Developing the Tourism Aspects of a Cultural Route

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Abstract

A cultural route links destinations that contain illustrations of a common theme, for example religion. It has been reported that the number of cultural routes are increasing. However, to date there is no evidence in the literature of any studies developing a framework which outlines the information visitors may require when following a cultural route. This paper describes a framework which is designed to be used by those responsible for planning and implementing cultural routes. The framework also serves as the structure of a web portal that is intended to act as an example of good practice for other cultural route portals to follow.

Keywords:

Documentation, Internet, Portal

1.0 Introduction

Cultural routes can be viewed as a methodology of interconnecting places by adopting a relevant theme and developing links between attractions and service providers in order to promote and deliver tourism and cultural experiences. Cultural routes can span a single city such as the Boston Freedom Trail [MG97]; comprise a number of regions; such as the wine routes of South Africa [Bru03]; or involve a number of countries for example the Camino de Santiago route [MG97].

The cultural route usually involves a diverse range of tourism service suppliers. This diversity could be in terms of size, nature (profit / non profit making) target customer segments (quality, budget) etc. This makes it extremely difficult for managers to co-ordinate programmes to be implemented throughout the cultural route. Furthermore a cultural route often has a large number of intervening layers between those who develop strategies and those at the site location [MB01]. However it is essential that cultural routes involve a level of co-ordination in order for them to run effectively. This paper concentrates on the development of a framework to assist tourism and heritage managers and planners who need to pre-empt and provide for cultural route visitor information needs. The framework also acts as a guide for route management co-ordination and serves as the structure in the design of a portal.

2.0 Cultural route motivators

Although cultural routes can be onerous to co-ordinate, they can provide important benefits to regions: by formalising initiatives to support regional economic development; enabling the mutual promotion of destinations [Ple02]; providing a source of differentiation; presenting opportunities to emphasise cultural resources; promoting lesser known attractions; attracting additional custom from specific customer segments; and may regenerate areas and provide local jobs [Atk04].

Cultural route suppliers can gain from 'co-opetition' which means to co-operate but at the same time compete, for the purpose of gaining a slice of a larger pie [Buh03]. That is, different places can benefit from pooling resources and attracting visitors to experience a particular theme.

The benefits of cultural routes for visitors are that resources are targeted towards specific interests of theirs; the sites have been pre-selected; itineraries prepared; an awareness of similar attractions nearby is created and publications interpreting the cultural route theme have been developed. Thus reducing the visitor's needs to prepare for their visit.

The success of the cultural route concept is such that since 1964 the number of cultural routes has been steadily increasing and now stands at twenty two [www.coe.int/].

3.0 Methodology

In order to develop the framework for gathering cultural route information, secondary data research was undertaken. This consisted of a review of the literature and an examination of projects listed at the Council of Europe's website [www.coe.int]. This organisation introduced the concept of Cultural Routes in 1964 [BW04]. The secondary data research resulted in five categories being generated. These were divided into two sections. Part A contained information required by visitors. Part B concentrated on providing guidance to support cultural route management co-ordination.

3.1 Framework categories explained

Part A

Tourism:
This category focuses on the destination and is subdivided into six classifications: Attractions; Accessibility; Amenities; Available Packages; Activities and Ancillary Services [in Buh03 pp 291].

Resources:
These are sources of reference that can provide information on the area. For example historical, music, and archaeological documentation. Resources support the theme of the route and can help differentiate the place from others.

Maps:
This section details different types of maps that visitors may utilize, from maps depicting the cultural route, to maps displaying tourism information such as attractions, accommodation and restaurants.

Regional Economy and Development:
This section contains details of businesses and products that represent the region. An example of the former would be chambers of commerce and for the latter food, wine etc. Thus the cultural route assists in not only promoting the destination's products and services to customers, but also attracts investors from other regions.

Part B

Cultural Route Management Co-ordination:
This concentrates on the overall management of the route as a whole and includes such themes as marketing, quality initiatives, publications, network of expert management and planning for new routes.

Once the main categories had been established, the examples of cultural routes obtained from the literature and the Council of Europe's website was examined. The five main categories were subdivided into further categories. For example an attraction could be manmade, natural, artificial etc. Furthermore, a manmade attraction could be a museum, art gallery, archaeological site etc. Once all the possibilities for each category were listed, the information visitors may need was mapped using a tree diagram format. Thus the branches of the trees depict potential information requirements. The tree diagram enabled this process to be conducted in a systematic way, ensuring that the categories were thoroughly examined. The end result was a framework of visitor and cultural heritage manager information requirements. Figure 1 - 4 depicts the framework categories. Figure 5 presents a summary of the framework.

