

# Online communication strategies of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

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## Abstract

With the nomination of Santiago de Compostela as a World Heritage Site in 1985, cultural routes started to receive international attention as a new category of heritage: this led to the creation of the Cultural Routes programme by the Council of Europe, which nowadays (end of 2019) counts thirty-eight routes, thirty-four of which have a functioning website. As there is little research on how these routes use ICTs to support their goals, the research presented in this paper aims at understanding which narratives, information, services and functionalities are offered on the official website of each route and how these websites support potential travellers. To do so, the technique of benchmarking was applied and an analytical grid was developed, following an iterative process per saturation, which allowed classifying all the types of contents and functionalities offered by the websites. Forty-seven indicators of contents and functionalities were identified and grouped into six categories. The analysis clearly showed the commitment of the different stakeholders to stimulate cooperation and promote active involvement on their websites even though tourism practices appear not to be supported enough yet. It is advisable that this direction of an active involvement of users is taken by all the routes, to take advantage of the opportunities given by ICTs to reach the ambitious goals of the Cultural Routes programme, with a strategic use of social media channels for promotional purposes and dedicated mobile apps for tourism-oriented goals.

**Keywords:** cultural routes; European heritage; cultural tourism; online communication; websites; benchmarking.

“The only true voyage of discovery, the only fountain of Eternal Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is”  
(Marcel Proust, 1923)

## 1 The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

With the nomination of Santiago de Compostela as a World Heritage Site (1985), cultural routes emerged as a new category of heritage and started to receive

international attention. In 1987, the Council of Europe launched the Cultural Routes programme, with ‘Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes’ being exactly the first network of routes to be certified. The programme had, and still has, two main goals: on the one hand, to foster sustainable territorial development by allowing synergies between national, regional and local authorities and a wide range of associations and socio-economic actors; on the other hand, to highlight the educational role of travelling in discovering “the rich and diverse heritage of Europe by bringing people and places together in networks of shared history and heritage” (Council of Europe, 2019). In this sense, cultural routes are a sort of throwback to the Grand Tour, which was the journey that European aristocrat descendants used to do outside their homeland, mainly between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with educational, cultural and personal development goals (Hibbert, 1987).

In 1998, the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) created the International Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC) with the aim of defining the main elements of cultural routes and establishing a methodology to design new routes. From this, the following elements emerged: the *context*, which represents the natural setting where the route unfolds, as well as the place of living of local communities; the *content*, which is the range of creative tangible and intangible assets in a region; the *cross-cultural significance*, which refers to the meaning and value of the route as a whole; and the *dynamic character*, which is given by the routes’ networking nature that implies interaction and exchange among the many socio-economic realities they federate.

In 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Resolution CM/Res (2010)53, establishing an Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes, to enable closer co-operation between states particularly interested in the development of cultural routes. For the first time, a more straightforward definition of a cultural route was formalised. This definition describes a cultural route as “a cultural, educational heritage and tourism co-operation project aiming at the development and promotion of an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with a transnational importance and significance for the understanding and respect of common European values”.

Nowadays, the programme of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe counts thirty-eight routes. These routes can be considered complex and multidimensional cultural goods, defined by the tangible and intangible heritage of the territories they cross and in which they are rooted (Zabbini, 2012). They have a transnational dimension, since they go beyond countries’ administrative borders up to the European level. The unifying principle of each route is the *landscape*, which is not just a decorative element but rather a bearer of meanings that connects territorial realities at a geographical as well as historical and identity level (Berti, 2013).

On a geographical level, cultural routes can be divided into three categories, according to the relation between the elements of the route and the territory:

- *Territorial routes*, which involve entire territories that share the same theme. Different paths might be proposed to help understanding the theme. An example is the ‘European Mozart Ways’, a route that allows the traveller to discover one of the most fascinating musicians of all times by retracing Mozart’s footsteps through Europe. Several paths are proposed across ten European countries.

- *Linear routes*, which correspond to a physical path or a network of itineraries that are univocal and recognisable. An example is the ‘Route of Saint Olav Ways – The Pilgrim Paths to Trondheim’, which is a network of routes through Denmark, Sweden and Norway, all of them leading to Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, where Saint Olav lies buried. There are dozens of different routes to take to reach the Cathedral, from short one-day trips to journeys lasting several weeks.
- *Archipelagos routes*, which represent a network of sites that share common heritage elements and that can be reached by following different paths. An example is the ‘Réseau Art Nouveau Network’. The network federates over twenty European cities with a rich and varied Art Nouveau heritage to explore, and offers the tourist numerous activities, exhibitions and materials for a better understanding and appreciation of the rich legacy of this art style.

