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Which image(s) for Genoa as a World Heritage site?

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Italy will soon nominate the “Palazzi dei Rolli” in Genoa, for inscription in the World Heritage List. This system includes around 200 palaces within the historic core, and represents an ingenious solution adopted by the Oligarchic Republic to host official guests in a town with no royal palace.

WH inscriptions generally influence perceptions and the future of inscribed sites. Therefore, care is required in selecting a ‘narrative’ fully covering the essence of the town, to avoid approaches that may separate heritage from life or trivialize cultural significance.

Over the last decade informal discussions among institutional representatives have explored various nomination profiles for the town. Two broader ideas were initially proposed for further framing. One referred to the Renaissance period and included the historic core, the system of walls and fortresses, the surviving suburban villas and parks, while the other recognized Genoa for its influence across the Mediterranean area since the Middle Age.

Recently, the process of developing a nomination has accelerated and the present ‘roadmap’ has been drafted with no public discussion. Meanwhile, the town has been developing the vision of its future.

Thus, the current nomination proposal raises several questions: does it adequately depict Genoa’s outstanding universal significance? How does it relate to the vision for the future of the town? What are the consequences of Genoa for forwarding of ‘Palazzi dei Rolli’ nomination in comparison with the former proposals? Which underlying ‘meta-narratives’ may be identified and how can these affect the future of the whole town? How can its potential be reinforced and its weaknesses reduced? The paper will explore issues and reasons for the present choice, while providing some suggestions for its strengthening.

Introduction: nomination processes and profile(s) for heritage significance

Any heritage ‘construction’ process, that is, any intentional and conspicuous effort to identify, define and transmit the heritage significance of a place – and the inscription in the WH List is a particular and complex form of heritage construction – implies a variety of ‘ingredients’, the heritage property and its intrinsic and attributed values being only some of the components that will determine the final ‘official’ profile of the site.

Preparing a nomination for a place as a world heritage site encompasses legal issues, international protection and management requirements and local traditions, cultural and economic capacity, heritage interpretations. These are based on the features of the site itself and on narratives intentionally and unintentionally attached to it. The former attest to the level and articulation of the knowledge of a site (the more available interpretation paths, the richer and more varied are the studies and understanding of the site), the latter ‘illustrate’ current aspirations and objectives, at both the local and national level, and/or contribute to address the future of the site and that of its communities.

Furthermore, a nomination for a site to achieve the WH status is rarely matter of pure chance, due to the considerable amount of qualified efforts which are required at different levels, from the technical

and administrative expertise to the political will of undertaking this path, but it is often a matter of picking the opportunity, that is, understanding ‘which is the right moment’ to forward a nomination. In Europe, built heritage recognition and conservation, especially of complex sites like towns or cultural landscapes, have become part of larger processes of physical and economical rehabilitation of our post-industrial economy, in which heritage might play more or less relevant roles. In this situation, the moment of inscription is not indifferent, in that it might start a renewal process, have a cumulative effect in conjunction with other ongoing initiatives, or, on the contrary, might remain an isolated episode, which brings notoriety but is not part of a structured development process.

Beyond the intrinsic features of any heritage site and the body of knowledge, interpretations, stories attached to it or the spiritual links established by humans with the site, the process for designation plays an integral role in defining the profile for a candidate. This holds true in general, because any designation system has its own ‘cultural biases’, but it does in particular where the rules and the process are highly articulated, as in the case of the World Heritage framework. The Convention and its Operational Guidelines requirements are several and interrelated: these focus primarily on the protection measures that are to be put in place by each State party for nominated sites, and, secondly, provide a number of guidelines about eligible categories of heritage property, the criteria and qualifying conditions that have to be met by nominated property. These indications are intended as an help for identifying and structuring the elements that make up the outstanding universal value of nominated property, and a checklist for evaluation, both at the preliminary and final stage of the process. All these interrelated provisions and strategies influence the elaboration of the nomination by the State parties and, to paraphrase Vanderburgh, it “is no particular surprise to anyone: a proposal for nomination to the [WH List] is nothing if not a carefully constructed argument”¹.

The challenge posed to authorities, heritage professionals, and other stakeholders in developing this ‘carefully constructed argument’ is the harmonisation of multiple goals, technical requirements and heritage significance into a credible proposal able to respond to the various issues at stake, while, at the same time, ensuring the retention and safeguard of the whole body of existing and potential values and meanings. Pursuing this task is often difficult – cultural heritage is by its very nature ambiguous, polysemous and contradictory – and, therefore, even with the best intentions, it is not rare that nomination dossiers frame ‘demonstration’ of significance on selected heritage dimensions, aiming at offering a convincing picture of nominated properties that may ensure wide understanding and acceptance of their candidature. In case of inscription, sites managers find themselves to deal with the consequences that a selected perspective might have on protection and presentation of heritage values and resources. According to the nature – inclusive or exclusive; multiple or simple – of the interpretation adopted for achieving the WH status, the ways – loose and creative or restrictive and rigid – in which managers will address protection, conservation, actualisation, and communication of the site’s significance may have a remarkable impact on the resources and how it is perceived by inhabitants and visitors.

The case of the nomination of the ‘Strada Nuova and Palazzi dei Rolli’ in Genoa for inscription in the World Heritage List is a good example of the dynamic interaction among the above mentioned factors and of its resulting outcomes. The present paper explores the various ‘ingredients’ – including the possible alternatives that were on the ground – that make up the present nomination, its limits and

¹ David Vanderburgh, Remarks toward a reasonable rhetoric of integrity, in *Multiple views, multiple meanings. A critical look to Integrity*, March, 11-13, 1999, Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland. In this paper, Vanderburgh analysed the construction of the integrity argument within the National Register designation system, and referred the quoted statement to this framework.

potentials in reflecting multiple levels of the town's heritage significance and the overall management strategies through which integrate the full range of heritage values and meanings.