3.2 Using the framework

The tree diagram has been designed for information collection at destination level, or route that connects destinations. Therefore the process of working through the framework must be repeated for each destination or connecting path throughout the entire cultural route. In addition information has to be provided for every museum, monument etc. in the corresponding area. This information must be kept up to date. It is expected that additions to the framework should reflect visitor requirements.

The framework takes into consideration the possibility that there can be multiple visitor entry points along a route. Furthermore the framework incorporates different visitor requirements, such as historic or religious buildings.

The framework could be seen as a 'checklist' that the cultural route manager can use to ensure that they have provided comprehensive information for visitors and route management co-ordination. Secondly establishing this framework prevents the cultural route manager from 'reinventing the wheel' i.e. repeating the process of determining information requirements over and over again.
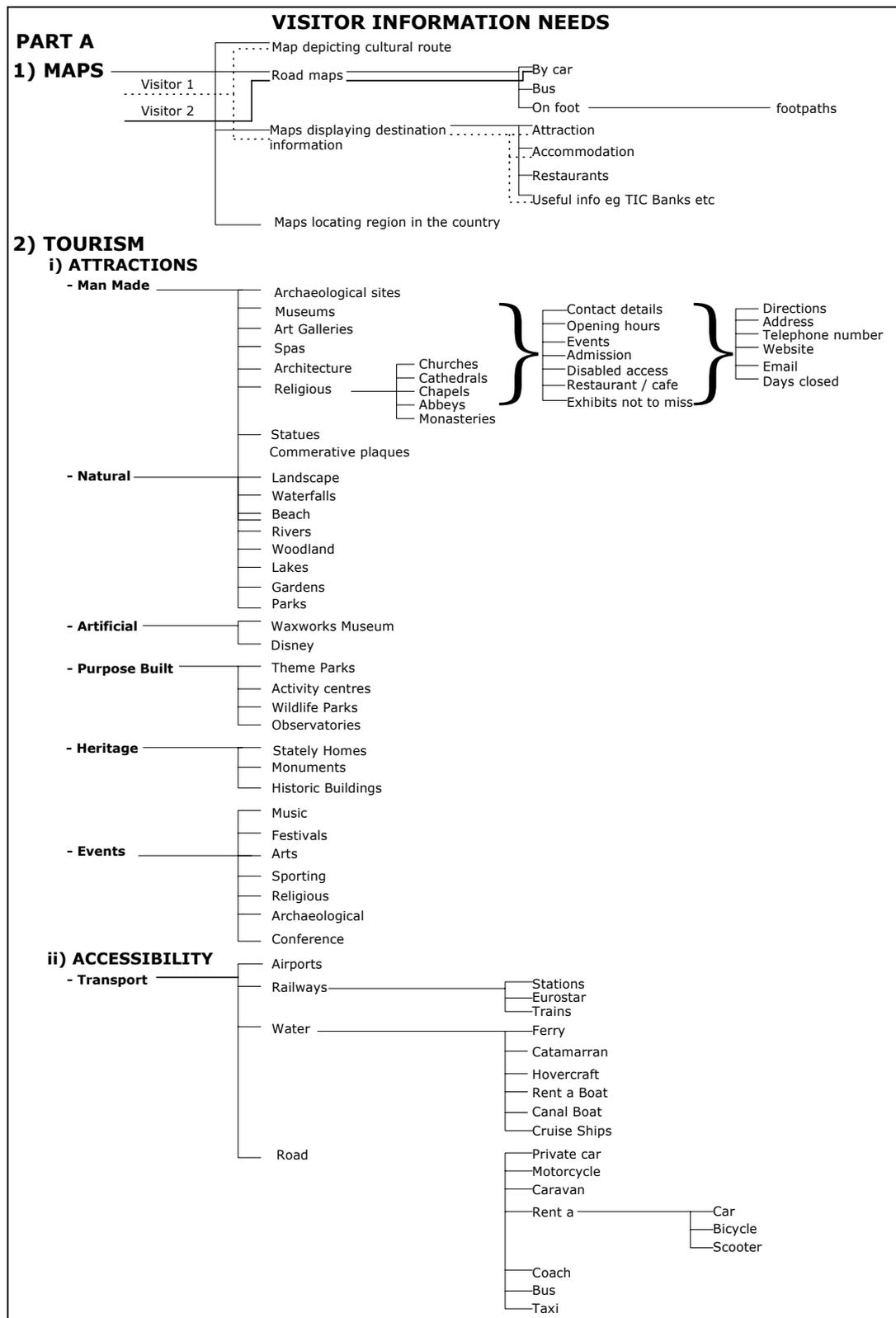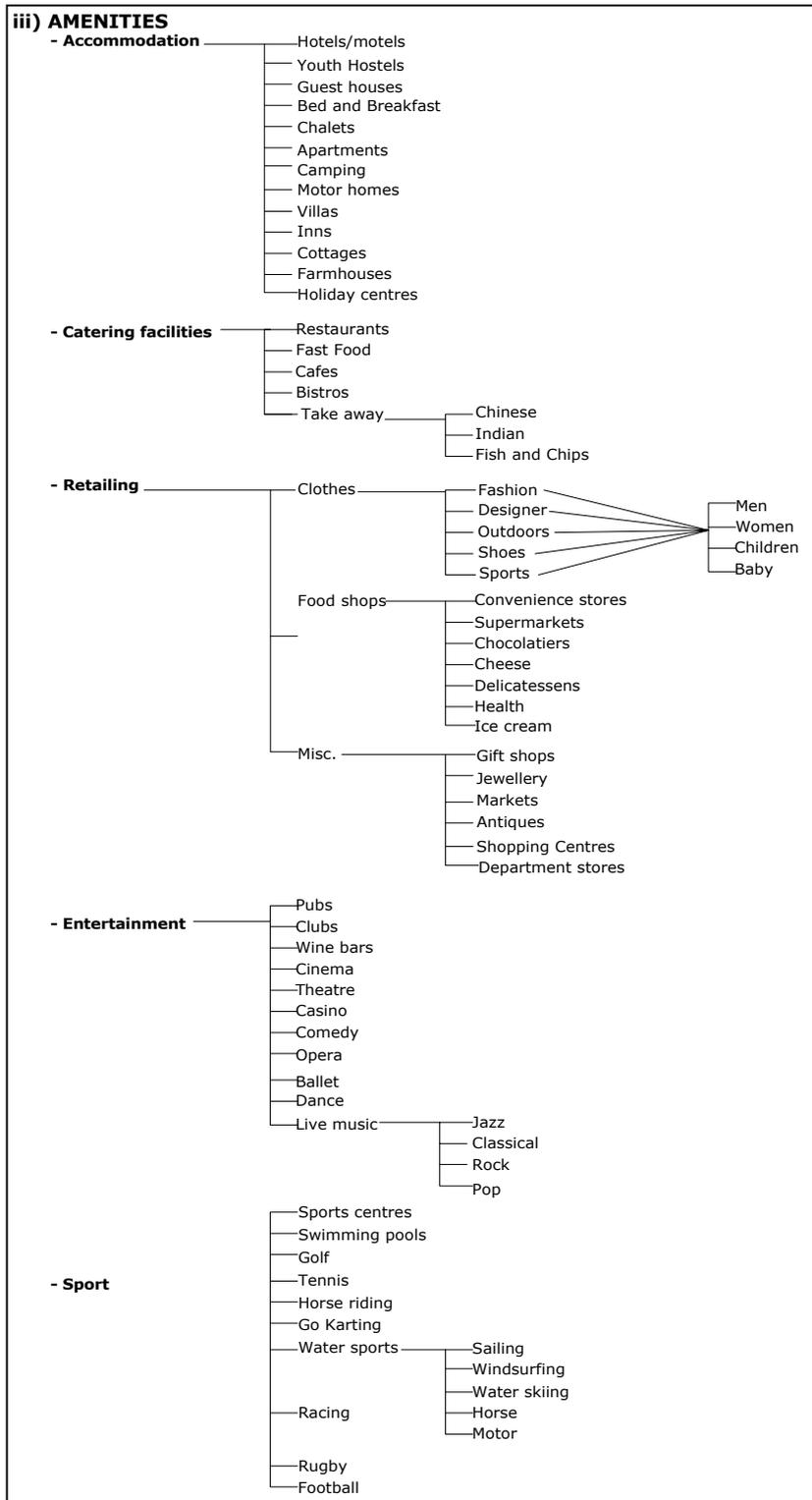
Figure 1: *Sample of the cultural route tree diagram*

