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# Analyzing cultural routes from a multidimensional perspective

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to examine cultural routes from a multidimensional and hence a multidisciplinary perspective. Economic impacts and geographical sides are the most studied aspects. We want to show that cultural routes are also a form of cultural consumption and a form of experience. Considering the cultural routes under these different angles allow us to broaden the debate and to show that beyond the geographical and / or economic aspects, cultural itineraries the cultural routes constitutes then a new concept, which leads to a new kind of heritage, and thus respond to new tourists' expectations, more experiential.

Keywords: Cultural itineraries, Cultural consumption, Experiential consumption

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## 1. Introduction

Cultural routes and itineraries are a relatively recent cultural phenomenon that led to the emergence of a new type of heritage. They are not ends in themselves; they are both a geographical journey through a territory and therefore through plural local identities, but also a mental journey with representative values, meanings, expectations, experiences, and finally a tourism product. This meta system gathers different territorial systems.
The current context is marked by the evolution of the concept of heritage and conservation to a broader concept that defines wealth as the outcome of many different influences that give its meaning. Through the interpretation and transmission, cultural expressions and traditions have gained recognition thanks to UNESCO (2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage). Heritage becomes a resource, and an engine of regional development together with its underlying cultural diversity.
The definition of the itineraries and cultural routes makes the object of a vast scientific and professional debate within various international authorities, in particular the International Committee on Cultural Routes (CIIC) and the European Institute of Cultural Itineraries. Cultural routes defined by the international scientific CIIC-ICOMOS Committee in its draft of international charter on cultural routes, is the following :

> *"Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and historic functionality, which must fulfill the following conditions: It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge and values between peoples, countries, regions or continents over significant periods of time. It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage".*

The defining elements for cultural routes stated by CIIC_ICOMOS are: context, content, cross-cultural significance as a whole and dynamic character of cultural routes. Where context refers to natural setting, content refers to tangible elements that bear witness to its cultural heritage and provide a physical confirmation of its existence and cross cultural significance implies a value as a whole which is greater than the sum of its parts and gives the route its meaning. For Murray and Graham (1997:514) route-based tourism, and moreover cultural routes, operates at a variety of spatial scales and diverse cultural contexts. They are much more than just roads with signage promoted to visitors. They emphasize the heterogeneous nature of this particular tourist product. Cultural routes are both tourism products and methods (Puczkol and Ratz 2003: 411).
The aim of this paper is therefore to present cultural itineraries from a multidimensional perspective. We will first present cultural itineraries from the spatial scale perspective, the most often studied. Then we will emphasize the cultural consumption aspects of cultural routes. And then we will explain why consuming cultural routes is in fact a way of consuming experience.

## 2. Cultural itineraries from the spatial scale perspective

For Csapó and Berki (2008:3) the first key factor of a thematic route is the area's attractions structure:

> *"The development of the attraction structure depends on the external and internal factors. The features of the geographical–natural–social–economic–infrastructural–environment effects basically affect the appearance and structure of the tourism attractions."*

Thematic routes are then attached to attractions organically tied to the geographical space. They emphasize the uniqueness and individuality derived from the geographical space by connecting attractions with similar characteristics. This category launches the model of a new type of heritage. The cultural route also illustrates the contemporary design of the values of heritage for the private and public sector stakeholder organizations as a resource of a sustainable social and economic development.

For Weaver 1995, tourism routes, and more especially heritage trail, can assist in environmental conservation and visitor management, and then contribute to an economic development (Strauss and Lord 2001). Cultural routes can then be used as a development tool for marginal or rural areas as they can help to stimulate economic activity and to bring tourists into these areas.

Morgan, Lambe and Freyer (2009) suggest three strategies rural communities use to promote economic growth. The three approaches include place-based development, economic gardening and cultivating creativity. Furthermore, tourist routes are also based on the principle of collaboration. Collaboration can make a contribution to reaching the aim of sustainability, primarily through its integrative approach. In order to implement successful sustainable tourism, a wide range of tourism stakeholders need to be included, hence cooperation provides an ideal basis to do so.

