

THE ISSUE OF THE HISTORIC CENTRES AND THE ITALIAN CONTRIBUTION TO THE EAHY 1975: PRECEDENTS AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT In Italy, the safeguard of the ‘non-monumental’ architectural heritage has been inflected primarily as the issue of ‘historic centres’ and the cruxes of the debate have revolved around the theme of the insertion of the ‘new’ into the ‘old’, and around the governing of urban transformations brought by the economic boom. This specificity was reflected in the Italian proposals for the European Architectural Heritage Year (EAHY 1975) and determined the themes and the discussions of the symposium held in Rome in December 2015 as a conclusion of the Italian participation in the EAHY 1975. The paper describes the precedents in the Italian culture of conservation and urban planning and the emerging debate and cultural agenda of the 1970s on the historic centres that prepared the participation of Italy in the EAHY 1975 and the selection of the four ‘exemplary realisations’ in Verona, Bologna, Ancona and Taranto, of which a synthetic account is also provided. Finally, the paper attempts a first appraisal of the legacy of the EAHY in the Italian context.

1. PRECEDENTS

Gustavo Giovannoni

The large-scale demolitions of the late nineteenth century and the transformation of the image and scale of many cities and of their immediate surroundings fostered protests for the safeguard of our monuments and architectural complexes and the first formulations of the need and legitimacy to preserve the traces of our past. This was to continue in the early twentieth century and in the fascist period, when the idea took hold that it was necessary to preserve not only the monuments, but also their setting. The most important witness of a ‘contextual’ approach to the monument and of the respect due to the ancient city was Gustavo Giovannoni, who, since 1913, elaborated a personal theory regarding the modes of intervention on the historic built fabric.¹ Giovannoni intended the city as an ‘aesthetic organism’ which was to be integrated into contemporary life with no damage to its vital parts. Improved hygienic conditions and adaptation to new exigencies were not to be pursued through massive demolitions but, rather, through precise cuts and small destructions, limited to insignificant constructions or obtrusive additions, allowing for other buildings to breathe. However, the most original element of Giovannoni’s proposals concerns particularly the territorial breadth of his approach to the problems of urban heritage: this did not become the object of an autonomous discipline, but was included in to a global urban vision which assigned to the old city the task of accommodating the ‘slow time’ of living, while, for the ‘fast time’ of production, ad-hoc spaces were to be designed. The historic centre acquired thus a primary role, as it was integrated into a project anchoring the local to the urban and territorial scales and assigned specific functions for contemporary life (Choay 1995; Varagnoli 2003).

In Giovannoni’s writings there can already be found many intricate problems that were resumed in the debate along the following decades and which crystallised, sixty years later, in the → *Amsterdam Charter* (see appendix); the importance of preserving the built fabric beyond the monuments, the role of the

ancient setting as a suitable place for contemporary life, the need to choose appropriate functions, the attention to the threats of vehicular traffic, the cultural, scientific, educational, but also use value of the historic urban heritage.

Giovannoni's influence was long-lasting, even beyond critics' recognition, which arrived only much more recently. Nevertheless, it is worth recalling that, in Italy, between the early 1910s and the 1940s three crucial laws were issued through which heritage protection and urban planning were managed for several decades, and all of them incorporated aspects of Giovannoni's thought.

The post -World War II debate

The scale of the losses caused by the war entailed the widespread consciousness that preserving historic and traditional urban contexts was necessary, particularly because new upheavals threatened the historic fabric: further demolitions of fragile buildings justified by modernisation objectives, the saturation of open spaces for speculative reasons, alteration of the urban surroundings through building expansion.

The debate on how intervening and fixing the ruined buildings – either with mimetic interventions, following a contemporary language, or relying on an intermediate way – was often harsh: exemplary, in this regard, is the contrasting pro and against the reconstruction of the buildings forming the setting of the Ponte Vecchio in Florence.

