

València's opportunities in the Silk Road

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1 The Silk Road that unite us today.

“There is nothing impossible to him who will try”.

Alexander the Great

Researchers say that the first recorded mention of the Silk Road dates back to around year 100 BC when a Chinese expedition set off West to purchase horses in Central Asia, where they learned that the silk they had brought (with them) was highly prized in the bazaars. But it is believed that the route was already several thousand years old by then and that Alexander the Great followed much of it during his Eastern conquests. Genghis Khan, Timur (also known as Tamarlane) and Marco Polo were other historical figures familiar with the great Eurasian highway.

According to Ricardo Franch, fabrics of Islamic tradition had already arrived to València from the arrival of the Arabs to the-Ándalus, in the 8th Century, but it was in the late 14th Century when the traders Genovese contributed to the diffusion of the mulberry crop from the South of Italy. The production of silk intensified during the 17th Century and arrived to its maximum expansion during the first third of the 18th Century, when this industry was present in 90% of the more than 500 towns of València’s Kingdom.



It is estimated that in the middle of the 18th Century around the half of the population of the city of Valencia worked, directly or indirectly, in this sector. It explains that the silk influenced deeply, not only the physiognomy and the urban economy of the city, but also the social relations and the cultural expressions of València. A strong epidemic that affected the silkworms and the irruption of another type of textiles and production processes affected to the competitiveness of the sector by the end of the 18th Century, eradicating considerably this way of production. Nowadays, we preserve numerous elements that can be observed and enjoyed by citizens and tourists, in order to understand how important was this economic activity for the Valencian society during centuries.

València, as part of this tapestry of territories that traded among them during lots of centuries and that extended from the Far Orient until the Iberian Peninsula, forms an active part again of an amazing project that will contribute to improve all type of relations with other cities from almost half the world.

2 The participation of València in UNWTO Silk Road Program.

In 1993, during the UNWTO General Assembly, attendant members requested the Secretary General to boost a partnership that was called **The Silk Road Project**. The UNWTO conceptualized the idea of a long-term tourism project that would promote the natural and cultural richness of the historic Silk Road and unite the participating countries through tourism exchange. Under the auspices of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and UNWTO's Secretary General, in 1994 nineteen participating countries adopted the *Samarkand Declaration on Silk Road Tourism*.

With the *Samarkand Declaration* a new trans-continental tourism concept was born, its main objectives being:

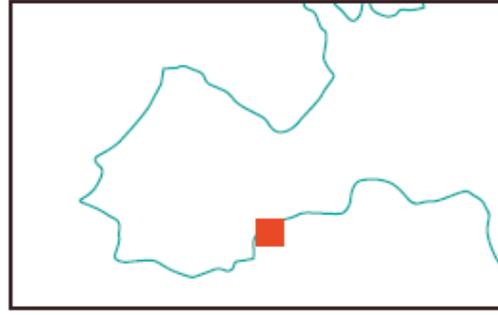
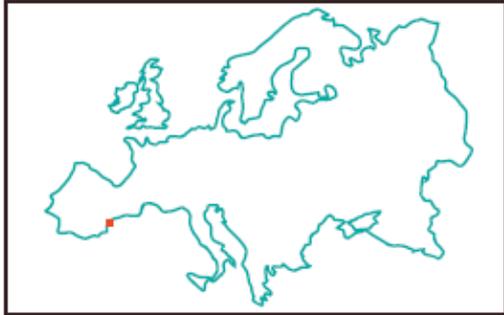
- commitment to regional cooperation, thus contributing to regional stability and prosperity;
- establishment of a high quality tourism brand, by bringing together different stakeholders from all levels; and
- the firm decision to link culture with tourism.

Private and public enterprises also have an important role in the Silk Road Organization, because they help with their expertise to reach important agreements. Sponsors also form a very important role in the Silk Road organization, for their contribution to economic resources.

