

ECTN, European Cultural Tourism Network organizes the 9th International Conference for Cultural Tourism in Europe: “Intangible Heritage, incomparable asset for sustainable and responsible tourism development”

Video Speaker: **Stefano Dominioni**, Executive Secretary, Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe (EPA), Director, European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR)

23-24 September 2016, Plataforma das Artes e da Criatividade
Guimaraes, Ave region (Portugal)

Mr. Raitis Sijāts, President of ECTN,
Ms. Ieva Treija, ECTN Coordinator,
Honoured participants and guests,
Dear friends,

On behalf of the Council of Europe, it is a great pleasure to greet all the organizers and the participants of the 9th ECTN International Conference for Cultural Tourism in Europe. I would like to start by thanking Ms. Treija for her kind invitation to join you all here today in Guimaraes on the occasion of this important conference whose theme focuses on intangible heritage as an asset for sustainable and responsible tourism development. I truly wish I could have been with you here in Portugal.

Our continent is permeated by the richness and the diversity of the European cultures. The Cultural Routes programme was launched by the Council of Europe in 1987 and tells the story of this past and present heritage through itineraries that crisscross Europe and beyond. The programme contributes to the promotion of European identity through the knowledge of Europe’s common heritage, developing intercultural links and dialogue spanning across different countries of Europe.

Travelling along the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe is instrumental in achieving a thorough understanding of our common European cultural heritage and in embracing the most fundamental values of the Council of Europe, upon which our society has developed. These values are human rights, cultural democracy and diversity, mutual exchanges and understanding. The Cultural Routes represent and illustrate the chapters of European memory, history, tangible and intangible heritage, and aim at developing exemplary projects in the fields of cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development.

Intangible cultural heritage represents the history, the traditions and culture of a group and is the emblem of an inherited and invaluable wealth of knowledge and skills. We reckon of utmost importance the protection and recognition of the intangible cultural heritage, on the one hand, but also its promotion and cultural fruition, on the other. As a means to achieve this objective, the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme aims at strengthening dialogue, cooperation and participation between cultures.

When we talk about cultural heritage, we do not only imagine a historical monument or a cathedral but also the practices, knowledge and skills that communities recognize as integral part of their cultural

heritage, the so-called “intangible cultural heritage”. This immaterial and yet palpable heritage provides those communities a sense of identity, of intergenerational transmission and enriching cultural diversity.

The Council of Europe Cultural Routes represent an essential tool for raising awareness of the shared European heritage not only as a cornerstone of European identity and citizenship, but also as a source of social, economic and cultural development. So far, 32 Cultural Routes are integral part of the programme and have been certified by the Council of Europe. Their rich thematic history and identity span from the industrial ceramics to the olive tree, from Phoenicians’ nautical courses to the Viking legacy, to mention a few.

The Cultural Routes programme takes account of the physical and intangible heritage of ethnic or social minorities in Europe and each Cultural Route promotes intangible cultural heritage and cultural tourism through its theme traditions and history. Let me mention two examples of cultural and responsible tourism based on the immaterial heritage of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, both crossing Portugal with regard to their thematic history.

The Phoenicians’ Route is the network of the great nautical courses used by Phoenicians since the twelfth century B.C. as their main trade and cultural lines of communication in the Mediterranean Sea. “The Hannibal Pathway” is an innovative project covering the main overland walk on the Phoenicians’ Route and the area where the epic battle between Roman and Punic troops took place in Tuoro, Italy. In the area, nothing tangible is left, except the landscape, intact thanks to a forward-looking administration. The tourists and visitors may experience today the Phoenicians’ Route through virtual reconstructions and the enjoyment of a past and yet imaginable landscape.

The olive tree has marked the everyday lives of the Mediterranean peoples and is associated with their customs and ways of life. Common meals have always been part of the Mediterranean communities, bringing conviviality and social exchanges through food. For this reason, the Routes of the Olive Tree prioritize the promotion of traditional Mediterranean gastronomy and products leading to the blooming of popular food and wine tourism, fostering intercultural dialogue, responsible tourism and cultural events.

The continuous expansion of our programme will be object of our annual Advisory Forum taking place on 26-27 October in Vilnius, Lithuania, to which you are invited! The Forum is the most significant event for the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme and will explore the themes of expanding our geographic coverage as well as of developing new best practices.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe established in 2010 the Enlarged Partial Agreement (EPA) through a Resolution open to member and non-member States of the Council of Europe aiming at providing political support to promote Cultural Routes projects. Portugal joined the agreement in 2011. ECTN has the potential for becoming an Observer to our programme by virtue of its mission to bring together the tourism and cultural industry professionals to exchange mutually and develop new innovative approaches to the fields.

I wish you an excellent continuation in your International Conference.

Thank you for your attention.

Stefano Dominioni

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Director, European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR)