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MANAGING WORLD HERITAGE PROPERTIES

Crespi d'Adda, Italy: the management plan as an opportunity to deal with change

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the elaboration of the management plan for the UNESCO World Heritage site of Crespi d'Adda, a late-nineteenth-century company town that was inscribed in the World Heritage List in 1995 due to the integrity of its urban structure and the functional continuity of its productive and residential system. At the time of inscription, a management plan was not mandatory, and inscription did not produce a real development strategy able to counter the risks arising from de-industrialisation. The management plan preparation, launched in 2007, was assumed to represent an opportunity to ensure both protection and sustainable evolution. The process of elaboration made it necessary to promote coordination and dialogue among different institutions. This permitted enhancement of local governance. Moreover, the management plan acted as a framework within which to set guidelines for intervention on the external and internal features of the buildings, aimed at preserving the values of the site through the implementation of good practices.

KEYWORDS

Conservation; governance; historic buildings; management plan; stakeholders; World Heritage

Crespi d'Adda, the ideal workers' village

The company town of Crespi d'Adda is an outstanding legacy of the industrial revolution, which affected northern Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. Within a few years, the textile sector became a driver of growth for the local economy, and large cotton factories sprang up alongside the main rivers. The owners build proper company towns to host workers in only a few cases, as well as in the case of the ambitious project realised by Cristoforo Benigno Crespi in Crespi d'Adda. In line with British models such as Saltaire and the ideals of utopian socialism, the company town was provided with a certain number of services (a church, a school, public lavatories and wash-houses, a clinic, a consumer cooperative) and social and recreational facilities. In addition, a hydroelectric power station supplied the whole village with free electricity.

The different types of housing in Crespi d'Adda emphasise a precise hierarchy: there are about 70 detached and semi-detached houses for common workers and their families (Figure 1), bourgeois detached houses for managers and office workers, and simple



Figure 1. View of the company town (looking south) with the workers' houses and the school. Photograph: Anna Teresa Ronchi.

accommodations for unmarried women and unskilled workers, as well as special residences for the priest, the doctor, the teacher and an impressive owner's manor. The same hierarchy may be observed in the graveyard, which is dominated by the monumental mausoleum of the Crespi family.

In the 1930s, a phase of economic decline forced Silvio Benigno Crespi, son of the founder and the main sponsor of the project, to sell off the whole settlement. This was followed by several changes in ownership until 1937, when another industrialist took over the management of the factory and the company town. For 20 years, he guaranteed the provision of public services and the maintenance of workers' houses through minor ordinary works. As a result, throughout this period the buildings remained nearly unaltered, except for a major project carried out between 1939 and 1943 including the addition of technical facilities such as toilets and storage space and the removal of the brick cornices (traces of which are still visible) from the workers' houses. Also, the straw-yellow fronts were repainted in green and red.

In 1972, the property was split up and the houses were sold to the inhabitants, while the factory entered a long process of decline which ended with the final cessation of production in 2003 (Figures 2 and 3).

The reasons for UNESCO recognition, 20 years later

In the early 1990s, a committee sustained by local authorities and civic associations endorsed the preservation of the village from a possible housing development, and submitted an application for inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List. In 1995, after a long evaluation process supported by one of the first thematic studies¹ prepared as a result of the 'Global



Figure 2. Photograph of the factory in June 2010. Photograph: Matteo Scaltritti.



Figure 3. Photograph of the interior of the factory in November 2012, prior to acquisition by the new owner. Photograph: Anna Teresa Ronchi.

Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List' (1994), the World Heritage Committee decided to inscribe Crespi d'Adda on the basis of criteria (iv) and (v) of the Operational Guidelines.² The justification for inscription stated that Crespi d'Adda:

is an exceptional example of a working village of Europe and North America, dating back to the 19th and 20th centuries, and reflecting the predominant philosophy of enlightened industrialists with respect to their employees. Although the evolution of economic and social conditions constituted an inevitable threat to the survival of Crespi d'Adda, its integrity is remarkable and it has partly conserved its industrial activity.³

In a certain sense, the outstanding universal value (OUV) of the site has been linked to characteristics that are contradictory to each other. On the one hand, the integrity of the urban structure recalled a specific historic and cultural phenomenon, a feature that was reinforced by the continuity of its function, given that the factory was still operating in 1995. On the other hand, the evaluators emphasised the vulnerability of the site, due to a predictable end to industrial activity, which in fact took place a few years later.