Briedenhann and Wickens (2004:72) argue that:

> *"The clustering of activities and attractions, in less developed areas, stimulates cooperation and partnerships between communities in local and neighbouring regions and serves as a vehicle for the stimulation of economic development through Tourism."*

Moreover the fragmented and diverse nature of the tourism industry is frequently a barrier to the adoption of sustainable practices and as cooperation can help to overcome this fragmentation, it can also help to spread sustainable practices. For Mitchell and Hall (2005:5):

> *"The very essence of rural tourism is local cooperation and community involvement through appropriate forms of networking, arguably one of the most important requirements for the sustainability of rural tourism".*

Based on Meyer 2004, the central element for successful route development

> *"is the formation of co-operative networks among a multitude of often very diverse tourism suppliers".*

We can then underline the benefits that tourist routes can bring (Meyer page14):

- Attraction of new tourists and repeat visitors;
- Diffusion of visitors and dispersion of income from tourism, hence more even distribution of economic benefits;
- Increase of length of stay and expenditure by tourists;
- Bringing lesser known attractions and features into the tourism business/product regions, states and countries;
- Tying up several attractions that would independently not have the potential to entice visitors to spend time and money;
- Enable a more integrated product development and marketing approach;
- The achieved synergies promise greater pulling power;
- Increase of the overall appeal of a destination;
- Increase the sustainability of a tourism product;
- Management of carrying capacity is facilitated due to dispersion of tourists;
- Negative environmental impacts are reduced due to dispersion of tourists.

In this context, the concept of cultural route appears to be complex and multidimensional. It introduces and represents a qualitative contribution to the notion of heritage (both cultural and natural) and its preservation. A cultural route can be expressed on a theoretical plane defined by the spatial axis and the temporal axis as a geographical representation of the continuity based upon the dynamics of movement or the concept of exchange; on the other hand, the actual size and density of tangible and intangible elements of the property that remain physically, vary from case to case as well as the degree to which their authenticity can be verified. In addition, among cultural routes, there will be many examples that spatially expand on extremely large scales ranging from the regional level to international, multi-national and even intercontinental levels. The setting in network of the territories is thus the principal force of cultural routes. The route is segmented in sub-networks and networks of sites having a common coherence. The search of this common coherence and this continuity is very significant in terms of image and visibility for the destination. Cultural tourism is not limited to a series of visits of sites.

As a new approach to the cultural itinerary concept, the Council of Europe is developing a 'Cultural Corridor' scheme, initially in South East Europe. The Council of Europe (2006) defines Cultural Corridors as:

> *"Networks of interaction and economic exchange based on culture and creativity, incorporating principles of sustainability, fairness and inclusion, based on wide stakeholder partnerships which are rooted in solid institutional frameworks that stimulate regional socio-economic development."*

The basic idea is to create networks which move beyond physical routes linking cultural sites to include the full range of creative assets in a region (Richards, Russo and Grossman 2008). Links and corridors imply "multi-destination itineraries" and can be defined by a tourist visiting during a trip a sequence of regions across one or more countries. This requires co-operative strategies among the considered regions. In its ultimate form, "multi-destination tourism" would involve tourists of many regions, in our case the Mediterranean regions of the "Phoenicians' Route". Destinations often view their neighboring destinations as competitors, and too much competition among destinations within a region weakens the regional tourism development (Naipaul and al. 2009:462). In a case of multi destination tourism, the competition gives way to cooperation, and cultural corridors allows destinations to collaborate in marketing their destinations.

Tourism corridor and cultural corridors are a specific approach to tourism that offers travellers the opportunity to visit a variety of both built and natural attraction (as cultural landscape) along a themed route. Cultural corridors fall into two categories, those that provide a link between a number of major and minor destinations to form a cultural itinerary and those where the corridor becomes the destination and focus of tourist activity.

All the visitors have common waiting : to discover and feel the identity of a territory built on an image, a topic, a history, myths…. The increasing integration of culture as a basic element in the tourism consumption is an innovation in itself. This represents for many authors the sign of a new kind of tourism. In this regard, these tourists appear to be motivated by special interest, less oriented toward package tours, but searching for experiences and sensation seeking. This paper will then attempt to clarify the concept of cultural itineraries as a form of cultural consumption.

