

The Surveyor's Role on Urban Renewal in Small Italian City Centers

Cromwell MANALOTO, Italy

Key words: urban renewal, Italian city center, Planning tools, Tax breaks, Italy, Land Management, Land readjustment

SUMMARY

The whole Italian territory is covered with numerous small towns and cities which were built since the ancient times while the existing buildings are the end results of various city planning done throughout history.

Most cities can date back up to the Middle Ages (from twelfth century onwards) and are typically situated on hills which gave them the typical architectural and construction style of the era.

Urbanization or the migration from small town to the metropolis, caused most existing buildings in small and medium density city centers to be left unused and consequently abandoned. This is due to the elevated amount of advantages that big cities present (i.e. availability of work and resources, residential comfort and benefits) than the remote and economically inconvenient conditions of smaller towns.

The presence of these buildings in Italian city centers, now abandoned by their owners, is an issue that is particularly important today, not only for the preservation of historic monuments but also to rediscover modern lifestyle in small towns that promotes economic advantages and improved welfare conditions.

Proper management, the choice of planning strategy and promotion are issues that the local government should address with exceptional technical competence and adequate knowledge of the area.

In this context, the Surveyor plays a vital role and may be considered to be a key figure on defining and implementing different strategies aimed at urban requalification, reuse of buildings and their architectural values.

Current urban plans approved by the present Italian laws allow a wide range of plans and/or restorations from both public and private sectors. They are essential in conserving local customs and traditions, history and culture. Moreover, to promote economic and social progress, not only of the proprietor but also, of the same commune.

A success on this kind of action would result to a positive effect on the demographic blueprint (something called "reverse migration") favoring an increase to the town's population in city centers' almost abandoned residential settlements.

This report aims to identify the principal causes that lead to abandoning certain properties around different small Italian city centers. It will be followed by some possible solutions that can be proposed, not only to the Surveyor's client, but may also be extended to local government bodies, which, by the way, should be promoting these initiatives, as well. While taking into considerations local norms and approved communal urban plans, as well as existing standards and technical parameters, we can easily combine a feasible proposal for a specific project.

By giving an example, we will illustrate step by step the technical phases a Surveyor must follow, starting from the rightful identification of his client and the property itself, preliminary site visits, surveying methods, data analyses and study. From these operations, the Surveyor may now proceed to client consultation, urban norms and standards checkup, research on possible tax breaks, environmental impact assessment and of course, technical procedures for obtaining working permits and waivers. Risk management and safety measures for the construction sites that would be opened soon should also be considered beforehand.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The whole Italian territory is covered with numerous small towns and cities which were built since the ancient times while the existing buildings are the end results of various city planning done throughout history. Most cities can date back up to the Middle Ages (from twelfth century onwards) and are typically situated on hills which gave them the typical architectural and construction style of the era.

Each town then has its own "urban core", commonly referred to as "Centro Storico" (historic city center).

It is usually the oldest part of the town wherein several buildings were originally constructed over a century ago and in the course of time, have acquired a certain degree of social, historical and cultural values. However, "Centro Storico" may also refer to part of any town inside old wall fortresses or medieval castles.

In 2010, Italy is divided into 8,094 administrative municipalities. Only one hundred and fifty of which have surpassed a population greater than 50,000 inhabitants, hence can be considered as large cities. The remaining portion can be considered as small and medium sized municipalities.

This paper focuses on a limited area of study chosen between the regions of Marche and Abruzzo in Central Italy. In these two regions, only two fall under the category of "large towns." The first, the City of Ascoli Piceno, followed by the City of Teramo. Both are main cities of their respective provinces. We'll take in consideration the towns of Ancarano and Controguerra and the area around Tronto Valley. The primary reason for this is given by the similarities their urban distribution, as well as the landscape and history of the area.

The last national census shows that there have been 14,862 requests made regarding reconstruction and building renovation for buildings constructed ante-1919 over a total of 132,369 registered applications. Most of the buildings, of course, are located within the old villages.