Considering a more historical and identity level, as Zabbini states, “one of the key points of itineraries is the idea that they are not created from the places, but from the *sense!*” (Zabbini, 2012: 70). In fact, routes cover a range of different themes that are the key to understand the heritage and identity of the networked territories. There are routes about eno-gastronomic heritage (the ‘Routes of the Olive Tree’ and the ‘Iter Vitis Route’); about art, music, and literature (‘In the Footsteps of Robert Luis Stevenson’ and ‘Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades’); those focusing on religious heritage (‘Saint Martin of Tours Route’ and the ‘European Route of Cistercian abbeys’); and routes that feature historical figures or periods (the ‘Viking Routes’ and the ‘European Routes of Emperor Charles V’).

Before describing the research aim and methodology, in the following section, some characteristics that are typical of the Cultural Routes programme’s approach to tourism and heritage are covered.

## **2 Tourism and heritage in the Cultural Routes programme**

The cultural routes offer a *holistic destination approach* based on the enjoyment of culture: cultural resources can be appreciated both for the meaning they have in their specific context and for the personal meaning they might have for the visitor, who is driven by his/her discovery and knowledge goals. By linking tangible and intangible heritage across different territories, the routes allow visitors to discover the identity of those territories and, more importantly, which aspects of history, values, and resources they share. They offer a more complete and deeper tourism experience that goes far beyond the mere consumption of a single heritage object.

With regards to the ‘supply’ side of tourism, cultural routes constitute a development tool for marginal or rural areas, as they can stimulate *cooperation* and partnership between communities as well as among a wide range of tourism suppliers, to improve tourism offers and, thus, bring people to those areas (Briedenhann and Wickens, 2004). Contrary to what usually happens among destinations, networking routes have a strategy that focuses on cooperation rather than competition. Destinations, in fact, often view neighbouring or similar destinations as competitors, and this might weaken the regional tourism development. The case of cultural routes is inherently different, since

they need partnerships between stakeholders following principles of fairness and inclusion in order to be meaningful and attractive; moreover, for a route to be accepted, at least three different countries must be involved. To ensure working partnerships, cooperation must be rooted in solid institutional frameworks that stimulate regional socio-economic development. It has been underlined, in fact, that a “cultural route also illustrates the contemporary design of the values of heritage for the private and the public sector stakeholder organizations as a resource of a sustainable social and economic development” (Madjoub, 2010: 31).

Another important characteristic that lies at the core of cultural routes as territorial and tourism development is *sustainability*, with its three main levels: economic, socio-cultural and environmental. At the economic level, because of the routes’ transnational dimension, administrative borders need to be overcome, different political levels must cooperate and local stakeholders must be involved in order to develop the necessary hospitality infrastructures and services. At the social level, cultural routes emphasise the uniqueness and individuality derived from the geographical space. In this way, vulgarisation and homologation of places and the loss of social identity are avoided and connections between people and relationships among communities through memory and history are promoted (Madjoub, 2010). In turn, the increased appreciation of a territory and its cultural resources derives in a more elevated respect of the environment and awareness of the consequences of one’s actions. Joint management actions, in addition, help facilitate a better distribution of tourists, thus reducing environmental impact.

Cultural routes as a new form of heritage and as a strategy for socio-economic territorial development introduce also a new holistic idea of *heritage protection*, wider than just conservation or promotion. For this, cooperation between the different stakeholders is crucial as it can contribute to the promotion and conservation of the tangible and intangible cultural resources as well as to the increase of awareness of their value (Zabbini, 2012; Messineo, 2012).

In the cultural routes landscape, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) might play an important role to promote knowledge and provide services to visitors (Cantoni et al., 2016; De Ascaniis et al., 2018). According to the Vilnius Roadmap of the 6th Annual Advisory Forum on Cultural Routes (Council of Europe, 2016): “ICT can help to extend access, especially of young generations, can better the experience of travellers, help connect locals with their routes, and locals with visitors, dis-intermediate some relationships, they can also be used to train relevant players, especially micro enterprises”.

