

2017
INTERNATIONAL YEAR
OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM
FOR DEVELOPMENT



Report

2nd International UNWTO Western Silk Road Workshop

Sofia, Republic of Bulgaria

27-28 June 2017

Overall 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. Held as part of the 'Enhancing the Understanding of European Tourism' project developed by UNWTO in cooperation with the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs of the European Commission (EC), the second workshop consolidated the results obtained during the first workshop in Greece in April. Supported by the Western Silk Road Working Group, these results will now be translated into practical tourism initiatives aimed at establishing the Western Silk Road as a fully operational transnational tourism route.

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. Tourism Consultant, Mr. Gavin Bell, 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 group 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.

Western Silk Road Update by Mr. Gavin Bell

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), Mr. Bell's 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 result 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?

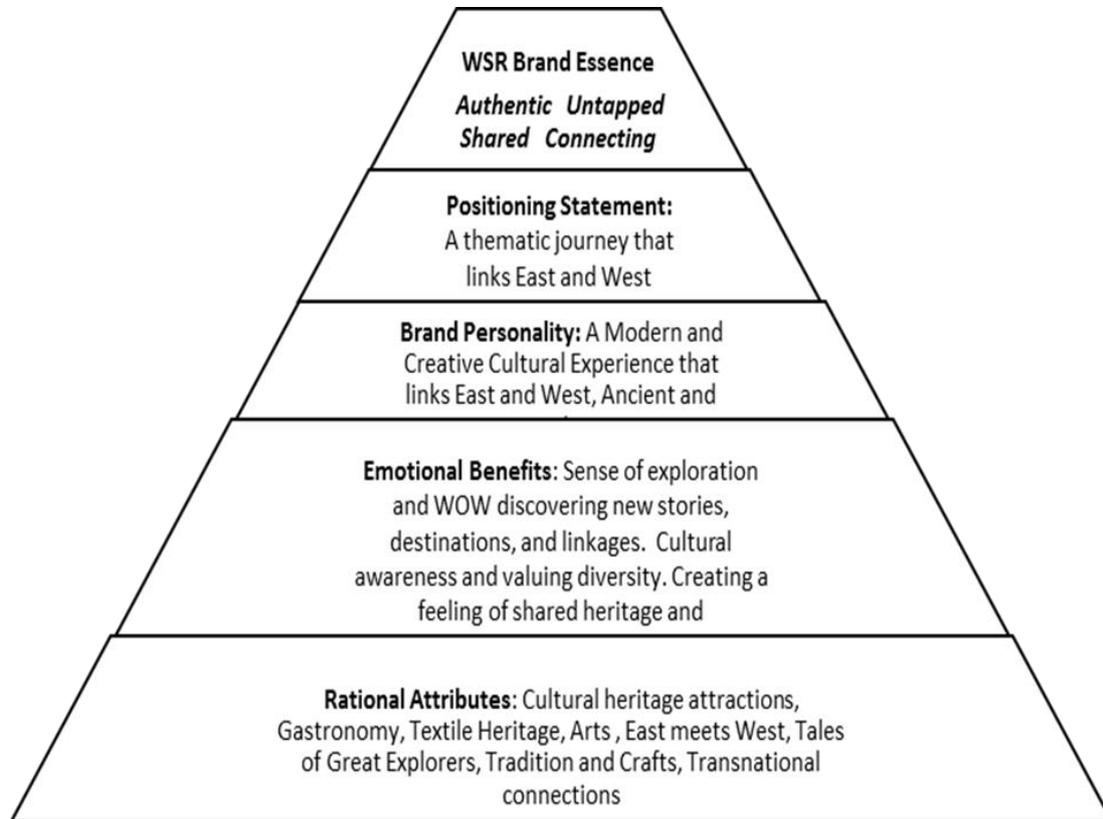
- Brand Values:

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 brand pyramid focused on the Western Silk Road 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 key points:

- Western Silk Road 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. With little time to elaborate, 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 will need to be addressed by the Silk Road Working Group, a proposal suggested following the example of the Euro coin by creating a two-layered brand: one layer representing the unity of all destinations and stakeholders involved that would be further 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, Mr. Bell highlighted 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.