Crespi d'Adda now has approximately 400 residents. The ageing population and the lack of opportunities have led to a drop in the working-age population, though a few newcomers have moved to live in the village. Moreover, while the overall urban structure has remained quite intact, in the last decades, the process of depopulation has led to the closing of public services and to degradation of the buildings (Figure 3). After a few years of neglect, the industrial plants have slowly become the focus of new interest. The power plant was acquired by a private company in 2010, which is currently performing restoration and technological upgrading work, and in 2013, the factory was acquired by an important company based in the nearby city of Bergamo, which is planning to move its offices and establish other activities there.

The site was inscribed in the World Heritage List without a proper management tool, since nominated sites have only been required to provide a document stating the management strategies to be adopted since 2002. However, a national law⁴ states that the sites already enlisted must also adopt a management plan, prepared in accordance with specific guidelines.⁵ In 2008, the local municipality launched the preparation of the management plan. The process lasted several years, due to an internal political crisis but also due to a rapidly evolving scenario which resulted in acquisition of the factory by a company interested in reusing it. These events had a major impact on the whole process of elaboration, thereby clearly revealing to what extent the management plan should become a framework for collaborating on controversial issues and redefining its goals and content.

Main critical issues

The management plan faces a number of different issues, which can be summarised as follows.

Lack of protection and uncontrolled minor interventions on buildings

The protection system in force includes a set of different constraints. Publicly owned buildings (such as the former school and the church) and the mausoleum are listed,⁶ meaning that any intervention must be authorised by the Heritage Authority. Moreover, pursuant to two separate tools aimed at landscape protection,⁷ a Landscape Commission based in the Adda Nord Regional Park must authorise any changes to the external features of the buildings. In spite of this, after the tenants bought the residential buildings, in the late 70s, they started to perform redevelopment work. Since then, many inadequate interventions have

been carried out. For example, modern plaster and bright paint have endangered the overall perception of the landscape (Figure 4), while verandas, parking spaces and garages have progressively saturated the external areas between the houses (Figure 5). Although most



Figure 4. Photograph of an example of inappropriate plaster and paintwork. Photograph: Anna Teresa Ronchi.



Figure 5. Photograph of external areas saturated by garages and storage spaces. Photograph: Anna Teresa Ronchi.

houses were not affected by major intervention, widespread minor changes were implemented, such as changes in the interior layout, addition of restrooms and technical installations, and replacement of wooden windows frames with modern materials offering better performance and lower maintenance costs.

To counteract this trend, in 1995, the local municipality adopted a local planning tool aimed at managing intervention of residential buildings and private outdoor spaces.⁸ This regulation prohibited new constructions in the village, in order to protect the original urban structure, and gave specific instructions for intervention on external elements such as window frames, eaves and downspouts, canopies and enclosures. Nevertheless, the rule did not restrict the possibility of working on the interiors, and invasive interventions such as replacement of stairs and intermediate floors were allowed. For private outdoor spaces, the tool imposed the demolition of external structures which were not consistent with the original structure of the village, while it permitted construction of new structures according to a model proposed by the municipality. However, the model was not approved, and no structure was demolished.

In 2006, the municipality prepared a 'Colour Plan' governing work on the façades. This tool proposes different colour palettes for each type of building (workers' houses, villas and industrial buildings). Additionally, the colour must blend in with the context, the neighbouring buildings and the vegetation. However, while a reference to standard codes for identifying colours has been provided, no guidance as to adequate materials and techniques has been given, nor any directions for preserving surfaces that are still in good condition. The limited results obtained can be traced to insufficient instructions in the regulations, widespread non-compliance with the rules and also ineffective control of the process of project evaluation prior to issuing building permits.

