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Messineo, E.

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## Eliana Messineo

## Abstract

Cultural itineraries represent a favourable context for the development of creative processes and experiences. This paper examines the creative activities and projects of a European Cultural Itinerary, The Phoenicians' Route. The aim was to explore the creative features related to the production and development of the cultural-tourist offer, through a survey of participants in a pilot project, and on a network of local partners that co-operate in running the itinerary. The results of this research provide a rating of the total potential of itinerary itself, contributing to its definition as a 'creative system'.

## Keywords

creativity, cultural itinerary, heritage, network, system, regional development

**Being creative: an 'obligation' in tourism and cultural planning?**

Ten years after the first research on the relationship between creativity and tourism, nowadays this area represents one of the most innovative research fields contributing to the debate on the transformations of touristic experience, in the light of the changes wrought by globalization, by the democratization of consumption and by postmodernism (Richards, 2007).

Such transformations have remarkably changed the subjects and objects of tourism, entailing the necessity to revisit, in a contemporary light, and the mechanisms involved in its production and consumption. Creativity contributes to tourism in two major ways: on the one hand, it has become a synonym of new models of production and consumption, and of the new values and elements that contribute to the touristic growth of a locality; and on the other hand, creativity is a remedy, a claim, that may enable some regions to address the problems that contemporary tourism itself may cause. Creativity, therefore, is a sign of contemporaneity and of change, but is also a resource and tool for ensuring that the results of tourism are as positive and beneficial as possible. This double meaning of creativity in tourism is particularly in the case of culture-based tourism.

Creativity, according to this approach, can promote a new way of doing and consuming tourism. It embodies, in fact, both the inclination to experience of the post modern consumer, and the inclination to enhance local heritage, providing a possible alternative resource for tourism development. Creativity therefore, concerns global processes, subjects, companies, processes, resources and experiences.

In recent years, many examples of programmes that follow these trends have been discussed (Richards & Wilson, 2006; Richards & Wilson, 2007; Richards & Wilson, 2008; Wurzburger et al., 2010). Creativity in tourist production and consumption opens the door to a variety of themes, activities, experiences, combined with different levels of involvement and participation of tourists. Looking at the examples that have been discussed in the literature to date, we can some main lines along which the production of offers of creative tourism moves and towards which the corresponding consumption is directed:

Workshops and experiential activities, that are generally associated with elements of local intangible culture, as for instance, crafts, gastronomy, enology, dance, music, etc.;
Routes that emphasize sensory faculties and the relationship between activities and the senses involved, such as tastings, itineraries of various kinds, etc.
Activities related to a new interpretation of  traditional cultural heritage, for example entertaining and learning activities connected to archaeology, contemporary art, etc.
Happenings, festivals or cultural events offering new forms of promotion and exploitation of various aspects of material and immaterial culture, which constitute a sort of container for different experiences.

In all these activities, creative participation and involvement of tourists is stimulated by formative learning through attending thematic workshops, or by multisensory and emotional stimulation associated with well-defined experiences (Ferrari et al., 2008). The more learning and sensorial stimulation are co-present in the same experience, the more the experience will be unique, attractive and creative, contributing also to making the tourist a 'prosumer' of their own holiday (Richards & Wilson, 2006). Halfway between producer and consumer, the creative tourist contributes personally to the making of their own holiday experience, because the way in which everyone understands, interprets and lives information, incentives, feelings and emotions is unique and original.

All these proposals offer tourists the possibility to develop their own creative potential through an unusual, educational and cultural travel experience, where the contact with cultural diversities is a stimulus to approach experiences flexibly, beyond rigid patterns and boundaries (Kliček, 2008). But it is also possible to experience cultural diversity through a tourist performance which becomes a performance of self, helping to develop the individuality and the cultural background of those involved (Sin, 2009).

**The creative potential of cultural itineraries**

In the range of products designed to establish a partnership between tourism and the cultural sector, itineraries connected to cultural heritage are considered an effective means of generating positive externalities, and they have therefore gained a central role in local tourism development policies (OECD, 2009). Although often criticized for their idealistic nature and their lack of concreteness in design and implementation, cultural itineraries represent a possible mixture between tradition and innovation, a connection between local culture and external influences. But above all, their capacity to adapt themselves to the local resources of a region, and in doing so, to express their inner creativity, can promote the diffusion of innovative processes and products, and therefore increase local competitive advantage.

