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ACCESSIBILITY AND ENHANCEMENT OF CULTURAL HERITAGE: EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES IN EUROPE

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Premise

The UNO Convention (United Nations Organisation) is the first great treaty of the twenty-first century on the subject of human rights. It marks a change in attitudes and strategies related to disabled people by stating that people who suffer from any kind of infirmity are eligible to enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms (political, economic, social and cultural), promoting respect of their dignity in every possible way. The section on Accessibility (article 9) stresses that measures for eliminating architectural barriers apply not only to physical environments, buildings and transportation, but also to information and communication systems, technologies as well as public services, while states adopting it recognise (article 19) that people with disabilities have the right to independence in life and inclusion in society, undertaking to adopt effective measures for their full integration and participation (UNO, 2006).

The first world Congress on accessibility took place in Paris on 19-20 January 2012 at the headquarters of UNESCO, which promoted it with the participation of numerous associations and international institutions operating in the field. The idea of universal accessibility emerged strongly at the symposium, primarily as a planning concept that favours access to buildings or public venues to all potential users. A society that adopts the practice of accessibility improves the quality of life of all its members. Implementing this approach allows, indeed, for autonomy and participation of differently-abled people, drastically reducing discrepancies between needs and desires, on the one hand, and the different cultural, physical and organisational features of environment on the other (UNESCO, 2012).

In April 2013, UNESCO launched a program in Jakarta within the framework of the Convention of the United Nations, concerning the rights of the disabled. It was meant to facilitate social inclusion of disabled people. It was carried out throughout Indonesia in September 2013, with the objective of enacting adequate policies to improve accessibility to social, cultural and political life for the whole community.

Universal accessibility in Europe has become a real issue for eighty million disabled and the society as a whole, which faces the growing problem of aging. Since the 1980s, the Council of Europe began working to remove existing obstacles to accessibility in European regulations and practices of Member States. *Conventions* (with curbs at juridical and political level) and *Recommendations*, which do not impose juridical obligations on States but commits them politically, are among its main tools. Many recommendations on accessibility have been issued, such as the one from 2001, which proposed to introduce the concept of accessibility to the training of construction professionals. In such context, the Council of Europe organised, in December 2011, the World Human Rights' Day to implement European tools for protecting human rights and strategies to further the concept of universal accessibility (Genovese, 2013).

Pragmatic approaches or legal restrictions in European public accessibility policies

Laurent Saby, who is in charge of accessibility projects at CERTU (Centre d'Études sur les Réseaux, les Transports, l'Urbanisme et les Constructions publiques – Study Centre on Networks, Transports, Urban Planning, and Public Buildings), worked at the transversal program "Ville Accessible à Tous" (City Accessible to Everyone). In particular, he coordinated research on "L'Accessibilité dans 11 villes européennes: recueil de pratiques en faveur des personnes à mobilité réduite" (Saby, 2011).

He found similar difficulties in the cities he examined – as I note in my study on "Cultural Heritage and Accessibility in Europe" – "to the ones concerning interventions on architectural and urban heritage, for which the 'case by case' theory is confirmed, with each project representing an individual case, featuring possible solutions to be found in agreement with conservation experts and the specialised Associations of the sector. Furthermore, concerning the difficulties in addressing the needs of people with mental, hearing or physical handicaps, it was observed that the main measures implemented involve, above all, individuals with mobility or sight deficiencies.

The organisation of services to enable transversal work between different specialists on themes relative to accessibility varies in Europe from one city to another and therefore presents heterogeneous solutions; however, the comparative study carried out showed, at the same time, the existence of common objectives. Systematic research in the field for the improvement of accessibility in places of historic interest, realized in eleven European cities and coordinated by Laurent Saby, was organised around three fundamentals: normative, organisational and technical incentives. This enabled to draft solutions and innovative approaches concerning best practices in the years 2007-2008. One of them is represented by Lund, founded around 990 and hosting one of the oldest universities in Sweden (founded in 1666). The city boasts important cultural heritage, but is also seen as a reference for practical achievements. Real effort was made so that the conservation of historical buildings could meet accessibility, supplying, for instance, many buildings with ramps and access causeways that are well integrated with the brick facades (figs 1-2), or finding solutions that facilitate realization without changing the nature of architectural character. The station, the main building of the University and its library constitute the best examples of such integration" (Genovese, 2013).