However, research on the use of ICTs to promote and support cultural routes is quite limited. A preliminary study on the features of official mobile applications was recently proposed (Cantoni & De Ascaniis, 2020), in which four routes were considered – the only routes having dedicated mobile applications at the time of the study – namely: ‘Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes’, ‘Via Francigena’, ‘European Route of Ceramics’, and ‘The Hansa’. Even if the sample was limited, the analysis highlighted a major challenge in designing applications for such complex cultural destinations, namely the difficulty in finding a balance between the need to present the route as a whole and the need to provide information and services about its different parts

(especially for territorial, linear routes and archipelago routes). A usability analysis (Cantoni, Di Blas & Bolchini, 2003; Garrett, 2010) showed that the apps were mostly successful in helping travellers along the road not to get lost and in guiding them to the main tourism and hospitality services. They were, on the other hand, hardly useful in the organisation of the journey and in providing a context for the meanings and values represented by the route (Cantoni & De Ascaniis, 2020).

As of today, October 2019, the Cultural Routes programme is widely presented on the official website of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2019) which dedicates a page to each route. On each page, the following pieces of information are provided: a short historical overview, the route's heritage features, its connection with the values promoted by the Council of Europe, travel possibilities, and a map of the involved member States. All routes have their own official website, twenty-six of them have a Facebook page, three have a Twitter account, one has an Instagram account and one has a blog. Official mobile applications have been developed for six routes.

### **3 Research aim**

To continue this line of research and to develop the literature on the topic, the research presented in this paper aims at understanding how the Cultural Routes programme is communicated online through its main official channels – namely which narratives, information and services are given on the official website of each route. In order to do so, two operational goals are pursued: a) to investigate, categorise and compare the contents and functionalities provided by the routes' official websites; b) to highlight which kind of support a potential traveller receives if s/he wants to plan a journey or just learn about a route.

### **4 Methodology**

To gain an overview of the types of contents and functionalities offered by the official websites of the cultural routes and to highlight the kind of support they offer to potential travellers, the technique of *benchmarking* was applied. Benchmarking is a bottom-up technique, which considers specific aspects of similar objects (e.g. types of products, websites in a given domain), identifies their characteristics and divides them into categories, allowing, thus, a comparison between them.

The founding father of benchmarking is Robert Camp, who developed this method while working at Xerox at the beginning of 1980, when the company was floundering. In his text, appeared in 1989, Camp explains that “benchmarking is the search for those best practices that will lead to the superior performance of a company” (Camp, 1989: xi). Benchmarking is, in fact, a process aimed at gaining a competitive edge on competitors by identifying and understanding the best practices of those organisations considered the best in their field and changing operations accordingly in a structured fashion (Bhutta & Huq, 1999). Benchmarking has been used by a variety of organisations to improve different areas including customer processes, information systems, supplier management, and human resources (Elmuti, 1998). The principles of benchmarking have also been applied to websites, with the general goal of measuring and comparing one's websites with others. It might be used, for instance, to measure how the website of a certain organisation compares to the sites of related organisations

and hence, to develop ideas on how to improve it (Johnson & Misić, 1999). Analysing competitors' websites might also allow understanding the dynamics of a certain sector, its strengths and weaknesses (Barnes and Vidgen, 2002; Hassan and Li, 2005). Different aspects of websites can be considered, such as navigation, interactivity, accessibility, layout. In the study presented here, the focus is on contents (information provided) and functionalities (possibilities of action given to users, such as buying or reserving).

As a first step, an *analytical grid* was developed, following an iterative process per saturation, which allowed classifying all the types of contents and functionalities offered by the websites (Lizzi et al., 2011; Inversini & Cantoni, 2011). Considered one first website, each type of content or functionality was classified as an *indicator*, which was then applied to all the following websites. For instance, different pieces of information about the history and development of the route were classified with the indicator "history of the route", and all the websites were examined against such indicator. If a website presented a certain indicator, it received the value "1" in the grid, if the indicator was missing, the website received the value "0" for that indicator. Each time a new indicator was identified, all the websites were investigated backwards against the new indicator, until the saturation level was reached.

The second step was to group the indicators into *categories*, according to similarities in terms of contents and functionalities. For instance, indicators as history of the route, map of the route, pictures of the hotspots were grouped in one same category called "information about the route". The categories were, then, organised in a comprehensive *narrative* showing what the websites' themes, contents and goals are.

