The experience of common European heritage: A critical discourse analysis of tourism practices at Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

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Abstract

Routes and networks with a heritage theme can be seen as alternative ways of approaching heritage, as they situate heritage sites in larger geographical and cultural contexts. The development of routes and networks can benefit places and stakeholders by attracting tourists, but in practice most routes and networks do not use their potential to become an experience-based form of tourism. In this article, seven Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe are researched to see how they connect places, present European narratives and provide tourism experiences. Critical Discourse Analysis is used to examine the use of tourism in Cultural Routes. Most Cultural Routes are networks of sites that share a theme, without being physically connected. These networks, often led by governments and heritage experts, aim at creating a pan-European identity by showing the connections between historic narratives over Europe. In this way, local narratives are placed in a European perspective to teach Europeans about their common heritage. However, despite the aim of the Cultural Routes to let visitors experience common European heritage, practical information for tourists is often missing in information sources of the Cultural Routes. In addition, it is impossible to let people experience a complete European network, so the word route can be misleading. This raises the question whether creating tourism itineraries is really one of the main goals of the Cultural Routes, or if it is more about bringing stakeholders together in a European network.

Keywords

European cultural heritage, identity, networks, routes, stakeholders, tourism experiences, tourism itineraries

Introduction

Routes, trails and networks are not new concepts but have a long history that goes back to pilgrimages and trade routes and networks. Nowadays, heritage routes and networks are used for conservation, education and to promote tourism, many of them inspired by ancient routes. Routes and networks are complementary, but are not the same. Moulin & Boniface describe the difference as follows: “routes are the actual itinerary of travel, and networks are the background mechanisms to produce them as entities”. While routes imply the physical experience of a geographical area, networks serve as a platform for information access and move beyond physical routes that link places.

Routes and networks can bring economic, social and cultural benefits. These can include social contacts and possibilities for the exchange of information to stakeholders and residents of areas along the route or in the network. These benefits are gained by attracting tourists who then bring revenue to the area, and by sharing the load of nature and heritage conservation among different stakeholders. Routes and networks can especially help with the attraction of tourists in marginalised areas, as a route or network can bring tourists to a certain region and bring attention to places that would not have been visited as a tourism destination on their own. In this way, routes and networks are suitable tools for environmental conservation and economic development. However, they do not only provide benefits for
marginalised areas but also for other destinations, because they increase the attractiveness of a destination as a whole. They provide better visitor management potential and create the possibility of increasing the sustainability of a tourism product by, for example, promoting the spreading of tourism.10

Routes and networks with a heritage theme can be seen as alternative ways of approaching heritage, since they connect heritage sites in a larger geographical and cultural context. They also have the possibility to place historical connections in a broader context.11 They can occur at a local, regional, national, international and transcontinental level, or all levels at the same time.12 Approaching heritage sites as part of a larger network can help to emphasise the wider importance of the heritage and the stories which can then potentially reach a bigger audience. In order to achieve this goal, educating visitors on the theme and on local, national or international histories of places on the routes or in the network is essential.13

In this article, seven case studies of Cultural Routes included in the Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe are studied to show how routes and networks with a European heritage theme connect places in Europe and to show how they present narratives and communicate practical tourist information to visitors. From earlier research it emerged that the potential of most Cultural Routes to become an experience-based form of tourism could be more exploited.14 It is the top-down approach towards both the development of routes and the provision of information to visitors that influences tourism practices.15 First, literature about heritage discourses, European heritage and heritage tourism is reviewed. This is followed by an exploration of the seven case studies and the opportunities and challenges they face within the European identity, tourism and the influence of discourses.

Heritage discourses

To develop Cultural Routes successfully as tourism experiences, it seems clear that route developers should use the knowledge of the (local) tourism industry.16 The only question is how to realise this.17 Cultural Routes often have a top-down approach, driven by the dominant heritage discourse. However, it is the question if this approach is the best way to achieve the tourism goals of cultural and heritage routes and to satisfy both visitors and local residents.18