Cultural itineraries indeed, can act as a container for those patrimonial and structural attributes of a region that can contribute to the tourist-cultural offer. They can enhance cultural heritage, establish relationships between communities, regions and external actors, communicate and diffuse values and common inspirations, and export competences and knowledge, or *savoir faire*. The combination of cultural itineraries and tourist creativity could strengthen the local brand (Gallucci, 2007), encouraging the improvement of territorial space and the creation new networks*.*

The debate on the value of cultural itineraries is exciting and open on many fronts. There are basically two elements to be considered: the cultural heritage and the tourist activities which can be developed around it. The ability of cultural itineraries to bring these two elements together can generate significant benefits for economic and territorial development (Pardellas, 2006).  The contribution of cultural itineraries to the growth of a region and its community can be significant, provided that they are planned carefully to maximise competitive advantage and at the same time to improve and regenerate cultural resources rather than degrading them (Torres Bernier, 2006; Lopez Fernandez, 2006). In such planning activity the definition of the theme has a particular importance; it embraces the philosophy of the network and the linking of distant cultural realities, of small places often without tourist infrastructures, with the double target of rebuilding a local identity and favouring the attraction of touristic flows (Meneghello & Furlan, 2008). This approach seems to be particularly suited to areas which are not only underdeveloped from a tourist point of view, but also for which increased cohesion and shared aims and identities can stimulate positive economic results and stimulate general growth of weak areas (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Orbasli & Woodward, 2008). Such development is supported and favoured by some specific features of itineraries and cultural routes that Puczkó and Rátz (2007)

summarize in the following terms: first, Itineraries and cultural routes can be realized with relative low investments; second, they can diversify and extend tourism demand in time and space; third, they can contribute to the employment, for touristic purposes, of unexploited and unexpressed resources; and fourth, they can contribute to develop new demand for specific types of tourism.

**The Phoenicians' Route**

The Phoenicians' Route is one of the 25 European Cultural Routes promoted by the Council of Europe following the launch of European Programme of Cultural Routes in 1987. Its central administration is located in Sicily, Selinunte (TP), but this transnational route involves 18 countries in the Mediterranean area. The itinerary involves a variegated and widespread system of cultural activities, which are based on Phoenician and Mediterranean culture, but which also function as a stimulus and as a promotion for the various cultural elements that compose the route as a whole.

**Figure 1**: Phoenician trade routes



**Source:** Public Domain http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:PhoenicianTrade_EN.svg

At a tourist level, the Phoenicians' Route pursues targets of tourist development in line with the aims of the European Cultural Itineraries, which seek to develop sustainable quality cultural tourism inspired and motivated by the will to perpetuate and spread European cultural heritage. But the Phoenicians' Route actually represents an original and unique case in the context of the European Cultural Itineraries.

Innovation and originality came first of all from the approach to cultural heritage. Archaeological sites are concrete testimonies of the Phoenician's culture, but they are only a small part of the tourist cultural offer of the Phoenicians' Route. Instead the route has a contemporary vision of traditional cultural heritage and the way this is integrated into tourist activities. Some pilot projects have been developed to enrich the cultural offer through experiential and innovative activities, including innovative interpretative methods. The methodology adopted is the pedagogy of heritage, which allows the cultural heritage in its entirety to be included in the interpretative mechanisms: landscape, architectural elements linked to history and local traditions. The result is an overall enhancement of the local heritage and greater tourist involvement with the identity of the place. The understanding of local culture, in this way, passes through a particular reading of its elements and the phenomena they are linked with, contributing to a double result: the first being an enhancement of the resources system, the second being the possibility of establishing connections based on sharing and tolerance, which allow tourists and the local community to participate together. These results can be enhanced through the employment of sensorial faculties that can increase the participatory and emotional value of the experience. The stimulation of the five senses increases the value of the experience, both at the moment of consumption and through future reproduction through memory and on recollection. A perception of a perfume or of a sound, the sight or the contact with some elements put into the experience, or the taste of a local product accentuate the whole value the consumer assigns to the experienced activity and in the same way, can help in building an experiential route which is individual, but that can also provide a collective experience for all who engage in the same activity.

