



Grant Agreement Enhancing the Understanding of European Tourism

Conclusions Report 1st and 2nd UNWTO International Western Silk Road Workshops

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1. Summary of the Conclusions Report

This conclusions report is a summary of the two workshops held as part of Work Package 3 – Western Silk Road Tourism Development (WSR), a project developed by UNWTO in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs (DG GROW) of the European Commission (EC):

1st International Western Silk Road Workshop Alexandroupoli, Greece; 26-27 April 2017

Jointly organized by UNWTO, the Ministry of Tourism of Greece and the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and in cooperation with and supported by the European Commission.

2nd International Western Silk Road Workshop Sofia, Bulgaria; 27-28 June 2017

Jointly organized by UNWTO and the Ministry of Tourism of Bulgaria, in cooperation and supported by the European Commission.

Both workshops met the required logistical conditions, as outlined in the Work Package description:

- Calendar of implementation
- Timeframe: 2-month separation between workshops
- Event duration: 2-day workshops
- Location: two EU Member States
- Participation: requirements achieved, both in terms of numbers (over 50 international participants per workshop) and a mixed professional background
- Local support and sponsorship in hosting both events

As to the overall purpose, the workshops were highly successful in mobilising support and raising awareness for the Western Silk Road. To a very high degree, participants who contributed research input, be this via answering the online questionnaire, creating focus groups or similar, also attended the workshops. Thus, a highly motivated group, comprising official Silk Road Task Force representatives of (European) Silk Road Member States, UNWTO Affiliate Members, members of academia, specialised tour operators and local tourism stakeholders from various fields (tour guides, heritage specialists, artisans, etc.), recognised the potential of the project and agreed to dedicate valuable time in the persecution of its objectives.

As to content and practical outcome, both workshops proved to be highly valuable. With the programmatic structure and outline of the workshops previously agreed upon by the project partners, both events followed a stipulated path. The workshops were held according to the calendar of implementation and fulfilled the objectives described in the Work Package description, with slight modifications caused by the shift in the delivery date of the research. In handsight, and although only provisional research results were presented during the first workshop in Greece, the additional time necessitated for further research proved highly valuable, as a more complex and in-depth picture of the tourism potential of the Western Silk Road was gained. Moreover, the additional time granted to partners to study the nature of the Western Silk Road and to understand their participation and contributions therein also proved beneficial for the constitution of the Western Silk Road Working Group. While Greece set the foundation of the Working Group by fomenting a sense of purpose and ownership, by the time the second workshop in Bulgaria took place, all was set, in terms of final research results and Working Group

Terms of Reference, to discuss the specific objectives and goals of the Working Group. All in all, strong efforts were undertaken to ensure that most of the objectives of the 1st workshop were met, especially those focused on raising awareness on the potential of the Western Silk Road project, mobilising stakeholders, and in discussing potential marketing tools and strategies.

As to the second workshop, the output achieved was in strong consonance with the objectives originally expected. With the final research results available, strong progress was made in assessing the tourism potential of sites, corridors and Western Silk Road products, and in discussing the development of joint activities. With a majority of participants attending both workshops, a strong sense of unity and common ownership was also achieved.

Generally speaking, whereas the first workshop proved important in explaining the overall nature and purpose of the project, and in sharpening certain ideas and tools proposed, the second workshop set the scene for the future development of the project by establishing the Western Silk Road Working Group and discussing potential projects to be developed in the short-, medium- and long-term. At the end of this report (“The Way Forward”), and based on the research and workshop output, we propose to re-focus the (branding) handbook originally stipulated in the Work Package. We believe that changing the scope toward a Western Silk Road Roadmap would be more conclusive to the overall objectives of the Western Silk Road, as it would aim to bridge existing divergences among destinations and stakeholders, and, in-line with the workshop feedback, reflect a common Western Silk Road vision and narrative.

As to the workshop content detailed in this report, please acknowledge that the UNWTO Silk Road Programme team was responsible for taking notes during the workshops and the subsequent debate sessions. The notes were then studied and further specified with the help of supplementary sources, such as the PowerPoint presentations, Workshop Evaluation Forms and secondary source material (documents submitted by participants, websites mentioned during the discussions, etc.).

Finally, it is important to state that not necessarily all proposals or opinions contained in this report reflect the view of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme. Some may surpass the outreach of the Work Package description and lack concrete financial assessment/ planning, but our main objective, especially during the workshop debate sessions, was to unleash creativity and a positive debate atmosphere, and to foster a sense of purpose and ownership among participants, elements which may have otherwise suffered had the debates been too tightly constricted. The report intends to recreate the debate as it occurred, and while all propositions are worthy of consideration, none entail financial commitments and/or aim to counteract the objectives stipulated in the Work Package description.

2. 1st International Western Silk Road Workshop

2.1. Workshop Summary

The city of Alexandroupoli, Greece hosted 100 national and international participants for the 1st International Western Silk Road Workshop. The event was jointly organized by UNWTO, the Ministry of Tourism of Greece and the region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, and constituted the first practical step of the Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative.

Three panels integrated the Workshop: (i) the challenges and opportunities of developing the Western Silk Road as a trans-national tourism route, (ii) the marketing potential of the route, and (iii) the practical steps that need to be taken in order to ensure the project's long-term success and viability. As part of the discussions, the creation of a Western Silk Road Working Group in charge of guaranteeing a coordinated approach was outlined and agreed to be further specified during the 2nd Workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria (27-28 June 2017).

Attended by the Minister of Tourism of Greece, the Governor of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace, the Mayor of Alexandroupoli and the Secretary-General of the Greek National Tourism Organization, the workshop counted upon excellent feedback from a wide range of international stakeholders from the tourism sector and beyond, including tour operators, universities, cultural routes representatives and stakeholders from the creative arts. Important input was also contributed by TripAdvisor, the Fundación Turismo Valencia, the World Federation of Tourist Guides Association (WFTGA), the European Federation of Tourist Guide Associations (FEG), the Greek Guiding Association, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Iraq, Destination Makers and Aegean Airlines, who shared its actions in promoting route development and connectivity across the Silk Road. The Chamber of Evros and the Tsiakiris Silkhouse supported the event. As part of the programme, a technical tour to Soufli, the silk city of Greece, was organized.

Overall, the organization and international presence was highly appreciated by the national, regional and local tourism stakeholders of Greece. The Region of Eastern Macedonia and Thrace highly welcomed the momentum – it was the first visit of the current Minister to the region - and the attention placed upon one of the less developed tourism regions of the country.

On the local level, the workshop had a great and immediate practical impact: a Task Force of 20 stakeholders, including representatives from the local and regional administration, local businesses, silk producers and three local museums, was set up in Soufli to advance in a specific tourism development plan based on available silk heritage. Measures agreed upon and currently being developed by the regional Task Force include: the establishment of a local tourism body, the development of a website that will promote Soufli (www.visitsoufli.com – currently underway), and the restoration of the Tzivre Silk Factory, a Silk Road industrial heritage site.

2.2. Workshop Session 1:

The Challenges and Opportunities of Developing the Western Silk Road

The first session of the workshop focused on outlining the challenges and opportunities of developing the Western Silk Road as a transnational tourism route. The UNWTO Silk Road Programme provided an overview of the project, which included some results of the Western Silk Road online survey conducted during the 2016/2017 period.

The presentation was followed by a roundtable discussion that counted upon the participation of:

- Dr. Stella Kostopoulou, Associate Professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
- Dr. Lusine Saribegian, Senior Manager and Lecturer of the Department of Management, Business and Tourism, Russian-Armenian University, Armenia
- Mr. Vasily Dikhtyar, Professor, Institute of Hospitality business and tourism, People's Friendship University of Russia
- Mr. Paolo Baraldi, Researcher, M.S. Tourism Economics and Management, University of Bologna

The roundtable discussants either led or contributed to national Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats/ SWOT Analyses determining the role to be played by their individual countries within the Western Silk Road project (their individual presentations are available online). A summary of the results obtained during the roundtable discussion and subsequent Q&A-session is provided below.