This is a dense residential historic place which develops a harmonized urban environment characterized by proper use and combination of the local construction materials such as stones, bricks and tiles.

2. MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE URBAN HOUSING RECOVERY

The most interesting feature of city centers is not solely about their architectural planning nor because of the public spaces, which are respected everywhere and shared in their utmost simplicity. How different facades, colors, floor designs and roof are combined gives clear connotations to city centers as "urban monuments."

Building renovation is therefore synonymous with urban renewal, where the most important social and strategic purpose is to improve the quality of life in urban areas, promoting residential development and the socio-economic sustainability and competitiveness of the territory.

The indication of the intervention on identified historical units, is carried out according to the results of the analysis of the historic building types, which now offers culturally and socially shared parameters that are objective and indispensable. While before, these parameters only gave essentially subjective judgments, in other words, the property is evaluated whether it is still in good or bad static conditions or the exact date of completion is uncertain.

Proper identification of building types allows you to assign the necessary information on operating procedures for each building unit, to the practice of restoration and rehabilitation philological typology. Based on these criteria, it is then possible to determine for each type, the range plausible interventions on buildings and eligible uses.

Recovery plans concern the characteristics of construction projects and the specifics of each building unit, while complying to the obligations and constraints to be respected (landscape, environmental, health and hygiene systems and “green” building, fire safety and anti-seismic). The main objectives of the various recovery plans and redevelopment are:

- To regain identity of the city as a landmark of history and urban culture.
- To slow down the depopulation of town/city centers and to improve their housing conditions.
- To Improve the viability and mobility within the town/city centers and to identify areas for car parks.

To deal with the challenges of "urbanization" and to ensure, if not reversed the flow of population, at least the permanence in the center of its current inhabitants, the urban-renewal plan (other than the recovery of existing assets), should include new housing solutions to encourage the settlement of young families.

The stay of the residents in the center, also depends on the revitalization of the center with new commercial and cultural activities, related to the specific and local identity.

3. URBAN PLANNING TOOLS

The planning instruments approved by the Italian law allows various restoration and urban regeneration proposals that can be presented by either private or public initiative. They are useful to promote the conservation of tradition, history and culture, and to promote sustainable economic and social interests, not just to those who own a property (abandoned buildings), but also to the community as well.

The Italian legislation classifies “urban planning tools” into four groups, depending on the area of interest:

- Strategic national programming and planning;
- Interregional planning;
- Inter-municipal and regional planning;
- Communal planning and implementation.

4. CONTRIBUTIONS AND/OR BUILDING REHABILITATION TAX CREDITS

The Italian government has provided some economic benefits for certain types of specific project proposals.

Some restoration work carried out by a construction firm in the center of town, mainly consisting in the removal of existing pavements and street lighting and resurfacing, may serve VAT at 10% instead of the normally applied 20% VAT.

The same tax breaks can be requested for the following works:

- restoration and conservation
- building renovation
- urban renewal

The first point includes projects regarding the conservation of the building and to ensure the functionality of it; restoration may transform the whole building or just part of the existing structure and finally, with the interventions of urban renewal can also replace some existing structures and other works, making changes to the lots, blocks or to the road network.

Building expansions, demolitions and renovations also benefit from the incentives as long as they meet the imposed prerequisites. These works may even avail of the tax deduction of 36% or 55% if they can be classified under "restructuring" as defined by the Italian legislation.

That is "demolition and reconstruction with the same volume and shape, subject to seismic retrofitting." Otherwise, they are considered as "new construction" (the fabrication of building above ground or buried, or expansion of existing ones outside of their shape).

It is still advisable to check from time to time possible structural proposals that may be classified as restoration and renovation and therefore, may be subjected to reduced fiscal rates.