In particular the paths for *archeotrekking* – archaeological walks – along the Phoenicians' Route replace the traditional tour with an innovative description and recreation of archaeological heritage, enriched with sensorial and emotional elements. This helps to diversify the offer and to address the needs of a more diverse public. Another example of the potential of the itinerary as a formula for creative tourism is the project 'Voyages of Interculturality' which intends to strengthen local identity and stimulate cultural exchange by means of educational programmes, direct experiences, debates with local communities, privileged testimonies with local actors and experiential activities.

The groups to which this offer is directed are involved in activities of learning and education that emphasize the emotional and participatory value of the experiences. In addition to *archeotrekking*, indeed, there is a rise of the activities that allow the participants to put directly in practice the information and knowledge, the guides have given them, through

involvement in games, stage setting of stories, scenes, and performances, which represent the cultural heritage and let the users themselves play an active part in it. For example, an urban hiking path in a city on the itinerary can turn into an opportunity to get in contact and to experience with some local producers. A visit to a bakery becomes an opportunity for participants to observe but also to test personally the procedures for the preparation of typical and traditional recipes. Here, we find all the elements of creative tourist consumption: sensorial faculties, learning, education, active participation, acquisition and increase of knowledge, individual transformation and the creation of a sense of tribal belonging (Cova, 2003; Hetzel, 2002).

**Researching the creative potential of the itinerary**

In order to test the creative potential of the Phoenicians' Route, research has been conducted[i] to shed light on both its structural and functional aspects and above all to specify the contribution of creativity to the processes of production and development of the tourist-cultural offer. The research has been focused on two specific areas: a pilot project of the itinerary, 'Voyages of Interculturality' and the local network of the partners of the itinerary operating in the area of northwestern Sicily. The aim of the first part of the research was to detect forms of tourist creative consumption on the 'Voyages of Interculturality' and how they have been perceived by the participants. This project in fact contained several activities related to cultural development, ranging from the most traditional ones to the most creative and experiential ones. The case study selected is represented by a group of about 50 French high school students who made the trip in the month of March 2010.

The second part of the survey on the route was directed to the local network of partners operating on the region of northwestern Sicily. A representative group of stakeholders was interviewed to analyze the mechanisms that characterize the local network supporting the itinerary, and the creative dynamics and processes operating within it. In particular, this research aimed to evaluate: if participation in the network is perceived as a factor of potential growth and general improvement for individual participants and their activities; and what the contribution of creativity and of creative processes in achieving this aim is.

Direct observations of the activities that affected the itinerary were undertaken  between March and July 2010, concentrating on the main enterprises which were involved in the route in Sicily. This provided an understanding of the functional dynamics of the itinerary, especially regarding the relationship between local partners and national and international networks. These initial observations helped to orientate the following phases of the research.

A survey of tourist activities was undertaken in the pilot project 'Voyages of Interculturality' using a semi-structured questionnaire and a travel journal, containing comments and observations of the participants themselves. For the survey of the local network of partners we selected 10 key informants drawn from organizations which play a major role in the local network of the itinerary. The categories of informants were tour operators; tourism and ancillary services; museums, associations and public institutions

It was decided to select those partners that have already been actively involved in the itinerary, rather than to cover partners who still only have a formal role. In addition to the key informants selected for each category, the Director of the itinerary was also interviewed as the connecting element between all local partners.

In this exploratory study we analysed data collected from 29 questionnaires completed by participants and the comments contained in their travel journals.  The questionnaires were subject to a preliminary monovariate analysis, which was followed by the construction of a matrix of the data gathered from questionnaires. A qualitative analysis  was then carried out by means of an Aseb demi Grid Analysis. This follows the methodology adopted by Beeho and Prentice for their study of tourist experiences at New Lanark World Heritage Village (1997). A separate analysis was made for each of the four dimensions contained in the questionnaire (activities, setting, experiences, and benefits). The travel journals were analysed through a study of the contents of the text, to identify keywords and themes, particularly where these could support the themes emerging from the questionnaires.

