HUMAN RISK AND THE CONSERVATION OF URBAN HERITAGE. AN INTEGRATED APPROACH FOR SUSTAINABLE ENHANCEMENT AND FRUITION

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Abstract

Planning and conservation policies in many European historic cities are fragmented and short sighted as they result mainly interested to the short term economic advantages of tourism. Similarly, the enhancement of the cultural heritage has direct consequences on the conservation of artefacts, in as much as it increases fruition, which implies a greater risk of decay due to the greater numbers of visitors and their interaction with the artefacts and the environment in which they are located. The so called "human risk" still nowadays is not comprehensively studied and one can observe a lack of methodological approaches capable to monitor the state of conservation of urban historic sites while in the meantime the increased mass tourist pressure in these sites alters their characteristics and inherent values.
Starting from these premises, the aim of this paper is to propose an integrated methodology, still lacking from relative literature, dealing with monitoring urban conservation in relation to tourist impact and place identity. The methodology elaborated and experimented uses two complementary approaches. The first one consists in monitoring the impact of mass tourism with respect to tangible and intangible transformations, such as uses, buildings' state of conservation and urban quality of historic sites. The second approach refers to a dynamic urban analysis and design which consists in the application of the PlaceMaker method and software devoted to both the detection of elements which constitute the contemporary identity of the places and identification of appropriate project interventions. Furthermore, suitable recommendation for sustainable enhancement and fruition of historical places will be proposed.

1. Introduction

The negative impact of mass tourism on the conservation of urban heritage and the impoverishment of central places from their traditional civic values is

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apparently evident and had already been noted in European and International Reports (Council of Europe 2000; ICOMOS 2002; ICCROM 2005; Drdàcky and Drdàcky 2006). The historic centres of many European cities (Brussels, Prague, Barcelona, Rome, Venice, etc.) are besieged by masses of tourists and are being depleted (of their traditional civic values) and degraded (growing occupation of public property, disproportionate increase of commercial activities, filth, bad smells, overcrowding). Moreover, the authorities in charge of preserving these monumental sites often authorise restoration work with dubious results; while, planning and conservation policies in many European historic cities continue to be fragmented and short sighted as they result mainly interested to the short term economic advantages of tourism. Similarly, the enhancement of the cultural heritage has direct consequences on the conservation of artefacts, in as much as it increases fruition, which implies a greater risk of decay due to the greater numbers of visitors and their interaction with the artefacts and the environment in which they are located. The so called "human risk" still nowadays is not comprehensively studied and one can observe a lack of methodological approaches capable to monitor the state of conservation of urban historic sites while in the meantime the increased mass tourist pressure in these sites alters their characteristics and inherent values (Boissevain 1996; Frers, Meier 2007; Gunn 2002; Haldrup, Larsen, Urry, 2004; Urry 1995).

Starting from these premises the initial aim of our research was to identify criteria and define a method for monitoring mass tourist impact in historic centres with respect to their conservation in physical and functional terms as well as regarding their inherent intangible values. The methodology elaborated and experimented comprised two complementary approaches. The first one was a monitoring survey consisting in a systematic collection and planimetric representation of data. Based on survey forms -- similar to the one produced by pioneers of urban conservation, such as Donald Insall for Chester in 1966-1968 – our study documented the transformations historic cores were undergoing in relation to three major aspects: buildings' uses and state of conservation; urban spaces' uses and state of conservation; place identity and traditional intangible values. Our methodology was confronted with recent research on the subject (such as for example the European 6FP project "Picture") and two major fields of experimentation were undertaken: one, regarding small historic centres of great value but relatively abandoned and not attracting mass tourism and the other regarding the historic cores of major cities under constant tourist pressure. The respective case studies were Asolo (situated in North east Italy) and Rome, whose results were presented in the ISUF conference in Guangzhou (Porfyriou 2009) and in Recife-Brazil (Porfyriou-Sepe 2011). Within this context was also elaborated and financed by the European Commission (Culture Programme 2008-2010) the project "Preserving places. Managing mass tourism, urban conservation and quality of life in historic centres" which under the co-ordination of Heleni Porfyriou (CNR-ICVBC) promoted a more broad comparison, on these issues, among six European countries (Porfyriou 2010).