Laurajane Smith states that heritage is a social process creating and maintaining certain social and cultural values. Heritage is highly political as it is a source of power and it has a discursive nature.19 Smith20 defines heritage discourses as “the collection of ideas, concepts, and categorizations”. The dominant heritage discourse is strongly based on western elite cultural values. These values are promoted as being universal, but are actually part of what Smith calls the “Authorized Heritage Discourse”.21 That heritage is dominated by a western viewpoint makes sense knowing that Europe, the United States and the English language dominate academia.22 The Authorized Heritage Discourse is a set of values and meanings of experts, institutionalised in state agencies and amenities, and undermines alternative ways of thinking about heritage.23 It constructs both the theoretical idea of heritage as well as the practices of heritage, which include conservation, management of heritage and tourism activities.24 The Authorized Heritage Discourse focuses most of its attention on material sites, objects, places and landscapes that, as Smith25 says, “must” be cared for, to enable passing them on to future generations. In addition, the discourse mainly cares about the narrative of a national or universal heritage, in order to provide a sense of community on a national or wider level, ignoring sub-national narratives. It also tends to promote the narrative of the elite classes, ignoring other social groups such as indigenous communities.26 An example is the heritage of the working class. The number of sites is growing, but only a very small part of UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites are related to industrial heritage.27 At existing sites, the emphasis is mainly on the elite: they focus on inventors and entrepreneurs rather than on the people who worked there.

The work of international organisations such as the UNESCO World Heritage Committee has a lot in common with the Authorized Heritage Discourse, as their definition of heritage values assumes that heritage is something to be studied by “experts”.28 Furthermore, some scholars have noted that the political influence and national strategic interests of countries have increasingly driven the selection processes of the World Heritage List of UNESCO, and similar criticisms are given to Intangible Cultural Heritage.29 This also becomes clear through the notion of “universal heritage value”, a concept developed during the World Heritage Convention in 1972 by UNESCO.30 The meaning of “universal” in this sense is that the importance of something with “universal heritage value” goes beyond local boundaries, and therefore automatically ignores local communities. This gives privilege to the individual or organisation that has the power to decide if something has universal value.31

Since the 1990s, several scholars began to criticise the concept of heritage. Many of these critics challenge the Authorized Heritage Discourse.32 The critiques and counter discourses that challenged the Authorized Heritage Discourse were mainly about the idea that the past is not “a foreign country” as Lowenthal wrote, but that the past is connected to the present, here and now.33 Around the year 2000, “critical heritage studies” really emerged as a scholarly reaction against the Authorized Heritage Discourse. This also criticised the traditional focus of heritage as something technical and political, by emphasising that heritage is mainly a cultural phenomenon.34

Critical heritage studies implies a democratisation of the practice of heritage because the power of experts and traditional institutions is being questioned35 and
heritage is becoming more open and accessible to people. It is therefore interesting to see that an expert-led institution like the Council of Europe decides which routes qualify to become a European Cultural Route. This stresses the domination of experts in European heritage and shows that there is still a huge gap between many heritage routes and critical heritage studies. However, there are also signs that heritage is becoming more and more bottom-up by the growing role of public participation. Especially the internet is important in this, as the internet allows us to interpret and to apply critique to heritage without the control of official agencies. So, there is an increasing desire among people to include their own heritage, but the designation of heritage is still in the hands of “experts”.

**European heritage**

Bodies like the European Union and the Council of Europe were the first who attempted to see Europe as “a united pan-European Europe – be that in political, economic, or cultural terms.” From the 2000s onwards, the idea of a common heritage was becoming increasingly important in policies of the European Union. The view of a common heritage in Europe is based on discursive interpretations that are rooted in a sense of European identity. This sense of European identity implies that there is one European culture with a “community of Europeans”, while in reality Europe is very diverse. Cultural heritage is an important factor in building a European identity; since the construction of European identity is based on a common past. However, focusing on a common past can generate the idea that European countries were always as integrated as they now are. This can be problematic because European history is not linear and knows many discontinuities, including stories outside the “dominant” narrative. When creating European heritage, it is important to be aware of the included heritage and the represented or forgotten groups by utilising a European narrative.

By the implementation of European cultural heritage initiatives and programmes, the European Union aims to strengthen its legitimacy in which it uses a strategy that is also known from nation-building processes. In this way, the creation of a European heritage is a political project of the European Union and, as Lähdesmäki describes, “a form of using discursive, narrative, and performance power.”

