

First Routes4U meeting for the Adriatic and Ionian region (EUSAIR)

"Fostering regional development through the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe"

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(Centro Congressi San Servolo, San Servolo Island)

Workshop 1: Regional development through cultural tourism

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INTRODUCTION INTO THE TOPIC

The EU Strategy for the Adriatic-Ionian Region (EUSAIR) includes four thematic pillars among which sustainable tourism development, stressing in particular diversified tourism offer and sustainable and responsible tourism managementⁱ.

Regional development is a **complex, multi-dimensional concept** dealing with various factors, such asⁱⁱ: endowment with cultural resources, influence of (tourism) sectors on regional development, the dynamics of new business models' (new multi-destinational products) development, infrastructure investment and accessibility, employment, quality of human resources, education, multidisciplinary, etc.

EUSAIR cultural routes certified by the Council of Europe present "cultural assets enriched by the different cultures they have fertilized and which transcends them in overall value by offering a substantial number of shared characteristics and value systems"ⁱⁱⁱ. **Equally they have great importance for territorial (regional) cohesion** and diversified tourism offer, so efforts should be made to develop and promote them further on, along with their responsible and sustainable use for tourism purposes, always with the adoption of appropriate measures aimed at eliminating risks.^{iv} In this sense it is important to acknowledge wider tourism context within which AIR cultural routes operate, expand and develop in accordance with macro-regional cultural characteristics.

UNWTO World Tourism Barometer statistical data for 2017, show huge discrepancy regarding tourist arrivals and tourism receipts of different EUSAIR countries. EUSAIR countries received in the last year 115 million tourist arrivals (i.e. Italy more than half or 58,7 million arrivals). All **Adriatic and Ionian Region (AIR) countries received 81,2US\$ billion from tourism (receipts ranging from 1 US\$ billion to 44 US\$ billion per country)**.

These differences warn us of **serious discrepancy within tourism development in the framework of AIR countries** and, accordingly, within active cultural routes operation.

AIR cultural routes development and extension is thus connected essentially to the challenges in the regional distribution of tourism flows, highly differing mature from the emerging destinations. Macro-regional development should **reduce inequality** correlated to countries' tourism activities, carrying capacity, tourism offer and performance in cultural tourism, and sustainability of their resources. Now it is still impossible to collect statistical data on cultural routes visitors for most of the EUSAIR countries.

Although all of the EUSAIR countries share joint cultural background and area, some have included cultural tourism in their strategic planning, others have not, and rare are those considering cultural routes development in their tourism strategies(with respect of their sustainable use).

Routes4U Project

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Cultural tourism in AIR cultural routes involves several major development issues: cultural tourism product development, new needs of cultural tourism users for products, integrated approach to destination development and regional connectivity.

Cultural tourism users ask for **dynamic interactive approach to cultural offer, high level of participation within creative products' design and infrastructure. Fostering cultural creativity through innovative products can be answer to the challenges of the less developed regions and micro sites.**

New macro-regional business model and cultural tourism on cultural routes asks for **sophisticated smart specialization approach**, taking into account new market trends, new visitors and new values they are searching for. Best practice examples include sophisticated interpretation & presentation of heritage within product super-segmentation possibilities (hybrid packages involving creative and wellness tourism, active and cultural tourism, culinary and ecotourism etc.) and steps towards diversification of regional compatible areas.

Creative industries can provide resources for stimulating and inspiring interpretation and presentation of hidden heritage i.e. through VR (virtual reality) as trigger and AR (augmented reality) for better understanding of destinations on the spot, creating macro-regional virtual brochures etc. for the common digital platform.

Proper destinations' profiling taking into account cultural common values, diversities and preserved identities is valuable for extension of existing and creation of new routes.

Cultural routes with integrated regional management solutions, including destinations on the routes with holistic approach and connectivity models, can be solutions to existing demographic problems.