The second methodology elaborated was a dynamic urban analysis and design approach based on the PlaceMaker method and software, which identifies the cultural resources and the identity of places – introducing also visitors' participation through questionnaires -- and consequently projects interventions for their conservation (Appleyard 1981; Hague, Jenkins, 2005; Lynch 1960; Massey, Jess, 1995; Sepe 2009). The PlaceMaker method gathers, processes and reconstructs the data deriving from nominal, perceptual, graphic, photographic and video surveys, and compares these data with those provided by an analysis of expectations, traditional cartography and the two questionnaires administered to local inhabitants and users. The method has been experimented in urban sites of historical relevance all over the world, including the Ramblas in Barcelona, the Oxford street in London, the Kitano-cho area in Kobe and the South Broadway Theatre district in Los Angeles.

In this paper, the case study of the Trevi-Pantheon itinerary, situated in the historic centre of Rome, will exemplify our integrated methodological approach and its results.

2. The history of the case study area

The case study area has a very long history going back to the Roman empire when Pantheon was built by Marcus Agrippa as a temple in the first century BC while later in the 7th century it was consecrated as a church. Also Hadrian's temple, situated along the itinerary has being built by a roman emperor in 145 AD, and transformed later in the 17th century by the famous architect Carlo Fontana into Dogana di terra. Only the Trevi fountain is of a more recent origin. In fact it had been completed in 1762 giving to the small square in front of it a fascinating and originally scenic image. Both Pantheon square and the one in front of Hadrian's temple have been used through centuries as market and civic places where commerce and public manifestations were held. The urban form of this old part of the city had not been changed as the Nolli map of 1748 shows when compared with the Pio-Gregorian urban cadastre of Rome of 1820s. In these squares community life has taken place, through the centuries, consecrating them as places of cultural, artistic and historical importance and as places of collective identity and civic pride, where the sense of belonging grows and takes root. In 1991 the municipality of Rome announced a competition for the "re-qualification" of this central part of the city . The aim was to close it to vehicular traffic and create a pedestrian itinerary (Fig.1) connecting Pantheon square with Trevi Fountain -- that is two of the most famous and visited monumental sites of the eternal city! Furthermore, another experimental project was proposed for the same area: the pedestrian itinerary had to be specially equipped for blind people (with pavement, infrastructures, and appropriate signs). The direct beneficiaries of these interventions should have been, according to the municipality's aims and declarations, the citizens of Rome, whose life should have been improved by less cars (due to more pedestrian streets), cleaner air, better streets and infrastructures.

These conditions should also have had a positive effect on the conservation of this monumental part of the city (Ufficio per la Città Storica 2002).

Fig. 1: The Pantheon –Trevi itinerary in the historic centre of Rome, Italy

The project was supported by the special funds of the 2000 Jubilee and had finished on time. Since then, in the last 10 years, the numbers of tourist had grown at an exponential level in Rome (and in Italy more in general). More than 30 million people per year are calculated to visit Rome (on the basis of hotel presences); which means that on a daily basis 100.000 tourists are present in the historic centre. The Pantheon square and Trevi fountain are probably together with the Coliseum and the Vatican area the major attractions of the city. Connecting Trevi to Pantheon with a pedestrian street (initially specially designed for blind people) implied creating a privileged itinerary especially attractive to tourist groups and flows; who in fact immediately adopted as the only real-direct connection between these two monumental spots of the city. It's amazing that nobody in the municipality's offices (where this project was conceived) seems to have thought of it and nobody either considered to monitor its effects, which have been devastating for the area, as our research has shown.

The aim of our experimentation at this point was threefold:

1) to monitor tangible and intangible transformations related to the increased tourist presence;

2) to evaluated the effects of increased tourists' flows on the monuments' both material and historical connotations;

3) to develop techniques for mitigation and control of tourist impact and risks having as a final aim the development of recommendations for a sustainable enhancement and fruition.

3. An integrated methodology for monitoring tourist impact

As it has already been mentioned the methodology elaborated for monitoring the Pantheon – Trevi area utilised two complementary approaches: one static, the other dynamic. The first approach consisted on three interrelated surveys mapping changes and transformations with respect to: the uses and functions of the buildings along the itinerary; the state of conservation of their facades and the urban quality of places. In other words a systematic collection of data along the itinerary was undertaken for each building in two forms created on purpose (Porfyriou, 2010a).

