



Improving the quality of life in Large Urban Distressed Areas

Centro Storico & Porto Antico, Genoa, Italy

E-Compendium: Good Practice Case Studies



Introduction

The purpose of the e-compendium case studies is to provide information about the experiences of large urban distressed areas in Europe. All of the case studies are linked to the LUDA project, either as partner cities or as reference cities. This case study focuses on the Centro Storico and Porto Antico in Genoa. Genoa is one of the twelve partner cities in the LUDA project, and the historic centre and port area are being regenerated.

This case study gives a brief outline of the area's history; the challenges it faces and the potential it has for redevelopment. The case study then discusses the current approach to regeneration in Genoa, and gives a detailed account of one part of the process.

The e-compendium is designed to be used online. The text includes interactive links which allow you to move around the document, to link to other handbooks, or to open websites. Links are shown as **coloured text**. You can also find the links by looking for icons in the page margins, as shown here.



If you prefer to read this handbook like a normal book, then you can print it out. Please note that all of the handbooks are designed for double-sided printing.

Acknowledgements

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The cover photograph shows a view of the Old Town of Genoa, with the main railway station. Photo: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg.

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The Centro Storico (left) and a former border between the port and the old town (right) the area beneath the bridge is currently open space. Photos: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg

I. Overview

The Centro Storico e Porto Antico (the historic city centre and waterfront of Genoa), stretches between the sea and the hills behind. The area covers 198 ha and is home to around 23,000 people. The local population is quite diverse, and includes many young Italians as well as migrants. Living conditions are often cramped and the population density in the district is much higher than in the rest of the city (17.600 inhabitants/km² compared to 2515 inhabitants/km²). Given the historic nature of the district, the area includes many ancient buildings and street patterns which date from the 12th century. In terms of uses, the area is quite mixed, with a well-developed residential function as well as business services (banks, offices and a university) shops and some tourist facilities (hotels, museums and restaurants). The growth of tourism and the development of these facilities is helping with the regeneration process.

2. History & background

For more than a century Genoa has been an industrial city. It has a strong tradition of public services, and is still the most important Mediterranean port for goods and passengers. Over the last few dec-

ades Genoa has been transformed from an industrial port city to an advanced service centre with many small and medium enterprises in the information technology, electronics and telecommunication sectors. Despite these changes and the growth in tourism and culture, Genoa is still fighting its image as a city of 'factories and factory workers'.

The Centro Storico and Porto Antico have also changed. When many city services relocated to the upper parts of the city, and the harbour activities moved to another area of the waterfront, this area became rather neglected. As a remedy, the port authorities and the municipality reached an agreement which has led to the regeneration of the waterfront and the creation of a common development strategy. Subsequently, several revitalisation and redevelopment actions have taken place, and their results can be already seen.

3. Challenges & potential

The historic centre of Genoa is characterised by high density development, poor accessibility and problems associated with neglect. There are still many derelict buildings in the area, as well as poor lighting, rising crime and drug consumption. The social composition of the area has also changed as a result of post-war urban growth and immigration from Southern Italy. As a result of these problems and changes, many local businesses have closed or moved to safer parts of the city.



High density living & historic buildings in Centro Storico. Photos: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg.

The Centro Storico also has a problem with infrastructure. The medieval street pattern is not well-suited to cars, and provides little space for the usual waste & recycling facilities. This means that some parts of the neighbourhood are affected by unpleasant smells and rodents. The capacity of the sewerage system is also an issue, and some parts of the area have inadequate street lighting. The very old buildings are expensive to maintain and do not always meet current expectations; one-ninth are without either a bath or a heating system.

Dealing with crime, drug abuse and prostitution, as well as illegal housing services for the immigrants have been always difficult regeneration issue. Attempts to remove the problem from the old town have been only partly successful; instead of solving the problem it has just been moved to another part of the city.

At the same time, the historic nature of the city means that it has a very strong *genius loci*, rooted in the architecture and aesthetics of the ancient streets. The position of the area close to the waterfront and the city centre, with good transport links are a great asset. The position of the area close to the waterfront and the city centre, with good transport links, is a great asset.

4. Approach

The overall approach to regeneration has been based on gaining public interest and investors' focus in the city of Genoa. This has been achieved using, among other things - a series of public events (e.g. World Cup in 1990; Columbus Celebration in 1992; G8 meeting in 2001; European Capital of Culture designation in 2004). As part of this programme, the local administration has made the regeneration of the Centro Storico a central goal. The approach is to reinstate public services to the old harbour areas and improve the attractiveness of the city to tourists. Achieving these objectives requires the renovation of buildings in the historic centre as well as the redefinition of the old port. Throughout the regeneration process, the municipality has attempted to carry out integrated projects that address physical issues as well as economic and social regeneration.

A comprehensive regeneration programme in the historic centre has restored the most important ancient palaces; improved dwelling standards; reduced social problems; supported the local economy; and, improved public transport. In addition, a complete renewal of the waterfront is taking place. This process is converting the industrial port into a series of new urban spaces with converted warehouses and a new parking and traffic management system. Together the regeneration of the Centro Storico and the Porto Antico are improving the attractiveness of Genoa as a tourist destination.



