

# HISTORIC ROADS AS A NEW CATEGORY OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: THEIR DIFFERENCES WITH RESPECT TO CULTURAL ROUTES

*Kaisa Barthuli, Alicia Cabn, María Rita Ruiz Fernández, María Rosa Suárez-Inclán and Michael Taylor*  
*September, 2018*

## Introduction

Since the inception of the ICOMOS Cultural Routes Scientific Committee (CIIC) in 1998, there have been continued discussions and debates about the commonalities and differences between cultural routes and historic roads (or paths, trails, corridors, etc). After numerous CIIC international meetings and symposia over the past two decades, a need for definitions and concept clarification continues to be sought as evidenced by discussions among members regarding the subject that have taken place in conjunction with CIIC meetings in Ise, Japan (2009); Jammu, India (2011); Chihuahua, Mexico (2013); Florence, Italy (2014); New Delhi, India (2017), and at numerous meetings held in Spain. The matter has also been the subject of recently presented papers by CIIC committee members<sup>1</sup>. This uncertainty and debate is understandable, given the complicated nature of what constitutes a cultural route and the relative newness of the concept. Clearly, there continues to be a need for an intersection of ideas, a clarity of terminology, an understanding of where common goals lie, and where they differ. It is fitting that we are discussing the subject here in Gorlitz, Germany on the occasion of the Council of Europe's forum on cultural routes launched in 1987, that has a much different concept of cultural routes than does CIIC.

The intent of this paper is not to revisit the concepts and definitions presented in past papers, but to summarize commonalities and differences between cultural routes and historic roads, and present options on how and where historic roads can have a secure place within the ICOMOS organization in the future.

## Discussion

Cultural routes as defined by the ICOMOS charter represents a qualitative change in the concept of heritage conservation and are increasingly considered important aspects of world heritage as evidenced by being recognized as one of four World Heritage categories established to date.

Cultural routes make up the connective web of the world's heritage. They have long been considered key elements tying regions and empires together. In recognition of that importance, the ICOMOS 2008 General Assembly in Quebec City, adopted the Charter on Cultural Routes that was prepared by the CIIC based on years of diligent work and organization of numerous symposia to develop and define this cultural heritage category. The charter formerly established the new concept of a cultural route and codified its definition and guidelines for documentation, conservation and promotion of these important global heritage resources. The concept of cultural route, as defined by the CIIC, is a physical route which was used or deliberately served a concrete and peculiar purpose not just for travel between two points, which has been in use over a long historic period. The route must also have led to cross-fertilization of cultures and produced clear heritage outcomes, both tangible and intangible, which testify to exchange and movements along the route and to the length of time it has been used. Such routes may be on land or water. Identification of a cultural route is based on an array of important points and tangible elements that attest to the significance of the route itself. A cultural route refers to a set of values whose whole is greater

---

<sup>1</sup> Fernandez Salinas, V. *Cultural Routes and Historical Routes: Differences and Analogies*. Heritage and Cultural Routes: An Anthology. Edited by Poonam Chaudhary, Shubhi Publications, Gurgaon, India. 2012. And Taylor, M. *Cultural Routes and Historic Roads: How the Two Co-Exist*. Heritage and Cultural Routes: An Anthology. Edited by Poonam Chaudhary, Shubhi Publications, Gurgaon, India. 2012.

than the sum of its parts and through which it gains its meaning and conveys its significance (ICOMOS 2008).

Since adoption of the Charter, ICOMOS members have had spirited discussions about the scope of cultural routes and how emerging concepts in heritage identification and conservation are acknowledged within the ongoing work of CIIC, ICOMOS, and the general public.

In the modern world, requirements for determining whether or not to consider an object or a tangible or intangible element as an item of cultural heritage has evolved over time. Among these requirements, we should mention antiquity (an aspect not considered by the same measure in different cultures) and, on the other hand, we must highlight the significance and value attributed to such elements by the community in which they are located or by that to which they are historically and/or culturally related.

In parallel, the conceptual coverage and nomenclature for items to be considered as such has extended to include those called cultural routes that, in certain cases, may even stretch to continental or intercontinental distances and accommodate all kinds of cultural elements, including extremely varied cultural landscapes very distant from each other yet linked by the significance they share through belonging functionally to the same guiding thread provided by the Cultural Route and their shared specific purpose.

The ICOMOS Charter on Cultural Routes, approved at the CIIC General Assembly in 2008, provides a description for this kind of cultural asset as well as their defining elements and a methodological basis for their identification and handling.

The following aspects can be considered to be essential characteristics distinguishing a Cultural Route from any other kind of path or historic road of heritage value:

In line with what has been said above and as has already been analysed and agreed by the CIIC, the variety of properties that could make up and form part of their functional dynamic and global significance could include HISTORIC ROADS that would in turn correspond to a heritage category, options for which follow, that deserve to be recognized just like many others whose nomenclature is already universally accepted, such as monuments, historic cities, or the cultural landscapes mentioned above, etc.

A Historic Road is a communication route, habitually also used for the transport of goods and merchandise, linking two or more geographical locations and traditionally related to a human community that imbues it with a special heritage value within its own historical culture.

Historic Roads are the fruit of the course of time and correspond to a human need or drive to move physically from one place to another and, where appropriate, to transport goods and merchandise. Historic roads can include those designed for foot, animal powered vehicles, or automobile.

Significant Historic Roads can have profound and lasting cultural, social, economic, political, technological impacts on the associated geographical regions/nations.

Historic Roads must have a materially identifiable traces throughout their itinerary. Nonetheless, should any stretches have disappeared, it is possible to reference their historical existence either through documents or through scientific evidence or oral traditions proven to be reliable.

Historic Roads may come in many different types, layouts, specific uses and dimensions. Accordingly, they may receive very different names in the various cultures and languages. For example, path, byway, trail, track, walkway, footpath, road, highway, etc.

As indicated above, there may be historic roads or sections of historic roads, just like other heritage properties of diverse nature, that help make up components of a cultural route, although on many other occasions this may not be the case as they may exist independently of the said cultural routes. On occasion, a significant historic road may meet the criteria of a cultural route in and of itself.