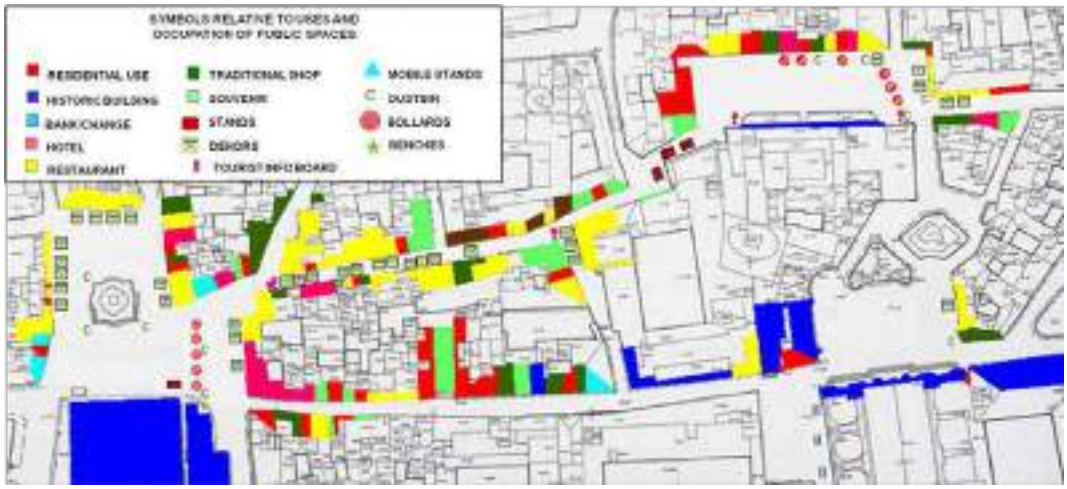

Fig. 2: Planimentric representation of uses and occupation of public space, along part of the Pantheon – Trevi itinerary

The first one documented the uses and the occupation of public space directly related to the building's pertinence. The second one documented the state of conservation of the building's street façade, particularly in relation to the various changes of uses the ground floors were undergoing. This documentation has then been utilised in order to create three thematic maps representing the: i) the uses and functions to which are destined all buildings along the itinerary; ii) the occupation of public space, both legal and illegal along the street (Fig. 2); iii) the state of conservation of the facades of the buildings along the itinerary. Finally a contextual representation of buildings' state of conservation in relation to their functions and to the use of public space of their pertinence summarised all three thematic maps (Fig. 3).

Fig.3: Contextual representation of buildings' state of conservation in relation to their functions and to the use of public space of their pertinence

The second approach implemented, that is the dynamic urban analysis and design consists in the application of the PlaceMaker; that is a method supported by a software (Sepe, 2010a) which comprises eight phases, five of analysis and three of design (Sepe, 2007).

With respect to the analysis phases, the first one is anticipatory, namely an analysis of expectations which introduces the core surveying methodology of PlaceMaker with the aim to describe, using any type of instrument or tool of expression, all information or ideas relative to the area in question, known prior to the first inspection of the site. Then follows the second one which comprises five surveys: namely the *denominative* - consisting in the collection of data regarding constructed elements, natural elements, transportation mode, people -, the *perceptive* - consisting in a survey carried out on perceptions related to smell, sound, taste, touch and visual sensations, and on the global perception, focusing on the localization, type, amount and quality -, the *graphical* - consisting in sketching the places according to a visual-perceptive standpoint -, and the *photographic* and *video* survey of the whole study area, taking care to record facts rather than an interpretation of the places. The third phase involves the analysis of traditional cartography of the selected sites. The fourth phase is a survey related to the questionnaire administered to visitors of the area in order to gain an idea of the place as perceived by those who are not involved in the study and are not

specialists in related fields, but only perceive the site as users, at various levels, such as inhabitants, passer-by, tourist. Then, the last phase of analysis is that of assembling the collected information. In this phase, we test the maps produced, the congruence of the various collected data, and choose the useful elements to construct the final map of analysis. We then have three design phases. The first one is devoted to surveying identity resources in the study area, through three distinct measures: the identification of the identity potential, the identity problems and the identity quality. In this phase the identity resources available for the project are represented as a sort of map of intents, the first step for the construction of the complex map for the identity project in question. The second one is a survey of the identity resources now addressing the users of places, locals, passers-by and tourists, to whom a questionnaire designed to elicit information emerged from the previous phase is administered. Finally, the overlay of data collected during the previous phases is represented in a complex project map, that identifies also the project proposals. This map is the last step in the design process, where the information contained in the complex map of analysis, after being filtered and transformed into resources, gives rise to proposals for the construction and enhancement of a sustainable place identity.

