

# ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes

Prepared by the International Scientific Committee  
on Cultural Routes (CIIC) of ICOMOS

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## PREAMBLE

As a result of the development of the sciences of conservation of cultural heritage, the new concept of Cultural Routes shows the evolution of ideas with respect to the vision of cultural properties, as well as the growing importance of values related to their setting and territorial scale, and reveals the macrostructure of heritage on different levels. This concept introduces a model for a new ethics of conservation that considers these values as a common heritage that goes beyond national borders, and which requires joint efforts. By respecting the intrinsic value of each individual element, the Cultural Route recognizes and emphasizes the value of all of its elements as substantive parts of a whole. It also helps to illustrate the contemporary social conception of cultural heritage values as a resource for sustainable social and economic development.

This more extensive notion of cultural heritage requires new approaches to its treatment within a much wider context in order to describe and protect its significant relationships directly associated with its natural, cultural and historical setting. Within this advance, the concept of the Cultural Route is innovative, complex and multidimensional. It introduces and represents a qualitatively new approach to the theory and practice of conservation of the cultural heritage.

Cultural Routes represent interactive, dynamic, and evolving processes of human intercultural links that reflect the rich diversity of the contributions of different peoples to cultural heritage.

Though Cultural Routes have resulted historically from both peaceful and hostile encounters, they present a number of shared dimensions which transcend their original functions, offering an exceptional setting for a culture of peace based on the ties of shared history as well as the tolerance, respect, and appreciation for cultural diversity that characterize the communities involved.

The consideration of Cultural Routes as a new concept or category does not conflict nor overlap with other categories or types of cultural properties—monuments, cities, cultural landscapes, industrial heritage, etc.—that may exist within the orbit of a given Cultural Route. It simply includes them within a joint system which enhances their significance.

This integrated, interdisciplinary and shared framework creates new relationships among them by means of an innovative scientific perspective that provides a multilateral, more complete, and more accurate vision of history. This approach stimulates not only understanding and communication among the peoples of the world, but also increases cooperation to preserve cultural heritage.

The innovation introduced by the concept of “Cultural Routes” reveals the heritage content of a specific phenomenon of human mobility and exchange that developed via communication routes that facilitated their flow and which were used or deliberately served a concrete and peculiar purpose. A Cultural Route can be a road that was expressly created to serve this purpose or a route that takes advantage either totally or partially of preexisting roads used for different purposes. But beyond its character as a way of communication or transport, its existence and significance as a Cultural Route can only be explained by its use for such specific purpose throughout a long period of history and by having generated heritage values and cultural properties associated to it which reflect reciprocal influences between different cultural groups as a result of its own peculiar dynamics.

Therefore, Cultural Routes are not simple ways of communication and transport which may include cultural properties and connect different peoples, but special historic phenomena that cannot be created by applying one’s imagination and will to the establishment of a set of associated cultural assets that happen to possess features in common.

Cultural Routes have sometimes arisen as a project planned a priori by the human will which had sufficient power to undertake a specific purpose (for example, the Incan and the Roman Empire Routes). On other occasions, they are the result of a long evolutionary process in which the collective interventions of different human factors coincide and are channeled towards a common purpose (such as in the Route to Santiago, the African trade caravan routes, or the Silk Route). In both cases, they are processes arising from the human will to achieve a specific objective.

Given the cultural richness and variety of both the interrelationships and the characteristic assets directly associated with the reason for the existence of Cultural Routes (such as monuments, archaeological remains, historic towns, vernacular architecture, intangible, industrial and technological heritage, public works, cultural and natural landscapes, transportation means and other examples of the application of specific knowledge and technical skills), their study and management requires a multidisciplinary approach that illustrates and reinvigorates scientific hypotheses and stimulates increased historic, cultural, technical and artistic knowledge.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CHARTER

- To establish the basic principles and methods of research specific to the category of Cultural Route as they relate to other previously established and studied categories of cultural heritage assets.
- To propose the basic mechanisms for the development of knowledge about, evaluation, protection, preservation, management and conservation of Cultural Routes.
- To define the basic guidelines, principles and criteria for correct use of Cultural Routes as resources for sustainable social and economic development, respecting their authenticity and integrity, appropriate preservation and historical significance.
- To establish the bases for national and international cooperation that will be essential for undertaking research, conservation and development projects related to Cultural Routes, as well as the financing required for these efforts.