**Heritage tourism**

Tourism has the ability to enhance the link between the past, the present and the future and can shape the way people make sense of the world. In the field of tourism, heritage provides possibilities but also challenges. Many challenges are contained within the perspective of the dominant discourse in heritage tourism. There are, for example, conflicts between bodies like UNESCO, the “experts” and local governments, representing the “common people”. Furthermore, heritage and tourism have a complicated relationship, as it represents the debate between tradition and modernity. Heritage, especially according to the perspective of the dominant heritage discourse, represents tradition and stability. Tourism on the other hand involves change. Heritage sites are right in the middle of the tradition of conservation and tourism, but in this way can also connect the present with the past so that, at heritage sites, the past can be experienced.

It is notable that heritage tourism literature mainly focuses on the supply of heritage and its management. Less attention has been paid to the demand site of heritage tourism, or the relation between supply and demand. However, visitors and their demand play an important role in heritage tourism, as the connection of tourists with heritage influences the tourism experience and can give heritage tourism a meaningful understanding. Experience is an important concept in relation to demand. It seems that tourists are not just looking for tourism products and services anymore, but for experiences accompanied by tourism products and services. The value and performance of a tourist destination is determined by the experience it offers and the motivation of tourists to visit a destination is affected by the offered experience. This includes providing a compelling and memorable theme with a coherent story and engaging tourists with, for example, tourist activities. Personalisation of experiences is needed, as people want to feel that their experience is unique and authentic, even if the authenticity of the experience is staged in some way.

In recent years, many new heritage tourism experiences have been developed that are different from the traditional heritage experiences that are mainly focused on visiting monuments of the past. The new heritage tourism experiences are based on discourses that occur during the visit of heritage sites by the tourists themselves and make heritage tourism a social, bottom-up phenomenon. Tourism stakeholders can in this way help with the development of a more community-based understanding of heritage. The involvement of other actors in the way the state frames heritage is increasing, with tourism as a driving force behind these changes. Looking from the supply and demand base of heritage tourism this is interesting, as an increasing wish to experience heritage destinations within a community-based understanding of heritage can cause a shift in the supply of heritage tourism.

Focusing on routes and trails, it is also important to pay attention to the needs and demands of tourists. As an example, for tourists, cultural heritage routes are a form of tourism in itself. For tourists interested in heritage routes, it seems that the journey is as important as the destination itself and for them, physically going through a landscape is part of the tourist experience.
This experience of traversing a landscape is interesting for routes as tourists are increasingly interested by the actual experience of heritage. Visitors of a cultural heritage route want to discover and feel the identity, history and stories of a landscape while traversing it and being "on the spot", and creating a holistic experience of place. Cultural heritage routes are ideal for experiences, as routes connect different heritage sites and give tourists a complete experience of the landscape and therefore a deeper meaning. Accordingly, cultural and heritage routes are a good way of giving tourists an experience-based tourism product. This increasing demand of experiences gives routes many opportunities to bring their theme and narratives to the public.

Methods

In the present research, Critical Discourse Analysis is used to look critically at the way tourism is used to promote European cultural heritage, which represents the diversity of the European identity and the commonness of European heritage. Critical Discourse Analysis is an effective methodology to study meanings, interpretations, (the creation of) identities and the way narratives are presented and promoted. The methodology also makes it possible to analyse the context of language use, together with the relationship between language and power. For these reasons, Critical Discourse Analysis is a useful tool in order to research how European identity and European heritage are interpreted and presented by the Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe. Many varying research approaches can be taken in Critical Discourse Analysis, from qualitative case studies to studies with large data sets. In this research, a qualitative research approach is used as this allows a deeper insight into tourism practices at cultural routes and makes it possible to critically reflect on this phenomenon to investigate the current state of the engagement with tourism.

To critically study tourism using cultural routes, the content of the websites of seven Cultural Routes and other sources such as brochures have been analysed. The seven routes in this research were selected by their date of certification as Cultural Routes: all seven routes were certified in 2019 and 2020. The sources were selected by their relevance for the research and their availability, looking at as many relevant sources as possible. The content of the data is observed from the viewpoint of a visitor, without engaging with the developers of the routes. This made it possible to critically analyse the content of the sources, without outside influence, as the term critical needs to be understood as being distanced to the data. For the analysis, the criteria of Critical Discourse Analysis are used. In Critical Discourse Analysis, analysis needs to focus on three things: "on texts, on the discursive practices of production and consumption and on the wider socio-cultural practices which discourse helps (re)produce." Those three criteria were translated into a topic list (Table 1), which is used to analyse the promotional content of the Cultural Routes. The results of the analysis were brought together in a dataset in Excel, which made it possible to create a clear overview of each route and to compare the seven routes with each other.