The PlaceMaker method is supported by its software (Sepe, 2006b, 2010a) elaborated on purpose in order to relate appropriately and communicate easily all the information collected during the different kind of surveys (Fig. 5c). With the PlaceMaker software it is possible to represent and interpret the places in an area through interactive dynamics and by creating multimedia maps (Ayeni et al., 2004; Graziano, 1999; Marinelli, 1999). Places are represented by inserting symbols and elements into maps connected to multimedia schedules that can be continuously updated. The prime users of this tool are: urban planners, administrators and citizens.

The main characteristics of the software are: flexibility, facility and rapidity of use, strong graphical impact, and indexing of the results. Its flexibility makes it possible to store, manage, modify and update in a particular format the data required to create the multimedia schedule, connected to the symbols placed on the maps. The database contains all information collected in the different phases of the PlaceMaker method as well as those related to the state of conservation of buildings and monuments in relation to their functions and to the use of public space of their pertinence -- that is the information collected from the first static monitoring survey of the proposed integrated methodology. With respect to the indexing of the results, the symbols created to construct the complex maps can be connected to a database and translated by PlaceMaker into numerical indices in order to allow the calculation of data useful for the study of the sustainability of the places in question, such as liveability, well-being, etc.. Furthermore, the map can be adapted to local changes by updating both multimedia database and symbols.

3. The outcome of our survey regarding tangible and intangible transformations

The data of our case study -- collected in the above mentioned maps -- was analysed and evaluated in relation to the original situation of the area, before the realization of the re-qualification intervention by the Municipality. In synthesis the results of our monitoring reveal that human risk and the impact of mass tourism on the state of conservation of buildings is relatively low, while totally absent is the impact on urban morphology, as revealed by a comparison between historic cartography and today's urban form. The urban form of this antique part of the city has not in fact changed at all, during the last 200 years, as one can see when comparing the Nolli map of 1748 or the Pio-Gregorian cadastral map of 1820 (Fig.4) with a contemporary Google map. Significant, on the contrary, is the impact of mass tourism on the quality of life in the area and on the quality of these places, considered as symbols of collective identity; in other words on the related to the area intangible values.

Fig. 4: The Pio-Gregorian urban cadastre of Rome (1820s) is superimposed to the Nolli plan (1748) and compared with the city plan of the area today

More specifically the outcome of our survey shows that: commercial activities, specially restaurants and bars, have been extremely increased; often substituting previous commercial activities related to residential needs, such as shops for fruits and vegetables, bakeries etc, or other neighbourhood services. While most souvenir or commercial shops don't sale anymore local products but instead products of a global market. Furthermore the commercial activities related to restaurants, bars, gift shops, souvenirs etc., gradually increased their occupation of public space (both in legal and illegal terms) with tables, umbrellas, stands, benches, dustbins, fences, flower vases, etc (see Fig. 2). The increased presence of tourists attracted also other itinerary activities, such as street actors and street sellers, taxi and carriage parking, gladiators, police cars, etc, all of them occupying in a savage way the public space. We also observed that tourist masses increased in an exponential way along this street; thus destroying the new

pavement put by the municipality, when it re-qualified the area. The urban decay of all spaces along the itinerary is quite evident, both in material terms (graffiti, occupation of public space, bad pavement, congestion), social (expulsion of residence and related functions) and civic terms (civic activities have less space to be expressed as they have to share it with mass tourist presence). The street has changed in fact from a residential to a tourist one: overcrowding, filth, unqualified occupation of public space, disproportionate increase of commercial activities.

In reference to the effects of increased tourists' flows on the monuments' both material and historical connotations we identified two major approaches. Through the analysis of the state of conservation of the facades of the buildings along the street (see Fig.3) one observes numerous interventions of maintenance and of external bettering of the facades, often realised by commercial activities occupying the ground flour of historic buildings of minor architectural prestige, which give a fresh colour to the façade of the new activity they open; a plaster, often of slightly different colour with regard to the original building colour, thus resulting to a patchwork which contributes negatively (instead of bettering) the appearance of the whole area. In parallel, important historic buildings get restored. These interventions often related to buildings bought by tertiary or commercial activities, such as hotels or banks, which want to add prestige to their investment, at times look exaggerated in their restoration or pose questions regarding the city's colour plan or relative conservation regulations (as for example in the case of the building in Piazza del Pantheon which turned from ochre to light blue after its recent restoration). The question of a city's colour plan as a method for contributing to urban conservation and to a city's visual integrity is a characteristically Italian approach. The debate was in fact initiated in the 1980s in Rome by Paolo Marconi and others in reference to issues of authenticity (Muratore 2010). It was later developed, influencing European debate, involving diagnostic methodologies, such as stratigraphic analysis and colorimetry, with the aim to define a scientific approach (Conference Proceedings 1990). However, although colour plans are integrated in Italian conservation legislation, their application remains an issue, as the Trevi –Pantheon case study reveals.

