

**THE EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM IN CALABRIA:
THE CASE STUDY OF THE SILANA RAILWAY**

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INTRODUCTION

This contribution aims to investigate the phenomenon of experiential tourism in Calabria, the southernmost region of the Italian peninsula, specifically in the area occupied by one of the main regional nature reserves, the Sila National Park. The present research will try to highlight the peculiarities of the park and then to analyse its tourist potential. Among all the tourist itineraries in this specific area, the study will focus on a particular attraction that will serve as a case study: the ancient Silana railway. The choice of this specific itinerary, as a case study, is due to its structure which – as will be seen during the discussion – lends itself well to the creation of experiential paths that can constitute a resource for the tourist development of the Silan hinterland. Hence, the investigation will also focus on the complex relationship between tourism and cultural heritage, as essential elements for the development of the regional tourism system. Precisely for this reason, the characteristics of the itinerary will be examined in order to understand its critical points and potential, with the aim of proposing interventions to improve tourist services.

Once the tourist potential of the Silana railway has been considered, the research will focus on the modes of fruition of this heritage through new technologies, especially considering the recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has made its use increasingly necessary. Specifically, I will focus on the possibility of interfacing with heritage through digital technologies, which over the last few decades have taken on an increasingly important role for tourism and museums. With regard to this last point, a multimedia support will be introduced: an interactive map of the Silana railway route, developed during the research work. This digital device, based on cutting-edge technologies, will provide a valuable tool for potential tourists wishing to discover the railway itinerary through a virtual tour. The interactive map allows users to view the main stops along the itinerary and to identify the most representative cultural assets that can be encountered along the travel route, with a view to a reasoned and aware discovery of the itinerary.

The second part of this paper will focus on a comparison between the chosen case study, the Silana railway, and another similar case located outside the Italian borders. Based on certain analogies, a comparison will be made with a railway that is part of the Portuguese heritage, the Linha do Tua. These two narrow-gauge railways have similar characteristics: both were designed at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century to connect the most remote areas to the main centres. Also, these railways were developed through an uneven territory, whose unique features make these ancient routes appealing from the point of view of tourism. Our aim will be to understand the methods of managing heritage railways in a foreign country and understand which best practices can be shared and exchanged between the two tourism systems.

In the last part of the work, the results emerging from these investigations will be presented. We will see how they can help formulate certain suggestions to improve the tourist offering in Calabria. More specifically, we will see how the results obtained might be used in the implementation of tourist services. These results could provide a contribution to the debate on the enhancement of the

Silana railway, with the aim of making this resource an added value for the local territory and for the regional tourist system.

EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM IN THE SILA NATIONAL PARK

The idea of discovery via first-hand experience constitutes the essence and the distinctive feature of so-called experiential tourism. This type of tourism, one of the most recent, can be considered an answer to the much more widespread mass tourism, a sector now considered saturated and outdated. The possibility for tourists of having new experiences and their active participation are among the essential requirements for experiential tourism, which is part of a broader range of services and goods that put consumers' needs first, relegating the production of standardised products to the past¹. The tourist offering itself is customised to suit the individual needs of the person who takes an active role in the construction of the vacation. The new tourist approaches the consumer experience no longer with the desire to buy something that he does not have, but rather with the desire to try something that he has never tried before and that can make him experience new emotions². Experiential tourism has transformed holidays – previously understood as short breaks from everyday life – into a search for authenticity and uniqueness to be discovered during the journey. Hence, this new tourist approach allows the traveller to absorb the typical features of local cultures, through a path of mutual exchange and learning. Furthermore, through this type of tourism travellers can look for experiences that can put them in contact with the most authentic aspects of the places they visit³. Bearing the experiential tourism model in mind, the study will investigate the potential of a tourist itinerary: a heritage railway

¹ Bernd Schmitt, *Experiential Marketing* (New York: The Free Press, 1999).

