

TOURISM AND MEGA EVENTS

THE CASE OF GENOA

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ABSTRACT

Genoa and Turin, among Italian medium-sized cities, carried out major urban regeneration plans between the 20th and the 21st centuries. Genoa concentrated on the enhancement of its old town centre through three events: (1) 1992, the EXPO to celebrate the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus was the occasion for the integration of part of the historic port with the old town centre, as designed by Renzo Piano; (2) 2001, the year of the G8 summit held in Genoa (with a tragic outcome) an operational Strategic Plan was drawn up and in 2000 an Integrated Plan for the Old Town Centre was included; (3) 2004, the year in which Genoa was designated European Capital of Culture. Thanks to funds made available for these three events, numerous projects were carried out. The conclusions present the three requisites for success.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades there have been many «cases» of urban regeneration in Europe. Innovation has almost always played a leading role, along with actions aimed at enhancing the historic centres. In many cases innovation has resulted in major urban planning changes introducing new buildings designed by great architects (as in Valencia); in some cases a single very important architectural project has been the driving force behind an extensive change at urban planning level (as in Bilbao); major events involving the town have also been an opportunity – given the vast quantities of public and private funds they

attract – for implementing a large-scale urban regeneration programme (the Olympic Games in Barcelona and in Athens).

Something similar happened in Genoa, though the financial resources available cannot be compared to the cases quoted above. Yet Genoa benefited from a *series* of events: 1992, the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America, 2001, the year of the notorious G8 summit and 2004, when Genoa, along with Lille, was designated European capital of Culture, subsequently achieving the status of Unesco World Heritage site in 2006 for the Strade Nuove and the Palazzi dei Rolli in its historic centre.

2. THE URBAN LANDSCAPE AND THE HISTORIC CENTRE

The first images in this rapid overview of planned and implemented projects aim to give an account of the historic urban landscape that marks Genoa's identity (I will use this concept even though I do not take for granted the meaning proposed by UNESCO in the «Vienna Memorandum» of 2002 and which is still under examination).

Subsequently the images focus on the historic centre – that is, the subject of my article, however without forgetting that the programme of regeneration also involved many other parts of the city.

3. THE HISTORIC CENTRE

Genoa's historic centre is clearly medieval in its layout. Though its «facies» has been modified in the course of time by repeated stratification processes, the fact remains that the urban layout is still clearly medieval, despite restoration work mostly carried out in the 19th century. The problem is the area's high building density – very narrow streets and very tall buildings (7 or 8 floors high).

The network of alleyways is a combination of the Islamic tradition of winding, intricate streets, whose route was prompted by orographical

motives, and the European tradition of the medieval «bayonet» rule (a closed-vision route frequently adorned with architectural elements such as portals, arcades, loggias). Since the post-war period Genoa's historic centre has been inhabited by immigrants, who still account for over 13% of the resident population. It also includes some 250 palaces of the aristocracy, some of them in good condition, others in a poor state of repair.

4. THE OLD PORT

The second group of images concerns the Old Port area, before 1992 given over to harbour facilities no longer used as such, which was chosen as the site of the Columbus Expo. Thanks to the project designed by Renzo Piano, the town was given its first and fundamental waterfront *within* the port, thus eliminating a separation created in the 15th century, when the so-called «murette» were erected. I would like to underline that the discovery of the harbour view at port level was an extraordinary surprise for the citizens of Genoa, who now consider this conquest a well-established habit. Renzo Piano regenerated pre-existing constructions through careful use of superior restoration work and technological solutions to safeguard their architectural qualities.

In addition, in 1992 the Carlo Felice Opera House was opened, the Palazzo Ducale was restored to be used as an exhibition and cultural centre, and the faculty of Architecture was inaugurated.

In 1998 Genoa was chosen as venue for the G8 summit in 2001. A TOWN PLAN was drawn up and extensively discussed.

