

Obiettivi - english



Origins, development guidelines and objectives.

Three questions to the architect and project manager of 'Romanesque Monferrato - A white mantle of churches?', Federica Emanuel.

What are the factors that have given rise to this project?

Whoever knows the area of Monferrato is profoundly aware of the beauty and integrity of this landscape and the uniqueness and richness of its artistic heritage.

The area has been preserved by the absence of industrialization and monoculture and so has retained the original mosaic of vineyards, woods and cultivated fields that now make it authentic and in tune with its past. A land that at the same time has the breathtaking views that make those that cross it feel immersed in a unique, precious landscape.

Reinforcing the special character of this area are dozens of Romanesque churches (pievi), including some real artistic gems, that dress these hills like a real "white mantle of churches?". Thinking back to Medieval times, we can imagine the small villages that once surrounded these churches, set along the ancient paths of travelers and pilgrims which are still usable today, and the many castles that dominate these villages. Further still, the area is home to an asset of extraordinary historical and artistic value, included in the itineraries of the European Council: the Rectory of Santa Maria at Vezzolano. And to top it all off, excellent wines, local produce and cuisine can be found throughout the area.

This project stems from the perception of great room for growth in the potential for tourism that this area has. The pillars are all there and therefore it just took the coming together of a small group of technicians, administrators and representatives from local associations to give birth to the common network that promotes this project, with the support of Compagnia di San Paolo.

What are the first actions you intend to take?

We hope that this new network starts a process that will strengthen over time by remaining open to stimuli and opportunities that arise in the area, and welcoming exchange with European and international networks.

Thanks to the contributions received by the Compagnia di San Paolo for the years 2014-2016, we chose to begin this journey by prioritising two areas: raising awareness amongst inhabitants of the area about the richness of their cultural heritage, and strengthening the touristic imagery of this area.

More concretely, we believe that to protect and love a place as adults, we must learn to do so as children. In line with this belief, the Ecomuseum Basso Monferrato Asti has initiated a programme for the years 2014/2015 and 2015/2016 dedicated to nursery and primary schools in the area, encouraging children to discover the Romanesque heritage and its landscape.

The Foundation Giovanni Gorla will curate a training program aimed at residents, young people and local tourist operators on topics related to the enhancement of cultural tourism enhancement based on concrete tools and successful case histories.

Contemporaneously, the Giovanni Gorla Foundation will curate a communication campaign to reinforce the online and offline identity of Romanesque Monferrato through the creation of a dedicated website, presence on social networks, press activity and other targeted actions. The call, addressed to all tourist operators in the participating municipalities, is to report events and demonstrations related to Romanesque buildings and the landscape of this area in order to substantially increase its visibility.

Some promotional videos, for the web and events, will be produced by Alessandro Rota.

How do you imagine the future of these places?

As Salvatore Settis teaches, we firmly believe that the valuation of the assets of Monferrato should be based on two fundamental principles: a value to be preserved must be used and protected in its own context.

If these wonderful churches have been preserved until now, it is because popular religion was kept alive even when people who once lived around these churches moved to safer places (our present-day villages). Today it may be culture, alongside spirituality, that can enliven the activity of these places. We hope that more and more people, local and not, can recognise the opportunity in these spaces for quality cultural proposals, distributed throughout the year, respectful of the fragility of the locations. These activities, in addition to enriching the quality of life of the area's inhabitants, could also increase the cultural 'offer' for tourists.

There is great room for innovation in the creation of an increasingly experiential and immersive cultural tourist format. Successful examples abound. It is true that the drastic cut in public resources devoted to culture imposes a total rethink of funding structures, but the British cultural model shows us how, when presented with quality proposals, private companies willingly participate in the coverage of costs.

The quality of the environment and the landscape is another other key factor, not only for the effective protection of Romanesque heritage, but also for local development, economy and tourism. Councils and engineers have a great responsibility, as do individual citizens. Just one abhorrent building would be enough to spoil the magic of reaching a church on the hilltop and stopping in silence to admire the surrounding landscape.

Fundamental to any tourism development project however are not only local resources, but also infrastructure. Local spaces must be increasingly equipped to receive and accommodate specific target groups of tourists, such as families, cyclists or lovers of relaxation and silence. Bars and shops, open at weekends, offering typical products must be ready to suggest places to discover in the surrounding area . For the system to work, every point in the network must be prepared to point their visitors in the direction of another local business or place of interest.

The most successful tourist destinations are those who over the years have been able to build a clear and attractive image of their territory. This means that, even before visiting a place, a whole series of stories have aroused in the potential visitor a desire for discovery. The more this storytelling ability is shared between local agencies and operators the more, thanks to the web, satisfying the results can be.

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