Challenges:

As to the main challenges in developing the Western Silk Road as a unified tourism route, following key points were mentioned:

Create benefits and raise awareness among local Western Silk Road communities

Local ownership and participation are key issues that will ensure the route's uniqueness and vitality. Also, by engaging local communities, the correct management and promotion of available heritage, both natural and cultural, will be secured. To ensure participation of local stakeholders, following actions were recommended:

- Bottom-up approach: secure local stakeholder participation in the Western Silk Road management structure/ Western Silk Road Working Group; and engage in Western Silk Road events, activities and information updates
- Develop the route component of the Western Silk Road: cross-border activities such as walking, cycling or horse-riding infrastructure will not only secure local participation but also support the economic development of localities involved

Ensure a strong framework for collaboration

The Western Silk Road Working Group should function as a strong collaborative platform in charge of:

- Coordinating a common approach towards the development of the Western Silk Road, especially among the public sector
- Ensuring a balanced approach between the public and private tourism sector, and among stakeholders active within the local, regional, national and transnational levels
- Coordinating joint activities in the areas of marketing and promotion, and product development

Development of research and data

By conducting the Western Silk Road research, a first initial step has been made in terms of studying the Western Silk Road as a unified tourism concept. However, research is still scarce and scattered. Therefore,

- The creation of a Western Silk Road database or an inventory of available sites and monuments was proposed. A unified database or inventory would support the exchange of knowledge, support the development of partnerships – for example, among Silk Road

museums located in different countries - and allow for the development of cross-border tourism products and marketing strategies

- Ongoing research, especially of a transnational character, is needed in order to support interested stakeholders in the development of joint tourism products
- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, with the support of the Ministry of Tourism of the Hellenic Republic and UNWTO, will establish a research body that will address the tourism research needs of the Western Silk Road on European level.

Preservation of available heritage

As many participants made clear, available heritage is disappearing due to decay and/or lack of funding. Also, traditional skills and techniques in the arts and crafts sector are being lost due to lack of support or market factors. As the attractiveness of the Western Silk Road depends on its cultural offer, it was proposed that following actions should be studied:

- Seek private sector funding and participation to restore damaged heritage. An example of successful public-private participation was implemented in Valencia with the restoration of the College of the Greater Art of Silk by the Fundación Hortensia Herrero;
- Support local Silk Road business in their internationalization;
- Provide trainings and organize workshops in the areas of sustainable tourism development, and heritage management;
- Support stakeholders, such as local guides, through the provision of trainings.

Development of tourism products

Two main challenges impeding the development of specific Western Silk Road tourism products were identified:

- The fragmented tourism supply;
- Inadequate branding and promotion: many tourism assets linked to the Silk Road are not branded as such.

Security and travel facilitation concerns

In terms of travel and visa facilitation, a regulations and infrastructure gap between Schengen and non-Schengen states participating in the Western Silk Road project was identified. Additionally, it was mentioned that the proximity to unstable regions could have an impact in terms of visitation and cross-border partnerships.

Unique Elements and Opportunities:

As to unique elements that would allow the Western Silk Road to compete within the globalized tourism market, following key points were mentioned:

The Western Silk Road is in-line with the new way people approach and relate to travel

The Silk Road is unique in that it connects many different countries, cultures, nationalities, religions and people under a common brand. In line with the so-called experience economy, travelers are increasingly seeking a different kind of value return, favouring enriching experiences and authenticity along with the traditional product purchase. Thus the Silk Road, a cross-border tourism initiative with a multifarious offer (nature, cultural heritage, eco- and adventure tourism, city tourism and maritime routes), has the components to prosper, adapt and grow in a competitive environment. Additional unique elements mentioned included:

- Untapped knowledge: as opposed to the classical conceptions, the Western Silk Road initiative can present the Silk Road under a new lens;

- The interconnections between the East and the West in the spheres of arts and gastronomy are strong areas to build upon
- Historical connections and common elements among Western Silk Road destinations could support further integration among countries;
- The Western Silk Road could revive rural industries, decayed monuments and sites, and reinvigorate traditional skills and techniques in the fields of gastronomy, clothing, jewelry, etc.

Diversity of the route

Due to its location and the countries involved, the Western Silk Road can potentially integrate several different tourism elements: urban, rural, adventure, eco, cultural, and gastronomy-tourism. Building on available data, Silk Road related sites should be identified and included into the route.

2.3. Workshop Session 2:

Western Silk Road Marketing Strategies and Tools

The second session explored the potential of the Western Silk Road from a marketing and promotional perspective. Ensuring a coordinated approach, developing a common logo and brand identity, media and social media campaigns, the development of Western Silk Road events and festival, raising awareness and involving the private sector, the potential of arts & crafts and gastronomy, were identified as main aspects that would need to be developed in order to establish the Western Silk Road as a recognizable tourism brand. As to ideas aimed at creating stronger coherence among members, the following points and strategies were discussed:

To share efforts and resources

- Joint promotion of the Western Silk Road countries at international tourism fairs by using, for example, a shared stand;
- Integrate the Western Silk Road into the strategic planning of the involved NTOs;
- Seek synergies between the Western Silk Road and China's "Belt and Road" Initiative;
- Identify cluster countries / regions willing to cooperate or advance jointly in defined areas;
- Establishment of a network of silk museums;
- Organization of specialized workshops and capacity building sessions within participating countries.

Western Silk Road Logo and brand identity

The following issues were considered important in order to advance with a shared logo and brand:

- To create and/ or identify an inspiring joint logo and brand name for the Western Silk Road;
- Criteria establishing potential use of the logo should be discussed;
- The logo and brand name could be diverse in the sense of adapting it to each particular language and cultural particularities;
- Production of Western Silk Road souvenirs.

Media promotion and social media

- Production and use of short films and clips about the Western Silk Road should be studied;

- Use of a unified hashtag, such as #SilkRoadTourism – to be used when stakeholders and travelers post photos and articles on social media. The use of a national hashtag per country could also be studied;
- Digital campaigning, online and in printed media;
- Bloggers and FAM trips.

Western Silk Road events and festivals

- Developing a rotating Western Silk Road festival across Europe.

Awareness raising and capacity building

A need to raise general awareness on the importance of the Silk Road was debated. Strategies proposed included:

- To work towards including the Silk Road in the tourism curricula of universities;
- To train new tour guides on practical skills and guiding techniques for countries, as well as *Train-the-Trainer* programmes.

Tourism and beyond

- Peace, culture and economy should be taken into consideration when establishing a recognizable brand;
- Connecting the Western Silk Road with artisans and fashion, as well as with new designers who use silk in their production should be studied;
- Gastronomy: as was done in Valencia, the creation of Silk Road recipes and cook books should be studied;
- Bearing in mind the current influx of Syrian refugees, it was proposed to make use of the Western Silk Road as a tool for integration and support. Syrian artists, artisans and local entrepreneurs could be offered an opportunity by integrating their traditional skills within the local businesses structure (silk factories, museums, etc.).

Involvement of tour operators and private sector, B2B

In terms of private sector engagement, it was agreed that a more practical approach would be needed: especially tour operators capable of offering Western Silk Road tours could assist in raising awareness among potential travelers. However, for this to happen, initial financial and promotional resources, to be provided by NTO's and international organizations, would be needed. Additional measures could include:

- Integration of specialized B2B opportunities for Western and Chinese tour operators;
- Creation of a network of tour operators working on the Western Silk Road;
- Organization of an event in cooperation with investment stakeholders – to raise business and sponsorship opportunities;
- Creation of a legal framework for the Western Silk Road in order to ensure common opportunities and practices;
- Design of tailored tourism products bearing in mind traveler particularities - for example, needs and interests of the Chinese traveler
- A participant proposed to divide the Western Silk Road into two complementary routes: a caravan oriented historic route and a product-based (silk) route. The caravan route would need European funding as it could contribute to the well-being of low-income and war-torn economies in the Middle East. The two routes, by attracting a different type of traveler, could diversify the tourism offer of the countries involved

Following initiatives within the area of **marketing and promotion** were proposed:

- Establishment of a unified Western Silk Road souvenir passport approved by UNWTO: to offer specific benefits such as discounts at museums, heritage sites, etc.;
- Western Silk Road twin cities (sister cities) partnership i.e. Soufli and Valencia and/or Venice;
- Transmitting know-how through cities partnerships, joint projects, etc.;
- A proposal from TripAdvisor to promote all initiatives of the Western Silk Road on one dedicated Western Silk Road traveler page;
- Partnership with the Turkish city of Bursa famous for its focus on Islamic costumes made out of silk – specific promotion under the Western Silk Road brand;
- Iraq: the development of the Marshes of Iraq in the south of the country and its potential connections to the Western Silk Road initiative should be studied.