Besides the analysis of relevant texts, ArcGIS Online is used to visualise the geographical structure of the routes. Mapping the geographical structures of the routes helps to show the connection and spreading of the routes.

Table 1. Topic list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General information</th>
<th>The creation of a pan-European identity</th>
<th>Heritage tourism</th>
<th>Discursive nature of heritage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Name of the route</td>
<td>· The display of the theme as European culture</td>
<td>· The available information for visitors (practical as well as background)</td>
<td>· The inclusion of cultural identities in the narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Organisation</td>
<td>· The emphasis on unity and diversity between European citizens</td>
<td>· The way the information is presented to (future) visitors</td>
<td>· The way of presenting narratives to visitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Start date</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>· Who tells the narratives?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Year of certification</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Qualification(s)/Certification(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Route type</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Geographical structure of the route</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Target group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Main aim of the route</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cultural Routes

In this research, Cultural Routes of the Cultural Routes Programme of the Council of Europe are studied. The programme was launched in 1987 and since then, 40 routes through Europe have been declared to be Cultural Routes. All of these routes have themes concerning either peoples, migrations or major European movements. Besides the different thematic areas, Cultural Routes also have different geographical structures. There are three main categories of geographical structures of routes:

- territorial routes;
- linear routes;
- reticular pattern (archipelagos) routes.

It is important to note that the word "route" is not only understood in the sense of physical pathways, but is also used in a more general way as being a network of sites or a geographical area sharing a theme.
routes are Cultural Routes that involve territories that share a theme. This theme should link different regions of Europe that are characterised by the territorial contiguity of the included territories. Linear routes are based on historical infrastructure, such as pilgrimage and trade routes. Sites along these routes are physically connected by the route. Reticular pattern routes are not characterised by territorial continuity such as territorial routes, but are composed of individual goods that are connected by a theme. They are network-based routes and can consist of different elements like individual goods or (part of) cities.82

For European organisations, routes and networks can act as mechanisms towards the European ideal, with a political agenda behind the creation of routes and networks.83 The transnational dimension of cultural routes is very important for the Cultural Routes programme. Being transnational allows travellers to look beyond the administrative borders of countries and makes it possible to link different regions in Europe and even beyond Europe.84

Cultural Routes play an important role in the European Tourism Strategy, especially for cultural tourism, as Cultural Routes represent a sustainable form of tourism and they represent Europe as “a destination for a quality cultural experience”.85 The focus on cultural tourism and travelling is also visible in the aim of the Cultural Routes programme and seems to be imported for the realisation of the goals.86 The programme is based on an ideology and has high ambitions, which makes the Cultural Routes programme a complex project which needs constant action, research and evaluation.87

Earlier study has been applied to the use of Cultural Routes for tourism and how to improve this by Walda in 2014.88 It is interesting to see if there are changes visible since then, to see if the newer routes are more engaged with tourism. This article gives the current state of being of tourism issues at the Cultural Routes by investigating the discourses behind the routes that are certified in 2019 and 2020, which are the following seven Cultural Routes:

- European Route of Industrial Heritage
- Iron Curtain Trail
- Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades
- Liberation Route Europe
- Routes of Reformation
- European Route of Historic Gardens
- Via Romea Germanica

These routes are the best representation of the current creation of European identity through tourism and the heritage subjects Europe is currently interested in. They can also show whether something has changed since the research of Walda. In the following, the seven Cultural Routes will be introduced.

Results

In this section, the results of the discourse analysis of the seven Cultural Routes are given, first providing the structure of the routes (Figs 1–7) and an overview of the general information (Tables 2–8), followed by the results of the analysis which was structured using the topics of the topic list in Table 1.

European Route of Industrial Heritage

![Figure 1. Map of European Route of Industrial Heritage sites (source: Author, ArcGIS Online).](image-url)
Table 2. General information of the European Route of Industrial Heritage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>European Route of Industrial Heritage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>ERIH-European Route of Industrial Heritage e.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, partly UNESCO World Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Route since</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Several audiences (general public, families and school groups)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Network route, consisting of Anchor Points, Regional Routes and European Theme Routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Reticular pattern route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>To open up and link the industrial sites and landscapes of Europe to visitors, both local and from other regions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The narrative told by the European Route of Industrial Heritage (ERIH) is that of the spreading and the impact of industrialisation in Europe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Iron Curtain Trail

Figure 2. Map of Iron Curtain Trail (source: Author, ArcGIS Online).

