

## PRESS RELEASE

### Assessment of the benefits of existing cultural routes by ‘Cult-RInG’ Interreg Europe project

The direct & indirect benefits of existing cultural routes for Growth & Jobs have been highlighted by the **Cult-RInG project (Cultural Routes as Investment for Growth & Jobs)**, in the **Interreg Europe** programme of interregional cooperation. The assessment of these benefits in terms of socio-economic development has been based on a ‘Study on the Cultural Routes’ Impact on SMEs Innovation, Competitiveness and Clustering’, jointly launched by the European Commission and the Council of Europe. This Study aimed to:

- examine the potential of the CoE Cultural Routes for European **cultural tourism development**
- provide insights on the effects produced by the Cultural Routes on SMEs creation, their performance, innovation, network and clustering
- analyse how much Cultural Routes networks -national & transnational- can benefit SMEs, especially in less-known destinations, and
- how SMEs’ involvement can create a solid basis for promoting Europe as “the world’s No 1 tourist destination”

The findings of this Study are as follows:

- Cultural Routes have achieved a noteworthy impact and progress: they encourage widespread community participation in cultural activities raising awareness of a common cultural heritage
- Established on the cultural and social principles, the CoE Cultural Routes represent a source for innovation, creativity, small business generation (tourism SMEs), and cultural tourism products and services development
- They represent a great potential for networking, intercultural dialogue, and promoting the image Europe and its values
- Cultural Routes vary by themes, target groups, time of existence, progress made, network & management structures, & capacities
- Most visible within the Routes are the issues of low trans-national connectivity of the CR networks, such as:

- lack of coordination at trans-national level in the CRs development and promotion strategies
- weak brand image and marketing strategies
- limited human and financial resources
- lack of expertise in networks management
- low degree of good practice exchange
- unavailability of network management & performance evaluation tools
- For information intensive field like tourism, use of ICT is crucial for sustaining its competitiveness.

Benefits of ICT include:

- increase in the supply and quality of culture and tourism information
- access to knowledge and information at low cost
- reduction of the production and transaction costs (events, travel arrangements)
- removal of geography constraints for service suppliers and customers, and
- increased openness and transparency of business process
- Several Cultural Routes have already integrated ICT tools in their network management, marketing, and communication strategies using social media, mobile, GIS system, blogs, etc.

## Recommendations

In order to address the existing issue, the Study recommended that focused action is needed in 5 main areas:

- **Capacity building**
- **Network Governance**
- **Performance evaluation**
- **Brand image and marketing**
- **Cooperation**

### Capacity Building and Governance

- Link all Cultural Routes together in a common collaborative -noncompeting - strategy
- **Develop a more comprehensive understanding of the value of tourism for culture**
  - **the mechanisms for sustainable cultural tourism development (*Growth & Jobs*)**
  - **the role of local communities in such development**
  - the way in which technology could support this development.

- Apply clear network **governance** models (**Links with regional authorities and tourism boards/associations**)
- Earmark **funding** for key training, networking and cross-marketing activities (**Investment**)
- Engage more experts & trained professionals in Cultural Routes **governance** and management (**Links with local and regional authorities etc**)
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### Cooperation with Stakeholders

- The CoE Cultural Routes have increasingly become an instrument of **cultural diplomacy** offering a huge potential for collaboration at all levels –local, national, European, and international
- It is thus important to
  - develop a roadmap for cooperation between
    - the CoE Cultural Routes,
    - the **Routes created with European Union funds**,
    - the **UNESCO labelled European sites**, and
    - **other international initiatives**

in order to establish a strategy for the **promotion of joint cultural tourism product**

- launch a coordinated action for the development of related educational, **cultural and tourism networks**, management models, expertise, R&D, training and capacity-building programs
- **expand Cultural Routes initiatives to include non-EU countries (Iron Curtain Trail, Argonautica).**

The assessment of benefits has been enriched with evidence of success from existing cultural routes in the **Cult-RInG** partner regions, including Council of Europe certified Cultural Routes, such as:

- 'The Hansa' in north Latvia (in the cities of Valmiera and Limbazi, members of 'The Hansa Cultural Route' as well as Vidzeme Tourism Association, Cult-RInG project partner),
- 'Via Francigena' in Lazio Region, Italy (northern and southern parts)
- 'Santiago de Compostela' in north Portugal (Alto Minho, coastal route)
- St Olav Ways in West Sweden (Vastra Gotaland region),
- 'The Phoenicians Route' proposals for itineraries in Cyprus (Pafos region),
- Other routes, such as the 'Wine roads' in northern Greece (Central Macedonia Region), and
- Mythology-based and intangible heritage related proposed routes (Aphrodite in Cyprus, Greece and Italy; 'Argonautica' from ancient Iolkos, present day Volos in central Greece to ancient Kolchis, present day Georgia and return via the Black Sea, Eastern and Central Europe, Mediterranean Sea to Greece).

## Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn by **Cult-RInG Interreg Europe** project regarding the independent assessment of existing cultural routes:

- Cultural Routes are instrumental in promoting common European identity, deploying heritage and traversing borders for **cultural tourism**, as well as **contributing to regional development by creating new jobs and new businesses**, mainly SMEs and microenterprises.
- **Cultural Routes can offer unique, attractive and viable investment opportunities for Growth & Jobs.**
- The **assessment of existing Cultural Routes in this respect is of high relevance to improving policy instruments, with mainstreaming to Operational Programmes & European Structural and Investment Funds** (specifically in: Lazio Region, Italy; Norte, Portugal; Central Macedonia, Greece) and to regional tourism and cultural strategies (Vastra Gotaland, Sweden; Vidzeme, Latvia; Pafos, Cyprus).
- **Lessons for the development of proposed new Cultural Routes and improvements in existing routes** are very important (eg: 'St Paul's foot steps' through Cyprus, Greece and Italy; 'Iron Curtain Trail' – EuroVelo 13 Cycling route to be upgraded to a cultural route from Finland to the Greek/Bulgarian border; Argonauts' return route, Aphrodite route; extensions to Santiago de Compostela in north Portugal and improvements to St Olav Ways in west Sweden).

- Ends -

## Notes to Editors

The **Cult-RinG** project is led by the **Region of Central Macedonia** in Greece with five other destination authority partners: **Lazio Region** in Italy, **Region Västra Götaland** in Sweden, **Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Board** in Poland, **Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho** in Portugal and **Pafos Regional Board of Tourism** in Cyprus. The **European Cultural Tourism Network** (ECTN) based in Brussels is an Advisory partner in charge of project communication matters.

**Cult-RinG** is the only project in the Interreg Europe programme that focuses on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe.

The overall objective of the **Cult-RinG** project is to highlight the value of investments in European Cultural Routes, in terms of their contribution to Growth & Jobs, with capitalisation of good practices, policy learning, policy implementation, development of new Cultural Routes, monitoring and capacity building. Main outputs are action plans on CR development and upgrading, with implementation and monitoring of improved policy instruments in six regions, communication and dissemination tools for policy learning and capacity building, contribution to EU policies and EU2020 targets. The beneficiaries are regional authorities looking for capturing the benefits of CRs, both existing ones with greater visibility and new ones, NGOs, European Networks, EU institutions, international organisations and stakeholders.

The first phase of the project (2017-2018) will focus on exchange of experience and policy formulation resulting in action plans for implementation during the second phase (2019-2020).

The policy learning process will be organised with a focus on three specific themes related to CR impacts and development, viz:

- **Assessment of existing CRs** (expost), in terms of socioeconomic development, direct and indirect benefits for Growth & Jobs. Six CoE certified CRs through the partner regions are selected: Via Francigena (Lazio Region, Italy), Saint Olav Ways (Västra Götaland region, Sweden), Via Regia (Podkarpackie region, Poland), Santiago De Compostela (CIM Alto Minho, Portugal), Phoenicians (Pafos, Cyprus), Iter Vitis (Central Macedonia, Greece). The evaluation will follow CoE tools, criteria, principles and processes, which assess CRs in terms of stimulating cultural tourism, particularly in remote and lagging areas, and for the contribution they make to local communities in terms of: economic development and employment via the creation of tourism SMEs implementation of a variety of innovative practices within such SMEs advancing cultural understanding of the local population and CR visitors through the preservation of heritage and traditions increasing the overall attractiveness of destinations retaining local populations and improving their quality of life raising awareness of a common cultural heritage via open cultural events and festivals, as well as by means of social media.
- **Capitalisation of established best practices** from previous projects (especially CHARTS and CERTESS completed projects in the INTERREG IVC programme).

- **Development of new interregional CRs** (based on the above evaluation and capitalization), such as St Paul's footsteps (through Pafos - Cyprus, Macedonia - Greece & Lazio, Rome - Italy).

The project approach includes Interregional Workshops, leading to the production of 'Policy Guidelines', staff exchanges in order to provide hands on experience and thus strengthen the policy lessons, study tour where key issues and good practices can be demonstrated on the ground for the benefit of policy makers, stakeholder engagement, action plans preparation and implementation monitoring including new cultural routes development and enhanced visibility of existing routes, with links to SMEs, host communities, sustainable cultural tourism development, and mainstreaming of the results into Operational Programmes and European Structural and Investment Funds.

Project events in 2017 were in the frame of the UN '**International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development 2017**' and all project events in 2018 will be included in the activities for the '**European Year of Cultural Heritage 2018**', in cooperation with European Institutions.

The Cult-RInG project will conclude with an international conference, as a high level event, in the Spring of 2020.

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#### 1. Cult-RInG project Partnership:

Region of Central Macedonia, Greece (Lead Partner)	<a href="http://www.pkm.gov.gr">www.pkm.gov.gr</a>
Lazio Region, Italy	<a href="http://www.regione.lazio.it">http://www.regione.lazio.it</a>
Region Vastra Gotaland, Sweden	<a href="http://www.vastarvet.se">www.vastarvet.se</a>
Podkarpackie Regional Tourism Board, Poland	<a href="http://www.podkarpackie.travel">www.podkarpackie.travel</a>
Intermunicipal Community of Alto Minho	<a href="http://www.cim-altominho.pt">www.cim-altominho.pt</a>
Pafos Regional Board of Tourism, Cyprus (Lead Partner)	<a href="http://www.visitpafos.org.cy">www.visitpafos.org.cy</a>
European Cultural Tourism Network, Belgium	<a href="http://www.culturaltourism-network.eu">www.culturaltourism-network.eu</a>

2. **Interreg Europe programme** is one of the instruments for the implementation of the EU's **cohesion policy** and helps regional and local governments across Europe to develop and deliver better policy. The Cooperation programme covers the whole territory of the European Union and Norway and Switzerland. The programme is co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) with a budget of €359 million for the 2014-2020 period. More information about the programme: [www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu) .