

CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN ROMANIA. A WAY TO PROMOTE ROMANIAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

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Abstract. *Launched by the Council of Europe in 1987, the programme of cultural routes is meant to prove that the European cultural heritage (regardless of the time and space) has the ability to create a commune ground between all countries within Europe. They represent everything that Europe stands for: from cultural democracy and diversity, cultural enrichment, to human right protection. The cultural routes represent a model of cultural management promoted by the Council of Europe, but they can also be perceived as a model of touristic management, as they have the potential to contribute the economic development of a country, as a landmark. After the covid-19 pandemic it is interesting for us to see the way in which we can foster these routes including sites in Romania, to use them as way of promoting Romanian cultural heritage.*

Keywords: *cultural heritage, cultural routes, romanian tourism, economic development*

Introduction

The great cultural value of European heritage can be somewhat overwhelming for tourist looking to uncover the beauty of history, art, and beauty within Europe. As a way to ease and facilitate access to cultural heritage, the Directorate General of Democracy (DGII) launched the Cultural Routes programme supporting the Council of Europe, in 1987. Over the centuries, cultural routes have helped with the travel and mobility patterns, becoming a valuable resource for promoting cultural heritage in tourism and travel.¹ As of 2022, we have a total of forty-eight² Cultural Routes, created by the Council of Europe, all having different themes, and being spread throughout different countries within Europe. They are easily-accessibly by country or by theme, using the official website of the Council of Europe.³

In Romania, there are seven out of the forty-eight Routes: European Route of Jewish Heritage (2004), TRANSROMANICA (2007), Iter Vitis Route (2009), European Cemeteries Route (2010), ATRIUM (2013), Réseau Art Nouveau Network (2014) and Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route (2015).

1. Why Cultural Routes

Cultural routes are a new concept in international heritage protection that appeared in the last ten years in scientific papers (Li Mei, 2014). They have recently been used especially in tourism, to promote cultural destinations. Yet, the theoretical tools to help cope

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1 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/57321_en, accessed July 18th, 2022.

2 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/by-theme>, accessed August 1st, 2022

3 <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/about>, accessed August 1st, 2022

with this new concept in the field are still at a beginner's level and are mainly focused on tourism management issues (Severo, 2019). Research shows that in recent years an increasing number of people have opted for guided routes when deciding to explore, travel, see or experience something new and scientist have even created metadata support for routed algorithms targeted towards cultural heritage exploration (Baker&Verstockt, 2017). This goes to show that they are becoming more and more of interest for the scientific community and for beneficiaries alike.

For the Council of Europe, cultural heritage is one of the main priorities, as seen in The European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century, which helps better consolidate and reiterate the previous Resolutions and engagements of the Council with regards to culture and cultural heritage.⁴ In line with the strategy, and following the same pattern for promoting and conserving cultural heritage, the routes created by the Council are a tool that acts like a driving force for developing a new approach towards physical and intangible heritage and are considered as key element in building a local identity at an European level (Beltrano, 2015).

2. Cultural Routes in Romania

Romania is a member state participating in the cultural routes since 2013 and it is crossed by eight out of the 38 Cultural Routes: European Route of Jewish Heritage, TRANSROMANICA – The Romanesque Routes of European Heritage, Iter Vitis Route, European Cemeteries Route, ATRIUM – Architecture of Totalitarian Regimes of the 20th Century in Europe's Urban Memory, Réseau Art Nouveau Network, European Emperors and Danube Wine Route and Iron Curtain Trail.

As of 2020, the Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment has created a voluntary system for the recognition of Cultural Routes. It was developed together with the local public authorities and the touristic organisations in Romania. This was also the occasion for the first cultural routes of Romania to launch: the Route of the Wooden Churches, in Bihor County.⁵

In the next paragraphs we will discuss the role and involvement of Romania in each of the eight Cultural Routes, starting with the European Route of Jewish Heritage. Historically speaking, Romania has been one of the most important Jewish centres in Eastern Europe. According to the History Museum of the Romanian Jews, the first traces of Jews heritage in Romania date 2nd c. C.E in the Roman province of Dacia. Later, after the second half of the 12th century (CE) Jews start appearing more and more in historical writings all throughout Romanian territory. The first Great Synagogue is built in Romania in 1846 (Bucharest) and two years later there is evidence that Jewish craftsmen and intellectuals join the Revolution (bankers Davicion Bally and Hillel Manoah, painters C.D. Rosenthal and Barbu Iscovescu et. al.)⁶. After that moment, Jewish cultural representation

4 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 22 February 2017 at the 1278th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies, <https://rm.coe.int/16806f6a03>, accessed September 8th, 2022

5 More information with regards to the subject: Romania: the first Cultural Route certified by the Ministry of Economy, Energy and Business Environment, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/-/romania-the-first-cultural-route-certified-by-the-ministry-of-economy-energy-and-business-environment>, accessed September 8th, 2022.

