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The re-use of derelict port areas: the Old Port

Ondina Barduzzi

The re-use of historical ports poses problems that must be met with adequate urban planning strategies. The first significant redevelopments of derelict ports were carried out in the sixties and seventies in the United States and Canada. This type of undertaking is known as "waterfront redevelopment"; it includes restoration work on abandoned areas of old ports, which have great potential as they are located both near the 'old town' and close to important centres of economic activity. These areas are therefore important to re-use for new urban functions, new activities capable of re-launching the city's economy, taking it centre stage regionwide or internationally. Regenerating this type of area and deciding how best to use it is neither a simple nor a straightforward task. Due to its complex nature, the seafront requires more effort in choosing planning strategies. Indeed, its restoration is not only a method of urban up-grading, but it is also a way of developing the city. It is for the aforementioned reasons that planning for derelict port areas is moving towards a multiplicity of uses, programmed to be both functionally and spatially compatible. The decline of many port areas has been put down to the inadequacy of traditional port structures when dealing with new types of ships and commercial trade. The Port of Trieste has itself had to deal with these intense technological changes in navigation and in the methods of handling cargo, revealing an imbalance in demand and supply of facilities. With the building of Pier VII

in 1973, many activities were progressively moved from the Old Port to the New Port. This was because of the fact that the new area benefited from infrastructure which was sufficiently advanced to deal with new maritime traffic and containers. However, with the progressive abandonment of the Old Port, a debate over re-use began, which still continues to this day.

In 1971, Kenzo Tange presented the "Guiding Lines for the development of Trieste's area", which considered the coast as a unitary organism. In 1974, Guido Canella put forward a project which, whilst still partially retaining port activities, also foresaw new uses. Between the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties, two new ideas were developed for the area: the Polis project, by Nicolò Savarese, and the Bonifica project, by Luciano Semerani.

The first was a radical urban transformation of the old port which concentrated built-up areas in order to free spaces for public use. The second, on the other hand, formed part of a feasibility study on the economic re-launch of the Giulia area as a whole. The latter put forward a new waterfront layout which removed the State Property status from the old port area and used part of this land for tertiary activities and the creation of two marinas for pleasure navigation. In 1990 Gino Valle presented the draft of a detailed plan which combined the two projects.

1997 saw the birth of Trieste Futura, which considered the extension of the area of the New Port and the regeneration of the Old as one of its primary objectives. Two years later the organisation charged Manuel de Solà Morales with the task of drawing up

the regeneration plan for the Old Port, with the aim of looking at new uses that would be of interest to the city. Finally, in 2000, the Trieste Port Authority, owners of the area in question, entrusted Stefano Boeri with the variant to the master plan of the port in this area.

The variant began its approval procedure trying to reach an agreement between the various governing bodies involved in the planning proposal and on 8 June 2001 the Board of Trieste Town Council gave its approval. This procedure was interrupted, however, by a new decree issued by the Minister for Culture and Heritage, which put new restrictions on already existing buildings, and by a resolution issued by the Port Committee due to a substantial change in the variant.

The Town Council is now drawing up a variant to its local plan for the area of the Old Port with the aim of it conforming to the port's plan, and at the same time verifying, on an urban scale, the coherence of the proposals with structural elements of its planning methods. The Port Authority is at the same time updating the variant of the port plan for the area of the Old Port. The latter will also develop aspects of urban development including detailed information. It seems obvious that the two projects should conform both in their contents and timescales in order to be approved contemporaneously. However, experience has shown the enormous difficulty in bringing together interests, sometimes contrasting, between the Port Authority and the Town Council. These difficulties can sometimes result in critical situations. Agreement between the Town Council and Port Authority seems to be the

main 'way out' for the approval procedure. Indeed, this is obligatory according to law no. 84/1994 and is directed to harmonise the ideas of the variant of the port's plan with that of the Town Council. If the two plans do not agree, then either the port's plan must be modified or a variant to the master plan in force must be adopted.

It is clear that the reaching of an agreement is aimed at ensuring a sound collaboration, not only in the project-making phase but also during the future implementation of projects, and cooperation between the Municipality and the Port Authority. In the case of the Old Port of Trieste, the peculiarity of places requiring special attention to restoration works designed to grant maximum urban quality, and the need to speed up the authorization procedure of the project (the area is candidate to host the international Expo in 2008) call for a technical co-ordination between the bodies involved: Ministry for Culture and Heritage, Region, Town Council and Port Authority. In order to achieve these purposes, a Programme agreement between the aforementioned bodies is put forward as an innovative method for the approval of the two variants.

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