A view of the Centro Storico from the port and Renzo Piano's 'biosphere'. Photo: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg

5. Tools & methods

Over the last few years, the city of Genoa has been undergoing a comprehensive programme of regeneration. This process has included many individual projects as well as participation in number of European and other international initiatives (e.g. GLAMOUR, part of the European RAFAELLO initiative). In order to coordinate these numerous and very diverse activities within an overall vision for the city, the municipality developed two parallel and complementary layers of regulations. The first was a static master plan, and the second a dynamic (flexible) plan which operates outside the normal legal framework. The master plan is a statutory planning tool which together with the operative plan form the 'integrated plan'. The operative plan (*Piano operativo*) was a specific tool developed in Genoa to deal with the dynamic situation there. This tool makes use of GIS (geographic information systems) and mapping technologies. The operative plan was developed to help overcome the problems associated with the traditional Italian master plan, which is not very efficient because of the financial and administrative regulations.

The Comune di Genova and the Osservatorio Civis were responsible for the initiation of the integrated action plan. The purpose of the plan is to direct private sector investment and help to create a sustainable and independent society. Several private investors were invited to participate in the regeneration process and build a partnership with the municipality.

The operative plan and the integrated action plan define the regeneration process for the Centro Storico and the Porto Antico. They were drawn up following some analysis of the area using indicators and the creation of dynamic, visual and contextual maps. Dialogue with actors helped to iden-

tify the priorities for the regeneration strategy. The goals of the operative plan are: the physical regeneration of buildings and public spaces; improving accessibility; improving socio-economic conditions; and, public participation.

One interesting aspect of the regeneration process in Genoa has been in the use of maps. Critical state maps have been used as a way of recognising, prioritising, estimating and evaluating the situation. Maps have also been used to control, monitor and verify the implementation process, particularly in relation to environmental issues. It has also been shown that city mapping and cultural mapping help to increase social awareness and improve the image of the area.

It took 2 years to prepare the operative plan, with considerable time given to public participation and involvement in the strategy. Despite the rapidly changing situation in the area and the complex variety of actions undertaken, many projects have been praised for their innovation and have received funding from regional government, central government and the European Union.



The impressive façade of the Palazzo Ducale. Photo: Aleksandra Kolpak, University of Salzburg.

6. Innovation & unusual features

One of the main challenges in the regeneration of Genoa has been creating a new image for the city. This has been achieved by analysing the past, thinking about the future and mapping the cultural and natural heritage of the city. The result has emphasised the potential of Genoa's old town and the waterfront. With this as a starting point, the city has used a series of international events to stimulate the regeneration process. These events have attracted many new visitors and tourists to the city, and helped to generate positive media coverage about Centro Storico and Porto An-

tico.

Genoa's successful regeneration approach has been praised as a model for other Italian cities to follow. The success of Genoa has been defined as *'a synergy between the extraordinary financial talents connected with the events within a complex urban identity and upgrading strategy [that] has contributed to changing the face of the city'*.

As part of the regeneration efforts in the city, much attention has been paid to the collection of useful and visual geographic information. This has been used by the Genoese Osservatorio Civico to support the regeneration process. The Osservatorio has done this by monitoring and evaluating progress and sharing data with other organisations. The map of urban decay prepared as part of this work is now being used as the baseline for reports about the progress that has been made.

The mapping process is also proving useful, even in areas where funding is not yet available to carry out renovation or regeneration projects. In these situations, the mapping of cultural and historic features, as well as measurements of individual buildings means that there is some record of what exists, even if it cannot be preserved. This process of mapping applies to individual buildings as well as the district. The themes covered in the maps are as follows: aesthetics; accessibility; the physical environment; socio-economic conditions; documentation and research.

7. Results

The regeneration of the city of Genoa is already having results. Apart from the successful staging of international events over the last 15 years, many individual projects have been successfully implemented. Part of the Centro Storico are now free from traffic, and many of the most important buildings have been renovated and upgraded. These actions have helped to improve the quality of life for the local residents and make the area more accessible. In addition, the regeneration of the waterfront, Erbe Square and St. Donato have all been very successful, as has the new location of the Faculty of Architecture. Together these actions have begun to inspire private investment—for example in the renovation of the Carmine.

8. Lessons learned

Genoa's experiences of regenerating two complex and historic parts of the city have revealed a number of key lessons:

- It is difficult to find external funding without internal resources;
- The objectives of external funding bodies do not always coincide with local priorities;
- Actions to tackle deprivation are not always successful, and may simply move the problem to another part of the city;
- Documenting and mapping the deprived areas in a systematic way has been enormously

beneficial;

- Cultural and natural heritage is an issue for many cities—as a result, there is great potential for national and international projects, as well as exchanging information with other practitioners;
- GIS can be a powerful tool in the monitoring and evaluation of projects.
- Small economic and physical improvements can have enormous influence on private initiatives, as they awake the internal dynamics of the local communities by showing people interest and respect.

9. Further information & links

If you would like more information about the regeneration of Genoa then the following references will help you:

Comune di Genoa (2002) 'Un piano integrato per il recupero del centro Storico di Genova'.

Castellano Assessore, A. (2004) 'Genoa: a city to be Discovered'.

Lagomarsino, L., (2004) 'Genoa. 100 Years of Architecture'.

If you would like more information about the Genoa story, then you can contact:

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