A long season of discussion and confrontation on the legitimacy of the insertion of new constructions into the old built fabric and on the type of architectural language, forms, and materials to be used for new architecture to be 'in context' was inaugurated in the immediate aftermath of WWII; this marked a distinction from the earlier debate. The idealist philosophy which came to imbue the culture of restoration and the message of the Modern Movement challenged Giovannoni's principles as they denied any creative role to the restorer (Pane 1944) and prevented architectural design contending with the challenge of juxtaposing contemporary architecture to ancient pre-existences (Boriani 2007). Meanwhile, urban speculation, massive immigration/emigration and increasing decay threatened the historic cores of several cities and small towns: all problems which the cultures of architectural conservation or new design were not well prepared to address. At the end of WWII, the discipline urban planning appeared the most ready to pick up the challenges at stake. In Naples in 1949, the congress of the *National Institute of Urban Planning* (INU) discussed the urban problems of cities with historic characters, while in Lucca, in 1957, the topic was the defence and valorisation of the rural and urban landscape.

The attempt to implement these ideas was pursued with dedication by Giovanni Astengo in the master plans for Assisi (1955–1958) and Gubbio (1958–1964). In Assisi, a detailed historical and typological analysis was accompanied by an unprecedented effort to map socio-economic data and the living conditions of the inhabitants: the retention of the social structure was seen as a warranty for the conservation of the physical form of the city, while the knowledge of the settlement and evolutionary matrix of the city was to govern location and layout of the expansion zones. The plan was never adopted or implemented: a special law for Assisi was approved in 1956 and it provided for more flexibility in the interventions and was thus preferred by the local administration. The Gubbio master plan was elaborated along similar lines, but, differently than in Assisi, was adopted and partly implemented. On the wave of the debate triggered by these planning experiences, in 1960 the INU organised in Gubbio the national symposium on the 'safeguard and the recovery of the historical – artistic centres', which coagulated the historic centres and led to the foundation of the *Associazione nazionale Centri Storico-Artistici* (ANCSA, National Association for Historic-Artistic Centres) and to the adoption of a final declaration of principles and intents – the *Gubbio Charter*. This urged the safeguard of the historic centres as a premise for the development of the modern city, requested that measures for the old city be integrated into general planning, refused mimetic criteria in building interventions as well as any *diradamento*;² underlined the need for a preliminary historical-critical study to determine forms and levels of intervention, and the need to identify and to retain the social structure of historic neighbourhoods. This early debate led, in 1967, to the law n. 765

being issued. This law introduced two key concepts for the safeguard and valorisation of the historic centres: their inclusion into the general planning system and the determination of specific standards aimed at safeguarding their ancient fabric and character. The law established also that each municipality had to map their historic centres and, in the absence of a master plan, building activity within historic centres had to be limited to conservation and recovery with no volumetric modification; detailed plans for these zones strictly limited alteration to volumes, density, building height and distances between edifices.

The *Commission of Investigation for the Protection and Valorisation of Historic, Archaeological, Artistic Heritage and of the Landscape* (known as the Franceschini Commission), established in 1964 to examine conditions and exigencies of the protection of the Italian cultural heritage, also addressed in its works the problems of the historic centres. The Commission, which saw also Astengo's participation, formulated eighty-four declarations and ten recommendations; a specific declaration was dedicated to historic centres (Declaration XL 1967, 72), which confirmed the approach of the *Gubbio Charter* and underlined the need for financial and fiscal incentives for private investors. The subsequent declaration on the new urban settlements, more importantly, correlated the old parts of the city with the new ones, to be designed as 'cultural properties' in progress, to form a significant urban landscape 'as a civilised environment for life'.

2. ITALY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE EAHY 1975

The preparation for the countries' participation implied a three-year information and reflection campaign which involved institutional organisations, such as the Council of Europe, the European Community Commission, the European Conference of the Local Powers, UNESCO, as well as NGOs, e.g. Europa Nostra, ICOMOS, etc., which were called on to organise several sensitization initiatives. The national delegations defined the themes to be addressed and the exemplary case studies to be selected and presented.

Italy's participation in the European Architectural Heritage Year 1975 (EAHY 1975) saw, beyond the contribution to the preparatory work and the selection of the case studies, the organisation of a preliminary conference in Bologna (21–26 October 1974), included in the official programme of the EAHY 1975 initiatives, and a conclusive national symposium held in Rome in December 1975. The symposium was accompanied by an exhibition that collected all 'exemplary cases' that were selected for the Amsterdam Conference, held in October 1975. The event had a considerable resonance in the national press: sixty-nine articles published in the days of the symposium are conserved in the Archive of the *Centro Documentazione e Studi Comuni Italiani*; a resonance not confirmed by the specialised press which in the same years before and after the EAHY 1975 preparation was almost silent on the topic.

