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NEW STRATEGIES FOR THE ENHANCEMENT AND PROMOTION OF LOCAL IDENTITY IN COASTAL AREAS. THE CASE OF THE SORRENTO PENINSULA

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Abstract

The paper proposes to consider the port areas as strategic nodes for the valorisation of the territory. The port areas can be "doors" of the cities, starting points for the welcome of the visitors, the place where first information about the territory are given, guiding the tourist in the discovery of the local heritage. The localisation of new cultural, recreational and promotional activities can also increase territorial competitiveness and attractiveness and employment rate, related to functional mix and economic activities.

In many contemporary cities, recent rehabilitation processes carried out this strategy, including the reuse of existing buildings in the ports by new activities especially connected with the maritime tradition of the city: the *Museu Maritim de Barcelona*, the *Maritime Museum* and *Los Tinglados* of Valencia, the *Galata Museum* in Genova are significant examples.

The proposal aims to verify the opportunity to build a strategy based on valorisation and management of excellent coastal areas characterised by a network of small ports in small cities. The Sorrento Peninsula (Italy) represents an emblematic case study in order to enhance the role of port areas for the promotion of natural, cultural and historical resources in a systemic vision of the territory.

The reuse of existing buildings for tourism promotion, together with the rehabilitation of the pedestrian paths system can contribute to realise a network that – starting from port areas – improves accessibility and usability. This strategy can also renew the historical relationship between coastal and rural areas. In Sorrento Peninsula, this result could be achieved through a new tourist use of the pedestrian paths that in the past had the role to connect agricultural areas with the port for maritime trade of the excellent citrus production.

Keywords: network, reuse, small cities, small ports, valorisation.

INTRODUCTION

The port areas have always had strategic roles and locations, represented historical nodes of networks that linked distant countries and people.

In the last decades their function is often changed because of the relevant transformations in the maritime and port sectors caused by the technological evolution – such as the re-location of shipyards connected to new techniques of production and materials, prevalence of container-shipping. These changes and the delocalisation processes of the activities that characterised the port area often resulted also in the cultural lowering of the relationship between the local community and the sea [1]. The recovery and enhancement of the relationships among community, city, port and coastal areas can make possible innovative strategies aimed at the rehabilitation and valorisation of local identity, shaping new development perspective [2].

Current methodological approaches and many experiences show that the renewal of waterfronts and port areas is able to start regeneration processes if it is based on a strong relationship with the urban context, enhancing its local characteristics and vocations [3] [4] [5] [6]. The port areas are often enriched with new contemporary architectures but also reuse their built heritage consisting of port warehouses and disused shipbuilding for new activities. This strategy can offer the opportunity to integrate new cultural, recreational, touristic activities, increasing territorial competitiveness and attractiveness and employment rate, related to functional mix and economic activities.

The implementation of this integrated approach is particularly adequate in areas with excellent environmental, cultural and historical characteristics. In these areas new strategies of development, new activities and uses in the buildings and open spaces must guarantee the safeguard of resources, identity and vocations of the territory [7].

NEW ROLE AND NEW FUNCTIONS IN PORT AREAS

Since the second half of last century, the port areas has become a field of interest for new redevelopment and regeneration process. The evolution of ships, shipping and port facilities has provided an heritage of areas and buildings, especially warehouses, available for new functions [8].

Indeed, the redevelopment projects often involve brown-field or degraded sites that have gradually weakened their role in the urban context, as result of profound changes of the maritime-port sector.

In many cases the renovation of coastal cities of large, medium and small dimensions is determined by the need to redefine their model of development in order to point towards tourist and cultural offer. For many metropolitan areas located on the sea, the processes of recovery and valorisation of old ports depend also on the needs of rehabilitation of cities in international competition.

This strategy is intended both to attract investment for new production facilities (traditional territorial marketing) and to conquer events, fairs, exhibitions, major sporting and cultural events (event marketing).

