CONSERVATION—RECONSTRUCTION

SMALL HISTORIC CENTRES
CONSERVATION IN THE MIDST OF CHANGE

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European
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ACCESSIBILITY AS A DESIGN RESOURCE FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF LESSER-KNOWN CULTURAL SITES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF TOURISM

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Castelvecchio Calvisio, a significant example of a lesser-known Italian cultural site

Castelvecchio Calvisio is a fortified medieval village, tortoiseshell-shaped. Its elliptical and very compact urban structure presents a main central street on the major axis; on each side, cross streets branch towards the perimeter ring that encloses the historic village. The village is characterised by small and closely spaced living units.

In recent times the village has spread out in a messy and unsystematic way all around the ancient core, with less harmonious and meaningful buildings. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the village has undergone continuous and unrelenting depopulation, starting from the earthquake of 1915. Over that time this phenomenon has been stressed at least for three reasons: 1) the loss of suitable socio-economic conditions; 2) the inadequacy of housing provision with respect to the changing requirements for modern living; 3) the lack of transportation infrastructure and the distance from the main connections between the capital and neighbouring towns or more attractive areas/sites.

The loss of population increased after the earthquake in 2009, which also stopped an attempt to revitalise the village through sustainable tourism oriented towards foreign tourists, captivated by the lifestyle evoked and by the striking beauty of the village and surrounding landscape. This attempt was supported by alternative uses of residential facilities such as the *albergo diffuso* or widespread hotel (Dall'Ara, 2010) or by the seasonal opening of houses by emigrants.

Castelvecchio Calvisio with its medieval core represents a typical example of a lesser known cultural site[1], a distributed asset on our territory which makes Italy a widespread museum. It is a shared opinion that a new awareness concerning people, landscape, territory and its resources is required, to revive the identity of the place and to generate the actions required to improve its attractiveness.

The questions arise: in lesser known places such as Castelvecchio Calvisio, what role can enhancing accessibility play in tourism development; in places like this, what role can cultural tourism play in improving accessibility conditions?

Starting from the discussions developed and the challenges outlined during the IV Meeting and Workshop EAAE-ENHSA Network in Conservation, held in Rome –Castelvecchio Calvisio on October 2013, this paper tries to answer by taking accessibility as having a dual meaning: 1) as an operational tool that networks and strengthens a sustainable tourist offering, while raising the quality of life of the community; and 2) as a side effect of regeneration processes of settlements that can encourage and promote the independent living of the inhabitants.

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Italy, widespread museum

Italy is characterised by a broad dissemination of cultural goods. We can say that every city and every small village guards a valuable artistic, architectural or landscape heritage. The recent ISTAT report on cultural heritage shows a reality that is in some ways surprising: in Italy there is one museum/institute for every 13,000 inhabitants; nearly one out of three municipalities (2,359 out of 8,092) holds at least one museum or similar institute; in some regions, cultural institutes are spread in an even more extensive way (ISTAT 2013). Therefore, it is correct to consider Italy as a widespread museum (Emiliani 1974; Settis 1992).

The concept of a widespread museum is based on the idea that every work of art (in the broadest sense) should be enjoyed beyond where it was conceived, being at the same time cause and effect of the land and the community that expressed or generated it.

In this sense, it can be argued that the concept of the widespread museum is particularly suitable and consistent when it comes to the protection and enhancement of small historic villages or, in a more accurate description, of 'lesser-known sites' or 'neglected places' (Vallarani 1994).

By definition, these places do not have strong tourist attractions, but the cultural evidence they hold and represent is often closely linked to landscape, to food and wine culture, to lifestyle. Overall, they can offer a model for emotional and knowledge tourism, which can attract the interest of many people and can represent a real factor in achieving a territorial balance between the most popular, traditional and often overloaded tourist areas and the lesser-known and less exploited sites.

It should be considered that the lesser-known cultural sites are Italy's backbone. In this sense Tuscany is a meaningful example by being, according to the above-mentioned ISTAT report, the Italian region with the highest degree of tourist access (ISTAT 2013). In Tuscany tourist flows concentrate in a few cities and areas where the best-known monuments are, neglecting the small and very small villages in hilly areas and inland mountains, which constitute the greater part of its territory and which often express architectural, landscape and ethno-anthropological values of singular beauty and interest.