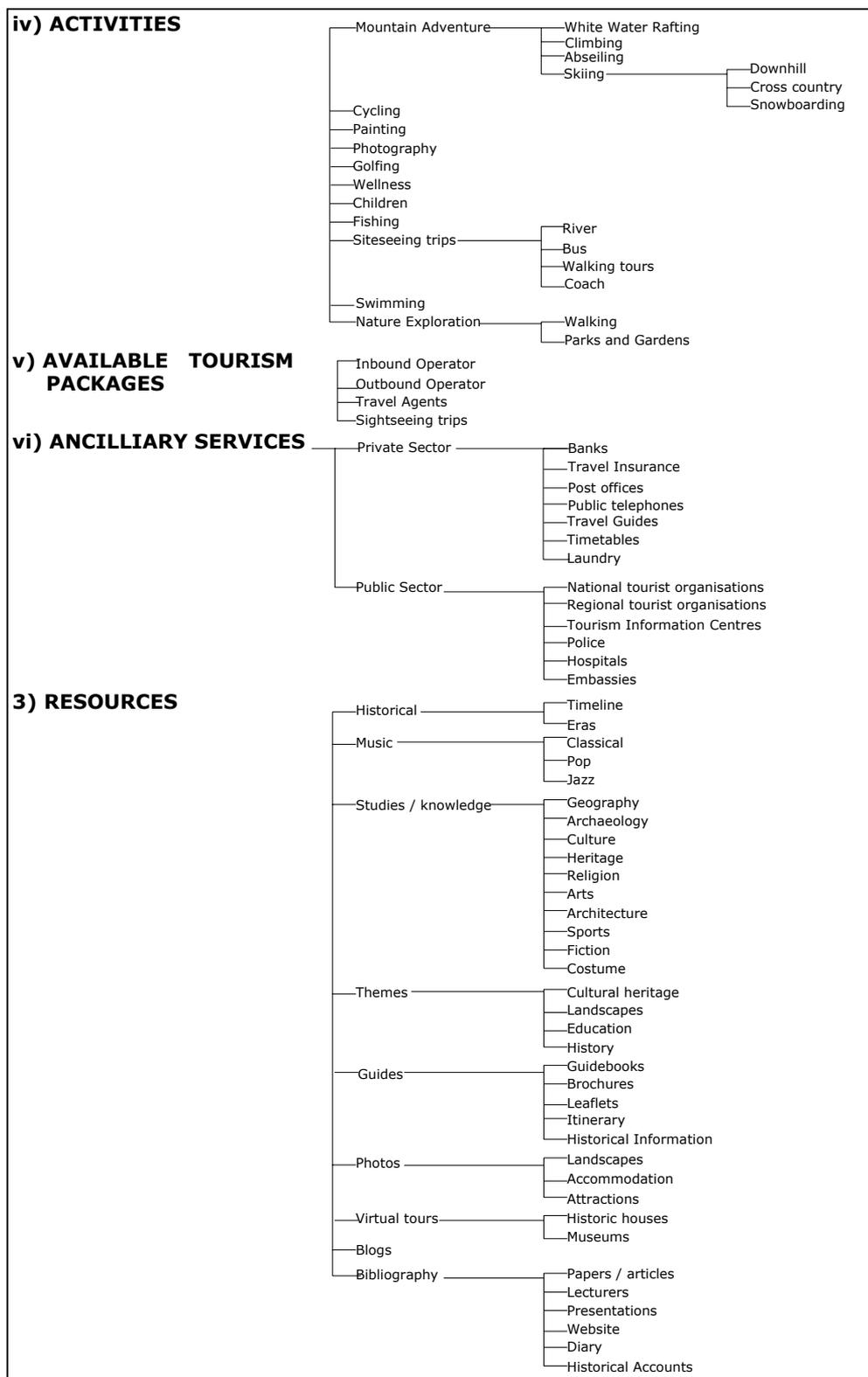**Figure 2:** *Sample of the cultural route tree diagram.*