## DEFINITION

Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality to serve a specific and well-determined purpose, which must fulfill the following conditions:

- a) It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time;
- b) It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage;

- c) It must have integrated into a dynamic system the historic relations and cultural properties associated with its existence.

***Defining elements of Cultural Routes: context, content, cross-cultural significance as a whole, dynamic character, and setting.***

1. *Context:* Cultural Routes occur in a natural and/or cultural context upon which they exert an influence and which they help to characterize and enrich with new dimensions as part of an interactive process.
2. *Content:* A Cultural Route must necessarily be supported by tangible elements that bear witness to its cultural heritage and provide a physical confirmation of its existence. Any intangible elements serve to give sense and meaning to the various elements that make up the whole.
  1. The indispensable physical element that determines the existence of a Cultural Route is the communication route itself as an instrument serving a project designed or arising through human activity to accomplish specific goals.
  2. Other basic substantive elements are the tangible heritage assets related to its functionality as a historic route (staging posts, customs offices, places for storage, rest, and lodging, hospitals, markets, ports, defensive fortifications, bridges, means of communication and transport; industrial, mining or other establishments, as well as those linked to manufacturing and trade, that reflect the technical, scientific and social applications and advances in its various eras; urban centers, cultural landscapes, sacred sites, places of worship and devotion, etc.) as well as intangible heritage elements that bear witness to the process of exchange and dialogue between the peoples involved along its path.
3. *Cross-cultural significance as a whole:* The concept of Cultural Route implies a value as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts and gives the Route its meaning.
  1. The cultural route constitutes a cultural asset enriched by the different cultures it has fertilized and which transcends them in overall value by offering a substantial number of shared characteristics and value systems.
  2. Within its overall identity, the value of its parts resides in their common, shared, multi-faceted significance.
  3. Its wider scale permits a cultural linking of peoples, countries, regions, and continents.
  4. This breadth of scale is important from the point of view of both the territory included and of the comprehensive management of the various heritage elements included in it. At the same time the cultural diversity it implies provides an alternative to a process of cultural homogenization.
4. *Dynamic character:* In addition to presenting physical evidences of its historic path, along with cultural heritage elements, Cultural Routes include a dynamic factor that acts as a conductor or channel through which the reciprocal cultural influences have flowed.
  1. The dynamic of a Cultural Route does not obey natural laws or casual phenomena, but rather exclusively human processes and interests, and is therefore understandable only as a cultural phenomenon.
  2. This vital fluid of culture is manifested not only in material or tangible aspects, but also in the spirit and traditions making up the intangible heritage of Cultural Routes.
  3. By understanding a Cultural Route as a set of dynamic elements of cultural communication between peoples, its cultural heritage assets can be appreciated in their true spatial

and historical dimensions, which allows for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to the conservation of the Route as a whole.

5. *Setting:* The Cultural Route is closely linked to its setting and forms an inseparable part of it.
  1. The geographical setting has helped to shape the Cultural Route, either determining its path or influencing its development over time.
  2. The territorial setting, whether natural or cultural (urban or rural), provides the framework of the Cultural Route, gives it its particular atmosphere, characterized by elements and values of both physical and intangible nature, and is fundamental for the comprehension, conservation and enjoyment of the route.
  3. A Cultural Route connects and interrelates geography and very diverse heritage properties, forming a unified whole. Cultural Routes and their setting are related to their different landscapes, natural or cultural, which are but just one of their components and have their own distinctive characteristics and identity depending on the different areas and regions they pass through in their course. The different landscapes contribute to characterize the diverse sections of the Route as a whole, enriching it with their diversity.
  4. The relationship with nature is especially sensitive in some sections, in others it is the relationship with the urban or rural environment, and in the areas with monuments that are isolated from other buildings (such as chapels, monasteries, fountains, bridges, boundary crosses, etc.), it is the relationship of these monuments with their landscape setting which shapes the nature of that section of the Cultural Route.
  5. The protection and conservation of the Cultural Routes requires a profound knowledge of the historic, natural and cultural characteristics of their surroundings. Any interventions that may be necessary must fit in with this context and respect its defining features by facilitating their understanding and not distorting the traditional landscape, whether it is natural, cultural or combined.
  6. A delineation of the setting must be provided for the Cultural Route, clearly marking the boundaries of a well-defined, regulated buffer zone, which should allow the material and immaterial cultural values included in it to be preserved in their full authenticity and integrity. Such protection must include the values of the different landscapes forming part of the Cultural Route and providing its characteristic atmosphere.