Ineffective governance and lack of public involvement

In past years, the site has suffered from the absence of effective coordination among the policies of the local institutions in charge of the area, namely the Municipality of Capriate San Gervasio (responsible for the UNESCO site) and the Adda Nord Regional Park (responsible for planning and heritage preservation for a large natural area along the river). A Steering Committee was set up in 2007, before beginning preparation of the management plan.⁹ In 2011, a second institutional working group was created, involving the authorities responsible for heritage preservation at the national and regional level, in order to review the protection system. However, a lack of political intention and instability has been a major barrier. In September 2012, following an internal political crisis, the city council was disbanded. Although the new elections held in 2013 opened up a new phase in the work which led to completion of the Plan, weak political leadership still represents a hindrance.

The prolonged absence of fruitful open debate on opportunities for development of the village had also led to a significant level of distrust among residents and substantial misunderstanding of the meaning of the UNESCO recognition. On one hand, many of the inhabitants are afraid of the constraints arising from the World Heritage Site status, and fear that they may be forced to carry out work on their houses which is expensive and does not meet their own needs. On the other hand, until the recent acquisition of the factory, adequate strategies and proposals for reuse had been lacking, leading to a state of uncertainty about the future of the whole village.

Inadequacy of tourist facilities and site promotion strategies

Tourism may be considered an unfulfilled promise of UNESCO recognition. For many years, promotional strategies conveyed a simplistic image of the 'ideal village,' while ignoring the transformations that have occurred over time, and barely referred to the value of the site as part of a coherent territorial system. In other words, Crespi d'Adda has been regarded as an exception rather than a part of a system.

These two viewpoints are not mutually exclusive, but a stronger relation with other significant examples of industrial heritage along the Adda River (such as the 'Taccani' hydroelectric power plant in Trezzo sull'Adda, or the 'Velvis' textile factory in Vaprio d'Adda) could catalyse tourist flows and attract different opportunities for funding. In addition, a systemic perspective would be consistent with most current approaches, according to which heritage identity cannot be defined in isolation, since it is founded on the cross-fertilisation of different cultures and values.¹⁰ In line with this approach, the territory can be seen as a bearer of multiple tangible and intangible traces which still have the potential to evolve and create new meaning. However, 20 years after the inscription in the World Heritage List and 10 years after the end of production, Crespi d'Adda continues to look for a new identity.

Actions for sustainable management

During the drafting of the plan, a number of different actions were performed, including discussion of the values of the site (4.1), development of scenarios for reuse of the factory (4.2) and a set of actions (4.3), which were organised within four thematic 'Action Plans':

- the 'Protection Plan', aimed at better coordinating planning and protection tools;
- the 'Plan for Liveability and Fruition of the Site', which deals with accessibility, life quality for residents and sustainable development of tourist facilities;
- the 'Plan for Site Promotion', which proposes a set of on-site and web-based actions;
- the 'Plan for Community Involvement', which aims at sharing information on the management plan with the local community, promoting awareness of heritage values and supporting the activities promoted by local associations.

Extend values

The main aim of the management plan is to ensure the preservation of the OUV of the properties inscribed into the World Heritage List.¹¹ This means ensuring better integration between different protection tools, providing a consistent plan of restoration and maintenance work, and coming up with adequate strategies for promotion. However, in the presence of complex and evolving contexts, the management plan should also enable development processes led by cultural identity and cultural diversity.¹² In other words, preservation and change cannot be seen as parts of an irreconcilable conflict, but must be viewed as integrated strategies within a comprehensive management process. The management plan should therefore not be confined to administrative and organisational aspects, but must deal with the multiple perspectives and desires expressed by different stakeholders (institutions, heritage professionals, building owners), thus acting as a platform for sharing knowledge and coordinating actions.