iv) ACTIVITIES
- Mountain Adventure
  - White Water Rafting
  - Climbing
  - Abseiling
  - Skiing
    - Downhill
    - Cross country
    - Snowboarding
- Cycling
- Painting
- Photography
- Golfing
- Wellness
- Children
- Fishing
- Siteseeing trips
  - River
  - Bus
  - Walking tours
  - Coach
- Swimming
- Nature Exploration
  - Walking
  - Parks and Gardens

v) AVAILABLE TOURISM PACKAGES
- Inbound Operator
- Outbound Operator
- Travel Agents
- Sightseeing trips

vi) ANCILLIARY SERVICES
- Private Sector
  - Banks
  - Travel Insurance
  - Post offices
  - Public telephones
  - Travel Guides
  - Timetables
  - Laundry
- Public Sector
  - National tourist organisations
  - Regional tourist organisations
  - Tourism Information Centres
  - Police
  - Hospitals
  - Embassies

3) RESOURCES
- Historical
  - Timeline
  - Eras
- Music
  - Classical
  - Pop
  - Jazz
- Studies / knowledge
  - Geography
  - Archaeology
  - Culture
  - Heritage
  - Religion
  - Arts
  - Architecture
  - Sports
  - Fiction
  - Costume
- Themes
  - Cultural heritage
  - Landscapes
  - Education
  - History
- Guides
  - Guidebooks
  - Brochures
  - Leaflets
  - Itinerary
  - Historical Information
- Photos
  - Landscapes
  - Accommodation
  - Attractions
- Virtual tours
  - Historic houses
  - Museums
- Blogs
- Bibliography
  - Papers / articles
  - Lecturers
  - Presentations
  - Website
  - Diary
  - Historical Accounts

Figure 3: *Sample of the cultural route tree diagram*

4) REGIONAL
- Municipality
- Chamber of Commerce
- Products
  - Food
  - Wine
  - Agriculture
  - Handicrafts
- Music
  - Anthems
  - Folk

PART B

5) CULTURAL ROUTE MANAGEMENT CO-ORDINATION

- Stakeholders
- Meetings
- Conferences
- Workshops

- Co-ordinating action
- Visitor infrastructure
  - Signposts
  - Plaques
- Manage network of experts
  - Co-ordinate reserach
  - Opinion gathering
  - Organise events to bring experts together
- Research
  - Books (Guides)
  - Databases
  - CD Rom
  - Instigate Research
  - Collate
  - Monitor
- Meetings
  - Gather input from stakeholders
    - Develop marketing plan
    - Compile listing of tourism resources
    - Feedback on product
    - Advice to make improvements
  - Disseminate information e.g. good practice
  - Coordinate new initiatives
  - Build and maintain network, reinforce collaboration

- Marketing
- Implement plans
  - Country level
  - In the route
    - Activities to pool experience
    - Inspection / monitoring
    - Feedback
    - Competitions reward best examples
    - Set up educational programmes
- Route planning
  - Expansion
  - New routes based on theme
- Internet
- Trade fairs
  - Exhibitions
    - Permanent
    - Travelling
  - Seminars
- Festivals
- Itinerary
  - Listings

