

## HISTORIC CORE OF SPLIT AND THE PERISTYLE OF DIOCLETIAN'S PALACE:

### Economic impact of cultural heritage preservation

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**Abstract.** A management plan for the historic centre of Split has recently been produced in order to improve the planning and coordination of activities which aim at better quality of life of its inhabitants and of the economy, while securing the long-term protection of cultural values of the place, and coping with the impact of growing tourism. The restoration and rehabilitation of the Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace is described as one of the most significant and the most extensive projects in the historic core of Split since its inscription on the UNESCO's World Heritage List 30 years ago. Started in 2004 as a stone cleaning operation, after a two-year survey of the as-found condition of the Roman colonnade and the surrounding buildings from later periods, it developed into a complex project including archaeological, geophysical and geo-mechanical research, consolidation of foundations and upper structures, cleaning and conservation of stone, plaster and other materials, lighting and presentation of this multi-layered monument. It is anticipated that the project will be completed by 2012.

Apart from being an outstanding opportunity for young experts to gain hands-on experience in the most contemporary conservation and restoration procedures, the Peristyle project, together with other significant restoration works within the historic core, showcase the best conservation practice, and support the local economy by creating new jobs in conservation and maintenance of historic structures. Property value has risen and new uses, both commercial and cultural, have been attracted to the site.

#### 1. Conservation and Management of the Historic Core of Split

Founded in 305 as a fortified villa of a retired emperor, Split developed into a medieval town, keeping traces from all periods and incorporating them into one harmonic whole. In 1979 the historic core of Split was declared a World Heritage Site on account of its well-preserved architecture from all periods, but also because of the fact that it is still a living organism with all urban functions. It has been threatened by the rapid growth of the modern city, by the pressure of commercialization on the ground level of properties, and by unfavorable changes in the social structure of the population. Badly managed and steadily growing "cultural" tourism has made an additional impact on the quality of life in the historic core.

During the last two centuries the historic centre of Split has been a laboratory for practicing theoretical conservation principles. The centre of Split, like many other historic cities, was too often understood as a container of fixed

values, almost "frozen in time". The lack of evaluation as a vital part of the conservation procedure can lead to oversimplification and to false "solutions" of problems. We have recently witnessed contrasting approaches to conservation – from an almost romantic reconstruction to strict conservation, with no changes allowed (cf. the guidelines put forward by the Ministry of Culture in the 2010 listing of the historic core). It seems that conservation is not advancing, but undergoing cycles and often repeating old mistakes. Some mistakes could be avoided with a multidisciplinary approach and an open dialogue among the stakeholders.

Culture is a process, not a set of things with a fixed meaning. Values-centered conservation acknowledges that values – and therefore ideas of cultural significance – evolve over time <sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the concept of community-based, transsectorial conservation is far from being recognized by the central administration or by local decision-makers <sup>2</sup>. They are probably the category of stakeholders that is the most difficult to influence or educate.

While most of other stakeholders have a lasting interest in conservation and enhancement of the historic core, the interest of the politicians is limited by their term of office. Activities within the framework of heritage conservation are usually time-consuming and require a vision and a permanent commitment by all stakeholders. Therefore, a necessity is being felt of a vision and a durable cultural policy coordinated on the local, regional and central levels.

Back in 1979, the historic core was inscribed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage sites according to the usual practice of the time – without well defined borders, without a buffer zone, and without a management plan. Thirty years later, the making of a comprehensive management plan was not only an urgent need, but also an obligation according to the new UNESCO standards.

A management plan for the historic centre of Split has recently been produced in order to secure a long-term, sustainable protection of cultural values of the place, coping with the impact of growing tourism. The objective of the Plan is to preserve the Spirit of the Place (*Genius Loci*) by minimizing conflicts between cultural values and stakeholders' values, while recognizing a need for development and change. The Plan proposes a new model of management, in order to improve the planning and coordination of activities that aim at better quality of life of its inhabitants and of the economy [3].