6 For more information about Jews history in Romania: The Museum of the History of the Romanian Jews, <https://www.museum.jewishfed.ro/index.php>, accessed September 8th, 2022.

in Romania grew and spread throughout the country. Today, you can find Jewish cultural heritage in every big city of Romania (tangible: Theatres, Museums, Cultural centres, and intangible: sonatas, festivals, dances). The federation of Jewish communities in Romania is very active and organizes different events in cultural cities as Sibiu, Sighisoara, Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca.

Being part of the European Route of Jewish Heritage allows Romania to share these activities and promote them using European platforms dedicated to culture. Using the case study of Oradea (one of the biggest promoters of Jewish culture and heritage), we can see that a major part of foreign tourist coming to Oradea, are attracted to Jewish cultural heritage. House Darvas alone, managed to bring over 16.000 tourist in Oradea in the year of 2021⁷. But Oradea has ten houses and palaces and six synagogues, all contributing to the attraction of tourist in the city.



Figure 1. A map for Transylvanian synagogues

TRANSROMANICA is another cultural route that Romania is being a part of. It embodies the Romanesque culture, architecture and gastronomy and it is one of the most developed routes of the Council of Europe. Being part of oldest Roman legacies in Eastern Europe, allows Romania to be one of the few countries in the region to be part of this route. The representative cultural heritage for this route in Romania is the Roman Catholic cathedral Saint Michael, in Alba Iulia. This cathedral is highlighted in TRANSROMANICA's web page, making it easy for tourists to find information regarding it.⁸

The culture of wine and winemaking is an important part of Romanian food culture. It was just natural that when a cultural route involving viticulture and wineries was made, Romania was included. The problem with this route is that, despite being very popular

⁷ According to Transylvania Business, <https://www.transilvaniabusiness.ro/2022/02/16/casa-darvas-la-roche-din-oradea-a-atras-in-anul-2021-peste-16-000-de-turisti/>, accessed September 9th, 2022

⁸ The website even offers suggestions with regards to establishing a one day trip to Alba-Iulia, providing information such as location, contact, opening hours and more, <https://www.transromanica.com/location/roman-catholic-cathedral-of-st-michael-alba-iulia/>, accessed September 9th 2022.

among some of the other countries within the Route, when it comes to Romania, it is not promoted at all.

Another route that would have the potential to promote Romanian culture and heritage is the Route of European Cemeteries. The Merry Cemetery (Săpânța), Bellu Cemetery (Bucharest), The Central Cemetery (Cluj-Napoca) are some of the names of the most recognizable graveyards in Romania, but still, they are not visible when it comes to the cultural patrimony that is being promoted. The only one that is named and promoted via the Route of European Cemeteries is Bellu Cemetery, the place where famous cultural and historical personalities are buried.⁹

ATRIUM is Route designed to honour the architecture of totalitarian regimes in the 20th Century. In Romania, we have two cities that are part of this route: Stei (starting 2019) and Iași (2013). Used as a propaganda system, the Communist architecture was mainly focused on demolishing and rebuilding central areas in urban regions. This is best observed in Iasi, a city that stood a cultural model in the communist era in Romania. Stei, on the other hand, joined the ATRIUM Route as the first city that was made from scratch by the Communist Party. It was designed in Moscow and build under Soviet supervision.¹⁰ These two cities are of great importance for the cultural heritage left by the Communist era in Romania, one of the few if we could say that.

Yet again, the city of Oradea in the focus point when it comes to the European Cultural Routes, as it is the only one included in the Réseau Art Nouveau Network. Together with cities such as Vienna, Paris, Palermo, Barcelona or Brussel, Oradea is the focus of a Route created to celebrate the Art Nouveau style and architecture. In Romania, we can also find Art Nouveau buildings in cities such as Bucharest, Constanța, Târgu Mureș and Iași.

Lastly, Romania integrated the Historic Cafes Route in 2022 with two cafes which date hundreds of years back. The first Café, housed at Brukenthal Castle in Avrig, Romania, has a history dating back to 1788, while the second one, *Festival '39*, in Brașov, date back to 1939 but has many cultural and design elements of the early 1900s, such as old typewriters, decorations and cash registers.¹¹

3. The Impact of Cultural Routes

The eight European Cultural Routes, that Romania is being a part of, can be considered a starting point for the touristic cultural development of our country. As assessed by Steliana Cojocariu, a National representative of the Authority for Tourism in Romania, the development of cultural routes is an important tool that contributes to social cohesion through intercultural exchanges and participatory activities (Cojocariu, 2015). Being part of the network of European Cultural Routes has allowed Romania to develop its own Cultural Routes: The cultural Route of the Fortified Wooden Churches in Romania, the route of open-air ethnographic museums in Romania, „Following Hercules” Route, Memorial

9 The entire article can be read at: <https://www.romania-insider.com/romanias-only-cemetery-on-the-european-cemeteries-route-in-the-spotlight-in-2015>, accessed September 13th, 2022.

