



Romheritage

TOWARDS A EUROPEAN ROUTE OF ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

COMMON METHODOLOGY FOR PROMOTING
ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE IN EUROPE

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INTRODUCTION: WHY DO WE NEED A EUROPEAN ROUTE OF ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE?

We, the Roma, are the largest European minority and our communities live in all countries of the Council of Europe. With over several hundred years of history on the European continent, we are a people with a millennial history: we were here before many of the European nations were formed; and we are also more numerous than many of the modern European states. We are a diverse people with a language (Romani čhib, which includes several dialects) and culture, composed of a mosaic of traditions and customs. Our history is an inseparable part of the history of Europe, intertwined with the past of all European nations. Over the centuries of our presence in Europe, we have made innumerable contributions to European and national social, economic, cultural, artistic and linguistic fields. Yet, to this day, this is hardly ever acknowledged and is not included in the canon of collective narrative of the continent's past and present among the majority non-Roma society. At the same time, Roma culture and history continue to be either largely misrepresented, stereotyped and fetishized or absent altogether.

On the other hand, as argued by the Roma artist Delaine Le Bas and Roma art curator and Executive Director of ERIAC Timea Junghaus: "Roma are deprived of their right to access their cultural heritage, and of their right to the production, presentation, and interpretation of their own Romani culture."¹ Roma lack spaces and resources to conserve, document, develop and disseminate the diverse manifestations and artifacts of Roma culture. The centuries of Roma contributions, achievements and cultural productions are not properly researched, documented and presented. The Roma cultural products and artifacts remain hidden, unknown and inaccessible to the next generation of Roma and to the society at large. At the same time, and contrary to the common misconception of Roma as disconnected from physical spaces, Roma have a deep historical connection with the territory which we have inhabited for centuries. Unfortunately, sites of Roma cultural history are unknown, desecrated and/or forgotten.

¹ Delaine Le Bas and Timea Junghaus. 2015. 'Europe's Roma Struggle to Reclaim Their Arts Scene' in *Open Society Foundation*. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/voices/europe-s-roma-struggle-reclaim-their-arts-scene>

Finally, there is also an undeniable connection between the wide-spread antigypsyism and the lack of reliable knowledge about Roma identity, history and culture. The dominant discourse and imagery associated with Roma is negative and stereotypical. More balanced narratives, representations and positive examples in public spaces, which have the potential to challenge antigypsyism are lacking. At the same time, in the arts, being Roma tends to be an asset and Roma culture is valued more positively. This is why arts and culture represent useful tools which can contribute to greater mutual understanding and dialogue between Roma and non-Roma. It is also the most effective way to communicate the diversity of Roma cultures, identities, realities and lifestyles, challenging the homogenizing policy approaches towards Roma as a target group. Consequently, to maximize the potential success, it is necessary to foster and fund innovative strategies aimed at changing public perceptions and discourses on Roma as well as at educating majorities about the rich Roma arts, culture and history.

Making Roma historical presence and contributions visible and accessible – both the majority society and to Roma themselves – is one such strategy which enables tackling widespread prejudice towards Roma while building pride. By literally placing Roma on the map – we highlight Roma's belonging to national – and European – socio-cultural landscapes. By building on the experience of the ROMHERITAGE project, we argue that developing national itineraries of Roma culture – as a stepping stone towards an ever-growing European route of Roma cultural heritage – are both needed and timely. For this purpose, the consortium of ROMHERITAGE project relied on the existing Cultural Heritage Routes, created by the Council of Europe to highlight the common cultural heritage of all Europeans. The project was launched in 1987 and a number of themes were selected relating to peoples, migrations and the spread of major European currents of civilization. The Cultural Routes are a powerful tool to promote and preserve Europeans' shared and diverse cultural identities and to reflect on the complex nature of the cultures and societies that have formed present-day Europe. Considering Roma's centuries-old presence in Europe and our versatile contributions to European societies, it is surprising that such have not yet been created already.

Taking the methodology of Cultural Routes is logical as it can impact multiple spheres of social, cultural and economic life, influencing positively both the Roma communities and the majority at large. On the one hand, Roma cultural heritage itineraries give visibility to the most significant Romani cultural manifestations, and establish a link with neighborhoods, sites, museums and documentation, research, cultural and educational centers. All these are vehicles and sites of knowledge and facilitate recognition of the Romani cultural heritage: a culture that is part of the European

and universal common heritage. On the other hand, developing cultural routes of Roma culture involves a significant number of local, regional, national and European social, cultural, touristic and economic stakeholders. Such itineraries result in the creation of a network of stakeholders which together work towards:

- preserving, promoting and disseminating the diverse Roma culture and heritage, while involving actively new audiences;
- promoting mutual knowledge between communities by strengthening intercultural dialogue across Europe;
- fighting against discrimination and change attitudes towards the Roma;
- promoting the active participation of Roma individuals, artists, associations and companies;
- enhancing social inclusion, and to improve the economy and living conditions of a significant number of Roma people, by boosting the local economies and supporting sustainable local touristic and cultural development.

TOWARDS A COMMON METHODOLOGY FOR NATIONAL ITINERARIES OF ROMA CULTURE

Based on the experience of the ROMHERITAGE project, this document is a practical guideline for building national itineraries of Roma culture. The rich experience of developing Roma cultural heritage routes in Italy, Slovenia and Spain provides a rich experience that serves as a basis for a common methodology which is replicable and transferable to other countries and geographies. The long-term aim is to motivate other stakeholders – especially Roma cultural organizations – to develop their own local, regional or national itineraries and in this way contribute to the preservation and promotion of Roma tangible and intangible heritage. Over time, this will enable us to create a Europe-wide route of Roma culture which, as the Roma, transcend borders, national, religious and linguistic divides. The common methodology will ensure that similar principles will be respected while developing national itineraries. It will also guarantee that the subsequent routes will follow the criteria established by the Council of Europe, allowing the Roma routes to eventually become recognized and certified as one of the European Cultural Routes.

The document is structured in the following way:

- The First part introduces the ROMHERITAGE Project and the partners involved

- The second part covers the Council of Europe Cultural Routes, introducing the philosophy of these European initiatives as well as relevant definitions. This part also briefly discusses the history of the Roma Cultural Heritage routes
- The third part discusses the pilot experience of setting up three national Roma itineraries in Italy, Slovenia and Spain. Here, we also discuss challenges and lessons learned
- The fourth part introduces the common methodology. The first segment informs of the procedure and criteria of all Cultural Heritage Routes, building on the guidelines developed by the Council of Europe. The second segment provides detailed elements which need to be considered to develop Roma cultural itineraries specifically. This part builds on the specific findings and experiences of the ROMHERITAGE project.

ABOUT ROMHERITAGE PROJECT

The project European Itineraries of Roma Cultural Heritage (ROMHERITAGE for short), financed by the Creative Europe program of the European Commission was implemented between 2023 and 2024 by a consortium of 4 partners: Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana (Spain), ERIAC (European Roma Institute of Arts and Culture), EPEKA (Slovenia) and Associazione Thèm Romano (Italy), as well as associate entities such as Instituto Cervantes (Spain).

The ROMHERITAGE Project aimed to establish itineraries of Roma Cultural Heritage in Spain, Italy and Slovenia. The tangible and intangible transnational cultural heritage of Roma people is present in the entire EU, so this project is a small-scale pilot experience (3 member states plus a European network) that served as a first step for the establishment of a growing number of national itineraries. The Roma cultural heritage itineraries focused on giving visibility to the most significant Roma cultural manifestations, and linking neighborhoods, sites, museums and documentation, research, cultural and educational centers, which promote the knowledge and recognition of the Roma cultural heritage.

The Project was developed in four phases:

The first phase focused on creation of the Roma Cultural Heritage Itineraries in the three countries concerned: Spain, Italy and Slovenia, and thus preserving the diverse Roma culture: a culture that is an essential part of the common European and universal heritage.

The Itineraries, on the one hand, identified the tangible cultural heritage of the Roma, for example: neighborhoods, monuments, museums, blacksmiths or forges, crafts, cultural centers, documentation centers, etc. On the other hand, the Itineraries gave visibility to the intangible cultural heritage, that is: customs, traditions, festivals, gastronomy, or significant artistic expressions, such as Roma dances and music (among which we can highlight Flamenco, declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of for Humanity by UNESCO in 2010). A large part of Romani culture is immaterial, and is transmitted from generation to generation, within the family.

The second phase of the project, once the itineraries have been created, consisted in establishing a network of institutions and social, cultural, tourist and economic agents, at a local, national and European level. This network became part of the itineraries, both to contribute to the recognition of the Roma cultural heritage, and, in the medium term, to increase social cohesion and improve the living conditions of a significant number of Roma people, through the promotion of the local economies

and the development of sustainable cultural tourism, with the active participation of Roma people, associations and companies.

In the **third part** of the project, various activities and events were carried out (such as concerts, exhibitions, conferences, workshops), which were circulated through the different points of the itineraries. In this way, Roma culture was disseminated to a diverse European public, promoting mutual knowledge between the communities through intercultural dialogue.

In the **fourth and last phase**, the experience accumulated during the development of the project enabled the establishment of a **common methodology** to promote the sustainability of the itineraries, and for them to be replicated in other European countries, with the aim that the Roma Cultural Heritage Itineraries be certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe, from 2026.

To disseminate the project's activities and achievements, a website was set up where detailed information is available: <https://romheritage.eu/> Here, you can access the routes in Italy, Slovenia and Spain: https://romheritage.eu/?page_id=224 Furthermore, information about all activities and events is available here: https://romheritage.eu/?page_id=247

ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM MEMBERS

ABOUT EUROPEAN ROMA INSTITUTE FOR ARTS AND CULTURE (ERIAC)

The European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture e.V. (ERIAC) is a joint initiative of the Council of Europe, the Open Society Foundations, and the Roma Leaders' initiative – the Alliance for the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture. ERIAC was registered under German law on 07 June 2017, in Berlin, Germany.

ERIAC exists to increase the self-esteem of Roma and to decrease negative prejudice of the majority population towards the Roma by means of arts, culture, history, and media. ERIAC functions as an international network which upscales the voices and promotes the activities of Roma organizations, intellectuals, and artists to form multilateral initiatives and regional alliances, and to connect them with the policymakers and leaders of the different national and European levels.

