

URBAN II Evaluation

Project Case Study: Civic Museum of Marble
(Carrara)



1.0 Introduction

The project related to the restoration and the re-arrangement of the “Civic Museum of Marble” found in the centre of Carrara. The “Civic Museum of Marble” was established in 1982 by the Municipality of Carrara, with the purpose of documenting and promoting the local culture around marble and represents the first public museum in the city, acting as a key catalyst for the city's wider regeneration.

Since 1982, the Museum has become the centre for the city's cultural revival as well as one of the most well known museums in Tuscany and a national and international reference point for the archeological and artistic marble sector. About 10,000 pieces have been displayed in six indoor sections (totalling 1,930 m²) and one outdoor area (of 7,670 m²). The exhibition includes marble processing machines, marble samples and artistic artefacts made from marble.

In more recent times, the Museum has needed an improvement to the building and a re-arrangement of the exhibition rooms. Besides the physical deterioration of the exhibition space, there has also been a slow decrease in visitor numbers and therefore a loss of revenue funding for the museum to rely upon. It was estimated that the Museum visitor figures had decreased by about 10%, from a total of 8,171 visitors in 2005 to 7,958 in 2007.

The need for a restoration project was under discussion well before the start of the URBAN II Carrara Programme in 2000. Because the Museum is located at the city entrance and is in close proximity to the Tourism Territorial Agency, local residents had for a long time been asking for a project that strengthens the role of the Museum and gives the city a stronger positive identity.

The URBAN II Carrara Programme allowed not only for the project to be funded, but also developed the Museum into a broader strategy of urban renewal and tourism promotion. The projects inclusion in the Programme came from the awareness that marble is an important resource for the city as well as an understanding that improving the museum could be a turning point for the tourism sector which had been declining over the years. It also could reinforce the identity of the city to being the most important centre for the Italian marble industry, whose extremely valuable white rock has been used since the Roman Age to construct the countries many monuments and sculptures spread all over the Italian landscape.

The Museum restoration was planned in synergy with the general programme objective of Measure 2, which related to the re-launch of cultural tourism in the area. The purpose of

the intervention is not only the restoration of the Museum building and its re-launch at national level, but also making it the centre of all activities and major events related to marble at the national and international level.

2.0 Implementation

The restoration works started in summer 2007 and by the following summer the Museum was re-opened to the public. The total cost of the intervention amounts to €716.557,65, of which €456,732.61 (64%) was financed by the ERDF. The URBAN II funds supported:

- The re-arrangement of indoor exhibition space;
- The renovation of the Museum's external area and green spaces, and the re-arrangement of the collections displayed in these spaces;
- The renovation of the lighting system;
- The set up of a multimedia room.

One of the key aspects of the project was the creation of a new multimedia area. Inspired by the Audiovisual Museum of the Resistance (located in Massa Carrara), the Municipality Administration wanted an innovative representation of the History of Carrara and of its marble industry, through a sequence of audiovisual presentations.

The selected operator for the audiovisual element of the project was Studio Azzurro Produzioni from Milan¹, one of the most important and influent art video groups in Italy. The multimedia space (measuring about 300 squared meters) was divided into four sections, two of which were operated by a touch screen system and the other two with an optical sensor (activating when people come into the room).

In order to guide the visitors in the multimedia area and to facilitate their learning of the history of Carrara, different thematic routes are provided in this space: the “lunense” marble; the city of Carrara from the Middle Ages to the Modern Era; the day of an excavator; the industrial archaeology in Carrara; the Contemporary Art.

The restoration of the Museum also allowed for the transformation of an area of the facility for conferences and cultural events.

¹ Studio Azzurro is an artistic research group, established in 1982. The artistic production is variegated: video-rooms, sensitive and interactive spaces, theater and film performance, small multimedia museums, thematic exhibition planning.

3.0 Results and Impact

The intervention of the Museum has been finished but it is not possible yet to calculate its effects in terms of tourist growth because it has only recently been completed. However, the number of visitors is higher today compared to last year, but it would be too early to claim that this growth is a direct consequence of the restoration project funded through URBAN II.