The 'ingredients' of the case

The History of the town as reflected by its built fabric

It is not possible to render the complexity of the formation of the town in few lines, and therefore conscious simplifications will be made, in particular, in outlining the history of the town, attention will be directed to those epochs that have left material traces that are still recognisable and have influenced the subsequent development phases of the town and their identity, as perceived by foreigners and inhabitants. The chronological structure of this account highlights elements that the nomination has used in its attempt to escape the periodizing logic and to propose 'transversal' readings of the Genoese urban case.

The 'completed' city of the 13th century

Genoa, as many other European towns, had an ancient foundation, linked to the native Ligurian tribes, which inhabited the region during the Stone, Iron and Bronze Ages. The town was conquered by the Romans, that made possible the first real urban settlement. Genoa increased its importance as a port and became a strategic settlement for the Romans. However, not much remains of that early period of the town – in comparison with other roman settlement – both in terms of archaeological and informational sources. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the town knew a long period of decay and neglect.

It is only with the 11th century that Genoa increased its importance as a commercial centre, founded the basis of what has been defined as a medieval 'commonwealth' across the Mediterranean (Balard, 1993; Gorse, 1997) and, by the end of the 13th century, acquired its first consolidated urban form. The urban fabric of that period was maintained over time and still largely contributes to the actual image of the historic town. The idea of a completed town is somehow justified by a mature urban culture, based on clear objectives and regulations that allowed a daily management of the building activity (Poleggi, Cevini, 1981). The major surviving elements of this phase are:

- The Ripa Maris (literally, the seashore), an impressive multifunctional commercial and residential structure, consisting of a long series of porches, a sort of covered commercial street, erected on the waterfront. This structure was the planned response of the municipality to the urban development that was already occurring in this area. The structure became an impressive and continuous series of palaces, funded by private funds but conceived as a public work, and resulted in a commercial infrastructure which, at the same time protected from the action of the sea. The Ripa, however partly transformed and reconstructed in the 19th century, following the creation of a traffic road, is still clearly recognisable and has deeply marked the image and the identity of the town through the centuries until the present. It is a still lively part of the town, with several shops and other commercial activities organised along the covered path. The modes of its erection bear witness to the ability and tradition of this town of controlling building activity and directing it toward common objectives for the economical benefits of the town.
- The second city walls, erected (1155-61) to defend the town against the German Emperor Federico II "Barbarossa" (Grossi Bianchi, Poleggi, 1979). The new walls enclosed all previous boroughs in their perimeter. Surviving portions of this infrastructure are two gates, one of which restored in its supposedly original forms in XIX century, and few pieces of the walls. The difference of the outer urban fabric, less dense and with larger built lots, still marks the boundaries of the former walled town.

- The Palazzo San Giorgio, or the “Palace of the Sea”, the economic heart of the city. It was built in 1260 and which is the physical symbol of the inventiveness of the Genoese trade milieu in developing technological, economical and financial instruments that let them succeed as a trade and business centre for various centuries (Heers, 1993);
- A very dense urban fabric, with a maze of narrow streets, ending in cul-de-sacs, derived from the Islamic commercial spaces – well known by the Genoese merchants – and adapted to the local social situation and constructive traditions (Grossi Bianchi, Poleggi, 1979; Poleggi, Cevini, 1981; Eslami, 2000; Bobbio, 2004).

Peculiarities of this medieval stage of the town that remained over the centuries, are the absence of a common public space, and the non hierarchic labyrinth of the streets: both features are due to social and functional reasons. The population was organised and divided into closed ‘clans’, the ‘alberghi’, evolution of the earlier ‘consortia’, which were based on alliances among families grounded on contiguity, on the common control of immovable property and on the concentration of socio-political functions through the government organs (Grendi, 1987; Grossi Bianchi, Poleggi, 1979). Each consortium was associated with a delimited urban space, the ‘curia’, which supported mixed functions (residential, commercial, productive and religious) and correspondingly built structures and spaces: these built clusters generally encompassed houses, often of different quality reflecting the importance of the inhabitants, with their warehouses, a defensive tower, a private square, a church. In case of need, these clusters could be isolated from the extant part of the town. Still recognisable examples of this settlement pattern are the Piazzas San Matteo, San Luca, Cattaneo della Volta and San Marcellino.

Urban renovation: from the 15th to the 17th century and the ‘Genoese Golden century’

The shift from a trade- based to a financial economy, occurred between the end of the 15th and the early 16th modified the profile of the wealth and led to the change of the government system from the Dogatum (a diarchy counterbalanced by an elected council) to the Oligarchic Republic. At this modification corresponds a remarkable alteration of the urban and architectural design within the town and the surrounding territory. Significant components that illustrate this period are:

- The numerous renovated palaces, streets and piazzas within the historic core. They represent the precedents to the renaissance conspicuous *renovatio urbis*, took place in the second half of the 15th century and was pushed by the private initiative: fillings of the commercial porches at the ground-floor of the residences, the development of an internal courtyard, sometimes a garden, the acquisition of adjacent minor buildings, the reshaping of buildings into new complexes, and the subsequent plastering of the external surfaces with monochrome painted decoration. The renaissance urban renovation of Genoa, however, maintains elements of great originality and diversity in respect to the contemporaneous Italian urban culture. These peculiarities can be explained with the specific political situation and the strong attachment of many old families to their curiae, or courts, as they came to be defined, which were strategically located close to the Ripa, the port, and their headquarters. This implied a number of ‘surgical’ cuts and careful remodelling of the urban fabric to rectify or enlarge streets and squares, to achieve a new magnificence in the residences, through the inventive and masterly adaptation of foreign models (initially imported from Milan and Florence, later on from Rome, with the presence of roman artists called by Andrea Doria) to the local urban conditions.
- The Strada Nuova or ‘Via Aurea’(Golden Street), the celebrated episode of a Renaissance residential palace street or ‘linear piazza’ (Gorse, 1997). This ensemble represents the adaptation of roman models to the Genoese culture and topography. This undertaking was

proposed by the ruling Oligarchy as a necessary moment of the extensive renovation programme for the embellishment of the town, while, at the same, the most prominent members of the ruling aristocratic elite were assigned a lot where to build sumptuous residences, in completely renovated forms. The rules to carry out the operation were tight, in fact, while facilitations for purchasers abounded, fees were established for those who would not build within two years from the beginning of the works. These palaces became the centrepiece of Rubens' 'Palaces of Genoa', a deluxe folio volume which publicized in northern Europe the way of life of the Genoese nobility. It is worth noting that the Strada Nuova did not become a model for future interventions, neither in its social dimension – the concentration of few most powerful individuals with their close families – nor in its radical destruction of the extant fabric. Strada Nuova, however, successfully attests to the Genoese long-lasting tradition in publicly regulating and managing urban activity, without which the whole operation would not have been possible (Poleggi, 2004).

- The Ducal Palace, the headquarters of the Oligarchic Republic and the biennial residence of the Doge. It was renovated and organised in a functional whole that hosted the major political and administrative functions. It was partly rehabilitated in 18th century, following a disastrous fire which burnt down the roof and the vault of the Major Salon (salone del Maggior Consiglio).
- The suburban system of the villas. Flourished in safer conditions in the extra- urban territory, they framed the hilly territory through the walled subdivision of the property. The same walls that featured the Ligurian landscape and were celebrated by Eugenio Montale in one of his poems. Also the architectural and settlement models of the villas underwent a substantial modification during the 16th century, leading to the adoption of common typologies and architectural forms. The architectural similarities emerged in this epoch between the urban palazzo and the villa bear witness to the close connection of these two aspects of dwelling since the 13th century.

The apparent immobility of the late 17th and the 18th century

This period is characterised by the rationalisation of the several renovation works carried out during the previous century:

In respect of a [period in which the] town that renovates itself part by part, thus actualising a 'discontinued' structure in terms of both its building organisation and its connection system, the 18th century is characterised by being a transition period in which a few episodes emerge, different from those previously described: an increased consideration of the town as a whole organism, a cautious care for the problems of the urban structure that are no longer closely dependent by the exigencies of the patricians, and an attitude directed to the search of innovative solutions².

Significant episodes of urban transformation carried out in this period were:

- the opening of the Strada Novissima, which conjoined the two trunks of the 'strade nuove';
- the construction of the bridge from the oldest part of the town to the Carignano hills, which has remained a landmark of the urban scape;
- the enlargement of the Via Giulia from the centre to the east;
- several other infrastructure works to overcome the problems of accessibility that a town compressed between the sea and the hills has had ever since;

² Giontoni, Balletti (2002), *Genova. Territorio e società tra antico regime e età moderna*, Genova, De Ferrari, p. 43.

- the rehabilitation of the Ducal Palace following a disastrous fire that brought to adopt an ingenious fire-proof solution for the carrying structure of the roof, based on the use of stone masonry parabolic arches, connected by slate slabs. This intervention again attests to the high quality and originality of Genoese workmanship and to the vital cultural milieu of the town (Galliani, 1984; Bartolini, 2003)
- the construction of the Palazzo Bianco in Strada Nuova;
- a number of small rehabilitation interventions focussing on the façades and interior decoration, and
- the uprising of existing buildings in view of their adaptation to rental apartments. This implied a number of internal modifications whose study illustrate the knowledge and command of the building structural behaviour of Genoese masons.

The construction of the 19th century bourgeois town

At the end of the 18th century Genoa lost its independence, before by the Napoleonic occupation and later on through the annexation to the Kingdom of Sardinia. This is the period of the creation of the ‘bourgeois town’ with the construction of new buildings and spaces for new functions (the theatre, the academies, the squares and the promenades) and the expansion of residential spaces. The ‘Piano di ingrandimento della città’ (masterplan for the enlargement of the town) developed in 1825 focussed on few main axes of action: the accessibility to the town from the West, the crossing of the town from the West to the East; the creation of new residential neighbourhoods. This plan represented the ‘programmatic platform’ (Poleggi, Cevini, 1981) of the future development of the town, carried out through the direct involvement of private investors.

Among the physical testimonies that may be accounted to this epoch there are:

- The opening of the ‘Carrettiera Carlo Alberto’ a road suitable for vehicles built along the waterfront, and the enlargement of an existing narrow street to create via San Lorenzo, which permitted the penetration to the centre of the town from the west;
- The opening of the Via Carlo Felice, which may be considered as the 19th completion of the ceremonial path composed by the Via Balbi (which, from the early 19th century hosted the Royal Palace), the Strada Nuovissima and the Strada Nuova. The Via Carlo Felice ended before the newly erected Theatre;
- The opening of Via Caffaro and Assarotti, which go up straight onto the hills and illustrate the bourgeois re-interpretation of the Strada Nuova, with their isolated block-shaped edifices standing along the street;
- The subsequent adoption of this model for other residential streets that will be connected through a ring promenade from the eastern to the western margins of the old town;
- The construction of the upper ring road (Circonvallazione a Monte), a series of boulevards facing on the historic town and built on the side adjacent the hillsides, with its system of small urban gardens for embellishment of the new neighbourhood;
- The creation of Piazza De Ferrari, the first public square of the town and the enlargement of Via Giulia with the construction of Via XX Settembre, to connect the centre with the eastern part of the town.