5. THE STRATEGIC PLAN OR TOWN PLAN

The following outline is a basic summary of the philosophy of the approach suggested for the interventions planned.

The strategic plan presented by the municipal authorities between 1999 and 2000 has the aspect of a real «urban project», a type of urban

intervention corresponding to the original meaning of «projet urbain». The term was in fact coined in France, where the first examples of this method of intervention are to be found, undoubtedly inspired by the well-known, previous Barcelona experiences.

An urban project consists in determining a series of coordinated and interactive «actions» for the purpose of carrying out a specifically determined regeneration process concerning the entire city, or an significant part of it. These actions are not necessarily projects, though naturally the urban project involves the implementation of architectural projects. It is a question of a *totality of actions*: town planning, architectural, administrative, economic and social. The urban project is therefore an *integrated* project and concerns interventions that cooperate with each other, in order to trigger a synergetic mechanism with a view to achieving the goal of urban regeneration.

The strategic plan favoured the area of the historic centre – a choice that was widely approved since it was agreed that the city as a whole could not recover from the crisis that reached its peak in the Eighties unless a process of recovery was set in motion *starting* from the historic centre, considered at the same time a serious handicap for the entire city, given its state of deterioration, and a treasure trove of riches yet to be enhanced, given its structure, history and importance.

The plan contains different strategies relating to the various fields of intervention, direct and indirect, of the public administration, from welfare to culture, from port development issues to economic development, employment, the suburbs and the historic centre, and has also concerned specific interventions in various parts of the city.

It should be stressed that this *strategic plan* presents a distinctive feature within the big strategic plan category since it is a proper *operational plan*, of an integrated nature, that sets out «actions» described in files (one file for each «action») each one containing:

- the aim to be pursued;
- the connection with «other» actions;
- the beginning and end of the action;
- the «actors»;
- the users;

- the cost;
- the sources of funds employed.

With regard to urban planning, the physical actions proposed and to a large extent implemented concerned two major fields:

- the *first* can be considered as *extraordinary maintenance* work: pedestrianisation, public lighting, street paving, the facades, the urban sub-service network, etc.;
- the *second* concerns several major works corresponding to the investment of substantial funds, especially with regard to museums, leisure and culture.

The strategic commitment consisted in bringing together the «actions» of the first and second group.

6. THE OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR THE HISTORIC CENTRE

A plan was created expressly for the historic centre and launched in 2000 as an OPERATIONAL PLAN, its nature being that of an *Integrated Plan*.

The Plan comprised various fields of action:

1. buildings;
2. public spaces;
3. easy access;
4. socioeconomic interventions;
5. interventions to support planned actions.

6.1. *Public spaces*

The regeneration strategy mainly concerned public spaces. Property fragmentation made it advisable to adopt the Barcelona method, consisting in improving public spaces to stimulate private intervention on the buildings. This method worked for Barcelona and invariably for Genoa too.

6.2. *Pedestrianisation*

The issue of public spaces involved street repaving and lighting as well as pedestrianisation. The operation was very extensive and involved the main historic streets as well as building facades which, though private property, make up the most important part of the public scene. Private owners of the palazzos received subsidies of 35-40%, thus achieving an exceptional result.

6.3. *The facades*

The subject of the building facades is worth examining in detail, since it achieved very interesting results. Genoa has a great tradition of painted facades beginning in the 15th century and culminating in the 16th-18th centuries, though it continued up to the 19th century. «Genua Picta» is in fact the title of a major exhibition organised at the end of the Eighties by the Faculty of Architecture, originating from studies and research carried out within the faculty.

6.3.1. – Studies and research have followed three guidelines:

- *the first* regarding themes and forms of the paintings on the facades by means of detailed surveys and historical research on the buildings;
- *the second* regarding technical aspects of the restoration work: the exact reconstruction of pigments and plaster, their chemical make-up and the origin of the materials used;
- *the third* regarding fresco techniques, the aim being to recreate by means of a scientific restoration parts that had gradually faded to the point of seeming to be cancelled.