ERIAC is an international membership-based network, bringing together Roma and non-Roma individuals and organizations, with relevant and demonstrated competencies and experience in the field of arts and culture and who are committed

to ERIAC's values. ERIAC's associate members are organized in four thematic sections: Arts and Culture; History and Commemoration; Research and Publication in the fields of arts and culture; Media and Information in the fields of arts and culture. The Romani language is a transversal thematic section. Associate Members have key roles in building the resources of ERIAC, engaging in creative exchange and co-production, taking ownership of ERIAC's initiatives and engaging in its decision-making. The entire ERIAC programming is built with the participation of and relying on knowledge and expertise of its members. Additionally, ERIAC relies on a large network of community members who provide input, expertise, and advice, and at the same time contribute as multipliers to our work. www.eriac.org

ABOUT ASOCIACIÓN NACIONAL PRESENCIA GITANA

Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana was founded as a civic entity in Madrid in February 1972. The laws in force in Spain at that time did not recognize the Spanish Roma/Gitanos full membership as Spanish citizens. In accordance with the democratic Constitution in force from January 1979, Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana presented that year its statutes to the Ministry of the Interior. Declared of Public Utility on April 12, 2005, it is recognized as a civil, aconfessional, pluriracial, intercultural apolitical and not-for-profit association with democratic internal processes, and acts legitimately throughout Spanish and European territory.

The Asociación Nacional Presencia Gitana is a member of the [Spanish State Roma Council](#) (holding the coordination of the European Agenda working group within the Council) and the [Spanish NGO's Platform for Social Action](#). The Association is a founding member of the [European Network Against Racism \(ENAR\)](#) since 1998, after participating in the Declaration of 1997 as the European Year Against Racism. Presencia Gitana is also a member of the [European Roman Institute for Arts and Culture \(ERIAC\)](#), since its foundation in 2017, and has been the focal point of the [Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015](#) in Spain.

Presencia Gitana has collaborated with the European Commission and the Council of Europe since 1979 in several initiatives and programs. In October, 2019, we organized the [International Seminar "From India to the Mediterranean"](#), in which we paid tribute to the Council of Europe, with the participation, among others, of Mr. Marcelino Oreja (former Secretary General of the CoE), on the seventieth anniversary of the creation of the Council of Europe and the 50 years of its dedication to the Roma Community. Among other projects, we are currently national coordinators of the Roma Civil Monitoring 2021-2025 project and we have been selected by the European Commission as civil society consultants up to 2030, in particular on the monitoring of the implementation of the Roma policies at EU level.

Since 1985 [Presencia Gitana Publishing House](https://www.presenciagitana.org/) publishes the Library of Roma Issues and the transnational multilingual Collection Interface; in 2008, the association began its audio-videographic editions with the creation of a new label ("RoMaNó SòNoR"). <https://www.presenciagitana.org/>

ABOUT THÈM ROMANÓ ONLUS CULTURAL ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1990 in Lanciano, the Thèm Romanó Cultural Association was established by a group of Roma and Sinti individuals to promote and enhance Roma culture both in Italy and internationally. The association's primary mission is to foster better understanding and de-stigmatization of Roma culture while empowering Roma communities to embrace and celebrate their rich heritage. Its ultimate goal is to break the cycle of marginalization and facilitate the integration of Roma people into broader society.

Key Activities and Initiatives:

- **Cultural Promotion and Education:** Thèm Romanó has organized numerous events, educational programs, and exhibitions to promote Roma culture. It has collaborated with schools, universities, and cultural institutions across Italy and Europe. Notable initiatives include the "Tu taj Me" multimedia exhibition, which has toured schools and cultural venues since 1991, and the "Amico Rom" International Art Competition, one of Italy's largest and most inclusive art events, held annually with the patronage of the Italian President.
- **Collaborations and European Projects:** The association has played a pivotal role in Roma education and integration, completing several European-funded projects, such as Roma Source (2012-2013) and working closely with the National Anti-Discrimination Office (UNAR). It was instrumental in the founding of the Free Peoples federation of Roma associations and the Thèm Romanó associations in Reggio Emilia and Pisa.
- **Cultural and Memorial Projects:** A landmark achievement was the creation of Italy's first monument to the Romani Samudaripen (Roma Holocaust) in Lanciano, inaugurated in 2018. The association later expanded this initiative with a European memorial, Naj Sen Bistarde, created in collaboration with Croatia and Romania. These projects commemorate the Roma victims of the Holocaust and promote remembrance and solidarity.
- **Education and Immersive Programs:** The association offers annual Rom Summer School and Rom Winter School programs, providing immersive experiences for students and teachers to learn about Roma history, culture, and traditions. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the association digitized its multimedia exhibition, making it accessible online through the Municipality4Roma Project.
- **Accademia Nazionale Romani:** The association launched an online platform to preserve and promote Roma culture, offering courses, conferences, and educational resources taught by certified experts. This platform aims to educate both Roma and non-Roma people about the diverse aspects of Romani culture.

Recent Milestones: In 2024, Thèm Romanó played a key role in organizing the first-ever Romani Week in Italy, celebrating Romani culture through a series of events. It also facilitated a historic concert at Teatro alla Scala in Milan, where Roma compositions were performed by La Scala musicians, highlighting Roma musical heritage.

The association collaborates with national and international bodies such as UNAR, FORMEZ, and CNR to further its mission of cultural promotion and social integration. It is an active member of the Forum of Roma and Sinti Associations, established by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers and UNAR.

As of 2024, Thèm Romanó continues to be a leading force in promoting Roma culture, advocating for Roma rights, and fostering integration efforts for Roma communities in Italy and beyond.

<https://www.associazionethemromano.it/>

ABOUT EPEKA

EPeKa was established in 2008, when Maribor became the European Capital of Culture 2012. In 2010, we launched the European Capital of Youth initiative, which the city won in 2013, bringing together the youth sector. In 2012 we were representative of the Slovenian pavilion in Architecture Venice Biennale with the project 100YC.

We were the first association in Slovenia to become a social enterprise in 2013 and founded the first Romani restaurant, Romani kafenava in 2014, which operates according to the principle of social entrepreneurship and is an example of good practice in Roma inclusion at EU level. In 2013, we won the Erasmus award in the field of intergenerational projects.

We have established national branches in Ljubljana, Ptuj, Zidani Most and Izola. We have also established branches in Germany, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, Montenegro, Serbia, the UK and the Czech Republic.

We have set up a multi-purpose Roma Centre, which we link with public and other institutions to educate, fight discrimination, antigypsyism, etc. We provide organisational and professional support to Roma associations in the region. We participated in the activities of the European Social Economy Capital 2018. We run the EPEKA Youth Centre in cooperation with the municipality and other organisations. We set up the EPEKA Youth Entrepreneurship Education Cooperative to connect young people and entrepreneurship. <https://epeka.si/en/about-us/>

WHAT ARE THE CULTURAL ROUTES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE?

In 1987, the Santiago de Compostela Declaration laid the foundations for the first Cultural Route of the Council of Europe by stressing the importance of multiple European identities, which are rich in diversity, color, depth and origin. Today, the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes oversees 48 routes crisscrossing Europe, connecting culture and heritage.

The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme was launched to demonstrate, via journeys through space and time, how the heritage of the different countries in Europe contributes to a shared cultural heritage. Today, this initiative acts as a channel for intercultural dialogue and promotes better knowledge and understanding of European cultural identity while preserving and enhancing natural and cultural heritage². In fact, cultural Routes are powerful tools to promote and preserve Europeans' shared and diverse cultural identities. The routes serve as channels for intercultural dialogue, and provide a better understanding of the history of Europe through cross-border exchanges of people, ideas and cultures. They are a model for grassroots cultural co-operation, providing important lessons about identity and citizenship through a participative experience of culture. They help to ensure access to culture as a fundamental right.

Each Council of Europe Cultural Route combines tangible and intangible heritage, illustrating and celebrating the exchanges, cultures and traditions that have shaped Europe over the millennia.

AIMS AND PHILOSOPHY OF THE CULTURAL ROUTES

The Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme is a direct and universal means of implementing its policies on the value of cultural heritage for:

- promoting cohesive societies,
- the necessity for intercultural dialogue and
- the right of access to culture for all.

² <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/certification>

Cultural Routes link local heritage to the wider movements of ideas and encourage collaborative grass-roots initiatives which give European citizens a sense of ownership and pride in their heritage as an element of common European heritage.

Today, pilgrimages remain a dominant theme for Cultural Routes, not least because they embody the potential for shared experiences and intercultural dialogue, attract mixed social groups and cultures and emphasize a “simple”, more or less “exploitation-free” form of tourism which corresponds to the Council of Europe’s requirements. There are however, many different types of route, from industrial heritage to art and architecture, and the hope is that their variety and diversity will expand to provide cultural activities for all to enjoy and share.

The Resolution CM/Res(2013)67 revising the rules for the award of the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification, confirms the objectives of European cultural co-operation as embodied by the routes, identifying the programme as “an essential tool for raising awareness of the shared European heritage as a cornerstone of European citizenship a means of improving the quality of life and a source of social, economic and cultural development”. It also underlines “the importance of Cultural Routes as tangible illustrations, through European trans-border itineraries, of the pluralism and diversity of European culture based on shared values, and as means for intercultural dialogue and understanding”.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has turned its attention to cultural co-operation in the member states. In 2010, the European Commission declared its objective of making Europe the world’s No. 1 tourist destination and set out a new political framework for tourism in Europe. The solid partnership with the European Commission already established in this field was reinforced in the framework of the EPA. Cultural Routes are an important element of the European Tourism Strategy and in particular for cultural tourism – tourism which is sustainable, ethical and social, because it builds on local knowledge, skills and heritage assets, and which presents Europe as a destination for a quality cultural experience.

DEFINING CULTURAL ROUTES

The complex and inclusive character of Cultural Routes has been underlined since the beginning of the programme. The word “route” is to be understood not only in the restricted sense of physical pathways: it is used in a more conceptual and general sense, meaning a network of sites or geographical areas sharing a theme, taking different forms according to the “identity” of each site or area.

Three main objectives established by the Council for Cultural Co-operation (CDCC) for the Cultural Routes programme provide some fundamental elements to understanding the definition:

- to make European citizens aware of a real European cultural identity;
- to preserve and enhance European cultural heritage as a means of improving the surroundings in which people live and as a source of social, economic and cultural development;
- to accord a special place to cultural tourism among European leisure activities.

There were many attempts to formulate a comprehensive definition of what a Cultural is and supposed to be. the definition of Cultural Routes given by the Council of Europe in Resolution CM/Res(2013)66 confirming the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA), adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 18 December 2013, is the following:

Cultural Route: a cultural, educational heritage and tourism cooperation project aiming at the development and promotion of an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with a transnational importance and significance for the understanding and respect of common European values.

From this definition, a Cultural Route is to be understood not in the restricted sense of physical pathways. "Cultural Route" is used in a more conceptual and general sense, expressing a network of sites or geographical areas sharing a theme.

The same definition is given in Resolution CM/Res (2013)66 confirming the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA).