The 20th Century

This century has been characterised by the definitive interruption of the building and planning tradition developed over the centuries by the town. The expansion of the industrial and residential settlements lost any logic and, in spite of the fact that interesting and valuable architectural episodes certainly remain, the overall rationale of the urban development is confuse and disappointing in its results. As Musso observes:

In the 1930s, through an intense planning activity, a new destiny for the town is designed, based on radical substitutions aimed at actualising a dream of total 'renovatio urbis', destined to remain incomplete or, unfortunately, to find late and guilty completions. To this cultural climate belong some 'grafts' which inaugurates management practices [based on] focussed demolitions/substitutions [...] that have progressively taken over the 'building through cutting' modes. [...] With those interventions started an epoch of profound contradictions between the increasingly faster processes of abandonment of the old town and of substitution of its inhabitants, with subsequent consequences on the conservation of the assets, and the rising of a new architectural season that gave light to a town marked by noble and refined 'interlockings' (the new municipal offices, the design of the museum spaces in Palazzo Rosso and Palazzo Bianco, the 'Treasure of San Lorenzo', the museum of Sant'Agostino). [...] But while the town knows unexpected episodes of architectural vitality, [...] the history shows the results, perhaps not foreseen or wanted, of those choices: a town made through radical and violent substitutions mixed up with debatable novelties. No more surgical cuts but erasing of entire urban fabrics³.

Emerging patterns of significance for Genoa

Looking at the history and the physical substance of the town, it is possible to identify different patterns of significance, based on differing interpreting approaches. Only some of them have been considered and further explored as possible theme for nominating the town for inscription in the WH List:

- A Mediterranean emporium throughout the centuries in relation to its markets: routes, centres, contacts, mutual exchanges in language, art, architecture, economy and cooking.
- The materialisation in the physical urban and suburban setting of the social, economical and cultural changes occurred during *el siglo de los genoveses* ('the century of the Genoese'), when the town became a major financial centre for the Spanish Hapsburg empire, and the influences of these changes across Europe.

While others, have only recently came to the fore, like the idea of a significance lying in the 'implicit urban plan' that the town has pursued over the centuries, by virtue of its location (Musso, 1994 and 2001). Physical testimony documenting the outstanding significance at the various levels are:

- the recognisability of the walled city and of the 17th century fortified system;
- the continuity of the urban fabric since the Middle Age as a sign of a place-based social identity and the functional and social logic and of the labyrinth and its permanence over the centuries;
- the materialisation of the medieval social structure in the urban fabric, a feature which is still perceivable and is one of the main original traits of this town (Grendi, 1987; Mazzino, De Negri, 1974; Grossi Bianchi, Poleggi, 1979; Poleggi, Cevini, 1981);

³ Musso (2004), Genova città caleidoscopio, in *Giornale Do.co.mo.mo*, n. 15, p. 1

- the conscious importation and adaptation from the Islamic world of functional settlement models, which have been originally integrated in the local building tradition (Grossi Bianchi, Poleggi, 1979; Poleggi, Cevini, 1981; Eslami, 2000);
- the monumental Ripa Maris, which has astonishingly survived throughout the centuries in the port area, subject to ongoing upgrading of infrastructures to meet technological naval and commercial advancements;
- the network of the main urban commercial and residential streets, illustrating the coherent response to the search for urban accessibility throughout the centuries, and embodying a sort of ‘implicit plan’ for the town, which has been evolving since the origins of the urban settlement (Musso, 2001 and 2004);
- the urban and architectural renewal of the town occurred in 15th- 16th century which represent an ingenious adaptation of foreign models to the local conditions and, at the same time, the tangible expression of social and governmental changes (Grendi, 1987; Grossi Bianchi, Poleggi, 1979);
- the role of the public administration in developing rules for the control of the building activity and their ingenious use to achieve public benefits through the activity of private citizens (Poleggi, 2004);
- the interrelation of the urban palaces and suburban villas, testified by the villas themselves and the still surviving pedestrian paths that from the centre go up the fortifications circle or criss-cross the 20th century residential expansion of the town. Urban palaces and suburban villas are two inseparable moments of the life and exercise of control over the territory by the various Genoese families, as the use of the same word ‘palatium’ to designate both in the documents suggests (Poleggi, 2004);
- the permanence and adaptation of use of block- shaped house model since introduction in 16th century until the 19th century urban bourgeois expansion, which has ensured a visual and formal integration with the ancient town, at whose margins were built the first streets with block-shaped houses (Strada Nuova and Via Balbi), while also embodying symbolic intentional connection of the new bourgeoisie with the aristocratic ruling class of the Genoese Golden Age (Poleggi, Cevini, 1981; Bobbio, 2004).

Intangible dimensions of the outstanding heritage significance of this town may be found in the social organisation of the Genoese ruling class, in the careful and tight control of the building activity that ensured the achievement of remarkable public undertakings and minute, spread improvement of the public spaces thanks to the coordinated management of private building activity. More obvious forms of intangible values are provided by the innumerable accounts and descriptions that have been provided by travellers of each epoch, and the copious iconographic material available (drawings, paintings, engravings). It is however peculiar that if foreigners’ interest has been attracted by the singularity and complexity of this town, locals have shown an apparent embarrassing disinterest towards their built environment. The best representations of the town provided by local artists were and remained for long the topographic maps drawn for pragmatic reasons, or some views with a cartographic flavour.