6.3.2. – The theme iconography essentially concerns two large categories:

- *the first* regards the patterns that take the place of marble in architectural decoration: columns, pilasters, capitals, candelabra, cornices of all kinds and styles. Though possibly created to save money, this type of decoration concerns palaces of major architectural importance;

- *the second* regards figurative themes, such as members of noble families, warriors, dignitaries, doges, etc.

6.3.3. – These paintings frequently cover the entire facade and, along with the openings (doors, windows), define the structure of the building.

6.3.4. – The fresco painters belong to the numerous Genoese studios in existence starting from the first half of the 16th century. In many cases the high quality of the frescoes makes it possible to attribute them to specific studios. .

The implementation of a plan for the enhancement of the city's most aristocratic street, representing a *unique* example in the history of European architecture, was a must for 2004. Via Garibaldi was built in the second half of the 16th century as a harmonious ensemble of palaces created for the merchant aristocracy and designed by the best architects of the period. These are the palaces depicted and published by P.P. Rubens, in the hope of convincing his fellow citizens to imitate them.

6.4. *Easy access*

The issue of easy access represented the most important item of expenditure and the one destined to create the greatest overall impression in the near future (once the urban subway line is finished, at least up to Brignole station). The historic centre has 5 subway stations (Principe, Darsena, San Giorgio, Sarzano and De Ferrari), 3 of which are already functioning.

6.5. *Socioeconomic interventions*

Socioeconomic interventions consisted above all in the creation of a business incubator programme offering incentives for the opening of new shops and craft workshops. One of the most alarming aspects of the urban

blight was the number of *closed shops*, especially in the principal shopping streets, so that the numerous re-openings due to incubator incentives have played a fundamental role in the rebirth of the historic centre.

6.6. *The information process*

The most interesting *actions* are linked to the information process effected by setting up the archives of the historic city, the CIVIS (the municipal office in charge of developing all information on the historic centre) and many other tools supporting the interventions. A leading role in this context was played by the Faculty of Architecture, where the archives of the historic city were created, an operation involving the cataloguing of all the buildings in the historic centre (around 3000). To manage this wealth of information the municipality created the «CIVIS» permanent laboratory which carries out new studies and research and monitors interventions in the historic centre.

7. A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY

7.1. 1992

The operation plan was implemented for the most part in the period between two big events involving Genoa: the G8 summit in 2001 and Genoa European capital of Culture in 2004, though the city's rebirth began in 1992, when the Old Port area was chosen as the venue for the Columbus International Expo.

The project was drawn up by Renzo Piano's studio and the Old Port zone, managed by the Porto Antico company, is still under the constant architectural supervision of Piano's studio.

Porto Antico SpA is a publicly owned company: the City of Genoa is the majority shareholder, while the Chamber of Commerce and the Port Authority are minority shareholders.

The company manages the area and the buildings, invests in maintenance and constant improvements and draws its income from the rental of spaces under its jurisdiction.

The area includes many establishments of great importance for Genoa: the Aquarium, the Congress Centre, the Città dei Bambini and the De Amicis Library (books for children), and many other recreational and cultural centres – a system widely acknowledged as functioning very well.

The area was repaved and a large quantity of palm trees were planted on the occasion of the second major event involving Genoa: the G8 summit in 2001.

7.2. 2001

The G8 summit took place in two strategic locations: Palazzo Ducale, headquarters of the meeting, and the Magazzini del Cotone, headquarters of the international press. To link these two locations with a pedestrian route which included Via S. Lorenzo and the Cathedral, newly restored for the Jubilee 2000, was an obvious move.

Street paving and the related sub-service network was carried out, while owners of the buildings received a public subsidy to restore the facades. Of all the interventions, this was probably the one that met with most success.