² Joseph Pine II and James Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is a Theatre and Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

³ Pine and Gilmore, 2013, "The experience economy: past, present and future" in Jon Sundbo and Sørensen (ed.), Flemming, *Handbook on the Experience Economy* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013), 21-44

route included within the area of the Sila National Park. This Park extends into the hinterland of Calabria and was established in 1997⁴ and its definitive institution was in 2002⁵. It is considered the great green lung of Calabria. The Park offers a variety of landscapes, ranging from rugged mountains to hills, attracting the interest of travellers with an eye for natural beauty. It is worth recalling that the Sila Park has been awarded the title of Tenth Italian Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO, thanks to the recognition granted within the MAB (Man and Biosphere) program⁶. This wide range of natural resources enables the creation of experiential tourist itineraries, in which travellers can interact with aspects of local life and benefit from the distinctive features of the Park's biodiversity. These lend themselves to the realization of the aforementioned itineraries, through the establishment of walking or hiking trails.

Furthermore, the Sila National Park also hosts a series of vestiges associated with the history of the area and its material culture that are well suited to the creation of cultural itineraries. Indeed, the multi-layered heritage of the Sila Park contains not only traces of the material culture of the populations who inhabited it, but also concrete signs of the artistic and architectural expressions produced by them, such as secular and religious buildings. This form of itinerary certainly falls within the trend of experiential tourism, as it satisfies the need for authenticity and allows individuals to immerse themselves in the local culture.

THE SILANA RAILWAY: TOURIST POTENTIAL

⁴ [Legge 10 ottobre 1997, n. 344. Disposizioni per lo sviluppo e la qualificazione degli interventi e dell'occupazione in campo ambientale \(G.U. della Repubblica Italiana n. 239 del 13 ottobre 1997\) \(mite.gov.it\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

⁵ [Decreto del Presidente della Repubblica 14 novembre 2002 - Istituzione del Parco nazionale della Sila e dell'Ente parco \(mite.gov.it\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021). See *Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana*, no. 63, 2003, p. 4.

⁶ [Sila | Unesco Italia](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

Among the many tourist itineraries to be found within the Sila National Park, we will focus on one that allows visitors to discover the peculiarities of the territory and to get in touch with the local culture. The tourist itinerary in question concerns the route of an ancient railway line, the Silana railway. This is a narrow-gauge railway built in Calabria in the first half of the twentieth century to connect the main centres in the region with more isolated areas, such as the Sila. The original railway route was intended to connect the two opposite sides of Calabria, the western side and the eastern one, passing through the centre of the region, occupied by the Silano Plateau. This railway was designed to facilitate not only the circulation of people and goods from one side of Calabria to the other, but also the economic development of the areas it passed through. The railway was progressively put into service between 1922 and 1956⁷. Despite the undisputed usefulness of the route and the benefits it brought to the entire area, the original project was abandoned, also due to the advent of new means of transport and the expansion of the regional road network. Therefore, the two routes already built, which were originally designed to meet at the centre of the region, were never united. In the following years the line underwent a slow and progressive decline until part of it was dismantled or interrupted after becoming obsolete for the transportation of passengers and goods. In 1997 it was officially announced that a short stretch of the western section of the line, that from Camigliatello to San Giovanni in Fiore, would be reserved for tourism purposes; this is precisely the part of the Railway that is the subject of our study. After a brief period of inactivity, the railway reopened in 2016. Nowadays it hosts a series of events that are carried out on board a historic steam train.

Here we will analyse the tourist potential of the Silana railway, taking in consideration the main points of interest that are scattered along the railway line. The current tourist path on the Silana railway does not extend for its whole route, but is limited to a short stretch, which starts at the station

⁷ See Domenico Cerminara, Emilio Salatino, and Fedele Sirianni, *In treno sulla Sila. La ferrovia Cosenza-San Giovanni in Fiore e le altre linee minori* (Lorica di San Giovanni in Fiore: Ente Parco Nazionale della Sila, 2017).