The renovation of the seafront, which involved over the past year the major port cities in Europe, has led to the emergence of a common tendency of opening, both formal and functional, the port to the city and the territory, hardly detectable in the early Nineties [9].

The will to reunite the old town and the port is to be found in the rehabilitation of the Old Port of Genoa, designed by Renzo Piano for the Expo '92. This project, in addition to providing a wide multi-purpose space addressed to culture, leisure, shopping and solidarity, has affected all the historic buildings of the port and the docks [10] [11].

Therefore, the Expo '92 marked the starting point for establishing a functional and territorial continuity between city and sea and to promote the organisation of new events.

By the City Plan 2002, which saw in the "Genoa Capital of Culture for 2004" the deadline for its implementation, the works – started in the port area for the Expo '92 – continued. Recreational and cultural activities of the Old Port were enhanced, the Quarter of Darsena was requalified and the Palace of Galata and Hennebique were reused, respectively, as Museums of the Sea and Navigation and as Faculty of Engineering.

The project of rehabilitation of the Old Port of Genoa was based on the systemic reuse of un-used buildings for scientific and cultural uses: the Aquarium, the Galata

Museo del Mare with the submarine Nazario Sauro, the city of children and young people, the Biosphere and the Bigo. It represented also a positive example of synergy between public and private sectors, that identifies in the users basin of the aquarium (1.7 million visitors and a total consolidated turnover of 24 million euros in 2011) the driving force for other structures.

In Europe, one of the first process of rehabilitation of Old Ports started in the city of Barcelona in the '80s, with a strong boost in 1992 with the planning of the Summer Olympic Games.

The Catalan capital in the coastal area optimised services and the reception for the historic port, requalified the seafront and beaches with picnic areas, green walkways, constructed ex novo the Olympic port to the east and reused existing buildings for touristic activities [12] [13] [14].

A long process of renovation, characterised by the recovery and valorisation of the relationship between city and sea, is represented by the experience of Valencia. Starting from the 70s, the city activated the process deviating the Turia River by the construction of an artificial canal.

This intervention represented for the city of Valencia the resolution of the problems created by flooding of the urban fabric and an opportunity for the renovation and rehabilitation of the city.

On the basis of the Master Plan 1966, on the old river bed was built the Jardín del Turia, a large green space with buildings and urban facilities.

In the '80s, the reorganisation of the waterfront started with the construction of an observation tower, the creation of a tourist port and restoration of historic buildings: the Clock Building, the Varadero, the Building de Adinas, the Tinglados, which represent the witness of modernism in Valencia [15].

In 2003, when the city was selected to host America's Cup, the urbanisation project of the maritime area was amended in its architectural and functional aspects, in order to adapt to the sailing competition. This event represented an opportunity to redefine the relationship between the port and the city by recovering significant portions of the urban fabric. The confirmation of Valencia hosting the 2010 America's Cup, represented another result determined by the ability to recover and value its identity as a city of the sea [16].

The study of experiences realised and still in progress in Italy and Europe, shows that nowadays the rehabilitation and functional recovery of the port areas and urban waterfronts is a topical issue. It is a complex issue, related to the typologies of urban coastal areas and to the relationship between the urban development and the coastal functions. If in the Northern Europe, the rehabilitation of port areas has often involved large parts of the city, with great residential and tertiary interventions, in the Mediterranean area, the recovery of the waterfront often involves limited areas, next to the historic centre, in which the historical memory of the place, made up of buildings of historical and artistic value to safeguard, plays an important role.

The case of the Sorrento Peninsula

Starting from recent approaches and experiences in many contemporary cities, our proposal aims to test opportunities and modalities to transfer these in a specific territorial context diffused in Italy.

Along about 7500 km of Italian coastline, there are tourist and commercial ports, landfall and docks, with an average of one every 14.2 km of coastline. Between 2007 and 2011 the number of infrastructure port has increased by more than 7.6 percent (Report on the Nautical Tourism 2012 of the Marine National Observatory).

