

Caroline Fischer

Caroline Fischer has been acting as Art Director and Managing Director of the European Center for Culture and Information in Thuringia since 2009. Given that this center also acts as the contact point for the Via Regia, Ms. Fischer furthermore acts as manager of this cultural route and is responsible for the coordination of the network Via Regia on a European level as well as for the management of the international marketing of the project. She studied communication and social sciences. One of her newest projects is the “accessible tourism” (Tourism for all: VIA REGIA – a time travel from Francfort/Main to Leipzig) as well as the historical study (E40 - Path of remembrance in Europe).

Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe: a unique program which connects tourism and cultural heritage

Cultural Routes are transnational networks that have been officially recognized by the Council of Europe. They further aim to connect culture, tourism, heritage, education, preservation, economy, research, and art. Such networks attempt to strengthen and develop a route or a network of routes that are built upon a historical route (VIA REGIA), a cultural concept, person (e.g. Napoleon), or a phenomenon and that holds a significant importance for the understanding and respect of the shared European values. The realization of such projects aim to secure the following:

- to visualize and emphasize a shared cultural identity
- to preserve and better the European cultural heritage
- to provide new opportunities for the cultural tourism for all Europeans

Aside from the diverse activities that projects of cultural routes have to - and need to - be active in, it is their (cultural) touristic development that is indispensable. This could be for example signposting on the path, publication of travel guides, and the collaboration with tourism agencies. The goal must, however, always be the communication of these projects of cultural routes to the general public. The initial intention, to connect Europeans' leisure time with topics and activities related to cultural heritage, must be a priority. This, in fact, marks the unique relationship between tourism and heritage.

The focus should not be the marketing and sale of mass-touristic products, but rather the facilitation of sustainable, decelerated tourism for the individual that is aware of its unique

responsibility for the European heritage. Therefore, “tourism development and infrastructure projects take account of the aesthetic, social and cultural dimensions, natural and cultural landscapes, biodiversity characteristics and the broader visual context of heritage places“. The value of such touristic offers for the facilitation of European unity is mentioned in details in the resolution 185 of the Council of Europe (2004) ‘on the promotion of Cultural Tourism as a Factor of Development of the Regions’. Traveling and motion provides the opportunity to get to know ‘the unknown’ and marks the foundation for a shared identity because “„tourism offers the opportunity to discover other regions and cultures, and [...] the development of tourism in general, and by regional authorities in particular, can help to bring people closer together, creating a respectful awareness of the diversity of cultures and lifestyles [...] tourism helps to develop the feeling of a European identity and to raise awareness of the values of the cultural heritage of peoples in their regional diversity, while promoting respect for different cultures and constituting a factor for tolerance;”.

This understanding binds the Council of Europe to the projects of cultural routes as the council is bound "to support the creation of European cultural routes bringing together regions of Western, Central and Eastern Europe to develop tourism strategies, policies and projects". The passing of the Dubrovnik Declaration, which discussed the question “Cultural Tourism – Economic Benefit or Loss of Identity?”, emphasized the Council of Europe’s understanding that cultural tourism and European heritage are interrelated. The declaration reads: “cultural tourism has a major role to play in preserving and realizing the value of our cultural heritage, which includes not only the physical heritage and landscape but also the intangible heritage such as languages and religious and culinary traditions. [...] cultural tourism is a determining factor for cultural exchange, for getting to know the other, and for cultural diversity to flourish; recognizing, therefore, its contribution to the peaceful affirmation of our different identities;”. The priority remains the exchange of information with and of the unknown. The Council of Europe declared this one of the prerequisites for European collaboration. This emphasizes the necessary intercultural dialogue of actors within the network of cultural routes. Important points that need to be discussed collaboratively are the shared topics and their content but also the shared contact with European heritage, the development of touristic infrastructure, and especially the shared need for transnational consensus.