In brief, the outcome of our investigation sounds an alarm on three major aspects: i) enhancement policies (or re-qualification ones) devoid of a comprehensive vision and lacking impact monitoring may produce negative results and may become counterproductive, as the case of Trevi –Pantheon has shown; ii) conservation policies are more effective if not restricted to the restoration of a single building or monument, but to the historic centre in its integrity, comprising both tangible and intangible heritage; iii) human risk or in other words mass tourism has a negative impact on the vitality of a place, on its quality of life and on the identity of places stratified through centuries - in other words it conditions the "city of people" more than the "city of stones".

4. Mitigation techniques and recommendations for a sustainable enhancement

Among the techniques for mitigation and control of tourist impact, that our case study had posed as its third aim, we identified the following interventions which are derived from the “complex map of analysis” (Fig. 5a-b) and exemplified in the “complex map of project” (Fig.6).

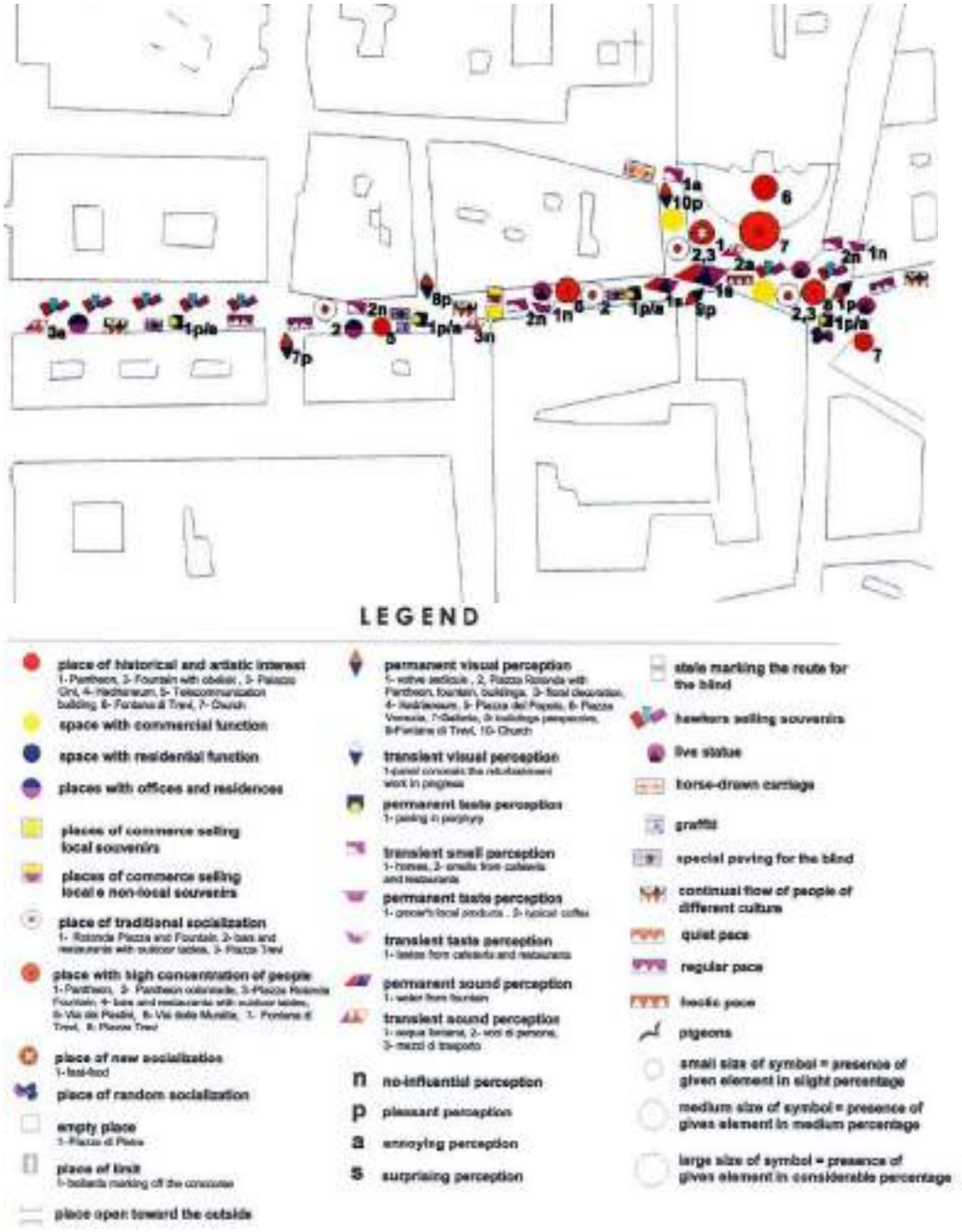

Fig. 5a-b: Detail and legend of the complex map of Trevi-Pantheon

Fig. 5c: PlaceMaker software

The first one regards restoring traditional activities, such as handicraft, or other local products, including high-quality goods, thus rescuing vanishing skills and eventually reducing the commercially undifferentiated global goods present in tourists' streets, which contribute to feelings of displacement. Similarly, the design of a coordinated project for shop signs and windows, particularly for the streets which connect major squares may ensure a greater balance in the composition of spaces and organisation of the various activities, eventually discouraging the creation of additional fast food shops and outlets. The second intervention envisaged aims to create alternative routes between the monumental squares of the Pantheon and the Trevi fountain, thus reducing tourist pressure on the pedestrian street introduced by the municipality. This solution may well prove both educational and sustainable: it would attract visitors' attention to buildings, churches, architectural features, religious icons inserted in facades, and other cultural and historical aspects which pass unobserved in a hasty visit under the pressure of mass tourism.

Other interventions identified consist in giving identity to what is transitory by: creating lightweight multifunctional structures to be introduced at the focal points of monuments and street commerce, variable in extension and dimension, opening and closing, where artistes, hawkers, living statues and others can create their own fluid spaces within a dynamic, light grid which nonetheless constitutes a framework. This form of urban décor can be equipped for various functions including multimedia. Similarly, by virtualizing the graffiti or visitor's path with multimedia guides alternative and attractive solutions can be introduced which may distribute in more thoughtful way tourist pressure and related activities (Sepe, 2010b).

