

A PARTECIPATORY DESIGN OF AN EDUCATIONAL TOURISM PRODUCT BASED ON DISSONANT HERITAGE

THE EXPERIENCE OF ATRIUM GO!

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Atrium Go! is an innovative schools' educational tourism product which has been developed through a 18-month long project of intense activities aimed at ensuring both a careful interpretation of the "dissonant" heritage that Atrium Go! itineraries explore and participatory design via co-creation.

Atrium Go! is the result of Atrium Plus, a project funded by the Italy – Croatia CBC Programme aimed at capitalizing "ATRIUM – Architecture of the Totalitarian Regimes of the XX Century in Urban Management", a previous project funded by the South-East Europe Programme (2011-2013), The specific intention of Atrium Plus was to exploit ATRIUM's achievements, over all the Cultural Route recognized by the Council of Europe in 2014, by contributing to make dissonant heritage a cultural tourism attraction to be approached always in an informed and ethic way. Atrium Plus involved 5 partners: the Municipality of Forlì standing as the lead partner, the Municipality of Ferrara, the Municipality of Bari in Italy, the Municipality of Labin and the University of Zadar in Croatia.

The Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism has provided the Municipality of Forlì with external scientific and research-based expertise aimed at supporting the construction of a tourist product addressing upper secondary schools in line with the aims and scope of Atrium Plus.

This methodology is in line with the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (Faro Convention), launched in Lisbon in 2005 by the Council of Europe and not yet ratified by the Italian government. In addition, it follows also the Council of Europe guidelines for the European Cultural Routes. Consequently, we followed an approach based on community participation and promoting human rights and democracy.

To reach these, a Road map in 7 steps has been proposed following the three main principles: 1) in-depth critical interpretation of "dissonant" cultural heritage; 2) participatory design ensuring sustainability of the final product; and 3) meaningful co-creation as they are applied to tourist experiences and heritage-making.

The first principle is more connected with the topic of the thematic itineraries that Atrium Plus would have developed, focussing in fact on the architecture of totalitarian regimes which connote a variety of European cities. The visible signs of 20th centuries non democratic experiences can be intended as highly problematic examples of “dissonant” cultural heritage. On one side they may provide an excellent realm to inspire reflexivity and awareness of the tragedies of the past, on the other side they are always at risk of failing in this aim and actually sustain practices and interpretations that are contrary to the intent that have made Atrium become a Cultural Route recognised by the Council of Europe in 2012.

The second principle is more explicitly connected with recent debates on tourism and sustainable local development, stressing the importance of considering the sphere of tourist stakeholders in its widest sense and investing all of them with new responsibilities in front of tourism. This also means that in designing a tourist product many variables should be taken into consideration, including the needs and the expectations of all those involved in the supply-demand chain.

The third deals with the idea that meanings are co-created and interpretation is a multi-sided process. It is also considered that co-creation generates new ways of seeing the world and leads to the opportunity for non formal learning and self-development. Participatory design considers that involving end users leads to more relevant and usable products and services, while reducing risk. This implies a willingness to engage with participants and incorporate their suggestions for the benefit of the user and the organization. Participatory design, like design thinking, can involve the development of iterative prototypes as a means of testing user reactions.

The Road map is an operational tool that takes into consideration the porosity of these principles in order to reach the final aims and scopes of Atrium Plus. 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!

This brief presentation focusses on the initial stage of this experience which aimed at making stakeholders, namely tourist guides and tour operators, aware of the variety of risks implicit in dealing with dissonant heritage. To increase this awareness, at the beginning of the project, a methodological training programme on how to deal with dissonant heritage was organised. The training programme was conceived following the logic of “train the trainers”, and included a theoretical part, a variety of interactive moments devoted to give voice to practitioners and favour peer-to-peer exchange, and a project-based workshops. In particular, the training programme focussed on risks on promoting dissonant heritage on the ground of tourism and on how to build an “ATRIUM” network of stakeholders. The training programme on “How to deal with dissonant heritage” was held in Forlì 1-3 Oct. 2018 and is the result of nearly a decade of cooperation between the Center for Advanced Studies in Tourism of the University of Bologna and the Municipality of Forlì. 32 participants, representing the five different partners of Atrium Plus, took part in the training, including the institutional representatives of the projects as well as tourist guides, teachers, professionals within the Cultural and Creative Industries, and residents; they all represent stakeholders of Atrium Plus.