### *Specific Indicators*

As basic differentiating indicators applicable to the category of Cultural Route, the following should be considered: the structure of the route and its physical substratum as well as historical data about its use to accomplish a specific goal; any physical structures associated with the concrete purpose and functionality of the Cultural Route; communication elements, and the existence of cultural manifestations of shared origin along (or at given points of) the route such as practices, traditions, customs, and common uses of a religious, ritual, linguistic, festival, culinary, or similar nature; reciprocal influences in music, literature, architecture, fine arts, handicrafts, scientific advances, technical and technological skills, and other material and immaterial cultural assets whose full understanding derives from the historic function of the Cultural Route.

## TYPES OF CULTURAL ROUTES

Cultural routes can be classified as follows:

- According to their territorial scope: local, national, regional, continental, or intercontinental.
- According to their cultural scope: within a given cultural region or extended across different geographical areas that have shared or continue to share a process of reciprocal influences in the formation or evolution of cultural values.

- According to their goal or function: social, economic, political, or cultural. These characteristics can be found shared across a multi-dimensional context.
- According to their duration in time: those that are no longer used versus those that continue to develop under the influence of socio-economic, political, and cultural exchanges.
- According to their structural configuration: linear, circular, cruciform, radial or network.
- According to their natural environment: land, aquatic, mixed, or other physical setting.

## IDENTIFICATION, INTEGRITY AND AUTHENTICITY

### • *Prima facie indicators*

For identification and assessment purposes, the following aspects may initially be considered as *prima facie*, non-conclusive evidence of the existence of a Cultural Route:

- Expressions of dynamic social, economic, political, and cultural processes which have generated exchanges between different cultural groups of related areas;
- Distinguishing characteristics that are shared by different geographical and cultural areas connected by historical bonds;
- Evidences of mobility and of relationships forged between peoples or ethnic groups of different cultures;
- Specific cultural features rooted in the traditional life of different communities;
- Heritage elements and cultural practices—such as ceremonies, festivals and religious celebrations representative of shared values for different communities within (a) specific cultural and historic area(s)—related to the significance and functionality of the Route.

### • *Identification process*

The process for identifying a Cultural Route will necessarily take into account its specific functionality to serve a concrete and well-determined purpose, the tangible and intangible values of its heritage dynamically generated as a results of reciprocal cultural influences, its structural configuration, its whole geographic and historic context, its natural and cultural setting, whether the latter is urban or rural, and its corresponding characteristic environmental values, its relationships to the landscape, its duration in time, and its symbolic and spiritual dimension, all of which will contribute to its identification and to the understanding of its significance.

The intangible assets of a Cultural Route are fundamental for understanding its significance and its associative heritage values. Therefore, material aspects must always be studied in connection with other values of an intangible nature.

For the purpose of its comparative evaluation, the temporal duration and historic significance of the different sections of the Route in relation to the whole should also be taken into account.

In the case of a living Cultural Route, the relationships and dynamic functions associated with the specific and well-determined purpose that gave rise to its existence and serves to define and identify the route should be maintained, even if the historic processes have undergone change over time and new elements have been incorporated. These new elements should be evaluated within the framework of their functional relationship to the Cultural Route, and the case may occur where properties that have heritage values in themselves cannot be considered as components of the Cultural Route because they do not form part of it.