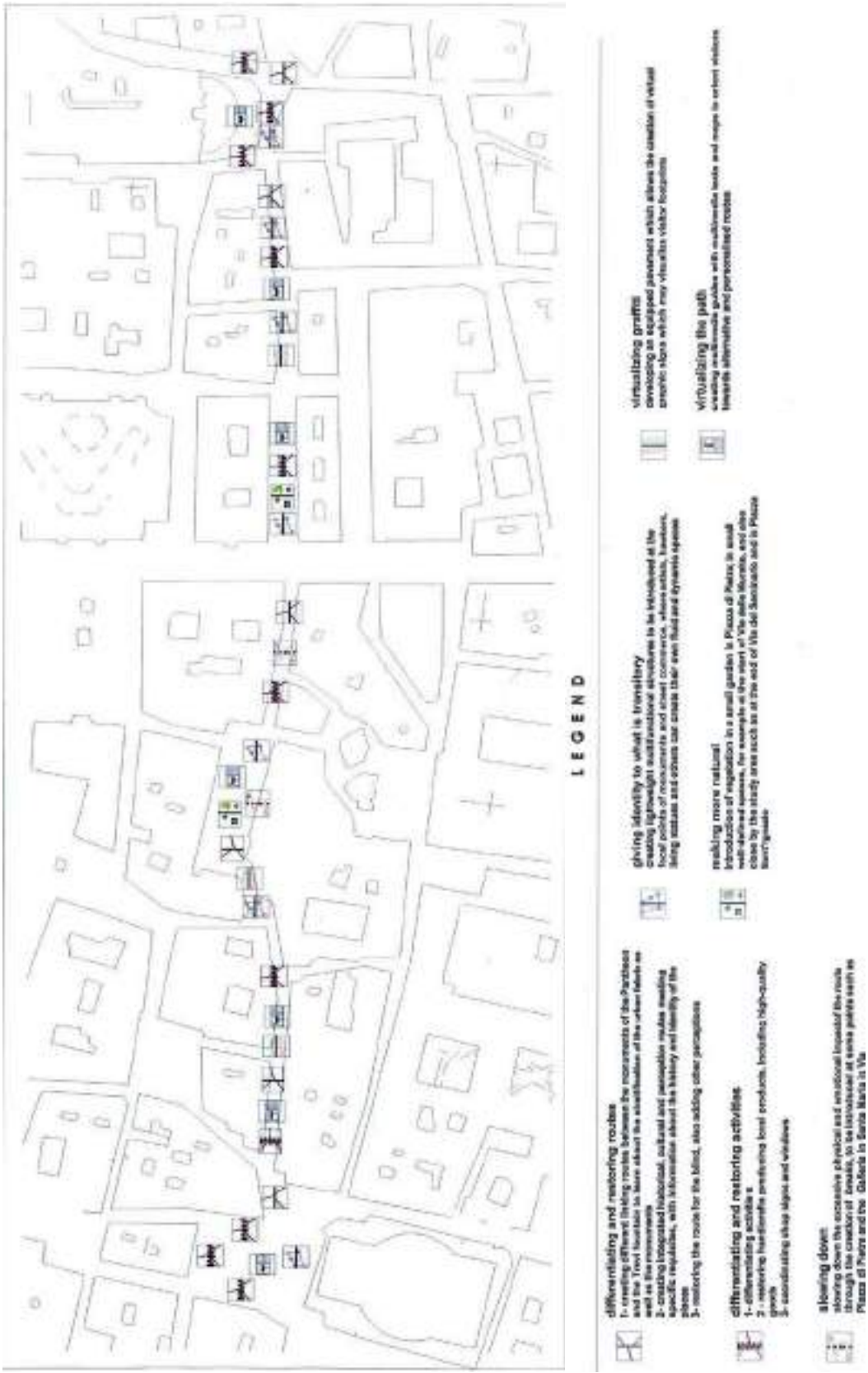

Fig.6: PlaceMaker, complex project map and caption

5. Conclusions

The case of Rome is not unique, as we all know Venice (Montanari and Muscarà 1995; Van Den Borg and Costa 2004) and many other European historic cities (Porfyriou 2010) are besieged by the constant increase of mass tourism and are being depleted (of their traditional civic values) and degraded (growing occupation of public property, disproportionate increase of trading activities, filth, bad smells, overcrowding). However not dissimilar is the situation in many other countries as for example in China (Anderson 2005; Cina 2005). Therefore, if we wish to safeguard the places of collective memory, we must immediately commit ourselves to finding ways to reconcile the needs of the tourist industry with those of life in historic centres and the conservation of their monumental cores. In this respect the final recommendations resulting from this research are of two kinds regarding a set of principles and a number of suitable tools to obtain-maintain place-identity.

The principles identified as the outcome of the various experiments carried out by using the PlaceMaker method, (Sepe, 2012) are specifically related to the place identity enhancement and are the following:

1. The identity resources of a place have to be protected and enhanced so as to give the place in question a distinctive character.

2. Place identity has to be determined with ad hoc methods.

3. Attention to context is to be understood from a social, environmental and urban perspective.

4. The maintenance of buildings, roads and public spaces should be programmed.

5. Places should perform functions which do not cause intensive use that can damage site quality.

6. Local business should be enhanced.

7.Users of a site should be questioned about place identity during both the survey and design phases, taking different needs into account.

8.Place identity should be monitored periodically.

9. Vehicle use in areas with heavy pedestrian throughput should be avoided or slowed down.

10. The safety of users is paramount.

11. Proper enjoyment of the physical characteristics and natural beauty of the place should be considered a priority.

12. Respect for place identity should be considered a sine qua non within the framework of a project's quality requirements.

The suggested tools to obtain-maintain place-identity are the following:

1. to introduce coordinated urban policies instead of fragmented ones;

2. to diversify tourist offer instead of simply increasing the incentives of demand;

3. to promote monitoring of enhancement policies and of tourist impact instead of repeating an urban policy without testing its results.

It should be kept in mind, however, that although the above mentioned tools should remain unaltered the principles elaborated should be considered in a dynamic way, thus keeping in pace with the increasingly rapid rates of change and allowing for a constant updating related to new procedures and requirements in site design.

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