MAIN OBJECTIVES

Cultural routes in AIR can provide focus on new business models development, through **common content and yet distinctive identity levels, diversification of product for niche markets, interactivity and holistic approach**. In this sense already existing cultural routes can be extended to new wider areas of AIR if proper research, evaluation, mapping, funding, education and management is provided.

Accordingly the relevance of this workshop - regarding the overall objective to strengthen regional development through the Cultural Routes is in its ability to:

1. **Foster regional development** through extension of existing cultural routes and development of new ones stimulating reduction of inequality
2. **Stimulate sustainability** - detect challenges regarding the development of new business models, management of cultural routes in EUSAIR countries, connectivity, presentation and interpretation of cultural heritage, and harmoniously integrated infrastructure for visitors.
 - Cultural routes providing not only new experiences for visitors but understanding and transformation – awareness raising and **responsible consumption**
3. **Enhance connectivity**: provide insight into
 - The current state of collaboration between cultural industries and tourism on AIR cultural routes, and among EUSAIR countries,
 - Expansion possibilities within AIR cultural routes through innovative product design
 - Presentation, interpretation and guiding practices on AIR cultural routes
 - Best practice examples of CR product design

4. **Diversify tourism offer:** acknowledge culture and heritage as drivers for sustainable growth, especially for extension of the routes, and creation of new ones (AIR routes of salt, of ancient civilizations, sacral routes, ...)
5. **Present possible regional partnerships and solutions** for cultural routes multi-destinational product development enhancing social and economic sustainability of the area
6. Detect needs for **further education and joint development of projects** and generation of project ideas (summer schools for youth; education in management, marketing, digital performance, or excellence in AIR guiding)

Provide recommendations for **enhanced profiling of the macro region and its cultural routes** and their competitiveness

KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

1. **New business models for development:** Can macro regional development of cultural routes foster reduction of poverty through new business models (product development), new employment possibilities and economic growth, with the reduction of inequality? Can routes provide synergies, foster coordinated actions through tourism, connecting networks of small but sustainable destinations, creative cities and rural areas? What are current existing management models of the routes including good management practices and tools and what are proposals for improvement?
2. **Trans-border macro-regional development of cultural routes:** what extensions can be made to existing cultural routes and what are potentials for developing new AIR routes with major AIR cultural framework
3. **Research:** how can existing best practices and research models be used for:
 - a. new macro-regional thematic areas for routes
 - b. macro-regional co-operation in knowledge exchange and R&D for new AIR markets
 - c. summer schools...
4. **Diversified macro-regional tourism offer development through CR:** how are cultural and tourism stakeholders involved in the process of diversified multi-destinational products development with regards to multidisciplinary, protection, presentation and interpretation of cultural content of the route and what are new proposals for:
 - a. enhancement of the memory, history and AIR heritage through product development
 - b. strategy of diversified AIR routes products

Strategic approach implies constant innovation in creating routes' products. An innovative and creative approach is expected, taking into consideration users, their attitudes and needs and particularly the fact that users today wish to be the co-creators of their tourism packages and that they expect adaptability and dynamic cooperation in that sense.
5. **Activities strengthening regional innovation and SME's:** what are most successful activities provided by the routes, combining cultural heritage / industries with structural content (creativity, wellness, food, activities on the route....) for visitors needs, and what are proposals for improvement?
6. **Awareness raising and responsible tourism:** How is tourism infrastructure integrated within cultural routes and what are proposals for improvement along the AIR. Each cultural route as a destination with their own DMOs?

"A comprehensive model for Smart Travel, one that includes Smart Visas, Smart Borders, Smart Security processes and Smart Infrastructure, will revolutionize the travel and tourism sector the way the smartphone has transformed the telecommunications and media industries, bringing job creation and growth along with it."^v

7. Key recommendations will cover key questions and areas of discussion.

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^{iv} Ibid.

^v World Economic Forum, "The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report" (2017).