We are convinced that, in order to make the Plan sustainable, it is very important to achieve consensus and understanding of its scope and objectives. That is why the City organized a series of round tables for different stakeholders, involved in the issues concerning the historic core. Interestingly enough, the Management Plan has become a political issue because these discussions about the Plan were used as a platform to criticize the overall situation in the old city core, but also the inability of the local government to cope with the problems of running the city in general, and the lack of adequate democratic procedures in making strategic decisions.

However, even before the Management Plan for the historic core of Split is officially adopted, the City has initiated several projects in line with its proposed action plan. Some of these projects have been finished, others are in progress.

Following the recent removal of the signage which disfigured the facades of old buildings and spoiled the overall ambiance of the historic core, a new information and presentation system was put in place. Small and unobtrusive panels were mounted on facades with bilingual (Croatian and English) information about the meaning of street names and directions toward the main

landmarks, about individual listed buildings and about the businesses located in small streets off the main pedestrian routes (Figure 1). Apart from the great improvement in the orientation and information of visitors, the new signage has changed the way in which the local inhabitants perceive old buildings which had previously often escaped their attention and whose value had been mostly unrecognized.



Figure 1. New system of signalization in the historic core of Split.

A plan for improvement of accessibility of public spaces and most important historic buildings is currently being prepared.

A series of studies of infrastructure in the historic core has been prepared, or is being planned. The historic core of Split, being a living place for 17 centuries, is crossed by infrastructure of all kinds and age, starting with an extensive sewage system of vaulted channels from the Roman period, which is blocked by a thick layer of organic deposit, and has only partly been explored and surveyed.

Planning, implementation and maintenance of infrastructure (above or underground) can have a big impact on the built heritage. Leakage of wet infrastructure may cause stability and conservation problems, in addition to the nuisance to inhabitants and visitors.

Excavating for laying sewage and water supply pipes is an intervention in the archaeological context, and can cause conflicts with archaeologists who sometimes wish to excavate large areas, before the location of new lines.

In order to raise the public awareness, a great number of conservation projects from the past 30 years have recently been presented in a publication and a large exhibition<sup>4</sup>. Although much effort has been made during the recent years in restoration of the historic core of Split, some of the difficult issues have not yet been properly addressed.

It has proven hard to influence local authorities to put the emphasis on improving living conditions and on the maintenance of urban infrastructure. In a transition economy such as Croatian, the general view, both on the national and local levels, is that the same rules apply for individuals and the society in general, namely that the short sighted investment producing quick gains of profit for the individual is also good for the country or the local government. The long term investment, producing sustainable benefits for the community, is seldom found on the agenda of the local authorities. It has proven hard to influence them to put the emphasis on improving living conditions and on the maintenance of urban infrastructure in the historic centre.

Historic buildings are primarily perceived as tourist attractions and economic resources, but relatively very little money generated from tourist and other activities is being re-invested in the historic core. Conservation activities are usually considered to be luxuries, especially when leaner times force a reassessment of priorities.

Our built heritage has a reputation of being a burden to the owners and the community. Restoration is indeed a costly operation, especially after many years of neglect, with poor or nonexistent maintenance. However, historic preservation is much more than nostalgia; it should be recognized as a powerful tool for economic development and community revitalization, creating new jobs, increasing tax revenue, raising property values, and encouraging community reinvestment<sup>5</sup>.

Today, we are in a position to reconsider our approach to conservation, and make a fresh start with a changed perspective.

In order to display the basic principles which should be followed in everyday practice, such as conservation rather than restoration, the use of traditional materials and techniques, emphasizing the maintenance of properties and reconstruction of urban infrastructure, conservation of key buildings such as the Cathedral (Diocletian's mausoleum), the Baptistery (the Temple of Jupiter), the

Golden Gate and the Peristyle has being used as good practice examples.

## 2. Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace

The restoration and rehabilitation of the Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace is described as one of the most significant and the most extensive projects in the historic core of Split since its inscription on the UNESCO's World Heritage List 30 years ago. Started in 2004 as a stone cleaning operation, after a two-year survey of the as-found condition of the Roman colonnade and the surrounding buildings from later periods, it developed into a complex project including archaeological, geophysical and geo-mechanical research, consolidation of foundations and upper structures, cleaning and conservation of stone, plaster and other materials, lighting and presentation of this multi-layered monument.

