Creation of Cultural Routes

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Experiences from the Danube's Archaeological eLandscapes Project

Interreg
Danube Transnational Programme
Danube's Archaeological eLandscapes

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EDITORS
Sanjin Mihelić
Porin Šćukanec Rezniček
Jacqueline Balen
Ivor Janković

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Nedjeljko Špoljar
Sensus Design Factory

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The European Neanderthal Route Initiative

Sanjin Mihelić
Archaeological Museum in Zagreb

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Cultural Route is a cultural, educational, heritage and tourism co-operation 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.

Council of Europe (2013)
Resolution CM/Res(2013)66 confirming the establishment of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA).

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CULTURAL ROUTES generally function as networks of stakeholders interested in joint management, valorisation and promotion of specific cultural and/or natural phenomena, often covering large distances. The model has gained prominence in the past few decades, particularly following the launch of the Council of Europe's programme of cultural routes and the certification of the first routes in late 1980s and early 1990s. To date, the programme has certified several dozen cultural routes — as of 2022, a total of 48.

A European cultural route is eligible for certification by the Council of Europe if it satisfies the following criteria:

- involve a theme that is representative of **European values** and common to **at least three countries** in Europe;
- be the subject of transnational, multidisciplinary **scientific research**;
- enhance **European memory, history and heritage** and contribute to interpretation of Europe's present-day diversity;
- support **cultural and educational exchanges** for young people;
- develop exemplary and innovative projects in the field of **cultural tourism** and **sustainable cultural development;**
- develop **tourist products and services** aimed at different groups.

For a number of years it has been evident that the Neanderthals — whom we tend to think of as the First Masters of Europe — lend themselves extremely well as potential subjects of a cultural route that would cover almost all of Europe, extending even beyond our continent to parts of Asia. Such a cultural route would fully appraise the wide spectrum of present-day perspectives on Neanderthals, from the public appreciation of their role as long-gone partial ancestors of modern Eurasian populations to the valorisation of their legacy in broader cultural terms, including for instance the cultural tourism angle. In addition to the work and ideas developed within the Danube's Archaeological eLandscapes Project, an initiative to establish such a route — the **European Neanderthal Route** — has recently been launched by the network of scholars and cultural managers gathered around the COST Action entitled Integrating Neandertal Legacy: From Past to Present, abbreviated as iNEAL.

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The initiative dedicates special attention to potential positive impacts different aspects of Neandertal heritage, like museum displays or archaeological sites may have on the socio-economic development of a given community through mediation of tourism. This perspective underscores the public and touristic attractiveness of tangible and intangible aspects of the Neandertal story, while exhibits and heritage sites are considered as tourist resources. Consequently, their management and valorisation for purposes of tourism enter the domain of destination management, as a continuous process in which tourism industry, administration at various levels, and other stakeholders develop a destination with a view to fulfil a shared vision of its future. In addition to this, as part of its work on the establishment of the cultural route on Neanderthals, the iNEAL Action seeks to develop a package of informational, educational and didactic tools to be used for communicating topics relating to various facets of Neanderthal heritage. The package will be designed to cater for different publics, from general public, schools, civil society and local communities, tourism sector, heritage institutions, small and medium enterprises, and all others interested in these topics.

As part of the preparation for the creation of a Neanderthal cultural route, the iNEAL Action organized a *Training School on Valorization of Neanderthal heritage through the creation of cultural routes* in Zagreb in November 2021.

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The European Neanderthal Route **Initiative** is open to all persons and entities who share the vision to establish the **European Neanderthal Route** and are willing to participate in the creation and organization of a broad network of stakeholders interested in the preservation, promotion, presentation, management and valorisation of Neanderthal heritage across the continent.

For more information please contact: *smihelic@amz.hr*

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