Many other pedestrianisation and restoration interventions were carried out for the G8 summit. Moreover, private intervention resulted in the implementation of houses, a hotel and a tourist port at Ponte Morosini, between the Aquarium and the docks (Darsena).

7.3. 2004

The third event took place in 2004 when Genoa, with Lille, was designated European Capital of Culture.

The programme of urban maintenance on a large scale was continued for the occasion. New pedestrianisation projects, a new facade

restoration plan and above all major interventions regarding the central museum issue were carried out.

The conclusions reached in an ad hoc study by a specialized company commissioned by the Town Council resulted in a goal, which was systematically pursued.

Three «museum centres» were created:

- *the first* is the ancient art museum centre, based on an original nucleus of two palaces in Via Garibaldi and a third palace, the town hall;
- *the second* is the Museum of the Sea and of Navigation in the Darsena area. An international architecture competition held in 2000 was won by Guillermo Consuegra's project. The museum opened in July 2004 and is one of the two major new architectural works scheduled in the Strategic Plan;
- *the third* is the modern art centre in the setting of the Nervi parks east of the city. The GAM (Gallery of Modern Art) opened in November 2004, after extensive refurbishment. Due to open is the Wolfson Museum, also in the park area and featuring a 1920s and 1930s art collection, with the prospect of achieving an organic management of the entire complex comprising the museums and parks.

8. THE WATERFRONT AND PONTE PARODI INTERVENTION

A large part of the old and new port complex. The completion of the «Waterfront» operation involves the Darsena and Ponte Parodi area, where a huge grain silo was built in the 1960s.

8.1. *Darsena*

The Darsena area, owned by the municipality, is the object of a major operation in which the first step was the installation of the Faculty of Economics in an old warehouse, completely transformed by a project that maintained its original features intact. The construction of the Museo del Mare and work on the other Darsena buildings, formerly

warehouses, has now been completed. The warehouses have been converted for different uses linked to the two principal themes of art and contemporary music thanks to private intervention. The two buildings are connected by a glass gallery, achieving an outstanding overall result.

8.2. *Ponte Parodi*

The most innovative and exceptional intervention as to size, use and appeal potential is undoubtedly the Ponte Parodi project.

In 2000 an architectural contest in three stages was launched. Ben Van Berkel's project was the final choice given its originality, power of attraction, strong personality and persuasive programme. The competition requested a «Mediterranean piazza», and Van Berkel has designed a piazza that extends to the roof of the entire building.

The gigantic Ponte Parodi grain silo built in 1965 had been set aside as an issue to be tackled later. The Van Berkel project envisaged its demolition, effected in a spectacular fashion in 2003.

After the competition the Porto Antico company, who managed the entire operation, put the project out to tender following project financing procedure and finally the French company Altarea, with a group of Genoese operators, was awarded the contract, which will presumably be completed in 2008.

9. THE ELEVATED ROAD

The urban elevated road built in 1964 links the Genova Ovest motorway tollgate to the Foce del Bisogno area, thus performing an invaluable service in crossing the town from west to east. Nowadays however it clashes with the historic city and cannot be considered as marking the boundary between town and port, since this boundary no longer exists. It is now a harmful element (pollution, noise) that must be eliminated, at least in its present function, to take on a new one if necessary. The

under water tunnel project in the port has the great merit of reducing travelling time, with a definitely more acceptable impact on the urban landscape.

10. UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITE

In 2006 Genoa was designated a UNESCO World Heritage site for the System of the Palazzi dei Rolli (the noble palaces inscribed on the lists drawn up by the Republic, whose owners were required to host state visits).

11. A BRIEF NOTE ON RESOURCES

A brief report on resources. A workshop initiated by the French Ministry of Infrastructure was held in Genoa in May 2003 to study the «case» of Genoa, considered of interest because the public administration has managed to channel a series of resources ranging from those made available for three major events (Columbus Expo 1992, G8 2001 and European Capital of Culture 2004), to private resources (Darsena, Ponte Parodi), private sponsors («Bolla» and Isola delle Chiavette by Renzo Piano) and foundations (Carige for the museums, San Paolo for the Museo del Mare e della Navigazione and many other interventions, etc.).