**3. Cultural itineraries from a cultural consumption perspective**

In words of Murray and Graham (1997:514):

> *"Whatever the scale, the essence of itineraries is that they combine cultural consumption with points of sale and are inextricably linked-as with all heritage tourism- to a continuous re-imaging of place and culture that draws inspiration from nostalgia, memory and traditions".*

Cultural itineraries respond to the needs of the tourist by providing the links among disparate experiences for a more comprehensive visitor experience. By thus, the phenomenon is also referred to a holistic destination approach, based on cultural consumption. It also means that these consumption objects are consumed not only for what they do but also for what they communicate and mean to oneself and one's surroundings, and hence they become part of consumers' identity formation processes. Therefore tourist consumption choices cannot be understood without considering the cultural context in which they are made. We can define that particular context:

> *"That is, when consumption in a product category is characterized by intense positive emotional experience, this experience will tend to have the effect of making the tastes that exist during this experience into enduring preferences."* Schindler and Holbrook (2003:279).

We must take into account the emotional component of the consumer-object interaction. Scholar suggests that "emotion" includes aspects of arousal and felt experience as well as investment or degree of emotional attachment. Consumption objects can thus be arrayed along a continuum of generalized emotional response that ranges from low to high intensity. Furthermore, Holt (1995:1) suggests:

> *"The act of consuming is a varied and effortful accomplishment underdetermined by the characteristics of the object. A given consumption object… is typically consumed in a variety of ways by different groups of consumers."*

This precisely is the case also for cultural tourism, which is in fact used and consumed differently by different tourists. By means of the products they purchase, tourists state a lifestyle and make a demonstration of taste or ownership of a given cultural and symbolic capital. Cultural itineraries become components of an experience and the act of purchasing them is the way of accessing it. For Hayes and MacLeod (2007:49),

> *"Visitors' experience of place is much enhanced by the linking of formal tourism products (e.g. museums, historic houses, visitor centers) with informal products such as open-air markets, cafes and pubs, which convey a vivid sense of local culture. Trails would seem to be an ideal way of linking these two types of visitor attraction to create a more holistic experience of place."*

The competitive arena for tourism in the future will be centered on a network of companies that will offer innovative solutions together with the customers (co-creation) (Pralahad and Ramaswamy 2004).They argue that the actual value to meaningful experiences lies in the customers` experiences within the context of a specific event (p. 52) and for the 'co-creation experience' as a basis for value and as the future of innovation, e.g., the 'next practice' experience economy. The firm and the consumer are increasingly creating value through personalized experiences that are unique to each individual consumer. The co-created experience becomes the very basis of value. They define co-creation as:

> *"Engaging customers as active participants in the consumption experience, with the various points of interaction being the locus of co-creation of value"* (Pralahad and Ramaswamy 2004:16).

Co-creation should not be seen as outsourcing or as the minimum adaptation of goods or products as if it were tailor made. Consumers want much more. There is a need for the creation of meaningful and specific value for individual consumers through personal interaction with the company. Dimensions of the experience are produced in part by the visitor themselves through their personal thoughts, feelings, imaginations and the unique backgrounds that visitors bring with them to the leisure setting. By encouraging visitors to co-create their service experience, the aspects that they individually value are likely to be incorporated into the experience, making it unique and personal to each individual visitor. In our context, the experience of place seems to be the core of cultural itineraries. For us, cultural itineraries are a kind of new space for discovery, relations and feelings, and thus an innovative tool. They integrate both physical and immaterial heritage to the experience and emotion production system.

**4. Cultural itineraries from an experience perspective**

The integration of culture as a basic element in tourism consumption is a change that represents, for many authors, the sign of a "new tourism", different in quality and quantity from cultural tourism. We must distinguish the patrimonial tourist who visits a country, to learn other cultures, to increase his/her knowledge. In the majority of cases, this process is passive and is limited to the visit of archeological sites, monuments and museums, to take part in festivals… To a tourist it's just sightseeing unless interpretation ,it does not encourage them to be expressed, and these tourists are simple consumers of sites, in other words, observers (Ryan 2002, p.61).

The tourist wants to dissociate himself, by love of discovered and especially wants "to be". It is a person who preaches comprehension and appreciates the cultural activities, physical and sporting ones. Consequently the traditional cognitive designs are not suitable any more. Experiential tourism is therefore driven by factors emanating from the sphere of consumption and from the production side. These include the increasingly skilled nature of consumption, the growing importance of experiences and the greater role for intangible and everyday culture in tourism. The development of skills through consumption is also linked with a high level of involvement and absorption in the experience, which has resonance with the ideas of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982).The notion of experience entered the field of consumption with Holbrook and Hirschman's pioneering article of 1982 regarding the experiential aspects of consumption, since then the conceptualization of consumption experience has gained more attention (Carù & Cova, 2003).