2.4. Workshop Session 3:

Western Silk Road Governance Structures and Themed Approaches

The third session of the workshop discussed possible governance structures for the Western Silk Road. The participants assessed the advantages of establishing a Western Silk Road Working Group, and recognized the potential of public-private partnerships.

The following transnational and collaborative initiatives were discussed:

- The development of walking and biking routes. The Camino de Santiago and the Via Francigena were mentioned as best-practice examples in the field of promotion, brand recognition and local community integration
- The development of mobile applications, containing information on specific routes (places to visit, etc.), was mentioned
- The Via Dinarica, which works closely with tour operators, was mentioned as a best-practice example in the field of business development and integration
- The creation of an International Western Silk Road Day aimed at raising awareness was discussed
- A Western Student Exchange Programme and/or Summer School involving Western Silk Road universities was discussed
- Western Silk Road and Sports: the idea of a rotating Western Silk Road Marathon was put forward

As to additional points raised that could support the development of the Western Silk Road as a transnational tourism route, following issues were mentioned:

- Network of associations between the countries to share projects, opinions and storytelling, should be developed
- The need for clear financial management and planning is considered vital if any of the future projects are to be long-lasting and self-sufficient

2.5. Additional Workshop Information:

The [webpage of the 1st International Western Silk Road Workshop](#) contains all relevant meeting information, including:

- Official UNWTO Press Release and relevant press clippings
- PowerPoint presentations held during the workshop

- Workshop Programme
- Participants List
- Photos and Videos of the event

3. 2nd International Western Silk Road Workshop

3.1. Workshop Summary

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) and the Ministry of Tourism of the Republic of Bulgaria hosted the 2nd International UNWTO Western Silk Road Workshop in Sofia, Bulgaria, on 27-28 June 2017. The second workshop was attended by over 100 national and international participants, and consolidated the results obtained during the first workshop in Greece in April.

The workshop shared specialized expert input on how to progress from theory to practice in the development of the Western Silk Road as a transnational tourism route. UNWTO presented the main findings of the Western Silk Road study, an innovative research approach that brings the input of tourism stakeholders together with valuable contributions from participating universities and focus groups from across the Western Silk Road region.

Following the presentation, two specialized sessions were held on product development, and tourism certification and quality standards. Ms. Ethna Murphy of Ethna Murphy Consulting, an expert with extensive experience in leading international tourism development projects, shared her ideas and insights on how to ensure the long-term success of an initiative involving a broad range of stakeholders cooperating on a transnational scale.

The value of tourism certification schemes and ensuring high-quality standards within the tourism sector was addressed by Maria Cruz Cádiz Gómez of the Spanish Institute for Quality Tourism (ICTE). The importance of creating an emotional link between the visitor and the host destination, and relevant tools to improve the quality of services within the tourism sector were addressed during this interactive session.

Also, a Western Silk Road B2B speed-networking session was organized, where attending National Tourism Administrations, tour operators and SMEs, universities, tourist guide associations and cultural route representatives networked and discussed potential initiatives to be developed within the framework of the Western Silk Road.

Finally, the main ideas, objectives and tools sustaining the Western Silk Road Working Group, a collaborative platform established during the meeting in Bulgaria, were discussed.

What follows below is a summary of the main points raised during the group discussions taking place after the main workshop presentations.

3.2. Workshop Session 1: Western Silk Road Update

On behalf of UNWTO, tourism consultant, Mr. Gavin Bell, presented the main findings of the research conducted on the transnational tourism potential of the Western Silk Road. Building on a UNWTO presentation delivered during the first workshop in Greece (initial research results of the

Western Silk Road Online Questionnaire), the overview focused on the development of a Western Silk Road Brand, the establishment of a management structure for the Western Silk Road, and the identification and mobilisation of potential financial donors. After the presentation, the participants were divided into groups and were asked to provide feedback on the specific points touched on. A summary of the feedback received is outlined below.

Group 1 – Reviewing the Brand Pyramid

In-line with the results obtained from the Western Silk Road research, workshop participants reiterated their support for the development of a Western Silk Road brand. While recognising the existence of common motifs and heritage that could form the basis of a shared brand, it was acknowledged that key theoretical issues still needed to be fully addressed before pursuing the practical development and implementation of a Western Silk Road brand and brand toolkit.

One of the main issues discussed was the *Western Silk Road Brand Pyramid*. A brand pyramid is a standardised model or template defining key elements requiring assessment prior to any brand-development phase. As outlined by UNWTO, the key multi-layered elements requiring concise definition are:

- Attributes:

What are the tangible, verifiable, objective, measurable characteristics of a destination?

- Rational Benefits:

What benefits for the tourist results from the destination's features?

- Emotional Benefits:

What psychological rewards or emotional benefits do tourists receive by visiting the destination?

How does the tourist feel?

- Brand Personality:

What key traits and characteristics of the destination should be communicated by the brand?

- Brand Values:

What values does the destination instil?

- Brand Essence:

What is the essential nature and character of the destination?

Based on the research and on the feedback received from the 1st workshop in Greece, the following Western Silk Road brand pyramid was developed:



Although the research report specifies that the Western Silk Road brand pyramid only constitutes an intermediate phase of the brand development process that would have to be further concretised by the Western Silk Road Working Group, initial feedback from the attending participants focused on the following:

Could the Western Silk Road exist and thrive as an autonomous brand?

Participants expressed their concern in establishing an independent Western Silk Road brand that could potentially collide with the more commonly known classical Silk Road identity. Bearing in mind the widespread usage, *connaissance* and visual imagery of the Silk Road, participants were reticent to the idea of a competing or separately co-existing brands. While a merger of the two brands was mentioned, a focus was placed on avoiding a potential East-West dichotomy that could counteract the intended message of showcasing the multiple benefits to be derived from exchange.

Brand Essence: competitive value of the Western Silk Road

A potential solution that could avoid the emergence of two competing brands centred on clearly defining the concept of authenticity included within the Western Silk Road brand pyramid. Two potential attributes defining Western Silk Road commonality and authenticity were identified: gastronomy in its multiple aspects (food tourism, gastronomic journeys, etc.) and the Western conception of the Silk Road, as understood in the fields of the arts (painting, sculpture, architecture and literature). By visually integrating these two aspects into a Western Silk Road

brand, an authentic and multi-layered, as opposed to a competing, approach to the Silk Road could be developed.

Also, it was suggested to replace the brand essence key words– *Authentic, Untapped, Shared and Connecting* – with a Western Silk Road motto or slogan. The key words were criticised as too generic and potentially applicable to any destination. By contrast, a Western Silk Road slogan would be more successful in raising awareness for the brand and in highlighting the concept of authenticity mentioned above.

The Western Silk Road and country specificities

Apart from the issue of how to create synergies between the Western and the more classical Silk Road, an important point focused on the transnational usage of the Western Silk Road brand. Questions brought forward by the participants included: How to ensure that country specificities are reflected within a jointly shared brand? Would common marketing/ usage rules be necessary? How to integrate the transnational brand into the branding and marketing campaigns of participating countries?

Although these questions would need to be addressed by the Silk Road Working Group, a proposal suggested following the example of the Euro coin in creating a two-layered brand: one layer representing the unity of all destinations and stakeholders, and a second layer customised to include country specific themes or categories. Although interesting, many participants warned against a plurality of logos that could lead to confusion, especially as it would be difficult for participating countries to renounce their individual destination brands.

Group 2 – Brand Identity and Positioning

Complimentary to the brand pyramid, the importance of brand consistency (usage, visual identity and branding/ messaging) and in securing a unity between the values promoted by a brand and the actual experience offered by the destination were highlighted.

Applied to the development of a Western Silk Road logo, some additional qualities that were presented included:

- **Simplicity:** to ensure a logo is distinctive and memorable. Best-practice examples show that ideally no more than 3 components should be integrated into a brand logo
- **Attractiveness:** whilst attraction is subjective, the testing of possible designs should be undertaken and a consensus reached
- **Consistency in its long-term use:** once agreed upon, consistency is key to reinforcing the strength and awareness among brand consumers and users

Asked about their ideas of what a Western Silk Road logo could potentially look like, participants responded the following:

- Silk and silk production is a common and easily identifiable motif that could be reflected within a Western Silk Road logo;
- Camels and caravans were also identified as potential motifs, whereby the European linkage to camels and caravanserais raised questions;

- A colourful logo, with predominance of red (in order to attract Chinese visitors), received support;
- The connections between East and West and Ancient-Modern synergies could also be integrated into the logo.

