

## **INTANGIBLE VALUES AS REVENUES IN A WORLD HERITAGE CITY PROPOSAL FOR THE REHABILITATION OF THE DOMINICAN CONVENT IN SAN GIMIGNANO (Italy) Erzebet KOVACS\*, Hongrie / Hungary**

After professors and students of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Technical Sciences in Florence had already completed the architectural survey of the building and the analysis of its history, architectural decoration etc. in 2001, the City Council of San Gimignano and a private foundation from Florence (Paolo del Bianco) invited 20 professionals from 16 countries to prepare the rehabilitation proposals of the empty, state-owned Dominican Cloister, which was used as a prison from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the early 1990's.

The beautiful World Heritage city of San Gimignano, Tuscany, is rich in tradition. This fact invites citizens, local and national authorities, academics, artists, and a host of experts and investors to search for new ways to put it to use.

In 1990, San Gimignano was nobly awarded 60<sup>th</sup> place on the list of World Heritage sites. Pride of the local community was high, but citizens quickly realized that with this honour came new responsibilities, such as the maintenance and protection of the site. According to latest statistics, the number of visitors to San Gimignano significantly increased over the past few years. About seven million tourists visit the city in a year, while the number of inhabitants is around seven thousand and only a few hundred live inside the city walls! However, most visitors stay in town for just a few hours and spend money only on souvenirs. Thus, despite more tourist visits to the town, no significant growth in revenue was reported. This has raised a number of new concerns related to the protection of its heritage.

Therefore the goal is to preserve this cultural heritage site and at the same time to create new opportunities for local economic development. Ideally this means decreasing the number of 'transit' visits by offering new opportunities for tourists to get better acquainted with the town's rich local traditions and culture. I am convinced that the preservation and restoration of the unique Dominican Cloister would contribute to this cause, especially if it is combined with a variety of educational and cultural programmes/events that would hopefully persuade visitors to lengthen their stay in town.

In order to achieve this goal, a step-by-step approach is needed. To begin with, the building should regain some of its functions. These could include its ability to host events and programs which would then stir further interest on the site and increase its chances of preservation for the future.

Since the preservation of the Cloister is a complex undertaking, which involves long-term professional and financial commitments, there is a need to coordinate the activities between all parties involved in such an initiative.

The exemplary co-operation in this proposal, which was initiated by Paolo del Bianco Foundation, is making progress, and could also be continued as a professional support offered by various scientific partners, such as universities, research institutes and international professional associations. These partner organizations and experts may support the foundation with various professional activities like research and professional assistance. In fact, another cooperative model has already been piloted in San Gimignano and has been used in the restoration of the Castelvecchio buildings (San Gimignano), where the Gruppo Storico Castelvecchio directs the work of volunteers each August who come to aid in the physical preservation of the site.

It was too early to start preparing concrete plans for the rehabilitation and reutilization of the Cloister of San Domenico. Although professors and students of the Faculty of Architecture at the University of Technical Sciences in Florence have already completed the architectural survey of the building, analysis of its history, architectural decoration and construction, research still lies ahead. Strict rules for heritage reconstruction projects insist that all work be done methodically and carefully so as to best restore sites to their original splendor. Hence, this is not a short-term task. However, this should not be seen as a burden that would prevent temporary utilization of the cloister building. Temporary utilization, in fact, may help attract further interest on the overall project.

It is vital to maintain professional contacts with international partner institutions and to establish the San Domenico International Summer University, as a first step. The University could serve as an institutional framework by which students of architecture, conservation and art history can take part in the refurbishment process several months each year. Moreover, the international academic staff of the University may serve as a professional forum to exchange ideas and experiences regarding heritage protection and preservation projects.

In addition, the Summer University could host other programs for the preservation of local cultural traditions and could use the unique architectural environment as an inspiring background for post-graduate courses in creative arts, music and theater.

Also, with the famous marble mines of Carrara nearby, summer workshops for sculptors could also be added to the selection of courses that are inspired by local flavors and traditions.

The incredible beauty of Tuscany, with its fruits, herbs, olive trees, and vineyards, invites a multitude of cultural programs to be set up to teach the traditional professions of the region. Later, as the reconstruction works progress, the Cloister could host a museum of wine and viticulture linked with cellars that offer wine-tasting events to promote the fabulous wines of the region.

The traditional knowledge of the use of plants and herbs for dyeing textiles was once among the main sources of wealth in medieval San Gimignano. The chief ingredient for dyes was saffron, one of the world's most celebrated and expensive plants/spices and which grows naturally in Tuscany. Besides revitalizing silk-paintings, courses on local ceramic painting techniques or on the region's fabulous wrought iron works can be offered for those interested in artisan works and crafts.

There are other opportunities for creating new traditions. The area within the walls of the former prison offers an excellent stage for theater, music and dance performances. High quality performances can become the centerpiece of future town festivals and can provide excellent opportunities for students of the arts or amateur groups.

The products of such a variety of cultural and artistic activities would be shown in exhibitions and could be sold at cultural fairs. The presence of students and artists and the fruits of their work should induce visitors to extend their stay in San Gimignano. The proceeds of this should help the town revitalize its historic center and better preserve this site.

Finally, the process of reconstruction and preservation of heritage sites may become a tourist attraction in its own right. If the results of the explorations and research are presented to the public at large, tourists may find it fascinating and insightful to witness step-by-step how ancient edifices are transformed to their original grandeur.

Over time, students, professors, artists and various others who contributed to the preservation of the architectural and cultural heritage of San Gimignano may create a large network of professionals and artists with a strong commitment to the city. Such a network would increase the cultural and human vibrancy of the city.

Besides the professional body, it would be necessary as well to establish a managing body whose responsibility would be the implementation of the program. This body would guarantee a long-term (at least 50 years) commitment to the program so as to ensure its sustainability. Parallel to the establishment of the management body, a board of trustees should also be set up. This board should include representatives of all the aforementioned interested parties and should supervise the professional and financial operations of the management team.

To secure the financial backing for the restoration program a foundation would be needed, supported by various resources, including state and regional sources, and national and international donors. It is crucial that funding is also forthcoming from various interested investors who will hopefully play a big role in the ultimate success of the program.

The primary tasks that lay ahead in the revitalization project are the following:

1. Clarify the scope of management;
2. Create a board of trustees and the San Domenico Foundation;
3. Clean the site (remove rubble and establish basic infrastructure systems for fresh water and sanitation);
4. Organize San Domenico Summer University;
5. Implement programs for the preservation of heritage;
6. Prepare mid- and long-term business plans.

## **ABSTRACT**

The medieval Dominican Convent was used as a prison from the mid 19th century until 1995. At present the building complex is empty. It has an excellent location within the historic city, well integrated into the characteristic Tuscan landscape and in keep of its own architectural values.

San Gimignano was nobly awarded 60th place on the World Heritage list. According to the latest statistics, the number of visitors to San Gimignano has significantly increased over the past few years. However, most tourists stay in town for just a few hours. This has raised a number of new concerns in terms of heritage protection. The goal would be to stir the visitor's interest for longer stays in order to acquaint them with the rich and interesting culture and tradition (intangible heritage) of the site.

The revival of the traditional arts and crafts of the region, combined with a special educational system and events would be the basis for the unique Dominican Cloister's restoration process. By doing so, visitors will be persuaded to lengthen their stay in town. These varied activities would be co-ordinated and financed by a special body in which all the interested partners would be represented.

The proposal deals with

- the intangible heritage of the place,
- the educational method,
- the restoration process of the building complex, and also
- the financial solution for the project.

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