The benchmarking was independently conducted by three researchers who analysed a sub-sample of the considered websites and described the retrieved contents and functionalities in terms of indicators. The researchers compared their analysis, reached an agreement about similar indicators and their categorisation, and elaborated a grid, which was then applied to the whole websites sample. The benchmarking was conducted from September to October 2019.

## **5 Results**

### **5.1 Contents and functionalities of cultural routes' websites**

All the thirty-eight routes have a link to an official website. However, as four of these websites were not working at the time of the study ('Pyrenean Iron Route', 'European Route of Ceramics', 'Fortified towns of the Grande Region', 'Via Charlemagne'), in total, thirty-four websites were analysed. Forty-seven indicators of contents and functionalities were identified and grouped into the following six categories: a) information about the route, b) news, events, projects, c) tourism, d) social media channels, e) services and functionalities, f) credits. In Tables 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e and 1f the indicators belonging to each category are listed in descending order of their presence. A description is given for each one of them, and their recurrence (N°) in the sample is reported.

**Table 1a.** List of indicators of the category “Information about the route”.

Indicator	Description	Nº
Description of the route	Description of the route or of its connecting theme, its history, relevant personality(ies) (e.g. Mozart, the Vikings) that the route is dedicated to.	33
List of countries/cities along the route	List or map of stages/hotspots making part of the route (no description of the hotspots – just name/location).	32
Map of the route stages/hotspots	Map with the route hotspots (in the case of archipelago routes) or stages (in the case of territorial and linear routes).	32
Photo gallery of hotspots/attractions	Pictures of the route/hotspots and/or its attractions.	30
Goals of the route/association	Goals of the route or of the association that underlies the route (e.g. to preserve heritage, to improve visitors’ knowledge).	28
Presentation of the route stages/hotspots	A more detailed description of the different stages/hotspots that are part of the route, either in the form of a list or on a map.	28
Promotional content	Promotional downloadable content (e.g. brochures, sales manuals).	19
Rules to become a member of the route	Rules that a country/city/stakeholder must follow to join the route’s association or to be part of the route.	19
Description of art and architecture	Description of art works and architecture to be found along the route.	14
Video gallery of hotspots/attractions	Video(s) on the route/hotspots and/or its attractions.	12
Notorious figures	Presentation of past/contemporary travellers (e.g. journalists) or historical figures (e.g. famous Vikings) that travelled the route or lived along it.	10
Mention of UNESCO WHS	Reference to UNESCO WHS on the route, either as a filter to find attractions or mentioned in the attractions’ presentation.	9
Audio-guides	Audio-guides or podcast published on the website with explanations on the route/hotspots and/or its history.	6

**Table 1b.** List of indicators of the category “News, events, projects”.

News	News regarding the route (e.g. development, recognitions, new members).	30
Events	Past and/or upcoming events connected to the route.	25
Projects	Past and/or future projects connected to the route.	19
External links to news on the route	Links to external websites with news about the route or press release section in the website.	15
Exhibitions	List of museums and/or exhibitions related to the route and its hotspots.	14

**Table 1c.** List of indicators of the category “Tourism”.

Attractions to visit along the route	Presentation of attractions to be visited along the route or in its hotspots.	22
Educational/training services	Material and/or programmes that can be used for education purposes (e.g. in schools, as guidelines for exploring the route).	11
Travel packages	Suggested trips along the route with itinerary and accommodation.	9
Accommodations	Suggestions for accommodations along the route or on the route hotspots.	3
Instructions to get pilgrim credentials	Guidelines for visitors along ‘linear’ or ‘territorial’ routes to recognise their journey along the route.	1

**Table 1d.** List of indicators of the category “Social media channels”.

Link to Facebook	Direct link to the route’s official Facebook page.	28
Link to Instagram	Direct link to the route’s official Instagram account.	11
Link to YouTube	Direct link to the route’s official YouTube channel.	9
Link to Twitter	Direct link to the route’s official Twitter account.	9
Share content on Facebook	Possibility to share content (e.g. an article, a description, information regarding an event) on the visitor’s Facebook page.	9

Share content on Twitter	Possibility to share content on the visitor's Twitter account.	7
Link to a mobile app	Link to a mobile app dedicated to the route.	6
Link to Pinterest	Direct link to the route's official Pinterest page.	5
Pin content on Pinterest	Possibility to share content on the visitor's Pinterest page.	3
Link to LinkedIn	Direct link to the route's official LinkedIn page.	2
Share videos	Possibility to share/embed videos.	1
Share content on LinkedIn	Possibility to share content on the visitor's LinkedIn page.	1