of Moccone and ends at San Nicola Silvana Mansio, passing through Camigliatello Silano. The decision to limit the itinerary to this short route is due to the temporary unavailability of the remaining stretch, which in theory could also be used for tourist purposes. Still, even the limited portion of the railway section that is open allows potential travellers to slowly savour the peculiarities of the place and to get to know its characteristic features. Hence, it offers the possibility of creating experiential tourist routes. However, the potential of this railway route has not been fully exploited yet, which is why during this research some suggestions to improve the service will be made. Along this specific path, travellers can become familiar with the surrounding area and the communities that inhabit it, triggering a process of mutual exchange that inevitably enriches both parties. Furthermore, this route offers the opportunity to employ an unusual means of transport, a historic steam train from the 1920, which makes this trip a unique experience, quite unlike anything visitors experience in their everyday lives. Also, taking a journey along the Silana railway allows tourists to discover the naturalistic heritage of the area from an unprecedented and privileged point of view. The route passes a series of centres which stand out for their naturalistic value. The railway crosses totally isolated stretches of woodland which are normally not easily accessible to hikers. Among the innumerable natural resources located near the railway, an important place must certainly be assigned to the “Giganti della Sila” reserve, in the locality of Croce di Magara. It consists of over sixty larch pines and mountain maples that were planted in the seventeenth century⁸. This reserve is a place where the biodiversity of the park has been fully preserved, allowing tourists to discover its naturalistic peculiarities. The centuries-old trees found here are known as the ‘giants of the Sila’ on account of their imposing size: unique in their kind, they can reach a height of about 45 meters and a width of 2 meters. They stand as the last vestiges of the ancient Sila wood. The valuable “Giganti della Sila” reserve is managed by FAI (Fondo Ambiente Italiano) since 2016.

⁸ | [GIGANTI DELLA SILA | Bene FAI \(fondoambiente.it\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

Further naturalistic sites that can be traced in the vicinity of the railway are certainly Lake Cecita and the nearby Cupone visitor centre⁹. Lake Cecita is an artificial lake built around the mid-twentieth century for hydroelectric purposes. Its size is impressive, and the entire surrounding area is characterised by lush vegetation that offers tourists a chance to admire the rich biodiversity of the park. Furthermore, on the banks of the lake there is an equipped area where it is possible to engage in recreational activities and have picnics. Near this reservoir there is a visitor centre which takes its name from the nearest locality, Cupone. This centre is designed to promote the heritage of the Sila National Park through a museum and naturalistic itinerary. In the museum visitors can discover the biodiversity of the park – its incredible flora and fauna. The visitor centre also offers a wildlife trail, which allows you to admire animals in the wild, and a botanical garden, where you can learn about the plant species of the Sila Park.

A further potential of this route lies in the historical value of the railway, which may be regarded as an example of industrial archaeology. The Sila railway line also stands out on account of the engineering works placed along the entire route. Some of these engineering works, the most significant, will be included in the interactive map of the route that will be presented in the next paragraph. Among these we must certainly mention the Viaduct of San Pietro in Guarano, located along the San Pietro in Guarano-Camigliatello section that was opened in 1931. This viaduct must undoubtedly be regarded as the cornerstone of any industrial tourism itinerary, given its striking size and the incredible skill of the workers who designed it. Indeed, it seems to merge with the valley it crosses, reaching a considerable height and an extension of about 68 meters. Furthermore, from the top of this infrastructure it is possible to enjoy a wide view of the surrounding area.

Another engineering work is the Camigliati Viaduct, part of the Camigliatello-San Giovanni in Fiore section inaugurated in 1956. This viaduct is one of the main and longest on the line, with an

⁹ [Parco Nazionale della Sila - Centro Visita Cupone \(parcosila.it\)](https://www.parcosila.it) (accessed 29 September 2021).

extension of 166 meters. The viaduct is clearly visible from different angles that enable visitors to appreciate its grandeur, although today the view is partially obscured by the new motorway 107 and by the spontaneous vegetation of the Sila. Further points of interest for a possible industrial tourism itinerary are all the pieces of equipment necessary for running the locomotives that used to travel along this historic railway. One example is certainly the revolving platform located at San Nicola Silvana Mansio station, which allowed the train to reverse the direction of travel; another is the water columns arranged along the track, serving as a water supply point.

Additionally, mention must be made of the stations along the route, some of which feature original architectural structures that have been recovered and enhanced, as well as depots for locomotives and buildings for railway personnel. Among these stations, the aforementioned one of San Nicola Silvana Mansio stands out, the highest Italian narrow-gauge railway station, at almost 1406 m above sea level.