Following one of the first definitions given by the Council of Europe in the 1980s, the term "European Cultural Route" is understood as:

- a route crossing one or two more countries or regions,
- organised around themes, whose historical, artistic or social interest is patently European, either by virtue of the geographical route followed or because of the nature and/or scope of its range and significance
- the application of the term "European" to a route must imply a significance and cultural dimension which is more than merely local
- the route must be based on a number of highlights, with places particularly rich in historical associations, which are also representative of European culture as a whole

A Cultural Route could be also defined as a complex cultural good and as a territorial project, which includes different aspects of cultural expressions and falls within the present-day framework for interpreting heritage.

Given these definitions, the cultural context, and the lively debate on Cultural Routes, the project is a complex one: it must take into account several dimensions such as territorial and trans-border aspects, as well as touristic, economic, social, intercultural/interreligious, creative and sustainability issues.

ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTES – A SHORT HISTORY

The ROMHERITAGE project builds on a few decades of work, leading to the establishment of the Cultural Heritage Itineraries. In fact, the original idea of the Project to create a Roma Cultural Heritage Route goes back to the exploratory study carried out by the sociologist and researcher Jean Pierre Liégeois for the Council of Europe in 1993. This document was subsequently updated and enriched over the years, for example through the document "Education des Enfants Roms en Europe, Itinéraire Culturel Rom", published by the Council of Europe DGIV/EDU/ROM(2004), with the active participation of various Roma organizations, including several of the ROMHERITAGE project partners, such as Them Romanò and Presencia Gitana.

Subsequently, from 2004 to 2008, Presencia Gitana assumed the design and development of a transnational cooperation project entitled "The Romani Presence in the music of Europe", with the institutional and financial support of the European Commission, within the framework of the Program "Culture 2000", for the promotion and safeguarding of the common European cultural heritage.

From 2008 to 2013, a project to develop a transnational itinerary for Roma Culture Heritage was carried out, which was unsuccessful due to lack of funding and leadership. On October 30 and 31, 2013, on the occasion of Marseille's European Capital of Culture, a meeting organized by the CoE was held with the objective of launching the itineraries and establishing contacts with social and cultural entities for the presentation of a new dossier to the Council of Europe.

But during this time, we were missing a fundamental element to be able to successfully articulate the project: incorporating a transnational European Roma institution that could lead, together with its members, the initiative. And we filled that gap in 2017, with the creation of the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC). Since then, the process accelerated and materialized in the ROMHERITAGE project, co-financed by the Creative Europe program of the European Commission, to be

implemented during 2023 and 2024. There is a momentum for officially launching the Roma cultural itineraries – at least in the pilot countries (Spain, Italy and Slovenia). Moreover, the numerous meetings with the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) carried out over the past two years in the frame of the ROMHERITAGE project shows the growing interest and support towards the initiative.

PILOTING ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTES: THE ROMHERITAGE EXPERIENCE

In the frame of ROMARCHIVE, the partners developed national itineraries in three pilot countries participating in the project (Italy, Slovenia and Spain). These national itineraries are grouped by themes that give them meaning and at the same time connect the points in a logical and attractive way. Each of the thematic itineraries has enough content to provide a foundation for an engaging cultural and historical journey and brings together a significant number of locations. However, one should consider that the selected elements of these itineraries are likely to be expanded with subsequent points over time.

When preparing the itineraries one of the criteria was to include relevant points that already exist and are easily accessible, such as monuments, museums, neighbourhoods, cultural venues, or activities that are already being carried out and to which the component of the Roma/Gitano culture can be added, achieving a quick impact.

The ROMHERITAGE project is a rich learning experience to understand the opportunities and challenges in the process of developing a European Cultural Route. In this section, we provide an overview of the three pilot routes developed in Italy, Slovenia and Spain. By providing a brief overview of the itineraries, including the map and thematic routes' description, as well as mapping of stakeholders and the summary of activities, the reader will get an insight into the rich cultural heritage of Roma in these three locations. This chapter ends with a summary of challenges and lessons learned.

ROMA CULTURAL ROUTES IN ITALY

The ROMHERITAGE cultural route in Italy offers a unique exploration of the Roma people's history, culture, and contributions to both Italian and European civilization. Spanning the length of Italy, from the North to the South, the route immerses visitors in the deep-rooted traditions of Roma communities, blending both ancient and recent Roma cultures. The journey highlights Roma's migration, resilience, and creativity, focusing on elements like music, art, crafts, cuisine, and religious traditions. With approximately 150,000 to 180,000 Roma people in Italy today, the route reflects the rich diversity of both long-established Roma groups (Roma and Sinti) and newer communities from the Balkans and Romania.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND CULTURAL IMPORTANCE

Roma communities have been an integral part of Italy for centuries, especially in the southern regions once under the Kingdom of Naples and the Papal States. The **Roma of ancient settlement** is predominantly found in Southern Italy, while the **Sinti** live in central and northern regions. Over time, Roma have left a lasting impact on Italian culture, particularly through music, craftsmanship, and trade. Traditional Roma occupations, including blacksmithing, horse trading, and metalwork, continue to influence local industries today, such as the butchery trade in Southern Italy. Additionally, the **Sinti** have significantly shaped Italy's performing arts scene, particularly in circus acts and music, which remain vital to the cultural fabric of the country.



CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DIVERSITY

The ROMHERITAGE route celebrates Roma culture's diversity, embracing various musical styles, religious practices, and culinary traditions. An example is the **Taberna del Gitano** in Laterza, Puglia, which offers dishes like "Callared Gitana," highlighting Southern Italian Roma cuisine. The route also promotes intercultural dialogue and human rights, in line with the Council of Europe's values, by offering a transnational

cultural experience. By involving visitors in Roma heritage's preservation and promotion, ROMHERITAGE fosters understanding and appreciation of Roma culture across Europe.

THEMATIC ROUTES: ENHANCING THE ROMHERITAGE EXPERIENCE

To further enrich the ROMHERITAGE experience, thematic routes can be created, focusing on various aspects of Romani culture. These thematic paths meet different tourist interests and highlight the multifaceted nature of Roma heritage, categorized as follows:

1. **Dates: Historical Milestones:** This route explores key events in Roma history, such as their arrival in Italy, their roles in major historical events, and the challenges of persecution and migration.
2. **Music: Roma's Musical Legacy:** Music is central to Roma culture. This thematic path showcases Roma-influenced folk music, flamenco, jazz, and their contributions to the Italian and European music scene.



3. **Art: Roma's Artistic Expression:** Exploring the visual arts, this route highlights Roma craftsmanship, painting, and performance art, particularly the legacy of Roma circus performers and acrobats.
4. **Crafts and Landscape: Tradition and Environment:** Focused on Roma craftsmanship, this path highlights traditional crafts like blacksmithing, horse

trading, and metalwork, alongside the landscapes that have influenced these practices.

5. **Religious Traditions: Spiritual Practices:** This route explores the unique religious beliefs and rituals of Roma communities, blending Christian practices with Roma spirituality, and focusing on Roma-led religious celebrations.
6. **Language: Romani Language and Identity:** Romani language is a key part of Roma identity. This route explores the linguistic diversity within Roma communities and offers insights into the language's history and cultural significance.
7. **Samudaripen: Memory and Heritage:** Focused on the remembrance of the **Samudaripen** (the Roma Holocaust), this path visits memorials and museums that honor the victims and preserve the memory of this tragic chapter in Roma history.
8. **Food: Culinary Traditions:** This route celebrates Roma cuisine, with a focus on traditional dishes and food practices, from the "Callared Gitana" in Puglia to other regional Roma specialties, reflecting the diverse culinary traditions of Roma communities.

These thematic routes allow travelers to explore Roma culture in-depth, offering a comprehensive understanding of its immaterial heritage while catering to different interests and experiences across Italy.

Map of the Italian route:

<https://www.mapcustomizer.com/map/Italian%20Itinerary%20Roma%20Cultural%20Route>

SLOVENIAN ROUTE OF ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

The Roma Cultural Route in Slovenia is an initiative designed to highlight and celebrate the cultural heritage of the Roma community. It aims to provide insights into the lifestyle, traditions, and history of the Roma people, who have been a part of Slovenian cultural mosaic for centuries.

The itinerary typically includes several key locations in Slovenia where Roma communities have had significant historical presence or cultural influence. Some of these locations are:

1. **Prekmurje Region:** This area in northeastern Slovenia has a notable Roma population already living there for more than 200 years. The itinerary includes visits to local Roma settlements (most known is Pušča region), participating in cultural events, and learning about the Roma language and traditions that are

particularly strong in this region (Lendava, Murska Sobota, Beltinci, Kamenci and others). There is located also Roma museum, Roma radio, Roma genocide remembrance memorial plaque etc. (check Slovenian itinerary European Roma Route map of Slovenia for more details)

2. Dolenjska Region: Known for its Roma community, this region is featured in the cultural route for its efforts in integrating Roma culture into the broader community. It also highlights educational and social projects aimed at improving the life and visibility of the Roma people in Slovenia. Roma people are living there for centuries, mostly in the Roma settlements.



3. Maribor: As one of Slovenia's largest cities, Maribor has been involved in various initiatives to promote Roma culture and improve the socio-economic conditions of the Roma community. The itinerary includes visits to local Roma associations and cultural centers, Roma restaurant *Romani kafenava*, Roma airBnB, flea market etc.
4. Ljubljana: The capital city may not have a significant or large Roma population, but it serves as a cultural and political hub where many initiatives for promoting Roma rights and culture are coordinated. Events, exhibitions, and workshops on Roma culture could be part of the route.



The Roma Cultural Route aims to be educational, raising awareness about the Roma's rich cultural heritage and the challenges they face. It often involves visiting local communities, participating in cultural festivities, and engaging in educational programs. This helps foster better understanding and integration between the Roma and the wider community in Slovenia.

Map of the Slovenian route:

<https://www.mapcustomizer.com/map/European%20Roma%20Route%20-%20SLOVENIA>

ROMA CULTURAL ROUTE IN SPAIN

THE GITANO CULTURAL HERITAGE IN SPAIN

The Gitano people in Spain have a long history of coexistence, contribution and mutual enrichment with the majority society. The first sources that cite the existence of Roma/Gitanos in the Iberian Peninsula date back to 1425, in which there are evidence of groups of people coming from Egypt Minor and who claimed to go on religious pilgrimage. Since then, and despite the centuries of persecution and mistreatment that the Spanish gitano people have suffered, the contributions that gitano culture has made to Spanish culture are innumerable and of capital importance for the configuration of Spanish culture itself. The gitano culture is so intricate that a Spanish culture would not be understood without taking into account the Spanish gitano component. In fact, we have often seen how this gitano element has been used as an element of international tourist attraction to the point that it has come to create confusion between the line that separates what is Spanish, what is traditional, and what is gitano.