Proper identification of the OUV in relation to contemporary social and territorial dynamics is an initial key element for balancing preservation and development actions within a comprehensive management strategy. Additionally, the OUV statement forms the basis for evaluation of the impact of potential development on heritage.¹³ However, due to depopulation and the cessation of production, at the time of the preparation of the management plan, some conditions that had significantly contributed to the OUV of Crespi d'Adda, such as the vital mutuality between local production and the residential system, had already disappeared. Therefore, to be consistent with the OUV, the management plan had to support the creation of new links between the factory and the residential system, and new relations with the surrounding territory.

Creating new development scenarios

In order to identify possible scenarios for future reuse of the factory, in 2013, a working group, composed of the Steering Committee and a number of representatives of regional and local economic associations, was established. As a result of its consultation, a number of redevelopment scenarios were proposed which addressed three themes: energy technologies, textile and fashion design, culture and leisure.

This process was covered in the local media, which helped raise public awareness and possibly accelerated the evolution of events. In October 2013, a private company purchased the factory with the intention of moving its offices there and also establishing other activities. They first proposed a master plan which included private functions (offices, meeting rooms), public functions (a museum, an exhibition area) and mixed functions (a restaurant, a guest-house). In regard to the proposal, the residents and the Municipality expressed great concern about the impact that an increase in the number of daily users would have produced on the accessibility and livability of the village. The subsequent negotiations took the form of a Memorandum of Understanding between the municipality and the owner,¹⁴ who is currently developing an integrated plan of action in order to obtain building permission.

Improving protection

Within the framework of the management strategies, the need to review and improve regulatory tools has been deemed a priority, in order to permit sustainable change while ensuring protection of the site's value. Since inscription in the UNESCO World Heritage List does not guarantee any additional protection, the Regional Directorate of the Heritage Authority, in collaboration with Politecnico di Milano (Milan Polytechnic), launched a process of review and integration of the local protection tools, which was carried out in addition to elaboration of the management plan. As a result, the number of listed buildings has been extended to include Crespi's manor, the factory, the thermal power plant with the substation and the chimney and the hydroelectric power plant.

In addition to preparing the management plan, the elaboration of specific guidelines for managing work on residential buildings was launched.¹⁵ This action, coordinated by the research group based in Milan Polytechnic, went through various stages, from in-depth analysis of the state of conservation to the definition of a set of criteria for intervention. Finally, drafts were presented to the city council in order to collect comments and suggestions and proceed with a final review. Considering that Crespi d'Adda is a living and evolving

site, the guidelines were based on the assumption that transformations should be allowed, provided they fulfil a set of requirements consistent with the needs of conservation. In line with this approach, the awareness of project designers and building owners has been deemed of major importance, and tools have been directed at stimulating good practices by suggesting technical solutions rather than being strictly prescriptive.

The first tool (*Rules for intervention on building facades and public spaces in Crespi d'Adda*) deals with interventions on the external surfaces of the buildings and on paving materials in public areas (sidewalks, stairways, driveways).¹⁶ An initial version had actually been prepared in 2007–2008, prior to the elaboration of the management plan. At that time, an analysis had been conducted on each residential building, through graphic and photographic documentation of the type, material, colour, texture, and state of conservation of plaster, painting, windows frames and paving. This analysis revealed that in most cases, the negative outcome of past interventions was attributable to the incompatibility between the new materials, such as cement-based plasters and synthetic paint, with the brick and stone masonry or lime-based plaster. Moreover, due to use of inappropriate materials and colours, some new paintwork had significantly altered the overall perception of the village.

In order to avoid inadequate interventions, the guidelines proposed a list of suitable materials and technical instructions to be selected according to the material and the state of conservation of plasters and painting. Also, chromatic suggestions were given for each building, although the guidelines did not define colours through standard parameters, but left the responsibility of the choice to the owner and designer. According to the rules, in order to obtain permission from the Landscape Commission, the project designer should fully justify the choice of colours, materials and techniques, supporting them through the results of diagnostic activities and adequate sampling. This approach was meant to overcome some conceptual and operational limits of the previous colour plan.

In 2013–2014, the guidelines were reviewed in response to a request to simplify the procedure by the municipality. What is more, the method was tested in the field on two buildings chosen as pilot cases. This was done by a group coordinated by researchers from Milan Polytechnic, and including local officers, a construction company and the owners of the buildings. In both cases, the final choice of colour, material and techniques was supported by several samples verified on site.

