

School Tourism: Testing the Innovative Potential of ATRIUM-Based Cross-Border Study Visits

ATRIUM GO!

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ATRIUM PLUS is a European project under the Italy-Croatia Cross-Border Cooperation Programme, aimed at capitalizing the previous South-East Europe Programme “ATRIUM – Architecture of the Totalitarian Regimes of the XX Century in Urban Management” (2011-2013). ATRIUM PLUS is financed under the specific objective of making natural and cultural heritage a leverage for sustainable and more balanced territorial development and, in particular, to activate a pilot cross-border programme of study visits, involving schools located in the cities taking part in the project: Forlì, Ferrara and Bari in Italy, and Labin and Zadar in Croatia. In so doing, ATRIUM PLUS tests the potential of the ATRIUM Cultural Route in terms of both cultural tourism and education of the new generations as responsible and informed tourists of the future.

A Roadmap in 7 steps was designed with the aim to support the construction of the cross-border study visits, which may turn in an innovative educational tourism product for schools. The Roadmap was based on 3 pillars: 1) in-depth critical interpretation of “dissonant” cultural heritage; 2) participatory design ensuring sustainability of the final product; and 3) meaningful co-creation applied to tourism and heritage-making. A variety of methodologies have been adopted – ranging from more formal surveys to creative workshops, addressing and involving different targets – and triangulated in the end to provide guidelines towards what is by now called ATRIUM GO!, the brand name to pinpoint the cross-border study visits that are an output of the project.

This brief presentation focusses on the result of an analytical mapping of current offers of school tourism products in the Italian and Croatian market, and of a survey administered to ATRIUM PLUS selected target, that is to say teachers and students attending upper secondary schools. In particular, a first questionnaire was administered to teachers and students with two aims: the first one, to identify learning and leisure gaps in existent school tourism products, by asking them to answer a set of questions with reference to the last cultural tourism school visit of at least two nights out that they had undertaken in the previous school year (2017-2018); the

second aim, to assess youngsters' average knowledge and awareness of the attractions of their cities and ATRIUM-related heritage. The same questionnaire was repeated at the end of ATRIUM PLUS cross-border study visits in 2019. In so doing, the learning and leisure potential of the ATRIUM PLUS prototype of a tourist product – by now called ATRIUM GO! – could be assessed and serve to give suggestions towards its final format.

In sum, 12 upper secondary schools located in the Italian partners areas and two upper secondary schools located in the Croatian partners areas were involved in the survey; that is to say 798 students and 37 teachers in sum. The surveys were completed between October 2018 and February 2019 as for the first questionnaire, while the second one was administered in the weeks just following the cross-border study visits in Spring 2019.

First of all, it shall be noted that a strict normative framework in both Italy and Croatia exists concerning school trips. In addition, organising school trips is perceived often as an additional workload by teachers. Students in Italian upper secondary schools generally take school trips of one or more overnight stays all along the school cycle (from the first year to the fifth year). On the contrary, students in Croatia are generally engaged in daily school trips in the first years of upper secondary school cycle, then they take part in a one night or two nights school trip in the year before the last one, and in the last year they take a trip of one whole week, also known as graduation trip. This difference may influence the choice of the destination, with traditional city of arts and European capital cities being the more chosen destinations in Italy, while in Croatia seaside destinations and theme parks are also chosen.

Traditional destinations and packages still dominate the school tourism sector today. On one side, it seems that schools have difficulty in updating themselves and adhering to innovative proposals that exist – albeit representing a minority – on the market; on the other side, it shall be acknowledged that innovative offers consist either in a more complicated commodity chain or in a more expensive trip. In fact, cost is a significant factor for choice, with trips having an

average cost of 275/300 euros for three or four days (four or five nights) in Italy and even a higher cost due to a longer length when it comes to graduation trips in Croatia.

The few existing studies on school tourism generally focus on the perceptions and opinions of teachers, while students have rarely been surveyed. Indeed, students are not in charge of choosing the final destination – the key actors with this reference being teachers in Italy or families in Croatia. But they remain the main protagonists of school tourism: the survey conducted through ATRIUM PLUS is a unique chance to make their voice be heard.

When asked to look back to their last study trip, both Italian and Croatian students have perceived it as moderately related to their school program. They declared that cultural and historical aspects are the only ones explored before departure (vs. environmental and natural, scientific and sporting aspects). No work groups or specific tasks were assigned to be performed during the trip, nor workshops or active students' engagement. Most importantly, trips are recognised, by both teachers and students, as important socializing moments for the students, and for students with teachers. For students in particular, trips are not only socialising moments with their peers and teachers, but they consider them indispensable moments of school life. However, students are not sure that the trip contributed to the improvement of their scientific-cultural training. On the contrary, those students who took part in the cross-border study visit organised through ATRIUM PLUS consider that the trip represented a socializing moment for them, but they also agree that the trip was an 'educational' experience for them.

