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The Phoenician Cultural Route as a Framework for Intercultural Dialogue in Today's Mediterranean: a Focus on Malta

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines how the Phoenicians' Route acts as a framework for intercultural dialogue in today's Mediterranean. Particular reference is made to tourism in the region, with a focus on Malta. The paper refers to recent aspects of the route's development in the field of intangible heritage. It focuses on those elements of intangible heritage that accompany, reveal and highlight the social relevance of heritage by highlighting the appreciation accorded by Mediterranean communities to artefacts, sites and monuments that are part of the route. It emphasises the educational and social elements of the actions supported by the route in relation to intercultural dialogue, looking at how this practice relates to other cultural manifestations.

This paper pays special attention to the inter-relation between tourism activities and cultural expression in Malta, a recent member of the route. Furthermore, special attention is given to the annual Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival, in order to study the way the approach towards research about the Phoenicians supported by the route is applied in the framework of the Festival. The paper notes how the Festival links past and present by seeking inspiration from historical episodes of intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean and applying them to the contemporary needs of artistic, cultural, political and social exchange within the Mediterranean space.

Keywords: Cultural Routes; Intercultural Dialogue; Malta; Mediterranean; The Phoenicians' Route

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Introduction

In the geopolitical context encompassing local as well as regional and international dimensions, this paper provides a modest yet novel contribution to the analysis of the dynamics inspiring intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean basin. It will do this by focusing on the inter-relation between educational, social and tourism activities and cultural manifestations in Malta, recent member of the Phoenicians' Route.

The relevance of culture to tourism in conjunction with the development of intercultural dialogue has become a key element in research into the Mediterranean reality. Cultural tourism is in turn assessed in terms of its sustainability and its growth in importance is reflected in increased scholarship. The Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe act as an instance of cultural tourism practiced in a sustainable and intercultural form (Innocenti, 2018, p. 76).

Cultural routes are particular tourism products. They tend to connect individual sites to one another in order to make more accessible a particular heritage theme. They can differ in scale and the theme of their cultural heritage (Timothy, 2017). They play an important economic role (Timothy and Boyd 2014), as well as a social one by enabling a sustainable form of tourism and development (Council of Europe, 2011; Mansfeld, 2015).

The Council of Europe describes a cultural route as a:

(...) cultural, educational heritage and tourism cooperation project aiming at the development and promotion of an itinerary or a series of itineraries based on a historic route, a cultural concept, figure or phenomenon with a transnational importance and significance for the understanding and respect of common European values (Council of Europe, 2013).

Cultural routes carry significant economic and social impacts on those communities involved in this vehicle of commercial exchange and intercultural dialogue. Cultural routes may encourage community participation in cultural activities and higher levels of engagement with cultural heritage and processes of intercultural dialogue (Council of Europe, 2011). The European Commission stresses the role of cross-border routes in the tourism sector with respect to social solidarity and economics (European Commission, 2010).

By 2005, UNESCO identified cultural routes as one of the four heritage categories for the classification of World Heritage Sites, further raising their profile. In 2008, ICOMOS published its Charter of Cultural Routes. This text outlined the evolution of the concept of cultural assets and the values belonging to their setting, and set clear foundations for cultural routes. The charter also established codes of conservation and management for cultural routes (Durusoy, 2016, p. 115).

The Phoenicians' Route is a cultural tourism network of excellence certified as a Cultural Route by the Council of Europe. The framework of this paper is provided by a reflection on how the route acts as a structure for intercultural dialogue in today's Mediterranean region. It addresses this area of study with reference to recent aspects

of the route's development in the field of intangible heritage and its impact on tourism. The main preoccupation of the paper is with those elements of intangible heritage that are related to the social import of heritage by spotlighting the significance accorded by Mediterranean communities to artefacts, sites and monuments that form part of the Route, while engaging with the tourism sector.

The Phoenicians' Route is a not for profit association established in 2004 as the guarantor of the European Cultural Route celebrating the Phoenicians' influence on Mediterranean and European heritage. It manages relations with international, European, national and regional institutions interested in joining the route and with the Council of Europe, the European Institute of Cultural Routes and the Secretary of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Cultural Routes. It acts as the reference organisation of the route and supports the activities of the members in the fields of education, intercultural dialogue and tourism. It prioritises the spread of knowledge of the culture and history of the ancient Mediterranean civilizations with the purpose of promoting Mediterranean interculturality and initiatives that can contribute to the nurturing of a common European and Mediterranean identity.

Since 2016 the route has been supported by the World Tourism Organization through an ad-hoc Core Working Group. The route presents itself as a route of intercultural dialogue and includes ten countries. It abets a cross cultural model that seeks to strengthen bonds between different people. It follows the methodology of heritage pedagogy, encouraging an approach that is integrated and responsible in its management of cultural tourism in collaboration with public and private institutions at local, national, regional and international levels. The route abides by the Council of Europe's European Landscape Convention (Florence, 2000) and the European Convention on the Role of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro, 2005).

The scientific committee and the steering committee of the organisation are composed by international experts in various cultural fields. The committees work closely with the International Organisation of Social Tourism, the Observatory on Tourism in the European Islands and the International University Network of the Route.

1. Intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean

A number of studies have focused on the topic of intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean context.[1] This paper does not assume that dialogue in the Mediterranean takes place between partners that are not on an equal footing.[2] Imbalances between the so-called North and South, and among actors of cultural and political import of shared geo-social territories, be they Western European, Balkan, Asian, Middle Eastern, Mashreqi or Maghrebi, need to be acknowledged. As this research aims to show, it is difficult to distinguish between where one influence starts and stops *vis a vis* local cultural relations, production and expression. The pervasiveness of this influence runs across all levels of society, including business sector, education, tourism, pop culture, design and eating habits. An observation of this pervasiveness has lead the authors to engage in an assessment of cultural trends within this wide perspective. This approach includes the acknowledgment of the

growing significant commercial role played by markets in the Arabian peninsula and China, of late outweighing traditional American interests.

The Phoenicians' Route cuts across different territories in the Mediterranean and brings together different institutional contexts. These include official authorities of local government and the academic level as is the case in Italy, Croatia, Spain and Lebanon. These members are able to share experiences and best practices between one another as well as with civil society organisations. For the purpose of this paper it is interesting to note that among route members non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are relatively few when compared to national and regional authorities.

1.1 Intercultural dialogue in a migratory Mediterranean

In terms of rhetoric, a recent papal address on the value of cultural routes was striking in the succinct way with which Pope Francis linked the cultural and tourism dimensions of such exercises thereby underlining their potential for dialogue and peace.[3] This renewed research of a system supporting the positive management of international relations through culture seems to lie in reaction to the equally persistent, yet arguably louder and more pervasive, rhetoric of conflict.[4] One main way of distinguishing and dividing people is a nationalistic approach towards culture. Stuart Hall points out that:

 [i]nstead of thinking of national cultures as unified, we should think of them as a discursive device which represents difference as unity or identity. They are cross-cut by deep internal divisions and differences, and "unified" only through the exercise of different forms of cultural power (Barker, 2003 p. 253).

Indeed, a growing number of migrants travelling to Europe since the 1990s have developed a different pattern to the pattern of their predecessors. Many earlier migrants travelled to the homeland of the coloniser or close to the "imperial centre" (Robins, 2006, p. 25). Recent migrants try to travel to countries where their chances of being accepted may be higher, leading to patterns that are far more arbitrary. This has resulted in a "more random logic of migration" accompanied by a 'relatively wide distribution of particular groups' across Europe (2006, p. 25). In turn, this has brought about a "new kind of dispersed and cross-border migration pattern" leading to migration flows, connections and networks that are significantly flexible and diverse (2006, p. 25). Furthermore, improvements in communication technology have made building or maintaining relationships across most borders cheaper and easier, and have been identified as being crucial in facilitating this phenomenon. In the case of Malta, the focus of this paper, one may speak of a (i) microcosm within the Mediterranean context, itself a (ii) regional reality in a (iii) global context.[5]

1.2 Un-commonality in the common sea

The Mediterranean remains a challenging concept to engage with. This is partly because of its complex nature. However, this is also true because of the various inter-related layers of interpretation to which the Mediterranean has been subject.

Cultural expression in the Mediterranean basin consists of various elements, not easily reconcilable and often producing conflicting interpretations.

Various writers on the Mediterranean have qualified this space as a constructed reality. Iain Chambers describes the Mediterranean as an imaginatively constructed reality in light of writings by Edward Said particularly with regard to Orientalism and the self-referential construct based on the paradigm of domination by the North of the South he describes. Both writers' portrayal of cultural expression in the Mediterranean are of a fundamental importance to generate a thorough understanding of existing discourse and producing a vision for the future which is comprehensive (Chambers, 2004). Other writers, like Michelle Pace, aim to "conceptualize the social construction of this area (as a holistic 'region') and the underlying assumptions of such imaginings" (Pace, 2006, p. 2). Pace's approach is interesting and promising since this conceptualisation may be a theoretical exercise as well as a means to lead to the development of a method which allows action and a framework for work. Key to Pace's endeavor is the question of whether the Mediterranean is a region or a meeting of regions. Concluding that neither view is satisfactory, she momentarily puts the concept of regions to one side and locates the core of her research in the concept of identity, thereby noting that the Mediterranean brings together several identities which also overlap. The relationship between the Mediterranean and the identities which contribute to its make up is a dynamic one. From this perspective, the construction of the Mediterranean is a continuous process, developing on the basis of a set of identities which are themselves in the making thanks to different discourses and perspectives. Returning to the regions, Pace notes that their relationship with the Mediterranean too is a dynamic one, since 'regions are themselves products of processes of identity construction' and '[r]egions are not natural entities but rather social constructs' (2006, p. 4). However, the difficulty in applying theory to practice is tied to the complexity of the constructs themselves. From a regional sub-level to the larger Mediterranean regional dimension, one of the main challenges lies in reconciling the differences between European territories both within the European Union (EU) and outside, particularly the Balkan states, Turkey, the Middle Eastern Arab countries and Israel, and North Africa.