The second tool (*Guidelines for interior renovation of the residential buildings in Crespi d'Adda*) provides operational criteria for planning suitable changes to the interior of the houses while ensuring the preservation of historic materials. Similar to the previous case, prior to the drafting of the guidelines, an analysis was conducted with the aim of assessing the state of conservation of the buildings and the number and intensity of transformations already implemented. Although these turned out to be modest, the study allowed the research group to point out the recurring needs which had motivated the interventions. Based on these findings, a set of internal layouts with incremental transformation rates was suggested for each type of building. Moreover, the guidelines include technical suggestions for improving the structural and energy performances of building elements such as wooden floors, roofs, windows and doors. These instructions seek maximum compatibility with the needs of conservation, rather than imposing strict compliance with the standard performance required in new constructions.

A third tool should have been prepared in order to manage work on private outdoor areas, where in the past decades many structures had been built without permission. The

location, materials and dimensions of all the structures were documented through a field survey, although preparation of the guidelines was hindered by divergent ideas within the Steering Committee. While some proposed a single complete project, others would have preferred to provide only general criteria for new constructions.

Critical issues and further action

The elaboration of the management plan for Crespi d'Adda has produced results that go beyond the plan itself, and are expected to be just as relevant, or even more relevant, in the years to come, when the management system will be fully operational. Involvement and dialogue among stakeholders is an initial goal. The plan does not have direct operational effectiveness, meaning that conservation and development goals can only be pursued in a cooperative framework in which roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. This goal has been pursued in many ways in Crespi d'Adda. At the beginning, the need to prepare the management plan became an opportunity for discussion of the future of the site within the local municipality, which had formerly showed weak political will. Afterwards, inter-institutional cooperation was promoted through creation of a Steering Committee. Given that governance remains a critical point, establishment of a management structure composed of different institutional stakeholders is currently under evaluation.

Another relevant problem is the scarcity of resources, since access to grants often requires technical and financial capacities which are not consistent with the possibilities of a small municipality, and the cooperation of other public and private players becomes fundamental. In relation to this opportunity, the new owner of the factory is expected to play a pivotal role in the process of revitalisation of the village. Similarly, a stronger link should be promoted between the institutions and the residents, so that the actions implemented within the site are shared and they are coherent with their needs. In line with this goal, a process of community involvement was launched in late 2014, through which local residents and other stakeholders were invited to participate in three thematic working groups (culture and tourism; innovation; social needs and young generations). This activity led to the collection of ideas for projects to be implemented on the site, which will possibly be considered for inclusion in the management plan.

Continuity of action over time is another relevant issue. In view of the dynamics of transformation that will affect the site over the years to come, monitoring plays a pivotal role in ensuring preservation of the OUV. While *ex-ante* evaluations (i.e. Heritage Impact Evaluations) are widely established for large-scale development projects, minor changes require tailor-made monitoring, to be fine-tuned over time. At first glance, reactive monitoring process based on impact indicators and threshold values do not seem to be effective, while preventive monitoring could prevent inappropriate intervention.¹⁷ However, developing such pro-active evaluation would require strong commitment on the part of the local officers responsible for issuing building permits and, once again, continuous collaboration between the various different institutions responsible for planning and protection.

In conclusion, the difficulties encountered throughout the process have challenged the viewpoint proposed by the Italian guidelines for the elaboration of the management plan, which seem to refer to situations in which different actors, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, can easily start working together on long-term scenarios. Conversely, even in a site of average complexity and small size, any agreement on future decisions could be

hindered by an unstable equilibrium within local institutions, or between them, and a long and difficult process of network building among local stakeholders is needed. We argue that in Crespi d'Adda, the collaborative network has definitely been an outcome of the process, rather than a prerequisite, and has been one of the main achievements in view of the challenges that the site will have to face in the years to come.

