

Policy Learning Platform on environment and resource efficiency

Webinar brief

CULTURAL ROUTES

07 FEBRUARY 2019, 14.00-15.30 CET

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Introduction

The Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform organised a thematic online discussion on Cultural Routes with focus on stakeholder involvement. The webinar was held on 07 February 2019, 14-15.30 CET.

The interactive webinar was designed as an opportunity to exchange ideas on the development and management of cultural routes as sustainable assets for regional development. The topic already triggered first discussions during the thematic workshop on cultural heritage organised by the team of the Policy Learning Platform in Berlin in June, 2018. The online discussion was led by Venelina Varbova and Ruslan Zhechkov, Thematic Experts for environment and resource efficiency, and moderated by Raluca Toma, Communication Manager of the Policy Learning Platform. Over 70 representatives of Interreg Europe project partners and other stakeholders, as well as representatives of Interreg Europe's Joint Secretariat contributed to the discussion.

The link to the webinar replay is available [here](#).

Presentations

The webinar started with an official welcome by Raluca Toma who presented the speakers and explained the technical details of the webinar. Ruslan Zhechkov gave an overview of the platform's activities on cultural heritage. Venelina Varbova provided [insights](#) into the challenges and opportunities related to the development of **cultural routes**. Following the thematic introductions by the team of experts, the webinar turned theory into practice, giving the floor to the owners of good practices identified in three Interreg Europe projects:

- **St Francis Way: development of an intangible asset of cultural history**, a [good practice](#) presented by Ruslan Zhechkov on behalf of Ms. Chiara Dall'Aglio from Sviluppumbria (Italy), [SHARE project](#)
- **Wine roads of Northern Greece: a network promoting Greek cultural heritage related to wine**, a [presentation](#) delivered by Ms. Lamprini Tsoli, Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia on behalf of the Region of Central Macedonia (Greece), [Cult-RInG project](#)
- **Duero-Douro River Transnational Route: development, management and promotion of the riverside territory in Spain and Portugal**, a [presentation](#) delivered by Mr. Jesús Rivas, Iberian Association of Riverside Municipalities of Duero River (Spain), [EPICAH project](#)

The interventions paved the ground for an interactive discussion between the thematic experts and the project representatives on cultural routes at regional level.

Key messages:

Priorities for action

- Among the most urgent policy actions that need to be taken up at regional level, the panellists highlighted the need to improve **knowledge and capacity of public authorities** on the potential of cultural routes, thus preparing the ground for the dedication of sufficient funds for their development, maintenance and promotion. The challenge of lack of knowledge and capacity to engage and collaborate with the right **stakeholders** was highlighted by 74% of the participants in the webinar. As noted by 45% of the participants, insufficient **funding** is also considered a problem, as well as **limited understanding** of the potential of cultural tourism (23% of the votes) and lack of digital tools (20% of the votes).

Exploring synergies – discovering new perspectives

- One of the objectives of Interreg Europe [Cult-RInG](#) project is to **assess the benefits** of existing Cultural Routes and opportunities for the development, improvement and extension of new routes in the context of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe. In this regard synergies can be sought between [Cult-RInG](#) and [STAR Cities](#) projects, as the latter is also considering applying to the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe certification with focus on riverside routes. The opportunities for support offered under EU initiatives such as the [EU-funded Routes4U](#) Project could be also considered. The Routes4U Project provides assistance to cultural routes projects in view of their certification as a “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” or to certified Cultural Routes for their extension, according to the priorities identified in EU macro-regions.
- In addition to the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, the interregional exchange and identification of good practices in the framework of Interreg Europe projects revealed new perspectives for regional development, ranging from developing religious-pilgrim routes ([SHARE](#), [Green Pilgrimage](#),) to wine routes ([Cult-RInG](#)) and transnational routes linked to natural assets and cultural heritage ([EPICAH](#) and [CRinMA](#)), as well as thematic trails promoting eco-tourism ([ThreeT](#)).