On the other hand, the spiritual association of the Genoese people with their own town might be difficult to be understood, since it nurtured itself in a private dimension, always protected from and subtracted to the sight. Ennio Poleggi observes:

The [Genoese] collective conscience, generically referred to pragmatic values, has never been able to see the town in the horizons of the great artistic Italian towns. The roots of this weird dissociation between the community and the authentic landscape and formal values through which this community has been able to express itself, date back long in the past, much before the traumas of the industrial epoch, provoked by the abnormal port and vehicular infrastructures and by the industrial and residential settlements⁴. [...] The peculiarity of a late growth of the consciousness of the values of the Genoese landscape [...] may be easily explained through the prevalence of a technological culture based on the port and maritime activity [...] but it should not be hidden other and deeper motivations [which] are rooted in a very special relationship man- nature, linked certainly to the ethnic character, which, however, has never hidden the proud consciousness of the role that the town had in the history of the Mediterranean, with no preoccupation to express it consciously⁵.

The understatement and somehow exclusivity that has characterised the Genoese people is still a living element that explains the not unanimous reaction towards the urban renewal operation and the communication strategies put in place by the administration (Gazzola, 2004) and is partly responsible for the difficulties that outsiders often have in understanding and associate themselves to the town.

Images of Genoa

The possible images of Genoa are countless and co-existing: the physical aspect of the town and the character of its inhabitants have suggested the idea of a ‘superb’ Genoa, the apparent and real inaccessibility of its treasures and of its essence let coin the appellation of ‘secret Genoa’ (Gabrielli, 2005), while the social separation between working class and ‘bourgeoisie’ during the industrialisation period has led to the slogan ‘Genoa, divided city’. The topography of the site and the incredible architectural solutions to overcome space and slope constraints have contributed to a complex, ‘piranesian’ (Musso, 2001) urban landscape:

Genoa grew and evolved in a difficult and hard environment; moulding a steep and rough land, creating a sort of complex and layered pattern, rich in sudden glimpses, improbable jumps, and impressively ‘out of scale’. The urban scene is marked by quick images where the most different architectural episodes, the most varied formal and material references overlap, often in an excited rhythm, in a kaleidoscope of impressions that strike senses and imagination. Walking through the town one is struck, at each corner, wherever his look goes until almost getting lost by strong and pressing contrasts. Thus the evocative vision of Genoa as a ‘piranesian town’ arises, an astonishing masterpiece of an army of engravers who worked not a copper plate but a corner of the world, through the centuries of its history. A town for long grown on itself, compressed in narrow spaces, along tortuous routes, often re-using the existing resources or sacrificing the least amount of them.⁶

Recently, the image of the ‘polycentric town’, suggested by the creation of the “Great Genoa” in 1926, through the unification of Genoa with several towns and villages nearby (but historically rooted in the medieval *curiae*) has constituted the wider framework for planning programmes for mobility and productive facilities⁷ improvement. The ‘Plan of the City’, an operational planning tool that implement actions at different, integrated levels (physical, social, economical), identified the major themes of the governance. The recent urban conservation and rehabilitation programme of the historic town and

⁴ Ennio Poleggi, *Introduzione*, in Poleggi, Cevini (1981), *Le città nella storia d’Italia*. Genova, Laterza, Bari, p. 2

⁵ Poleggi, Cevini (1981), *Le città nella storia d’Italia*, Bari, Laterza, pp. 11-13.

⁶ Stefano F. Musso (2001), *Genova, città piranesiana*, in *Giornale Do.co.mo.mo*, n. 9. Translation by the author of the present paper.

⁷ In several public meetings and conferences, the *Assessore* for Urban Quality and Planning, prof. Bruno Gabrielli, referred to the idea of the ‘beautiful city’ and of the ‘polycentric city’ to explain the vision on which recent renewal policies have been based.

harbour were forwarded and publicized under the image of 'Genoa, the beautiful city', the next phase of the implementation of the plan has identified the 'classic' image of 'Genoa, superb city' for the completion of the renovation and communication programme (the cultural marketing of the historic town). At a more general level, the motto for the economical development of the town and the metropolitan area has been identified in 'Genoa, town of knowledge' (Pericu, 2005). The present nomination to the World Heritage List has adopted as leit-motiv the image (purposely constructed?) of 'Genoa, city of palaces'.

While this almost frenetic production of virtual images from the inside, is a very recent feature of the town, the more 'authentic' expression of the Genoese character is that of an apparent 'assent presence' of images continuously changing, like those produced by a kaleidoscope (Musso, 2004), and nourished by the words of poets, travellers and singers, in the colours and views of painters and photographers. All these images are legitimate and inspiring, but, at the same time, intrinsically partial. Their ability to enrich the daily experience that inhabitants have of their town is directly proportional to the co-existence of as many as possible.

'Contingent' elements influencing present nomination.