The eleven interviews carried out with local partners were audio-recorded and transcribed, before being analysed through the following steps:

- Analysis of the contents of each interview, noting the main themes and keywords, highlighting the most significant textual references of the respondents.
- Grouping of interviews, and of the analysis gathered, by category of respondent, so as to detect the distinctive themes for each category.
- Identification of macro categories and subcategories for grouping the main themes and attributes in order to provide an overall reading of the texts.
- Overall response to the research questions.

**Creativity in the pilot project**

The comparative analysis of the two sources of information on the pilot project highlighted some predominant themes, which led to the identification of some dimensions that could

provide a measure of the creative potential of the route. These dimensions are intertwined with the activities and experiences offered during the trip, and to involvement and post-experiential reflection of the participants. These dimensions are summarized in Table 1.

Our analysis indicates that the activities included in the case study examined predominantly portray the tourist experience as creative. The perception of these experiences by the users is also characterized by experiential and creative elements. However, the structuring of the activities, and the specific targets set by individual participants tend to limit the creative scope of the project, linking it more closely with learning and training, which, compared to other possible forms of tourist creative offer, are more bound by utility and the use of specific interpretative tools.

**Table 1**: Dimensions of creativity in the pilot project

| PRODUCT OFFER (activities/experiences) | PARTICIPANTS (processes and post experiential transformations) |
|---|---|
| Experiential/emotional value (kind of perception) | Revision and learning (personal growth) |
| Multisensory stimulation/involvement of senses (perception and involvement level) | Socialization/community (community development) |
| Variety of heritage/related activities | Existential/experiential authenticity (individual and personal revision of activities and experiences commodified) |
| Kind of activity (workshops/more traditional activities) | Degree of participation in creative activities (direct/indirect) |

Nevertheless, all the aspects of creativity in tourism outlined in the literature seem to be present in the case study: a variety of heritage in the proposed activities, sensory stimulation, emotional development, perception of authenticity in the experiences, personal growth, and strengthening of the tribal sense of belonging ascribed to the community. The tourist-cultural product of the project 'Voyages of Interculturality' seems therefore to be providing creative experiences, and the experiential and creative elements of the product are perceived by participants as important values for the overall assessment of their travel experience.

**Creativity in the local partner network**

The partner interviews revealed two main themes: network and creativity, which are analysed in Table 2 (below). The analysis of the interviews shed some important light on the current state of the network, on the degree of co-operation that binds the partners, on the level of creativity expressed individually and communally in the itinerary, and above all on

the prospects of development of both the network itself and of the creativity required to implement its activities.

The local partner network of the Phoenicians' Route is in a phase of construction and growth. It needs a stronger planning and a clearer orientation in order to generate a greater degree of involvement of different types of partners, who if possible should be grouped on the basis of specific interests and of mutual inspirations of an operational nature.

**Table 2**: Main themes and categories emerging from the partner interviews

| Theme | Category | Levels of measuring (attributes) |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Network | Activity | Varieties/typologies |
| | Collaboration | Meeting frequency and modality, importance and quantity of projects carried out (intra partners and with itinerary) |
| | Communication | Knowledge of activities and projects, communication channels (intra partners and with itinerary) |
| | Integration (with other networks) | Participation in other regional projects, or national and international links (opening/closing of network) |
| | Accessibility | |
| 2) Creativity | Resources | Varieties/typology of resources involved |
| | Processes [ii] | Typologies/repeatability |
| | Tools | Typologies/repeatability |
| | Spatial dimension of creativity | Internal (of partner) External (of region) |
| | Time dimension | Explicit or current and potential (of itinerary and of network) |

The variety of partners already present reveals the complexity and richness of themes and goals present in the network. This diversity represents a strong creative potential, that should support the implementation of innovative and creative tools and methodologies, which could stimulate new uses of resources, especially those related to cultural heritage. The network seems to be capable of encouraging the dissemination of best practices which do not replace but rather complement the existing traditional offer. In order to maximise this potential, however, there is a need for greater professionalization, particularly of those actors who can support the interpretation of regional creativity, in order to support the growth of both tourism and culture.