However, several factors suggest that the project will contribute to a significant increase of cultural tourism in the area in future. Firstly, through the project the Municipality have been encouraged to think about the overall strategy and tourism offer for the area, especially now a significant amount of funding has been targeted at this sector of the local economy.

The Museum offer is now at a level which will attract tourists from a wider area, from outside of the immediate sub-region. The museum previously tended to only attract people from neighbouring areas meaning the catchments area (and the tourism market) was limited.

The Municipality's commitment to the museum represents an assurance to the sustainability of the future management of the Museum. In the past the Municipality has tended to 'loose interest' in the museum which has greatly increased the risks for continuation for the project. Because the new museum has stimulated more interest and pride in it from local people, this will further act to encourage the Municipality to stick to its responsibilities.

The strong synergy with the interventions financed by the Measure 2.2 "Improvement of Cultural Heritage", in particular with the International Biennial of Sculpture, contributed to the increased visibility of the Museum and to the improvement of the quality of the tourism offer overall for the area.

The introduction of a multimedia area in the museum also allows it to enter into a national level network of multimedia museums (among which are the Museum of the Formigine Castle in Modena and the Museum of the Mind in Rome, both arranged by Studio Azzurro), that attract a specific type of tourists interested in this new exhibition technique, between engineering technology and arts. As a result, the multimedia aspect of the Museum has a direct effect on the increased city visibility at the national level.

In the long term, the stakeholders forecast a steady growth of visitors as a consequence of the restoration project. Visitors will come from a wider geographical areas, from academic

groups within the region, from sector and industry experts and from the important foreign visitor market.

There were little views about how the project has impacted on deprivation issues within the city. Certainly the Museum acts as a key employer for the area and the majority of the staff live nearby (in more deprived areas). Stakeholders also said that the tourism sector in general employs many individuals from poorer areas and because the Museum brought in more visitors then associated businesses (hotels, bars etc) will see an increase in employment numbers.

Stakeholders also said that they wanted to build on the strengths of the area and not always fund projects which addressed the negative issues of the city. Supporting positive aspects of Carrara was a conscious decision by all those involved and made it slightly different from other nearby regeneration schemes. The fact that the main beneficiaries of the museum were visitors or tourist was also well recognised by stakeholders but again they saw tourists as the key drivers in the local economy which needed to be harnessed if Carrara was to help itself out of poverty and relative deprivation. The museum tackled, head-on one of the driving forces behind the decline of the city- its poor image.

4.0 Identified Good Practice

Several factors have contributed to the success of this intervention and to the identification of this project as good practice:

- The synergies with other interventions promoted under the Measure 2.2 “Improvement of the Cultural Heritage” (in particular the International Biennial of Sculpture) has allowed for a critical mass of activities to be developed that interact with one another to have an overall 'uplift' in the tourism offer.
- Linked to the above, the Municipality did not simply tackle the improvement of the museum but also thought about how to improve tourism in the area over the long term. The museum was part of a wider strategy and URBAN encouraged the Municipality to think about the broader agenda of how tourism can encourage economic innovation within the area.
- The strategic decision to introduce the multimedia sections is another factor of success. The advantage of the audio-visual equipment is that it can transmit a subject that could be of limited interest to many in an interactive and stimulating way. If the project had simply improved what was already in the museum without adding to it through this new

route, the impact was seen to of been less. The quality of the work, implemented by a well-known operator, significantly contributed to the success of this component.

- Finally, the involvement of a number of stakeholders at the beginning of the project and in the formulation of the strategy was seen as being key. All the key actors of the URBAN partnership and all the representatives of the Monitoring Committee were involved, so that a range of ideas and points of view were considered when it was time to decide on the allocation of resources for the overall project. The Office for Culture, within the Municipality Administration, also took strong leadership in the formulation of the project at the same time as involving a wide range of partners views and opinions.