### 2.1. Review of the conservation and restoration works

The Peristyle is a complex architectural unit that includes both the Roman period structure and the façades of the buildings from the later periods that surround the imperial square. The vaults of the ancient porticoes that once stretched along the Decumanus and the forecourt of the cathedral, once Diocletian's mausoleum with the periptery, are also considered to be a part of the Peristyle. In the northeast, the unit is completed by the Chapel of St Roche, and in the southwest by the elevation of the Grisogono Palace.

Because of the great extent of the zone covered, the project of the restoration and rehabilitation of Peristyle was divided into a number of phases, each one of them corresponding to one segment of the space. The first phase of the project encompassed the northern part of the eastern colonnade. During this stage, the methodology of conservation and restoration works was developed. However, each segment of the Peristyle is specific in the issues involved in conservation and restoration procedures. Crucial for the solution of these complex problems was the very close cooperation and the constant dialogue between the team of experts that took part in the project. The execution of the project was confided to the Croatian Conservation Institute. Along with the group of stone conservators from the Stone Sculpting Section of the Croatian Conservation Institute – Department in Split, a whole team of experts from various specialized areas took part in the project: architects, building engineers, structural engineers, geologists, chemists, archaeologists, art historians...

First, a precise diagnosis of the as-found condition had to be set. Two types of soiling were identified on the stone surfaces: inorganic soiling (black crusts and dark sediments) and biological growths. There were several types of damage to the stone blocks: erosion caused by



the rain, stone flaking and powdering caused by soluble salts, structural damage caused by metal corrosion and by human action. Some buildings had serious problems with the statics. In earlier restoration operations, some inappropriate materials were used.

The operations carried out at the Peristyle were extensive and would deserve a paper of their own<sup>6</sup>, so only a basic review of the conservation-restoration works is given in this paper (Figure 2).

All the stone surfaces were inspected in detail,

with a stone carving hand tools. On the upper surface of the cornice, a triangular covering of mortar was made, and on it a cladding of lead sheeting was placed, which made sure that rainwater fell in the proper way. The new lighting elements were placed on the lead coping. Finally, the salient parts of the colonnade were rendered to make sure that there was an appropriate fall for the draining of rainwater and a spiky protection system was installed to prevent birds landing and remaining.



Figure 2. Peristyle of Diocletian's Palace during the conservation-restoration operations (July 2009).

photographed and described. Organic dirt was removed with a combination of mechanical and chemical methods, while the basic method for removing the black crusts and dark coatings was laser cleaning. Desalination was carried out, and places where the stone had flaked very much were subsequently strengthened with acrylic resin. The final protection of the stone was done with a mixture of ethyl silicate and acrylic resin (Figure 3). Portland cement mortar was chiseled out of the joints between the stone blocks. The joints were then filled with acrylic-lime mortar. Lime binder was injected into the structure of the walls. All metal objects anchored in the stone were removed. The iron clasps on the upper surface of the cornice of the Roman colonnade were replaced with new clasps, of stainless metal. The old concrete reconstructions were all removed. The cracks were injected with epoxy resin. Following the principle of minimum to moderate intervention, reconstructive operations were done with artificial stone and stone patches (Figure 4). In the reconstruction of large items of damage, reinforcing of stainless metal was previously installed.

The final working of the reconstructed parts was done

## 2.2. EDUCATIONAL AND ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

Although the Croatian Conservation Institute was in charge of the project, the Conservation-Restoration Department of the Arts Academy of the University of Split played a key role in it. In 2004, the Stone Sculpting Section of the Croatian Conservation Institute – Department in Split had only one conservator, Marin Barišić. Mr. Barišić was the first head of the Peristyle project. As he was also teaching at the Conservation-Restoration Department of the Arts Academy in Split, he offered the students who specialized in stone conservation the opportunity to acquire practical knowledge at the Peristyle. After their degrees, most of the students were hired by the Croatian Conservation Institute and continued to work on the site. Today, the Stone Sculpting Section has a team of more than ten conservators. The current head of the conservation-restoration works at the Peristyle, Ivan Sikavica, has been involved in the project from the very beginning. In 2004 he was still a conservation-restoration student at the Arts Academy in Split.

