



Routes4Youth

*Invisible Places and Cultural Routes:
The Case of Terni*



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INVISIBLE PLACES AND CULTURAL ROUTES: THE CASE OF TERNI

The 2017 statistical data of the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer shows a huge discrepancy regarding tourist inflows among the various AIR countries. These countries received 115 million tourist arrivals, of which more than one half to Italy that, according to ISTAT data, is the fourth EU country in terms of tourist preferences. Although Italy is a popular international tourist destination, its territory has strong differences in the distribution of tourist flows. Actually, some major destinations attract the most part of tourists to the country. In 2017 Rome, with almost 27 million arrivals (6.4% of the total in Italy), was again the most important destination, followed by Milan, Venice and Florence, all areas that extend the impact such big incoming to their neighbouring municipalities. Outside these areas of influence, there are thousands of small and medium-sized municipalities across Italy that are excluded from large tourist flows. Among this group of municipalities, in a strategic location with respect to Rome, there is Terni, a medium-sized town surrounded by rural areas of valuable landscape and cultural interest. Inhabited since the Neolithic period, between the 19th and 20th centuries its area underwent an industrialization process that transformed the town into an important steel and chemical industrial centre, determining its new economic development. With the new millennium, the privatization of large companies was the beginning of an industrial crisis that grew progressively worse until today. This caused such a severe social and economic divide, that in 2016 the Ministry of Economic Development recognized Terni and 17 other municipalities in southern Umbria as complex crisis areas. During this long declining phase, and especially in recent years, the government worked out a number of interventions to relaunch local economy by investing in the tertiary sector, based on an analysis of the economic and environmental contexts and dynamics of its territory. Tourism was among the sectors of intervention. Attempts were made to integrate tourism into the traditional economic fabric, based on the identification of local competitive advantages and putting in place strategies for an integrated development between economic sectors and local stakeholders. At present, Terni's area has the resources and potential to become a tourist destination of great interest. However, the attractiveness of its locations is not yet sufficient to ensure a significant positioning of Terni in the tourist market, not even limited to the Umbrian market. All local landmarks are outside the town: the Marmore Falls, 7 km from Terni, is the main local attraction with 400 thousand visitors per year; the archaeological site of Carsulae, 13 km from Terni, is growing in tourist attractiveness, and the Piediluco Lake, 14 km from the town, has a strong sporting vocation. Only Terni is missing from this list: even its residents perceive the town as an industrial centre, without tourist interest and actually extraneous to the tourist flows visiting the surrounding areas. Although the town is not attractive, it is culturally rich and has many services directed to the sustainable use and enhancement of its typical features. Terni has many valuable churches such as the cathedral, San Valentino and San Francesco; many examples of contemporary architecture by Cesare Bazzani, Mario Ridolfi and Giancarlo De Carlo; or urban furniture of artistic value such as the

Obelisk by Arnaldo Pomodoro and the Piazza Tacito fountain. Finally, purely cultural venues include the C.A.O.S., a museum and cultural production centre devoted to contemporary arts.

Currently, there has been an increase in domestic tourism to Terni, thanks to important events animating the town centre during the year. Among these, Cioccolentino (a chocolate festival connected to the celebration of the patron saint Valentine), TerniOn (the town's nuit blanche), and Cantamaggio (a folk festival), Ternifestival (a contemporary art festival organized by the current private owner of C.A.O.S.) are worth mentioning. The use of events as a means for promoting tourism did not have favourable long-term effects; the lack of consistent planning, disconnected from a broader local narrative, only created impromptu initiatives, especially exposed to delocalization. If the scope of this analysis is broadened at regional level, it becomes apparent that Terni is excluded also from the various kinds of tourist flows that are directed to northern Umbria. Religious and pilgrimage flows are among the most important. They do not pass through Terni, despite the Municipality's involvement in inter-municipal and inter-regional pilgrimage projects, and despite international tourism recognising a strong spiritual connotation to Umbria thanks to privileged destinations such as Assisi. In this context, it is clear that individual attractions, blockbuster tourist sites or spot events are not sufficient to benefit the entire territory, and indeed, lacking a multidirectional connection network, all this ends up generating strong differences, even within a restricted geographical area. Terni's basic isolation has many reasons. To understand them, it is necessary to consider its complex context where exogenous and endogenous factors are deeply articulated and interconnected. The most evident causes are, among others, the lack of an integrated territorial tourist system and a general overlapping of roles and responsibilities, respectively due to inefficient cross-sectoral planning and the lack of clear governance among municipal and regional administrations on these aspects. The outcome is a fragmentation of the actions taken, with dispersive and substantially uncoordinated results compared to the driving strategies put in place by the Umbria Region. In this scenario, a large number of Terni's stakeholders take autonomous and circumscribed initiatives, while acting towards the same objective. This adds to a long-standing lack of resources, which has led to the financial collapse of the town's administration and has blocked its ability to support the town in a period of economic crisis. Other connected factors have worsened this condition, limiting the possibility for Terni to receive funds from the EU. These include: i) the tendency at regional level to invest more in the area of Perugia, where the power is seated, than in Terni, also because of a tradition of vassalage generated by a deep-rooted political and business system; ii) the administration's difficulty in working out competitive projects to obtain EU funds; iii) the administration's reluctance to find experimental solutions using sophisticated legal and economic instruments; iv) the absence of a university pole that contributes to innovating the area, and v) a massive emigration of qualified active population that inhibits the community's ability to address new challenges. In this scenario, some public sectors are suffering from the imposition of policies deprived of financial resources, which, as a result, are substantially inadequate to pursue long-term objectives and strengthen the local economic fabric. The lack of funds and the adherence to market principles, in a