Table 3. General information of the Iron Curtain Trail.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>Iron Curtain Trail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>European Cyclists’ Federation ASBL (ECF)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, partly UNESCO World Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Route since</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Turkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Cyclists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Cycling Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Linear Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>To bring European history, landscape and culture together in a region that was once divided and letting visitors experience this reunited Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The Iron Curtain Trail is a cycle route that follows the physical border that divided Eastern and Western Europe for almost half a century. Along the route, people will be reminded of a divided Europe, by the landscape and historic sites. By remembering the division of Europe, the story of a reunited Europe is told.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades

![Map of Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades](source: Author, ArcGIS Online)

**Table 4.** General information of Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>Le Corbusier Destinations: Architectural Promenades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Association des Site Le Corbusier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, partly UNESCO World Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Route since</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Belgium, France, Germany, Switzerland, Argentina, Japan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Several audiences (individuals, families, academics, groups and schools)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Network route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Reticular pattern route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>To promote the works of Le Corbusier across Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Le Corbusier was a Swiss-French architect, designer and writer who travelled a lot during his life to get inspiration and acquire new techniques from other countries. He was part of the ‘Modern Movement’, and introduced new ideas in the architecture of Europe such as functionalism, purism and brutalism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Liberation Route Europe

![Map of Liberation Route Europe](source: Author, ArcGIS Online)

**Figure 4.** Map of Liberation Route Europe (source: Author, ArcGIS Online).
Table 5. General information of the Liberation Route Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>Liberation Route Europe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Liberation Route Europe Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Route since</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands, United Kingdom, United States of America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Everyone who is interested (Europeans and outside Europe), but focus on younger people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Network route and hiking trail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Reticular pattern route, including a linear route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>To commemorate the liberation of Europe and to make this part of European history more visible and accessible for visitors, using innovative and sustainable tourism products.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The Liberation Route Europe links the main regions that were impacted by the liberation of Europe in 1944–1945 and follows the routes of the allies. It connects different European regions, places and sites of remembrance of the Second World War.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Map of Routes of Reformation (source: Author, ArcGIS Online).

Table 6. General information of the Routes of Reformation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>Routes of Reformation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Routes of Reformation e.V.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Route since</td>
<td>2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Austria, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Everyone interested in the heritage of the Reformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Archipelago Route (network of heritage sites, intangible heritage and other routes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Reticular pattern route (including some linear routes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>Linking reformation histories in Europe to enhance and promote the cultural heritage of the Reformation and to create awareness about the different aspects of the Reformation movements in Europe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The Routes of Reformation reflects the heritage of the movements of Christianity in the 16th century which led to a transformation of Christian values, ideas and practices.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
European Route of Historic Gardens

![Map of European Route of Historic Gardens (source: Author, ArcGIS Online).](image)

Figure 6. Map of European Route of Historic Gardens (source: Author, ArcGIS Online).

Table 7. General information of the European Route of Historic Gardens.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>European Route of Historic Gardens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Association of the European Route of Historic Gardens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, partly UNESCO World Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Routes since</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Germany, Georgia, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Everyone who is interested in historic gardens, but a focus on young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Network Route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Reticular pattern route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>To promote and raise awareness about historic gardens and to create a high-quality cultural and tourism product to develop the places where the gardens are situated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The European Route of Historic Gardens shows historic gardens all over Europe. The gardens tell the story of the history of gardens and enable people to experience human creativity. The gardens are a combination of cultural, artistic and natural heritage.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Via Romea Germanica

Table 8. General information of the Via Romea Germanica.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the route</th>
<th>Via Romea Germanica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>EAVRG – at Azienda di Soggiorno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualification(s)</td>
<td>Cultural Route of the Council of Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certified as Cultural Routes since</td>
<td>2020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries included (countries with network members)</td>
<td>Germany, Italy and Austria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target group</td>
<td>Pilgrims (on food, bicycle or horseback)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Route type</td>
<td>Pilgrimage route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographical structure</td>
<td>Linear route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main aim</td>
<td>The enhancement of interreligious dialogue through sustainable cultural tourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>The Via Romea Germanica is pilgrim route that is retracing the route that Abbot Albert of Stade described in his diary. In his Annales Stadenses (1256) he analysed different routes and described the Via Romea Germanica as the best route to Rome coming from the north. The heritage of the Via Romea Germanica shares cultural, religious and social values which are identified through things like cultural landmarks and historical architectural sites.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
The creation of a pan-European identity