The participants agreed that the logo would have to be professionally designed and developed. However, the benefits of organizing a competition were also discussed. To be subject to specific criteria and to be revised by the project partners involved, a competition could be highly positive in the sense of fomenting a sense of ownership, in raising awareness for the project, in mobilising stakeholders and in generating valuable ideas.

The need to manage the use of a Western Silk Road brand was also mentioned as important. For effective management, a brand manager, secretariat or similar and a certification system to assess control would be required. It was agreed that UNWTO, with firmly established communication standards and procedures, in conjunction with project partners, could potentially take the lead in ensuring the correct management of a future brand.

Group 3 and 4 – Western Silk Road Management Structure, and the Cultural Route Model

During the presentation, the establishment of a strong management structure was considered essential if the Western Silk Road is to compete within a highly competitive tourism market. A unified management structure would have many diverse responsibilities, the most peremptory being: to assure the long-term sustainability and financial structure of the project, to manage the brand and to control its visual identity, to involve and foster public-private partnerships, and to engage multiple stakeholders active across various policy levels.

While the project partners have already started to advance towards a strong management structure with the establishment of the Western Silk Road Working Group (discussed further below), UNWTO mentioned that especially NTOs could facilitate the future work of the Working Group by already starting to review their national, regional and local marketing and strategy plans. Also, it was suggested that a Western Silk Road Web Portal or Knowledge Exchange Network could support the steady coordination of media and capacity building initiatives among all partners.

Asked about their priorities, all participants agreed that the establishment of a management structure was necessary, whereby it was recommended that a cluster or group of countries take the lead in actively promoting Western Silk Road. Such a proposition not only acknowledged that some countries are further advanced than others, but also draws upon the *enabling* factor of countries, to be especially understood in financial terms. To exemplify, while the participation of local communities, local businesses and universities is considered important in order to secure the local appeal of the route, discussions made clear that only official agencies and institutions could initially shoulder a project that would require time to grow and prosper. In this sense, a 5-year period was considered necessary in order to bring all partners towards a similar development stage in terms of identifying available heritage, engaging partners and proposing

specific development initiatives. Hence, the need to identify and secure financial resources was considered a priority for the newly established Western Silk Road Working Group.

Additional points that were raised focused on coordinating and ensuring the homogeneity (in style and content) of the information to be distributed. Although all languages would have to be represented, the need to agree upon a common language, especially for official communication, was noted. How many languages would finally co-exist and who would be responsible for the translations were questions that were left for future discussions.

As to the proposition of working towards the integration of the Western Silk Road as a European Cultural Route under the guidance of the Council of Europe, reactions were reserved. As outlined in the research, the Western Silk Road would, a priori, fit the thematic certification criteria of the Council of Europe. The Western Silk Road:

- Represents shared European values
- Is being developed by multidisciplinary experts from different regions of Europe
- Is illustrative of European memory, history and heritage, and contributes to an interpretation of diversity throughout the continent, and
- Fosters educational and cultural exchange among the host communities, especially young people

While recognising the potential of following an established certification and criteria scheme (namely with the creation of a *Cultural Route Network Association for the Western Silk Road*, which would require the appointment of a route manager, would be a good governance model to follow), participants highlighted that the Council of Europe Cultural Routes had wider objectives compared to the Western Silk Road, such as the promotion of human rights and democracy. Notwithstanding the positive contributions of tourism promotion to the overall development of peaceful societies, it was agreed that the Western Silk Road should primarily focus on the development of a transnational tourism route. In order to achieve this objective, a management structure fitted to its own particular needs would have to be developed. Best-practice examples should be studied, but, at this stage, integration into an overarching system did not receive majority support.

Group 5 – Financial Opportunities

As highlighted above, securing financial means was considered vital. With the Western Silk Road project basically starting from scratch, patience and financial security is initially needed in order to establish the main structures (management structure, initial research, partner mobilisation) that are to carry the project forward. In recognition of the broader strategic and enabling role of participating countries and International Organizations – official funds normally create the conditions for subsequent private funding - participants were asked about potential financial sources and/or strategies aimed at gaining funds.

It was agreed that the Western Silk Road Working Group would have to play a central role in studying, elaborating and submitting financial proposals to relevant institutions. Additional project partners would support the Working Group in collecting information, identifying programmes and

providing feedback on proposals. Among the financial options cited were: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), Interreg Europe, Adriatic-Ionic Fund.

3.3. Workshop Session 2: Specialised Session on Product Development

With nearly thirty years' experience in managing national and international tourism and business development programmes, Ms. Ethna Murphy was involved in establishing signature tourism projects, including the Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin Discovery trails and leading the development of Irelands Adventure experiences. Hence, she was considered the best choice to moderate a specialised session on tourism product development.

Ms. Murphy's presentation and central message during the workshop focussed on highlighting the shift that has taken place within the tourism industry, away from traditional product development towards a more personalised relation between visitors, host communities, destinations and industry stakeholders. This new type of relation centres on the key word *experience*. By showcasing best-practice examples and sharing insights, the session and subsequent discussion groups focused on identifying those experiential elements that would allow the Western Silk Road to gain a name among future consumers and stakeholders.

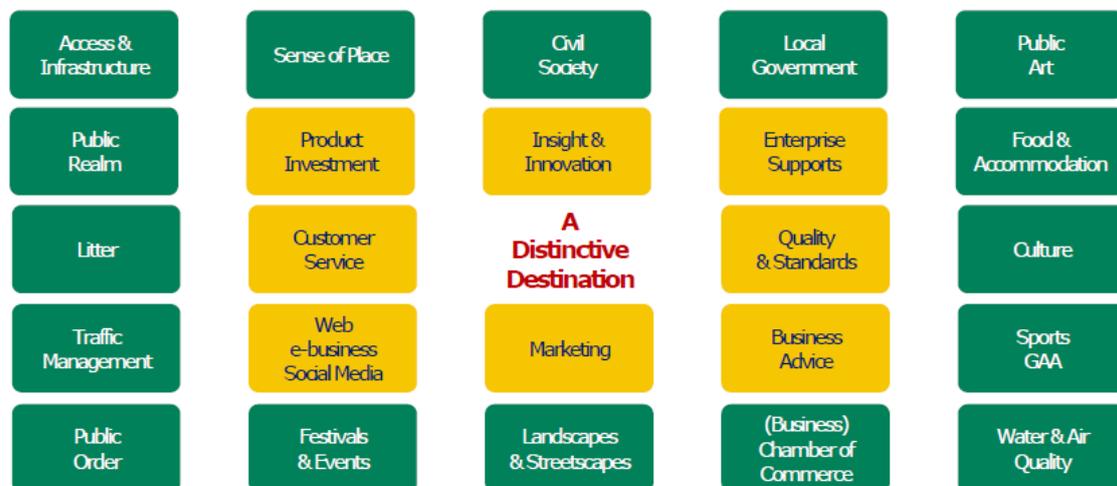
As Ms. Murphy made clear, global is the new reference. Fuelled by innovations in technology and travel, destinations, even those drawing entirely on local elements, compete on a global scale. All sectors, industries and organizations have had to adapt to a new global paradigm that has even changed the way people think, communicate and aspire to live. Applied to the tourism sector, this means that experiential travel, previously only available to a few, has become the new standard. Travellers are increasingly seeking a different kind of value return, favouring enriching experiences and authenticity along with the traditional product purchase. Notwithstanding the potential negative repercussions that such a new type of tourism could have – massification, decayed natural and cultural heritage, commodification and conflicts between tourists and host communities (only to name a few side-effects) - experiential branding has become tantamount for any destination or tourism related product. This is especially true for the Western Silk Road, a cross-border tourism initiative with a multifarious offer comprising nature, cultural heritage, city and eco-tourism proposals, and maritime and land routes that would only need to be correctly transmitted and shared among consumers.

As part of the presentation, Ms. Murphy introduced the *Experience Development Framework*, a template or strategic outline aimed to support destinations to find and define experiences that subsequently could be implemented and promoted through an experiential brand. The strategy was developed based on the best-practice example of Ireland, a destination that suffered a significant decrease in international visitation in 2007, which led it to question and reinvent its overall standing within the tourism market. According to the template presented, a brand that promises visitors spontaneous and engaging experiences would need to be based upon four pillars:

- **Key Propositions:** to be understood as ideas or offers capable of providing a destination with a competitive edge
- **Themes/Stories:** the development of unique and authentic themes and stories that could bring the identified propositions to life
- **Signature Experiences:** to be understood as delivering on the propositions made; that is, iconic experiences of sufficient scale to deliver on the Proposition promise and serve as a motivator for international visitors. Generally, though not always, they comprise a combination of experiences that can be story-based, thematic or geographical.
- **Supporting experiences:** tourism products (e.g. activities, attractions, restaurants) that also deliver on the proposition promise. Individually, however, not motivators for international visitors, but vital to ensuring a complete visitor experience.

