diversity and European cultural identity, dialogue, exchange and mutual enrichment regardless of borders and time.

The first two routes received certification in 1987. The first was the ‘Ways of Pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela’, a network of routes which has played a highly symbolic role in the construction of Europe, and which is travelled by the tens of thousands of pilgrims who walk to Santiago de Compostela each year. The second was ‘Architecture without borders’, on the theme of cross-border rural vernacular architecture, which was created during the European Campaign for the Rural World with a particular focus on the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, Belgium, Germany and France.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a Resolution in 1998, completed in 2007, to define the requirements leading to certification and to create a list of criteria which characterise the nature of the themes accepted, the various initiatives which should be implemented, and the characteristics of the European networks which manage the cultural routes once awarded habilitation by the Council of Europe.

To date, twenty-nine themes have been awarded the prestigious certification of the Council of Europe. They are grouped according to larger concepts: European peoples, migrations, great trends of civilisation, the ways of pilgrimage, religious heritage, European figures, and industrial heritage, among others.

### **The European Institute of Cultural Routes**

The European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) was established as a European public service and technical body as part of a political agreement between the Council of Europe and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg (Ministry of Culture, Further Education and Research). Since 1988 the Institute has worked in close collaboration with the Council of Europe in carrying out its responsibilities, namely to ensure the continuity and development of the programme of the Cultural Routes in the 51 signatory countries of the European Cultural Convention and, depending on the geographical and historical requirements of the themes, in those countries which have had and continue to have close relations with Europe.

The EICR resides in the Centre Culturel de Rencontre – Abbaye de Neumünster, in Luxembourg. It retains all relevant documentation and maintains a specialist library on the routes. The Institute regularly welcomes those in charge of the networks of the routes as well as project managers, researchers, students and members of the general public. The EICR is also charged with participating in European training, research and analysis programmes concerning cultural tourism, for the European Commission and various governments and project managers. The Institute organises themed symposiums and specialist training, collaborates in the setting up and running of the Routes, and participates in specialist exhibitions while promoting a greater awareness of the links between culture, tourism and the environment.

From 2004 to 2006 the Institute managed the visibility and communication work of the European research programme PICTURE (*Proactive management of the impact of cultural tourism on urban resources and economies*).

In 2008 the European Commission (Directorate-General Education and Culture) named the EICR as a body active on a European level in the field of Culture, in recognition for its essential role in creating a coherent programme of sustainable cultural tourism initiatives promoting the “Destination Europe” and encouraging Europeans to discover their common roots and history through travel and the exploration of material and immaterial heritage.

The Institute is a member of NECSTOUR, an association of European regions working to develop competitive and sustainable tourism, and has signed an agreement with the Cité de la Culture et du Tourisme durable to provide distance-learning and to study the sustainability of introducing tourism to the cultural routes. The Institute is currently working with the Council

of Europe and the Tourism Unit of the European Commission on a study into the impact of the cultural routes on small and medium businesses.

In 2011 the Institute should welcome a Partial Agreement aimed at combining the voluntary contributions of those member countries of the Council of Europe who wish to increase the funds available to the cultural routes.

Since the opening up of Europe to the East, the Cultural Routes have enabled, and continue to enable (particularly by expanding to include the Southern Caucasus), the creation of a real dialogue between Eastern and Western Europeans. The opening of a resource centre for the Cultural Routes in Sibiu, in the Casa Luxembourg, in liaison with the European Institute of Cultural Routes in Luxembourg and the Mioritics Association is testament to this.

### **Between tourism and culture**

The Cultural Routes act primarily as an ‘open air’ laboratory of the European construction. They are the concrete realisation of Charters, Conventions and Recommendations on cultural heritage and sustainable tourism, enacted through an educational approach aimed at raising awareness of the importance of protection and sustainability. Beyond heritage, the routes also promote inter-culturalism and inter-religious dialogue through an open and diverse interpretation of Europe.

The Cultural Route as envisaged by the Council of Europe represents the conceptual evolution of the academic travels undertaken by scholars via the monasteries of Europe in the Middle Ages, and the Grand Tour, a journey made by the young bourgeoisie and European aristocracy in the eighteenth century to learn about Europe from its *Monumenta et Mirabilia*, monuments and artefacts which had to be seen and visited in order to gain an understanding of the foundations of European culture.

The Cultural Routes work to democratise this model while combating the excesses of mass tourism. The routes encourage a diversified form of tourism where individual and collective approaches are directly combined through the new technologies being developed today.

With the publication of more modern travel guides in the twentieth century, the emphasis shifted from the heritage items to be visited, to include the routes and itineraries linking them that could be travelled. Michelin began publishing road maps which indicated scenic routes: “The Michelin map is a landscape (...) certain routes are marked in green. This means, ‘There is hope!’ The route is scenic.”

With time and the growth of the tourist phenomenon, and the progressive concentration of tourists in certain places where certain cultural goods are to be found, there is once again the risk of an interpretation of goods which is divorced from their context. As complex and dynamic systems and tools for interpreting various contexts, the role of the Cultural Routes is to place the cultural goods situated along them in their context and to establish the links between them, promoting a contextualisation of these goods which is based on thematic continuities.

In this way, the cultural and identity-related context of the places travelled through corresponds to the interrelations between the land (as a physical context), material and immaterial heritage, and history and memory.

The Routes, as systemic tools, connect places, heritages, ordinary landscapes, in the sense of the European Landscape Convention, and landscapes recognised as UNESCO World Heritage sites, environmental networks and natural parks.

Together, all the elements of the various regions produce complex systems in a succession of different landscapes – industrial, agricultural, urban and maritime – which help to interpret and understand the plurality of identities which make up Europe.

The Cultural Routes are truly a “*global hypertext*” which can be read step by step, in time with a slower form of travel, with its sounds and colours, its shapes and smells, helping us to find the links between the elements and characters we come across during our journey.

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