In 2015 Spain was included as the 32nd Member State in the UNWTO Silk Road Program (the group is currently made up of 33 countries), with the Comunitat Valenciana and the city of Valencia making a decisive contribution to this objective. Les Corts Valencianes (autonomic parliament of the Comunitat Valenciana) approved in July 2015 an institutional Statement, signed by all the parliamentary groups, urging to the Consell (autonomic Government) to develop one "Strategy 2016-2020 for the Comunitat Valenciana in the Silk Road".

The Spain Ministers Council approved this same year an Agreement by which supported the initiative "Valencia, City of the Silk 2016", inside the "Strategy of the Comunitat Valenciana in the Silk Road 2016-2020", considering it a great opportunity for Valencia to retrieve its leadership among the mythical Silk Road cities and project internationally its valuable historical heritage-artistic.

In addition, Spain joined in April 2015 the Silk Road platform of UNESCO, implemented under the framework of the decade for the close up of cultures (2013-2022), an initiative joined by nineteen States.



3. The Silk Road as an opportunity for València.

We would like to highlight some key elements of València's diagnostic made under the Strategic Plan of València Tourism 2017-2020¹. It allows to understand the opportunities that this alliance present to the States that are part of UNWTO Silk Road Program.

- It exists an offer of tourist basic services of quality, although it is necessary to continue working to create a cultural story that portrays our identity and singularity.
- We still have to increase the visibility of our destination brand in international markets.
- We must move to a more segmented marketing with more specific contents and tools.
- It is necessary to improve the air connectivity with new international markets.
- It is necessary to consolidate a new model of collaboration, characterized by full coordination of public Administrations and an increase of businesses' participation.

From the diagnostic made, we are convinced that the participation of the city of València in this Road Silk Program can contribute to reach some of the goals that have been established in our Strategic Tourism Plan.

The geographical and historical framework that reach the Silk Road is key to elaborate our cultural story. València can be more known in Asia and Africa if we keep an active participation in international forums related with the Silk Road. That institutional presence of València, through its public and private representatives in the actions that may be articulated during the next years within the frame of UNWTO Silk Road Program will contribute to increase the exchange of people, commodities and services, helping achieve the tourism goals that we set for the city of Valencia.

But especially and much more important: it will make us richer citizens in terms of cultural exchanges and friendships with other peoples.

¹ http://www.visitvalencia.com/es/admin/ftpEstudios/PE_2017_2020_PA_2017.pdf

3.1 The emotional connection with Asia.

The Silk Road is a historic symbol, an identity element for a large number of citizens from more than thirty countries in Asia, Africa and Europe. The historical legacy of one of the most popular and important routes in modern history of mankind has strong emotional values, which transmit friendship, proudness, and a sense of belonging to a common past and therefore grounds for closer collaboration in the present.

In order to build stable relationships among the different nations and cities that constitute the silk roads, the great historical legacy is a shared value of such magnitude that it would be a mistake to ignore it. Above the differences that may exist among all of us, that common commercial past serves to strengthen tourism cooperation agreements that are signed today.

Therefore, encouraging further research based on the remains of the long period of commercial traffic through the traditional routes of the silk and other goods will help to find common ground for dialogue and understanding between the different nations and cities.

We have been able to read that València is a very Chinese city, very Asian. The rice, the pyrotechnics, the citrus, the collective festivities in the public space, etc., are all elements that together with the silk facilitate the emotional connection of Asians with València. For far and emergent markets, points of cultural identity that generate an additional frame of trust and convergence, allow to accelerate the possibilities to establish enduring relations, in topics like education, economy, ... or to exchange best public practices, among others.

3.2 Valencia, the Silk City in Spain.

Valencia has world-class heritage resources related to industry and trade in silk. We can cite two emblematic buildings, The College of High Silk Art and The Lonja (World Heritage by UNESCO); we can write a historic chapter of Valencia, probably its most relevant, over the influence of the silk industry in the city between the 15th and the 18th centuries, being one of its most important economic activities; we can observe in the neighborhood of Velluters many buildings with an origin linked to the production of the silk, and so on.

These and other factors, together with the importance of the Valencian traditional clothing elaborated from the silk textile, with glorious examples that can be observed in museums throughout the city, allow València to be labeled the Silk City in Spain.