**Table 1e.** List of indicators of the category “Services and functionalities”.

General contacts	General contact information of the route's supporting association (e.g. contact@, info@, phone number).	30
Interactive map of the route	Map(s) of the route and/or of its stages/hotspots that allow(s) accessing new pages/pieces of information.	23
Language choice	Possibility to change language.	23
Form to ask for information	Possibility for the visitor to contact the route's supporting association by submitting a form.	18
Newsletter	Possibility to subscribe to a newsletter and/or online magazine of the route/association, and/or to download previous newsletters.	17
“Support us”	Possibility to make a donation to improve the route or to support specific projects.	4
FAQ	A section where frequently asked questions are answered.	3
"My route"	Possibility to save destinations/attractions/spots to create a personal route.	1

**Table 1f.** List of indicators of the category “Credits”.

List of members	List of members that are part of the route's supporting association and/or of the route itself.	20
Partners	List of the route's partners.	16
Personal contacts of the route's main stakeholders	Contact information of the route's manager and/or the director/manager of the route's supporting association.	13
Rules for using the logo	Rules on how to use the logo of the route (e.g. in the press).	2

By recording the indicators' presence in each website and noting the most and least frequent indicators (see Tables 1a – 1f, and Table 2), it was possible to answer the following questions: what is communicated in the cultural routes' websites? Which is the informative function of each website? How do the website support travellers in the organisation of a trip?

The fact that cultural routes have both a historical and a transnational dimension is well represented on the websites. In fact, most of the websites (>30) provide a description and history of the route/theme, a map of the different route stages/hotspots, a list of countries/cities along the route, a photo gallery of attractions along the route, news, and the general contacts information of the route's supporting association. The following most recurring indicators are: goals of the cultural route or of the referring association (28), description of the different route stages/hotspots (28), information about past and upcoming events (25), link to the official Facebook page (28). Quite frequently, also a presentation of the attractions to visit along the route is given (22), as well as an interactive map of the route (23) and the list of member bodies (20). Another interesting aspect, is that cultural routes do not lie their focus on giving tourism information to visitors (see next section), on establishing links with social media or on allowing user generated content. Facebook represents an exception, with twenty-eight out of thirty-



four websites providing a direct link to an official page, but only nine actively supporting content sharing on that social medium.

## 5.2 Comparison among cultural routes' websites

Twenty websites out of thirty-four present more than twenty indicators. Among them, the “richest” websites (with more than thirty indicators) are those of ‘Via Francigena’, ‘European Route of Industrial Heritage’ and ‘Liberation Route Europe’. Via Francigena was one of the first routes to be certified (in 1994), and also constitutes an excellent example of website used to support pilgrims in the organisation of the journey as well as to give regular updates about activities and projects of the supporting association. The ‘European Route of Industrial Heritage’ and the ‘Liberation Route Europe’, on the other hand, were among the last routes to be certified (both in 2019), and are characterised by a strong network of members at different levels (public and private organisations, corporate members and individuals) that are federated by an association (ERIH - European Route of Industrial Heritage e.V., a registered association based on German law) and, respectively, by a foundation (Liberation Route Europe Foundation). The websites of all the 5 routes certified in 2019 present a high number of contents and functionalities (with more than twenty indicators), and share some indicators that highlight how the website is used to promote activities and attract new members: ‘list of members’ (20), ‘projects’ (19), ‘promotional content’ (19), ‘rules to become member’ (19), ‘newsletter/online magazine’ (17), ‘press releases’ (15), ‘exhibitions’ (14), ‘personal contact of the route’s manager(s)’ (13).