Figs 1-2. Lund (Sweden). Real effort was made so that the conservation of historical buildings could meet accessibility criteria. The station, the main building of the University, and its library constitute the best examples of such integration.

Laurent Saby has also examined the thorny problem of transversal implementation. In order to respect the continuity of connected operations, local communities of nearby countries must indeed face the issue of organising their services in such a way as to allow the technicians responsible for accessibility to carry out transversal work. The solutions adopted vary greatly from one city to another.

In Barcelona, for example, one workgroup – the GTMA – addresses the corresponding problems of all municipal services concerning accessibility: urban planning, transport, construction, information and communication. In the city of Liège, a single municipal and social service (Accessplus) deals with issues relative to disability problems. Combining the various skills of sociologists, social workers and architects, this multidisciplinary team also plays a role in improving public awareness, for instance by running a consultancy agency for accessibility in construction projects or local development.

In the United Kingdom, Sweden, or the Netherlands (Utrecht), communal recourse to an *access officer* is a widespread practice. The latter is often a person with disabilities, who received technical training, allowing them to assess projects. Combining technical service and personal resources, access officers are guardians who alert the municipality and pass recommendations to local associations.

Common issues to be solved

Laurent Saby chose to research eleven European cities (London, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Rotterdam, Bristol, Utrecht, Liège, Ghent, Lund, Halmstad, Brielle) of five different countries (Sweden, Netherlands, Belgium, United Kingdom and Spain), and compared them to the situation in France, finding similar difficulties in certain areas:

- interventions in cultural heritage; examples from different countries demonstrate, indeed, that every project is an individual case, but solutions can be found by allowing the associations responsible to work with architects;
- difficulties in considering people with hearing or mental disabilities; in terms of regulations, it has been found that the implemented measures chiefly concern people with mobility or sight disabilities.

As is the case with the Master Plans on accessibility in public transportation services (SDA) or the Plans regarding the accessibility of roads and the development of public spaces (PAVE), elaboration of accessibility strategies for built heritage also allows its managers to consistently, effectively and visibly organise accessibility of ERPs. Namely, it allows to agree on priorities over time, and to adapt to an operational dynamics spanning many years, which is more constructive than having a single deadline.

Based on the specificity of objectives needed to achieve accessibility, different approaches can be considered: definition of priorities linked to the logic of movement, consideration of specific issues concerning various public buildings, effectiveness of investments in relation to potential gains in terms of accessibility, regrouping of actions of similar nature, territorial repartition of past actions, etc. However, the strategies put forth by actors in this field often correspond to a unique mix of criteria that answer predetermined objectives.

Finally, different factors can be identified as essential for a successful approach. They concern especially the mobilisation of skills required for critical analysis and its development into an action plan, as well as the involvement of various subjects in the transmission chain within the community (technicians and elected administrators) and outside it (stakeholders in accessibility). It seems appropriate to reflect on the modality and degree of involvement among associations that represent disabled users. The follow-up to the implementation of the strategy is, furthermore, a decisive point that needs to be monitored in order to guarantee actual improvement of accessibility at the ERP Park. Lastly, it must be considered that there are various possible funding options (DETR, FIPHFP) that also imply regrouping actions concerning accessibility and other interventions in buildings.

These different elements facilitate better understanding of the specificities of accessibility. The fact still remains that it will have to be integrated into global heritage strategy to cover all aspects of cultural heritage management such as the improvement of energy consumption, required by "Grenelle de l'Environnement," or the safety of people facing threats – a necessary inference of accessibility for everyone.

Examples of best practices

Avila, a medieval city with fortifications

Accessibility in Avila (Spain) – a site included in the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1985 – has been extended to the crenelated walls of the city by creating parking space, pedestrian paths, ramps and causeways for people with disabilities, inserted into the environmental context (fig. 3).

