

REPORT ON THE 12TH CULTURAL ROUTES ANNUAL ADVISORY FORUM

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The Cultural Routes programme of the Council of Europe, launched in 1987 (Fig. 1), aims to demonstrate, through space and time, how the heritage of different European countries and cultures contributes to a shared and living cultural heritage. The certified European Cultural Routes act as a channel for intercultural dialogue, contribute to the preserving and enhancing of the natural and cultural heritage of the continent, and promote cultural tourism in line with the requirements of sustainable development. A highlight of the programme is the annual advisory forum, which took place in 2023 in Lodz, Poland, where the new routes recognised as CoE Cultural Routes were announced.



Fig. 1. The logo of the event

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The forum, to which all certified routes are invited, is an excellent opportunity not only to network with other routes with similar themes, but also to meet potential new partners. I attended the event as a representative of the Iron Age Danube Route Association (IADRA), one of the five archaeological/prehistoric routes also including the Phoenicians' Route, the Prehistoric Rock Art Trails, the European Route of Megalithic Culture, and the Aeneas Route.

The Forum was organised by the Polish Ministry of Culture and the European Institute of Cultural Routes, seated in Luxembourg, and attended by the representatives of the forty member states of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe and the representatives of the 47 certified Cultural Routes, as well as representatives of international organizations, observers to EPA such as UNWTO, UNESCO, ERA, academics from the Cultural Routes University Networks, and tourism professionals.

The 2023 Forum sought to explore the potential of cultural routes to reflect the social and creative dimension of cultural heritage in a post-industrial context, bearing in mind that innovative initiatives are essential to perpetuate the values of industrial heritage, alongside experience. As the concept note of the Forum formulated, "Integrating heritage protection into urban planning, diversifying funding sources, and fostering community engagement are crucial steps. Embracing adaptive reuse, promoting sustainable tourism, and educating future generations about the value of cultural heritage can contribute to its resilience in the face of major risks, ensuring that the legacy of Europe's past continues to enrich its present and future."

The town of Lodz, which underwent a gigantic industrial development from the 1820s onwards, was an excellent backdrop for all this, with a population that grew five hundredfold in a century, and which gave home to several industries besides the leading textile industry. The fall of the Communist regime in the 1990s marked the end of this large-scale development. Poland's third largest city has been and is still facing with the challenge of whether and what new functions can be given to the now abandoned industrial facilities built in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The venue of the event was one such complex, a former power plant (Fig. 2), which has been transformed at considerable expense into a cultural-scientific-innovation complex (now called Science and Technology Centre EC1 Lodz, City of Culture). We also had the opportunity to visit the buildings of one of the largest former textile factories, which have been converted into a museum (Fig. 3).

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Fig. 2. The venue of the forum: Science and Technology Centre EC1 Łódź - City of Culture

of the first day. This programme was coordinated by Inger Harlevi representing The Hansa Cultural Route. The meeting was an opportunity to report on the cooperation between IADRA and Phoenicians' Route. The morning programme was attended by Stefano Dominioni, Head of the Institute and main facilitator of the CoE initiative. The official opening took place in the afternoon, with special attention on the losses suffered by Ukraine and a special welcome to the country's representative. The keynote lecture on the social dimensions of cultural routes was given by Professor Lukasz Gawel of the Jagiellonian University in Warsaw. This was followed by welcoming the representatives of Moldova, the Czech Republic and Malta, new member countries in the decision-making body the Enlarged Partial Agreement/EPA.

The forum's programme featured a series of high-level moderated panel discussions (dialogues), the first of which focused on building a European identity based on freedom and solidarity. In addition to the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the discussion was attended by the responsible ministers of Poland, Lithuania, the Czech Republic, Moldova, and Ukraine or their representatives.

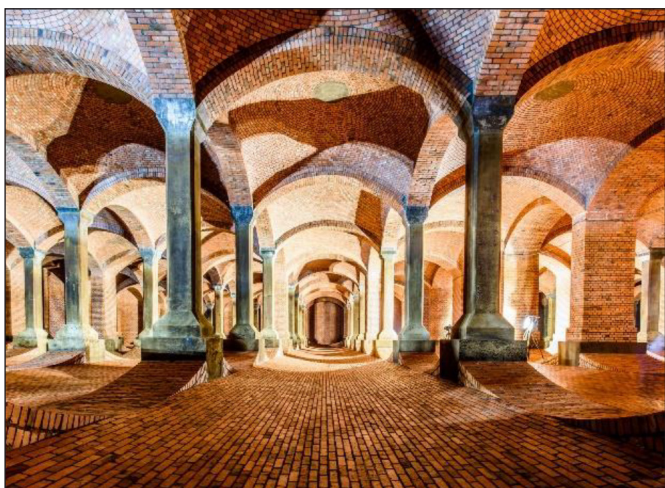


Fig. 4. "Underground cathedral" – one of the huge cisterns, Łódź

The cultural programme also included a visit to the City Museum (Fig. 4), built by one of the most important textile dynasties, the Poznanski family, at the end of the 19th century and operating as a museum since 1975.