system where the failure of public administrations in taking care of public assets has systematically led to asset privatisations and concessions, have brought the public administration to close-to-inacceptable conditions. An example taken from the recent news regarding the cultural sector was the failure of Terni in a tender for European funds devoted to the management of its city museum. The municipality – in financial bankruptcy – made its best to work out an economic tender that all the private operators visiting the site considered insufficient. In addition to devaluating the territory and the administration's accountability, this event demonstrated once again that, in a context of economic crisis, a model of public asset management based on competition between private stakeholders takes the form of a descending price – and therefore quality – auction. In recent years, attempts to overcome the crisis have led to see Terni and the connected geographical areas in a different light, with the aim of sharing resources and ideas to build competitive territorial structures at European level. An example was the Civiter project, started in 2014. The aim was to network four medium-sized towns in central Italy (Terni, Rieti, Viterbo and Civitavecchia) to create a supra-city system for integrated development focusing the real dynamics of local territories. The project, among the many opportunities offered, was expected to help Terni to intercept the huge tourist flows to Rome and Civitavecchia areas. However, right from the start, it showed criticalities due to the lack of agreement between different governmental levels. In particular, the negotiating tables that had to bring out shared positions among the two regions and four municipalities revealed the hostility of certain political forces with conflicting, and sometimes latent, interests. This demonstrated how administrative borders might sometimes become obstacles to local development. This ambitious project has partially sunk and, following its downsizing, today it is supported by a network of associations from the involved areas that try to bring it back on the institutional political agenda.

Overall, it can be observed that the momentum shown by local institutions in working out a local growth and innovation scenario was not able to spark off the needed process of regeneration and internationalization for economic recovery. Any transition to tertiary economy needs to be supported by forward-looking policies able to develop the territorial and urban context in all its forms into a cohesive system that creates tourist attractiveness according to the skills, abilities and entrepreneurship rooted in the territory. The role of citizens is particularly important in the processes of transition and change. It is well known that they are the first recipients of political actions and that they give a decisive contribution to the region's well-being. Active participation today is recognised as an essential prerogative for efficient governance, capable of addressing public interest issues that not only regard government-level decisions, but also the management of those public assets ensuring the quality of life of the community to which they belong. It is a paradigmatic mechanism of territorial cohesion, through which communities contribute to a better management of common wealth: from the environment to cultural heritage, from infrastructure to urban spaces. In this respect, Italy is testing shared management models that may promote the transition from administered cities to collaborative cities, where citizens, associations, non-governmental bodies, entrepreneurs and institutions work for the

management of public assets, building new types of proximity welfare and small economic circuits. The basis of these experiences is a system of partnership among public and private stakeholders and the community, where citizens can become project initiators using legal instruments from existing laws. This transition from the rhetoric of participation to the practice of participation is important to ensure that the exercise of social and civil responsibility has a lasting effect on the quality of life of all segments of population, including the weakest. This trend is increasingly widespread, including in the field of cultural heritage management. Even the Cultural Routes and the projects arising from this framework are propositional to participatory, polycentric and bottom-up dynamics. In particular, the orientation towards developing new types of cooperation and new spaces for citizen participation is also manifest in the Routes4Youth project, based on the cooperation of a transnational smart community, according to a model that can support local development strategies, as it is capable of activating wide-ranging operational networks. Any member of this network acts as an antenna extending its range on wide regional areas, in position to explore in detail the possible cultural and economic relations of those interested in networking. Actually, by living in the territory, it can evaluate the contact and confrontation with communities, stakeholders and local institutions, sorting out those groups that have a social DNA fit for constructive action and that can be trusted to create collaborative coalitions in line with the principles of sustainability and responsibility. Understanding the people to work with means building fruitful relationships. Actually, collaborative work can create innumerable difficulties, and it is necessary to identify those stakeholders who, although declaring to be willing to participate, assume passive or even hindering attitudes. In addition, by facilitating a direct dialogue with local partners through networking it is possible to target the dissemination of information about the European channels that may enhance local heritage, increasing the level of awareness of those who have a direct or indirect interest in joining Cultural Routes. Moreover, this participatory model focuses on local micro-dynamics and territorial planning. This allows cultural and tourist management tools and models of Cultural Routes to be adapted to local specificities.