The will to lead the historical recognition of the silk in our country requires of active policies to leverage all this legacy and to continue promoting new ideas for its international expansion. To be City of Silk will imply a responsibility and a commitment that will contribute to València with new creative lines.

The Town Hall of Valencia and the Valencia Tourism Foundation have undertaken so far different activities to promote Valencia as the City of Silk. Let's highlight some examples:

- New content on the Silk Road for web, social networks and newsletters.
- Stories in specialized journals, international televisions and other media about the attractions and the history of the silk in the area.

- Product development and commercialization of a "Valencia Silk Route", with specialized guides².
- Organization and participation in two focus group sessions for the *Western Silk Road Tourism Development Initiative* of UNWTO and the European Union.

3.3 The silk road in Valencia, a tourist product of a wide range of cultural offers.

The Strategic Plan of Tourism 2017-2020 of Valencia has a big aim, the creation of a Cultural Tourism Program that includes public and private participation to build tourism product, segmented and technology based promotion and diversification of markets. Inside the category of cultural tourism, the history of the silk in Valencia is the catalyst to be able to experience different tourist experiences, extending bednights and winning loyalty, especially in the Asian markets.

The strong identity the Silk Road has in the minds of Central and Oriental Asia population, facilitates us to introduce the city of València in those countries from our common culture associated to the silk. Valencia will attach to its silk proposals other components related with the arts, music, events, folklore, education, etc.

3.4 The networking with Asia-Pacific.

There is wide evidence that the Silk Road is and will be a competitive tourism product globally, with a strong tourism brand that will motivate the trip. However, to accelerate competitive success, it is necessary **to strengthen the networking and shared management** of actions that result in greater efficiency and positive effects for all countries and institutions that are part of the Silk Road network.

These specific characteristics of tourism (**participation of public and private agents, provision of public and private goods**) advise therefore to establish partnerships among public and private actors, in order to efficiently manage and promote the tourism product, in this case the Silk Road.

Valencia as the final stop for the Silk Road has great symbolic value. It allows to visualize different Silk Roads, in different historical moments and geographic stages, finishing or starting in Western Europe and Oriental Asia cities. The potential relationships that are at our hands with different countries involved, deserve to be exploited, with intense inter-administrative collaboration and with the private sector, with the know-how and the capacity of the Chambers of Commerce, universities, business associations, airlines, port authorities, etc. We move from a program of tourist relations to a program of city marketing, with a specific strategy of networking with Asia Pacific that it has to be defined.

These goal is what lead us to think about the different forms of cooperation that can be agreed, one or more types, depending on the objectives, in order to position Valencia in the Silk Road as a competitive and sustainable tourism destination, but also like a city to live, study, invest, trade.

² <http://shop.visitvalencia.com/es/visitas-guiadas-centro-historico/producto/visita-guiada-ruta-de-la-seda-valencia>

The difficulties we encountered in order to foster partnerships and international agreements between states, cities and companies of the Silk Road Program are those of any complex network of socio-economic, public and private agents: different interests, different sizes, different financing capacity, various legal forms, different organizational cultures, etc. However, we need to add two additional problems: these are international partnerships, in which many countries, cities and companies participate, and where the wealth and income levels vary widely across countries. And let us not forget that Valencia will establish its alliances remembering and respecting that the General Assembly of the United Nations agreed in 2015 to proclaim the 2017 financial year the “International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development”³.

Traditionally, to manage the issues with an international dimension, negotiations among members of the international community have been carried out through diplomatic procedures, through public representatives (politicians and civil servants) of United Nations. But now, with easier access to information, companies, NGOs and cities express their interest to participate in collaborating on issues that are complex and whose decisions will be much more stable if there were more participation and consensus. Hence, the emergence in recent decades of numerous philanthropic associations, civic movements organized through the Internet or public-private entities with different interests who wish to participate in environmental, cultural, political or solidarity issues and with which Valencia will have to collaborate to improve its overall position in Asia-Pacific.

4 Conclusions and Recommendations

I) A historical legacy on which further research should be carried out.

