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Speaking Points

When we refer to cultural routes, we talk about bringing together different parts of a territory or different countries, fostering integration, understating and social equity, but we also talk about economic growth and jobs, inclusion and empowerment of local communities, the promotion of local pride, and the safeguarding of our cultural heritage.

UNWTO cooperation history:

- UNWTO has a long history of working on the cultural routes projects and sees it as a powerful mechanism capable to create numerous collaborative opportunities at both local, regional and transnational level.
- UNWTO gives special importance to promoting the best practices of route development, through its publications and conferences as for instance 2015 Global report on cultural routes and itineraries and the upcoming Handbook on Marketing Transnational Tourism Themes and Routes created in partnership with the ETC to be launched in November 2017 in Santiago de Compostela, Spain.
- As a unique programme within UNWTO the Silk Road Programme is a collaborative platform for 33 member states, which fosters cooperation and promotion of sustainable and responsible tourism based on the values of preservation of heritage and intercultural dialogue.
- UNWTO and the Council of Europe have a long history of cooperation on the cultural routes. The Memorandum of Cooperation, signed between two organizations is a result of our joint efforts of formalisation of the cooperation and is a legal tool for strengthening the collaboration.

Benefits of Cultural Routes:

The current relationship between the spheres of culture and tourism is now correctly viewed as an interdependent partnership: sustainable goals and criteria are now an indispensable part of all tourism projects, whereas culture, aware that heritage has to be enlivened in order to remain important, recognizes the role played by the tourism sector in raising awareness, generating funds and maintaining the outstanding universal value of sites across the globe.

- Cultural Routes enhance abilities to promote the unique attributes of a destination or destinations
- They have a high potential to spread demand: with a themed approach, a destination can generate benefits in peripheral regions or at specific times of year.
- They provide a chance to redefine a mature destination and rejuvenate its growth.
- Theming can create a new profile for existing product offerings and can provide an innovative framework for strategic product development.
- The Cultural Routes instil a sense of pride within resident populations and create capacity to develop a greater level of cohesion within the tourism industry and the supporting commercial community.

- The Routes offer a cultural experience, where the visitor feels a personal engagement with the theme. Experience-based tourism adds value to the consumer, but also reinforces the identity of the territory, both internally and to the outside world.

Challenges of Cultural Routes:

- No matter if the route is locally focused or, as in the case with the Silk Road, spans across three continents, the development of routes requires a high level of organizational skill, intercultural dialogue and a diplomatic nature while fostering collaboration of various stakeholders.
- We deal with various stakeholders from various fields and policy levels that represent interests, both long- and short-term, which may not always coincide.
- We are confronted with a plurality of laws, regulations and procedures that normally reflect a set of ideals or a cultural understanding that can, but may not be, similar between countries interested in promoting a transnational route or concept.
- The stakeholders are under strong pressure to innovate and differentiate their products from the rest, then we achieve a pretty accurate picture of the complexity of our enterprise.

Why tourism matters:

- 10% of GDP
- 1 out of 10 jobs
- 1,4 trillion dollars in exports
- 7% of World's exports
- 30% of services exports

Tourism Barometer August 2017:

- 2017 –International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development
- Destinations worldwide welcomed 598 million international tourists in the first six months of 2017, some 36 million more than in the same period of 2016
- International tourist arrivals have increased to 1,235 million in 2016.
- International tourism receipts earned by destinations worldwide have grown to US\$ 1,220 billion in 2016.

UNWTO Silk Road Programme history:

- The history of the Silk Road tourism development dates back to 1994, when 19 countries signed the Samarkand Declaration.
- 2010 – Establishment of the specialised programme dedicated to advancing sustainable tourism along the Silk Road.
- The first Silk Road Action Plan 2010/2011 was launched at the 5th International Meeting on the Silk Road in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, where the three key focus areas were established.

Priority areas of the Silk Road Programme:

- Marketing and Promotion
- Capacity Building
- Travel Facilitation

Western Silk Road Tourism Initiative:

- The Silk Road Programme has been working on the Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative.

- This joint project of the UNWTO and the European Commission aims at revitalizing the Silk Road heritage located within an area of the EU Member States, the Mediterranean basin and the Caucasus.
- The Western Silk Road routes are home to a unique Silk Road heritage which has yet to be fully developed for tourism. The project is designed to create new opportunities for destinations and tourism stakeholders interested in cross-border partnerships and in developing novel products focused on untapped Silk Road heritage.
- Potentially with help of the Council of Europe and the European Institute of Cultural Routes the Western Silk Road can be developed as a Cultural Route and be nominated for the certification of the Council of Europe.
- Western Silk Road handbook is currently being developed and will shortly be published
- 2 successful Western Silk Road capacity building workshops brought together various stakeholders from public and private sectors, who became members of the recently launched Working Group of the Western Silk Road
- The Working Group of the Western Silk Road is designed to strengthen and diversify the tourism offer of Western Silk Road destinations as well as enhance regional cooperation and cross-border partnerships. It is the main contact point in terms of assessing, coordinating and following-up on the recommendations brought forward and received during the Research

Global Trends Impacting Silk Road Tourism:

- International tourist arrivals are forecast to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 which means that 5 million people will be crossing international borders for leisure, business or other purposes every day
- Asia and the Pacific will be the fastest growing outbound region in 2010-2030
- Advances in technology
- Improved connectivity
- The rising affluence of Asia's middle class
- Social media and user-generated content
- Cruise tourism
- Young travellers represent one of the fastest growing segments of the travel industry accounting for 20% of all international arrivals, generating an estimated 160 million visitors and a global market worth US\$182 billion per year
- Increasing demand for cultural tourism is growing at an unprecedented rate, now accounting for around 40% of global tourism
- The growth of the experience economy
- Heightened consumer sensitivity to climate and sustainability issues has increased the demand for responsible business practices and corporate social responsibility in tourism