Finally, the cultural potential offered by this itinerary deserves some consideration. The railway connects a series of Silan centres which, over the centuries, have preserved important artistic vestiges. One paradigmatic example is the famous Florense Abbey in San Giovanni in Fiore, the terminus of the western section of the Silana railway. This centuries-old place of worship is an outstanding example of the regional architectural style, located in the historic centre of San Giovanni in Fiore. This imposing building is one of the most significant architectural assets of the Sila and offers visitors an opportunity to discover the artistic history of Calabria. The architecture has been remodelled over the centuries, its stark interior invites contemplation and prayer. Furthermore, here it is possible to see the lithographs of the *Liber Figurarum*, a theological collection that reflects the thought of Joachim of Fiore.

Other settlements located near the route of the ancient railway also preserve important traces of the local cultural heritage. One of the richest centres from a cultural point of view is certainly Spezzano della Sila. Here the Hermitage of the Holy Trinity, founded by San Francesco di Paola,

deserves particular attention because the visitors can explore a site linked to the history of the Calabrian miracle-worker where, even today, it is possible to trace his spiritual heritage. Near Spezzano della Sila, in the centre of Spezzano Piccolo, the church of the Assunta stands out for its uniqueness. The wooden ceiling decorated by the famous Calabrian artist Cristoforo Santanna in the eighteenth century which makes this church one of the artistic places along the Silana railway route that no visitor should miss.

THE USE OF VIRTUAL REALITY IN RAILWAY HERITAGE SITES

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has ruled out conventional modes of fruition of the landscape and museum heritage. Indeed, the continuous restrictions imposed, in particular the prohibition of travel for unnecessary reasons, have increasingly reduced the opportunities to enjoy national and international cultural heritage sites. Although direct experience cannot (and should not) be replaced in any way, numerous cultural centres have made the use of their heritage available through virtual tours¹⁰. During the recent pandemic, digital technologies have provided a valid alternative to direct experience, with the aim of fully involving the individual using a subjective view. This specific technology already witnesses a wide diffusion before COVID-19¹¹ and its use to promote the heritage of historic railways has been adopted by national and international institutions. A concrete example here is certainly represented by the Rhaetian Railway, whose narrow-gauge itinerary crosses the Swiss Alps: it is now possible to enjoy this itinerary through a virtual tour. This railway network, specifically the Albula and Bernina section, has been recognised as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO on account of its unique architectural and engineering features¹². The heritage of the

¹⁰ Maria Vayanou, Akrivi Katifori, Angeliki Chrysanthi, and Angeliki Antoniou, "Cultural Heritage and Social Experiences in the Times of COVID 19", in *Proceedings of AV/2CH2020: Workshop on Advanced Visual Interfaces and Interactions in Cultural Heritage* (New York NY: ACM, 2020).

¹¹ Julia Beck, Mattia Rainoldi and Roman Egger, "Virtual reality in tourism: a state of the art review", *Tourism Review* (74:2) 2019

¹² [La ferrovia retica nel paesaggio dell'Albula e del Bernina | Unesco Italia](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

railway is now accessible through Street View on Google Maps, following a joint action by Google and the Rhaetian Railway¹³. This virtual route, therefore, allows the potential tourist to become aware of the extraordinary heritage of this historic railway, without necessarily having to go there.

Although the Silana railway is a well-established reality, it does not yet have a platform allowing the potential visitor to explore its path. This tool could be a useful source of information for anyone intending to visit the Silana railway line, or simply, as during the COVID-19 pandemic, to virtually discover its heritage. In the case of the Silana railway, developing an interactive map of the route would help support tourists during their travel experience. The virtual interactive map created for the Silana railway aims to highlight the peculiarities of the route, in order to help users find their way along the railway route. This virtual map is a prototype and is still under development, therefore other sites considered important for this multimedia project will be added to the sites listed below. The points included in the map are divided into three types: naturalistic sites (in green), industrial sites (in grey) and cultural sites (in blue). The starting point for the ideal route indicated on the map is Moccone station, where the railway section recently put into operation begins. The next stop on the route is Camigliatello station, which is essential since it represents the tourist basin of this locality, one of the most important in the Silan area. We then continue with the Camigliati viaduct, one of the longest of the entire stretch, whose sinuous shape can also be glimpsed at from motorway 107. The small station of Sculca is also marked on the map, as it allows visitors to admire the characteristic water supply system, which is preserved intact, according to the technical construction criteria adopted at the time. As the stretch continues, the route begins the climb necessary to reach the terminus, passing through Righio station, where you can admire one of the bridges that mark the route, framed by the vast expanses of the Silan plateau. Silvana Mansio station, the highest narrow-gauge station in Italy, is shown on the map as at the moment it is the final terminus of the route. Furthermore, here it is possible to admire the rotating platform through which the locomotive reverses