In the same way, there is a feeling of attraction and rejection of gitano culture because it has been identified by certain anti-gitano messages as something marginal, but at the same time as an important part of Spanish culture.

If there is something that we could highlight as the greatest exponent of the richness and importance of Spanish gitano culture, it is Flamenco. This music and its culture have their reason for being in Roma/Gitanos and Spanish, especially in Andalusia in their origin, but later it has been established in almost the entire country. The great

international recognition that this music and its culture have given Flamenco at the same time a social and cultural recognition that it did not enjoy in past decades, and above all the recognition that UNESCO made by declaring it as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2011.



In addition to Flamenco, there are other cultural contributions that the Gitano people have made to Spanish society and culture and that have great value: among them gastronomy, traditional Gitano crafts (which the Gitano people have performed in a traditional way in Spain, enriching it with its character and idiosyncrasy), gitano pilgrimages, vocabulary of Romani origin, tangible heritage such as gitano neighbourhoods, museums dedicated to Roma people and elements related to gitano culture.

In our itinerary we intend to create attractive routes for the public, so that Spanish and other countries' citizens get to know the gitano cultural legacy in Spain and also that the gitano people themselves have a complete vision away from stereotypes about gitano history and culture in Spain. At the same time, the itineraries could be an interesting touristic attraction for non-Roma people as well as promoting the recognition of Roma/Gitano culture.

THE FLAMENCO GITANO ITINERARY

The Flamenco path connects the most important cities and points in which Gitano Flamenco was born and developed and continues to develop today. Within this itinerary, emblematic places for this art are highlighted, such as the birthplaces of great artists, flamenco neighbourhoods, museums, interpretation centres, festivals and other relevant places and activities so that the visitor can learn about Gitano Flamenco in its original place.

We are aware that Flamenco is a first-rate element of attraction, so, although there are numerous resources and activities in the places that we are going to identify, as this itinerary comes to life, the growth of the activity is guaranteed. Even so, we highlight the existing resources within this itinerary:

This itinerary runs through the provinces of Cadiz, Seville, Malaga and Granada (with the purpose of covering more provinces and cities in further extensions of the itinerary). These cities are fundamental part of the history of Flamenco Gitano. However, this does not diminish the importance of other places in where Flamenco has had great importance. These places will be added in subsequent extensions of this itinerary and with the inclusion of other cities to the project.



EXTREMADURA GITANA "MAROCHANDÉ"

When the first gitano arrived in Extremadura they called it Morochandé. Or Marochandé, who has a variety of opinions regarding the precise pronunciation in Caló. But there is unanimity in the meaning of the term, which unites the words manró (bread) and chao (earth): Extremadura, "land of bread". About 15,000 gitano

currently live in Extremadura. Their story and that of their ancestors is still largely unwritten and unknown.

Therefore, in a region like Extremadura, the development of the ROMHERITAGE project can collaborate in the enhancement and vindication of gitano culture in this land of Spain since gitano culture is an essential part of the development and identity of Extremadura, something that could be seen in the deep-rooted gitano traditions such as the San Miguel Fair, the Plaza Alta in Badajoz, the Gitano Pilgrimage of Fregenal de la Sierra, the Chica Fair in Mérida, or in the Mojá de Varas.

The work of gitano civil society and institutional support has led to October being considered “month of gitano culture in Extremadura” since important gitano festivals take place in different towns and cities. These celebrations, some linked to religion and others to the traditional gitano trade of dealing with livestock, are centuries old and enjoy great respect among the gitano and non-gitano people of Extremadura. In addition, these are the best places to enjoy genuine Extremadura gitano Flamenco with its Jaleós, Tangos and other songs. Therefore, we recommend the month of October to enjoy this itinerary.

Map of the Spanish route:

<https://www.mapcustomizer.com/map/Roma%20Cultural%20Route%20in%20Spain>

CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

SUSTAINABILITY

For all the partners, the main challenge facing the routes is sustainability. To achieve this, it is essential to establish cooperation with all types of actors with whom it relates at all levels, from the international to the local level. These collaborations are crucial for pooling resources, expertise, and for gaining broader support from various stakeholders.

Knowing how to coordinate the role of each of the local stakeholders involved has been the main challenge and at the same time the greatest lesson learned. Another key issue of the project is to understand its role as a dynamizer of Roma cultural heritage and as a coordinator at the national level, but delegating the leading role (at local level) to local actors, especially the Roma associations and artists, and favoring their collaboration with local and regional institutions and with the private sector. Establishing working methods and monitoring them is the key issue to maintain the level of quality and sustainability of the project in the medium to long term.

GOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Collaboration with local and national government bodies to ensure alignment with cultural policies, receive regulatory approvals, and secure funding. This includes

Ministries of Culture, governmental Roma initiatives such as Instituto de Cultura Gitana in Spain, tourism offices, and education, municipalities... The role of governmental and regional institutions is key to sustaining the Route. These bodies provide the infrastructure, political support and are vital to its functioning.

In Spain in this regard, we are in regular contact with the Ministry of Culture and Sport, which is the national body that coordinates national Routes. In this sense, the Ministry has been very favourable and collaborative with this project and its interest in valuing the richness and diversity of European cultural heritage and making the European Route of Roma Cultural Heritage a tangible reality and our support in our process to be certified as a Cultural Route of the Council of Europe. In addition, we have established contact and collaboration with the Instituto de Cultura Gitana, a public body in charge of promoting Roma culture in Spain.

In Italy, Establishing and maintaining communication with governmental bodies at local, regional, and national levels has been slow and complex. Despite the importance of Roma culture in the broader European context, Roma heritage is often overlooked in national cultural policies, making it difficult to gain formal commitments and secure funding. One of the lessons learned is that persistence in building relationships with key governmental stakeholders, such as the Ministry of Culture, UNAR, and local municipalities such as Orsogna and Lanciano, has been crucial. We learned the importance of involving local governments early in the process, helping to align cultural policies with the project's goals.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community actors are one of the protagonists of this project and their involvement in it is crucial. They will be in charge of maintaining the local and day-to-day activity of the route, while being the main beneficiaries of this route. Involving them is a key issue for the Project.

For this reason, in Spain we have established contact and collaboration with Roma entities in all the towns (where they exist) so that they take a leading part in the actions of the Route in the town. In this sense, we highlight the very fruitful working relationship with the "Asociación del Barrio de Santiago de Jerez", which has become one of the best disseminators and ambassadors of the project in the city of Jerez. The same way, the Roma association "Acompasarte" in Malaga, has been willing to boost local activity by giving a lot of diffusion to the project among local actors. Other local actors at the local level have emerged from the relations with the Roma communities of Utrera and Lebrija where the association for the progress of the Roma people of Lebrija is in direct contact with ROMHERITAGE and the brotherhood of Gitanos from Utrera is the ambassador of the project at the local level in Utrera.

In the same way, we have established contact with the Ethnographic Museum of Roma Women in Granada with whom we have designated our local point of contact for ROMHERITAGE. This is an essential point because of the content that the museum has and its special connection with the project.

In Italy, engaging the Roma community in a way that ensures authentic representation has been a delicate process. One of the lessons learned is that it is essential to involve Roma communities in the decision-making processes from the outset, ensuring their full participation in the project's planning and execution. This includes working with Roma associations and organizations on the ground, respecting their cultural practices, and ensuring their voices are heard throughout the project. The active involvement of Roma artists, community leaders, and activists has proven essential in maintaining authenticity.

ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS

In Spain, the University of Seville has been one of the most interested in forming a partnership with the project, disseminating our activity, offering a place for the promotion of the values of the project and encouraging other actors and researchers to participate or follow the example. In this sense, we highlight the seminar "Flamenco in the XXI century" held in Seville on May 24, 25 and 26, 2024, in which the ROMHERITAGE project played a leading role on May 24 with a panel discussion focused on "Flamenco and heritage" with the participation of Presencia Gitana, ERIAC, the Spanish office of Creative Europe and CERV and expert Carmen Santiago, Vice-president of the State Council of the Roma People. In addition, a workshop was conducted for young people and families focused on the contents of the project and its dissemination as a field of study.

In Italy, securing long-term and consistent academic support for documenting Roma cultural heritage has been challenging. While initial academic partnerships were established, there was some difficulty in ensuring continuous involvement throughout the project's duration. One of the lessons learned is that building sustainable partnerships with universities and research institutions requires clear, long-term commitments from both sides. Collaborating with respected institutions like Università La Sapienza, CNR-IRPPS, and Formez has shown that the integration of academic research with cultural heritage projects can be highly beneficial when institutional support is established from the beginning.

NGO COLLABORATION

In Spain in this regard, we maintain a constant relationship and collaboration with the State Council of the Roma People, which is the body that coordinates Roma NGOs at the national level. This body is one of our regular collaborators and meetings are held periodically at least once or twice a month. The Council's role within the

Routes is to offer direct contact with Roma associations throughout the national territory. In addition, this body is key to the expansion of the project within the national territory and the relationship with the actors of the Roma community at the local level.

In Italy, many NGOs that work with Roma communities do not have the necessary funding to be fully involved in the project. As a result, there has been difficulty in securing partnerships that are both financially sustainable and capable of contributing at the scale needed for the project. One of the lessons learned is that collaboration with NGOs requires careful planning and securing of additional funding to cover their operational costs. The ROMHERITAGE team has learned to approach potential funders early in the project and to incorporate NGOs into larger fundraising strategies to ensure their involvement.

PRIVATE SECTOR INVOLVEMENT

The private sector is another of the great beneficiaries of the route at the local level. For this reason, one of the great challenges of the route is to make them aware of the benefits that this project can bring them and to invest their resources in starting and maintaining it.

To begin with, we have contacted the chambers of commerce of the towns through which the route passes. The response from these chambers of commerce has been positive and they have expressed their interest in the Route having a regular activity that can be attractive for tourism and that favors economic dynamism. In this regard, regular meetings will be proposed once the activity is already working, in addition to informing them via email and through the website www.romheritage.eu

In addition to the chambers of commerce, we have considered hotels, restaurants, and travel services. In the implementation of its activities, we have included Sponsorship deals that include branding opportunities and corporate social responsibility initiatives, in addition to the economic opportunity that the Route represents due to the economic increase for its businesses.

In Spain, the Association of Cultural and Creative Tourism Professionals - APTURCC Spain is an association that will be created in the second half of 2024 and will be made up of cultural and creative tourism professionals that include both the heritage sector, museums, performing arts and the creative and cultural industries, as well as specialized tourism (agencies, cultural hotels...). The APTURCC promoters have contacted the ROMHERITAGE team to be part of the Association since its creation and articulate a joint line of action and design specific cultural tourism products.

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

Since the Route is part of a broader European initiative, collaboration with organizations and counterparts in other countries to share best practices, resources, and to promote the Route internationally is needed, especially with CoE and EU.

