

Crossroads of Europe - Pavia, Italy, from 6th to 10th June 2012

For four days the city of Pavia has become for the first time the European capital of religious itineraries. Since Pavia is located at the crossroad of three pilgrimage routes: Via Francigena, the Way of St. Martin of Tours and that of St. Augustine, itineraries which were pilgrimage routes, the fair was dedicated to pilgrimage: the first experience in which people coming from all over Europe synchronized over common values.

The event, highly supported by the European Commission, particularly by the cabinet of the Commissioner Antonio Tajani and the Council of Europe, focused on the theme of European cultural and religious itineraries.

The EU Commission entrusted the Institute of Cultural Routes of Luxembourg with the coordination of the participation of other cultural routes not directly invited as pilgrimage routes. The routes were grouped in a large exhibition space devoted to showcasing the Council of Europe's programme, and participated in seminars and discussions during the fair. The **EHTTA Association** presented on this occasion its poster and its brochure **"Discovering the European Route of Thermal Heritage" – 25 Towns in Europe: Culture, Art, Architecture, History.**

The **EHTTA Association** also took part in the public conferences that promoted European cultural itineraries and raised awareness about the potential for tourism of its **European Route of Historic Thermal Towns** among stakeholders, destination managers, national and local authorities: "European Cultural Routes" crossing several regions or countries are a good starting point to promote the variety and complexity of European cultural tourism offers.

The focus was on both the demand and offer of cultural and religious tourism. The aim was to show where the added value of investing in transnational thematic tourism products, is what are the motivations behind the demand for this "niche" tourism model and what are the reasons driving the offer. Transnational cultural tourism products represent common European shared values and heritage, they contribute to present and promote Europe as a "unique tourism destination". Therefore the European Commission is implementing a number of activities to support transnational tourism products based on specific themes which still have great potential for growth as Cultural Routes. They are sustainable, ethical and social model, because they build on local knowledge, skills and heritage assets, and often promote lesser known European destinations.

On the 8th June the *European Route of Historic Thermal Towns* was presented by Mr Giuseppe Bellandi, Mayor of Montecatini Terme, at the "Info session" on Thematic-Tourism Routes, along with *Iter Vitis, Mozart Ways, Phoenician's Route, Prehistoric, Rock Art Trail, , Transromanica, the Route of Cistercian Abbeys, Saint Augustine, St. James Way.*

This session stimulated the interest of the present stakeholders the idea was of a session of raising-awareness where different thematic transnational routes have been presented.

After the info session we had a brief but essential meeting with the 2nd Joint Programme CoE/EU Cultural Routes 2011-2013 steering committee composed by the Director of the EICR, Penelope Denu, and the experts appointed to carry out and coordinate the implementation of each chapter of the programme: Eleonora Berti (EICR), Kseniya Khovanova (CoE-EICR), Nick Hall (CoE-EICR) and Luca Bruschi project manager, responsible for the management of the Joint Action of the implementation of its objectives. They informed us on the updating of the action planned in this framework.

A 1st Joint Programme with the European Commission was concluded in June 2011 by the presentation of an extensive study of the impact of the cultural routes on small and medium-sized industries.

This study, which outlined the strengths and weaknesses of the Council of Europe's cultural routes as vectors of cultural and tourism development, served as the basis for a new programme, launched in August 2011, targeting the creation of new tools for capacity-building, network governance, visibility and marketing of the routes.

The aim of this meeting was to present the results of two years of cooperation between the two institutions and present the ongoing 2nd Joint Programme on these objectives: capacity-building and destination management, network governance and performance evaluation; branding, marketing and promotion; and cooperation with main stakeholders for next training programme on cultural routes.

The European Institute of Cultural routes will concentrate on "professionalising" its work as technical agency of the Council of Europe, as a multi-disciplinary resource and assistance centre for the Council of Europe's cultural routes and as a guide for new cultural route projects, by improving access to its databases and online information services, by producing guidelines for compliance with the criteria for cultural routes of the Council of Europe and by organising the work of experts in the field. In order to fulfil its tasks they asked us to interact to brainstorm with them and with all the 24 routes.

The Governing Board, the Executive Secretary and the representatives of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg will seek to increase the political outreach of the programme at local, regional and national levels, in order to translate into concrete action the enormous potential already demonstrated at grass-roots level by the great diversity of the routes and their positive impact on cultural and cultural tourism development in the regions. The Annual Advisory Forum to be held in Colmar in November will provide an opportunity to raise awareness and encourage participation of member states, as a parallel event will take place in Strasbourg to mark the 25th anniversary of the Council of Europe cultural routes.

Key people:

- **Penelope Denu**, Director of the European Institute of Cultural Routes
- **Luca Bruschi** (project manager) Joint Programme CoE/EU Cultural Routes 2011-2013 : responsible for the management of the Joint Action of the implementation of the project.
- **Kseniya Khovanova-Rubicondo** (CoE-EICR): *"The Results of the 2010 Joint ECCoE Study on European Cultural Routes and its Importance for Cultural Tourism Development in Europe"*
- **Nick Hall** (CoE-EICR): *Branding, Marketing and Visibility for the Council of Europe cultural routes'*
- **Eleonora Berti** (EICR): *Vademecum on cultural routes management*