This new frame offers much more stimulating experiences as well as enabling the participants to develop themselves through those experiences (Arnould and al., 2002). These seminal works lead to a stream known as 'experiential economy' (Pine and Gilmore, 1999) and thus to a new kind of marketing (Schmitt, 1999, Hetzel, 2002) known as experiential.

In this context, and according to Holt (1995:2), we consume in at least four ways: as an experience, consuming underlies then emotional subjective reactions; as integration, it describes how consumers acquire and manipulate object meanings; as classification: the object we consume classify its consumers; consuming as play: how people use consumption to develop relationship.

In the same logic, Carù and Cova (2002 and 2003) define the concept of experience like 'something extremely significant and unforgettable for the consumer immersed into the experience' (Carù and Cova, 2003: 273).Within the meaning of Hetzel (2002) the experience is under these conditions known as optimal. The consumption experience is spread thus over a period of time which can break up into four great stages (Arnould and al, 2002): the anticipation which consists to seek, plan, dream the experience; the experience of purchasing which concerns the choice, the payment, the meeting of service and environment; the

experience itself which includes the feeling, satiety, satisfaction/dissatisfaction, flow; the remembering memories and nostalgia...
Desmet and Hekkert (2007) define product experience as

> *"the entire set of affects that is elicited by the interaction between a user and a product, including the degree to which all our senses are gratified (aesthetic experience), the meanings we attach to the product (experience of meaning) and the feelings and emotions that are elicited (emotional experience)."*

Desmet (2002) introduced a basic model of product emotions; it applies to all possible emotional responses elicited by human-product interaction and identifies the three universal key variables in the process of emotion elicitation: concern, stimulus, and appraisal.
The work of Csikszentmihalyi shows that experiential marketing will then have to create experiences of consumption with strong added value, based on the following criteria: the feeling, the emotional one, facility of use, the physical relation with the object, life style, social identity. Schmitt (1999) and then Holbrook (2000) distinguish multiple supports to the production of experience. According to Holbrook the consumption experience will be built starting from the four following concepts:

**Table 1: Components of the experience production**
**(Source: inspired from Holbrook (2000:180) ).**

| Experience | Entertainment | Exhibitionism | Evangelism |
|---|---|---|---|
| Escape from reality | Esthetics | To carry to the naked ones | To educate |
| Emotion | Excitation | To express | To give the example |
| Pleasure | Rupture | To discover | To guarantee |

What the tourist is seeking in these local places is more contact with real people and engagement with the local culture and creative practices. The postmodern search for identity, meaning and 'roots' impels many to seek experiences which give them the opportunity to interact with local communities, learning more about what makes them tick and how they relate to the world.

Most researches have studied cultural itineraries from a spatial scale perspective (iconography of a region, impacts on spatial and economic development, or sustainability). On the other hand, cultural itineraries have been seen as a tool of diversifying tourism product, and as a way of distinguishing places. In the actual context of competitiveness, destinations seek to develop their uniqueness through in particular, cultural itineraries. By following similar strategies, it ends up making those places look like the same, what is called 'serial production'. Clearly new types of tourism products are needed, experiential ones. This aspect of cultural itineraries has been neglected. Cultural itineraries lead to a specific consumption, cultural in nature and can contribute to a deeper sense of place and community by the experience. Experience seduces consumers into believing that they learn more than is actually so. Experience is more engaging than most attempts at education, both more vivid and intentional, and consequently more memorable. In this context, cultural routes represent a new approach in the currently evolving and quickly expanding process that affects the cultural heritage, and cultural routes offer new perspectives and tools for preserving cultural heritage. Over time, the notion of "monument" - originally seen as an artefact in isolation from its context - has gradually evolved and expanded with the recognition that a historic site or historic ensembles can be considered as cultural heritage properties. In this context, cultural routes introduce and represent a new approach to the notion of conservation of the cultural heritage. Cultural heritage and moreover the intercultural links are a dynamic, interactive evolving process, the cultural routes constitutes

then a new concept approaching the heritage from a multidimensional perspective, by revealing the heritage content of a specific phenomenon, human mobility and exchange through communication routes. The cultural itinerary is conceived both as a contemporary use of the past, where the use of what is past, present and future is linked to the mass culture according to different experiences and transformations, in a sustainable way for the local communities.

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