¹³ [Google Street View – the virtual RhB trip - Ferrovia retica SA](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

its direction of travel. We have decided to mark on the map not only the places along the Silana railway affected by the tourist service, but also those belonging to sections not yet brought back into operation, yet presenting some interesting peculiarities. Among these places the viaduct of San Pietro in Guarano certainly stands out, as one of the most successful engineering works of the entire railway route.

Finally, the interactive map provides a series of indications with respect to the main attractions that can be encountered in the vicinity of the railway route, as if to offer suggestions for tourists to improve and expand their travel experience. In particular, two sites are flagged: the first, Lake Arvo, is of a naturalistic type, while the second is a cultural site, the centuries-old Abbey of San Giovanni in Fiore. To browse the interactive map of the Silana railway, click on this link: [bestspotslofferroviasilana \(fabiorafele.dev\)](https://bestspotslofferroviasilana.fabiorafele.dev)

A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SILANA RAILWAY AND THE LINHA DO TUA

As anticipated in the introduction, an integral part of this investigation is the comparison between the selected case study, the Silana railway, and a similar one located abroad, yet still within the European Union. The aim is to understand how heritage railways are managed in different countries. Another goal is to identify any best practices present in this foreign tourism system in order to adopt them in Calabria – and vice versa.

The railway chosen for this comparison is the Linha do Tua, located in the Trás-os-Montes province, in Portugal. This choice was made by taking into consideration what these two sections have in common, not only from a historical point of view but also from an engineering point of view. As we shall see, the history of the construction of the Linha do Tua is very similar to that of the Silana, not to mention the fact that the current development of the Portuguese section is not so different from

that of the Calabrian historical route over the past few years. More specifically, the comparison between the two heritage railways will be based on the following points.

1) Similar historical events: when and why the two railways were created

The railways were designed between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth with the aim of connecting more isolated centres with larger ones and to develop the economy of the areas involved. Also, both railways were narrow-gauge lines to better suit the extremely rugged terrain they needed to cross.

SILANA: The hypotheses of constructing a railway line crossing the Sila was first put forward as early as the 1880s¹⁴. The perceived urgency of the project was certainly linked to the need to create an adequate means of transport, since travellers were forced to make long journeys, often in hostile weather conditions, to reach the coast. Another factor was the need to transport goods from the Silano Plateau to larger centres for commercial reasons. Although various local governments were involved in the Silana railway project from the start, it was only at the beginning of the 1920s that this project started to come true. The work continued until the 1950s. Unfortunately, as anticipated, the initial project was never completed: in the second half of the twentieth century the Silana railway was progressively downsized and finally closed down. Once the infrastructure was deemed inadequate for ordinary transport, as it was not in line with the latest safety standards, a small part of it underwent conversion to tourist use.

LINHA DO TUA: The Linha do Tua is one of the major Portuguese projects aimed at creating a railroad link¹⁵. Plans to establish a railway infrastructure connecting Porto with the Spanish border,

¹⁴ For more information on the history of the Silana railway, see Salvatore Rongone, *La Ferrosilana*, (Bari, 1980) Rongone (1980); Andrea Bevilacqua, 2018, *Il treno della Sila, fischia e sbuffa nel Parco Nazionale della Sila* (Cosenza: La Dea Editori, 2013), Cerminara, Salatino e Sirianni, *In treno sulla Sila*.

¹⁵ For more information on the history of the Linha do Tua, see Hugo Silveira Pereira Porto (ed.), *A Linha do Tua (1851-2008)* (Vila do Conde: Minerva Artes Grafica, 2015).

through the Trás-os-Montes region, had already been advocated in various debates carried out by the Portuguese engineering community as early as the 1880s. However, unlike the Silana railway, the first section of the Linha do Tua was already open by 1887 and the subsequent works were completed within the first decade of the twentieth century. However, growing competition with motorway lines and the lack of investments contributed to the constant decrease in traffic along the Linha do Tua, leading to the progressive closing down of the route, which unfortunately is still waiting to be converted to tourist use.