These data include not only big ports areas of many Italian cities, but also several cases of small ports in small cities, often near each other. Some of these areas have a long tradition in maritime activities and trade. The historical presence of the port has contributed to determine economics, cultural and social characteristics and influenced forms and functions of architectures and open spaces.

The case study of Sorrento Peninsula aims to deepen new strategies for enhancing this local identity in an excellent coastal area, with small ports in small cities. It represents an emblematic case, especially considering the relationships between landscape and built heritage, orographic and coastal characteristics, the areas of excellence subject to protection – such as SIC areas and marine protected areas – and the role of the maritime transports and culture in the history of this territory.

In the past, the coast had a strategic role for the economy of the area, it was connected with the urban centres and rural areas through historical paths that allowed to transport agricultural products to the port for the maritime trade. These paths crossed the farms, but of great beauty are the link between the agricultural area and the ports carved into the tufa with openings overlooking the sea. Geographic location and morphology of the area determined the maritime vocation of the Sorrento Peninsula: separated from the rest of the region by the massif of Fauto Mountain, the sea represented the main way for moving people and products.

In the Sorrento Peninsula, since the Greek colonisation, the sea was the scene of political, commercial and cultural relationships between the small port areas along the coast and the others Mediterranean cities.

In "*Descrizione geografica e politica delle Sicilie*" (1786), Giuseppe Maria Galanti wrote that the commercial shipping in the Kingdom was practiced mainly in «(...) Napoli, Procida, Ischia, Torre del Greco, Castello a mare, Sorrento, Vico-Equense, Positano, Conca e Vietri». But with the name 'Sorrento', he referred particularly to the villages along the tufa plateau outside the city, that today are the Municipalities of Meta, Piano di Sorrento, Sant'Agello and Massalubrense.

Shipyards were on the narrow sandy beaches bordered by tufa cliffs: the marines of Sorrento, Alimuri in city of Meta, Piano di Cassano in city of Piano, Equa in city of Seiano, Lobra in Massalubrense.

In the Sorrento Peninsula the ship owners were numerous, especially in the city of Piano, that became a real community of sea [17]. There were ancient sailing schools for officers and builders, shipyards with all traditional crafts (such as shipwrights, smiths, sail makers), traders, professionals such as notaries and lawyers specialised in matters of maritime law [18].

The shipyards along the Sorrento coast produced ships for long routes but also smaller boats for the cabotage along the Tyrrhenian coasts and the fishing.

In 1866 the Nautical School of Piano di Sorrento is declared a Royal Institute of Merchant Marine, together with the Nautical School of Savona and the Institutes of Merchant Marine of Genoa, Livorno and Palermo [19].

The main uses of the boats were the daily transport of goods and people to the small cities of the Peninsula and to Naples and the marketing of citrus fruits. In XIX century the Sorrento ships sailed to London, Liverpool, New York, bringing citrus in the International markets [20].

Gennaro Maria Monti (1939) describes the navy in the Gulf of Naples as the most developed of the Kingdom and the Sorrento sailors as the most courageous for the extent of their routes, even in the ocean [21].

During the fascist era, the physical and historical continuity between the small port cities of the Peninsula was administratively highlighted when Sorrento and Meta

becoming a single Municipality.

On the contrary, nowadays this characteristic of the area is often ignored, without relationship between policies, strategies and choices in nearby areas included in different municipalities.

It is necessary to consider this aspect in order to shape effective development strategies at local scale able to guarantee the safeguard of quality in terms of natural, historical and cultural heritage of the whole area of the Sorrento Peninsula.

Besides, at present, part of the shipbuilding activities is involved in a relocation process. The Marina Piccola of Sorrento, previously port for departure of cargo and passengers to Naples in connection with the Gulf islands, has increased a tourist vocation, becoming dock for landing of cruise tourists (Fig. 1).