In the case of Terni, the use of the Council of Europe's model of Cultural Routes might help to build a new narrative aiming to provide a more real, contemporary and international image of the town. Cultural Routes, as complex cultural assets, use a modern heritage paradigm that rediscovers the past by creating a system of meanings in the present time, as a multidimensional narrative device for memory telling, through which local communities can reformulate their identity. If enhanced consciously and widely, Cultural Routes can activate the co-creation of social and cultural changes by reinforcing social cohesion and civic responsibility through participation. In Terni's case, the scarce perception by citizens of their belonging to a cultural circuit that needs enhancing has long left the town lingering in a climate of indolence and has discredited political actions for culture and tourism support. A symbolic episode occurred when Terni ran for Italian Capital of Culture. The aim of this nation-wide competition is to strengthen the cultural stimulus as economic development, by encouraging the planning and enforcement autonomy of Italian cities. In 2016, the news spread that Terni's dossier was a finalist in

the competition and the population reacted with a disheartening, almost invective attitude. In particular, public opinion clearly showed that the debate around Terni's identity was blocked between the nostalgic restorers of an industrial past and working-class mythology, and an innovative minority willing to reconsider the legacy of the past also in cultural terms. The former group, refractory to change, was and still is the advocate of a strong self-pitying behaviour, aimed at delegitimising all local evolutionary movements, helped by the amplification of social networks and virtual communities. These reactions, a consequence of a long period of decline, are evidence of the community's impatience and they show the need to sterilize those processes of collective identity reformulation that confine the town's future to the past. On the other hand, the magmatic reality of Terni sends out encouraging signals, such as the participation of some sites in the recently certified European Route for Industrial Heritage, the Museum of Arms and the Multimedia Centre. However, this participation is isolated and insufficient to enhance the town's potential. Actually, there are many sites that might be connected to existing cultural routes, supporting the creation of a system of cultural and tourist enjoyment that is less fragmented, more sustainable and on a European level. The articulation of a tourist system must be structured by presenting the town as a united entity, with various points of interest pertaining to different themes and offering an experience that motivates tourists to remain in town for more days, starting from the attractions already available locally. The aim of a widespread distribution of tourist flows can be attained by promoting lesser-known destinations and facilitating efficient logistic connections. This operation should not only cover various points along a thematic route, but also the points excluded from and close to that route. The networking of the people involved in the management of cultural routes must identify solutions that facilitate the redistribution of arrivals and their economic benefits, in order to calibrate competition around the non-exclusion of some areas. This would make the natural unevenness of tourist inflows due to the different density of attractions acceptable. At regional level, one important experience was the candidacy of the Chocolate Route for recognition by the Council of Europe. The initial idea was to put together all confectioneries boasting an artisanal tradition, in order to protect them. This resulted in a partnership project supported by municipalities, chambers of commerce, production consortia, museums and producer associations from 7 European countries. The candidacy process, which began in 2016, failed at the last evaluation stage after an initially positive feedback. This failure, following a long preparation absorbing significant local finances, caused disappointment and raised many claims, an understandable reaction in a period of crisis in which scarce financial resources do not tolerate failures. However, the process put in place for the creation of this cultural route activated a virtuous circle inspiring the stakeholders to continue in their work. The result was a project that, with a distinct commercial profile, is now a successful tourist attraction, worthy of COSME funds. Therefore, even the fact of putting oneself to the test may be the spark that starts change processes able to create new ideas and chances of development.

At the end of this review of the wide range of tools offered by the EU for regional growth, Cultural Routes are amongst the most pluralistic and participatory. The opportunities offered can only be seized

with the right conditions in place, for example putting local stakeholders in position to compete or shifting attention to and investing in the many areas that are struggling to get out of the grey area of marginality. Remembering that “each city receives its form from the desert it opposes”, as Italo Calvino said, it is essential to work on the criticalities and weaknesses that make places invisible, not only to secure that tourism continues to be a significant contribution to the EU economy, but above all to distribute well-being and sustainability ensuring the needed harmony of Europe's common values and thinking.

Written by Alessia Curini

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