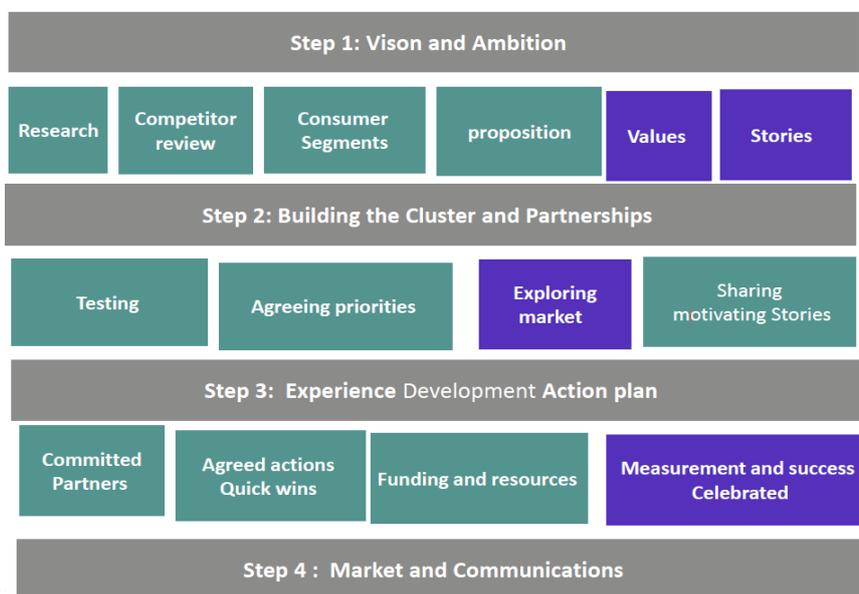
Of course, between defining a proposition and marketing a product, a whole range of issues would need to be fully addressed, including: identifying stakeholders and target segments (traveller types, key needs, etc.), building a management structure and agreeing upon a jointly shared Action Plan.

As experiences are highly complex products to develop and market, what would usually result is a tourism mosaic with input from many different stakeholders active across various fields:



The model above largely coincides with the focus placed upon the Western Silk Road by the UNWTO Silk Road Programme. By expanding the focus to include various different stakeholders throughout the entire project process – apart from NTOs, universities, cultural route representatives, representatives from the arts & crafts sector, tourism guide associations, local tour operators and similar – many benefits could be achieved, among which the following were mentioned: the creation of a self-sustaining structure that would not have to depend upon one single actor, networking opportunities and the development of a learning process that could drive constant improvement and encourage innovation, community integration and ownership, and, also, long-term economic and managerial self-sufficiency.

To conclude the presentation, Ms. Murphy presented a suggested path-way to support development along the Western Silk Road:



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With this visual available, participants were divided into five groups and asked to consider following questions:

Group 1 –What Western Silk Road experience could be delivered within the next 12-24 months?

Experiences based on gastronomy were considered the most likely to be developed within the proposed timeframe. Bearing in mind how food and cooking techniques travelled eastwards and westwards influencing the cuisine of innumerable destinations, it was proposed to brand certain herbs and spices as Western Silk Road products. Also, the development of experiences focused around food such as cooking classes, shopping tours, guided visits to local spice markets, specialised fairs and cooperation with organic food producers were identified as potential Western Silk Road experiences. The possibility of organizing a rotating Western Silk Road food festival, under the tentative logo of “follow the silk, taste the spices”, was also identified as an initiative that could help promote awareness of the Western Silk Road.

Additional potential experiences identified included:

- the re-conversion of industrial heritage sites throughout the participating countries;
- cross-marketing of UNESCO World Heritage Sites;
- experiences based on fashion and the creative arts: for example, visits to workshops of designers and artisans, master-classes in jewellery, clothing and other related crafts.

Group 2 – Identify two potential consumer segments for the Western Silk Road: who and where are they, and how to reach their expectations?

Millennials and active seniors were identified as two potential consumer segments for the Western Silk Road. Apart from being born into the global framework outlined above, millennials

are fully familiar with the technologies through which experiences are usually branded and transmitted, especially social media, and are comfortable to travel transnationally. With Inter-rail as a positive example, the millennial generation has transcended the concept of nation-state and understands Europe as a unity, a mind-set that benefits cross-border proposals such as the Western Silk Road.

As to active seniors, participants recognised multiple benefits: above average spending capacity, strong interest in cultural and natural tourism packages (a key strength of the Western Silk Road), more time to experience destinations, and a strong combination of packaged tours and autonomous travelling.

Group 3 – What needs to happen to unlock iconic experiences along the Western Silk Road?

A central point focused on the need for destinations to identify a specific itinerary, ideally cross-border, to be developed and marketed as part of the Western Silk Road. Without this happening, it would be very difficult to pierce individual destinations together and market an experience across many different countries. Once specific routes had been identified, capacity building workshops and awareness raising campaigns aimed at local stakeholders and tour operators could be implemented. Once again, artisans, artists, chefs, tourist guides and similar local stakeholders were identified as those who would be responsible for the authenticity and uniqueness of the tourism product.

Group 4 – What needs to be in place in order for a private sector operator to deliver a specific Western Silk Road experience?

Responding to this question, participants highlighted the importance of being able to access and build upon relevant and updated information concerning Western Silk Road heritage, sites, itineraries and similar. Information and research would be necessary in order for tour operators to study and decide upon the viability of certain tourism routes and experiences proposed.

A Western Silk Road database and/or the Western Silk Road Working Group could function as a secretariat in charge of processing the information received, whereby the Working Group would need to be supported by those stakeholders capable of providing information, such as NTOs, tourist guides, museums, restaurants, etc. There would have to be a commitment on the part of the involved stakeholders to share information on a regular basis, and so be able to keep up with competitors active on social media.

It was also suggested that UNWTO could make full use of its annual events at the main travel and tourism fairs to invite specialised Western Silk Road tour operators to workshops, events, awareness-raising cocktails and similar initiatives.

Furthermore, the development of unified Western Silk Road guidelines was proposed: Reflecting a common Western Silk Road vision and shared objectives, the guidelines would allow interested stakeholders to promote the Western Silk Road within their specific area of work. Criteria on how to use the brand, participation criteria and generic information on the Western Silk Road would be

necessary for stakeholders to get engaged (bottom-up approach) in an autonomous and grassroots fashion.

Group 5 – How do we measure success and what risks need to be managed while promoting these experiences to an international audience?

The fifth group singled out and focused on the two key words of the question – risks and success. Among the risks identified were:

- Lack of financial resources to keep the Western Silk Road project going
- Difficulty in keeping stakeholders mobilised and agreeing upon a common course of action
- SMEs may lack international access and know-how in order to compete and develop cross-border links
- Difficulties in developing a unique experience that could unify many diverging countries
- Diverging interests among participants in regards to key markets and key audiences
- Difficulties in guaranteeing the same quality standards throughout the different destinations

As to measuring success, participants highlighted that experiences could be measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Whereas an increase in international tourist arrivals would be a clear indicator of success, other (indirect or long-term) measures of success, such as increased cultural exchange, could not be fully pinned down in monetary terms. Also, participants active in the NGO sector mentioned that their main objective is not profit maximisation per se. Something similar could be said about International Organizations, who primarily do not aim to maximise profit but to create the conditions or a framework under which multiple activities and goals could be realised.

As to tangible results, a recognizable brand, the specific use of a packaged experience, and cross-border sectorial participation were identified as marks of success. The establishment of a benchmarking system that could potentially monitor progress was also mentioned as a best-practice example worth studying.

3.4. Workshop Session 3: Specialised Session on Tourism Quality and Certification Systems

Focused on strategies aimed at ensuring excellence within the tourism industry, Ms. Cádiz Gomez's presentation echoed various ideas and doubts brought forward by participants during the workshop discussions. As a cross-border tourism initiative involving so many different partners with various agendas, how would it be possible to create a sense of common ownership? How to ensure unified standards across the Western Silk Road? How to bridge divergences among countries?