The Marina Grande, previously used for fishing and the storage of boats, is currently increasing activities of bathing and dining (Fig. 2).

The risk is a loss of local identity and collective memory of a secular history. The valorisation of this historical identity represents an opportunity to enhance the role of the port areas as focal points for the promotion of the Peninsula, stimulating new dynamics of sustainable development.



Fig. 1 – Marina Piccola Port area.



Fig. 2 – Marina Grande.

By the Statement of hotel and extra-hotel Touristic Movement of the Tourist Company of the City of Sorrento-Sant'Agnello, it is noted that the tourist traffic recorded in the Marina Piccola of Sorrento, since 1994, is of about 2 million visitors to 'years (Tab. 1) that are concentrated in the months of May-June and September to October. Of these admissions, the origin is mainly due to the cruise traffic, that from 2000 to 2011 increased from 2% to 5% of all berths.

Given the increase of tourism, the port is devoid of infrastructure and equipment for the reception of tourists.

The risks associated with this condition are, on one hand, the decrease in flow in favour of ports more competitive in terms of services (Castellammare di Stabia in recent years has regenerated port area) and, secondly, the lack of development of the area through functions that are not only catering. The public/private partnership could be an engine of development based on the need by individuals to reuse the sheds previously used for boat building and the need for the public to offer special services to tourists.

Moreover, the presence of a tourism that comes to Sorrento still motivated by the charm of the Grand Tour can be an input to the strategic activities related to culture, to be located in buildings abandoned or underutilised of the Sorrento Peninsula

marine, such as a Museum of the Travellers of the Grand Tour, many of these guests of Sorrento nobility.

YEAR	ARRIVAL	PRESENCE
1956	98.838	255.783
1957	103.186	317.291
1958	110.058	355.005
1959	115.654	359.583
1960	121.720	385.509
1961	138.845	460.490
1971	199.735	781.200
1981	234.130	959.335
1991	421.036	1.799.926
2000	620.840	2.648.016
2001	609.756	2.627.760
2011	626.977	2.448.263

Tab. 1 - Statement of hotel and extra-hotel Touristic Movement of the Tourist Company of the City of Sorrento-Sant'Agello.

Finally, the landscape value of the Peninsula can be recognised and developed only through the recovery of paths connecting port/inland agricultural areas, raising a question already present in the request, more and more consistent in the last few years in relation to the nature trails.

The structure of the port is not equipped basic infrastructure and fire services for the first-aid, rest areas and orientation.

Besides this, the current dynamics of tourism do not enhance the potential of the territory of the Peninsula, characterised by an integrated and differentiated offer, where coastal areas, city centres and rural areas are parts of an historical landscape, resulted of environmental, social and economic factors with strong mutual connections.

Currently, the cruise tourists conduct shore excursions (about 80% of total passengers, of which about 50% via tourist packages organised by the same shipping companies and the remaining 30% held individually) transiting the City of Sorrento, focusing on the destinations of Pompeii, Capri and the Amalfi Coast.

The origin of foreign tourists is mainly English, American and German. The type of tourists is high class, as confirmed by the number of clients occupying hotels of high category (4 stars hotel). This data is particularly relevant for programming the touristic offer in the Sorrento Peninsula, but also for the development of new activities in the port, such as temporary or permanent exhibitions, cultural events, touristic promotion and information to be located in the un-used shipyards.

Another feature of the cruise tourism in the Marina Piccola Port is that the dock is at anchor, in fact, the port has moorings for small temporary halt. This feature of mooring influences the number of annual cruise passengers (in 2009, n. 135 ships with 69,005 passengers on board; in 2010, n. 147 ships with 69,672 passengers; in 2011, n. 113 ships with 55,240 passengers), as it is not necessary advance planning. This involves oscillations that may be affected also by events taking place in Europe and the Mediterranean (in 2012 the number of ships and passengers fell further because of London Olympics).