**Table 2.** Number of indicators per each cultural route’s website.

Cultural route Website	N° of indicators	Cultural route Website	N° of indicators
European Route of Industrial Heritage	33	Réseau Art Nouveau Network	20
Liberation Route Europe	33	Routes of the Olive Tree	20
Via Francigena	30	Viking Routes	20
Iron Curtain Trail	28	Santiago de Compostela Pilgrim Routes	19
European Routes of Emperor Charles V	27	Iter Vitis Route	18
Routes of Reformation	27	Destination Napoleon	17
European Route of Historic Thermal Towns	26	In the Footsteps of Robert Louis Stevenson	17
Transromanica	25	European Mozart Ways	16
European Route of Jewish Heritage	23	Huguenot and Waldensian Trail	16
Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades	22	Impressionisms Routes	16
Prehistoric Rock Art Trails	22	Route of Saint Olav Ways	15
The Hansa	22	Saint Martin of Tours Route	15
Cluniac Sites in Europe	21	Via Regia	14
European Cemeteries Route	21	European Route of Megalithic Culture	13
Phoenicians' Route	21	Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route	9
Routes of El legado andalusí	21	Via Habsburg	8
ATRIUM	20	European Route of Cistercian abbeys	7

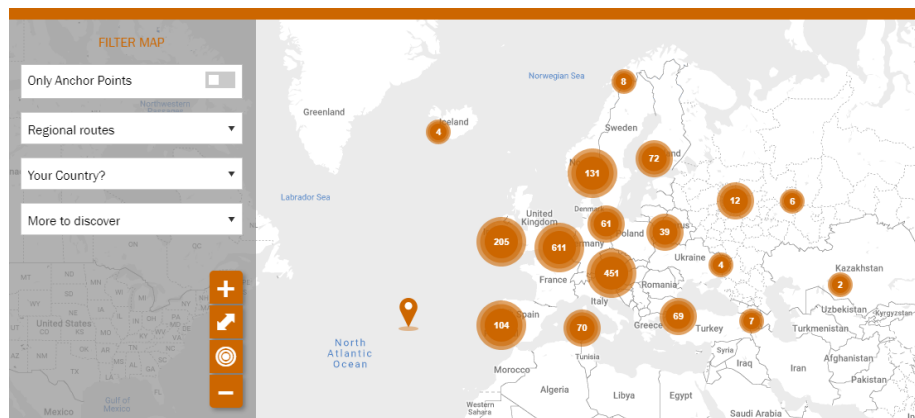
The presence of indicators does not mean, by itself, a better quality: it suggests how much information rich a website is. Indicators are like ingredients: a good recipe might

require few ingredients, while more ingredients might be badly combined or of poorer quality. However, in general, information richness suggests a more careful design and management, and is likely to better serve different users' needs.

Usually, websites of archipelago routes do not present an interactive map of itineraries, but they rather offer a map where the different hotspots/attractions are indicated with descriptions, pictures, and sometimes even videos. This reflects the typology of the route, which does not follow precise and linear itineraries but is created by the visitor who decides what to visit. All these routes share an artistic or historical theme; some examples are: 'Réseau Art Nouveau Network', 'Impressionisms Routes', 'In the Footsteps of Robert Stevenson', 'Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades'.



**Fig. 1.** An example of a non-interactive map from the 'Impressionisms Routes'.



**Fig. 2.** An example of an interactive map from the 'European route of industrial heritage' (the orange dots are clickable and the map zooms in).

### 5.3 The tourism dimension in the cultural routes' websites

Five indicators that are related to tourism information and services were identified and grouped in the category 'Tourism' (see Table 1c): 'attractions to visit along the route', 'accommodations', 'travel packages' (see Figure 3), 'educational/training services'

(see Figures 4 and 5), and ‘instructions to get pilgrim credentials’. The presence of these tourism indicators, though, is not widespread among the analysed websites. The average number of these indicators per website is 1.35, with only one website presenting four out of five indicators, twenty-three of the websites having only one or two indicators, and six websites with no indicators at all in this category.

The St. James Way by bike from Roncevaux



Based on  
1495€/pers.

Holidays 16 days/15 nights from Roncevaux

14 stages by bike and 15 nights in 2\*\* & 3\*\*\* hotels from Roncevaux to Santiago

Book these holidays

**Fig. 3.** Example of ‘travel packages’ (‘Santiago de Compostela’)

#### Training Materials

**ATRIUM Plus Training Course 2018**  
How to deal with dissimant heritage  
Three-day seminar for tourist operators and teachers organized by ATRIUM Forli with the scientific support of the CAST (Centre for Advanced Studies in Tourism, University of Bologna)  
[Download the Atrium Plus Toolkit](#)

**ATRIUM Training Course 2017**  
Patrimonio "dissimante" nel Novecento: narrazione ed esperienze di valorizzazione  
Two-day seminar for educators, tourist operators and cultural associations on the subject on dissimant heritage related to architecture of the 20th century and its difficult storytelling, organized by ATRIUM Forli, with the scientific support of the CAST (Centre for Advanced Studies in Tourism, University of Bologna) and the ISTORECO Forli.  
[Download training materials](#) (in Italian language)