Each Cultural Route of the Council of Europe presents a specific history in Europe and shows the spread of a narrative over Europe. The routes aim to create a pan-European identity and want to show that European countries are connected by their histories. The overall story told by the Cultural Routes is that of a united Europe and that there is something like an interconnecting European culture. The display of a theme as European culture becomes very clear at the European Route of Industrial Heritage. The developers think that the industrial heritage of Europe is an important resource for the identity of Europe, both now and in the future. By opening up industrial heritage, the network hopes to show how this is part of the European culture. Also the European Route of Historic Gardens focuses on how the heritage of gardens has its place in European culture. The route sees the garden culture as a common European culture, as all over Europe, parks, gardens and other man-made landscapes share similarities in flora and aesthetics.

The Routes of Reformation pays attention to how the heritage of the Reformation is part of the common heritage of Europeans. The route emphasises the different histories of the Reformation movements between local regions, but by uniting the stories under one route, the common heritage of the Reformation in Europe will be enhanced. The same idea plays a role in the Via Romea Germanica. Along the stages of the route, cultural landmarks and historically relevant architectural sites are shown that share cultural, religious and social values. The developers want to create a feeling of a shared European heritage.

Le Corbusier Destinations, different from the other routes, shows the influence of the work of Le Corbusier on European architecture and not so much how the work of Le Corbusier is part of European culture. Their goal is to exchange and share knowledge and collaborate with participants from different fields in various countries to enhance the heritage of Le Corbusier.

Other routes emphasise in their themes unity and diversity in Europe. The Iron Curtain Trail reminds people of a divided Europe, but at the same time tells the story of a reunited Europe. The memories concerning the Iron Curtain are not the same in the West and East, but showing the memories and the differences contained therein can help to promote a pan-European remembrance. The Liberation Route is focused on the impact of the liberation on Europe and its people, and on the role of the liberation in the construction of a democratic, peaceful and inclusive Europe. It demonstrates unity by describing the shared history of the liberation between European countries. As an example, the hiking trails that are being developed create a transnational memorial with stories of the Second World War.

There are some differences in the implementations of the connections throughout Europe. For some routes, like Via Romea Germanica, the European route consists of separate stages in different countries that are put together to become a “European route”. Although the three countries of the Via Romea Germanica are physically connected by the route, the amount of information provided differs and the routes are managed by different parties. Therefore, in practice it does not feel like a European route. For most routes, one country is more present than other countries, often the country where the initiative started. For example, the Liberation Route is most developed in the Netherlands and the European Route of Industrial Heritage is most developed in Germany. Only the Iron Curtain Trail connects countries, as this Trail connects stages, which can be seen as one part of the route, and these stages include different countries. The European Route of Industrial Heritage connects countries by their theme in Theme Routes. However, those Theme Routes are not physically connected, but rather function as a searching tool to find related sites in Europe. Despite being connected by a theme, a real, physical connection between European countries is often missing.
Heritage tourism practices

All seven Cultural Routes that are part of the case study have a website that provides practical and background information to visitors. There are differences in the amount of information and the quality of the information provided by the websites. Some websites, like the ones of the European Route of Industrial Heritage and the Liberation Route, provide much information related to the background of the theme. Other websites, like the one of the Via Romea Germanica, provide mostly practical information, supplemented by a small amount of background information. On the website of Le Corbusier Destinations, finding information can be difficult because the information on the website is displayed in French and English, where the English text is underneath the French text. On some of the websites of the seven routes, (practical) information is missing on some pages. This makes it more difficult for tourists to prepare their visit and compose their route, especially for network routes that are not physically connected.

The routes have different ways of presenting information and their story (on route and online) to visitors, but also show some similarities. At least, all routes aim, in one way or another, at tourists who want to visit (parts of) the route and experience European heritage at different sites throughout Europe. The network of the European Route of Industrial Heritage has more than 100 Anchor Points (points included in the network) that each provides a particular programme for visitors. Theme routes link industrial sites in Europe by their theme and Regional Routes connect sites close to each other. The (virtual) exhibition “Linking Europe” demonstrates the link between local and European narratives. For Le Corbusier Destination, in contrast, people have to make their own route by combining the architectural sites. The sites are not presented as a route, but more as a number of separate places.