The 1970s: from the historic centre to the existing city

The contemporary consciousness that the historic centre is part of a wider and more complex system of historical and cultural resources developed in this period. The housing pressure coupled with the scale of the building waste and of the decay intentionally pursued as a means to speculate on the values of the central areas emerged in all its urgency. The entire existing city appeared as a resource not to be wasted: re-use and redistribution of the existing built assets became a political dictate.

The 1970s saw important institutional and legislative reforms in Italy; in 1970 the Regions were instituted, establishing the election of the Regional Councils, in 1972 ad hoc decrees transferred to the regions specific matters among which urban planning, in 1974 the *Ministry of Cultural and Environmental Properties* was established, and in 1977 the responsibilities for landscape protection were delegated to the Regions, although the State maintained its supervisory role. At the time when the regions were forming their technical offices to fulfil their new duties in urban planning, a number of laws were issued to face the housing emergency (laws n. 865/1971 and 166/1975), providing the legal framework to carry

out the interventions in selected cases. Specific issues in some cities also triggered the promulgation of special laws, as in the case of Venice (l. 171/1973) or Ancona (l. 734/1972), continuing the case-by-case approach but failing to set up an overall framework able to address the structural problems of old cities. It was in this political and cultural climate that the discourse on historic centres and urban rehabilitation further developed, after the humanistic elaborations of the 1960s, and prepared the participation of Italy in the EAHY 1975.

Since 1970, the ANCSA had held a systematic series of congresses which addressed crucial aspects of the quest for the historic city, highlighting the potentials, limits and ambiguities of the most recent legislation, as well as the need for a multi-scalar analysis able to link the processes occurring in the historic centres with those taking place at a territorial scale, or for improved (or specific) technical methods and administrative tools in the conservation/ redevelopment³ of the urban fabric, criticizing the continuous recourse to exceptional measures (i.e. the special laws) instead of structural and regular legal, administrative, financial and fiscal tools. Most importantly, it was contended that the problems of abandonment or congestion of historic towns could not be governed without an overall economic and territorial policy able to coordinate the localisation of infrastructure or of productive activities, taking into account existing housing assets (ANCSA 1974).

While the consciousness of the 'building waste' was shared, the solutions to counteract it were not the object of common agreement. Administrations often preferred to pursue direct intervention through large scale redevelopment operations guided by technical municipal offices or agencies for social housing, but their implementation required substantial public investments that could not be secured in the long term. Additionally, these plans could activate uncontrolled processes of re-valorisation of contiguous areas that produced counter-effects also on the socially sensitive measures carried out by the public hand. The removal of inhabitants was also seen as a functional discontinuity of the urban organisms that should be avoided so as to ensure prompt social revitalisation after the physical recovery was achieved. Others noted that choosing the most physically and socially degraded areas to intervene in was not strategic, as substantial public resources would have been absorbed in limited areas with little chance to activate private investments, especially where the ownership was fragmented. Instead of heavy intervention, they proposed 'light rehabilitation', which at that time was a minority position, as it appeared not politically correct and not engaged to combat the formation of real estate income (ANCSA 1974), and it only gained currency in the late 1990s and early 2000s (e.g. in Genoa urban rehabilitation strategy).

The EAHY 1975 in Italy: the final *National Symposium on the Historic Centres*

The symposium concluded the Italian manifestations for the EAHY 1975: its organisation in Rome (15–20 December 1975) saw the direct involvement of the Ministry of Public Works, engaged at that time in the reform of the legal framework for urban planning and for the landholding system (l. 10/1977). Its title clearly indicates that the theme for the EAHY 1975 was incorporated into the Italian mainstream debate on historic centres, which had mostly come into being within organisations that were not directly involved in the preparation of the EAHY 1975, i. e., the ANCSA or the INU. While members of these organisations often held key positions in ministerial departments, public agencies or local administrations that participated in the EAHY 1975, the reason for the conceptual coincidence between architectural heritage and historic centres may be seen in the common understanding that these dimensions, and the solutions of their problems, could not be disjointed and needed, in fact, a wider territorial approach to be tackled appropriately. The symposium was divided into thematic sections – private and public intervention, the policy of local administrations, legal aspects, assessment of the exemplary realisations, operational perspectives, role of the regions, necessary teaching methods – each of which was opened by a discussion paper which invited discussion and reaction, followed by public debate (AS CD ANCI, 168/S). It was completed by the exhibition of the case studies selected throughout Europe and presented in Amsterdam. It was widely covered by the press and on television.⁴