1.3 The Mediterranean construct as a conflictual entity

Vazquez Montalban and Gonzalez Calleja provide a series of reference points regarding how the Mediterranean region became a homogenous entity. While not engaging in an argument for the assimilation of a Mediterranean identity through a simplification of various identities, the examples given are well-known and widely referred to as fundamental in developing an identifiable Mediterranean construct. There are:

i. historical and political factors, with a few highlights such as the Mediterranean being shaped into a Roman lake (280 BC – 300 AD), defined as an Ottoman territory (circa 1500 AD), and bearing the domination of Great Britain and France with particular interest lying in the links it provided to Asia and particularly India (1800 - 1850);

ii. cultural factors, that allow for a reflection on the common spaces generated through trade and communication and the ways these contributed to the Mediterranean's diverse constitution; and

iii. ideological and idealising factors, with contrasting features that can be nevertheless generalised. These include the fear of others on the one hand, and the awareness that the Mediterranean is in itself a place of passage and others in the form of travellers or visitors, therefore threatening but also full of potential. The authors note that during the Renaissance (1400 – 1560) the Mediterranean re-draws itself along Greco-Latin lines, thus generating a stage of idealisation and selectivity. Orientalism contributed to another stage in idealising the Mediterranean, not innocent of supporting plans and actions of domination through knowledge and representation. In this particular period in history, expressions of art and exploits of science are not unrelated to achieving imperialistic aims (Vazquez Montalban and Gonzalez Calleja, 2000, p. 9).

These representations, that contribute towards the development of unitary constructs of the Mediterranean, harbour within them elements of a split and divided space. In spite of the holistic vision of the Mediterranean emanating from Braudel (1995), one may argue this may have been partial and exclusive and, like other interpretations maybelieve they are building a vision on the basis of total or near-total inclusivity.[6] It is important to note that in this early modern re-appraisal Braudel constructed, he considered Islam as anti-West and as a Mediterranean unto itself extended by the desert.

Braudel's contact with Henri Pirenne is fundamental to the way both men developed their thinking about the Mediterranean. Braudel met with Pirenne in Algiers in 1930. Pirenne's vision of the Mediterranean is already found in the early editions of *Les Annales* (1929 – 1935). Pirenne believed the Islamic presence in the Mediterranean cut off the earlier communication maintained up till the Byzantine Empire. In *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (1935), the vision becomes sharper. According to Pirenne: "l'arrivée de l'Islam a eu pour conséquence de séparer définitivement l'orient de l'occident, en mettant fin à l'unité méditerranéenne". For him, this division has dire consequences. Referring to the tenth and eleventh centuries, Pirenne notes that: "Le Méditerranée occidentale, devenue un lac musulman, cesse d'être la voie des échanges et des idées qu'elle n'avait cessé d'être jusqu'alors".

According to Pirenne, following the rupture in trade and communication in the Mediterranean, the main historical developments of the Mediterranean shift north (*Ministère des Affaires étrangères et Européennes de la France,* 2008, p. 45).

Chambers outlines the main theses arguing for division as well as unity in the Mediterranean, and which abound in historical theses including Pirenne's and Braudel's. Thus:

i. he notes Pirenne's thesis of Mediterranean division due to the spread of Islam in the 7th century A.D;
ii. he refers to the counter-thesis of the reuniting of the Mediterranean thanks to the Arab spread;
iii. he notes the falling behind of the Muslim/Arab world which falls on the wayside of European progress (Chambers, 2008, p. 147).

Jean-Louis Triaud follows Pirenne's lead by noting that while the Islamic forces accomplished "la seule fonction historique qui lui est reconnue", Europe develops northwards, while Islamic lands stagnated (Fabre and Izzo 2002, p. 109).

A related yet different construction of Mediterranean unity is provided by the contemporary writer Predrag Matvejević (1987)[7]. One main difference between Braudel and Matvejević lies in the way one approaches the Mediterranean holistically while the other opens it up for what it is, reflecting a 'differentiated vision' of the Mediterranean. This construct includes negative elements, as the Balkan writer perceives the Mediterranean as being dominated by interpretations of its past over visions of its future, and bearing representations of its reality which are mixed up with what is real. It is important to note that, as the Mediterranean basin and the discourse on the Mediterranean are inseparable, narratives about the Mediterranean have sometimes been damaging to the Mediterranean in terms of the rhetoric used which has served ulterior and negative motives (Stillo, 2010, p. 23).

1.4 Conflict and cooperation

Paul Balta notes that history books and memory tend to be selective and stress the occurrence of conflict before that of cooperation. He notes that exchange has never been lacking and that exchange itself is never shameful or to be condemned – rather, it is the 'terms of exchange' which can be so. Balta also notes that conflict has never stopped the exchange from taking place:

Dans cette mer presque fermée, berceau des trois religions monothéistes révélées et foyer de multiples civilisations, les conflits – qui ont l'âpreté des querelles de famille et se règlent comme elles – n'ont jamais empêché durablement navigateurs, commerçants et hommes de science de circuler (Balta, 1992, p. 21).

Balta points out that the islands in the Mediterranean ''sont le point focal de ce double mouvement d'affrontements et de rencontres.'' For example, with regard to Malta he notes: ''Libérée des Arabes, Malte la catholique a repoussé miraculeusement l'assaut des Ottomans, mais elle a adopté comme langue nationale un dialecte arabe que les vicissitudes de l'histoire ont truffé de mots italiens et anglais'' (1992, p.15). Also from a French Mediterraneanist perspective, Edgard Pisani raises a fundamental question about the space's present and future: he asks whether the Mediterranean is a dividing place or a common basin and whether its populations will keep fighting themselves or try to complement and complete one another. In a strong image, the Mediterranean is envisioned as surrounded by a circle of fire and blood (Fabre and Izzo, 2002, p. 131).

2. The Mediterranean as a project

While Balta claims that a homogenous Mediterranean does not exist, Fabre goes further and asserts that the Mediterranean itself does not exist. This powerful claim allows the author to identify the need to invent one. Fabre envisions a Mediterranean that goes beyond the conflicts that it serves as a frame to, hosts and is the reason for.