The training programme involved different typologies of learning activities in order to move along three different levels of knowledge transfer:

- Lectures on selected topics were taught from academic experts as well as from practitioners in order to move from theoretical debates to case-studies;
- Lectures on selected topics were enriched with personal narratives from practitioners in order to learn from self-reflections on previous and on-going experiences of dealing with dissonant heritage;

- Each lecture was followed by a Q&A time-slot, and a working groups activity was organized in order to allow the participants to react to lectures as well as to foster cross-fertilisation among all the participants convened.

The lectures also had a multi-scalar approach, by presenting the general framework of a transnational cooperation tool such as the programmes of the Cultural Route of the Council of Europe or the Faro Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, but also how their principles can be applied at the local level. Examples on how to deal with dissonant heritage, tourism and sustainability included international experiences. We discussed this topic also by capitalizing on the past ATRIUM experiences, which were critically presented and analysed.

The training program was a lively occasion of confrontation, through which participants also had the chance to ask for clarification of concepts presented in the lectures, but more significantly, they advanced critiques to how lectures had been portraying certain topics. The emerging critiques pinpointed the sensitivity around the topic touched upon by the training program.

On the third day, training activities included group work. We grouped participants according to the locations they represented – Bari, Ferrara, Labin, Zadar and Forlì. Each group was given a map of its area, and was asked to develop itineraries around dissonant heritage by taking into account the risks discussed in the lectures. Question to be ideally answered were: What kinds of dissonance do your heritage and territory present? What are the risks related with the creation of a pleasant tourist experience around the identified dissonance? A specific attention should have been posed on opportunities and risks the route will meet and how potential risks might be overcome.

The discussion within the working groups made evident the existence of many points of attention and criticalities, which participants appropriately developed:

- a) The perception of a lack of risk connected with dissonance, since there is a general collective agreement in rejecting totalitarianism (both fascist and communist).
- b) The reluctance of residents to talk and elaborate about the dissonance of Communist heritage, since it has not been too very long they experienced it.
- c) The risks concerning the fact that the pleasant aesthetics of the architectures dating back to the totalitarian regimes covers up the dissonance of this heritage.

Participants to the working groups suggested also some possible solutions to cope with the risks they highlighted.

1) To uncover the dissonance of pleasant architectural style, they suggested the merging or coupling of the itinerary based on architectures with one integrating literary memories or life stories, which can help to bring the dissonance to the fore. For instance, referring to the fascist regime, the organization of walking tours to sites directly connected with the dramatic event of that historical period will counterpart the focus on architectural heritage.

2) To focus the attention on dissonance, tourist guides could include in their tour the ordinary signs inscribed on the cityscape from that time, in addition to the majestic architectures. For instance, guides could show the signs, which helped citizens to find their way to the air-raid shelters, that are still partly visible in some cities.

3) On another, the idea is to shift from the heritage linked with Fascism, which is embedded in the architectures, to the one linked with anti-fascism, which is made of stories and not of material artefacts.

4) To make people think of all the totalitarian regimes, itineraries can be organized joining the fascist and the communist architectures, of course, only for the cities experiences both the dictatorships.

The plenary discussion, which followed the activities of working groups, went deeper in the argument, by focusing on two main dilemmas.

The first one concerns the storytelling's contents, which guides can provide. From one side guides want to be objective as much as possible about the totalitarian architectures or episodes, however on the other side the value on which our society is based reclaim a position towards them. It is commonly agreed that factual history is the starting point for any itinerary concerning dissonant heritage but someone expressed the need to claim a specific position, namely the one of democracy.

The second one concerns the language to adopt when portraying dissonant heritage. Language provides emotions and is crucial to highlight the dissonance. However, it is not easy to find the proper language style and register. For instance, some guides consider that an emphatic language (the use of terms such as outrageous, terrible) might be counterproductive and shock audiences instead of stimulating their critical sense.

This debate underlined the importance of continuing discussing the risks connected with the cultural and tourist promotion of dissonant heritage.

Starting from this preliminary activity, each partner invented and offered to students coming from another partner city a cultural tourism experience based on dissonant heritage, trying to avoid the risks mentioned during the training.

The feedback we had at the end of the process, that is after the school visits in the partner cities, confirmed how important has been to start by focusing on dissonant heritage and making stakeholders aware of risks and providing them tools. The cultural experience offered included at least one of the devices proposed by the working groups during the training. For instance, the Forlì guided tour of the rationalist/fascist architectures included the life stories of

young people of the time. Labin tried to offer a picture of the daily life of the population during the fascist occupation.

To sum up, we can say that the cultural tourist experiences offered in Atrium plus used buildings to tell the story of people not only of the architectural styles. This is certainly a way to make visitors aware of the dissonance implicit in the content of message, which totalitarian regime's buildings included when they were built.

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