Most of the Italian (89%) and Croatian (87.5%) students that took part in the cross-border study visits organised in the framework of ATRIUM PLUS, consider the trips consistent with what they had studied at school. Both Italian and Croatian students consider that the topics touched upon during the study visit are the rise of totalitarian regimes in the 20th century; contemporary art

history; Italian and Croatian human and physical geography. The results suggest that the specific thematic characteristic of what will be named ATRIUM GO! was perceived by students.

When asked what they liked most of the cross-border study visit, Italian students agree on topics such as spending some time with school mates, visiting new cities, spending time away from home, getting to know other cultures, spending some time with teachers in an informal environment. It seems that taking part in workshops raised only a little more than indifference, however, workshop experiences through ATRIUM GO! raised more satisfaction than in their previous school trips experience, when students did not like workshops carried out or did not take part in any. Workshops stimulated a different method to experience a tourist trip and effective participation of all class members, but also the development of skills that differ compared to those in the school curriculum. These skills have been identified as related with intercultural dialogue, critical analysis of urban architecture, ability to speak up in public, transversal learning through guided tours, group work, contextual learning by doing, foreign languages in practice, experimentation with technologies.

It is also particularly interesting to look closely at what students pinpointed as they were free to answer (that is to say, beyond the multiple choice proposed in the questionnaire) on what they liked most of the study visit. Here some students specified that what they liked most about the trip was connected to getting to know students from other cities. This answer perfectly matches with the spirit of the cross-border study visit they had experienced, during which they had the chance to meet students in the partner towns. In addition, both Italian and Croatian students agree on being satisfied on the trip as a whole. These results confirm a general success of the ATRIUM GO! pilot project.

Students were also surveyed in order to understand their own perception of ATRIUM PLUS partner cities as cultural tourism destinations and their own perception of ATRIUM cultural

heritage. Students consider that Bari, Ferrara, Forlì, Labin would be suitable destinations for school visits, while Zadar is considered a suitable destination by 16 students out of 29.

Nearly all the students (more than the 92%), Italians and Croatians, do know that in the destination they visited there are many important buildings for the history of architecture as well as in the city they come from (more than 96% in this case). All the students who had visited Bari, Labin or Zadar knew, by the end of their study visit, that some of the buildings in the ATRIUM destination they had visited belong to the architectural movement called Rationalism. One fifth of those who visited Forlì and Ferrara did not. It shall be considered that many important buildings in Ferrara are not in the Rationalist style. However, all the students involved in the cross-border study trips are aware that in the destination they visited there are important buildings for the history of architecture that date back to the Fascist time, and they show the same awareness with reference to the city where their school is. This seems to show that Rationalism is not recognized as an architectural style in itself, but specific architectural features in the urban landscape are recognized as typical of the Fascist time. Finally, Italian and Croatian students equally agree on Fascism being a totalitarian regime or a non-democratic form of government. Both Croatian and Italian students disagree on the fact that Fascism was an architectural movement.

School trips are still nowadays a good tool to complete the pedagogical formalism that is experienced in the classrooms of the schools; they should actually be based on the “plus” of non-formal learning that they may offer. Going towards this direction, for ATRIUM GO!, would also allow to respond to new ways of consumption that imply learning through sensorial and practical dynamics.

Any stakeholder interested in supporting innovative and meaningful educational school tourism products should consider organising lobbying groups in front of national competent bodies

aimed at stimulating the recognition or forms of incentive for teachers to accompany the classes on school trips. In addition, it would be important to propose training modules or familiarisation trips to teachers with the aim to orient them towards the choice of trips that can become real non-formal education methods, and to tour operators to raise their awareness of the importance of the national and European integration potential of school trips. These two qualities are definitely a major characteristic of ATRIUM GO! In addition, the design and quality of the workshops and labs performed through ATRIUM GO! should be implemented: they represent an effective tool for students to develop soft skills beyond the usual school CV. The cross-border study visits organised within the ATRIUM PLUS project have also been highly appreciated because of the peer-to-peer intercultural dialogue that they involved. While the replicability of this element of the trip appears not easy, it is suggested to continue maintaining the possibility to organise peer-to-peer meetings in future developments of ATRIUM GO!