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
- Consistent in its long-term use: once agreed upon, consistency is key to reinforcing the strength and awareness among brand consumers and users alike

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 caravans 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 should 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, would take the lead in ensuring the correct management of the 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), Mr. Bell mentioned that especially NTOs could facilitate the future work of the Working Group and Western Silk Road promotion 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 activities. Such a proposition not only acknowledges that some countries are further advanced than others, but also draws upon the *enabling* factor of countries, to be understood especially 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 raised focused on coordinating the information to be made available on the Western Silk Road, and in securing homogeneity in style, content and messages communicated. 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 Mr. Bell 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, Mr. Bell believes that, a priori, the Western Silk Road fits 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

Furthermore, following the Cultural Routes example, Mr. Bell expressed that 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. While recognising the potential of following an established certification and criteria scheme, 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 is 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 private sector funding to follow, 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.

Specialised Workshop Session on Product Development by Ms. Ethna Murphy, Ethna Murphy Consulting

With nearly thirty years' experience in managing national and international tourism and business development programmes, Ms. Ethna Murphy has a proven track record in the design, delivery and management of innovative initiatives that deliver high quality, distinctive consumer experiences. Now as Director of her own consultancy business she successfully led a team of specialists to develop the new all-island coastal brand, Great Lighthouses of Ireland and has delivered a number of tourism development plans for public and community partnerships. Her recent international assignments include the delivery of a brand and market strategy for Tsodilo World Heritage site in Botswana and the development of a roadmap and plan for visitor experiences along the ancient route of the Phoenicians. As a member of the management team at Failte Ireland, Mr. Murphy was involved in establishing signature tourism projects, including the Wild Atlantic Way, Dublin Discovery trails and leading the development of Irelands Adventure experiences.

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 centred on the key word *experience*. By showcasing best-practice examples and sharing insights, the session and subsequent discussion groups centred on identifying those experiential elements that will 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 may 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 only need to be correctly transmitted and shared among consumers.

As part of the presentation, Ms. Murphy presented 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 *Experience Development Framework* template, a brand that promises visitors spontaneous and engaging experiences would 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.), build a management structure and agree upon a jointly shared Action Plan. As experiences are highly complex products to develop and market, what usually results 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 are achieved, among which the following were mentioned: the creation of a self-sustaining structure that does not have to depend upon one single actor, networking opportunities and the development of a learning process that drives constant improvement and encourages innovation, community integration and ownership, and long-term self-sufficiency.

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



© Murphy 2017

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 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 festivals, under the tentative logo of “follow the silk, taste the spices”, was also identified as an initiative to promote awareness of the Western Silk Road, to involve grassroots stakeholders and to showcase the benefits arising from exchange. For example, a dish such as dumplings travelled throughout the Silk Road and influenced the kitchen of many countries in Asia and Europe. By developing a so-called “dumpling map”, such exchange could be visualised and promoted.

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 branded and transmitted, especially social media, and are a likely segment to travel transnationally. With positive examples such as interrail, the millennial generation has transcended the concept of nation-state and understand Europe as a unity, which 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 of 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 a 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 and in order to make full use of social media channels.

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.

Furthermore, a Western Silk Road toolkit was proposed that would allow interested stakeholders to promote the Western Silk Road within their respective 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 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
- Developing a unique experience that could unify so 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, and could entail working for a loss. Something similar could be said about International Organizations, who do not aim to maximise profit but to create the conditions or a framework under which multiple activities and goals may 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.

Specialised Workshop Session focused on Tourism Quality and Certification Systems by Ms. Maricruz Cádiz Gómez, Technical Manager, Spanish Institute for Tourist Quality (ICTE)

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 workshop, 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 are 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 are able to survive within a highly competitive framework. Trust, fidelity and credibility are essential values that are extremely difficult to achieve and maintain, but 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. For example,

- The service industry (from restaurants and hotels to beaches, spas and mountain resorts)
- Necessary 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 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 and generic quality standards that could be implemented. Similarly, a tool-kit for governments that could unify local, regional and national standards was proposed. Special training and education initiatives were also proposed 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.

Presenting the Western Silk Road Working Group by Ms. Elena Dubinina, UNWTO Silk Road Programme

Ms. Elena Dubinina of the UNWTO Silk Road Programme presented the Western Silk Road Working Group (WSR-WG) to the workshop participants. Ideas presented included background information on how the idea of the Working Group evolved, in addition to the purpose and main objectives of the group, membership and participation criteria, initiatives launched, as well as future steps. All ideas presented were further sharpened during the group discussions.