Fig. 3. In Avila accessibility has been extended to the crenelated walls of the city by creating parking space, pedestrian paths, ramps and causeways for people with disabilities, inserted into the environmental context.

Arles, an accessible safeguarded sector

The Site of Arles (France), on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1981, represents an outstanding urban and architectural ensemble with its great number of protected monuments. Fig. 4 shows the Safeguarded Sector with the review of the Safeguard and Enhancement Plan: the current perimeter is indicated in pink and the extension in blue, as proposed in the resolution of 15 November 2007 by the National Committee for Safeguarded Sectors.

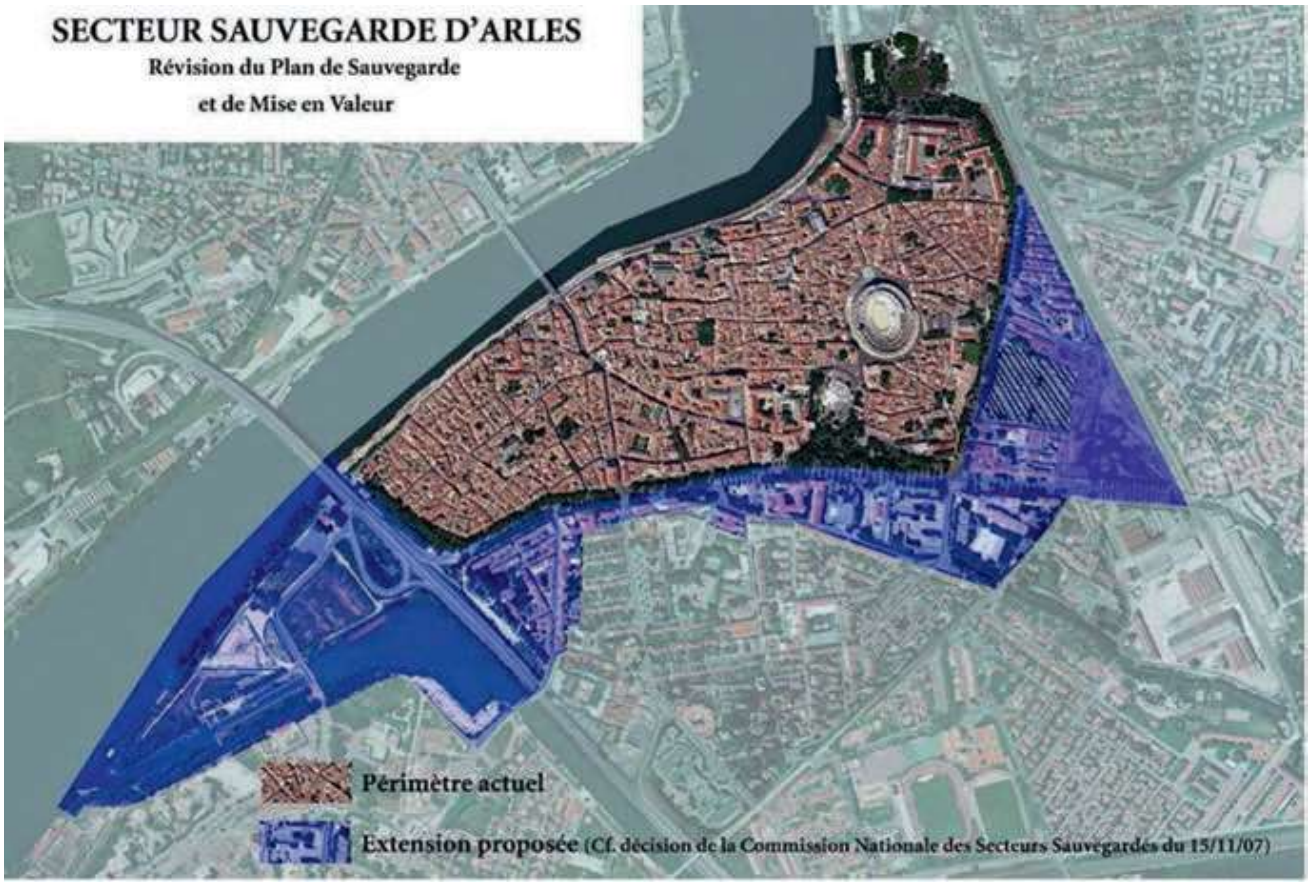

Fig. 4. Arles (France). The current perimeter is indicated in pink and the extension in blue, as proposed by the National Committee for Safeguarded Sectors.

