
The National Defensive Architecture Plan and the role of the Spanish Ministry of Culture in the Council of Europe's Cultural Routes Programme

Alburquerque's castle, Badajoz



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National cultural heritage plans

National Cultural Heritage Plans are heritage management tools, shared by the various public authorities and involving other public or private bodies.

Their aim is to develop **agreed criteria and methodologies** and to coordinate a programme of activities tailored to the needs of the heritage, including measures for protection, conservation, restoration, research, documentation, training and dissemination.

The National Plans provide **a factual basis for decision-making**, establish a **shared methodology** for action and set priorities based on heritage needs, with the ultimate aim of **protecting and conserving** cultural assets.

The Spanish Institute of Cultural Heritage (IPCE) is responsible for coordinating all the national plans.

There are currently **15 National Plans**, including the **National Plan for Defensive Architecture**.

Source: www.cultura.gob.es/planes-nacionales/planes-nacionales.html

The **National Plan for Defensive Architecture** is an initiative of the Ministry of Culture, approved in 2012, which aims to protect, conserve, restore and promote the historical heritage classified as defensive architecture.

This heritage includes castles, city walls, towers, coastal fortifications, walled city centres and other defensive structures built up to the 20th century.

Key objectives

1. To establish a common framework for the conservation of defensive heritage.
2. To analyse and assess the state of conservation.
3. To define standardised criteria and methods for restoration and enhancement.
4. To coordinate interventions between public authorities and organisations.
5. To promote public participation in the protection and conservation of these assets.



Areas of focus

- **Unique heritage sites:** Castles, towers, fortified buildings, bridges and 20th-century defensive structures.
- **Bastioned structures and coastal fortifications:** Coastal forts and batteries.
- **Urban walled enclosures:** City walls and enclosures in urban centres.

Methodology

- Compilation of **inventories** and risk assessments to identify and evaluate the condition of heritage assets.
- Carrying out **preliminary studies, master plans** and **cultural management projects**.
- **Architectural interventions** based on criteria of minimal intervention, the preservation of historical values and respect for the surrounding environment.
- Training and outreach programmes to raise **public awareness** and encourage public participation in heritage conservation.



Muralla Real [Royal Wall] (16th-17th centuries), Melilla



Monitoring and coordination

A **Monitoring Committee** was set up, comprising specialists from the central government, the autonomous communities and independent experts.

The Monitoring Committee is currently working on four areas:

1. Compiling **inventories**.
2. **Glossaries** of terms.
3. The **legal and legislative treatment** of this heritage.
4. The **preservation** of defensive architecture.

The walled enclosure of the Collegiate Church of Santa María Mayor (Alquézar, Huesca)



National legislation on the protection of historical heritage

- **Decree of 22 April 1949 on the protection of Spanish castles**

Under this decree, all castles in Spain, regardless of their state of repair, are placed under the protection of the State, which assumes responsibility for preventing any intervention that might alter them or cause them to collapse.

- **Law 16/1985 of 25 June on Spanish Historical Heritage**

2^a Additional Provision:

The assets referred to in the Decrees of 22 April 1949 [...] are also considered to be of Cultural Interest and are subject to the provisions of this Act [...]

TITLE I: Declaration of Assets of Cultural Interest (commonly known as BIC)

Article 9: Assets forming part of Spain's Historical Heritage that are declared to be of cultural interest by virtue of this Act or by individual Royal Decree shall enjoy special protection and safeguarding.

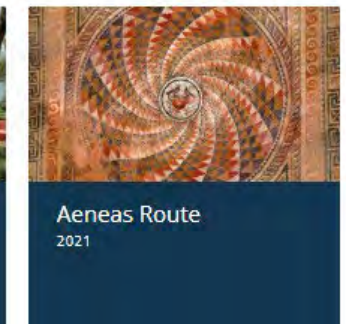
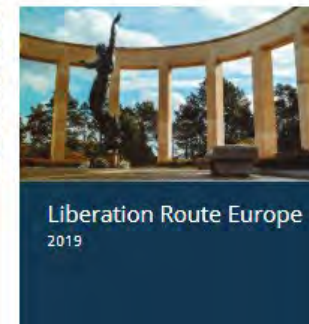
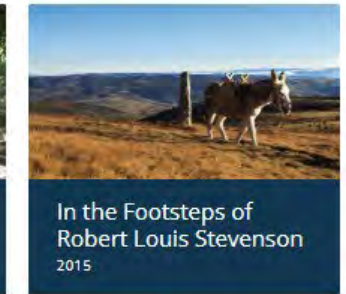
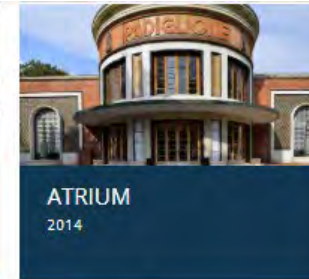
- **Legislation on cultural heritage in the Autonomous Communities (CC.AA.)**

An aerial photograph of Neumünster Abbey in Luxembourg. The abbey is a large, light-colored stone building with a dark roof, situated on a hillside. It features a large, paved courtyard in the center. A river flows through the abbey's grounds, reflecting the sky. The surrounding area includes other buildings, trees, and a stone wall. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

Council of Europe Cultural Routes

Neumünster Abbey, Luxembourg (former headquarters of the Council of Europe's Institute for Cultural Routes)

- **49 Cultural Routes (CR) certified** by the Council of Europe.
- **30 of these have at least one partner in Spain.**
- The CR's are not physical routes, but function as **networks**. Each itinerary comprises a (from individuals to **wide range of stakeholders** associations, local councils, foundations, universities, etc.)
- There is a **certified itinerary dedicated to defensive architecture**: “Fortified Towns of the Greater Region”. It comprises partners from France, Germany and Luxembourg...