2) The area where the railway line extends

SILANA RAILWAY: As already reported, the Silana railway extends through the territory of the Sila National Park, a mountainous region located in the centre of Calabria. The Sila National Park is characterised by an extremely rugged and rich biodiversity, in terms of both flora and fauna. Although it is located deep in southern Italy, the area is characterised by rather harsh winters and mild summers.

LINHA DO TUA: The Trás os Montes ('Beyond the Mountains') region was one of the most inaccessible areas of Portugal and is located in the north-eastern part of the country. It is known for its rugged mountain landscapes and huge valleys in its southern regions, and its capital is Bragança, which is located in a plateau bordering Spain. This wild landscape is precisely what constitutes the charm of this region, which further stands out for the high number of animal and plant species that make up its rich biodiversity. The climate is extreme, with very cold winters and hot summers.

3) Preservation of the original route

The two railway lines have undergone numerous alterations over time that have drastically reduced their extent.

SILANA RAILWAY: The original extension of the Silana railway was about 67 km in the Pedace-San Giovanni section, and over 40 km in the Crotona-Petilia Policastro section. This last

section of the railway was completely abandoned in the 1970s; therefore, the only one left in operation was the western section of the railway, the one from Pedace to San Giovanni. Due to the development of road communication routes and failure to adapt the infrastructure to modern safety standards, the Silana railway was gradually closed down in the second half of the twentieth century. Only a short section was reopened exclusively for tourist purposes, the one from Camigliatello to San Nicola Silvana Mansio.

LINHA DO TUA: The original route of the Linha do Tua stretched for about 134 km and connected the locality of Foz-Tua to Bragança. Unfortunately, during the second half of the twentieth century, it underwent countless alterations. In the late 1980s, roughly half of the line (the section between Bragança and Mirandela) was terminated. Another reason for the loss of this important historical railway section was the construction of a dam on the confluence of the Tua and Douro rivers¹⁶, which caused the loss of about 23 km of the permanently submerged route and the suspension of mobility for the remaining part of the route. The remaining line, which followed the original route, was completely renewed through an investment of 5.6 million euros¹⁷. In April 2011, the ADRV (Agência de Desenvolvimento Regional do Vale do Tua) was established¹⁸, a non-profit association that promoted a tourism mobility project in the Valle del Tua¹⁹. But despite its positive intention to develop this project, the Mobility Plan for the Valle del Tua has not yet been implemented. The reasons are to be found in the bureaucratic mechanisms at work which, despite the efforts made by the bodies involved, are inexorably slowing down the work.

4) Particular places of interest along the route

¹⁶ [Foz Tua: quando il rapporto con il fiume cambia | edp.com](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

¹⁷ Fernando Pires, “Mário Ferreira cansado do excesso de burocracia para o regresso do comboio à linha do Tua”, TSF 7 January 2021, [Mário Ferreira cansado do excesso de burocracia para o regresso do comboio à linha do Tua \(tsf.pt\)](#) (accessed 30 September 2021)

¹⁸ [Vale do Tua \(valetua.pt\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

¹⁹ [Assinatura de acordos e contratos finais para Plano de Mobilidade do Vale do Tua – Vale do Tua \(valetua.pt\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

SILANA: As previously mentioned, the Sila Railway winds through the territory of the Sila National Park, passing near some points of considerable naturalistic interest: the “Giganti della Sila” nature reserve, the Lorica Lake and the Cecita water basin. No less noteworthy are the points of cultural interest, already extensively discussed – as in the case of the famous secular abbey of San Giovanni in Fiore.