Almost in parallel, the ANCSA association held an extraordinary congress in Viterbo – Tuscany on 5–7 December 1975, where the ANCSA policy for the historic centres was discussed: differently from the official symposium, their results were published in the review 'Edilizia Popolare'. The congress also discussed the ten interventions in historic centres funded and conducted since then by the *National Agency for Workers' Housing* (GESCAL) and made its appraisal of the EAHY 1975.

The Italian exemplary realisations: Bologna, Verona, Ancona and Taranto

The research conducted for this paper could not ascertain why these specific cases were selected among a number of others that were nevertheless being elaborated in other cities or regions,⁵ although they exemplified different approaches and operational formulas in the redevelopment of historic urban parts. The Rome symposium was an opportunity to discuss preliminary results and implementation problems of the four cases and to present them to the wider Italian public.

In **Verona**, the selected area – Veronetta – coincided with one of the four homogenous neighbourhoods of the historic centre (Fig. 1). Relatively autonomous from the other parts of the old city, it suffered considerable decay, due to abandonment and lack of adequate comforts, but enjoyed an important opportunity, the insertion of the University. In 1969 a framework plan was formed, envisaging the pilot involvement of the GESCAL so as it could fund interventions for economic housing within the historic centres. The chosen pilot area (1,3 ha) was a block already empty, so its dwellings could be renovated and made available for residents of nearby areas, with a view to continuing the rehabilitation of the area without moving inhabitants to quarters further away and so to preserve social continuity and avoid gentrification, the prevention of which was to be ensured also through low rents. The intervention envisaged sanitary, heating and electrical upgrading, the integral conservation of the built fabric and the creation of services in the open areas and in non-residential buildings. The pilot intervention was meant to test the feasibility of the approach for its extension to all Veronetta and included sociological, economic- financial and juridical research to sustain the rehabilitation process in the long term. The envisaged operational formula foresaw the direct action of the Municipality, the constitution of a public participation society or of an ad hoc public subject for the programme implementation.

Community awareness and participation, although not well developed, facilitated the intervention and especially the preliminary research. The less defined aspect concerned the budget and the long-term economic sustainability of the operation.



Fig. 1: Verona – *A medieval fabric rediscovered* as quoted in the 1975 exhibition and 1977 publication *A Future for our Past. European Architectural Heritage* (Ministry of French Culture 1977, 157)

Bologna is probably the only case that reached an international resonance among the four selected for presentation in Amsterdam. The area of direct intervention through a plan for social housing (PEEP) covered five sectors (15 ha) out of the thirteen; the level of obsolescence guided the choice. The intervention aimed to return to use the built assets with an adequate level of comfort and to increase the density of inhabitants. Typological studies helped identify architectural types suitable for the envisaged use and their urban insertion. In these cases, 'conservative restoration' was applied, aiming at removing alien structures and re-proposing coherent external forms, while the interiors were adapted to modern necessities. The population was involved at an early stage – possibly due to the existence of residents' associations, not existing or mature enough in other cases – and instead of applying expropriation procedures, the municipality relied on conventions to engage directly the owners in the rehabilitation process and to shorten the implementation time of the plan. The municipality only acquired special architectural complexes to be adapted to house residence-related services. The plan finally addressed social and commercial aspects, supporting traditional workmanship activities, also by creating ad-hoc secretariats that helped small enterprises in administrative matters. The Bologna case is analysed in this same volume by Sandro Scarrochia, therefore it will not be examined here in detail; it suffices however to note that, although it enjoyed much positive critical reception, especially among urban planners, the interventions in the physical fabric were, in fact, less conservative than one could expect, as it was the typology that was preserved (and re-proposed) and not the material built fabric.