While impossible to address all these important questions during a 90-minute presentation, the session played an important role in framing the questions and in outlining the significance of

quality standards within the tourism sector. Similar to ideas expressed during the first session, Ms. Cádiz Gómez stressed the importance of concise planning and management before any steps could be taken towards the promotion of specific tourism initiatives. While certain ideals and unique experiences are comparatively easy to *market*, only destinations that deliver on their promises would be able to survive within a highly competitive framework. Trust, fidelity and credibility are essential values that are extremely difficult to achieve and maintain, but very easy to lose if certain protocols are not ensured and enforced. Hence the importance of certification schemes and protocols that can be tailored to individual (tourism) sectors. Examples include,

- The service industry (from restaurants and hotels to beaches, spas and mountain resorts);
- Guidelines applying to tourism infrastructure (airports, tourist centres, tourist guides and custom departments);
- Internal management structures of tourism stakeholders (NTOs, travel agencies, hotels, etc.).

Three cross-linked points emerged when participants were asked for their feedback regarding common certification schemes and standards for the Western Silk Road:

Divergences among countries

A main point focused on a lack of unified standards among countries. Gaps could be identified throughout the entire certification scheme: common criteria, divergent quality labels and quality granting systems, different levels of stakeholder participation among countries, and divergent levels of information made available that are of relevance to both consumers and users.

Country and Brand reputation

It was acknowledged that the identified gaps could potentially hinder further involvement of certain countries. Transnational tourism initiatives do not only imply sharing resources and costs, but also entail sharing risks. Without the enforcement of common rules and standards, destinations could limit their participation in order to avoid losing their (national) good name among consumers.

Timeframe, financing and implementation process

It was also acknowledged that the development of joint criteria, joint training and the establishment of a management structure capable of enforcing quality standards would necessitate long-term planning and adequate financial tools. Thus, work in this area could potentially conflict with other goals pursued by the project partners, such as the development of a common marketing plan.

As to **possible solutions** capable of addressing the above mentioned problems, participants suggested elaborating a generic check list or criteria catalogue focused on determining the main sectors in need of certification. Similarly, the development of guidelines reflecting a common approach to the Western Silk Road was proposed as a means to unify standards among local, regional and national tourism authorities.

Special training and education initiatives were also brought forward to ensure that the workforce is equipped to provide tourists with the services required. Trainings could potentially focus on: personnel management practices, customer care and hospitality, labour relations, heritage management, tourist guiding skills, etc.

Overall, in relation to certification schemes and quality standards, and bearing in mind the identified divergences, a step-by-step approach was agreed upon. Pilot projects, for example in the field of training, and developed among a cluster of countries, could subsequently pave the way for more ambitious proposals of a transnational nature.

3.5. Workshop Session 4: Presenting the Western Silk Road Working Group

In the following session, UNWTO presented the Western Silk Road Working Group (WSR-WG) and how its concept evolved. In addition, the purpose and main objectives of the group, membership and participation criteria, initiatives launched and future steps were explained and further sharpened during the discussions.

Designed as a collaborative platform, the Western Silk Road Working Group is the main structure that is to ensure the long-term viability and management of the Western Silk Road Tourism Development initiative. The main objectives of the Working Group are to:

- Position the Western Silk Road on the European tourism map
- Create a territorial brand for the Western Silk Road
- Guarantee the long-term viability of the Western Silk Road
- Encourage, stimulate and guide collaborative projects along the Western Silk Road through the interaction, exchange and joint efforts
- Support economic sustainability and the development of joint projects
- Establish a strategy defining a series of long-term objectives for the project

Open to all public and private stakeholders alike who wish to contribute to the tourism development of the Western Silk Road, members will be able to benefit from increased collaboration and promotion, networking opportunities, access to specialised knowledge and experts, and receive regular updates of the activities taking place within the Western Silk Road region.

As part of the presentation, the Western Silk Road Map, an interactive tool serving multiple purposes, was presented. The online map, hosted on the UNWTO Silk Road Programme website, enables one to locate a vast range of tangible and intangible heritage throughout the ancient Silk Road routes, as well as Silk Road events hosted by participating Member States. The map is continuously updated, freely accessible and easy-to-use. During the session, participants were encouraged to promote a unified Western Silk Road vision and narrative by registering and uploading their heritage, events, festivities and other Western Silk Road attributes. By making active use of the map, stakeholders would be able to:

- Support Western Silk Road research efforts by making previously scattered information on tangible and intangible heritage available on one common site
- Promote activities and events hosted by Member States and participating partners
- Showcase best-practice examples happening throughout the region
- Increase dialogue and exchange among partners and destinations

Note by the UNWTO Silk Road Programme: With the support of additional external financial resources, the map could potentially be upgraded into a high-tech collaborative and promotional platform supported by Western Silk Road applications and similar tools aimed at improving the visitor experience of the future Western Silk Road traveler. The UNWTO Silk Road Programme has the contacts and could seek the support of industry stakeholders, but external financial sponsorship would be necessary.

The Western Silk Road Map is available online and can be accessed here:

<http://silkroad.unwto.org/content/silk-road-events-and-heritage-map-0>

Additional information on the Western Silk Road Working Group can be accessed here:

<http://silkroad.unwto.org/content/western-silk-road-working-group>

Following the presentation, participants were divided into thematic groups and asked to assess and discuss key points pertaining to the management and structure of the Working Group.

Note by the UNWTO Silk Road Programme: as outlined in the introduction, it is important to state that not necessarily all proposals or opinions contained below reflect the view of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme. It is fully clear that the suggestions brought forward by participants during the group session debates (Group 1-3) would need to be further studied and concretised in order to align them with already established structures governing the work of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme, such as the Silk Road Task Force. Also, discussions focused on additional tools and potentially new structures would be subject to revision by the project partners and depend upon additional external funding.

Group 1: Input relating to the Governance of the Western Silk Road

The members of the governance group were asked for their input regarding the establishment of a Western Silk Road Secretariat/ Manager, membership types and conditions for participation, and governance structures. Also, as part of the brainstorming process, the theoretic option of introducing membership fees to help fund future collaborative projects and help self-sustain the overall project in the long-term was discussed, although finally rejected. Overall, future Working Group governance was considered to be challenging due to the involvement of many countries with varied approaches to tourism. However, such a view conflicted with another that held that the plurality would improve the measures adopted by the Working Group, as the decision making process would reflect the diversity of the stakeholders involved.

Secretariat/ Western Silk Road manager

In order to ensure a structured and unified approach, the participants were supportive of the idea of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme maintaining a leading and coordinating role within the

project. This was considered the best possible option bearing in mind the development phase of the Western Silk Road.

Homogeneous membership or various types of membership (full members / associate members)? What would be the difference between full and associate members?

In order to ensure inclusiveness and the participation of all interested stakeholders, the participants believed that a two-level membership or management structure would best be the best option for the Western Silk Road Working Group. The two-level structure would consist of a Governing Board in charge of managing and implementing initiatives, and normal members/supporters ascribed to the Western Silk Road Working Group. The potential of having different membership categories with specific rights and benefits was also highlighted, which could entail a multi-level management structure (concentric circles).

It was furthermore proposed that membership within the WSR-WG, as well as the functions of the Governing Board, should be based on a statute or charter, containing a description of the rules, obligations and benefits for members. As to the Governing Board, its members would be voted in (for the duration of between 1 and 5 years TBC). As to the additional members, all members ascribed to the WSR-WG would have a vote to elect members of the Governing Board.

Note by the UNWTO Silk Road Programme: As it stands, a Terms of Reference defines the role of the Working Group, and there is no intention to modify its current status. The two-level management structure and the development of a Western Silk Road Charter were potential ideas brought forward by participants during an open debate session.

Group 2: Input relating to the Management of the Western Silk Road

The second group focused on management issues, such as using the development of the Western Silk Road as a certified Cultural Route, the organization of annual events, and management priorities.

Should the WSR-WG adopt the management model of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes (establishment of a Western Silk Road association, development of a legal framework for the association)? If so, what type of benefits could such a model bring?

It was agreed that the model of the Council of Europe Cultural Routes could be used as a template, but that it should not be copied in its entirety. A specific model should be created taking into consideration the specific objectives of the Western Silk Road and the strengths of the CoE Cultural Routes structure. In any case, the UNWTO Silk Road Programme was proposed to be the leading partner.

Would it be necessary to elaborate a management and/ or a business plan for the Western Silk Road? How could we ensure sustainable funding?