LINHA DO TUA: The route of the Linha do Tua also winds through a major park, the Tua Valley Regional Park. Established in 2013, it preserves a great biodiversity. It is important to underline that the Park includes the Alto Douro Vinhateiro, classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site²⁰. This area also includes some thermal springs, such as those of Caldas de Carlão and Santa Maria Madalena, as well as the thermal springs of Caldas de São Lourenço. The latter are natural hot water springs situated in a small village near the railway route. The Interpretative Centre aims to enhance visitors enjoyment of the natural and historical riches of the Tua Valley Park. The Centre is divided into three main areas devoted to closely interconnected points of interest: the Valley, the Tua Line and the Foz Tua dam. As far as the dam is concerned, although its construction has affected the layout of the Linha do Tua, it is undeniable that this is an engineering work of great value for visitors. In addition, there are several points of cultural interest near the route which further enrich the tourist appeal of the railway, most notably the city of Mirandela, located in the heart of the Trás-os-Montes region and crossed by the Tua river. The city has several museums that preserve its great cultural heritage, such as in the museum of religious art²¹ and the municipal museum²². Also, there is a museum of the olive tree and olive oil²³ that also serves as an art gallery. The bridge over the Tua river has also been preserved: originally built in the sixteenth century, it has been modified and

²⁰ [Alto Douro Wine Region - UNESCO World Heritage Centre](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

²¹ [Mirandela Turismo / Museu de Arte Sacra da Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Mirandela \(visitmirandela.com\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

²² [CM Mirandela / Museu Municipal Armindo Teixeira Lopes \(cm-mirandela.pt\)](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

²³ [Museu da Oliveira e do Azeite | www.visitportugal.com](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

improved several times over the years. Also noteworthy is Tua station in Foz-Tua, which connects the Linha do Tua and the Douro line. Here visitors will find a small museum with railway equipment.

5) Tourist events organised to help people discover these railways

SILANA: Currently all events designed to promote and enhance this line take place on board a steam train from the 1920s called Treno della Sila²⁴. As anticipated in the previous paragraphs, this train provides a tourist service from “Moccone” to “San Nicola Silvana Mansio”, but chiefly on the weekend. Furthermore, before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, a series of events were organised with local schools to allow students to discover the Silana railway and its peculiarities.

LINHA DO TUA: Currently there are no planned tourist events and the line is awaiting the implementation of the tourist service.

6) Future plans to promote these railways from a tourist point of view

SILANA RAILWAY: Currently, in September 2021, the Silana railway is involved in a series of projects designed to reopen the section from San Nicola Silvana Mansio to San Giovanni in Fiore. The work began at the end of the summer of 2021 with the aim of allowing tourist events to reach the terminus of the western stretch of the Silana. Along this line, work is also being carried out to create velorail routes: feasibility tests were carried out in the summer of 2019²⁵. However, the velorail prototype is still in the approval phase. The future of the remaining stretch of the line, from Pedace to Moccone, is still uncertain, but its development would reopen to tourism the small towns it crosses and which, as we have seen, boast a significant cultural and artistic heritage.

²⁴ [Treno della Sila | Treno delle Sila](#) (accessed 29 September 2021).

²⁵ “Sta arrivando il ferrociclo”, Camigliatelloturismo 15 July 2019, <https://www.camigliatelloturismo.it/news/337-sta-arrivando-il-ferrociclo> (accessed 29 September 2021).

LINHA DO TUA: As far as the Linha do Tua is concerned, efforts are focused on the reopening of the tourist train service, an excellent opportunity to relaunch the entire area. Furthermore, operations are scheduled to begin for the development of a boat service between the dam and the railway station of Brunheda, where the service of the tourist train begins. Finally, future projects on this railway track include the renewal of Mirandela station, characterised by a unique architectural style, and its conversion into a cultural centre²⁶.

CONCLUSIONS AND ENHANCEMENT PROPOSALS

From the comparison based on the parameters chosen for the setlist it emerges that both the two management models adopted for these heritage railways present certain strengths and flaws that may be subject to improvement, not least through the sharing and exchange of best practices. Specifically, two points emerge from this comparison: 1) practices for enhancing the tourist railway itinerary; 2) the construction of a network of appropriate services to enhance the tourist experience.

Regarding the first point, the Silana railway, as we have seen, has already developed a tourist path, which has been partially recovered and used for events on board a steam train. Plans have also been formulated to further enhance the tourist experience, most notably through the establishment of a velorail service. Moreover, work has recently begun for the reopening of a further section of the route in order to expand the tourist offering.

The Linha do Tua, on the other hand, still lacks an effective tourist service, which would enhance the route and give new impetus to the tourism sector in neighbouring areas. For this reason, the Silana railway can be seen to offer a valid example of the efficient recovery and management of disused railway sections.