Ancona was the only case, among the selected ones, for which a special law was issued in 1972 following the earthquake that hit the region and the city in the same year. Two detailed plans for the old neighbourhoods – Guasco S. Pietro and Capodimonte – that form the historic centre (~50 ha, 8600 inhabitants) were completed before the earthquake and approved immediately after. On their basis, the municipality decided to allocate the funds secured by the l.734/1972 entirely for the rehabilitation of the historic centre. Exhaustive geometrical, urban, architectural and typological investigations were carried out as a basis for a critical analysis of the urban structures and of their modifications and for preliminary design indications. The two neighbourhoods – located on two hills separated by the Pannocchiara Valley and facing the natural harbour – had different urban vocations: Capodimonte maintained a residential function, while Guasco San Pietro, the city's original nucleus, much damaged by war and earthquake, contains architectural precincts that served the entire city (the library, the university, the prefecture, etc.). The intervention aimed to revitalise the historic centre for its traditional users and to make available social housing within the existing city, allocating public buildings to urban or social services. Also in this case, the plan aimed to avoid speculative operations and the expulsion of the residents. The provisions of the special law permitted the direct intervention of the GESCAL within the historic centre, and facilitated administrative procedures through experimental formulas that were later adapted to become the norm. Expropriation, temporary occupation and substitution were facilitated, in case the owners did cooperate with redevelopment. The plans aimed at the integral conservation of the entire urban body, while permitting the removal of incongruous additions, the liberation of courtyards, and the partial reintegration of the built fabric. Intervention approaches were modulated according to the character of each neighbourhood, and the new integrations could not be mimetic, but had to respect certain parameters, i. e., same volume of the building to be replaced but with different formulas in the internal distribution, same height, same alignment along the street, typological reorganisation. In Capodimonte, the intervention criteria appear more conservative than elsewhere and included the retention of building units (the apartment), exclusion of subdivision, retention of the building internal distribution, of ceiling levels, of the roofs, retention or re-proposition of the existing/former system of access staircases. The large scale intervention however, imposed the unification of certain building components, i. e., window and door frames, building materials, sanitary and electric installations, insulation systems, etc. The challenges in Ancona were represented by the advanced decay of many edifices, and by the negative perceptions caused by the earthquake (AS CD ANCI, 168/S).

The historic core of **Taranto** (29 ha) preserves evidence of its long and complex history, dating back to the Greek and Roman periods, with significant mediaeval and then baroque architectural examples. Since the 1970s, the city has been under the pressure of social tensions, the result of recent and ancient unbalances caused by industrial development, with the construction of the military arsenal (erected between 1883–1889) and the establishment of the iron industry in the early 1960s. The report dwells upon the drastic physical and social changes suffered by Taranto in a short period of time and highlights the role that its wider territory, still anchored to an agrarian economy, could play in the territorial rebalancing and reorganisation of the city (Fig. 2). The conditions of extreme degradation of the built fabric, along with the high density of inhabitants (more than 15.000 people at that time) made the operation particularly challenging. Technical installations within the edifices were very poor, while urban services were almost non-existent. A safeguard detailed plan covering the whole area was elaborated and approved by the Region in 1974. It was based on preliminary, much deepened studies of the urban fabric and of its development; the conservation approach was again typological and included eliminating incongruous later additions and occlusions of open spaces and supplying adequate services to improve liveability. At the time, public funds for an operational plan were secured, but political and technical obstacles prevented the advancement of the project; implementation could not rely on private initiative, as the inhabitants lived in very disadvantaged conditions. Therefore the municipal direct public action was envisaged through the application of the laws n. 167/1962 and n. 865/1971 to acquire the areas for social housing and to finance the recovery of the houses for residential purposes. At the time of the symposium only the monuments were under conservation, while work on the residential fabric was still to begin. A tragic collapse occurred in 1975 and triggered the progressive evacuation of the historic core, which accelerated the decay of the urban fabric and stimulated further building pressure to provide the evacuees with a dwelling. The zone plan for the area “Vicoli 1” could have been implemented, but bureaucratic impediments and cultural resistances in using the funds on the historic core (particularly from the technicians of the IACP agency in charge of elaborating and implementing the projects) slowed down the process.