Accessibility and historic places in Sweden

The Wrangel Palace in Stockholm (Sweden) was adapted following the project by Per-Anders Johansson (National Property Board Sweden – SFV), who has kept the radial stairway and original materials, while improving accessibility (fig. 5).

Fig. 5. Stockholm (Sweden), Wrangel Palace. The project retains the radial stairway and original materials, while adopting a solution that improves accessibility for people with disabilities.

The island of Suomenlinna in Finland: a maritime fortress and cultural site

This site, on the UNESCO World Heritage List since 1991, is an exceptional example of military architecture. Accessibility was improved at the Maritime Fortress of Suomenlinna (Finland) in historic, touristic and commercial buildings (project by architect Niina Kilpelä, Threshold Association / Kynnys ry) (fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Island of Suomenlinna (Finland). Accessibility was improved at the Maritime Fortress of Suomenlinna in historic, touristic and commercial buildings. Archival photograph from the Governing Body of Suomenlinna.

The 'mairies d'arrondissement' in Paris (France), a symbol of republican democracy

Accessibility to 'mairies d'arrondissement' was implemented through projects that adopted different solutions for each case, directed and coordinated by Thierry Balereau (architecte en chef de l'Etat) (fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Paris (France). Accessibility to 'mairies d'arrondissement' was implemented through projects that adopted different solutions for each case.

The Transbordeur de Rochefort bridge in France: a destination for everyone

Extension of accessibility through mediation tools suitable for different disabilities was achieved in the project by Rémi Decoster, director of development and projects at the Communauté d'agglomeration du Pays Rochefortais (fig. 8).

Fig. 8. The Transbordeur de Rochefort bridge (France). Extension of accessibility through mediation tools suitable for different disabilities achieved in the project by Rémi Decoster.

'*Coeurs de villes et villages accessibles à tous. Recueil de belles pratiques*' ('*City Centres and villages accessible to everyone, a collection of the best practices*')

The project, a collective effort by Cerema (Centre d'études et d'expertise sur les risques, l'environnement, la mobilité et l'aménagement), was carried out in France in twenty-three villages upon request from the Ministerial Delegation on Accessibility (DMA, Ministry of Environment, Energy and Sea) and its documentation was later published (Cerema, 2018). Its objective was to enhance implementations related to development in centres of small towns or villages. This notably concerns accessibility as well as other challenges of sustainable development such as urban and landscape quality, governance, revitalisation of historic centres, etc. The twenty-three examples of best practices refer to lands and contexts that vary greatly, thus illustrating a variety of solutions, methods and techniques. The following six themes were defined by Cerema:

- *Integrated approach (a global approach at the service of accessibility);*
- *Topography management (achieving accessibility in a restricted context);*
- *Pedestrian area (facilitation of pedestrian movement);*
- *Municipal development (turning accessibility into an incentive for municipal development);*
- *Conviviality (public spaces as spaces for everyone, committing to conviviality);*
- *Landscape and heritage quality* (pairing accessibility with the quality of cultural and landscape heritage).

Reflections on accessibility in Pompeii

In 1997, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee deliberated whether to include the Archaeological Areas of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata in the World Heritage List (no. 829), basing on Criteria (iii), (iv) and (v). On 2 August 2013, the Italian Government approved the Decree 'Valore Cultura' (Cultural Value), instituting a Special Superintendence for Pompeii, Herculaneum and Stabia with the objective of reinvigorating the development of the archaeological site through the great attractions of Campania. A Management Committee was later established (made up by the Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activities, the President of the Region and Province, Mayors of the Towns concerned, legal representatives of public bodies, and private citizens involved) to assist the new Superintendence with the functions of Permanent Service Conference. In the introduction to the UNESCO Management Plan of the Pompeii, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata system, Alessandro Leon stresses the importance of basing the model of development focused on protection and cultural and economic enhancement "on the following informative criteria:

- conserve the Archaeological Heritage, preserving it from all possible risks of physical deterioration, degradation and other events, recovering it, where necessary, in order to make it available and collectively accessible;
- improve the conditions and quality of realization, supplying areas with adequate level of services, improving accessibility and extending the offer for visitors;
- favour fuller integration between archaeological resources, cultural heritage of the area and the surrounding local context, with the purpose of increasing the economic impact of realization and accentuating local identity.