On the other hand, connecting the national routes with wider European cultural Routes, not just Roma Route is one of the objectives of the Project, so the connection with other cultural agents at European level is key. In this sense, we have regular meetings (every six months) with the Council of Europe in which we inform them of the progress of the Route at European level. Also, the role of ERIAC as an international network of Roma culture and a member of this project, provides that international connection that now is weaving its network.

COMMON METHODOLOGY: STEP BY STEP GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTES

EUROPEAN CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTES – FROM AN IDEA TO PROJECT

Developing a cultural route requires careful planning and meticulous execution, which involves multiple stakeholders working together over a longer period. Luckily, the Council of Europe and its European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) provides technical advice to any actor interested in launching a local, regional or national route. Furthermore, ROMHERITAGE has gathered rich practical experience that is gathered in these guidelines and partners involved in the project would be happy to further assist Roma actors wanting to launch their own Roma routes.

It is important to underline that each new route should follow this common methodology, observing the certification requirements and process. It is only in this way that over time a Europe-wide Roma cultural route can be established. On the other hand, considering the specificity of Roma culture and the ever-present antigypsyism, one must take into account the ethical considerations of working for the collective benefit of local Roma communities.

This common methodology is divided into two segments:

- First, following the guidelines of the Council of Europe, the process of developing and certifying a cultural route is presented. This segment includes detailed information on the eligibility criteria, certification process and the cycle of certification that all cultural routes must follow. It summarizes the knowledge gathered through trainings offered by EICR as well as relies on the materials available on the CoE website³;
- Secondly, building on the rich experience of the ROMHERITAGE project, these guidelines present specific considerations and advice for developing a Roma Cultural Heritage route.

³ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/home>

WHERE TO START?

Roma cultural heritage – both tangible and intangible – is rich and diverse. Likewise, centuries of Roma presence around Europe result in multiple sites of Roma (and European) worthy of being placed on a map, commemorated and celebrated. If you are considering developing a Roma cultural itinerary, you should remember a few important elements:

- A cultural route serves a number of purposes: in particular cultural, educational and touristic
- A route can be an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with a transnational importance and significance
- A route needs to be factual
- It needs involve a number of stakeholders to ensure its respectful development and sustainability

According to the Council of Europe, a cultural route is a journey through space and time, which demonstrates how heritage and cultures of different and distant regions of Europe contribute to a shared cultural heritage. From this definition, a Cultural Route is not to be understood only as a physical pathway. The term is used in a more conceptual and general sense, referring to a network of sites or geographical areas that share a common theme and that connect community-based actions into bigger transnational networks.⁴

When developing a Roma route of cultural heritage, start with a simple brainstorming to map out:

- Relevant Roma historical sites and figures
- Relevant Roma cultural events (recurring celebrations, festivals etc)
- Examples of Roma tangible and intangible cultural heritage particularly relevant to your country and/ or region
- Relevant Roma institutions, formal or informal
- Roma stakeholders you should work with – from local Roma organizations to prominent families, scholars and public personalities
- Your potential allies and supporters – from public institutions, authorities, local schools, historians etc.

This initial mapping is your first step to develop your idea of a route. Once your idea is more clearly defined, make sure to follow the certification criteria and guidelines defined below.

⁴ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/overview>

WHAT IS RELEVANT? UNDERSTANDING TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

When developing the Roma cultural heritage route – what is relevant? Apart from historical sites, which are more self-evident, one might wonder what are other forms of cultural expression which should be included on a Roma cultural itinerary? To do so, first you need to understand what tangible and intangible cultural heritage is.

Tangible Cultural Heritage refers to physical artefacts produced, maintained and transmitted intergenerationally in a society. According to UNESCO:

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural and natural heritage are both irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration. They are our touchstones, our points of reference, our identity. What makes the concept of World Heritage exceptional is its universal application. World Heritage sites belong to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located.⁵

According to this definition then, the cultural heritage of one community is essential for its identity and for its future generations. The knowledge and accessibility of one's own cultural heritage is important, for several reasons: for collective memory and for the self-knowledge of the community. And it has spiritual and historical value for the people of the community. Additionally, in recent years, 'heritage is being understood as a fluid and evolving sphere which is continuously reshaped, re-formulated and in the making; active participation in the making of heritage is understood as the basic right of groups and individual citizens...'⁶

On the other hand, The UNESCO convention provides a definition of intangible cultural heritage in Article 2:

The "intangible cultural heritage" means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. For the purposes of this Convention,

⁵ UNESCO. 2008. 'World Heritage Information Kit', 5

⁶ Višnja Kisić, 'Heritage in the Era of Plurality' in *EuropaNostra* 135

consideration will be given solely to such intangible cultural heritage as is compatible with existing international human rights instruments, as well as with the requirements of mutual respect among communities, groups and individuals, and of sustainable development.

The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself, but rather the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next. The social and economic value of this transmission of knowledge is relevant for minority groups and for mainstream social groups within a state and is as important for developing states as for developed ones.⁷

DEVELOPING A CULTURAL ROUTE: COUNCIL OF EUROPE GUIDELINES

A CULTURAL ROUTE IN A NUTSHELL – 5 STEPS

What is the process for developing a cultural route according to the Council of Europe guidelines? Here is a simplified overview in 5 easy steps:

1. **Defining a theme** (common to at least 3 countries): European values, memory, history and heritage
2. **Identifying heritage elements**: In coordination with their scientific committee, project initiators should identify the elements of tangible and intangible heritage linked with the route's theme and define a common narrative for the sites recognised as part of the route.
3. **Creating a European network**:
 - a. Establishing a European network with **legal status**, bringing together the sites and the stakeholders: either in the form of an **association or a federation of associations**, with members in at least three Council of Europe member states.
 - b. Each network has to **work in a democratic and participatory way** with respect to its management, research and programme of activities. The Route's initiators must ensure that the **association responsible for managing the cultural route is organisationally and financially viable**.
4. **Coordinating common actions**: to encourage **cultural co-operation** and stimulate scientific and social debate; must be **active in five priority fields of action**:
 - a. Cooperation in research and development
 - b. Enhancement of memory, history and European heritage
 - c. Cultural and educational exchanges for young Europeans

⁷ www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/01851-EN.pdf

- d. Contemporary cultural and artistic practice
 - e. Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development
5. **Creating common visibility:** To ensure visibility across Europe, each route is required to **create a visibility charter with a common logo** designed for the route.

The subsequent section of this methodology will now clarify each step in more detail.

CERTIFICATION CRITERIA AND CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The Council of Europe certification is important. It is a quality-label recognized across Europe and beyond by visitors, tourism operators and public authorities alike, whose prestige is based on:

- Being awarded by a renowned international organization
- A rigorous evaluation and certification process, followed by regular evaluations and monitoring
- A guarantee of excellence, innovation and high-quality standards
- International recognition
- A methodology applied for more than 35 years in over 60 countries
- Financial and political support of an increasing number of Council of Europe member States
- A strong commitment towards the enhancement and promotion of shared European heritage, history and memory.

Furthermore, the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification provides unique benefits for Cultural Routes and their network members, including:

- Certification and quality assurance
- Networking
- Visibility and communication
- Capacity building
- Access to funding opportunities
- Advocacy
- Sustainability
- Community involvement
- Scientific Research
- Network development
- Access to Council of Europe events and trainings

Since 1987, the Council of Europe awards the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification to routes complying with the criteria established in [Committee of Ministers Resolution CM Res\(2023\)2](#).

CERTIFICATION CRITERIA

The “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification gives visibility to European initiatives which bring to life Council of Europe values, such as cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and mutual exchanges across borders. Through the Cultural Routes programme, the Council of Europe offers a model for transnational networks working on the promotion of European heritage. There are three main criteria which needs to be fulfilled in order to successfully pass the certification process:

- Common theme
- Specific fields of action
- And existence of a network

THEME: themes must satisfy all of the following criteria:

- Be **representative of European values** and **common to at least three countries** of Europe
- Be researched and developed by groups of **multidisciplinary experts** from different regions of Europe
- Be illustrative of European memory, history, and heritage
- Cultural and educational exchanges for **young people**
- Development of initiatives and exemplary projects in the field of **cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development**
- Development of **tourist products in partnership** with tourist agencies and operators

FIELDS OF ACTION: Projects must pertain to all the following priority fields of action:

- **Cooperation in research and development:** projects must play a unifying role around major European themes
- Enhancement of **memory, history and European heritage:** projects must enhance tangible and intangible heritage, especially in lesser known areas, and explain their historical significance through Europe
- Cultural and educational **exchanges for young Europeans:** projects must organize activities with young people
- Contemporary **cultural and artistic practice:** projects must encourage activities and artistic practice
- **Cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development:** project must promote dialogue between urban and rural cultures, developed and disadvantaged regions, and between majority and minority. They must actively involve media and seek partnerships with tourism organizations

NETWORK: project initiators shall form **multidisciplinary networks** located in several Council of Europe member States. Such networks must:

- **have a legal status**, either in the form of an association or a federation of associations
- **present a conceptual framework** based on research carried out into the theme chosen and accepted by the different network partners;
- **involve several Council of Europe member States** (at least three) through all or part of their project(s);
- ensure that the projects proposed are **financially and organisationally viable**;
- **operate democratically**

CERTIFICATION PROCESS

To be awarded the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” certification, Cultural Routes networks must undergo an evaluation process in the framework of the annual Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe Certification Cycle.

A certification cycle lasts approximately 10 months, from the deadline for submission of the evaluation files to the Secretariat (July - Year 0) to the notification regarding the decision on the renewal or award of the certifications (June - Year +1).

During each cycle, three types of evaluations take place:

- Evaluations of candidate networks applying for certification: every year candidate networks can submit an application for certification to the EPA Governing Board.
- Regular evaluations of certified « Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe »: Once certified, Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe are required to undergo a regular evaluation every five years enabling the EPA Governing Board to ascertain whether they continue to satisfy the eligibility criteria for themes, priority fields of action and criteria for networks as well as visibility criteria.
- Exceptional evaluations of certified « Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe »: certified Cultural Routes whose performance has been found unsatisfactory during a regular evaluation must undergo an exceptional evaluation process during the following certification cycle.

The evaluation process will consider the following eligibility criteria:

- Representative of cultural values
- Researched by multidisciplinary groups of experts
- Illustrative of European memory, history and heritage, connected with today's European cultural diversity
- Fosters innovative initiatives in cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development

SCIENTIFIC DIMENSION OF THE CULTURAL ROUTES – ROLE OF KNOWLEDGE-PRODUCTION

Co-operation in research and development is also one of the key issues of the fields of action as defined by CM/Res(2013)67. According to this resolution, the projects for Cultural Routes must:

- play a unifying role around major European themes, enabling dispersed knowledge to be brought together;
- show how these themes are representative of European values shared by several European cultures;
- illustrate the development of these values and the variety of forms they may take in Europe;
- lend themselves to research and interdisciplinary analysis on both a theoretical and a practical level.