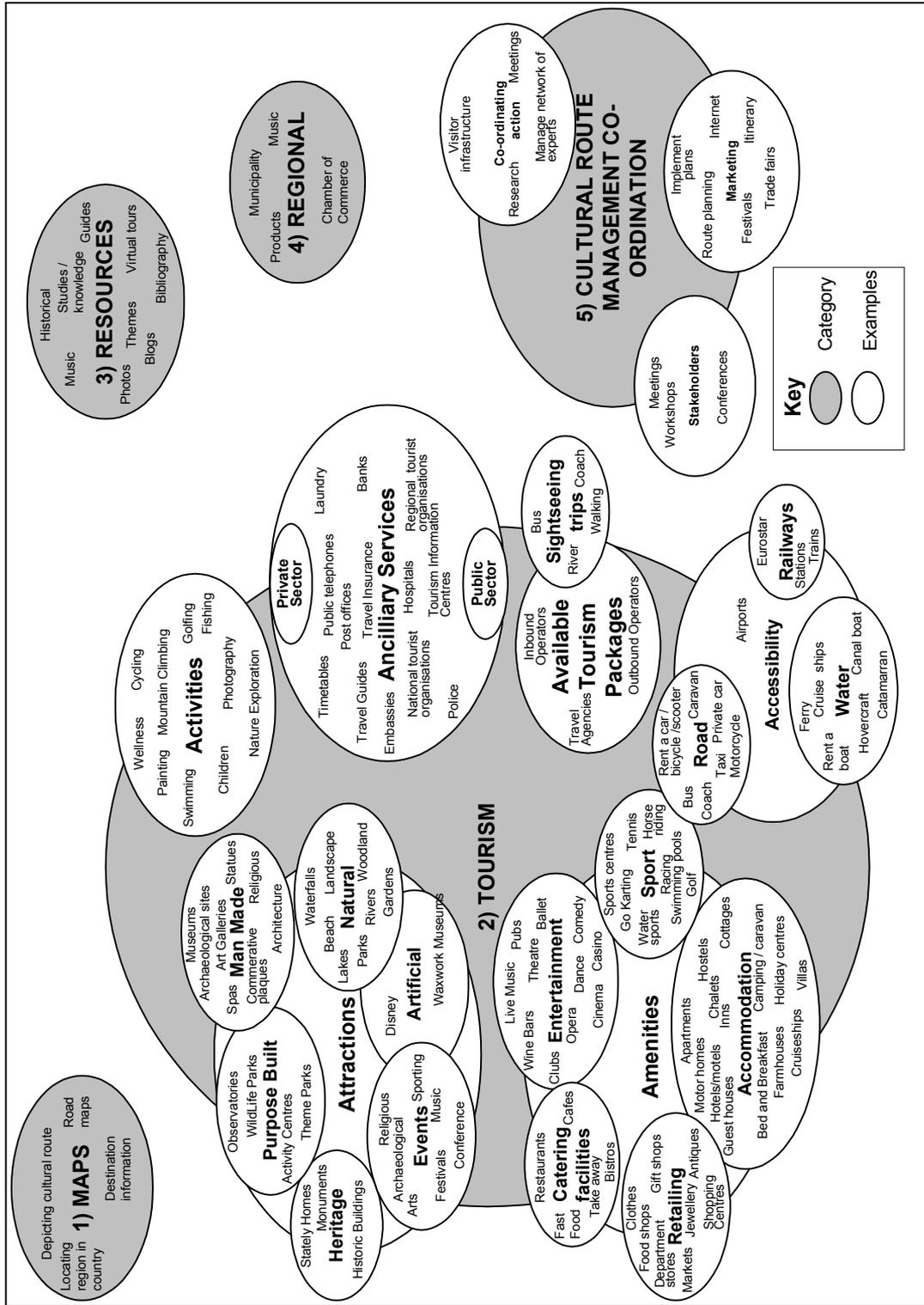**Figure 4:** *Sample of the cultural route tree diagram*