10 More on the subject: <https://www.romania-insider.com/stei-romania-atrium-cultural-route>, accessed September 13th, 2022.

11 Romania is the 14th country participating in the “Historic Cafes Route” and has Historic Cafes – members in EHICA – 2 Historic Cafes the new members of EHICA, <https://historiccafesroute.com/romania-is-the-14th-country-participating-in-the-historic-cafes-route-and-has-historic-cafes-members-in-ehica-2-historic-cafes-the-new-members-of-ehica/>, accessed September 13th, 2022.

Houses Route, and others¹². The main objectives set by the Romanian Government when it comes to these cultural routes are¹³:

- The promotion of cultural, artistic, and historical heritage sites.
- The development of tourism and stimulation of socio-economic development.
- The creation of a cooperation framework between the counties of Romania.
- Sustainable development among the locations across the routes.
- The increasing in the number of tourists in Romania.
- Promoting the tangible and intangible heritage of Romania in the EU and internationally.
- Promoting cultural destinations by organizing events including elements specific to the routes.

Cultural routes have impacted the way in which cultural heritage is seen. We can now observe the many layers of culture, by understanding the connection between different cultural sites from different region of the same country. We create a virtual map that allows us to travel through time and space, discovering the underneath of ancient life and connecting with our past and ancestors.

Conclusions

Analysing the impact of cultural routes for tourism and for cultural heritage, when it comes to Romania, there are some conclusions we can draw and suggestions we can make. First, as seen throughout this paper, the cultural routes of the Council of Europe are not well-known within the borders of Romania. A limited number of people know about their existence, and that is because they are not too visible on social media, they don't have a platform and are not being promoted by stakeholders in the field (entrepreneurs, cultural heritage owners, nor the state). Even though they have the potential of a great impact with regards to the development of cultural tourism (as seen in European countries such as Serbia¹⁴), cultural routes are not exploited and or benefited from as they should. Second, cultural routes represent for Romania a model of good practice, being a first step towards a more embedded system of promoting cultural heritage, of creating cultural networks that connect different counties or regions that have similar cultural backgrounds. As part of the Enlarged Partial Agreement of Cultural Routes, Romania has been the beneficiary of a network that connects tens of cultural objectives over the continent, offering tourist the possibility to experience a trail of cultural heritage, and not just one touristic objective at a time.

Lastly, the value of Cultural Routes in Romania is given by the possibility of new tourist to discover the beautiful heritage that lies within the borders of the country. For example, if enthusiasts and fans of the Roman empire and Roman architecture are interested in new places to discover Roman heritage, they can easily find information with regards to TRANSROMANICA Route, and by doing that, they discover Romania as a possible destination that satisfies their need for culture. Going on from that, those specific tourists

12 See the extensive list here: <http://turism.gov.ro/web/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NATIONALE-30.06.pdf>, accessed September 13th, 2022.

13 As presented by the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, <http://turism.gov.ro/web/rute-cultural-turistice/>, accessed September 13th, 2022.

14 As proved by a study conducted by Sanja Bozic and Nemanja Tomic, *Developing the Cultural Route Evaluation Model (CREM) and its application on the Trail of Roman Emperors, Serbia*, for Tourism Management Perspectives, vol. 17, 2016, pg. 26-35.

may find other enjoyable things about Romania, and it creates a circular system that help promoting and cultivating Romanian tourism and cultural diversity.

There are things that Romania has the potential to improve when it comes to cultural routes. Based on the information provided in this paper, there are few to be recommended. Starting with creating an interactive online platform to promote and offer detail on every cultural route that the country has, that will allow tourist (national and international) to easily establish a trail that they want to visit and create a vacation based on the cultural sites that they are interested in. The platform can also include recommendations with regards to housing, local food, activities, becoming a point of interest for beneficiaries and entrepreneurs/ business owners alike. Another recommendation would be towards the Romanian Government (The Ministry of Culture), and that is to offer the possibility of an official system that connects and creates different types of cultural routes depending on statistical data regarding tourist's feedback and needs. This system can prove the state's interest towards understanding the changing needs of the society and the transformations that occur in the cultural touristic market (more digitalised cultural objectives, a better focus on cultural events, immersive cultural experiences et. al.).

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