We also had the chance to visit the so-called "underground cathedral", which is actually a water reservoir system built in the 1930s. The four huge cisterns have a capacity of 15 million litres of water and are closed to the public for safety reasons; the forum's participants could visit one of the cisterns that has been drained.

The representative of the CoE certified cultural Routes had the opportunity to meet in the morning



Fig. 3. Poznański palace – Museum of the City Łódź

That was followed by the award ceremony for this year's Council of Europe certified Cultural Route.

The *Transhumance trail* was awarded the certification in 2023 as the 47th Route, of which a short video was shown to the audience. Finally, the EPA Governing Board announced which cultural routes have had their certification extended following the review process, which takes place every 3 years.

The second day was dedicated to the challenges of post-industrial heritage. The keynote speech was given by Meinrad Maria Grewenig, President of the European Route of Industrial Heritage Network, which was awarded the CoE Cultural Route in 2019. He highlighted the role of post-industrial heritage in shaping European cultural identity. The conference was also an opportunity to learn about initiatives in

the host city of Lodz, where there are nearly a hundred abandoned industrial buildings/ structures, nearly half of which have been revitalised with the involvement of the local community.

In the next panel discussion, participants analysed ways of preserving and adaptive reusing this endangered heritage, including recommendations on Post-Conflict and Post-Disaster Recovery and Reconstruction.

The afternoon session aimed at presenting new possibilities for participation in heritage management. The panel discussion was attended by a number of Polish cultural organisations, such as the European Touring Association and delegates from some cultural routes, who presented positive examples of cooperation with other organisations.

On the morning of the third day, the programme provided an opportunity for networking, i.e., to meet with representatives of other organisations and delegates from other countries to promote the activities of IADR and ask for their support in expanding the membership of the IADR Association. I took the opportunity to contact the representative of the Prehistoric Rock Art Trails Association, a network of 44 partners and 21 other contributing organisations in eight countries, and to consult with representatives of the Czech, Slovak, Croatian and host Polish EPA members.

The next keynote speech was given by Andries Gryffroy presenting the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) Report entitled “Cultural Routes: a platform for intercultural dialogue”. In the subsequent panel discussion, cultural heritage and tourism experts analysed the new trends in promoting the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme, alongside speakers from the Spanish, Lithuanian, Armenian, and Bulgarian ministries.

In the afternoon session, new candidates for the 2023–24 nomination cycle were presented:

- Historic Pharmacies and Medicinal Gardens Route,
- Leonardo Da Vinci Route,
- The European Network of Holy Week and Easter Celebrations,
- The European Paganini Route, and
- Via Querinissima.

The participants of the last panel discussion outlined a few creative and innovative practices, like, for example, the new tendencies within the European Heritage Days, through the programmes of four cultural routes: the European Route of Historic Thermal, the Women Writers Route, the Via Francigena, and the Route of St. Olav Ways.

The recordings of the presentations and panel discussions from the three days, as well as other documents from the meeting, are available on the Council of Europe’s Cultural Routes [website](#).

The best practice awards were announced at the closing ceremony of the forum. The hosts of the 2024 Training Academy (Via Francigena) presented the preparations for the event to be held in Brindisi, Italy, on 4–7 June 2024, mentioning sustainable tourism as one of the leading themes.

The closing event included the announcement of the location of the 2024 Advisory Forum, which will take place in Visegrád on 25–27 September 2024. The programme was presented by Máté Vincze, Deputy State Secretary of the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, Eszter Csonka Takács, Director and Coordinator of the Hungarian Cultural Routes, and Dénes Eóri, Mayor of Visegrád.

The main topics of the Visegrád forum will be the involvement of youth in the transmission of cultural heritage, innovation, cultural knowledge trans-



Fig. 5. The Hungarian hosts of next year's Advisory Forum

fer, and dialogue between generations. The event will take place during Hungary's EU Presidency and will be hosted by the Ministry of Culture and Innovation, the Szentendre Open Air Museum (Skanzen) and the Municipality of Visegrád.