The cultural heritage routes should have a solid scientific basis to lend legitimacy and pertinence. This is why routes establish scientific boards or other organs which support the development of routes, and which operate as networks of knowledge. These scientific organs are guided by the following principles:

- They should be largely collaborative
- They should be interdisciplinary
- They should be intercultural and mutually benefiting
- They should be creative and innovative

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT OF CULTURAL ROUTES

The process of co-operation on a common subject, involving partners from different countries, constitutes one of the most important pillars of the Cultural Routes programme. It is for this reason that each cultural route needs to be governed by a separate body. Preferably, a European network with **legal status**, bringing together the sites and the stakeholders, needs to be established, either in the form of an association or a federation of associations, with members in at least three Council of Europe member states. Each network has to work in a **democratic and participatory** way with respect to its management, research and programme of activities. The Route's initiators must ensure that the association responsible for managing the cultural route is organisationally and financially viable.

Criteria for network:

- Association / Federation of Associations with legal status, established in a Council of Europe member State
- Transnational Network: different stakeholders, i.e. local and regional authorities, civil society organizations, cultural associations, tourism operators,

chambers of commerce, cultural institutions (museums), University/Research Center

- Democratic governance
- Self-financed

Governance and management for:

- Cohesion / communication across countries and regions
- Representation
- Responsibility for resources and funding
- Sustainability
- Evaluation

Managing association / federation must:

- Have a voluntary and open membership
- Be based on commonly agreed principles: charter, membership criteria, etc.
- Be Transparent and democratic
- Be capable of managing financial issues
- Be responsible for a strategy, finances and sustainability of the Route
- Represent its members
- Be advised by the Scientific Committee and Functional Committees / working groups
- Call Annual General Assembly Meeting
- Have decisions carried out by a Rout Manager

The role of the Route Manager is multifunctional:

- Project management
- Fundraising
- Marketing

Membership:

- Must be inclusive and open
- From public and private sectors
- There are different levels of membership and different fee levels
- Funding and fee structure must be defined in the statute

Given the existing criteria established by the Council of Europe, which are a requirement to obtain official certification, governance might seem like a challenge. However, in the case of the Roma Cultural Heritage Routes, setting up a new and separate body might not be necessary. In fact, ERIAC, as the first transnational organization for the protection and promotion of Roma arts and culture already fulfils the criteria for a Cultural route operator: ERIAC is a membership-based organization, established legally as an association in Germany. Roma and non-Roma, individuals and organizations are part of ERIAC already. Furthermore, ERIAC's Barvalipe

Academy – a strategic and advisory organ – as well as the Research and Publication thematic section, can already provide the necessary knowledge-production network supporting the route's development and lending it legitimacy.

Nonetheless, and despite this possibility, it is yet to be decided in what way existing pilot routes, developed as part of the ROMHERITAGE project, and the future routes which might be developed in other European countries, will be governed. Operating and managing the Roma Cultural Heritage Route is a significant undertaking which requires sufficient human and financial resources; it is also a huge historical responsibility. The ROMHERITAGE consortium members have established a close collaboration with the European Institute for Cultural Routes (EICR) and have begun a conversation about the most convenient process for the certification of the future European Roma Cultural Heritage Route, including considering different possible scenarios for developing the right governance structure.

FUNDING AND FINANCIAL VIABILITY

One of the biggest challenges in setting up and managing Cultural Routes is no doubt the access to funding. That's because Cultural Routes must be self-financed. This means that beyond the certification process and technical assistance, neither the Council of Europe nor the EICR will cover the related expenses of cultural routes. Each managing entity or network is responsible for ensuring sufficient financial resources are secured. The reliable source of funding, whether private or public, is needed to:

- Achieve the mission
- Develop different activities and projects
- Finance the managing staff and cover administrative costs
- Develop common marketing strategy (promotional materials and campaigns), visibility (visual identification: website, logo, etc.), educational materials

The costs related to the Route management are significant which is why each Route operator needs to develop a viable fundraising strategy. It is even more relevant today considering the recent trends in the global arts and culture sector: a general reduction in government spending in the culture sector is taking place in almost all European countries. While there is no one perfect strategy or solution for this, experience shows that Cultural Heritage Routes have been successful in attracting funding from a variety of sources. EICR indicates that the most common sources of income for Cultural Heritage Routes are:

- Membership fees
- EU funding
- Subsidies (local, regional, national)

- Sponsorship and donors
- Crowdfunding
- Fundraising events
- Corporate funding
- Grant-giving foundations

The key is to develop a mixed portfolio and diversify sources of income. Different strategies can be used to attract different types of donors. Finally, it should be considered to what extent running successful for-profit activities in the frame of the Cultural Routes can be a stable and competitive source of income for Route operators.

VISIBILITY – COMMON VISUAL IDENTITY AND THE ROUTE “BRAND”

To ensure visibility across Europe, each route is required to create a **visibility charter with a common logo** designed for the route. Following certification, both the “Cultural Route of the Council of Europe” logo and the Cultural Route’s own logo designed for the route must appear on all of its signs and communication materials. In developing a visual identity/ branding of the route, the following uses should be considered:

- Logo
- Signposting
- Travellers passports
- Website and social media
- Apps
- Publications (brochures, leaflets, etc)

THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE OF CULTURAL ROUTES (EICR)

The European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR) is the technical agency of the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe programme. It was set up in 1998 as part of a political agreement between the Council of Europe and the Grand-Duchy of Luxembourg (Ministry of Culture, Higher Education and Research). The Secretariat of the [Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes](#) is located at the EICR in the heart of the historical centre of Luxembourg city.

The EICR has a key role during the start-up and preparatory phases of the Routes projects: in fact its fundamental mission is to support, provide technical assistance and appraise proposals for new routes, with a view to their evaluation by independent experts and the Governing Board of the Council of Europe’s EPA on

Cultural Routes, and to their approval by the CDCPP, the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape of the Council of Europe. The EICR:

- receives the projects for new Cultural Routes;
- analyses the initial state of the art of each project;
- establishes a work timeline;
- supports project initiators in the setting up and/or reinforcement of their European network, by participating in the general meetings and in the scientific committee's meeting, and providing training to the members of the network;
- provides advice to project initiators by suggesting experts and academics who can cooperate in the activities of the route and enrich the debate on the theme of the route;
- assists project initiators in the preparation of the application dossier.

After this accompaniment phase, the EICR prepares a report for each project, presenting the background and the evolution of each project, and underlining their strengths and weaknesses. These reports are part of the dossiers submitted to the Bureau of the Council of Europe's EPA and to the independent experts in charge of the evaluation of new projects.

ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE ROUTES – WHAT TO CONSIDER?

When developing the Route of Roma Cultural Heritage, it is important to consider several aspects related to the situation of Roma communities in Europe, and to the status of Roma cultural heritage, in particular. Based on the experience gathered during the ROMHERITAGE project, this section outlines the principles which should be guiding any entity which plans to develop a local or national Roma Cultural Heritage Route. Following these principles will ensure subsequent Roma itineraries will be factual, attractive and respectful to Roma communities and Roma cultural heritage.

ROMA SELF-REPRESENTATION, LEADERSHIP AND THE ACTIVE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ROMA COMMUNITIES

Ever since the first Roma arrived on the European continent over seven centuries ago, Roma culture and identity have been discussed by representatives of mainstream society. Scholarship and the arts have played a considerable role in creating and disseminating (mis)representations and stigma associated with Roma. These narratives of Roma identity and culture created from the outside were often plagued by bias, stereotypes and prejudices, and contributed to spreading antigypsyism, a specific form of racism against Roma populations around the world.

To counter the (mis)representation of Roma culture, Roma themselves have been employing various strategies to free themselves from the image that had been imposed on them and which until now has been shaped by external voices and an external gaze. By contesting these imposed narratives, Roma shape new ones, produced from the insiders' perspective by the members of the Roma community, and formulated 'in first person'. These counter-narratives of Romanihood are based on the premise of affirmation and ethnic pride and relying on the principles of self-representation and Roma leadership.

Today, it is clear that no serious initiative targeting the Roma population can be designed, implemented and evaluated without meaningful involvement of Roma people themselves. For initiatives related to Roma culture and identity, it is paramount that the Roma lead in defining their own culture and highlight what, in fact, constitutes Roma cultural heritage. It is for this reason that the process of developing Roma Cultural Heritage Routes should be led by Roma, based on principles of Roma leadership, Roma self-representation and Roma participation.

Furthermore, Roma community members should be involved in a meaningful way in the different stages of the development and implementation of the routes – the community should not be treated as passive beneficiaries or subjects, but rather should shape the Routes actively together with leading organizations. As an empowering process which fosters ethnic pride, the Routes can also create job opportunities (through cultural entrepreneurship and/or touristic potential of the routes).

PLURALITY AND DIVERSITY

Roma communities are vastly diverse. It is important that Roma Cultural Heritage routes are respectful and representative of the existing plurality of Roma voices, cultures, traditions and lifestyles. By the same token, it is vital that the narrative of Roma culture promoted through the itineraries avoids essentialization, homogenization, folklorization and stereotypization of Roma identity and culture. This is remarkably relevant because of the historical role which arts and culture have in constructing, proliferating and normalizing fetishized, exotified and/or stigmatizing images of Roma. In contrast, the Roma Cultural Heritage Route should rely on the power of self-representation to re-claim and re-define notions of Roma culture and identity, which are rooted in real, subjective experiences and historical realities of Roma themselves. By representing plurality and diversity of the vast Roma diaspora, it will be possible to avoid falling into the trap of replicating existing stereotypes and iconography of Roma representation. This might be the best strategy to create counter-discourse and effectively challenge antigypsy representation of Roma identity and culture.

TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE

Roma cultural heritage is both tangible and intangible. More specifically, Roma tangible heritage is constituted by all the objects produced and used by Roma, they are objects which shaped Roma identity, their collective memory, history, culture and which have an impact on the future generations. On the other hand, according to UNESCO "intangible cultural heritage is the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills that communities, groups and sometimes individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage"⁸. This can take the form of oral traditions; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; and traditional craftsmanship. However, 'heritage is not a given, nor is it automatically handed down from generation to generation. It is a multifaceted process in which different actors play active parts in its choosing, managing and interpreting.

Roma Cultural Heritage Routes should include both tangible and intangible heritage. For obvious, historical reasons, sites of tangible heritage of Roma culture are rare, but not non-existence. At the same time, Roma cultural heritage is rich in intangible practices, expression and knowledge, as, for example, is the case of Flamenco.