### • *Authenticity*

Every Cultural Route should fulfill authenticity criteria demonstrably and credibly expressing its value in terms of both its natural and cultural environment, and concerning both its defining elements and its distinctive features of a material and immaterial nature:

- These criteria should be applied to each section under study to assess its significance in relation to the overall meaning of the Route throughout its historical development, and to verify the authenticity of its structural layout through the vestiges of its path.
  - Authenticity should also be evident in the natural and cultural context of each stretch of the Route subject to analysis and assessment, as well as in the other tangible and intangible heritage elements included within its historic functionality and its setting.
  - Even if in certain sections the material traces of a Cultural Route are not clearly preserved, its existence in these areas could be shown through historiography, intangible elements and immaterial sources of information that prove their real meaning as integral components of that Route and evidence its authenticity.
  - The techniques and methodologies used for the protection, conservation and management of the Cultural Routes, whether traditional or newly implemented, must respect the authenticity criteria.
- *Integrity*

The verification of the integrity of a Cultural Route must necessarily be based on a sufficiently representative set of both tangible and intangible evidences and elements that witness to its global significance and values as a whole and ensure the complete representation of the features and importance of the historic processes which generated the Cultural Route.

Evidences of the historic relationships and dynamic functions essential to the distinctive character of the Cultural Route should be maintained. In addition, regard must be had for whether its physical fabric and/or its significant features are in good condition and the impact of deterioration processes controlled, and whether or not the Route reflects any possible side effects of development, abandonment or neglect.

## METHODOLOGY

The concept of Cultural Route requires a specific methodology for its research, assessment, protection, preservation, conservation, use and management. Given its breadth and its value as a whole, as well as its territorial dimensions, this methodology requires the establishment of a system of coordinated and integrally managed activities.

It is essential to start with the identification both of the Route as a whole and of its individual sections, along with an inventory of the assets that comprise it and an analysis of their state of conservation which will facilitate the elaboration of a strategic plan for its preservation. This plan should necessarily include measures for raising awareness of the Route and creating interest in it among public and private entities. It also requires the formulation of coordinated measures and specific legal instruments for the protection, use and management of all of its elements as substantive parts of the value and significance of the Route as a whole.

### 1. *Research*

The study of cultural routes may extend across different geographical areas, possibly widely separated from each other. It is therefore advisable to set up several research teams located at the main characteristic points of the Route under study.

The research methodology, along with the adoption of practices and the attachment of indicators for proper identification and assessment of the heritage values in the different sections of a Cultural Route, should never lose sight of the meaning of the Route as a whole, in order to avoid any loss in the meaning or historic significance of the route.

Research teams working on this cultural heritage category should be of a multidisciplinary and cooperative nature. Common working criteria should be established based on the prin-

ciple of starting with an investigation of the parts, but without losing sight of the project as a whole. Similarly, common methodological instruments—standardized in advance—should be used for the collection of data. The project plan should include coordinating mechanisms that will facilitate communication and cooperation among the researchers in order to make it possible to transmit data about the work and achievements of each team.

Researchers should keep in mind that the presence of various types of cultural heritage properties along the path of a Cultural Route does not, in and of itself, imply that they are necessarily integral components of that route or are appropriate objects of study in relation to it. The only elements that should be highlighted in the scientific investigation of a Cultural Route are those related to the specific goal of the Route and any influences arising from its functional dynamic.

## 2. *Funding*

Given the scope of the tasks involved in identifying and highlighting the value of a vast Cultural Route, funding should be obtained in stages that will allow for balanced, coordinated progress in the research projects as well as the preservation, use, and management projects related to its various sections. It is advisable to establish a joint estimation of the values to be preserved so as to allow the setting of a scale of priorities for action and the implementation of the corresponding strategies. This requires that funding be obtained through bilateral or multilateral cooperation agreements, as well as through the creation of bodies specifically devoted to researching and highlighting the value of the Route. Along the same lines, regional bodies whose jurisdictions coincide totally or partially with the historic path of a Cultural Route should determine how they can best gain the interest of the States involved and obtain their cooperation. It is also important to attract, if possible, the cooperation of philanthropic institutions and private donors.