In these contexts, the ordinary conditions of life for elderly and disabled people are often strictly related to geomorphological conditions that conflict with the accessibility of places, goods and services.

In particular, difficulties in mobility both at urban and territorial scale plays a crucial role in people's lives and, not infrequently, for the elderly and for people with disabilities, it creates exclusion and loneliness. In these contexts it is not infrequent for urban barriers to have a much stronger impact on the life of the inhabitants than the architectural ones.

Enhancement, accessibility and tourism

The matter of enhancement is one of the cornerstones of the Code of the Cultural and Landscape Heritage[2]: "[…] exercising its functions and in the regulation of activities aimed at promoting awareness of cultural heritage and ensuring the best conditions for use and enjoyment of the public assets, even by persons with disabilities in order to promote the development of culture. It also includes the promotion and support of conservation of cultural heritage. Referring to landscape, the development also includes the renovation of compromised or degraded buildings and areas under protection, or the creation of new consistent and integrated landscape values".

A detailed analysis of the above definition provides strategic guidelines that, in the context of this paper, may be assumed as keywords for the arguments developed below.

Doubtless, the "promotion of awareness of the cultural heritage" can also be enhanced. In Italy the lesser-known cultural sites represent a cohesive force of the large historical and artistic heritage, seamlessly distributed across the territory.

The terms "best conditions for use and enjoyment" refer to the ever-present necessity of establishing a relationship between the asset and the users, as "art [...] can definitely be art itself but it exists only if belonging to men, that is when they use it [...] every standing obstacle which somehow prevents or restricts the use of the relationship, or the experience of area [...] denies art itself and the principles that govern the proper practice of safeguarding the cultural heritage" (Treccani 1998).

In this respect, therefore, making places accessible to the broader groups of potential users is according to the Universal Design principles not only one of the unavoidable tools which "promote the development of culture", but also a goal to strive for that is increasingly present in the international and national guidelines about the role of culture with regard to inclusion and social cohesion. In the specific debate on the regeneration of places of cultural interest, it has been stated on several occasions how accessibility can be a 'civility marker' that our era will leave to the future and how it can ensure the unity of the community, thereby becoming an act of democracy (Murray 2011).

The promotion and support of conservation of cultural heritage recalls and refers to, in an unambiguous way, the economics and management issues[3] (Donato, Badia 2008; Caliandro, Sacco 2011), where the link between tourism and culture represents the main source of support.

This link "can be developed in many ways, but above all by creating paths of meaning, well focused in specific geographical areas, so that visiting a museum, a city of art or a natural park would be not simply to browse a series of masterpieces or monuments but results in an historically and culturally coherent way, or in many possible parallel cultural paths [...] This view, which could appear of secondary importance, can represent, along with others, an innovative and high-potential way to the enhancement of artistic and cultural heritage, also from the point of view of the creation of skilled employment opportunities. This may be perhaps the sense of rediscovering the Grand Tour of the XX century" (Bray 2013).

Combining ethical gain with economic profits and social cohesion and inclusion with competitiveness and wellbeing, accessible tourism can address the challenge of supporting the rights of weak and disabled people to participate on an equal basis with others in social life and to access sites, cultural activities and tourist services (United Nations, 2006; European Commission, 2003; European Commission, 2010).[4]

Market research shows that accessible tourism is an extremely interesting market segment with untapped potential (Touche Ross 1993; EU Commission 2003; Buhalis et al. 2005) and that, according to CARE 2006, 35 per cent of tourists with special needs (e.g. people with disabilities, but also the elderly, families with children, people with special health problems or food intolerances, etc.) travel for cultural reasons.[5] This project aims to improve the models of seasonality, in particular through the social function of tourism, creating more jobs in the tourism sector both from the qualitative and quantitative standpoint, and strengthening the sense of European citizenship. The project's target groups include the disabled, the youth (aged 18-30), families experiencing social deprivation, and the elderly.

A vision of sustainable tourism as outlined could represent an interesting opportunity for socio-economic development for a site like Castelvecchio Calvisio.