Stakeholder engagement

- The development of cultural routes requires a vision and dedicated efforts to build consensus across different stakeholders (local and regional authorities, tourism boards/associations, businesses, academia, etc.). Engaging a broad range of stakeholders with diverse interests requires creativity and innovative techniques for identifying and working with the appropriate people. Regions and cities are still facing problems in this regard.
- Real-life regional examples have motivational power and should be widely disseminated and studied. The example of the St. Francis Way ([SHARE](#) project), that connects cultural heritage and sites from the life of Francis of Assisi into a 550 km route, could serve as an inspiration for other regions in Europe how to effectively involve stakeholders that bring not only opinions, but also specific skills needed to implement, manage and promote a pilgrim route. To develop the St. Francis Way ([SHARE](#) project), communications channels were opened with influencer-stakeholders (experts, religious and civil associations) through calls for proposals with funding. The role of the regional agency of [Sviluppumbria](#) as a driver of the process and an active participant was essential. To ensure high quality of the walkers’ experience, the influencers spent days in the field walking together and sharing the needs of the pilgrim. Thus, they experienced the tourism product and worked together to improve it (e.g. by provision of signage, water sources along the trail, accommodation, etc.).
- Engaging the right stakeholders is even more complex when developing transnational routes based on a shared natural asset and common cultural heritage. Overcoming the differences of legal frameworks and competencies among all the levels of governance that impact the territory of the route is a key challenge that authorities need to address. Duero-Douro River Transnational Route in Spain and Portugal, identified as a good practice by the [EPICAH](#) project, is a successful example in this regard. It can provide helpful insights how to engage stakeholders from private and public sector from both sides of the border in working together and adopting common strategies and actions concerning a transnational route. Specifically, local, regional and national authorities (river basin and nature protection bodies), private sector linked to tourism industry, as well as universities and research centres were involved in the process. The joint work of the stakeholders from Portugal and Spain resulted in the development of a set of tools that allows different types of visitors to enjoy the route.

Sustainable tourism

- Cultural routes are instrumental for the development of cultural tourism, small business generation, improving social cohesion and stimulating intercultural dialogue and exchange. The number of visitors in many urban and rural areas along the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is increasing. Further efforts are needed in exploiting the cultural tourism potential of Cultural Routes destinations. Interregional cooperation can support the exchange of good practices and knowledge on crucial topics regarding the development and management of the routes.

- The good practices presented during the webinar can serve as an inspiration how to promote overlooked villages and cultural heritage sites, and sustainable thematic tourism products, how to attract visitors interested in local tourism, and secure sources of revenue and employment for rural communities. For example, the Wine roads network of Northern Greece ([Cult-RInG](#) project) that developed 8 thematic routes, can provide helpful insight how to promote wine tourism along with cultural tourism, raise awareness of wine history and products and bring economic benefits to local businesses. The activities led to rebranding of the whole local wine tourism product and attracted other regions to join the network. The development of the route St. Francis Way ([SHARE](#) project) resulted in increase of 35% of the number of hikers on the Way in the period 2015-2017. St. Francis Way won best European 'Destination of Sustainable Cultural Tourism' by the European Cultural Tourism Network and Europa Nostra (2018)
- Regions and cities need to take advantage of the opportunities that digital tools provide for better access to heritage assets and engagement of audiences. As highlighted by one of panellists in many cases the problem is how to use the information generated by the ICT tools. A good practice from Sweden identified by [Green Pilgrimage project](#) presents a [website based application](#) developed by Visit Ostergotland. The application allows users to explore the natural and cultural heritage of a famous pilgrimage route in an innovative way. It also allows local businesses to upload their details and to provide regular business updates for users to access food, accommodation and activities near the trail.

Other relevant information

Policy framework

[New European Agenda for Culture, and a Staff working document:](#)

- explains how the EC will support EU Member States in tapping into culture's potential to foster innovation, creativity, sustainable growth and jobs;
- outlines how to build on the legacy of the European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018;
- calls for boosting relevant skills such as digital, entrepreneurial, traditional and specialised, and encouraging innovation in culture.