Notes

1. The report was commissioned by Louis Bergeron, President of The International Committee for the Conservation of the Industrial Heritage (TICCIH). Until then, no company town had been admitted to the World Heritage List. Bergeron, "Les villages ouvriers".
2. United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), *Operational Guidelines*, 16.
3. UNESCO, *Nineteenth session* (Berlin, Germany).
4. Republic of Italy, Law 77/2006 Special measures for the protection of Italian sites of cultural, landscape and environmental interest inscribed in the UNESCO World Heritage List [*Misure speciali di tutela e fruizione dei siti italiani di interesse culturale, paesaggistico e ambientale, inseriti nella «lista del patrimonio mondiale», posti sotto la tutela dell'UNESCO*].
5. Italian Cultural Heritage Ministry, National Commission for UNESCO Sites and Local Tourism Systems 2004. Model Plan for Management of Cultural Heritage Sites inscribed in the World Heritage List: Guidelines [*Il modello del Piano di Gestione dei Beni Culturali iscritti alla lista del Patrimonio dell'Umanità. Linee Guida*]. Rome, Italian Cultural Heritage Ministry.
6. The public buildings are listed pursuant to Legislative Decree 42/2004, Part 2, Title I, Heading I, Art 10 *Beni Culturali* (Cultural Heritage). The mausoleum is listed pursuant to Decree 597 09/19/1985, in compliance with Law 1089/39 (now Legislative Decree 42/2004).
7. The first decree is aimed at preserving the 'overall beauty of the landscape' and applies to the western side of the territory pertaining to Capriate San Gervasio, including Crespi d'Adda. It was established by Ministerial Decree on 31 July 1969, pursuant to Law 1407/1939 (now Legislative Decree 42/2004). The second protected area, in conformity with Legislative Decree 42/2004, Part 3, Heading II, Art 142 *Aree tutelate per legge* (Areas protected by law), includes a band of 150 metres along each side of the river Adda and the territory which falls within the perimeter of the Adda Nord Regional Park, and therefore the whole village.
8. Municipality of Capriate San Gervasio 1995. Detailed plan for the village of Crespi d'Adda [*Piano Particolareggiato per il villaggio di Crespi d'Adda*].
9. The Committee involved representatives of the Municipality of Capriate San Gervasio, Adda Nord Regional Park, Region of Lombardy, Bergamo Province, Regional Directorate of the Ministry for Heritage, Cultural Activities and Tourism (MiBACT), local officers of the National Ministry (Superintendence for Architectural Heritage and Landscape), and a research group based at Milan Polytechnic (composed of professors Stefano Della Torre and Paolo Gasparoli, and architects PhD Maria Paola Borgarino, Anna Teresa Ronchi and Matteo Scaltritti). Afterwards, the research group was commissioned to prepare the management plan.
10. Pereira Roders, "Monitoring cultural significance"; Jokilehto, "Considerations on authenticity and integrity", 1.
11. UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines*.
12. UNESCO, *Budapest Declaration*; International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), *Paris Declaration*.
13. ICOMOS, *Guidance on Heritage Impact Assessments*.
14. Protocol agreement for the preparation of an Integrated Plan for Intervention for the redevelopment of the factory in Crespi d'Adda [*Protocollo di Intesa per la redazione di un Programma Integrato di Intervento finalizzato alla riqualificazione della fabbrica di Crespi d'Adda*]. approved with City Council resolution no 14 on 21 January 2015.
15. The guidelines refer to residential buildings because they present similar features and can be clearly identified by type. Accordingly, it was possible to give sufficiently precise and replicable

instructions. Some instructions, such as those for intervention on building fronts, also apply to other types of building.

16. Publications providing further description: Borgarino, “Crespi d’Adda World Heritage Site”, 115; Gasparoli, Livraghi, Ronchi and Scaltritti “Indicazioni normative per il progetto”, 319.
17. Heras et al. “Value-Based Monitoring System”, 130.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Anna Teresa Ronchi graduated in architecture (2008), earned a PhD on community involvement in conservation of the built heritage (2012). Since 2009, she has been conducting research in conservation and rehabilitation of historic buildings and management of heritage sites.

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