The conservation and restoration works at the Peristyle have entered their final stage: it is anticipated that the



Figure 3. Conservation works on stone (June 2009).



Figure 4. Conservation works on stone (June 2009).



project will be completed by 2013. After this, introduction of monitoring system and regular maintenance are planned. The maintenance of historic structures after their conservation and restoration does not have a long history in Croatia, but this is an area that, in the future, has a potential of creating new jobs. The art conservation programs and the conservation service have to work together on developing long-term strategies, as these jobs require highly specific skills.

Apart from being an outstanding opportunity for young experts to gain hands-on experience in the most contemporary conservation and restoration procedures, the Peristyle project, together with other significant restoration works within the historic core, showcase the best conservation practice, and support the local economy by creating new jobs in conservation and in some other areas, as well.

The cult Split Café Luxor, located on the west side of the square, is an example of how property value is raised by conservation and how investing in the rehabilitation of historic sites attracts new uses, both commercial and cultural. Café Luxor occupies the ground floor and the first floor of the Cipci Palace, which peers out from between the columns of the Roman colonnade. The Cipci Palace shows outstanding complexity; like many other buildings in the area of the Peristyle – and in Split in general – this palace was not designed by a single architect and built in a single campaign, but was created by

the annexation and extension of several buildings through the epochs. The façade of the Cipci palace was included in the second and the third stage of the Peristyle project. After the renovation of the lower part of the façade in 2006, and the renovation of the interior, the Café Luxor got a new glow – and many new clients. The unique atmosphere of the "washed" imperial square soon became a tourist attraction, bringing even more clients to the Café. While tourists visit Luxor to enjoy the unique atmosphere of the square (Figure 5), the citizens of Split are attracted by events such as the *Café Scientifique*, a project of the Association of the Alumni of the Faculty of Electronics, Engineering and Shipbuilding Split. This is a series of public lectures where scientists, over a cup of coffee or a glass of wine, present scientific topics in a non-scientific language<sup>7</sup>.

In the renovated Palace Skočibučić-Lukaris, located in the southwestern corner of the Peristyle, the future Museum of Ecclesiastical Art will be housed, additionally enriching this area and contributing to its status. The museum is also expected to bring new jobs.

Croatia's economy greatly relies on tourism. In that respect and in a wider sense, cultural heritage can be seen as a capital asset. It generates revenues and employment, but also requires investments.



Figure 5. Waiters of Café Luxor serve beverages to guests sitting on the stairs surrounding the square.

## References

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- <sup>2</sup> Council of Europe Framework. 2005. Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society. Faro: Council of Europe Framework. Internet. Available from: <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/199.htm> accessed 30 October 2011.
- <sup>3</sup> Solar, Giora, and Shahar Solar. 2009. City of Split Historic Core Management Plan. Croatian version available from <http://www.split.hr/fgs.axd?id=5174> and <http://www.split.hr/fgs.axd?id=51745>; accessed 30 October 2011.
- <sup>4</sup> Marasović, Duško. 2009. Historic Core of Split. Studies – Programmes – Realized Projects, Rehabilitation of the Historic Core, no. 5.
- <sup>5</sup> State of Washington. Department of Commerce. Historic Preservation. Internet. Available from <http://www.commerce.wa.gov/site/411/default.aspx>; accessed 30 October 2011.
- <sup>6</sup> Sunara has presented the Peristyle project nationally and internationally: International Institute for Conservation Congress in Istanbul, Turkey, 2010 (poster), TRAINMONHER in Morelia, Mexico, and Split, Croatia, 2008 (lectures), Restoration Fair Restauro in Ferrara, Italy, 2006 (lecture), Conference Use of Lasers in Conservation and Conservation Science in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2005 (lecture and posters). Three exhibitions about the Peristyle conservation-restoration works have been organized in Split: in 2010, 2007 and 2005.
- <sup>7</sup> More information is available from [http://ubs.fesb.hr/ubs/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=blogcategory&id=35&Itemid=53](http://ubs.fesb.hr/ubs/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogcategory&id=35&Itemid=53); accessed 31 October 2011.