Fabre notes that the peoples of the Mediterranean need such a space; therefore, such a Mediterranean needs to be invented. In today's Mediterranean, a number of initiatives or engagements may be assessed from the perspective of a project, as is the case with the Phoenicians' Route. The use of the term 'project' implies motivation, purpose, planning, a beginning and an end in terms of accomplishing the aims set.

One may contrast initiatives of domination over the Mediterranean with perspectives of actions that thrived on exchange. Arguably, historical references to a prosperous Mediterranean based on tolerance, curiosity and intercultural dialogue do not outweigh those to imperial dominance and colonisation. On the one hand, examples of the former interpretation may be limited, with the Phoenicians' activity related to the medieval periods of Al Andalus and the Norman era in Sicily, particularly that led by Frederick II *stupor mundi*. On the other, instances of the latter picture abound, ranging from Roman conquest to the Napoleonic incursion and exploration of Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century (1798 - 99).

Indeed, one of the projects which has had most impact on the peoples of the Mediterranean is the French expedition to Egypt at the end of the eighteenth century that led to the compilation of what became known as the *Description de l'Egypte* (1809 - 1822). Authors perceive and describe this as an event of great significance for Europe which was then in the process of discovering its modernity also in relation to what it would term the 'Orient'. At the same time, Egypt and other territories of the Ottoman Empire were discovering new facets of European ways of life which included the technological and scientific means that allowed for development, influence and dominance. The impact still has repercussions on relations today, and at a distance of more than two hundred years is perceived as a line of demarcation between the pre-modern and modern eras in the Middle East in particular and Arab countries more generally and an ongoing source of discussions related to development and progress which go with it (Laurens, 2004, p. 41). In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said identifies many of the elaborations of the way the West has interpreted and typecast the 'oriental' in this historical and cultural context.

Chambers refers to Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition to Egypt in 1798 - 99 by noting that this enterprise has woven a history where ''modern, 'progressive' Europe has taken possession of the rest of the world.'' This episode has great relevance for the study of contemporary cultural relations since it still provides a reference point for people on both the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean in terms of a coming together of different cultures and ways of living that was complex for all those involved. He argues that the encounter was not neutral, but rather skewed in favour of the West, and led to a variety of repercussions for the East. At the end of the eighteenth century, the Mediterranean, thus depicted, is an aesthetic and cultural backwater, a "lost world of antiquity, uncontaminated nature, and pristine 'origins'. The Mediterranean was thus 'safely consigned to the margins of modernity." Chambers also notes that the subsequent nineteenth century view of the Mediterranean was dominated by a ''Greco- Roman figuration'' of a *mare nostrum* linked to a Latinised ancestry, a European past and leading to an ''increasingly disciplined colonial project.'' Therefore, the study of archaeology, anthropology, and historiography connected the Mediterranean to Europe and depicted it ''as an integral part of Europe' in a 'deliberate act of recovery and resurrection'' (Chambers, 2004, p. 424).

2.1 The contribution of the Phoenicians' Route to intercultural dialogue

In contemporary terms, European organisations are aware of the culturally and econmically profitable links between the Mediterranean region's past and current tourism practice. In its official documentation addresseing innovative approaches to urban and regional development through cultural tourism, the EU highlights various important points. For instance, in the latest call for Horizon 2020 transnational collaboration addressing cultural tourism, the European Commission states the following:

The various forms of cultural tourism in Europe are important drivers of growth, jobs and economic development of European regions and urban areas. They also contribute, to the understanding of other peoples' identities and values by driving intercultural understanding and social development in Europe through discovering various types of cultural heritage. However, although cultural tourism by its nature invites cross border, regional and local cooperation, its full innovation potential in this respect is not yet fully explored and exploited. The level of development of cultural tourism between certain regions and sites, including those between the neighbouring countries in Europe, is still unbalanced. Deprived remote, peripheral or deindustrialized areas lag behind, whereas high demand areas are over-exploited in an unsustainable manner. There is also a significant knowledge gap in terms of quantitative and qualitative data on the phenomenon of cultural heritage tourism and on understanding its contribution to cultural Europeanisation and economic and social development in Europe.[8]

With regard to the Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, the programme underscores, in line with the Faro Convention, the importance of local citizens and their closeness with their region to understand and identify the cultural heritage. Local involvement through the Cultural Routes networks aims to attract new activities and encourages sustainable tourism, while ensuring that the economic use does not put at risk the heritage itself.

The project aims at fostering regional development through cultural heritage policies. The Cultural Routes cherish the contribution of cultural tourism to the nurturing of intercultural dialogue that may further develop European stability, harmony and integration while investing in the EU macro-regions at economic and social levels. The Council of Europe has launched several instances of collaboration with the EU in order to strengthen this dynamic. For instance, this applies to the Route 4U initiative. This programme promotes the identification and drafting of guidelines for transnational regional policies on Cultural Routes for local authorities and operators, the development of new competencies and skills through e-learning modules and the development of goods and services such as a Cultural Routes card and interactive trip planners.[9]

In 2020, there were 38 Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe, with very different themes that illustrate European memory, history and heritage and contribute to an interpretation of the diversity of present-day Europe. The Phoenicians' Route refers to the connection of the major nautical routes used by the Phoenicians, since the 12th century BC, as essential routes for trade and cultural communication in the Mediterranean. Through these routes, the Phoenicians – genial sailors and merchants –

and other great Mediterranean civilizations contributed to the creation of a *koiné*, a Mediterranean cultural community, producing an intense exchange of manufactured articles, people and ideas.[10]