A business plan for the WSR was considered highly important, as it would ensure a long-term and structured approach, especially in terms of applying for grants and resources. The following possible funding opportunities were identified:

- EU programmes

- National governments for specific activities
- Private sector participation (depending on the activities planned)

How often shall the WSR-WG meet? Who would be responsible for hosting the meetings?

Future financial resources permitting, at least one annual meeting at one of the main tourism fairs was proposed; in this sense, ITB Berlin was specifically mentioned. There was no concrete proposal as to the type of meeting – seminar, workshop, fair booth, etc.

Note by the UNWTO Silk Road Programme: the workshops clearly highlighted the potential and benefits of hosting Western Silk Road themed events. Already during the Bulgarian workshop, stakeholders from Armenia and Greece enquired regarding the possibility of hosting future Western Silk Road events.

Group 3: Input relating to the Communication of the Western Silk Road

The third group discussed the future communication strategy, tools and ideas aimed at fomenting the knowledge of the Western Silk Road. Regular updates, aimed at achieving results, and continuity of communication were considered key elements of WSR-WG communication.

What means of communication can be envisaged (Facebook group, LinkedIn, blog, institutional website, newsletters, and regular updates)?

A mix of communication tools (Facebook, LinkedIn, blog, newsletter) was agreed upon – all potential communication tools should be maximized. Special attention was paid to the possibility of creating a blog, which would be divided into subsections according to available attributes. A mailing list of all the members should also be created and used for the dissemination of relevant information. It was also proposed that a database with information on the Western Silk Road countries could be created.

Furthermore, participants agreed that there should be regular updates – however, only available to members in order to foster exchange and create a sense of unity. Achieving continued engagement was an important aspect launched by several participants; however, it was acknowledged that such a position would require full-time dedication in order to maintain consistency and interest.

Would you consider an Interactive Western Silk Road map containing heritage and events useful?

Task 3 of the Work Package description mentions the need to create synergies between Western Silk Road partners in order to enhance exchange and communication. As part of this effort, participants were asked to rate the Western Silk Road Map, which received widespread support.

Additional - Expectations from the WSR-WG

As to potential WSR-WG membership benefits, participants expressed following expectations:

- Continuous exchange of information capable of favouring partnerships and networking opportunities

- Continuous participation in order to create a sense of purpose and ownership
- Support platform, especially in regards to the development and implementation of related projects.
- Networking opportunities and exchange of good practices.

3.6. Western Silk Road Speed-Networking Session

In order to provide participating stakeholders with an opportunity to present their ideas, interests and/ or cooperation proposals, a Western Silk Road Speed-Networking session was organized. Each participant was given a 3-minute slot, which could be supported by a 3-slide PowerPoint presentation. After all volunteers had intervened, time was allocated for participants to network freely. What follows below is a brief summary of the proposals brought forward.

“The Silk Cycle Route” by Mr. Paolo Baraldi, Marketing and Sales, Vacanzattiva Network

Mr. Baraldi presented the Vacanzattiva Network, a 417 km route linking Venice to Livorno. The cycling route, connecting former Italian silk production and distribution centres, including the cities of Ferrara, Bologna and Pisa, counts upon Gpx tracks and official signage. Proposals brought forward included:

- Linking the route to the overall plans of the Western Silk Road: develop a sport/ outdoor segment within the Western Silk Road
- To engage specialized tour operators: creation of tourism packages to enrich Western Silk Road tourism appeal
- Silk Cycle Route: to extend the Italian route to other Western Silk Road destinations

“Travel & Tourism: An Independent Point of View” by Mr. Francesco Redi, President and Founder, Twissen

A Tiramisú World Cup or competition was proposed as a means to raise awareness for the Western Silk Road brand. In-line with the workshop discussions that recognised the potential of gastronomy, Mr. Redi offered Twissen as an official partner to promote an initiative that could stimulate user-generated content and potentially create business opportunities for involved partners.

“Academia and a Western Silk Road App” by Ms. Lusine Saribegian, Senior Manager and Lecturer of the Department of Management, Business and Tourism, Russian-Armenian University
The Russian-Armenian University (RAU) is an intergovernmental university under the joint authority of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Armenia. The university has the status of a higher educational institution in both countries. As an educational institution, Ms. Saribegian proposed:

- To create joint educational programs among universities participating within the Western Silk Road project: primary focus on student and teacher exchange programmes
- To create a Western Silk Road mobile application
- To produce accessories, souvenirs, modular pictures, as a means of boosting the arts & crafts heritage of the Western Silk Road

“Smart Tour – World Hub” by Ms. Maria Kononova, Professor, Dr-Eng.habil, Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University

Ms. Kononova presented the “Smart Tour – World Hub” project, which, among others, aims to adapt and monitor the sustainable tourism development indicators of the city of St. Petersburg, and to unify information on sustainability and green development in order to support the decision-making process. As a long-term project with a wide range of objectives to be implemented until 2025, a call for participation was launched. UNWTO recognises the value of this project, especially in-light of the 2017 International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development and the recent adoption by the United Nations of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As sustainability is one of the key pillars of the Western Silk Road project, UNWTO plans to monitor the progress of the “Smart Tour – World Hub” project, which could be extended to potentially include interested destinations and stakeholders along the Western Silk Road.

“Valencia and the development of the Silk Road” Ms. Maria Ruiz Arévalo, Head of Protocol Unit, Agència Valenciana del Turisme

As the Western Silk Road research showcased, the region of Valencia is a leading actor in the development and promotion of its Silk Road heritage. In her presentation, Ms. Arévalo provided a brief overview of the steps taken by the Valencian authorities to promote the Valencian Silk Road heritage and the initiatives developed throughout 2016-2017:

- Development of a corporate image
- Research and dissemination of cultural resources: Inventory (100 resources identified), International congress, training for local guides, cycle of conferences
- Tourist information material: Brochures, a Guide of Silk legacy in Valencia, Publication for children, video documentary
- Other activities: Music, Festivals, Gastronomy, Fashion, Handicrafts, Education

“València and the Silk Road: A tourism opportunity” by Mr. Vicente Haba, Manager, Tourism Product Development Department, Turismo Valencia, Spain

Mr. Haba proposed the development of a “Western Silk Road Passport” as a best-practice example that could help raise awareness for the brand, support cross-border cooperation and open up the Western Silk Road to the international traveler. The cultural passport would be jointly owned by all partners and, upon acquisition of stamps or similar, benefits such as discounts at museums, shops or similar could be obtained. Of relatively simple implementation and modest cost, such a best-practice example could mobilize public and private support and serve as a pilot project for future initiatives.

“The Routes of the Olive Tree” by Ms. Françoise Tondre, Vice-chair Scientific Committee, The Routes of the Olive Tree

The cultural route, the Routes of the Olive Tree, aims preserve the eco-system, traditional know-how, local gastronomy and the customs of the participating destinations. Presented as a best-practice example, Ms. Tondre highlighted potential collaboration between the two routes and stressed the importance of transversal cooperation. The Routes of the Olive Tree, which also links UNESCO World Heritage Sites, is a recognized route of the Council of Europe

“ITB China” by Mr. Christopher Marzahn, Product Manager, ITB China

By presenting the ITB’s travel and tourism fair in China, Mr. Marzahn focused on two essential priorities of the Western Silk Road initiative: increase the tourist inflow of Chinese travelers to Europe and to make active use of leading tourism fairs to promote the Western Silk Road brand and related activities.

In relation to the above, Ms. Nina Dadayan, Head of the Incoming Department of **Armenia Travel**, a specialized tour operator, proposed to have a mutual Western Silk Road stand at fairs in order to gain visibility. Also, she proposed to create a shared calendar of events in order to coordinate efforts in this area.

“Ignaz Tour” by Mr. Zhang Hongbo, Sales and Marketing Executive, Ignaz Tour Spa, Italy

An incoming tour operator based in Italy, Ignaz Tour is specialized in spa packages and wellness tourism. Mr. Hongbo stressed the importance of closer coordination among private sector stakeholders, especially tour operators, resorts and hotels. A shared platform was proposed to unify available information and ensure better coordination among Western Silk Road stakeholders and private sector tourism stakeholders interested in marketing or offering their services.

“Cultural Routes Society” by Mr. Jeremy Pine, Consultant, Culture Routes Society, Turkey

Mr. Pine’s intervention focused on presenting the Cultural Routes Society, an initiative aimed at protecting Turkey’s existing culture routes, to promote the establishment of new routes, and to set best-practice standards for their development. With a clearly established Action Plan available on their main website, future collaboration with the Western Silk Road stakeholders was proposed.