The decisive step forward in moving from potential to actual creativity is to disseminate those practices that have already achieved good results in terms of improving the co-operation between different actors, improving the level of professionalism throughout the region, and in communicating with potential participants. Those projects that are already recognized as centres for creative and cultural development can serve as a hub for all the surrounding areas, helping to overcome recognition problems and strengthening the regional brand and communication. Such processes can support the less popular destinations in the network, shifting the axis of competitiveness and creativity to new places and new types of experience.

**The overall creative potential of the itinerary system**
The results of this research allow us to understand the functioning of the route, and the contribution of creativity to the processes necessary to develop the tourist-cultural offer. The main finding is that it is important to see the itinerary as a system which links the users of the tourist-cultural offer and the network of suppliers that develop it. (figure 1). The driving force for this system and at the same the link between users and suppliers is creativity. Despite the weak points found both in the tourist offer and in the composition and functioning of the network, which both serve to limit the creativity of the route, there is clearly creative potential which can be developed in future.

On the one hand creativity the development of the tourist-cultural offer is represented by experiences and activities that enhance the local heritage and which because of their experiential, emotional and authentic contents, permit personal growth and development, both as an individual and also as a part of a group and a community. Creativity is thus, above all a reworking of themes and suggestions received during the travel experience, which allows a greater understanding of the area, its cultural heritage, its community, and which contributes directly or indirectly to personal growth. On the other hand, creativity in the

local partners network entails the use and spread of mechanisms, procedures and resources, specific to a place that can develop links and relationships: between different agencies operating within the network, between partners and the itinerary, between partners and the region and between partners and users of the tourist-cultural offer.

Stimuli resulting from the extension of creative and innovative mechanisms within the network of partners are pursuing a variety of purposes: first, they allow different resources to be exploited (internal resources of organizations involved in the network, and resources of the entire region); second, they improve competitiveness; and third they determine the creation of products and 'creative' services in the field of tourism and cultural development, moving in line with the demand trends and requirements.

Creativity expressed by the network and by users of the 'creative' attractions of the region, exerts beneficial effects on the entire system, which is primarily the itinerary, but in a wider context encompasses the whole region in which these mechanisms operate. The benefits for the region are, in short: an enhancement of heritage and regional resources; an improvement of competitiveness and economic development  and an attenuation of the effects of commodification and cultural globalization on the resources and on the tourist offer related to local heritage.

If, within the system itinerary, creativity favours the constant regenerating of resources, operating systems and development patterns, this can allow the cultural itinerary to develop as a container and expression of cultural heritage, serving the purposes of promotion and protection, and of activating cultural and economic development through activities and projects that can bring together capital resources and entrepreneurial know-how.

From this point of view, the Phoenicians' Route has solid and concrete elements which can strengthen the tourist-cultural offer. From the point of view of the existing activities and experiences, there are models related to the new cultural tourism trends, such as the 'Voyages of Interculturality'. There are also diverse heritage resources that can provide a basis for future development and which can involve a wide range of tourism and cultural operators. Although there is a need for a greater connection between actors and for greater professionalism and more rigorous methodologies for implementation, the commitment and the common goals seem sufficient to support future growth of the route.

## Conclusions

This research on the Phoenicians' Route tries to clarify some aspects of the contemporary development of cultural tourism. The survey of itinerary participants and the review of the characteristics of the local partnership provide an overview of the potential of the route, not

only as a basis for creative expression, but also as a potential stimulus for growth and entrepreneurial, economic and cultural activity for the region as a whole.

The tourist project of the route has many of the elements that mark a tourist experience as being creative, and this perception is widely shared by users. Although this is a project with clear educational and formative implications, and has a less active level of participation compared to other forms of creative tourism, the creative possibilities of activities related to the promotion of a diversified heritage, and to the growth of the person as individual and as a part of a community and strengthen its experiential component. Table 4 shows a summary of the main benefits.