The recent renovation programme and the 'project for the city'

Over twelve years, three exceptional events took place in the town: the Columbus Celebrations in 1992, the G8 Summit in 2001 and Genoa, European Capital of culture in 2004 (together with Lille). These events have brought to the town huge public funds to carry out the necessary rehabilitation and renovation works. These large resources were utilized to create a leisure area in the former old port and to bring about the City Plan, which included large scale urban maintenance of the historic town, through the pedestrianization of streets and piazzas, incentives to open innovative small enterprises, shops and bars, and the creation of an integrated state-municipal museum system. The objective of this beautification programme was certainly to transform Genoa from a declining industrial centre into a city of art to be inserted in the cultural tourism circuits, but also aimed at modifying how inhabitants perceived their own town, and especially its historic core. Most of the resources, therefore, was concentrated on this part of the town for urban recovery and conservation, while the only strategic regeneration programme thought for a peripheral area is represented by the leisure coastal park of Voltri, which, however, is the fruit of long struggles of the inhabitants (Bobbio, 2005). The rehabilitation programme has been so successful that has caused a sudden and unexpectedly high increase of property values, which the municipality does not seem adequately equipped to tackle (Gabrielli, 2005). To carry out the operation, only some aspects of the historical, morphologic, and material complexity of the town have been selected to create the new image of Genoa.

The administration, however, does not intend to concentrate only on 'cultural tourism' for the economical recovery of the town: it may be argued that the rehabilitation programme of the old town has been considered instrumental to stimulate interest towards the town and attract investors in other economical activities and to re-establish a climate of trust and optimism within local investors, always very prudent. The Administration has developed a strategy for development that has put at its centre the strengthening and expansion of the port activity, which has been a Genoese long-lasting and living tradition, and the technological industry and research, which represent already a successful reality. The gears of the port 'rebirth' are the substantial expansion of the port spaces and infrastructures, in the western side of the town, the improvement of accessibility to the town (the underwater tunnel) and

from the town to the transalpine regions (the high speed railway), the localisation of the Italian Institute for Technology, the project for a 'citadel' of technology on top of a hill, used as container deposit⁸.

The destruction of the piers of the 15th century port

This demolition of part of the remains of the old port was a disgraceful and shameful decision, which was carried out in 1989 during the rehabilitation works of the waterfront, in view of the Columbus Exhibition. The area was excavated to for the construction of a tunnel, which would free the areas in front of the port from the traffic, and the ancient piers were discovered, almost intact. A number of studies in the previous decades identified the highly probable location of the ancient port infrastructure, thus this 'discovery' was highly foreseeable. The port of Genoa – as well as the town itself – has always grown on itself, and the construction of new piers occurred through addition and almost no demolition, embedding the old in subsequent structures. In Genoa, an archaeological ensemble made up with an intact series of piers from the 15th to the 19th century was still in place, an almost unique situation in the world, whose integrity has been significantly undermined by the destruction of the 15th century piers. In some way, this episode also epitomizes the lack of understanding of the importance of medieval archaeology outside the expert precinct, in a country whose roman past is sometimes too much celebrated. The piers were not 'classical' remains to which the collective imaginary is attached, thanks to the wide celebration of the aesthetic role of ruins made by generations of painters and to interpretation of history focussing on the legacy of the Greeks and the roman empire. They were 'functional' structures, somehow perceived as less important, less noble, and therefore could be sacrificed. But Genoa and the Genoese lost a system of archaeological remains that materially testified the prominent role of the town in the Mediterranean and in Europe along the centuries. This event has influenced the profile of the WH nomination for Genoa.

Possible themes for nomination

The numbers , extension and approaches to research carried out in the last century, and especially in the last four decades, have provided a considerable amount of material to allow first syntheses and 'transversal' reflections on Genoa as a whole, though from different, mutually enriching perspectives.

The historic permanence and transformations of the historic Genoa would suggest that the ideal nomination would be based on the historic town – considered as a whole organism – the centre of a powerful medieval emporium, which has been able to evolve towards different and more successful forms of business during the renaissance and baroque period. Material testimony of these seasons are: the Ripa Maris; the gates of the town; the peculiar, the medieval urban fabric precisely reflecting the social structure and embodying Islamic influences; and the following urban renovation episodes – the opening of Strada Nuova, the less impacting adaptation of various streets – which substantially respected the existing material fabric, the street grid, and the continuity of intentions in its use and its modifications (i.e. the opening and/or enlargement of new streets to overcome accessibility problems). An enriching and unique component of the heritage significance of Genoa is the existence of one of the most important archival historic collections in Europe, accumulated through the centuries of activity of the public administration and private citizens, which has been one of the invaluable source of information – the other being the urban fabric itself - on which the knowledge of the town has been built. However, the destruction of the old port remains – a component of evident uniqueness – has been felt as major loss for the town, at least among professionals, knowledgeable citizens and the most

⁸ For an accurate and extensive account of the recent history of the transformation in Genoa see the monographic issue of *Urbanistica*, 126, 2005.

informed administrators, and has certainly contributed to undermine - in the eyes of proponents - the viability of a nomination focussed on the port town of the Middle Age.

A different and wider perspective of the Genoese medieval period focuses on the commercial network that Genoa was able to develop across the Mediterranean, which would reveal fruitful also when the town shifted from a merchant to a financial activity. Such a serial nomination would include, at least, the main centres of this network, emphasising the mutual exchange that occurred over centuries of contacts and the physical components that still bear witness to these exchanges⁹. While such a nomination would be innovative, stimulating and future-oriented, it must be acknowledged its complexity both at a technical and diplomatic level, also considering the current international climate. Realistically, any State Party would ground a nomination of this kind on other, more solid interests than the celebration of a glorious epoch (which might not be perceived as 'glorious' by everybody). Genoa, however, has not renounced its historic Mediterranean and multicultural vocation, also in relation to its economic future development. The Strategic Conference launching the Plan of the City in 1999 entitled Genoa: the routes of the Mediterranean to Europe, the numerous cultural initiatives of various institutions of the town, or the proposal of the administration to extend to regular immigrants the right of voting at the administrative elections (proposal, unfortunately, immediately blamed and stopped by the national government) well testify to this orientation and may lead in the future to strengthening loose relations. Challenges to this possible nomination could have come from the determination of the 'integrity' of the system itself (it will be difficult to decide which centres should be included and which ones could be left out) and in relation to heritage resources, or from tensions in the political/economical relations among countries. Finally, in this case, authenticity should be measured not only in relation to cultural resources of the site, but also to the overall meaning of the proposal (in case the nomination would not be based also on reasons relevant to contemporary life).

