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## The rehabilitation of the historic center

Giorgio Gatti,  
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"In the last fifteen years no other city has changed as much as Genoa" (*Panorama*, 2004). "How has a port city in crisis, that only ten years ago had record unemployment in the center-north and had lost almost a third of its inhabitants, become a model of urban livability and of innovative projects?" (*L'Espresso*, 2003). Evidently, and not only among those attached to labor and the specialized press, an opinion is spreading that the transformation underway in the city, in particular in its historic center, constitutes almost a methodological reference, a sort of model of good practice in the field of urban redevelopment both in its procedures as well in its results.

As in all processes of transformation, the exceptionally rapid change, in particular for a 'traditional' city like Genoa, arose out of the undeniable necessity to overcome the deep economic and social problems that had characterized the beginning of the 1980s. Even the historic center, extraordinary for its potential as well as its considerably problematic nature, had suffered severely the most critical aspects during this time: decline of building and maintenance, lack of a sense of belonging by the inhabitants to their neighborhood, social alienation, the crisis of the commercial network, the low quality of life. These phenomena were so extensive and deep-rooted that they made the modest attempts at public and private investment almost irrelevant.

For a long time the historic center was characterized by a substantial immobility, a phenomenon that if on the one hand had provoked its

slow decline, and in some cases a true and proper deterioration, on the other had nevertheless protected its comprehensive integrity. In fact, one of the most meaningful elements of the Genoese historic center is the permanence of the mediaeval settlement, both for its multi-functionality and vitality that characterize the main areas, as well as its integration with the contemporary city. The advantages of living in the historic center are noteworthy, as it has a diversified commercial network, is rich with artistic and historic heritage, centrally located with respect to urban activities, services and systems of transport, and characterized by a closer sense of socialization. To that is added in the Genoese case the exceptional potential of its facing the sea. Yet the rehabilitation of the Genoa historic center presents aspects of particular criticalness that make a different approach necessary with respect to those of other Italian and European cities.

### The strategy of redevelopment

These considerations emphasize how the programmatic approach of the civic administration to the redevelopment of the historic center had to be flexible and diversified: from the large redevelopment operations at an urban scale (such as the annexation of the historic port to the city and the installation of large and qualified public services) to the attention to the widespread recovery of the single building and single dwelling unit by means of private involvement. The strategy of comprehensive redevelopment is clearly articulated in the city's new urban plan that identifies as strategic objectives the reinforcing of the importance of the historic quarter, the realization of an adequate system of accessibility, the installation of services, and

the support of widespread recovery. The first urbanistic objective is integration, that is, the true and proper physical and functional connection between the historic center and the old port. Begun with the integration of the Expo areas into the city, this program has progressively expanded until it includes all of the areas between the old wharf and the maritime station. It is certainly the most significant innovation of recent years, for the breadth of the endeavor and the diversification of the instruments by which it was brought about.

In this sense the historic center has expanded, assuming an entirely new dimension in both quantitative as well as qualitative terms, with the exceptional opportunity of its facing directly on the sea, a completely new experience for the inhabitants of the historic center. With respect to the physical and environmental degradation, which includes the structural factors such as the elevated index of the density of the building fabric and overcrowding, the high number of empty lodgings, the old age and precarious condition of the buildings, the municipal administration has the aim of improving livability through carrying out a major program of investment in the redevelopment of public spaces, in order to raise the quality of life of the neighborhoods and to encourage investment in housing rehabilitation, especially on the part of private citizens.

These initiatives have clearly improved the quality of life of the neighborhoods and maintained their vitality unaltered. Even the contradictions testify that here there is life, there are people that live and work, stores, services, activities, and naturally, sometimes, trouble and tensions. All of this represents, together with the quality of its historic and

architectural features, of its un-disputed and unexpected monumental and artistic treasures, of the partial glimpses and views of its landscape, one of the most valuable possessions of the city.

One of the actions that has been most effective in slowing the degradation of the neighborhood is the investment in maintaining infrastructure and primary services, modernizing and the rationalizing of services (sewers and other uses), repairing the street paving (often recovering the preexisting stone material), improving public illumination (the new lighting gives a higher sense of security), and cleaning the streets. This reorganization has fostered trust in proprietors who, with some initial diffidence, have increasingly invested in the recuperation and maintenance of their own properties, obtaining public contributions put at their disposition within the scope of specific integrated redevelopment programs. Projects and programs were also begun at a larger scale, also involving private parties for large investments in urban rehabilitation operations as well as for their management (the completion and management of all of the public areas of the Expo, the realization of the touristic port with touristic accommodations in the area of Morosini, the re/development of the municipal dry dock, the next transformation of Ponte Parodi). In this case the cleverness of the administration was that of having initiated numerous integrated programs of a public-private nature and of having foreseen in these new forms of cooperation the more appropriate mechanisms for obtaining the consensus of the 'primary players' and more effectively making the rehabilitation of critical areas such as in the historic center.