David Abulafia notes the prejudice the Ancient Greeks sometimes expressed against trade-related aspects when they outweighed others related to military or governing prowess. This critical approach applied specifically to the Phoenicians (Abulafia, 2011, p. 65). On the one hand, this Classical suspicion of inferiority may act as a millenia-long mark of judgment that may tarnish our own of the Phoenicians. On the other, one may interpret this slight positively in today's (rather than Homer's) world and its emphasis on commerce when disconnected from warmongering and affairs of politics. It may be argued that this shift in interpretation has allowed the current twenty-first century focus on economics and finance to approach the Phoenician practice of trade as more positive than negative. Contemporary interest in the Phoenicians may be connected to an emergence in cultural and social activity that contributes significantly and beneficially to the growing enterprise in tourism. This is particularly true when tourism is addressed in ways that try to balance economic gains with environmental sustainability and cultural respect. This is so in light of the general positive way in which Phoenician activity is assessed as free from acts of colonisation and military imposition.[11]

In a Maltese context, the Phoenician presence plays an engaging part in people's imagination and emotive interpretation of their past and identity. Phoenician activity was at its highest between the eighth century B.C. and the Hellenistic period to start declining around the fourth century B.C.. As noted by Anthony Pace, it was motivated by the role played by Malta of an intermediate port of call along the routes, already followed during prehistoric times, towards the Tyrrhenean via the eastern coast of Sicily and the straits of Messina (Pace, 1998, p. 96). The early contribution to the development of an ''environment of exchange'', to quote Paul Sant-Cassia when referring to the contemporary Maltese context, has shaped history, the learning of the past, its interpretation, and a constant nurturing of the current imaginary that ties living people to a mythical past (Valletta 2018 Foundation, 2011). The extension of the spread of the Phoenicians' Route to Malta seems to have tapped into that curiosity that occasionally accompanies scientific research into the biological make-up of the Maltese, and other Mediterranean people, today.[12]

The Council of Europe affirms that culture is an critical part contributing to the tangible delivery of the core mission of the Council, i.e. defending human rights, the practice of democracy and the rule of law. Supporting culture as the "soul of democracy" stands for advocating strong cultural policies and governance striving for transparency of governance, access to decision making, participation in policy making processes and the nurturing and unleashing of creativity. The Council of Europe also claims its investment in the recognition of the unique value of Cultural Routes abets greater respect for diverse identities through the practice of intercultural dialogue and the defence of cultural rights. The Council affirms that its role in encouraging positive encounters of culturally diverse people as put into action by the Cultural Routes acts as a "basis for respectful and tolerant living together in an ever-more complex world".[13]

The first step needed by all sides and stakeholders involved in the development of relations in the Mediterranean is the acknowledgment of the divisions brought about

by the imbalances and injustices which the people of this sea have experienced and still experience. Past and present evaluations of the history of the Mediterranean are useful in understanding the dynamics of this space, and this understanding may clear and generate a vision for a better way forward in terms of the quality of relations to be practiced by all those involved.

Charles Coutel, writing at the time at the *Université d'Artois*, and author of an important paper dealing with relations in the Mediterranean, notes that at the Civil Society Forum in Barcelona in 1995 it was noted that 'dialogue and respect between cultures and religions are a necessary contribution to the bringing closer together of peoples' (Chambers, 2008, p. 41)[14]. He notes that in 1996 in Bologna, the intangible heritage of the Mediterranean was highlighted, but unfortunately, in situations that recall the prioritising of politically and economically sensitive issues over cultural ones, it was eventually relegated due to security issues. Coutel refers to Giuseppe Sacco, the Italian researcher, who notes that the Mediterranean has two main challenges which may be summarised in the following way:

i. Firstly, a strategy needed to be developed against fanaticism and integralism; and
ii. Secondly, and in relation to the first point, the theory of the 'clash of civilizations' by Huntington needed refuting.

Coutel links Pirenne's theory on Islam having divided the Mediterranean to Huntington's own (Said, 1994, p. 108). Coutel notes that well-meaning references to Braudel and André Siegfried do not suffice to challenge such theories, even though they do provide sound frameworks from which to start doing this. Coutel refers to Siegfried who writes: "In spite of the fact that the Mediterranean still benefits from the image of being a traditional cradle of civilization of cultures and religion, it is also true that it remains a source of conflicts and tensions'' (*Ministère des Affaires étrangères,* 2008, p. 40).

3. A focus on Malta

The Council of Europe presented a vision for promoting intercultural dialogue in its White Paper of June 2008. Through the paper it seeks to set a clear course for intercultural dialogue by contributing to the core objectives of preserving and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Council of Europe, 2008, p. 8). The first Summit of Heads of State and Government of member states (1993) stressed that cultural diversity lay at the foundations of Europe's rich heritage. It also emphasised the need for tolerance in order to guarantee an open and democratic society. This led to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (1995), the establishment of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the launching of the European Youth Campaign against racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and intolerance ('All Different – All Equal'). The third Summit of the Heads of State and Government (2005) identified intercultural dialogue as a way of supporting awareness, understanding, reconciliation and tolerance. Furthermore,

intercultural dialogue was perceived as an effective way of addressing conflicts and ensuring integration and social cohesino. This idea was elaborated in the Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's Strategy for Developing Intercultural Dialogue, adopted by the Ministers of culture later that year, which in turn led to the drafting of the White Paper on intercultural dialogue.