**Fig. 4.** Example of ‘educational/training services’ (‘ATRIUM’)

#### Educational material



##### Night Book, 2006

Designed for children in primary school (age range from 8 years upwards), with basic reading skills, this activity book offers short stories on the role of dream and nightmare creatures in Art Nouveau, as well as a set of exercises and games, based on Art Nouveau objects, furniture and buildings. The publication also includes an overview of the Network and European projects. It concludes with a European map locating the partner's cities.

The body of the publication focuses on the visual representation of Art Nouveau, using an exercise to illustrate each partner city. Each city chose an appropriate example of art, craft or architecture for their pages.

[English/French/Dutch version](#), [English/Polish/Finnish version](#),  
[English/Spanish/Catalan version](#), [English/Italian/Slovenian version](#),  
[English/Norwegian/German version](#), [English/Latvian/Georgian version](#)

**Fig. 5.** Example of ‘educational/training services’ (‘ATRIUM’ and ‘Réseau Art Nouveau Network’)

It is not surprising that the most present indicator is ‘attractions to visit along the route’ (22), as all the routes consist of different stages and consequently, every stage has an attraction to see, be it a city, a museum or a natural site. The level of information provided, though, is quite different from website to website. Some of them provide very detailed information about the attractions, even opening times and entry fees, while some others only mention the name of the attraction and its location. The second most recurrent indicator is ‘educational/training services’ (11), a result that is in line with the programme’s goal of preserving heritage and informing people about the existence of cultural routes and their value for the shared identity of Europe. These websites, indeed, have schools and groups that travel for educational purposes as one of their main audience and visitors. Only little information (on average) is given regarding accommodations and facilities along the route (3) or travel suggestions/packages (9) to organise a trip. However, many websites link to external pages of destinations and attractions.

## 6 Conclusions and discussion

The official websites constitute the main channels through which the cultural routes are communicated online. Often, then, a visitor's experience starts from the website that, thanks to its hypertextual nature, represents the route as a whole and at the same time provides insights on its parts/hotspots. The benchmarking of the contents and functionalities of the cultural routes' websites allowed outlining both the comprehensive narrative that emerges online about the programme and the information and services given by each route.

The online narrative of the programme suggests to the users that there are many route networks crossing several countries in Europe, which tells about important aspects/periods/figures of the European culture and are worth to be visited. Events and exhibitions are organised in hotspots that are part of the route, to promote knowledge about it and to bring people together. If one wishes to deepen the knowledge on the theme of the routes, s/he can visit attractions representing shared history and heritage, receive regular news and follow updates on social media. The routes are 'living' and open to new members.

It is important to notice is that, even though the cultural routes aim at being an invitation to travel and to discover the rich and diverse heritage of Europe, and one goal of the programme is to offer a holistic destination approach, tourism practices are not extensively covered by the websites yet. In fact, several pieces of information are given to present the route, its hotspots and attractions, but only a few websites also support the organisation of trips.

On the other hand, the websites clearly show the commitment of the different stakeholders – the managing association, the members of the route, local/regional entities – to stimulate cooperation and promote active involvement, as most of the websites have a section dedicated to news and initiatives and a section where indications are given on how to become member or support/take part in the route.

Furthermore, a difference emerges between the websites of the first routes that have been certified and those of the most recently certified ones. The websites of the newest routes – especially those certified in 2018 and 2019 – provide several, constantly updated and easy-to-find information about current activities and future events, and about how to take part in their organisation. These websites also constitute a tool for users to create a personal experience of the route, thanks, for instance, to interactive maps and audio-guides, educational materials and travel packages that can be bought on the website. It is advisable, hence, that this direction of an active involvement of users is taken by all the routes, in order to take advantage of the opportunities given by ICTs to reach the ambitious goals of the Cultural Routes programme. This should be integrated by a strategic use of social media channels for animation and promotion goals and dedicated mobile apps for tourism-oriented goals.

Finally, considering that most of the routes have a dedicated Facebook page, it would be worth conducting a future analysis of how this channel is used. This would allow both for a more comprehensive understanding of the actual online communication practices of the different routes and for an elaboration of guidelines/strategies to the advantage of the programme.

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