In order to differentiate and improve the tourist offer and at the same time preserve and enhance the historic vocation of the area, it is necessary to design new

strategies based on an integrated management of built and natural resources. This objective is supported by the configuration of the area: in the Peninsula ports have always been crucial pivot in an integrated system of mobility that linked rural areas, urban centres and coastal areas through pedestrian paths.

The path that crosses the Greek city gate in Marina Grande of Sorrento is an example (Fig. 3). In the past this path was the unique access to the city arriving from the sea but at the present it is underutilised and often unknown by the tourists.

Some pedestrian paths were obtained by digging in the tufa that characterises the coast in order to connect the city centre with the port area. Other paths connected the centre with the rural parts of the Peninsula (Fig. 4) and were mainly used for accessibility in agricultural areas [22].

Both these pedestrian networks provided an efficient system for transporting local agricultural products, particularly citrus fruits, from the hinterland to the port areas.



Fig. 3 - Greek city gate.

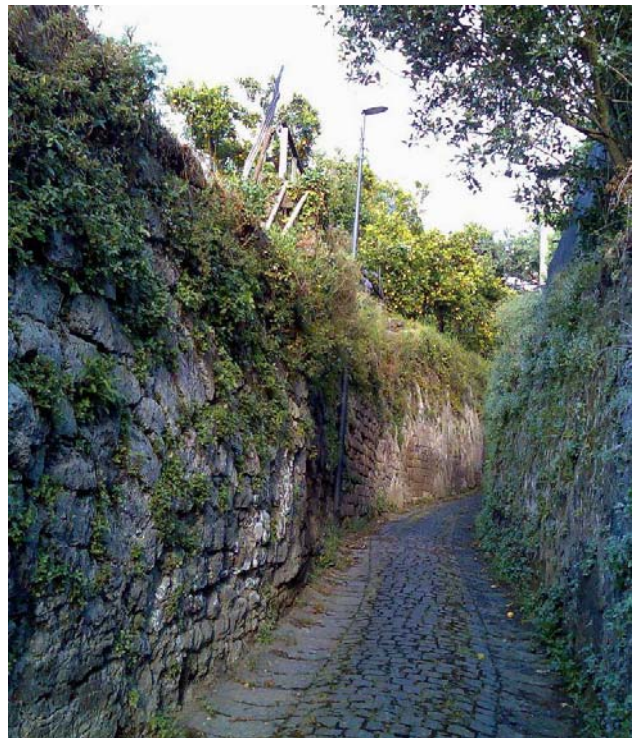


Fig. 4 - Historical pedestrian path.

At the present, many parts of this pedestrian paths are disused or infrequently used because of the innovations and changes that have affected the area.

On the disposal of these paths corresponds, on the contrary, an ever increasing demand for rural tourism. This trend is also evidenced by the need of the Municipality of the City of Sorrento to update maps of the paths of the Gods and Mills Valley designed by the cartographer Giovanni Visetti in 2003.

Starting from this new demand and the characteristics of the areas, the port could become an urban equipment area in a territorial system that should include both buildings and paths in an integrated strategy based on a reticular model, coherently with the characteristics of the area: the ports represent the nodes of a network and the ancient paths provide the connections between coastal, central and rural areas.

In this perspective, the small ports of the Peninsula could become not only infrastructures but public places that could have a welcome, cultural, promotional and recreational functions. They represent the adequate places where renewal and

enhance local identity, reusing built heritage to implement new sustainable development strategies.

CONCLUSION

The proposed case study aims to highlight the role of port areas for the enhancement of natural and built heritage in small cities. The Sorrento Peninsula is an emblematic area because the relations among rural landscape, urban centres and coastal areas have shaped unique characteristics and values that must be protected. Therefore, future strategies should valorise these historical relations, transforming the port areas in “nodes” of an overall network for a sustainable use of the existing resources. In this perspective, port areas must be transformed in “places” where people can spend their time in recreational and cultural facilities, can receive welcome and information and can be led to the discovery of the local identity and heritage.

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