



CONSERVATION / CREATION - The contribution of Conservation to urban futures

EAAE Conservation Network – IX Workshop

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Architecture and Design Department

University of Genoa

Genoa (Italy)

FIRST DAY

September 10th, 2024 (Architecture and Design Department DAD - University of Genoa)

Arch. Cristina Bartolini (Superintendent Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the Metropolitan City of Genoa and La Spezia Province)

15:30 Plenary session

Institutional welcome:

Good afternoon, everyone. I thank the university and Prof. Musso for the invitation to attend this prestigious meeting. I extend my greetings to everyone. I will speak in Italian, but you will also find the text of my greetings in English available on the website.

The Historic Centre of Genoa is one of the largest in Italy.

Thanks to the considerable economic resources generated by major international events since the 1990s, such as the Columbus celebrations in 1992, the G8 Summit in 2001, Genoa as the European Capital of Culture in 2004, and the prestigious recognition by UNESCO of the 'Palazzi dei Rolli' in 2011, a great number of interventions have been carried out on monuments and entire parts of the city, positively impacting the redevelopment of various areas within the historic centre.

Today, as we know, the historic centre is undergoing a new and extensive transformation driven by funding from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), leading to changes in the city that are perhaps unprecedented.

It is true that in recent decades, the rebranding of Genoa as a "city of art" has brought benefits both in terms of image and economy, mainly thanks to the growth of cultural and conference tourism. Despite the ongoing presence of some areas of degradation, the historic centre appears today to be generally vibrant and rich in identity.

The historic centre of Genoa is still a place where people live, and tourism has not yet managed to change its distinctive features. It is from this point, in my opinion, that any project for the redevelopment and enhancement of the historic centre should begin.

Genoa is made up of its representative monuments, but it is, above all, characterized by a unique combination of squares and uphill streets, the famous cobbled paths enclosed between walls, the traditional "creuse" celebrated by poet Eugenio Montale and singer Fabrizio De Andrè, and this is its rich heritage.

Genoa should learn from its history to shape its future.

The restoration of a monument or the creation of a museum or cultural centre can certainly contribute to the regeneration of an urban area, increasing its liveability and attractiveness. However, it is equally necessary to reflect on the relationships we wish to establish with the many and layered material traces of the past and the intangible meanings they contain, which we have a duty to pass on to those who come after us.

In this regard, in recent years, we have witnessed significant renovation projects of city museums. The partial reopening of the Sant'Agostino Museum holds great significance for Genoa and should be promoted from a perspective of historic centre regeneration, also through a new way of managing museums. This can make them a resource for residents, strengthening the sense of belonging among the citizens of Genoa to their artistic and cultural heritage.

The same applies to the renovation of the Loggia di Banchi, a project to which the Superintendent's Office and the Ministry have dedicated great effort, including an extensive campaign of archaeological excavation and restoration, which, if I am not mistaken, you will be visiting tomorrow. This site will become a hub capable of narrating the city's heritage and connecting Genoa's museums through a permanent exhibition, aimed at helping both citizens and visitors discover Genoa's strong identity.

So, can the historic centre of Genoa, so deeply rooted and lived-in, become a place for experimentation? And what could be the path to recover and enhance its many architectural treasures?

In my opinion, for the regeneration of the historic centre, the public and private sectors must stand side by side. The historic centre is still often regarded by the people of Genoa as a place of decay. However, I believe that a bottom-up approach can help maintain a high level of critical awareness, leading to a transformation that fully acknowledges the intrinsic value of the historic centre.

In my view, it is necessary to initiate a sort of non-invasive reuse, which can serve as a starting point for a policy of regeneration and development of these areas. This can be achieved through personal experiences of knowledge, fostering a collective vision that encourages a sense of belonging among its inhabitants while also improving the quality of services and residential life.

Within this program, the restoration of historic buildings plays a crucial role, not only for the monuments but for the broader architectural heritage.

In this context, the churches of the historic centre also play a significant role in enhancing the cultural heritage, welcoming both citizens and tourists, and making the area more liveable.

The history of Genoa is strongly marked by close ties between the church and the city's cultural, social, and economic history. The churches of the historic centre of Genoa are true open-access museums, characterized by complex historical and stylistic layers, and their presence strongly defines the ancient historic centre. For this reason, every restoration intervention on them has had, and still can have, positive impacts not only on their conservation but also on the redevelopment of the surrounding spaces.

Since the 1980s, many churches in Genoa's historic centre have been restored, often with funds from the Ministry, and we are still overseeing conservation work on many churches in the historic centre, such as Nostra Signora delle Vigne, S. Siro, and the Cathedral of S. Lorenzo.

Restoration work is often carried out in synergy with other public and private entities, with a fruitful exchange that has been ongoing for some time with the University and volunteer associations, to whom we must credit keeping many churches open. All parties work actively on project implementation, in a new dimension capable of activating and managing processes of participation and mutual sharing of cultural, social, and economic interests and goals.

Everyone must play their part, in their respective roles, with the aim of promoting an effective and virtuous dialogue among institutions, addressing the challenges facing the historic centre.

The role of the Municipality of Genoa in the recovery and enhancement of the historic centre to make it a more liveable and more visitable place. What should be the priorities of this intervention to ensure good results?

The Municipal Administration of Genoa has been working for years on a Strategic Plan that addresses issues of maintenance and technological innovation, socio-educational interventions, and tourism-leisure activities, with the main goal of pursuing the recovery of the city's historic and symbolic sites.

In this context, we are all called to face a series of questions regarding the physical and social transformation of urban space, fostering a dialogue between relational knowledge and technical expertise, aiming for a revival that is not only touristic but also cultural and civil in the broadest sense.

The Ministry provided for significant resources for the restoration of churches and many other monuments, such as the Lanterna, the symbol of the city, the historic Aqueduct, the “Palazzetto Criminale”, another site of the Archivio di Stato of Genoa, the new Museum of Emigration in the Commenda di Prè, the church of Saints Girolamo and Francesco Saverio, the former site of the University Library, to complete the cultural hub on Via Balbi. Important programs have been initiated by the Palazzo Reale Museum for the redevelopment of the Museum and the Gallery of Palazzo Spinola di Pellicceria. All these interventions contribute to the ongoing urban policies, such as the Waterfront of Levante, the Hennebique project, the redevelopment of the Fish Market, the imposing and debated cable car project to Forte Begato, the sub-port tunnel crossing project, and the related major transformations.

What must be constantly emphasized is a coordinated, comprehensive vision capable of designing a coherent future for the historic centre of Genoa.

In this context, the Superintendent's Office has established a strong collaboration with the Municipality of Genoa in recent years, formalized through several Memorandum of understanding, such as those regarding the Loggia di Banchi and the historic Aqueduct, as well as a broad agreement on simplifying authorizations for PNRR projects, which involve other institutional entities.

In this sense, the Superintendent's Office confirms its intention to make its expertise available, participating with guidance actions and preliminary evaluation of projects, with the common goal and commitment to enhance the cultural heritage of Genoa's historic centre and to promote socio-economic revitalization processes.

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