



Cultural Route “*Longobard Ways across Europe*”

Good morning everybody.

On this occasion, I represent two institutions. On the one side, Associazione Longobardia, which is the promoter of the Cultural Route “Longobard Ways across Europe” as well as the promoter of the successful application filed in 2005 to include the serial site “The Longobards in Italy. Centres of power (568-774 AD)” in the World Heritage List of UNESCO, then approved in 2011.

On the other side, I represent, in my capacity as the Councillor for Production and Tourism, the Municipality of Monza, which co-founded the Association. As a matter of fact, Monza is the keeper of the treasure of the first Longobard Queen, Theodolinda, who together with Pope Gregory I the Great, started the process of acceptance of Catholicism by the Longobards between the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th century a.D.: this event, as I will briefly describe, would be decisive for the evolution of Longobard civilisation and European history as a whole.

First of all, I will briefly illustrate the meaning and values of Longobard culture as promoted and enhanced by our Cultural Route.

PRIME ROOT

The Route “*Longobard Ways across Europe*” follows a European geocultural corridor that links the territories in which the Longobard peoples (*Gens Langobardorum*) - moving from the seas of the North to the central course of the Danube and from there reaching the Mediterranean limits of Southern Italy - emerged at a proto-historic and historic level (from the 1st century BC) and evolved until the peak of their Civilisation (8th-9th century).

A Civilisation which today is acknowledged the great merit of having accomplished that extraordinary synthesis of Germanic, Greek and Roman, Byzantine-Oriental and Slav cultures and traditions that lies at the origin of a “**prime root of European Culture, later developed by the Carolingians**” (UNESCO, 2011).

During their *Völkerwanderung*, the Longobards - catalysts and vehicle of the lines of culture that they met and assimilated - came repeatedly into contact with other populations, adopting their uses and customs, which they enriched with their own traditions, and giving rise to a strong system of cultural integration.

This was a characteristic of many peoples of that time, but only the Longobards succeeded in developing it throughout the entire cycle of their historic parabola.

It is also thanks to this singular privilege that today the Longobard heritage can be considered the heritage of so many peoples of present-day Europe: not only because of their epic journey or their settlement in the various territories; but above all for their cultural, religious and artistic bequests and, more or less directly, for the influence of the historic Longobard presence on the determination of new equilibriums among the great powers of the Early Middle Ages - marked by the rise of Catholicism and of the Papacy in Rome and by the birth of the Holy Roman Empire - which, after the end of Longobard power, characterised the next thousand years of European history.



Therefore, there are multiple reasons to cooperate not only with other European routes, but also with other Countries outside the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes, as I will explain later on.

GEOGRAPHICAL NATURE OF THE ROUTE

First of all, I would like to stress that our Route, owing to its cultural, physical and geographical characteristics, is an exceptional welding hinge between Eastern and Western Europe. In my opinion, this is a valuable topic to be discussed with a view to establishing international partnerships. Furthermore, when looking at the history of Longobard Principalities in Southern Italy (whose development after the Longobard Kingdom was conquered by Charlemagne was closely related to the first steps of Muslim Arab culture expansion), we should recognise that this opens a new perspective as an additional potential opportunity for dialogue, beyond current misfortunes.

Landscape is also very important to our Route, especially when taking into account the need to provide some examples of natural landscapes in the Early Middle Ages at the cultural and tourism level. That is why extremely valuable naturalistic areas such as biosphere reserves and interregional, regional and local natural parks are preserved and enhanced in many territories of the Countries through which the Route passes.

All these aspects are reasons for possible cooperation with other European routes in order to improve knowledge and awareness of the values of Nature that we should regard as primary universal values for the good of all.

I have already given a brief overview of the potential offered by the development steps of our Route, which are actual working objectives to achieve in close cooperation with all those who are willing to interact with us.

However, I would also like to suggest some additional ideas for consideration on the topics of this session.

EXTENDING COOPERATION TO OTHER COUNTRIES

Associazione Longobardia has already entered into an agreement with a specialised research centre in Moscow to define a historical and cultural route aimed at connecting some ancient cities along the Volga river with Byzantium and Longobard Italy.

At the same time, the Association has launched a cooperation with the Central European Initiative to start joint design activities. Owing to the nature of this European institution, these activities will certainly lead to a partnership with Kiev, which is closely connected with Byzantium.

Of course, this extremely interesting and historically valuable path is not at all easy and its prospects are uncertain, given the current situation.

We have also defined very important directions for research to compare the developments of Longobard civilisation and Saxon civilisation, which took place in partly coincident and partly parallel ways in both Northern Germany and British Islands.



Similarly, we shall also investigate the mythical origins of the Longobards in some Swedish, Norwegian and Danish areas.

We have also identified other opportunities of cooperation in Switzerland (presence of the Longobards in Canton Ticino), in France (presence of the Longobards in the area of Arles to support the Franks' defence against Arab invasions) and, as I have already stated, in the Middle East, also taking into account the strong artistic influences that developed from those areas and can be found in some exceptional artistic bequests of the Longobard period.

“LONGOBARDIA SYSTEM” AND SYNERGIES BETWEEN CULTURAL ROUTES

Lastly, I believe it would be worth recalling the new approach taken to organise this very complex structure. The Route was divided into two layers: macro-areas and “Tourism Clusters”.

The four macro-areas cover the historical development phases of Longobard civilisation: Germanic area, Central Eastern European area, Longobard Kingdom in Italy (which lasted from 568 to 774) and Longobard Principalities in Southern Italy (which developed from 774 to 1076, when Salerno was conquered by the Normans).

Each macro-area is subdivided into “Tourism Clusters”, that is into territories characterised by particular historic and environmental features referring to the presence of the Longobards and in which, alongside the basic cultural path, there are also minor territorial areas (municipal areas) with their respective resources of interest for tourism (other cultural lines, excellent products in the sectors of wines and gastronomy, handicrafts, etc.).

With the creation of the various Clusters (tourist attractions) in each macro-area, the offer for cultural tourism is simplified, but at the same time it is enriched with a great variety of proposals. The division into Clusters also offers users the chance to make more restricted and reasoned choices on which to focus their attention; however, all the options are such as to enable them to appreciate, alongside the specific Longobard theme, the other historic, artistic and environmental characteristics, as well as the typical features and excellent specialities of the various territorial groupings.

In each Cluster, closer relations can be established with other routes across the area because Longobard history as a ‘common thread’ is a guideline to understand the other historical and cultural values that developed in the various territories.

This is a sound foundation to build new partnerships, including at the project level.

Thank you for your attention

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