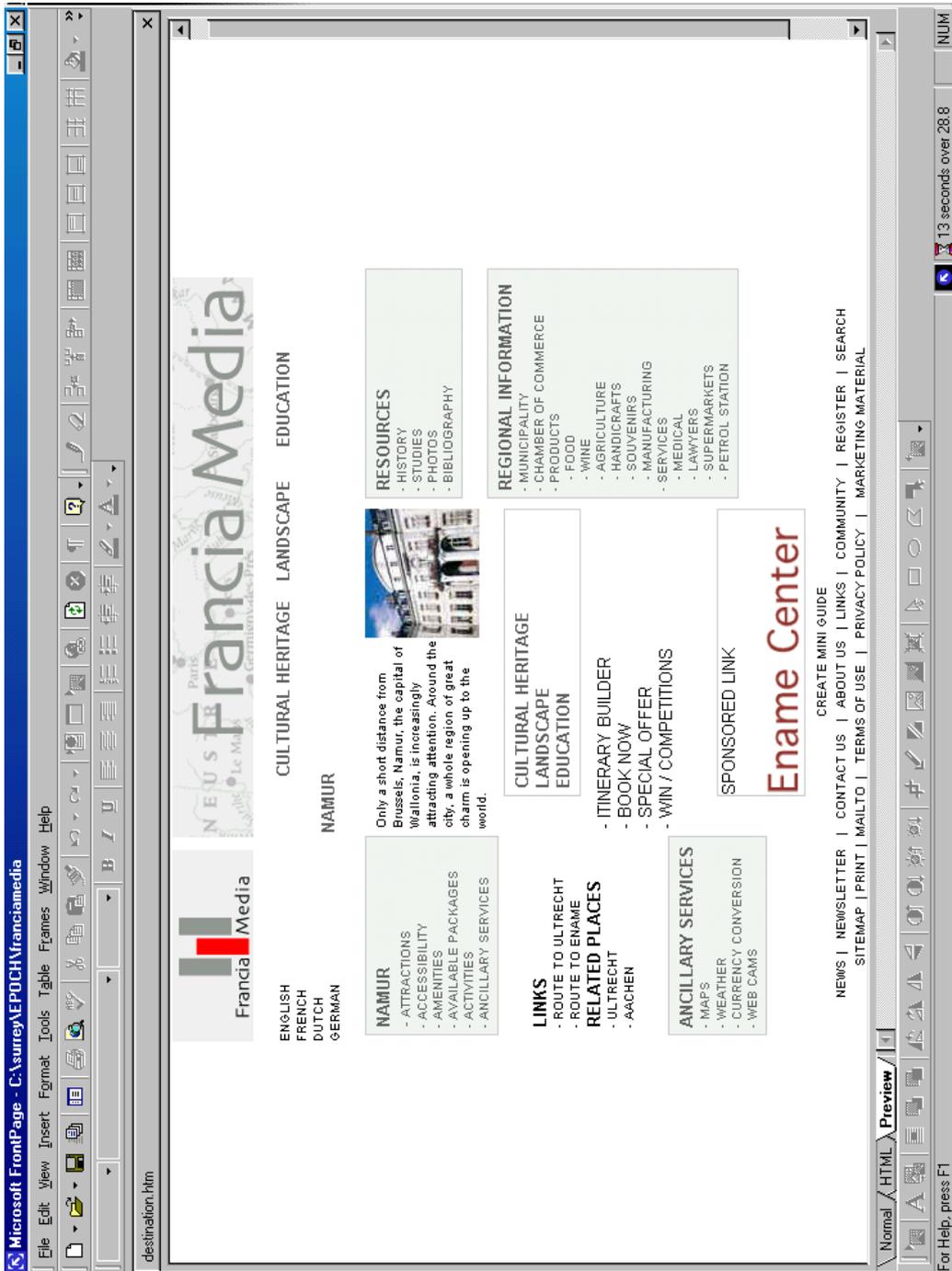**Figure 5:** *Summarising the cultural route framework*

Figure 6: *Francia Media portal prototype*

3.3 Developing the Francia Media portal

The framework was then used as the structure of a portal. Figure 6 depicts an example of a web page. The categories identified during the literature review were placed in different areas on each web page. Cultural route management co-ordination has not been included yet as the prototype website has been designed to meet the needs of visitors, rather than cultural route managers. An extranet will be developed to facilitate this process.

The Francia Media region is used as a test case in the development of this portal. The Francia Media region spans an area of France, Germany, The Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg, Switzerland, Italy, Slovenia and Croatia [www.franciamedia.org/]. The significance of this region in a cultural heritage context is that it was an important North – South trade route during early medieval Europe and played an influential role in the arts, technology and religion.

The purpose of the portal is to promote the cultural route; present tools for the visitor to plan their excursions; and encourage them to physically visit the route and its destinations. This is achieved by personalising the portal to the interests of the visitor, but also by giving access to the digital content of the site viewed after the visit, so that the portal becomes a personal logbook of how the visitor experienced the cultural route. The portal becomes even more personalised by implementing digital souvenirs that can be bought at cultural route destinations, and by adding personal pictures to this logbook.

4.0 Results

Using the tree diagram method to generate a framework enabled a thorough examination of visitor information and cultural route management information requirements.

The framework provided the Francia Media portal's structure. Thus, the branches of the tree diagram could be replaced by hypertext links. The next stage of this project will be to populate the portal with cultural route information from the Francia Media region. This process will also generate feedback that will be incorporated into the portal's design and the framework.

5.0 Conclusions

Despite a growing number of cultural routes being implemented, to date there has been no study which determines information requirements of visitors and cultural route co-ordinators. This paper has presented a framework which addresses this need. This framework was further utilised as a guideline for the development of a portal to promote the Francia Media region of Europe.

This research endeavours to establish guidelines of good practice for the implementation of a cultural route, and the development of a web portal as a tool for its promotion and demonstration.

Acknowledgements

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