Such criteria were identified after the collection, analysis and systemisation of existing plans concerning the protected land, based on the guidelines of the Ministry of Heritage and Cultural Activities (MiBACT) and the suggestions of UNESCO in determining the Strategic Axis of six main areas of action: Knowledge, Protection and Conservation, Enhancement, Communication and Promotion, Governance, Monitoring" (Leon, 2013).

In the technical Charter of the Management Plan of the UNESCO Site relative to the Archaeological Area of Pompeii (fig. 9), the perimeter of the World Heritage Property and of the Buffer zone are highlighted.

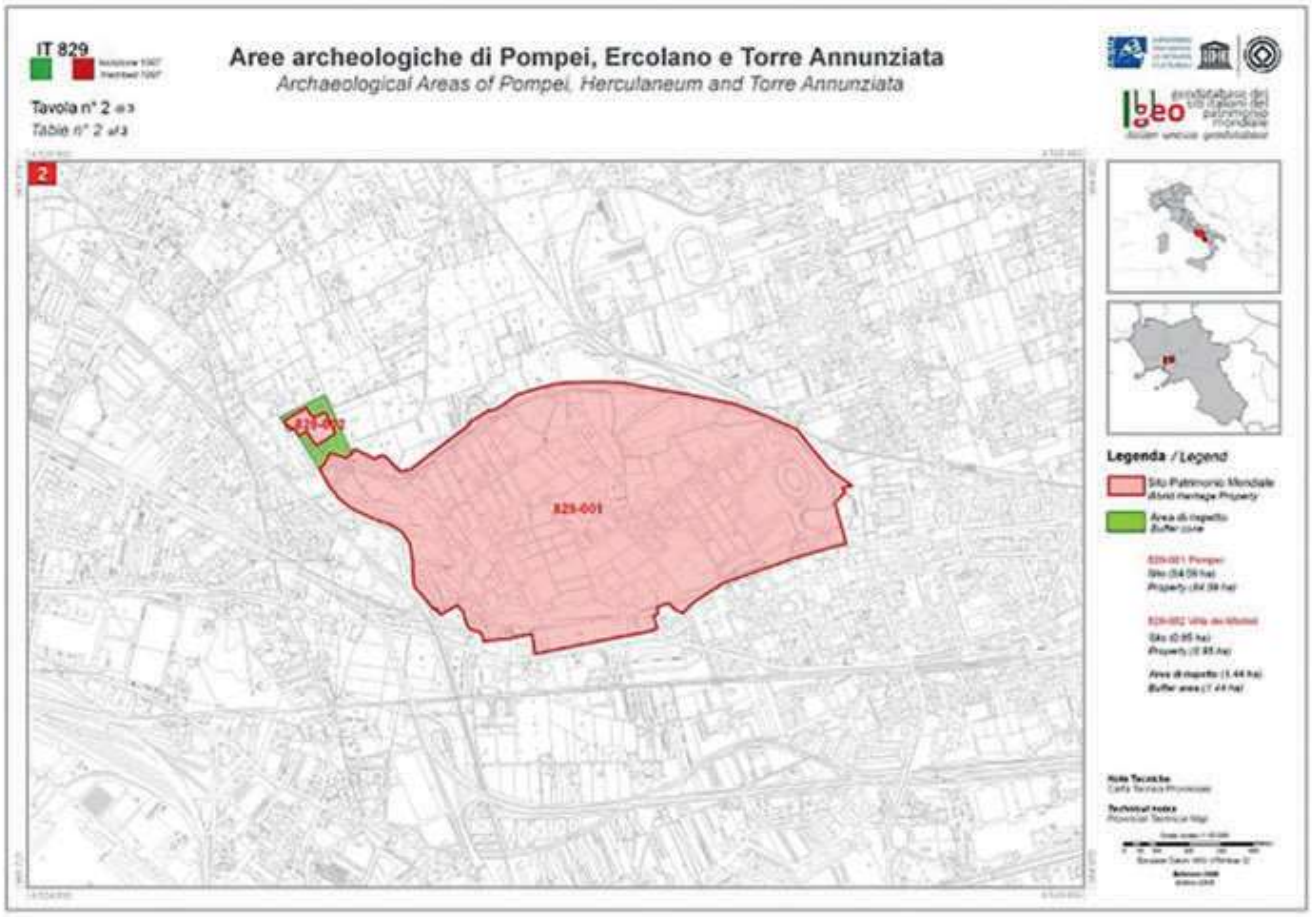

Fig. 9. Management Plan of the Archaeological Area of Pompeii with the perimeter of the World Heritage Property highlighted in pink and the perimeter of the Buffer zone in green.

One of the informative criteria in the Management Plan of the Pompeii, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata system is based on the conservation of Archaeological Heritage in order to make it available and accessible. Improving accessibility at the Archaeological Area of Pompeii is, therefore, a commitment to conserve, as much as possible, the testimonial, formal and material features of the site while addressing conservation issues as well as the design quality of improvements (MiBACT, 2015). The UNESCO Strategic Plan for the development of the territory included in the Site's *Buffer zone*, adopted on 20 March 2018 by the Management Committee of the *Great Pompeii Project*, establishes: a) improvement of accessibility systems and interconnections between the Archaeological Sites of Pompeii, Herculaneum and Torre Annunziata; b) environmental recovery, also reclaiming abandoned industrial areas; c) requalification and urban regeneration of local centres; d) enhancement of archaeological and cultural heritage to develop sustainable tourism.

The Great Pompeii Project was born as an extraordinary program of conservation interventions, prevention, maintenance and restoration of the archaeological area of Pompeii with the purpose of stopping the deterioration of the buildings, architectural and decorative elements, reducing hydrogeological risk and improving the general condition of the site. It thus introduced an innovative methodology of intervention, which allows to foster conservation, protection and enhancement in the archaeological area of Pompeii and, therefore, also in the *Insula Occidentalis* (Genovese, 2020).

