

## “Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: providing a unique platform for shared European history and heritage”



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Since its beginnings, the Council of Europe - the oldest pan-European International Organisation- has been aware of the importance of cultural heritage for achieving greater unity among Europeans.

One of its most innovative initiatives was to launch in 1987 the **Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Programme**, to enhance the richness and the diversity of the European cultures and to render shared European cultural identities into a tangible reality, beyond political and ideological divisions. By means of a journey through space and time, these Cultural Routes demonstrate how heritage and cultures of different and distant regions of Europe contribute to a shared cultural heritage.

In 2010, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe established an Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA) to enable closer cooperation between states particularly interested in the development of the Cultural Routes. The EPA ensures the development, implementation, evaluation and promotion of Cultural Routes, which put into practice a holistic understanding of cultural heritage from a European and transnational perspective. Today, the Programme benefits from cooperation among its 33 member States, regional and local authorities, as well as international Organisations, including the European Union, OECD, UNESCO and UNWTO.

Over the past 33 years, the programme has continuously grown, as the Cultural Routes have expanded in number, counting today 38 certified cultural routes; in membership, reaching more than 3,000 network members; and in geographical scope, with their increased presence in more than 60 countries in Europe and beyond.

The success of the Programme in the promotion of European values, respect for identities and diversity, intercultural dialogue and exchanges across borders was recognized in 2019 with the award of the Charles V Prize by His Majesty the King of Spain. This prestigious award - granted for the first time to a European programme - honours people, organisations, projects or initiatives that contribute to the enhancement of Europe's cultural and historical values.

Today, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe encourage European citizens to re-explore their heritage, by connecting community-based actions into bigger networks and promoting their visibility and access to visitors from all over the world. While some routes enhance arts, architecture, history and civilisations, some others are dedicated to landscapes, handicrafts and religious heritage. They all aim to act as a channel for intercultural dialogue and promotion of a better understanding of European cultural identity.

Cultural Routes allow the establishment of cooperation links between territories, promoting integration and opening up to other geographic horizons. This unique model provides opportunities for transnational cultural cooperation not only within the European continent but also with other regions such as Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC).

Europe and Latin America are linked not only by a common history but also by shared values, identities and heritage. As such, several certified Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe currently cross Latin American countries. It is the case of the European Routes of Emperor Charles V, whose network counts members in Panama, the Réseau Art Nouveau Network, with members in Cuba, and Le Corbusier Destinations, including members in Argentina. Other certified routes, such as the European Route of Historic Thermal Towns and the Prehistoric Rock Art trails, could be potentially extended to Latin America and the Caribbean as well.

The relevance of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe for Latin America is grounded not only in the possible extension of certified routes to LAC countries but also in opportunities for the establishment of new LAC routes following its successful methodology. The region could benefit from the exchange of knowledge, tools and good practices in order to reinforce endogenous capacities.

At a time when our societies face new and profound challenges, culture and heritage must remain at the core of our policies. In both EU and LAC regions, achieving sustainable development requires taking into account the role of culture as a driving force, the respect for cultural diversity and the protection of cultural heritage. The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme is certainly a unique tool to tackle these challenges in a sustainable way.

The potential for further European Union – Latin America and the Caribbean cooperation in the field of cultural routes is yet to be explored. The construction of new models of association between the different cultural, social and economic sectors and the participation of International Organisations, governments, entities and stakeholders from both regions can undoubtedly lead to fruitful joint initiatives. Exploring future synergies between the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the European Union and the EU-LAC Foundation could certainly mean a step forward in building stronger bridges between these two regions.

For more than 30 years, Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe have been fostering regional cooperation through mutual understanding and cross-border exchanges. We invite you to join us on these journeys of discovery!