In a cultural context, Malta is a signatory of the the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (1992). It has signed and ratified the European Cultural Convention (1966) and the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (also known as the Valletta Convention, 1992 and revised in 1994). Unfortunately, it is not yet a signatory of the Faro Convention, among others.

Malta has a total surface area of 316 km². It lies less than a hundred kilometres south of Sicily and less than 500 kilometres south-east of Tunis. Like other small, peripheral territories, it enjoys a 'cross-roads' position due to geographical reasons as well as political ones (Vella 2008). This has been so historically, but since EU membership in 2004 it has experienced a large number of different ethnic and cultural communities from its direct neighbourhood as well as from around the world.[15] The booming construction, i-gaming and financial services industries have attracted international investment and tens of thousands of European, African and Asian people seeking work and better economic conditions. In terms of numbers, as has been widely reported in local news, the population of Malta increased by 15,700 in 2017, over fifteen times the rate in the EU when adjusted for the size of the population, to 475,700. The largest relative increase was observed in Malta (+32.9 per 1,000 residents), well ahead of, for instance, Luxembourg (+19) and Sweden (+12.4).[16]

Communities from the Western Balkans and South-East Europe, Syria and East Africa are of particular recent interest. Some of the people belonging to these communities are migrants seeking refuge. Their experience is particular, and also differs from group to group. African and Middle Eastern migrants arrive bearing deep traumatic scars, particularly when the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea has been attempted - in their case, successfully, many times crossing from hostile conditions, to say the least, in Libya, undergoing its own social crisis. The Asian community is reported to travel less alone, individually speaking, and face less trauma since travel is more standard and organised (UNHCR Malta, 2018).

This influx of people, at times invited and expected, at other times un-invited and resented, with a variety in approaches that correspond to skin colour, ethnicity and religion, has challenged the small country to manage the great increase in the use of space, transportation, and services ranging from health and schools to general infrastructures like drains and sanitation. These pressures, among others, have, as elsewhere in Europe, led to resentment against the large "hordes" of people that tend to be branded as "invaders" that do not share the residents' culture and pose a threat to it and traditional ways of life (UNHCR Malta, 2018).. Clearly, the hypocritical tension between accepting and exploiting one's foreign business, ranging from Africans working in precarious conditions both economically and safety-wise in the construction industry, to Sicilian restaurants ownerships or leases mushrooming around the Island, and wanting to believe that ultimately these latter-day "guest workers" should "go home", is significant.

Within this rich and diverse, as well as challenging and tense, environment, a number of cultural operators engage regularly, though not wholly, with issues of cultural diversity and dialogue through their skills-sets as intercultural managers. Tellingly, these people are indicative of our current globalised age, in terms of their travel, academic and research pursuits, and a curiosity to explore human nature that is both innate as well as developed through cultural means. In its own particular way that is both pervasive and attracts visibility due to its dual nature, namely that of belonging to culture while reaching out to tourism, the Phoenicians' Route provides a rich, and relatively novel, because relatively still untapped, contribution of new data to the Mediterranean environment in general, and the Maltese one in particular.

The relatively recent entry of Malta into the EU needs to be taken into consideration to contribute to an understanding of the general context of international cultural collaboration by the island state. Malta's adhesion to the Phoenicians' Route through the cultural association Inizjamed has enabled the dynamic of cultural exchange and tourism-oriented relations to exploit this European and Mediterranean context. To date, the main instance of this is exemplified by the annual Malta Mediterranean Literature Festival. The Festival allows participants in the network to look at the way the cultural and tourism aspects of the Route are applied in the context of the Festival, through their various operations in culture, academia, tourism and research. The Festival progamme features specific debates were matters of interculturla dialogue are addressed by people from different cultural backgrounds, as well as literary and translation workshops that enable participants to exchange practice and experience based in Europe and the Mediterranean.

The Festival links past and present by seeking inspiration from historical episodes of intercultural dialogue in the Mediterranean, such as those pertaining to the Phoenicians, and applying them to contemporary, pressing needs of artistic, cultural, political and social exchange within the Mediterranean space. The participation of Malta in the Route has more recently expanded to include a EU projects collaboration with a number of continental partners and a perspective open to the Mediterranean.[17]

These collaboration projects generally consist of EU part-funded networks addressing higher education (Erasmus+), regional capacity building (Horizon 2020) and support to small and medium sized enterprises (COSME). They include series of seminars, workshops and tourism propositions, such as the development of engaging itineraries called 'smart ways', that promote the discovery, appreciation and further realisation of Mediterranean cultural heritage with those individuals and organisations that are willing and able to share their expertise in the fields of intercultural dialogue, archaeology, heritage and tourism.

The Phoenicians' Route thrives on the development of programmes that encourage a multitude of professionals and students of professions related to culture and tourism to pursue their interests and invest in their dedication to these areas of study and work. Therefore, collaboration with artistic ateliers, festivals, management network and institutes for higher education have allowed links to grow and develop in a way that nurtures training, capacity building and professional development in the fields of culture and tourism. For instance, since 2014 the route has established an International Network of Mediterranean Schools (Edu.Net). The network forges a cultural space of exchange and policy-making that are rooted in positive practices heritage pedagogy.