The comparative analysis on the intervention carried out by Vittorio Di Gioia (AS CD ANCI, 168/S) stressed that the execution of the interventions highlighted several issues that affected the implementation of the work, namely, the inadequacy of the hired professionals, which revealed the necessity of setting up technical offices inside the administrations, of masons or workers, who, with the changes in building production processes and materials, had lost the appropriate craftsmanship, and of the building materials, whose characteristics had been changed to fit modern building techniques. Also the equipment and

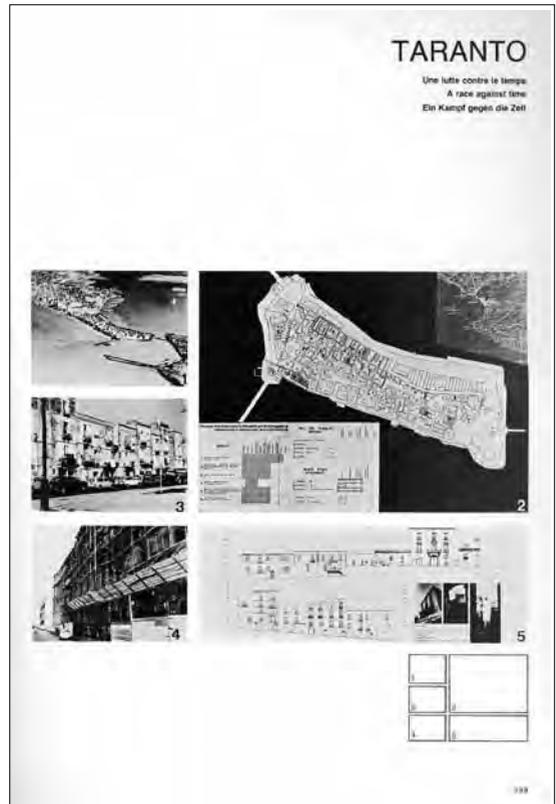


Fig. 2: *Taranto – A race against time* as quoted in the 1975 exhibition and 1977 publication *A Future for our Past. European Architectural Heritage* (Ministry of French Culture 1977, 157)

organisation for modern construction sites were revealed to be unsuitable for use in traditional or conservation building sites.

3. THE AFTERLIFE OF THE EAHY 1975 IN ITALY

The ideal and ideological drive of the 1970s, that also guided the 'International of architectural heritage' that was the EAHY 1975, was replaced by the more realistic, if not utilitarian, pragmatism of the 1980s: urban rehabilitation welcomed private investments and in many instances even tolerated a certain degree of property speculation, possibly aiming at accelerating urban rehabilitation of degraded areas. Little attention was given to the socio-economic processes that, triggered by the urban rehabilitation plans of central areas, caused the replacement of traditional social and economic structures by alien functions. Meanwhile, minor historic towns suffered from progressive abandonment, in the absence of any effective territorial vision.

While not directly linkable to the EAHY 1975, the law n. 457/1978 on housing set up a stable framework for the publicly or privately driven redevelopment initiatives and defined the categories of intervention on the existing built asset that was certainly grounded on the experiences of the redevelopment plans of the 1970s. This was not necessarily for the best: for the first time, the levels of intervention on the existing built heritage were fixed by law (ordinary and extraordinary maintenance, conservative restoration, building and urban upgrading) and immediately prevailed over the master plan norms. It was with these – generic and contradictory – categories that redevelopment was carried out in the following decades, contributing to the widespread impoverishment of the constructive character of our historic built environment.

Signs of change appeared in the 1990s: the updated ANCSA *Gubbio Charter* laid down a renewed agenda for historic centres, emphasising the need to extend the attention from the city core to its historic territory and to acknowledge that market logic/ dynamics prevail over and anticipate planning provisions. To govern these phenomena, a plurality of instruments framed within a global territorial and economic – financial strategy would be required to sustain and to make operational a multi-scalar and multi-temporal planning process: a comprehensive reinterpretation of urban problems and administrative, planning and financial tools allowed the full understanding of the strategic nature of the → *Amsterdam Charter* (see appendix).