The Routes of Reformation calls itself an archipelago route, a route that promotes sites, traditions, cities and already existing routes. A number of existing routes have their name and brand accompanied by the Routes of Reformation. In this way, the Routes of Reformation function as an umbrella that explains the overall story of the Reformation.

The Liberation Route Europe has, besides information on its website, listening points in the Netherlands and Germany: sites in the landscape connected with an audio document that tells a lively story about the site. In addition, hiking trails are being developed which give an opportunity to experience the heritage of the liberation at the places themselves. This improves the experience of following the route that the Allied Forces took during the liberation. The experience of being in a landscape is also the main focus of the Via Romea Germanica. The Via Romea Germanica is presented to visitors as mainly a pilgrim route, where along the route some information about the history of the Christian faith and the landscapes, villages and cultural landmarks is given. Because it is a pilgrimage route, the route mainly focuses on reflection and the experience of being a pilgrim. An example of this is the pilgrim Credential that is given by the Via Romea Germanica association and that people need to be recognised as official pilgrims.

The Iron Curtain trail provides the opportunity to discover the European Green Belt by bike, traversing a landscape with unique habitats that emerged along the former border strip of the Iron Curtain that was inaccessible and remained almost untouched for a decade. The developers of the route focus on presenting a sustainable way of experiencing the landscape, as cycling tourism is a form of slow, sustainable mobility. The message of the European Route of Historic Gardens network is also that of sustainability and conservation. With the attraction of visitors to historic gardens, the developers of the route want to create a cultural and tourism product and raise awareness about the importance of cultural and natural environments. Conservation is an important aspect in all of the gardens that are members of the network. This message is also being sent to visitors at the gardens themselves, by for example explaining why the amount of visitors is sometimes restricted.

Discursive nature of Cultural Routes

Between the seven Cultural Routes, there are differences in the degree of cooperation with local communities, stakeholders and whether or not to include the stories of the general public. This results in different ways of including cultural identities in the narratives told by the Cultural Routes. There are some routes, like the Liberation Route, where the developers of the route work together with local historians or other local partners on the (local) heritage narratives of the route to let them present the heritage of their region. Also, the Iron Curtain Trail and the European Route of Industrial Heritage are giving people from local communities the opportunity to include their narratives. Other routes, like the European Route of Historic Gardens and Le Corbusier Destinations, are telling one story about a specific phenomenon, respectively buildings by Le Corbusier and historic gardens, and do not represent a cultural identity of a group of people. Those two examples are also mainly developed and managed by experts from universities and (local) governmental bodies, including a top-down, expert-based perspective on heritage. An example of this is that the European Route of Historic Gardens has a Scientific Committee, consisting of twelve “prestigious” scientists, academics and professionals who feed the network with information about, for example, historical and tourism-related subjects.

There are also differences in the way information is presented to visitors. As mentioned before, some routes include local communities in order to develop the stories from a local cultural perspective, while other routes tend to utilise an expert view on what to do with the theme and the heritage sites. The European Route of Industrial
Heritage network works together with local narrators of industrial heritage sites to let them present the industrial history of their region. These local histories are tied together in a network of points and routes. The focus of the network lies on the connection of industrial heritage in Europe, while local industrial heritage sites present their local narratives. Also the Iron Curtain Trail works together with local partners like museums and tour operators. This results in a local and personal perspective. The Liberation Route Europe Foundation wants to show the memories of the war of individual nation-states while bringing them together in a European context. They want to show as much as possible the complex heritage of the Second World War by letting it be seen from multiple perspectives. On the website, many biographies can be found, telling the story of different people from generals to normal, local people.

The European Route of Historic Gardens shows a strong influence from the scientists and institutions that are involved in the network. This scientific perspective influences the way information on the historic gardens is presented and the vision of the gardens on protection and conservation. The main attention of the Association of Le Corbusier Sites is on technical information. Interestingly, the narrative of Le Corbusier is told by experts, but in his work, Le Corbusier himself broke with the architectural world that was dominated by academics. The developers of the Route of Reformations have put a great deal of effort into presenting the Reformation as something very important that shaped our history and influences today’s society. They have done this by describing it as “one of the greatest examples” of how religion shapes the world. This is also visible through the usage of words such as “successful movement”, “famous reformers” and “important historic personalities” and by describing the Reformation as “a proof that something great can work”. Other than the Routes of Reformations, the Via Romaea Germanica aims for dialogue between religions, but the focus of the route still lies on Christian history. The route is mainly developed from a Christian perspective and it follows Christian traditions such as collecting stamps for a Testimonium.