Encouraging further research on the remains of the long period of commercial traffic through the traditional routes of the silk and other goods will help to continue to find common ground to facilitate dialogue and understanding between the different nations. The research role of the experts and the Valencian universities must be supported to continue working in that direction.

II) Silk Road product development.

While Valencia has made an effort to protect and bring back to light tourist attractions related to the silk, which can already be interpreted from sightseeing tours, like Valencia Tourism tour, it is crucial to continue investing in those other resources disseminated through the region of Valencia and the city, and that have been inventoried under a magnificent work coordinated from the University of Valencia and the Agència Valenciana del Turisme.

³ http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/193&referer=/english/&Lang=S

VLC VALENCIA

Valencia, Silk Tour

Adults	With Valencia Tourist Card	Children (7 to 16)	Groups (20 - 35 paid)
20€	12€	10€	17€* For person

* Available on request and previous reservation.

- 📍 Tourist Info Ayuntamiento.
- 🗣️ Spanish - English (bilingual).
- 🕒 Saturdays at 11 a.m. Duration: 2 hrs.
- 🛡️ Trip guaranteed.

The Silk Exchange UNESCO
INSIDE VISIT INCLUDED

Silk Museum
INSIDE VISIT INCLUDED

Espai Seda Shop
INSIDE VISIT INCLUDED

Clothing
INSIDE VISIT INCLUDED

Complete your experience visiting the Museo Nacional de Cerámica and the Museo L'Iber, not included in the tour.

i Find out more and get these promotions in any of our Tourist Info offices, www.visitvalencia.com or at comercial@visitvalencia.com

Also it is worth to mention the initiative of the Hortensia Herrero Foundation financing the integral rehabilitation of the The College of High Silk Art.

From these public and non-profit organizations initiatives, **marketable products will have to be developed**. Travel agencies must take on and offer experiences that best suit different segments of travelers and their needs. To increase the reach of our cultural offers at the hand of the offer of the silk tourism product, from the Valencia Tourism Foundation it is our intention to create a work group with travel agencies participating in the *4th World Summit of Presidents of Travel Agencies Associations*, to be held in Valencia in November 2017. The participation of representatives from over 100 travel agency associations is expected, 85 of which are based in countries other than Spain.

III) Structuring the local network of agents interested in the Silk Road.

In collaboration with the Agència Valenciana del Turisme (Valencian Government), should create a **permanent forum for dialogue and exchange of knowledge** to take advantage of the potential that the Silk Road represents for Valencia. We must share public and private financial efforts to increase relations with cities of the countries members of the Silk Road, especially

the Arabs and Asians. In this section, specify the institutional design, the business model and sources of funding remain as unfinished business in order to be able to move on from an informal, soft relational model to one with a greater formality, size and capacity for influence.

IV) Associate the mark “Silk Road” to the “València” destination.

We can certainly say that Silk Road is a **global brand** with a great potential to be used in terms of marketing. The Silk Road brand in terms of tourism is an umbrella that can cover multitude of forms of cultural tourism. Also, this brand can help to develop products related to business tourism, conferences, conventions, learning and other types of tourism products.

As a unique term, the “Silk Road” and what it represents would have to form part of the strategy of approaching and communicating with numerous Asian countries, among them, undoubtedly, China. If we achieve a **strong association between the Valencia destination brand and “Silk Road”** in these countries, we will achieve a bigger reputation and greater influence in general, not just tourism, terms.

V) Develop more tools of marketing and communication.

We must to increase the number and variety of tools to disposal of the end client, tourist or investor, available to intermediaries in markets and, also, to the extent of local companies.

Although we have published in digital supports and in different paper contents that allow to communicate better the legacy of the silk in València and his capacity of interpretation, it is necessary to continue investing in investigation of markets and in the design of instruments for the communication, in key of city marketing.

The old ways that restarts Valencia with the Silk Road of European countries, Africa and Asia, become opportunities to enlarge us as Valencians. Citizens of half the world, with a past that binds us and we are proud, we are making use of a password that all understand as a sign of peace and Concord: Silk roads.