**Table four:** Summary of benefits
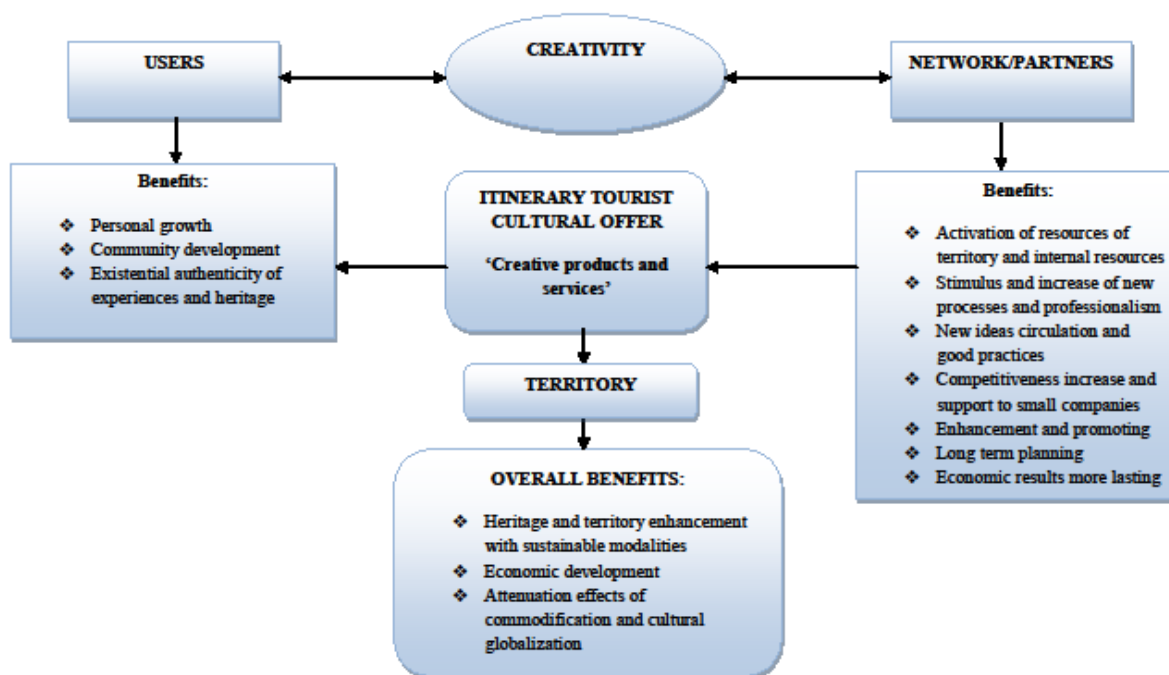


Creativity expressed by the local partners network consists of those resources, embedded in or inspired by the region, that stimulate processes, ideas and projects able to act positively for individual participants and for the network as a whole, for the itinerary and for the entire region. Creativity, especially in the case of the local network, can help develop those mechanisms of collaboration, communication and sharing of goals and planning which appear to be lacking and which are required in order to build a stronger partnership.

Although the project has to date achieved relatively limited results in terms of visitor numbers or wider effects underline the fact that creativity is not an absolute remedy that can solve

problems of structural, infrastructural, economic or cultural nature which may result from inadequate tourist planning. But creativity is certainly a resource that can strengthen, diversify and enrich the tourist planning process by linking the desires, demands and needs of both consumers and producers. To create forms of tourist creative production and consumption means offering traditional heritage resources in new terms, bringing in new ideas, new ways of interpreting heritage and place through experiential strategies that go beyond the moment of consumption and which can provide links to all the creative resources put into play. This contact is what facilitates growth, transformation and development, not only of participants, but also of those who work in planning and implementation of experiences. In this sense, creativity acts as a stimulus for the improvement of all the different components of the itinerary and encourages higher standards of efficiency, which can also be applied in other contexts.

Although the limits of these new forms of cultural tourism are evident, and although there are many challenges in the creative proposals of the itinerary, these can also be recognized as possibilities for future development. Above all the cultural itinerary can make a major contribution to coordinated development strategies that can act to promote and conserve the cultural heritage it represents.

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**Author details: Eliana Messineo**, Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche Aziendali e Finanziarie, Università degli Studi di Palermo
Edificio 13, Viale delle Scienze, 90128 Palermo, Italia.
Phone: +393283016849
**E-Mail** : eliana.messineo@libero.it