Fig. 10. *Insula Occidentalis*: localisation of the area of intervention in the Great Pompeii Project, which introduced innovative methodology, fostering conservation, protection and enhancement at the Archaeological Area of Pompeii and, therefore, also in the *Insula Occidentalis*.

Integrated Conservation and Intercultural Dialogue

In the light of growing greater awareness of environmental issues, it is necessary to contribute to changes in the attitude to planet Earth in order to develop a new conservation ethics that covers the values of cultural heritage and embraces the contribution of communities to its protection and enhancement, thus favouring intercultural dialogue.

The vision developed by the "Life Beyond Tourism" Movement is to build world peace through dialogue and cultural heritage, and to promote enhancement of local identities and hospitality based on reciprocal knowledge, respect and intercultural dialogue. With these assumptions, the Movement intends to support local communities by providing services that are consistent with the principles of protection and enhancement of identities and shared values.

In order to activate such involvement processes and ensure their sustainability, it will be important to develop training programs and introduce new management models that make use of digital processes deriving from ample multidisciplinary contributions. In such perspective, forms of association will have to be incentivised, making use of specific integrated skill sets among architects, archaeologists, anthropologists, economists and communication

experts in order to entrust the management of structures with those capable of guaranteeing the conservation of the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage and ensuring its accessibility.
The quality of conservation and restoration interventions will have to be perfected through fact-finding analysis, adequate training and the use of scientific and digital technologies, paired with a diagnostic approach capable of embracing digitisation, energy efficiency, accessibility, seismic improvement, digital management of *anamnesis*, and control over the restoration project premised on adequate knowledge about cultural property and its conservation.

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