Exercises foster creative approached towards identity matters through the design of cultural heritage materials. In so doing they strengthen the commitment of new generations to the practice of intercultural dialogue through actions and pilot projects developed in the various countries within the route. The network is committed to training young people in the appreciation of values embraced by the Council of Europe. The network offers various opportunities for cultural and didactic exchanges of a comparative nature, twinning and intercultural journeys in search of commonalities in Mediterranean cultural identities.

Conclusion: towards a Mediterranean project

Richards (2011, p. 24) identifies several challenges for the Cultural Routes to face in order to maintain relevance in a globalised and fast-changing world. Key among the issues he raises are a crowded market consisting of many programmes that promote meaningful and experiential travel linking territory with history and culture. Richards asks how will the Cultural Routes survive by distinguishing themselves while at the same time remain appealing to culturally relevant and economically viable numbers of people that are large enough (2011, p. 23). The Council of Europe has acknowledged such challenges by joining forces with other international organisations like the EU and UNESCO in order to broaden the base of its appeal and impact on intercultural dialogue through cultural tourism.[18]

In a European dimension, the new agenda for culture and the Council conclusions approved by the EU in May 2018 are the latest instruments aiming ''to bring common European heritage to the fore'' (European Commission 2018; Council of the European Union 2018). In the light of the discussion above regarding the importance of instruments like the Phoenicians' Route to the nurturing of intercultural dialogue in Europe and the Mediterranean today, it is pertinent to ask whether the EU, in the context of its important role in relation to the Mediterranean, the phenomenon of migration from Africa and the Middle East, and in relation to the criticised practice of its power in terms of human rights and value, is paying enough attention to all those people who contribute to its diversity, celebrated in its ubiquitous slogan, in order to take interculturality forward?[19] If room for improvement is acknowledged, categorical divisions, typecasting and formulaic approaches to culturally diverse people need to be revisited.[20]

One may also wish to ask whether European heritage, in its diversity, and cutting through that brand of heritage that is officially approved and promoted by nationalistic or European authorities, has any relevance to the many different people that keep making up Europe today. The next question would be as to how one may, or should, develop moments and places of exchange along which people may enter into meaningful communication with one another and find echoes of oneself and each other, giving rise to new common narratives with time.

In envisioning the Mediterranean as a project, one needs to ask oneself what is the contribution of culture to a Mediterranean identity. Elias Khoury asks whether a Mediterranean enjoying a cultural dimension exists, or whether one speaks of the

Mediterranean only because of the conflicts and political circumstances linked to the region which make such observation and analysis necessary. Khoury uses a powerful image to identify the touch points where Mediterranean cultures interact but also suffer from situations which give rise to conflict. He refers to the Straits of Gibraltar and Palestine, which act as the hinges of the Mediterranean, as the geographic contact points between North and South and which are still closely tied to colonial memory and suffer from conflicting interests with no resolution in sight (Khoury and Beydoun, 2002, p. 9).

By attempting to 're-think' the Mediterranean, Omar Barghouti and Adrian Grima attempt to dis-place conventional views of the Mediterranean in order to re-contextualise the space in ways that open up new possibilities and positive prospects. Such re-thinking may go far and range from political and social observations to pragmatic suggestions for energy and trade. By allowing this re-positioning, new ways of perceiving and addressing the main issues marking the Mediterranean open up. As noted by the authors, the Mediterranean is "representing a conflict mired in myths and misunderstanding; but it is also from the Mediterranean that new paths can emerge." Barghouti and Grima want to explore new possibilities by engaging in "reclaiming the Mediterranean as a cultural bridge."[21]

Reflecting on recent political initiatives addressing the Mediterranean, Alessandro Stillo argues that in spite of the fact that the Mediterranean is high on the political agenda in Europe, the great number of colloquia and events dedicated to it do not lead to any results which can bring about much needed change. He argues that of the three sides of the Mediterranean namely Europe, the Arab countries and the Balkans only Europe seems to have a holistic vision of the Mediterranean. This is mostly based on its own beliefs of what the Mediterranean should be, rooted in interpretations of the Roman Empire's mare nostrum. While Europe seems to perceive the Mediterranean project as a necessity, the South and Eastern (Balkan) shores see the Mediterranean project as crafted, forced and imposed upon everyone by Europe (Stillo, 2010, p. 58). Recent political initiatives do not seem to challenge this perception: rather, the Union for the Mediterranean, including the 6th Southern EU Countries Summitheld in Valletta in June 2019, and the various temporary agreements among EU and Mediterranean states on migrants, seem to reinforce the impression that political agendas drafted in the West have little impact on people on the ground, or at sea.[22]

Having assessed the shortcomings of high-level political initiatives, Stillo proposes what seems to him to be a possible and strong way forward, with reference to Danilo Zolo's concept of the 'pluriverso', which will be developed later:

L'ipotesi che si fa strada è allora diversa: il Mediterraneo, il Mare Bianco Interno, come viene chiamato in lingua araba, si deve considerare portatore e formatore di plurime identità, fluide come lo è la sua superficie, profonde come lo sono i suoi abissi, frastagliate come si presentano le sue coste (2010, p. 11).

From this perspective, the Mediterranean is a choice, not a given. This means developing an acknowledgement and use of diversity and contamination which does not find one's home in a unitary Mediterranean but builds a home as a 'collective'.