Another theme that was put forth and briefly explored focussed on the original adaptation of roman renaissance urban, architectural, and artistic themes to the social, topographic and cultural situation of Genoa. The main physical components supporting this perspective were the episodes of urban renewal within and at the margins of the historic town (Strada Nuova, Via Balbi, Strada Nuovissima, via di Scurreria, etc.); the fortifications and walls of the 17th century, the villas settlements, the elegant counterpart of the urban renovations, where no space constraints allowed the full expression of the new self-consciousness of the ruling class. Villa settlements impressed a frame on the territory which is still recognisable at different degrees on the hilly parts of the town and the rural territory outside the walls, which have been overwhelmed by subsequent development, due to 20th century urbanisation. While this interpretation identifies a significant 'slice' of the life of Genoa, it also adopts a holistic, systemic approach, in which all the featuring elements of this cultural season are read in an integrated manner. Both significance and authenticity requirements would be satisfied by a proposal grounded on these elements, while the newly introduced condition of integrity might create difficulties, in that the physical integrity of part of the resources has been undermined over time and is not immediately legible, especially in relation to the villa-settlements system, absorbed into the 20th century urban development of those areas. It might be asked, however, whether for integrity, we should refer to the one the site had at the time of its 'creation' or we should consider the actual integrity of the site at

⁹ A recent study, conducted by Alireza Naser Eslami (2000), has systematically explored previous and fragmentary intuitions about the Islamic elements present in the Genoese culture and urban setting, and convincingly proposed the thesis that the structure of commercial spaces of the medieval town is a conscious derivation and adaptation of models typical of the Islamic world. Prominent examples are the Ripa itself, but all the town was punctuated with commercial spaces and warehouses, where trade was exercised, that were organised according to these typological and distribution schemes. In the previous decades other studies have explored the still existing and recognisable traces and elements of the Genoese presence across the Mediterranean region.

present, since those conditions of integrity have allowed recognition of heritage significance (Bennett, 1995; Parks Canada, 1997).

Reasons, limits and potential of the present nomination

The brief exploration of possible themes for framing significance and selecting related heritage resources, with their strengths and weaknesses, helps understand how the roadmap for the present nomination has been mapped.

The nomination focuses on Strada Nuova and the Palazzi dei Rolli. These may be considered as two interconnected themes, two different and original aspects of the expression of the Genoese renaissance culture, rooted in its tradition of pragmatism and jealous independence. The first is an outstanding sample of renaissance urban culture which possess the unique feature of a private wealth used for public representation: the Strada Nuova in fact may be considered as a scenic urban promenade of the ruling Genoese aristocracy. The Rolli were the lists of the palaces that, thanks to their magnificence, could be considered for hosting public and official guests. This ‘invention’ was a creative solution to overcome the lack of a royal court, being the Ducal palace only a functional and not a celebrative headquarters. Each time official guests were expected, hosts were drawn from existing lists according to the importance of the personages and their retinues. At least three categories of ‘alloggiamenti pubblici’ (public lodgings) existed and used to select the most appropriate hosts. All the major families were involved in this activity, which was necessary as a complement of diplomatic and commercial relationships. The commitment was tough, if several documents bear witness to the complaints for the excessive expenditures to be faced.

The nomination apparently identifies a slice in the history of the town and, of this slice, selects the two most relevant episodes.

The objective of this ‘low-profile’ nomination is certainly to make understandable and communicable the originality and outstanding significance of both a town that escapes from usual interpretations of the Italian urban culture and the geographical, historical, social and anthropological milieu that made it possible. Genoa has since long suffered from its anomalies (uncertain and not evident roman traces, the stubbornly pursued independence, the permanence of the physical traces of the medieval past, etc.) and its difficult ‘accessibility’ is acknowledged (and maybe mythicized), therefore any effort to explain the town is charged with the doubt of failing. Selection of a ‘defined’ theme may give the hope to succeed in the undertaking, even if it might limit the scope of the nomination. The proposal also aims at securing the nomination, by focussing on clearly unique and uncontested features. Strada Nuova and the Palazzi dei Rolli certainly meet significance criteria and qualifying conditions of authenticity and integrity, while, in the case of the whole historic core much more effort would have been required to make explicit its ‘universal outstanding significance’ – considering the number of historic centres already inscribed on the list – and restrictive interpretation of integrity (in respect of single heritage resources) could offer space for debate.

In this specific case, appropriate timing for inscription may play a fundamental role in creating a synergy with the previous events and keeping high the momentum in view of consolidating the renewed popularity of the town.

At a first sight, this proposal might be charged with ‘reductionism’ and ‘elitism’, which partly holds true – it somehow seems to reflect a ‘traditional’ and reassuring vision of heritage – but the selected cases have the potential to be interpreted as complex and dense poles of meaning. The existence of Strada Nuova and the ‘Rolli’ has been made possible by many and interwoven factors that may shed light on the whole history and significance of the town. Depending the way in which the proposal has

been framed, it may, in fact, represent a ‘trans-disciplinary’ attempt to depict a corner of the world; the existing body of knowledge and the multiple levels of understanding of this town would allow this challenge.

However, there are at least two weaknesses in this proposal.