## 3. *Protection—Assessment—Preservation/Conservation*

Cultural Routes and their setting require new instruments for their assessment, protection, conservation and evaluation. It is not sufficient to guarantee protection of their heritage elements on a partial or random basis. The preparation of rigorous inventories of these elements, as well as an assessment of their authenticity and integrity should take place in order to identify impacts on the values of the Cultural Route and therefore impacts on its significance. It is also necessary to control the impact of deterioration processes, and to develop a strategy to prevent the adverse effects of development and neglect. All of this requires the establishment of a system of coordinated legal measures and appropriate instruments that guarantee that the Route will be preserved and its value and significance highlighted in a holistic fashion. Understanding heritage values is fundamental prior to any intervention on Cultural Routes that may impact/change their significance.

## 4. *Sustainable Use—Relationship to Tourist Activities*

With regard to its use, a Cultural Route can be used to promote an activity of social and economic interest of extraordinary importance for stable development.

Special care should be taken to avoid confusion between the concepts of tourist routes—even including those of cultural interest—and Cultural Routes. However, it should also be recognized that a Cultural Route is a reality that can have great importance for territorial cohesion and sustainable development. From this point of view, efforts should be made to promote knowledge about Cultural Routes, along with their appropriate and sustainable use for tourism purposes, always with the adoption of appropriate measures aimed at eliminating risks. For this purpose, protection and promotion of a Cultural Route should harmoniously

integrate a supplementary infrastructure—for tourist activities, access routes, information, interpretation and presentation—with the essential condition that it does not jeopardize the meaning, authenticity and integrity of the historic values of the Cultural Route as key elements to be conveyed to visitors.

Tourist visits should be managed on a rational basis in accordance with prior environmental impact studies and with plans for public use and community participation, as well as control and monitoring measures intended to prevent the negative impacts of tourism.

The development of a Cultural Route for tourism purposes should guarantee in any case that priority is given to the participation of the local community and to local and regional tourist companies. Every effort should be made to prevent the creation of monopolies by large international companies or by powerful companies based in the more developed countries through which the historic path of the Cultural Route passes.

Given the fact that a Cultural Route is an instrument for cooperation and understanding which provides a holistic reading of the encounter of cultures and civilization that form that Route, we should also keep in mind that independently of the relative importance of each one of its parts, the promotion of positive developments in each one, leads to increased interest on the Route and benefits for the other parts.

#### 5. *Management*

“Understanding of Cultural Routes Significance” becomes the basic/fundamental principle associated to management of cultural routes. This implies ensuring that all activities related to their research, assessment and social dissemination of knowledge about them are carried out in a coordinated and harmonious manner. This also requires a cross coordination that guarantees the combination of policies relating to protection, preservation, conservation, territorial organization, sustainable development, use and tourism. Therefore, joint projects need to be prepared that ensure sustainable development on a national (at the provincial, regional, local level, etc.) and international scale, as well as the establishment of management tools designed to protect the Route against natural disasters and all kinds of risks which could impact on the integrity and authenticity of the Cultural Route and therefore on its significance.

#### 6. *Public participation*

The protection, conservation/preservation, promotion and management of a Cultural Route calls for the stimulation of public awareness, and the participation of the inhabitants of the areas which share the Route.

### *International Cooperation*

There are notable examples of Cultural Routes whose historic paths involve various countries. For this reason, international cooperation is essential for research, assessment, and preservation of the assets that make up international Cultural Routes.

When Cultural Routes exist which involve countries with different degrees of development, it is recommended that the more developed countries provide the means for economic, technical, and logistic cooperation as well as assistance in the exchange of information, experience, and researchers.

It is highly desirable that UNESCO and other international organizations should establish mechanisms of cooperation (financial, technical, and logistic) to help foster and implement projects related to Cultural Routes that are of interest to more than one country.

Cultural Routes should be seen as symbols of union between peoples. The historic ties developed along Cultural Routes can serve to promote projects based on renewed cooperation between peoples who shared certain values and knowledge in the past.