Pointing out a paradox, Stillo notes that the differences lie in the starting points, while the common base lies in the will to work together (2010, p. 56).

In conclusion, this paper has argued that the Phoenicians' Route, in its evocation of a historical as well as mythical past, through contemporary practice in the fields of culture and tourism through the promotion of intercultural dialogue, may be assessed as one such small yet clear starting point towards the resolution of conflict and the development of collaboration across the Mediterranean, particularly in the fields of research, education, knowledge transfer, sustainable tourism and the arts The collectivity of the ancient purple people, and the significant positive perception people in Europe and the Mediterranean seem to have of them, are important vectors for the upcoming challenges the network has set itself in the foreseeable future.

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[1] The bibliography includes various titles of such studies.

[2] Neither does it assume that Malta has a 'crucial' role to play in this process; however, as will be argued, in the light of the social and tourism contexts in the island state, strategically placed at the heart of the Mediterranean, its contribution to intercultural dialogue in the region has been and remains significant. Teo Reljić, 'Shining a light on the inter-connected Mediterranean', *The Malta Today*, 17 March 2019.

[3] https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/-/the-holy-see-pope-francis-underlines-the-role-of-the-enlarged-partial-agreement-on-cultural-routes-of-the-council-of-europe (accessed 27 February 2020).

[4] The most popular thesis for the 'clash of civilisation' has been that set off by Samuel Huntington towards the end of the Cold War brought on by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the opposition between the West and Communism for over 70 years. In a similar way to Huntington, one may argue that this global division had kept other types of conflict related to ethnicity, religion and regional politics, as in the case of the Mediterranean, in check, or subservient to the Cold War logic. The end of the Cold War may seem to have released these other disputes. It is argued here that the conflictual narrative seems to have pre-dated one for intercultural dialogue which, therefore, developed in reaction to it.

[5] Interculturality in cultural exchanges in Malta as a microcosm of the global context is the subject of ongoing research by Karsten Xuereb. For instance, see:

https://culturalpolicy.blog/2019/01/24/intercultural-managers-in-europe-the-mediterranean-a-focus-on-malta/ (accessed 27 February 2020).

[6] Reference may be may to efforts at defining holistic perspectives of Mediterranean as in the excellent collection reviewing the work by Horden and Purcell *The Corrupting Sea* by W. V. Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean.*

[7] See in particular Matvejević, P. (1987) *Breviario mediterraneo,* Milano: Garzanti.

[8] https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/transformations-04-2019-2020 (accessed 25 February 2020).

[9] https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/eu-jp-2017-20 (accessed 25 February 2020).

[10] https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/the-phoenicians-route (accessed 25 February 2020).

[11] This was one of the main points to emerge from the international seminar 'ROTOT' held in Malta by Inizjamed in order to mark the participation of Malta in the Phoenicians' Route, March 2019, https://www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/events/umevents/2019/03/rotot-mediterraneanroutesthroughinterculturaldialogue (accessed 24 Febraury 2020).

[12] https://www.um.edu.mt/think/the-hidden-history-of-the-maltese-genome/ (accessed 27 February 2020); https://maltanetworkresources.com/2004/09/dna-study-reveals-maltese-phoenician-connection/ (accessed 27 February 2020).

[13] https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/culture (accessed 27 February 2020).

[14] Coutel's paper was later published as COUTEL C., *Politique de Condorcet*, Petite Bibliothèque Payot/Classique, Paris, 1996.

[15] Carmel Cassar has researched the historical dimension to this contemporary reality, noting the increase and growing diversity of the Grand Harbour population in the seventeenth century was already significant. See in particular *Malta's Role in Mediterranean Affairs: 1530-1699*, written with Dominic Cutajar (1986) and 'Popular Perceptions and Values in Hospitaller Malta' in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Studies in Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem* edited Victor Mallia-Milanes and published by Mireva Publications (1993), pp. 429-473.

[16] https://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20180710/local/increase-in-malta-population-more-than-15-times-that-of-the-eu.684039 (accessed 27 February 2020). UNHCR notes how between June and October 2018 Malta received 981 boat arrivals. While many of those seeking refuge remain in Malta, a number of those arriving on boats are relocated to other EU countries following ad hoc agreements between EU Member States https://www.unhcr.org/mt/figures-at-a-glance (accessed 27 February 2020).

[17] http://fenici.net/en/trames-smart-tourism-across-the-mediterranean-sea/5856/ (accessed 27 February 2020).

[18] The cornerstone of this joint-up thinking and action lies in the Enlarged Partnership Agreement on Cultural Routes (2010): https://www.coe.int/en/web/cultural-routes/about-the-epa (accessed 25 February 2020).

[19] The slogan is 'unity in diversity'; https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en (accessed 27 February 2020).

[20] Such a critique and ensuing suggestions for an improved approach featured prominently during Voices of Culture, the name of the Structured Dialogue between the European Commission and the cultural sector providing a framework for discussions between EU civil society stakeholders and the European Commission with regard to culture. Karsten Xuereb represented the Malta-based cultural organisation Inizjamed at the meetings of 16 - 17 March 2018 and 17 - 18 September in Brussels (accessed 27 February 2020).

[21] https://www.counterpunch.org/2005/09/09/re-thinking-the-mediterranean/ (accessed 27 February 2020).

[22] UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNHCR's Recommendations for the European Commission's Proposed Pact on Migration and Asylum, January 2020, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/5e3171364.html (accessed 25 February 2020).