CONCLUSIONS

It is arduous to ascertain what has been the direct legacy of the EAHY 1975 in Italy has been, as the debate on the conservation of the built heritage was already well established among experts and public administrators. While it is improbable that its organisation could have favoured the multiplication of redevelopment initiatives, which were already under way due to favourable legislation and to the urgency of the housing quest, the EAHY 1975 certainly stimulated the circulation of information, intensifying the occasions for exchange on specific experiences and on transversal issues. A further, important bequest of the EAHY 1975 period resides in the results of the immense analytical efforts that were made in the 1960s and 1970s for the preliminary studies of redevelopment plans; these remain unsurpassed and still represent a precious reference as a base for further analyses.

On the other hand, the actual realisation of the 1970 urban rehabilitation plans, even of the exemplary cases presented at the EAHY 1975, remained partial if not fragmentary, for specific but also very general reasons, i. e., the lack of financial support in the medium-long term, the failure of the reform of the urban planning legal framework, administrative or juridical constraints, the excessive length of the rehabilitation process. This is the very case of Old Taranto: its conservation plan was never really initiated, and its physi-

cal and social degradation has today reached unacceptable levels, due to its abandonment but also to the economic and environmental crisis caused by the ILVA industrial policy, so that the government has just launched an exceptional programme for the global revitalisation of Taranto through, again, a special law (law decree n. 5/2015, converted into law n. 20/2015). The experimental nature of these plans allowed the accumulation of knowledge of technical, administrative and juridical aspects and the enucleation of thematic issues that were progressively dealt with, i. e., the quality of conservation materials/ components, specialised workmanship and professionals, techniques and building site logistics, etc.

Also the typological approach in conservation, which was the mainstream in the 1970s, thanks indeed to some unfortunate occurrences, made room for a more attentive approach to the construction logic of old buildings and their building materials and components, and to the stratigraphic and archaeological depth of the built heritage, thus providing for a less schematic approach to urban and built conservation.

Today the problems of historic cities and built heritage are only partly coincident with those which emerged in the 1960–1970s: abandonment and rapid degradation of peripheral towns and villages, increased threats of more and more severe hydro-geological instability go along with increasing anthropogenic pressures on tourist towns and related physical wear-and-tear or social alterations affecting their character. Elsewhere, overpopulation, marginalisation and insufficient hygienic conditions reappear in cities subject to immigration, new poverty or organised crime pressures. Actualising the bequest of the → *Amsterdam Charter* would require addressing emerging conservation contradictions and new methodological and technical challenges as opportunities to reappraise former approaches in a process of re-appropriation of our heritage, bearing in mind that handing down our past in a vital manner requires first the ability to inherit (Younès 2011).

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¹ Engineer, architecture historian, urban planner, Giovanni had led the disciplinary debate since the 1910s. In his institutional roles, he had a major influence on the superintendencies. Because of his alleged closeness to fascism, his contribution to urban planning has been forgotten and his reappraisal is particularly due to Françoise Choay (Choay 1995; Pane 1996; Spagnesi 2005). Giovanni's fundamental writings on urban themes are 'Il diradamento dei vecchi centri' and 'Vecchie città edilizia nuova', both published in the review *Nuova Antologia*.

² This word was not neutral, as it was used by Giovanni to describe the selective reduction of urban congestion and the improvement of hygienic conditions: the planners of the 1960s wanted to mark an explicit distance from Giovanni (more theoretical than real).

³ In Italian 'risanamento' or 'recupero'.

⁴ The multimedia library of Rome conserves a short film on the opening session of the Symposium and of an interview with the Minister of Public Works, which seemingly was made for the television, <http://www.mediatecaroma.it>, accessed December 28, 2014.

⁵ An interesting proposal by the Umbria Region for the revitalisation of the small centres of the Apennine ridge took into account also the strategic location of productive networks. The case was discussed during the VII ANCSA Congress on territorial rebalance and historic centres, which was held in Vicenza on 16–18 March 1974 and purposely organised in preparation of the EAHY 1975. The author wish to express her gratitude to the *Centro Documentazione e Studi Comuni Italiani* and its staff for the generous and professional assistance received during the preparation of this paper.