5. THE “AMBITO CAPOLUOGO” PROJECT 2010

Taking into account the incentive legislation, the municipal administration of Controguerra has drafted a proposed redevelopment of the oldest part of the town, often referred to as “Capoluogo”

This project gives citizens and residents the opportunity to obtain a fiscal contribution to restore their property, especially within the selected area defined by the Town Administration, following the completion of various construction projects authorized for the maintenance, restoration and sanitary improvement of the buildings built within the so-called Centro Storico, as well as the renovation of facades and roofs of these establishments.

Moreover, to encourage the return of citizens to reside in the center and then to revive and regenerate the "heart" of the city, following requirements and parameters were set as guidelines in order to be eligible for the presumed economic benefits:

- Italian citizenship;
- The location of the property shall be within the region as identified by the special plan attached to the City Council resolution;
- The proposed project must comply with the approved zoning regulations
- The building shall not have already received similar tax breaks or economic support from previous or similar grants.

For most of the proposals received, the project aims to recover the abandoned houses and residential complexes that are left in poor state and needs an immediate repair, above all those who are in poor static conditions.

6. PROJECT ILLUSTRATION - CASE STUDY

6.1 Preliminary Research:

The territorial knowledge of the surveyor chosen to assist the client played a key role in the project development itself, starting from the rightful identification of the property. In fact, as a preliminary step, it was necessary to reconstruct the historical passages of the property since, according to official Land Registry entries, the building is still registered to different entities, some of which are either deceased, or show no interest in rebuilding.

In this case, only one "heir" has expressed his willingness to undertake these actions in order to "rediscover" an investment neglected for nearly a century.

From the cadastral report obtained, it is still needed to produce all the succession folders in order to proceed to the restoration project and attest the property to the client. This operation requires particular abilities in which the surveyor is extremely qualified, for example, property valuations, surveys and land registry forms compilation, verify any additional documents and property deeds.

The surveys highlighted the following results:

- The main object of the project proposal is a three-story building that has no continuous internal access. It is primarily constructed with brick with an exclusive courtyard and auxiliary sheds. It is also adjacent to another residential complex.
- The roofing is in a clear state of deterioration. There are also cracks in the vicinity of the windows on the second floor and a net, almost vertical gap of separation between the said building and the adjacent one, the latter, also was left in the same poor condition and maintenance. Moreover, the structure also presents some issues on public safety, because of the possible occurrence of falloff of roof tiles and bricks.
- There are obvious signs of previous construction works opted to ensure a minimum of structural sealing of the building left unused for decades. Nevertheless, the building requires immediate safety measures to avoid imminent collapse and detachment of structural elements (roof, floor, masonry).
- It is necessary to put the present structure into better static conditions, to allow further proposed design under the new regulations on energy efficiency, technological innovation and adaptation of plants to proposals to expand and then take advantage of current tax benefits (financial 2010, regional piano casa i.e. Abruzzo).

6.2 The Proposed Action

The observations done on the structure and followed by historical investigations allowed the surveyor to formulate the first part of the proposal, starting from the need to renovate this building and preserve its typical characteristic, which are the following:

- Fence installation and scaffolding to secure the building perimeter;

- Removal of existing roof covering and unsafe parts building;
- Section excavation and foundation reinforcement;
- Internal steel structure;
- Floor slab restoration and roof restoration

The processing required to present their proposal depends on the type of the building area. Floor plans, elevations and sections, sketch of a possible intervention reinforcement were produced, as well as sewage connection diagrams.

In addition to the usual documents (drawings, photographic documentation, certificates of ownership or other), the dossier of the project was integrated with a detailed cost estimate, as expected and indicated in the 2008 regional price list of Abruzzo.

The next phase will involve the design of the building and re-engineering. At present, as per the request of the client, the final draft is under deliberation.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Geom. Cromwell Manaloto is a young Italian Surveyor of Filipino ancestry. He's a freelance surveyor, currently working as Damage Evaluator for different home and building insurance companies.

At the same time, he focuses also on Project Site Management as junior collaborator and patrimonial division for succession.

He's enlisted in the Provincial College of Surveyors of Ascoli Piceno e Consiglio Nazionale Geometri (National Council of Surveyors – Italy)

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