SUB-THEMES OF ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Romani culture consists of both tangible and intangible heritage. A large part of Romani culture is immaterial, characterized at European level by typical musical styles, a common language and traditions. In order to make the most of the various facets of Romani cultural heritage visible, but also to meet the different tourist needs/opportunities, thematic itineraries could be created divided into macro categories such as: Music, Art, Religion, History, Crafts and Landscape, Religious Traditions, Language, Roma Holocaust, etc.

Music: It represents a virtual path that connects the three countries (initially), but also all the other European states could join the Itineraries. The traces of Romani music are present (and have influenced) all the music, the great European composers and musical styles, this means that one can insert concerts of Ethnophonic music in existing music festivals or create thematic repertoires such as those of the Philharmonischer Verein der Sinti und Roma in Frankfurt conducted by Riccardo M Sahiti.

⁸<https://whc.unesco.org/en/faq/40#:~:text=Intangible%20cultural%20heritage%20is%20the,part%20of%20their%20cultural%20heritagehttps://whc.unesco.org/en/faq/40#:~:text=Intangible%20cultural%20heritage%20is%20the,part%20of%20their%20cultural%20heritage>

Flamenco was inscribed in 2010 on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, and the entire Roma music heritage is being certified by UNESCO.

Currently there are countless examples of Romani festivals and musical events dedicated to Romani music taking place all over Europe, offering a variety of programs that could attract tourists of various ages and musical tastes, such as Khamoro, multiple Flamenco Festivals, Gypsy Fest - Latvia, Yagori in Norway, Roma Music Festival in Italy, Manouches Jazz Festival in France and Italy.

Art: An artistic itinerary could be created including the Venice Biennale, the artistic residences active at the time, the exhibition venues of ERIAC, the cultural center of Lanciano, the Museum of the Journey of Milan, the many Roma museums in Spain, the Roma Museum in Murska Sobota and the many in Eastern Europe. This itinerary could also consider galleries and workshops of various Roma artists, as well as public art (such as monuments) created by artists of Romani background.

Language: The Romani population is the largest ethnic minority in Europe with about 12 million people sharing a common language. Currently there are several events that could be linked to the European itineraries for the theme Language: The Friendly Rom Competition, the Romany Poetry Festival that takes place in Sibiu, Romania, and it's also possible to connect the various events organized on the occasion of 5 November that UNESCO dedicated to the Romani language, linking the route to those events already existing in Croatia, and Spain, stimulating the creation of other events to add to the itineraries.

History: historical routes can be created to consider historical sites of Roma history, both nationally and on the European level. Such historical routes can also have sub-themes, focusing, for example, on World War II or the history of Roma during the Spanish Civil War.

Roma Holocaust: Holocaust-related itineraries in which schools could be involved. In Italy, for example, there are numerous cities that have chosen to install commemorative plates of the Roma Holocaust: Trieste (stumbling block), Pisa (plate), Ginosa (plate), Laterza (plate), Lanciano's monument commemorative plaque and installation, Agnone (plate), Bolzano (plate), Pistoia (plate), Milan (installation), Padua (plaque and bas-relief at the temple of the unknown internment), Rovereto (flag displayed along with all the flags of the nations that had fallen in World War II), Monserrato (installation, in the concentration camp of Fossoli, and they guard the archives of the Centro Studi Zingari). Similar thematic itineraries, connected to the history of the Roma Holocaust can be created in every European country.

Religion: Religion is a very felt theme among the Romany population despite not being linked to a specific confession. Participation and animation of the various rites and celebrations throughout Europe make them unique and suggestive, as well as unmistakable. Currently, Ceferino Giménez Malla was beatified in 1997 and is considered the patron saint of Romani people in Roman Catholicism. Also, the process of beatification of another Spanish Roma woman is underway. Ceferino's feast day is celebrated every year on May 4, both in Italy and in Spain. Other religious traditions include the celebration of Kali Sara in Saintes Marie de La Mer, the celebrations of Saint Anthony in Padua and Molise, on May 6 Judgerdan (the feast of Saint George), the feasts of Saints Cosima and Damiano in Riace in Calabria.

ROLE OF ORAL HISTORY AND CROWD-SOURCING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

In accordance with the principle of Roma self-representation, the involvement of representatives of Roma communities, in various capacities, is crucial. This is particularly true when it comes to research which will serve as the basis for developing Roma Cultural Heritage Routes.

In the case of Roma, the role of oral history will be key in correctly assessing the relevance of physical sites of Roma culture and history. It is recommended to engage in participatory research methodologies, which rely on local oral histories, on the one hand, and which enable crowd-sourcing knowledge directly from Roma community members, on the other. This is a significant undertaking which will help to fill the numerous blind spots in Roma history.

Furthermore, when considering the knowledge networks, understood as complex systems associating numerous research pools in the different regions related to the Cultural Routes, it is important that non-academic sources of knowledge are as relevant as strictly academic ones.

ROMA HISTORY AND ROMA RESISTANCE

Despite the Roma being the largest European ethnic minority, their history on the continent stretching back over 700 years, Romani history remains inadequately remembered and commemorated as part of the national and European canon of history (van Baar, 2011). Even the darkest chapter of Roma history – the Roma Holocaust – for years, was referred to as the “forgotten Holocaust”. Indeed, for decades it was.

At the same time, Roma history is not only about victimhood. In recent years, however, the topic of Roma Resistance during World War II has grown into a powerful symbol that challenges the notion of Roma victimhood with acknowledgement of Roma agency and survival. Commemorating the day of Roma Resistance (May 16) has become a powerful reference point for Roma social and political mobilization. It is, therefore, important to focus not only on sites of Roma history, with the focus on Roma martyrdom, but also explore and commemorate sites of Roma resistance around Europe, embracing a wider array of acts demonstrating Roma opposition to injustice. This approach will help to reinforce understandings of Roma agency through sharing stories and identifying physical sites of resistance, building a culture of remembrance among Roma and non-Roma and highlighting the role of Roma in broader national and European historical narratives. Such approach to Roma Cultural Heritage Routes will help to challenge the dominant historical narrative which regards Roma as victims by focusing on individual and collective Romani stories of overcoming, celebrating Roma resilience.

ROMA SCHOLARSHIP AND DEVELOPING ROMA HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

The field of Romani Studies was a near-exclusive monopoly of non-Roma scholars for decades. Over the last few years, however, the increasing number of Romani university students and Romani scholars pursuing academic careers, is provoking a deeper reflection in Romani Studies. As Roma ascend to the ranks of academic relevance, they also increasingly engage critically with the legacy of Romani studies and the body of knowledge created about Roma by non-Roma. Emergence of Romani scholarship is an opportunity for the development of Romani Studies. The ascendance of authoritative Romani voices within scientific debates helps to unravel internal tensions, gaps and incongruences within Romani Studies. It also opens up Romani studies to new approaches, different inquiries and innovative avenues of research, in accordance with ethical guidelines necessary for inclusive and respectful research with Roma communities.

The dynamic development of Roma scholarship is particularly important when it comes to historical research. After all, history is narrated, historical events are infused with meaning and are interpreted from the standpoint of their protagonists. At the same time, as Roma history continues to be under-researched, the use of oral history, among others, is necessary to fill the many blind-spots, especially locally.

In developing Roma Cultural Heritage Routes, it is important to rely on Roma knowledge-production, and engage both Roma and non-Roma scholars and experts to ensure proper representation – and contextualization – of Roma historical events, and connected historical sites.

SUPPORTING ROMA ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND CREATING ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR ROMA

Cultural Heritage Site, beyond the objective of reinforcing cultural identity and promoting history, has an undeniable economic dimension. As a form of alternative tourism, economic and entrepreneurial opportunities will be created. Considering the situation of Roma at the labor market and the overall greater economic disadvantage of the Roma vis-à-vis non-Roma population, it is important to reflect on the implications and potential added value of Roma Cultural Heritage Routes for the local Roma communities. Careful planning of the Routes and direct involvement of Roma communities can lead to creating entrepreneurial possibilities for local Roma businesses, Roma cultural entrepreneurs or Roma facilities, among others. Connecting with local and international business incubators, for example, can facilitate creating adequate infrastructure for tourists and at the same time support economic development of Roma communities; organizations such as the Roma Entrepreneur Development Initiative (REDI) can play a positive role in this regard. In this sense it is important to consider how to support investment into local Roma businesses to benefit local communities and avoid aggressive competition from other stakeholders that can potentially lead to disempowering the Roma economic sector.

MAPPING OUT STAKEHOLDERS – IMPORTANCE OF BUILDING A NETWORK

While designing the Roma Cultural Heritage Routes it is important to foster meaningful cooperation among the variety of public and private stakeholders. Mapping out of actors which should be engaged in the design and implementation of Routes will be an important first step. These actors will include:

- public authorities, at national and regional levels and in particular the local ones
- academic community
- cultural and educational institutions, as well as museums
- public and private tourist stakeholders, especially tourist agencies
- local entrepreneurs
- civil society sector, and especially the Roma civil society
- local community, in particular Roma community
- international stakeholders, including the Council of Europe, UNESCO or ERIAC

The process of developing Roma Cultural Routes should consider respectful and meaningful involvement of all actors, in particular those of Roma background, in all stages of the process – from design to evaluation. Regular channels of dialogue and collaboration should be fostered that can ensure that participation is ongoing and constructive, rather than ad hoc and tokenistic.

It is also important to consult all the relevant stakeholders and conduct surveys to establish common expectations, develop a detailed needs assessment, map out economic opportunities, consider potential impact in the Roma community as well as the general socio-cultural, economic and touristic spheres. During the ROMHERITAGE project, each partner developed such strategic mapping and conducted surveys with the actors that play a role in protecting and promoting Roma cultural heritage. This led to a long-term collaboration with key stakeholders and facilitated establishing a strategic network of collaboration.

CONSIDERATIONS OF ETHICAL TOURISM

Cultural itineraries, nowadays, represent a new approach to the notion of both heritage conservation and cultural tourism. The increasing integration of culture as a basic element in tourism consumption is an innovation in itself. However, such cultural tourism needs to be sensitive both to questions of sustainability and ethics.

Sustainable tourism “refers to a level of tourism activity that can be maintained over the long term because it results in a net benefit for the social, economic, natural and cultural environments of the area in which it takes place.” Roma Cultural Routes should be developed to respect the principle of sustainable tourism. At the same time, tourism should also be ethical – as Roma Cultural Heritage Routes may lead to Roma settlements, Roma mahalas, places of Roma martyrdom etc., it is important to ensure that tourists – as outside visitors – are respectful to the life and lifestyles of local Roma communities.