A strategic vision calls for a comprehensive view and an integrated approach to accessibility: what next for Castelvecchio Calvisio?

Referring to the framework outlined above, the tourist enhancement of a lesser-known cultural site with a high level of complexity in geomorphological, urban, demographic and socio-economic terms (such as Castelvecchio Calvisio) is a very challenging issue. In our opinion, the possible measures that could trigger enhancement and consolidate a virtuous cycle, revitalising the village and making it more attractive, can find an effective basis in the different dimensions of accessibility.

The perspectives developed out of the socio-economic dimension of accessibility are closely connected to the implementation of a participatory process and from a bottom-up approach to local development. By exploiting the main territorial resources and by networking the borough and the surrounding villages with other tourist attractions (e.g. Campo Imperatore ski resort, Rocca Calascio, Santo Stefano in Sessanio, etc.), systemic actions could be implemented with the support of public and/or private bodies. The aim is to establish or, more appropriately, to join together existing networks (for instance, cultural districts) for the promotion of local resources and traditions (e.g. architectural and landscape heritage, food and wine culture, high quality agricultural production, tacit knowledge, arts and crafts, etc.). By actively involving the population in the initiation and management of the whole decision-making process, it should be easier to reach joint decisions and to have a lasting impact on the greater part of the community.

To trigger virtuous and lasting local development processes, a territorial system should design 'new' relations both inside the village of Castelvecchio Calvisio (including residences, public areas, tourist attractions, facilities and hospitality services) and outside it (with neighbouring sites). In this system, the selected places, goods or services of the involved villages become 'nodes' of a network, linked with one another by adequate 'relationships' (by exploiting sustainable and accessible mobility inside the village and towards neighbouring villages). In this system, a specific role should be given to each node. There may be 'welcome nodes' (mainly located in existing buildings which act as 'main portals' from which to explore resources) and 'hospitality nodes' (each of them carrying out a specific hospitality function, such as sports, cultural and recreational facilities; kindergartens, playgrounds, day-care centres, community centres, etc.).

Communication plays a decisive role within a competitiveness strategy with respect to the global market for the socio-economic development of the lesser-known cultural sites. The information system works when it can ensure ongoing communicative competence in various forms of language and expression, by means of a range of current technological tools. To convey the communicative dimension of accessibility to all potential tourists, an ICT-based accessibility information system should be implemented in Castelvecchio Calvisio and its territory. This system should allow tourists to plan their journey remotely in a safe and comfortable way and to get information (via the internet and *in situ*) on available tourist offerings and the degree of accessibility of places, goods or services.

To increase this accessibility, it is essential to develop plans and programmes that can encourage the weaker categories of users, and can also raise the quality of living spaces for the whole community and make urban spaces and landscapes more attractive.

Accessibility, in its physical dimension, could be defined as a class of requirements in mutual relationship (reachability, usability, safety in use, comfort, environmental com-

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municativeness, mobility, etc.) which, consistently and in synergy with each other, should inspire the designer's work in creating a more inclusive habitat.

'Reachability' expresses the accessibility 'towards' a place or building, and it is the necessary premise and actual condition of accessibility of a site. Especially when referring to the urban and territorial scale, reachability represents a paramount indicator of environmental usability and, more generally, of the quality of life.

To overcome urban physical barriers[6] in hilly villages such as Castelvecchio Calvisio unavoidably shifts attention away from the intrinsic, immutable qualities of the place to mobility modes.

In such a context it is impossible to depend on current standards (related, for instance, to the slope or the width of a path) while assessing accessibility, but different and more meaningful evaluation grids should be adopted.

For example, in the case of a public building approachable only by means of a path on a steep slope, reachability by a person with reduced mobility could be obtained (and therefore the urban barrier could be considered to have been overcome) when the following conditions occur simultaneously: 1) the possibility of coming close to the building using mechanised transport, preferably public; 2) the possibility of parking a private car without holding up traffic[7] and allowing safe entry/exit from the vehicle; 3) the presence of at least one connecting path between the parking area (private parking or public transport stop) and the building that is barrier-free and of a limited length (usually not exceeding 30 m)[8] (Laurìa 2012).