Most Cultural Routes have a mix of different stakeholders and are public-private partnerships. But there are some differences between the organisations, responsible for the narratives, behind the routes. For example, most members of the European Route of Industrial Heritage network are local heritage sites such as old industrial sites and museums, while the associations of Via Romaea Germanica and Le Corbusier Destinations mainly consist of municipalities. The Iron Curtain trail has had a lot of support from European Institutions over the years, as had the Routes of Reformation. Also the European Route of Historic Gardens is strongly oriented towards the European Institutes. The Liberation Route Europe is a real mix of stakeholders, who have the common aim of bringing national perspectives on the liberation of Europe together in a European network.

Discussion and conclusions

The Cultural Routes all focus on a heritage theme that is shared in different countries in Europe. Some are widespread and include many countries, while some are smaller and traverse only a few European countries. However, in practice the routes do not always show a clear European message. Examples are the European Route of Historic Gardens and Le Corbusier Destination. In these routes, the European message seems to be missing since they are networks presenting the narrative of, respectively, individual historic gardens and individual buildings of Le Corbusier. They emphasise the spread of sites over Europe, but there are no narratives about the connection between them. They are missing a “common European heritage”.

From the analysis of the websites of the Cultural Routes and other available information for tourists, it turned out that the main aim of all of the Cultural Routes is to attract tourists and to share the idea of a common European heritage. However, some routes put more effort into the creation of tourism experiences than others. The Anchor Points of the European Route of Industrial Heritage for example each have a programme for visitors. As another example, the Liberation Route is trying to give visitors an experience by providing them with listening points and a hiking trail. For many of the routes however, there is room for improvement in creating attractive tourist experiences. To construct tourist experiences, compelling and coherent narratives should be created, tourists should be engaged with, for example, activities and experiences should be personalised. A compelling and coherent narrative is available at all of the routes, as the theme and related stories are an important component of the Cultural Routes. However, the engagement of visitors could be improved at most routes by providing theme-related activities, sub-routes or physical trails. Furthermore, experiences could be personalised by for example focusing on the connection of different local stories in Europe. The Liberation Route Europe provides a good example of this, by placing local stories in the perspective of the liberation of Europe. In order to realise attractive tourist experiences, collaboration with local stakeholders is important.

The aims of the Cultural Route Programme and the aims of the individual Cultural Routes shows that the creation of a European heritage tourism product is seen as important. But in reality, the routes are not aiming at the creation of a tourism product that connects different sites across Europe, as the main attention is focused on local tourism experiences. It is impossible for the routes to let people experience a complete European network, even when it is called a route. The question remains whether tourists want these kind of local experiences, or would rather prefer to travel pre-defined physical routes such as pilgrim routes. They may, of course, also just wish to visit a site or small, pre-defined combinations of sites in one region. From the position of the Council of Europe, bringing stakeholders from all over Europe together and letting people experience European heri-
tage by following “routes” is a good way to promote their values. However, this approach of creating networks might not be in line with the requirements of tourists and therefore may not work in practice. To attain insight into the demands of tourists, more research on tourism demands and monitoring of tourists is necessary.

So, there are differences in the way the Cultural Routes contribute to a tourism experience of European cultural heritage, as some routes are putting more effort in presenting the European narrative, collaboration with local stakeholders and creating tourism experiences than others. However, except for the linear routes (Iron Curtain Trail and Via Roma Germanica), it is hard to let people experience heritage sites as a “route” while they actually function as a network. This is in line with the conclusion of Walda,99 who raised the question for whom and for what purpose Cultural Routes are developed. Going back to one of the main aims of the Cultural Routes programme, which is to be an itinerary or a series of itineraries, it is interesting that in practice the routes are mostly networks without clear itineraries. Are tourism and the creation of itineraries really one of the main goals of the Cultural Routes project? Or is it, in practice, more about bringing stakeholders from all over Europe together in a network, to create an idea of common European heritage?

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