“Diversification of the rural tourism offer of the Western Silk Road along Via Egnatia for Albania and FYROMs” by Ms. Shpresa Smajili, Project coordinator, GIZ

Based on their current work and the partners involved (Ministries of Tourism of Albania and FYROM, local communities, universities, private sector stakeholders and NGOs), Ms. Smajili proposed the following projects:

- Develop research on the tourism potential of the Albanian Western Silk Road;
- Identify two traditional houses (e.g. silk museum) to serve as interpretation centers presenting the natural, cultural and historic assets of the Western Silk Road;
- “Enhancing intercultural and nature conservation based dialogue” with youth, women and experts;
- Promote and market the WSR destination using multimedia video nationally and internationally.

Among the expected outcomes, the following points were mentioned: integrated rural development, tourism diversification and job creation, awareness of available heritage and the development of a Western Silk Road databank.

“Trakia Economic Zone” by Ms. Irina Beleva, Bulgarian-Chinese Business Development Association

Ms. Beleva presented the Trakia Economic Zone, a Euro-Chinese public-private business development zone. Although not strictly tourism related, the project showcases the multiple business interests between China and Bulgaria.

“University of Forestry” by Ms. Krasimira Staneva, University of Forestry, Sofia, Bulgaria

With a strong focus on geo-medical tourism (spa and wellness, health tourism products, etc.), Ms. Staneva proposed increased cooperation within two areas: forest recreational tourism and spa and wellness tourism as Western Silk Road niche tourism products and initiatives.

3.7. The Western Silk Road Academic Research Group as an additional outcome of the workshop in Bulgaria

The **Western Silk Road Academic Research Group** constitutes a positive (and unexpected) highlight of our *Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative*. Based on the positive experience of researching jointly for the Western Silk Road, and on the good results obtained during the two Western Silk Road Workshops, eight participating universities have decided to voluntarily contribute to the further development of the Western Silk Road Tourism as a research topic. Under the coordination of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme, the Western Silk Road Academic Research Group will support the development of transnational tourism initiatives through joint research and the creation of practical tourism intelligence. The details of the research group were agreed upon during a separate meeting that took place during the 2nd International Western Silk Road Workshop in Bulgaria.

The universities forming the Western Silk Road Research Group are:

- Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
- ISTHIA University of Toulouse, France
- People’s Friendship University, Russian Federation
- Peter the Great St.Petersburg Polytechnic University, Russia
- University of Bologna, Italy
- University of Kerbala, Iraq
- University of Valencia, Spain
- Visoka poslovna škola strukovnih studija "Prof. Dr Radomir Bojković", Serbia

By acting as “Western Silk Road Research Ambassadors”, the universities have voluntarily committed to:

1. Design a common research methodology that will enable to compare Western Silk Road Tourism data produced in the individual institutions
2. Identify and study the tourism potential of transnational tourism links along the Western Silk Road
3. Create Western Silk Road “National Heritage Maps” that present tourism potential

4. Develop Silk Road Tourism Intelligence on the local, regional, national and transnational level
5. Explore the use of tourism intelligence in areas such as marketing, capacity building, travel facilitation, and research.
6. Develop and publish Western Silk Road academic research articles and books
7. Identify additional academic partners to join the group

Creation of the European Silk Road Interdisciplinary Tourism Centre

In parallel, in what also constitutes a clear recognition of the value of the Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative, the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki has established the *European Silk Road Interdisciplinary Tourism Centre*. The centre, an initiative emerging from the Aristotle University that has received strong support of the Ministry of Tourism of Greece and the UNWTO Silk Road Programme, will support the work carried out by the Western Silk Road Research Group and function as a hub for joint research projects focused on enhancing the Western Silk Road tourism potential.

3.8. Additional Workshop Information:

The [webpage of the 2nd International Western Silk Road Workshop](#) contains all relevant meeting information, including:

- Official UNWTO Press Release and relevant press clippings
- PowerPoint presentations held during the workshop
- Workshop Programme
- Participants List
- Photos and Videos of the event

4. The Way Forward: a proposal to re-scope the Western Silk Road handbook

With the research results and feedback from the two workshops now available, a specification must be made regarding the release and nature of the **Western Silk Road handbook**. Originally intended to focus primarily on branding, we have now reached the conclusion that a more holistic approach aimed at closing existing gaps between Western Silk Road countries, not only in the field of marketing but also in areas such as research and capacity building, would be more beneficial in terms of practical project results.

A branding handbook presupposes a high level of coherence, strong awareness on what is available in terms of tangible and intangible heritage, and an equal development stage among participants. The level of participation and commitment from Member States and tourism stakeholders from many different fields (tour operators, route representatives, academic institutions, etc.) and policy-levels has fully convinced us of the long-term viability of the project, but given that with the Western Silk Road project we entered previously undiscovered ground, we cannot say that a development stage has been reached yet that would fully justify a branding handbook. The research and subsequent workshop discussions highlighted gaps that we believe would be better addressed by a Roadmap style approach. In contrast to a branding handbook of little practical value (bearing in mind the current status of the project), a Western Silk Road Roadmap, by containing a common development path applicable to all stakeholders involved, would be able to address existing divergences and thus enable the structured progress of the project. In comparison to when the project started, the project partners now have a much better understanding of the value of transnational collaboration and of the work that needs to be jointly addressed in order to overcome some of the challenges, as highlighted below:

- Lack of awareness:

With very few exceptions, such as Valencia in Spain or Venice in Italy, pre-existing information on European heritage linked to and branded as part of the Silk Road was scarce and, if at all available, isolated in its local approach and dimension. Prior to the research, the potential and possibility of transnationally linking available heritage was ignored altogether. The research has been successful in raising awareness on the tourism potential of the European Silk Road, whereas the workshops proved necessary in discussing and agreeing upon common objectives and an overall vision for the Western Silk Road. The Roadmap, by containing an overall vision, objectives and a description of the key areas of work, would allow for a common course of action and ensure the long-term sustainability of the project.

- Lack of research

The lack of common awareness on the side of the project beneficiaries on the intangible and tangible heritage of Western Silk Road proved challenging while conducting the research. As was already mentioned, initial difficulties to mobilise stakeholders to participate in the survey led the UNWTO to devise and implement additional research tools, such as engaging universities through analytical research papers (SWOT-Analyses), engaging destinations (on a national, regional and local level) through Focus Groups, and by collecting additional data through telephone and personal interviews. Although these additional efforts shifted the planned delivery date of the research, they were highly effective in gathering much needed information on the Western Silk Road. As the workshops brought to light, destinations and universities, who have started to interact transnationally through a Western Silk Road Research Group, are eager to continue to produce much needed research information. Moreover, the project partners now

understand the value of the project and are committed to work on a collaborative basis. The Roadmap would contain research guidelines aimed at supporting such a collaborative spirit.

- **Coordinated Stakeholder Approach Toward Common Initiatives**

The continued input, endorsement and participation of Western Silk Road stakeholders will ensure the long-term success of the Western Silk Road project. Formerly limited by little reciprocal awareness and a missing platform to collaborate, the workshops played an important role in creating a sense of unity. Supported by the establishment of a Western Silk Road Working Group, the Roadmap will reflect the structure and role of the Working Group and contain an outline of the initiatives discussed during the workshops, which, at the same time, were based on the results of the research.

Based on the above, we would like to strongly recommend and seek your approval to re-shift the initial proposal from a handbook focused on branding to a Western Silk Road Roadmap focused on closing existing gaps between participating countries and stakeholders. Bearing in mind the current development stage of the Western Silk Road, the Roadmap would have a more practical approach, ensure a common course of action and facilitate Task 3 of the Work Package, the development of recommendations on how to maximise the impact of the Western Silk Road at the local, regional and international level.

In order for the project partners to gain a visual idea of what is being proposed, UNWTO would like to showcase the following two models or templates:

UNWTO Silk Road Action Plan 2016/2017:

<http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/docpdf/sr2016web.pdf>

Roadmap for Development - Heritage Conservation & Tourism: Promoting sustainable growth along the Silk Roads Heritage Corridors:

http://cf.cdn.unwto.org/sites/all/files/pdf/3928_unesco_8pp_a4_silk_road_eng_online.pdf

The Western Silk Road Roadmap would be unique in its approach and subject, but could follow a similar outline in terms of fonts, word-image relation, the use of graphs, etc.