ANTIGYPSYISM AND SECURITY RISKS

At the time when Europe is facing a rise of the extreme right, nationalistic and xenophobic attitudes, antigypsyism is on the rise. Discrimination, hate speech and hate violence are unfortunately common and Roma are targets. Routes of Roma Cultural Heritage will result in mapping of most relevant sites of Roma cultural heritage and of Roma communities around Europe. In the current atmosphere, the risk of hateful acts against members of the Roma community and places of Roma heritage and memory should not be underestimated. Ensuring safety and security of people and cultural/ historical sites should be carefully considered and measures should be undertaken to mitigate possible risks (for example, by working closely with local police authorities, setting up monitoring etc.).

DEVELOPING ACTIVITIES ON THE CULTURAL ROUTE

The Cultural Routes are laboratories to re-interpret traditions, art, heritage, and encourage activities and artistic projects which explore the links between heritage and contemporary culture, highlighting the most innovative practices in terms of

creativity, in contemporary cultural and artistic practice, particularly as regards instruction for young Europeans in relevant fields. It is therefore important that the cultural routes are also sites of new activities which can further deepen knowledge and appreciation of the cultural heritage and at the same to be considered a touristic attraction. In the case of Roma cultural heritage, apart from site-specific activities and events, it is also important to build cultural programming around the key dates in the Roma cultural calendar, including:

- April 8 – International Roma Day
- May 16 – International Roma Resistance Day
- August 2 – International Roma Holocaust Memorial Day
- November 5 – International Day of Romani Language

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND THE ROLE FOR PUBLIC AUTHORITIES

Developing Cultural Routes requires a sustainable approach to financial management. For obvious reasons, Roma community members lack their own economically strong institutions which would be able to sponsor the creation and maintenance of Roma Routes. Roma are citizens of countries where they live and as such the Roma Routes should be considered as steps towards preserving and promoting national heritage too. It is important to build an awareness, in particular, among the public authorities, that the investment into Roma Cultural Heritage Routes is also an investment into economy, tourism, social cohesion, and more.

SUSTAINABILITY

One of the most important principles which should guide the development of Roma Cultural Heritage Routes is that of sustainability. It is paramount that the initiative aims at durability and stability, with the potential capacity to grow in scope, activities and further stops on the itinerary.

USEFUL RESOURCES

There are various sources of knowledge which can provide an academic and material back-bone to the local/ national Roma cultural routes. Several institutions and platforms exist that can be used as a knowledge resource for anyone developing Roma itineraries. Below is a list of selected useful resources that can be found online:

- **Council of Europe's "Roma History Factsheets"**
The Council of Europe produces a collection of pedagogical fact sheets on Roma history, culture, literature and language. The factsheets aim to provide basic information on the history and culture of the Roma for a wider audience including teachers, students, decision-makers.

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/roma-history-factsheets>

- **RomArchive – Digital Archive of the Sinti and Roma**

RomArchive is a digital archive for Romani arts and cultures. It archives works from all genres and augments them with contemporary documents and scholarly appraisals. Each section of the Archive is the responsibility of its respective curatorial team, who have also selected the contents. As an internationally accessible space that renders Romani cultures and histories visible, RomArchive is responding both to the ascriptions perennially imposed by others and to entrenched stereotypes by providing counter-narratives told by Roma themselves. <https://www.romarchive.eu/en/>

- **ERIAC Roma Online University**

Barvalipe Roma Online University is an online educational platform where Roma and non-Roma can access knowledge about the Roma identity(ies), history(ies) and culture(s) thorough a collection of high-quality lectures delivered by leading Roma scholars on topics ranging from the Roma Holocaust to Roma cultural productions. In partnership with Central European University (CEU), this project is part of ERIAC's Roma Cultural History Initiative financed by the German Federal Foreign Office (FFO). <https://eriac.org/barvalipe-roma-online-university/>

- **ERIAC's "Re-thinking Roma Resistance"**

"Re-thinking Roma Resistance" is a European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) project, funded by Stiftung Erinnerung, Verantwortung und Zukunft ([EVZ foundation](#)). Developed between October 2019 and December 2020 with the support of 12 Roma and non-Roma expert researchers, the project sought to initiate change in the European historical and cultural narrative concerning Roma. Namely, the project seeks to challenge dominant discourses which regard Roma as victims and instead focus on individual stories of Roma heroism and bravery. By "rethinking Roma resistance", the project provides evidence of multiple ways in which Roma not only fought against oppression and injustice, but also provides a vivid testimony of Roma contribution to national and European struggles for freedom, democracy and justice across Europe. <https://eriac.org/re-thinking-roma-resistance/>

Furthermore, there are relevant Roma organizations which are a source of authoritative knowledge on Roma history and identity, including:

- European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAC) <https://eriac.org/>
- Museum of Romani Culture in Brno <https://www.rommuz.cz/en/>
- Documentation and Cultural Center of German Sinti and Roma <https://dokuzentrum.sintiundroma.de/en/>

- Romani Studies Program at the CEU <https://www.ceu.edu/unit/romani-studies-program>
- Critical Romani Studies Program and the Sodertorn University <https://www.sh.se/english/sodertorn-university/research/our-research/critical-romani-studies>

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS A EUROPEAN ROUTE OF ROMA CULTURAL HERITAGE

Access to culture and cultural heritage is a human right. In fact, cultural rights are defined and protected by a number of international mechanisms, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. Furthermore, in 1966, the United Nations adopted the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR), which in its article 27 recognize the cultural rights of minorities to practice their culture, religion, and language; since then several recommendations and resolutions have been passed in this regard. More recently, in 2016, the United Nations' Human Rights Council unanimously adopted a resolution calling upon all States to respect, promote and protect the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, including the ability to access and enjoy cultural heritage, and to take relevant actions to achieve this. Later on, in 2022, the Human Rights Council adopted unanimously resolution [49/7](#) entitled "Cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage"⁹. On the other hand, over the years the Council of Europe has expanded its scope of work in this regard. Most importantly, the Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, adopted in 2005 and better known as the Faro Convention, emphasizes the important aspects of heritage as they relate to human rights and democracy. It promotes a wider understanding of heritage and its relationship to communities and society. In Article 4, "Rights and responsibilities relating to cultural heritage", the Faro Convention introduces a key concept, stating, "everyone, alone or collectively, has the right to benefit from the cultural heritage and to contribute towards its enrichment".

Given the existing legislation, framing cultural rights in relation to individual freedoms as well as principles of democracy, it is therefore surprising how little has been done to protect and promote Roma cultural heritage in Europe and the world. By nature, Roma identities and cultures are transnational and reach beyond national borders. Likewise, arts and culture, and language, are spheres defined by its transnational character and fluidity across borders. Even the EU itself argues that "Roma art, history and culture are integral features of our European and national landscapes."¹⁰ Yet there is a general lack of public and private initiatives enabling showcasing Roma

⁹ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/human-rights/economic-social-cultural-rights/cultural-rights-protection-cultural-heritage>

¹⁰ 2020 EU Roma Framework, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0620&rid=4>

contributions to majority societies. There is also a general lack of positive narratives about the Roma transnationally, and which supports explicit collaboration and cross-fertilization among Roma and non-Roma across borders. Roma culture remains peripheral, under-funded and under-researched.

Lack of policy and political commitment towards preserving, conserving and developing Roma arts and culture, in particular Roma cultural heritage, leads to cultural impoverishment and loss. Roma lack spaces and resources to conserve, document, develop and disseminate the diverse manifestations and artefacts of Roma culture. This is particularly striking in the field of language (Romanes): fewer Roma children learn it (it is not taught at school), there are limited possibilities for publishing in Romanes or using the language in the media. As Roma are not included into national cultural narratives, they are consequently absent from permanent national collections in the national archives or national museums. Likewise, Roma history and culture are not included in history books. The centuries of Roma contributions, achievements and cultural productions are not properly researched, documented and presented. An initial mapping conducted by ERIAC on Roma cultural heritage, estimates that there are approximately 10,000 artefacts of Roma culture kept in the basements and storerooms of ethnographic museums, but only two on permanent display in Europe.

Without policies and institutions, Roma art and culture are being appropriated by majority societies without a proper recognition of their Roma producers. There are no state-level or European level policies to counter the process of cultural appropriation. At the same time, Roma cultures are theorised into the outdated concept of “low culture”. In addition, many public collections, archives, museums and national cultural institutions have funding to acquire Roma artworks, but since these do not fit institutional narratives, they do not appear in permanent exhibitions. As a result, the Roma cultural products and artefacts remain hidden, unknown and inaccessible to the next generation of Roma and to the society at large. Moreover, the mapping of Roma tangible heritage in Europe, developed by ERIAC, points out to several problems, including:

- the lack of representation of Roma artists by the national museums
- Roma being often represented as ‘other(s)’
- the museums have the power of controlling the narrative of Roma culture and they have the monopoly over the discourse concerning the Roma

- many cultural heritage organisations and protocols granting funding and protection of the heritage from the nation-state perspective, which can be exclusive towards the ethnic minorities
- the need for cross-cultural awareness, redressing of past imbalances, for more inclusion and for the politics of control over cultural heritage.

All these arguments make it clear that developing durable and sustainable initiatives protecting and promoting Roma cultural heritage are not only necessary – they are urgent.

This is why, ROMHERITAGE project, as an initiative piloting Roma Cultural Heritage Route and as a practical step towards a European itinerary of Roma culture is so valuable. It is therefore only natural that the Routes of Roma Cultural Heritage should be transnational, connecting across borders and encompassing all European countries. While ROMHERITAGE project starts with pilot national routes, eventually it is envisaged that these routes will connect and be truly European – as the Roma people are.

This is not only important for Roma, but for Europe as a whole. As Gunter Grass, German Nobel Prize winner, noted “the Romani people are that which we are trying to become: true Europeans”. Indeed, the Roma are internally diverse and multicultural by nature, embracing a multitude of different religions, languages, traditions and lifestyles. It is this respect for plurality encoded within the Roma culture that should be showcased as a good practice to European citizens, showing that diversity in unity is possible. Promoting this discourse will reinforce the process of building a European identity among all European citizens, based on common values and a respect for diversity which Roma cherish.

Finally, let’s not underestimate the role of culture for maintaining healthy and resilient democracies. In fact, the [Council Resolution on the EU Work Plan for Culture 2023-26](#) acknowledges the importance of culture for Europe and its citizens, and recognizes the need to enhance “cultural participation and the role of culture in society”, as a meaningful tool to foster democracies and build peace. But to stand its ground, the EU and its member states need to acknowledge its most vulnerable citizens. At the same time, and maybe more importantly, Roma culture – like our communities – can be defined by our resilience, ingenuity, capacity to quickly adapt to shifting contexts, respect of diversity and plurality as an added value, community-oriented approach and consideration of putting resources at the service of collective benefit. These qualities – developed as a survival mechanism over centuries of adversities – are valuable skills which Europe can learn from and be inspired by.



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