The first might be considered ‘technical’ and resides in a certain ambiguity and complexity, that may give the idea of either two separated and unrelated themes or their complete inter-changeability, where Strada Nuova would be the prominent representation also of the Palazzi dei Rolli. The first case may lead to the inscription only of the Strada Nuova – the appreciation of its values may occur at a more immediate level, due to the fact that is already scholarly known outside Italy, or that it is easily comparable with roman renaissance architectural examples - as an original example of the adaptation of more famous renaissance models. The second hypothesis may lead to the inscription of Strada Nuova as a selection of the Palazzi dei Rolli. This would mean failing to understand that the Rolli are a network in which each building is an essential component of a unique and ingenious Republican ‘royal palace’ (nobody would exclude the kitchens from Versailles, because of their modesty). The palaces in the old town are an integral part of the system, whose integrity would be undermined by an inscription that would leave them out, and they still reflect the old organisation in ‘alberghi’.

The second weakness is ‘political’ and is represented by the lack of public or semi-public discussion of the preliminary local evaluation of any proposal. It might be argued that the sites and State Parties that openly discuss possible nominations are very few, and that such debates might complicate and slow down the process, but public participation aims at ensuring that consensus is based on shared decision and awareness of pros and cons of different options. Certainly, public participation requires a number of prerequisites to achieve its best results, like fairness and transparency in the process or a positive attitude to listening and discussion, otherwise may not lead to better decision-making. This holds true in particular in those countries where citizens participation is not habitual and stakeholders are not ‘trained’. Owners of the buildings included in the nomination have been somehow consulted and involved in the process, but only after the perspective for nomination was selected. Consensus and positive reaction towards the proposal among citizens at large have been stimulated by the timely organisation of exhibitions and publications which reframe and update the body of knowledge in view of this objective.

At the same time, this ‘minimal’ nomination might unintentionally reflect the private character of the Genoese and be a way to protect their ‘Thou’, their deep identity, from the curious or threatening glance of the ‘guest’ (always alien and unknown). The consciousness of the necessity of a certain openness to grasp the chance for revitalising economy might have convinced the Genoese to ‘sacrifice’ a delimited part of their ‘treasures’ for exhibition in the showcase of the global cultural heritage. In this sense, it is worth noting that Genoa has not invested only on cultural tourism as a gear for development, but on a mix of economical functions, and has already undertaken a number of steps to fulfil these goals.

The main challenge for managers, in case of inscription of the site, would be having a clear vision of the full range of perspectives which nurtures a living, evolving significance of the town, beyond the boundaries of nomination and beyond the values and messages selected for labelling the site in view of its inscription. This composite whole is what makes a site a ‘heritage site’ and inspires further interpretations and associational processes, and, therefore, its retention is of vital importance.

From the technical point of view, the already considerable amount of information on the old town, and particularly on the nominated site, has been organised into an informative system (the “Mappatura della città storica”, that is, the map of the historic city), which constitutes a good base for the

Management Plan and is already utilised by the Municipality as a tool for decision-making. The Administration has been updating the information contained in the database and has expanded the kind of managed information and of artefacts (from single buildings, the urban paving, to the supporting walls of the 19th century urban expansion, the electrical, cabling and illumination systems, etc.)¹⁰. Useful upgrading would be the storage and processing of the data produced and collected during the conservation programme carried out on these palaces in the last few years: this would allow to activate a monitoring programme for planning and scheduling future maintenance.

The City Plan itself, thanks to its operational structure that link short, medium and long-term objectives with concrete actions, might play the role of a wider framework for the Management Plan that UNESCO requires for every site inscribed in the World Heritage List. In this manner, the strategy for the site could be integrated into the general policies foreseen for the town by the administration.

The nomination profile, if well managed, suggests the possibility of pursuing multiple levels of presentation and communication by linking the site to other, no less important, heritage resources: for instance, Strada Nuova may be associated to the 19th century renovation and expansion programme, which has given the town exceptional pieces of urban bourgeois settlement and is today neglected and excluded by the heritage image of the town¹¹; while the Palazzi dei Rolli may open a window on the medieval epoch of Genoa, and its contacts throughout the Mediterranean.

As to conclude, I argue that the presence of structural difficulties and contingencies in framing nominations is almost unavoidable, therefore, nominations and inscriptions may suffer from the prevalence of one perspective over others. The challenge, in some way, is double: on one side, to find a perspective that is intriguing and inclusive enough to couple nomination objectives and adequate depiction of heritage values and, on the other, to distinguish the prevalent focus of nomination (obtaining inscription) from subsequent site- management objectives (retaining and protecting the whole range of existing and potential values).

It is a responsibility of site managers – as well as heritage consultants – to provide give space understand that the significance of a site cannot be reduced to the images selected/ constructed for forwarding a nomination. On the other hand, consciousness of these dynamics on the part of World Heritage experts might suggest the refinement of nomination and management theoretical framework and methodologies that may help limit the threat of reducing outstanding universal value to a ‘quality label’, which ultimately would flatten the depth of heritage meanings and trivialize significance.

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¹⁰ An accurate account of the rationale and consistence of the ‘Map of the historic city’ may be found at the following websites <http://services.arch.unige.it/rapp3/ue2-3isa.html> and http://www.comune.genova.it/portal/template/viewTemplate?templateId=e2s9kydrf1_layout_esf31hdsol.psm1

¹¹ The construction of a car park adjacent to the 19th century walls that sustain the hilly bourgeois settlements is hiding and affecting one of the most significant architectural solution adopted to expand the town to the hills. On the other hand, the administration has also initiated the mapping of the conditions of these structures, mapping that has already been implemented into the above mentioned informative system.

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