Designed as a collaborative platform, the Western Silk Road Working Group is the main structure that is to ensure the long-term viability of the Western Silk Road Tourism Development initiative. To be established within the initial 18-month timeframe of the project, the Working Group will function as the main contact point in terms of assessing, coordinating and following-up on the recommendations brought forward and received during the Research on the potential of the Western Silk Road and the two capacity building workshops.

As to the purpose of the Working Group, following key points were mentioned:

- To place the Western Silk Road on the European tourism map
- To create a territorial brand for the Western Silk Road
- To guarantee the long-term viability of the Western Silk Road

- To encourage, stimulate and guide collaborative projects along the Western Silk Road through the interaction, exchange and joint efforts
- To support economic sustainability and the development of joint projects
- To establish a strategy defining a series of long-term objectives for the project

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

As part of the presentation, the Western Silk Road Map was presented, an interactive tool serving multiple purposes:

- To locate and map Western Silk Road heritage, both tangible and intangible
- To promote activities and events hosted by Member States and participating partners
- To showcase best-practice examples happening throughout the region
- To increase dialogue and exchange among partners and destinations

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

Group – Governance

The governance group were asked for their input regarding the establishment of a Western Silk Road Secretariat/ Manager, membership types and conditions for participation, governance structures and possible membership fees. Overall, future Working Group governance was considered to be challenging due to the involvement of many countries with varied approaches to tourism. However, such plurality was also seen as a potential advantage in the sense of enhancing innovation and interesting ideas.

Secretariat/ Western Silk Road manager

There was widespread support to keep the secretariat within UNWTO/ UNWTO Silk Road Programme in order to ensure a structured and unified approach. No other options received support or were taken into consideration.

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

A loose membership criteria was proposed for the WSR-WG – it was agreed that membership should be easy and uncomplicated. It was also agreed that there should be a two-level membership or management structure. It was proposed to differentiate between 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. Potentially this could mean having a multi-level management structure (concentric circles).

It was furthermore agreed that membership within the WSR-Working Group, 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 Members, all members ascribed to the WSR-WG would have a right to elect members of the Governing Board.

Would it be feasible to establish 2 levels of the network: a transnational committee, representing countries, and a second national governance structure?

As above, creation of a governing board supported by a loose membership and participation scheme was backed. Also, according to feedback, the national organizations, represented through the official Silk Road Task Force representatives, should be involved in all project management phases – SRTF to ensure the top-down approach.

Should there be a membership fee?

All participants agreed that there should be no fee; however, a proposal to introduce fees for the private sector put forward (UNWTO Affiliate Members would be excluded from a membership fee).

Group – Management

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. That is, a model should be followed which could take into consideration the specific objectives of the WSR 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 WSR? 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.

Following possible funding opportunities were identified:

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

The Governing Board/ secretariat would be in charge of ensuring financial stability – checking resources, grant programmes, elaborating project proposals, etc. A sub-committee in charge of projects and funding was proposed.

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

At least one annual meeting at one of the main tourism fairs was agreed upon; ITB Berlin was specifically mentioned. There was no concrete proposal as to the type of meeting – seminar, workshop, fair booth, etc.

Group – Communication

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, 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.

Moreover, the position of moderator or a group of moderators (WSR-WG members willing to moderate on the voluntary basis) capable of maintaining consistency, interest, new members, etc. should be established. Achieving continued engagement was an important aspect launched by several participants, especially since moderation of the WG could entail full-time dedication.

Would you consider an Interactive WSR map containing heritage and events useful?

The proposal of the WSR interactive map received widespread support.

Additional - Expectations from the WSR-WG

As to membership expectations within the WSR-WG, participants would expect following key benefits to arise:

- 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 project.
- Networking opportunities and exchange of good practices.

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

“Marco Polo: International Network for the Western Silk Road Development” by Mr. Massimo Andreoli, President, Marco Polo Network

“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 to participation was launched.

“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 partner 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, which includes:

- Development of a corporate image of the project
- 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 the obtention 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, Ignas 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 FYROMMs” by Ms. Shpresa Smajili, Project coordinator, GIZ

Based on their current work and the partners involved (Ministry 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 outcomes expected, 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.

“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.