²⁶ Rbtribuna, "Convertirán la estación del tren de Mirandela (1887) en una gran Casa das Artes", Rías Baixas Tribuna 19 February 2021, [Convertirán la estación del tren de Mirandela \(1887\) en una gran Casa das Artes ~ RÍAS BAIXAS TRIBUNA \(riasaixastribuna.com\)](https://tribuna.riasaixas.com/convertiran-la-estacion-del-tren-de-mirandela-1887-en-una-gran-casa-das-artes/) (accessed 29 September 2021).

Regarding the second point, no concrete projects would appear to have been formulated for the enhancement of some of the main points of cultural interest in the area surrounding the Silana railway. For example, although many centres have an interesting historical and artistic heritage, they often lack an adequate hospitality system for tourists, since many structures are either closed or temporarily inaccessible. This aspect can discourage a certain type of tourism such as experiential tourism, based on the discovery of local culture and heritage. Furthermore, it is important to note the absence of a railway museum, which would help preserve and transmit the heritage of this ancient railway line. Although some projects have been timidly advanced, it has not yet been possible to establish such an important museum. With regard to this second point, the tourism system developed around the Linha do Tua seems to excel, thanks to the establishment of a railway museum like the one in the Vale do Tua Interpretation Centre. The same applies to the centres crossed by the railway, above all Mirandela, which has an important museum system aimed at promoting the territorial heritage.

Considering the potential of the Silana railway, it is possible to propose three itineraries which might be combined with travel aboard the historic train, and which take account of the distinctive features of experiential tourism: a naturalistic itinerary, an industrial itinerary and a cultural one. The ultimate purpose of these paths is to allow tourists to come into contact with the local culture and to rediscover its identity.

The first itinerary, the industrial one, would revolve around the engineering works present on the route of the Silana railway. The value of these infrastructures lies in the fact that they were built in an era, the first half of the twentieth century, in which manual work was only supported by machines to a limited extent. Therefore, the surviving artefacts reflect the mastery of the workers involved in the construction of the railway. It should be emphasised that the engineers' work was particularly burdensome, given the steepness of the Silano Plateau, which made the construction of the infrastructures even more difficult. For this reason, this railway section could be included in

industrial tourism itineraries designed for enthusiasts, in order to promote knowledge of the most significant industrial archaeology sites in Calabria. Certainly, by visiting industrial sites of the past, it is possible to gain a more complete understanding of the history of an area, and to more clearly identify the changes and evolutions that have occurred over time. Therefore, enhancing this heritage through tourist services would be a further way to promote its knowledge and conservation.

The second type of itinerary proposed is a cultural one. Indeed, the possibility of combining the journey on the Silana railway with the rediscovery of the heritage of the small towns it crosses would help promote the distinctive features of this territory. The initiative should not be limited to those centres where the railway is still active, but should be extended to sites where the railway service has been interrupted, in order to allow tourists to get a clear idea of the original railway route. However, as already specified, it is necessary to create a way to promote these resources, so as make them an added value for the local territory. Furthermore, it would be necessary to set up an appropriate hospitality system and a dedicated information office.

Finally, the last proposed itinerary is the naturalistic one, which relies on the significant biodiversity of the Sila Park, whose territory is entirely crossed by the railway line. For example, the numerous stations and stops dotting the route allow rapid forays into the heart of the dense web of larch and maple trees, offering travellers the opportunity to discover the naturalistic riches of the area in detail and tranquillity. This feature is ensured by the very structure of the railway, which was designed in such a way as to adapt to the morphology of the territory rather than alter it. For this reason, the establishment of soft mobility tourist routes could be a way to enhance the railway itinerary even more. Finally, this itinerary could be further enhanced through a velorail service that would allow visitors to admire the naturalistic beauties along the route: velorail is common in other

parts of Europe, especially in France²⁷, and would constitute an additional service to fully exploit the potential of the Silana railway.

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²⁷ In France 430 km have already been equipped for the velorail service. See Ilaria Maggiorotti (ed.) *Atlante delle greenways su linee FS. Dal disuso al riuso*. (Aversa: Grafica Nappa, 2019), 23

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