[European Framework for Action on Cultural Heritage](#)

- sets a common direction for heritage-related activities at European level, primarily in EU policies and programmes;
- actions that promote the Council of Europe's cultural routes are envisaged under the pillar on cultural heritage for a sustainable Europe.

Further information: Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, [Article](#) on the Framework for action

[Work Plan for Culture \(2015-2018\)](#)

- highlights the need for synergies with all relevant EU programmes and funds, especially in the fields of culture, education, research, digitalisation, and regional and urban development, in order to promote cultural policies in Europe.

Other sources:

- Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, Policy brief on sustainable tourism
- Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, [Policy brief](#) on protection and sustainable management of heritage in coastal and fluvial regions
- Interreg Europe Policy Learning Platform, [Policy brief](#) on digital solutions in the field of cultural heritage

- 2018, Cultural heritage [e-book](#) developed by Interact and the European Commission Directorate - General for Regional and Urban Policy
- EC, [Mapping of Cultural Heritage actions in European Union policies, programmes and activities](#), 2017
- [ICOMOS, International Cultural Tourism Charter. Principles And Guidelines For Managing Tourism At Places Of Cultural And Heritage Significance](#). ICOMOS International Cultural Tourism Committee. 2002.
- [EC, The Guide on EU Funding for the Tourism Sector, 2014-2020](#)

Annex 1: Agenda



Cultural routes

Focus on stakeholder involvement

Webinar, 07 February 2019, 14:00-15:30 CET

Objective of the webinar: During 2018 [European Year of Cultural Heritage \(EYCH\)](#) a series of initiatives and events were organised across Europe at EU, national, regional and local levels to enable citizens to become more engaged with Europe's diverse cultural heritage. The thematic focus of this interactive webinar will be on cultural routes with focus on approaches and methods to engage stakeholders. Interregional exchange on the topic of cultural routes started at the platform's thematic workshop held in Berlin last year. The purpose of the webinar is to build on previous thematic discussion and facilitate interregional learning among Interreg Europe projects and other relevant stakeholders. Participants will also have the opportunity to learn about several good practices on cultural routes and participate in an interactive discussion on the topic.

14:00-14:10	<p>Welcome and introduction</p> <p>Raluca Toma, Communications manager, Interreg Europe Policy learning platform Venelina Varbova and Ruslan Zhechkov Thematic Experts – Environment and resource efficiency, Interreg Europe Policy learning platform</p>
14:10-14:25	<p>Cultural routes in the context of interregional learning. Policy brief of cultural routes from Interreg Europe Policy learning platform.</p> <p>Venelina Varbova and Ruslan Zhechkov Thematic Experts – Environment and resource efficiency</p>
14:25-14:40	<p>Good practice: St Francis Way: development of an intangible asset of cultural history</p> <p>Ms. Chiara Dall'Aglio, Svilupumbria (Italy), SHARE project</p>
14:40-14:50	<p>Good practice: Wine roads of Northern Greece: a network promoting Greek cultural heritage related to wine</p> <p>Ms. Lamprini Tsoli, Regional Development Fund of Central Macedonia on behalf of the Region of Central Macedonia (Greece), Cult-RInG project</p>
14:50-15:00	<p>Good practice: Duero-Douro River Transnational Route: development, management and promotion of the riverside territory in Spain and Portugal</p> <p>Mr. Jesús Rivas Rojo, Iberian Association of Riverside Municipalities of Duero River (Spain), EPICAH project</p>
15:00-15:15	<p>Panel discussion with the presenters on the role of cultural routes in preserving cultural identity, fostering dialogue and sustainable territorial development.</p>
15:15-15:30	<p>Wrap-up and conclusions</p> <p>Venelina Varbova and Ruslan Zhechkov Thematic Experts – Environment and resource efficiency</p>

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