

Via Romana - Connecting Europe's Heritage

Introduction

The Via Romana project is a comprehensive initiative aimed at revitalizing and connecting regions along ancient Roman roads, fostering sustainable tourism, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting economic integration. Originally initiated 30 years ago, the project focuses on the historic Via Romana in the Netherlands-Germany region, transforming it into a car, bike, and walking route dotted with Roman-era sites. The overarching goal is to create a large green tourism network based on the Ancient Roman road network, promoting the principles of sustainable tourism as defined by UNWTO.

Historical Context

Via Romana, spanning 159 kilometers in a northern and southern part, narrates the story of the ancient Roman Limes – a military and trade route connecting settlements and forts. The initiative received support from Interreg funds, enabling the creation of a signposted route. Similar Roman (tourist) routes exist across Benelux, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, developed independently with varied names.

Roman Legacy and European Development

The Roman history laid the foundation for fundamental European developments, including the road network and urbanization, which stimulated migration and the spread of ideas. Roman law, forming the basis of modern European jurisprudence, continues to influence legislation and legal development. This historical perspective contributes to the awareness of a shared European history.

Rivers and UNESCO Recognition

Rivers played a crucial role in the socio-cultural and economic development of Europe over the past 2000 years. Settlements around the Rhine and other regions, including Romania, Hungary, and Poland, thrived during the Roman era. This historical legacy was acknowledged as the Limes was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List in June 2022.

Project Vision and Objectives

The Via Romana proposal seeks to create a unified European network of Roman roads, forming a green tourism network. The vision includes an umbrella platform that integrates local and regional initiatives, in the longer term offering a marketing tool for collective promotion. Objectives encompass boosting tourism, highlighting Roman history, facilitating accessibility to knowledge, and raising awareness of shared European history.

Activities and Implementation

The implementation involves bringing together with a common purpose regional Via Romana initiative and supporting collaboration between municipalities. The common regional development being addressed in the Via Romana project is the revitalization and sustainable development of regions along ancient Roman roads. The proposal aims to connect these regions through a large green tourism network based on the Ancient Roman road network. Key aspects of regional development include the following.

- **Tourism Infrastructure**

Via Romana seeks to strengthen tourist infrastructure by repurposing ancient Roman roads into digitally enabled mobility routes. This not only promotes tourism but also enhances the appeal of these regions for visitors.

- **Cultural Heritage Preservation**

The proposal focuses on connecting heritage sites and telling the story of the ancient Roman Limes. This emphasis on cultural heritage preservation contributes to the unique identity of each region and fosters a sense of historical continuity.

- **Economic Integration**

By connecting regions within the Blue Banana, the proposal envisions economic integration. The revitalization of Roman routes can serve as a catalyst for economic development, encouraging collaboration and synergy among the regions encompassed by the Blue Banana concept.

- **Educational and Digital Initiatives**

Via Romana aims to provide educational tools by incorporating digital technologies in the longer term. This not only enhances the visitor experience but also contributes to digital literacy. The proposals emphasis on education aligns with regional development by fostering knowledge and awareness by fostering a shared connection.

- **Regional Policy Improvement**

Via Romana recognizes the need for regional policy improvement. By actively participating in the EU's cultural policy framework, the project facilitates the exchange of good practices among partner regions. This collaborative approach aims to enhance regional policies through capacity building and the adoption of successful policies from other participating regions. Overall, the project addresses a holistic approach to regional development by intertwining cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, economic integration, education, and of course policy improvement. It envisions the participating

regions as interconnected nodes in a broader network, contributing to the shared European history and identity.

Policy Integration and Regional Development

The proposal aligns with the European Union's strategic framework for cultural policy, proposing a holistic approach that incorporates cultural heritage into various EU policies. Via Romana aims to contribute to regional policy improvement by actively participating in the EU's cultural policy framework, exchanging good practices among partner regions, and enhancing policies through shared successes.

Conclusion

During project implementation, good practices are exchanged among partner regions, leading to improved regional policies. The Via Romana project stands as a testament to the interconnectedness of European regions, fostering economic, cultural, and social development. By reviving ancient Roman routes, it creates a bridge between the past and the present, contributing to a stronger and more integrated Europe.