The most considerable resources were obtained by excellent municipal offices who managed to get their hands on funds for special projects: P.R.U., P.R.U.S.S.T., Contratti di Quartiere, etc. (Ministry of Public Works), URBAN 1 and 2 (European Community) and others.

The Ministry of National Heritage and Culture has also performed excellently, the Monuments and Fine Arts offices have collaborated with continuity and unity of purpose, and with substantial financial assistance.

12. CONCLUSIONS. THE THREE REQUISITES OF SUCCESS

The following is a very concise summary of the three requisites for successful interventions:

Strategy The strategic requisite consists in constructing a plan that can assess possible *interventions induced* by the actions *directly* implemented by the plan. Basically, allied activities must exceed direct intervention in quantity and quality. The volume of investment is an element that reveals the plan's strategic capacity, undoubtedly confirmed in the case of Genoa.

A quick reference to that fact that the real estate system and its variations can also be considered as *revealing* the effects of a plan of intervention. In Genoa the historic centre was the area with the lowest property value of the entire city. Now property value has greatly increased, creating a social problem, though the rise reveals the success of the operational plan. The subject deserved to be examined in detail with regard to the concept of

Integration Since out of all public investment policies, intervention on the housing heritage takes on an essential value, to assign an adequate share of the intervention to social housing. In the case of Genoa some 300 apartments were regenerated thanks to public intervention, this being the maximum possible effort. However, it is clearly insufficient.

It seems to me however that the subject of integration has been sufficiently illustrated. I insist on it because in Italy it is not easy to find in public interventions and in the cultural concept of the problem of historic centres.

I believe that the most important issue regards the integration between policies concerning objects and policies concerning subjects. The theme is important because an equilibrium must be achieved between interest *in the stones* out of which the historic centre is made and interest *in the citizens* who live there. Essentially, between URBS

and CIVITAS, remembering that the latter has priority. The concept of integration is more precisely that of *synergy*: each action must be enhanced by the other actions, achieving an effect of multiplication. The theme of urban *identity* can be interpreted in this sense, as a dynamic, not as a static element. The totality of the urban regeneration interventions must have the effect of revealing new identities, of enhancing in the city's inhabitants the concept of belonging.

Therefore the effect on the cultural heritage regards the *unveiling* of values that were neglected or no longer appreciated, as in the case of the painted facades.

Continuity An evident requisite. Once the mechanism of regeneration is triggered it must be fuelled continuously. The requisite of continuity is harder to achieve because it concerns the need to not waste, in the course of time, the positive effects attained. What is needed is stability of the administrative government and, above all, of the organisational structure created to direct and manage the interventions implemented by the plan.

RIASSUNTO

Fra le città italiane di media grandezza, Genova e Torino a cavallo degli anni 2000 hanno realizzato processi di rigenerazione urbana rilevanti. Genova ha puntato sulla valorizzazione del suo Centro Storico, attraverso tre eventi: (1) il 1992, cinquecentenario della scoperta dell'America, con una EXPO colombiana che è servita ad integrare al Centro Storico una parte del Porto Storico, con progetto di Renzo Piano; (2) il 2001, anno in cui Genova fu teatro di un G8 (che si rivelò tragico) che utilizzò un Piano Strategico (Piano della Città) a carattere operativo. Al suo interno, fu allestito, nell'anno 2000, il Piano Integrato per il Centro Storico; (3) il 2004, anno in cui Genova fu capitale europea della Cultura. Questi tre eventi, con le risorse che furono rese disponibili, consentirono di realizzare numerosi interventi. Nelle conclusioni, tre requisiti necessari per il successo.