Cultural route of the Council of Europe
Itinéraire culturel du Conseil de l'Europe



Certification of Cultural Routes: criteria and value

Cultural Routes are periodically assessed under the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes (EPA) and certified by the COE on the basis of several criteria:

1. They must focus on a theme that reflects **European values** and is shared by **at least three European countries**;
2. The theme must be the subject of **transnational and multidisciplinary scientific research** (scientific committee);
3. To **promote European memory, history and heritage**, and to contribute to an understanding of Europe's current cultural diversity;
4. To foster cultural and educational exchanges among **young people**;
5. To develop exemplary and innovative projects in the field of **cultural tourism and sustainable cultural development**; and to create tourism products and services tailored to **different population groups**.

The certification is a mark of quality recognised by local residents, visitors, tourism stakeholders and public authorities, whose prestige is based on:

- ✓ Being awarded by a **renowned international organization** (the Council of Europe).
- ✓ A **rigorous assessment and certification process**, followed by periodic evaluations and ongoing monitoring.
- ✓ A **guarantee of excellence, innovation and high quality standards**.
- ✓ A **methodology** that has been in use for nearly 40 years in over 60 countries (in 2027, the programme will celebrate its 40th anniversary).
- ✓ The programme receives **financial and political support** from an **increasing number of Council of Europe member states** (currently more than 40 member states).
- ✓ A firm **commitment** to the enhancement and promotion of Europe's shared heritage, history and memory, and to the values of the Council of Europe (democracy, diversity, human rights, etc.)

The certification process

1. **Call for applications** for certification. Published at www.coe.int/es/web/cultural-routes/home (applications must be submitted by 31 March).
2. **Submission of evaluation dossiers** to the Secretariat (by 31 July). *The itinerary or route must have been in existence for at least two years prior to the submission of the application.
3. Selection of **experts**, contact between the expert and the route, review of documentation, field visit and drafting of the expert's report (August–December).
4. **Evaluation** by the Institute's Secretariat and the Bureau of the Enlarged Agreement, and invitation to present the cultural route during the EPA Governing Board meeting (December–April).
5. **Governing Board meeting** (early May): **examination of the evaluation report and the recommendations** of the EPA Bureau; **hearing** of the candidate routes applying for certification (presentation of the route + possible questions – 10 minutes). **Decision** regarding the granting of certification.
6. **Notification** of the decision on the granting of certification (June). Translated with DeepL.com (free version)

Initiatives by the Ministry of Culture of Spain

- **Representation of Spain on the Governing Board of the Extended Agreement** (the decision-making body responsible for the certification of new cultural routes and the ongoing evaluation of those already certified).
- **Information on the programme and support** for routes and itineraries **seeking certification**.
- **Promotion** of the Cultural Itineraries programme in various fields:
 - Participation in meetings, seminars and conferences on cultural routes, cultural tourism, heritage and sustainability...
 - Social media.
 - Meetings of certified Cultural Route managers (in Spain).
 - Exhibitions and displays.

Annual meetings of COE cultural route managers in Spain



Photographic exhibition on the COE's cultural itineraries in Spain (Madrid Book Fair 2025)





13th Training Academy on Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe

Pécs, Hungary & Osijek, Croatia

2-5 June 2026



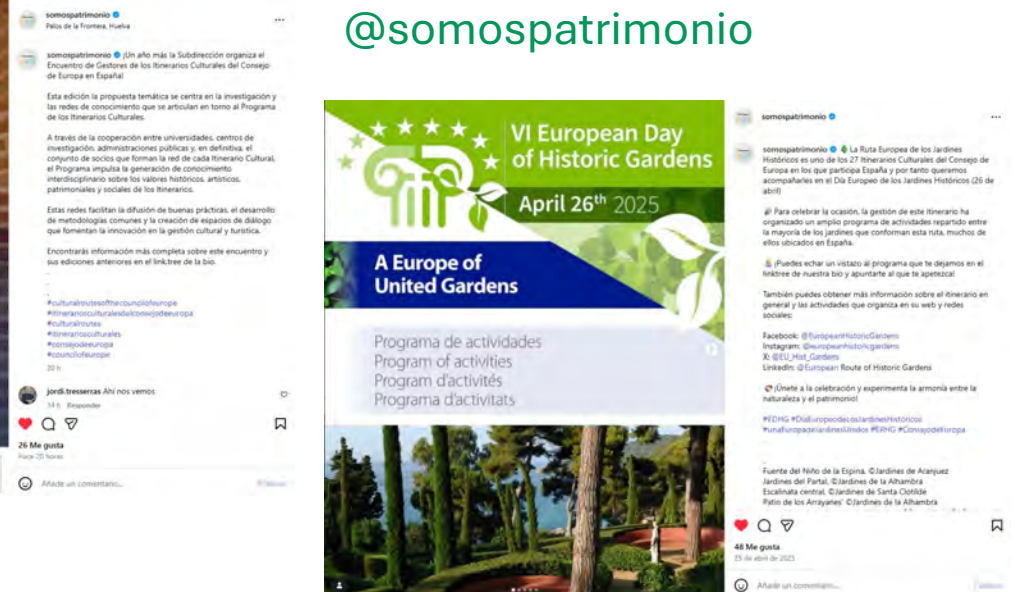
Cultural Routes in Spain app



14th Annual Advisory Forum on the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe



Instagram posts: @sospatrimonio



Trujillo's castle, Cáceres
(9th-12th centuries)

Thank you for your attention

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