It is therefore necessary to interweave the topic of reachability with that of an accessible and sustainable mobility, shifting to the urban-scale solutions which work at the building scale, where through mechanical lifting equipment and ancillary interventions people with reduced mobility can reach the different levels of a building.

To enjoy villages such as Castelvecchio Calvisio, characterised by narrow streets with irregular walking surfaces, or for excursions in the surrounding areas, alternative forms of soft mobility could also be successfully tested, with a more adaptable man-surface interface. For example, horses could be employed as means of transport, with therapeutic benefits for people with physical and cognitive disabilities (Aetna 2013). Special saddles are nowadays available to ensure that people with lower limb problems are safely secured (Hjaltalin 2009).

Despite the use of alternative means of transport, full reachability of places cannot always can be assured, thus their usability is reduced. Compensatory and interactive ICT-based technologies (e.g. augmented reality, three-dimensional reconstructions, etc.) can support accessibility from a virtual standpoint. Meaningful example of how effective such technologies can be is the use of the picture show, videos and virtual tour of the medieval fortress of Rocca Calascio, one of the most impervious sites in the area around Castelvecchio Calvisio[9].

Conclusion

The low degree of accessibility of the buildings and public spaces of Castelvecchio Calvisio has certainly contributed to its gradual abandonment, well before the 2009 earthquake. Its settlement is characterised by a complex system of narrow, closely spaced and tall houses with several levels accessible by characteristic systems of outdoor staircases, which represent a distinctive feature of the historic construction typology and, at the

same time, the most significant obstacle to the use of the buildings at the present time – not least because of their widespread ruinous condition.

The process of depopulation, due to the building typology and to housing solutions anchored in outdated social patterns and family models, has helped in the preservation of the authenticity of the medieval core of the village. Every recovery and restoration of the built heritage should preserve this while reinforcing and consolidating the building structure and reorganising the spatial layout to meet modern housing requirements and make it attractive even to tourists.

Unfortunately, in this context accessibility requirements cannot be fulfilled according to current standards. However, according to Universal Design Principles, accessibility assumes that the solutions and situations should be considered with their limits. Even if not all the potential users can take advantage of design choices, increasing the degree of accessibility will allow a large proportion of users to benefit from them in terms of comfort and safety. The degree of accessibility, moreover, can be improved through wise management and in ways that do not involve material intervention.

Starting from these assumptions, in Castelvecchio Calvisio the degree of accessibility can be improved by considering that:

1 those with impaired mobility or who are wheelchair-bound can traverse the main dorsal route and some side streets, although in some parts they will need help due to the steepness of some paths (according to the notion of 'contingent accessibility');
2 one of the buildings which is on the main dorsal street and has suffered great damage from the earthquake could be restored and designed as an information point; it could be provided with an elevator and with all design solutions to achieve a good degree of accessibility;
3 improving the degree of accessibility of the spaces can produce benefits in safety terms (e.g. providing handrails and better public lightning in open spaces);
4 suitable buildings on the outer ring of the medieval core can be appointed as possible accommodation and service spaces due to their greater reachability and the greater opportunity for change that they afford.

Notes

[1] The phrase "lesser known cultural sites" does not suppose and does not aim at evoking any value hierarchy. It simply identifies destinations less exploited for tourism, which therefore are outside the established routes of mass tourism (Antonioli Corigliano, 2000)

[2] D.lgs. 42/2004, Art.6.

[3] It is important, however, to distinguish between the economy of the cultural heritage in order to enhance its value and the monetisation of the cultural heritage, which often is used with inappropriate clichés that see Italian 'cultural deposits' as resources to exploit and to waste.

[4] All the mentioned documents cite the need to intensify efforts to improve access to tourist sites by people with disabilities as a strategy for the future of European tourism.

[5] In this respect, it is worth mentioning the 'Calypso Project', the EU initiative for social tourism.

[6] The urban barriers are severe obstacles as they can restrict or prevent access to entire parts of the city or territory. They could be physical barriers or perceptive barriers. (Laurìa, 1994).

[7] See DPR 503/1996, art. 11, sub.1, 2, 3.

[8] See Regione Veneto, 2003, 12.

[9] See http://www.roccacalascio.info/ [Accessed January 2014].

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