EXPLOITING THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE PIEMONTE REGION

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ABSTRACT

The Piemonte Region has been engaged for years in projects aiming at safeguarding and taking full advantage of its local cultural heritage. It has equipped itself, for that purpose, with special tools. At a legislative level, the Region introduced legislation to provide financing for a census of important architectural and historical municipal buildings with a view to restoring them to their original value. At a technical level, the Region has made use of special software to manage a catalogue of the historical-artistic and demo-ethno-anthropological heritage called "Guarini Patrimonio Culturale". It was developed by CSI-Piemonte and distributed free of charge in a stand-alone version to organizations which present specific projects regarding activities of this kind. It allows users to catalogue property to various levels of detail, permits geo-referencing on regional maps, and links to the image of the object. The results of these projects to catalogue and/or carry out an inventory of the cultural heritage in the region form the basis of the regional database for the local cultural heritage. The databank is then used to extract data in order to illustrate such properties and sites on the Regione Piemonte Public Administration website. One particularly interesting feature concerning information-retrieval and assessment of the local cultural heritage is the opportunity to view facts and figures about cultural sites together with other information about the territory as a whole. Within the sphere of the EU program "Interreg IIIB Alpine Space" (the "Culturalp" project to raise awareness, and restore the value, of historical towns and cultural landscapes in the Alpine Zone), a Database of Historical Sites and Settlements (BDIS) was set up. As a result, territorial data available from the regional information system was integrated with information about historical towns and their cultural heritage (urban plans and projects currently in force, manuals, studies, photographs, etc.). A web tool was developed to allow the integrated consultation of the informations, and enable users to carry out analyses and surveys while taking into account a variety of economic and territorial factors, as well as different cultural, historical, social and environmental aspects concerning the sites. Studies are currently under way to assess the potential use of innovative techniques, such as laser scanners, to examine architectural sites of interest in order to integrate catalogue information and territorial data with information useful for their restoration and conservation.

Piedmont's cultural heritage is a complex in which the use of technology can provide an situation laid down through the centuries over essential tool for good planning. the whole region. It is a tangible physical witness, the remains of the intelligent and In order to better understand the complexity creative workmanship of past generations, of Piedmont's cultural heritage, to encourage though they also show clear signs of their strategies for rationalising activities and the fragility and deterioration. It is a practical use of resources for cultural artefacts, the example of how conservation, culturally regional administration has adopted the motivated utilization and an understanding of necessary legislative and IT tools. Beyond the protection are valid concepts, which in duties stated in Art. 117 of the Constitution themselves constitute a project. Given the and in the articles of the new Code for extraordinary number of objects and the great Cultural Assets and the Land Heritage, the variety of the cultural heritage, it is a project Piedmont Regional Council makes use of specific local laws (Regional laws 58/78, 24/90, 31/95, 34/95, 35/95)[1] which allow it to identify emergencies and particularly significant displays of Piedmont's cultural heritage and to carry out surveys aimed at recovering and utilizing assets.

Parallel to these legislative tools, the Piedmont Regional Council has organized the development of special software tools for cataloguing cultural artefacts and the management of land information.

Cataloguing, carried out according to the methods of the Ministry for the Cultural Heritage, and related activities, in cooperation with the regions, comes under the heading of ordinary management of museum collections and constitutes a common tool for understanding the cultural heritage preserved throughout Piedmont.

To support cataloguing, the Piedmont Regional Council has developed the "Guarini Project". Following the first version of the software, developed by CSI-Piemonte as part of the project "From the Alps to the Pyramids", the Council selected the Guarini software as the regional IT tool for cataloguing its cultural heritage items (D.G.R. n. 368-37612 dated 3.8.1994). The various Piedmont bodies involved in managing this cultural heritage (museums, cultural associations and institutes, local authorities) can use the Guarini software for free if they present a specific cataloguing plan to the Region and sign up to a special convention.

Over the years, the efforts of the management of the Cultural Heritage Ministry have expanded from its original historical-artistic interests into neighbouring disciplines: historical archives and historical library heritage.

In support of these new projects, the original Guarini cataloguing software has been developed in three specialized modules for the various types of heritage: Guarini Cultural Heritage – Guarini Archives – Guarini Library Heritage, which together form the IT System of the Piedmont Cultural Heritage.

In the Guarini Cultural Heritage module one common procedure

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[1] R.L. 55/78: Promotion of the protection and development of the cultural heritage and activities R.L.31/95: Institution of the Piedmont Ecomuseums
R.L. 34/95: Protection and utilization of historical stores
R.L. 35/95: Identification, protection and utilization of the architectural heritage within municipal boundaries

allows the cataloguing of many different types of cultural artefacts: archaeological, architectural, historical-artistic, demo-ethnicoanthropological, according to the standards of the National Institute for Cataloguing and Documentation (ICCD).

The procedure includes all the useful cataloguing functions (input, modification, research, printing, etc.) and allows the linking of multimedia files and catalogue records and the georeferencing of cultural sites. In order to manage the physical movement of items in and out of museums for restoration, exhibitions, loans, etc a specific "movement" module has been developed as complementary to the cataloguing module.

The Guarini Cultural Heritage software is currently installed and used by 170 bodies.

On the basis of the Guarini Cultural Heritage module, which constitutes the "standard" cataloguing version, two smaller modules have been developed (MS/Access), to support the campaigns for a census of historical stores and architectural assets.

In 2005 the cataloguing of Piedmont's historical stores in Turin (caffè, patisserie, chemists, etc), begun in 1998, should be completed. The records produced will be utilized for promotional campaigns, editorial projects and published on the internet.

In addition to this, every year the Region finances the campaign to carry out a census of buildings within municipal boundaries, in order to protect and make good use of them (according to Regional Law 35/95).

This law deals with the acquisition of analytical information about the region's building heritage and is directed at those municipal authorities whose General Regulatory Plan (P.R.G.) has identified the buildings worth safeguarding.

The complete census documentation of each local authority (technical files, graphic designs, photographs, notes for the protection and utilization of census items) will constitute the "architectural heritage catalogue" to be approved by the City Council.

The census was begun in 1996 and, as of today, 629 municipal authorities of Piedmont region out of 1206 have taken part and More than 20,000 cataloguing records have been financed.

The cultural heritage cataloguing records constitute the cultural IT System of the Piedmont Region, for an integrated utilization of the region's cultural heritage: this system will be soon accessible on the region's website. Interrogating the database yields a synthetic description of the item, a picture and details of the body or authority responsible for it.

Apart from the above activities, the Piedmont Region has been heavily involved on two other fronts in these years: the developing and participating in international projects for integrated cultural heritage databases. The Region, in collaboration with the Universities of Piedmont, gives financial support to quality training initiatives to strengthen professional degree courses (for archivists, librarians, anthropologists, etc.) in order to create closer ties with the workplace in the cultural world.

Within the initiative of the EU "Interregional IIIB Alpine Space Programme" the project "Knowledge and utilization of the Historical Centres and Land of the Alpine Space – CulturAlp", which was completed at the end of 2004, had as its principal aims the safeguarding and utilization of cultural heritage through a deepening of the understanding of the typical characteristics of alpine settlements and the organization of sustainable integrated political initiatives that take account of the different territorial factors.

The activities of the project can be divided into various groups which deal with the organization of the available information on cultural heritage, the integration of new information and the creation of a new tool to analyse and support such decisions.

The Piedmont Regional Council in collaboration with the Departments "Progettazione Architettonica" and "Casa-Città" of the Faculty of Architecture of the Turin Polytechnic, has collected the existing data on historical settlements from a sample of about 150 Piedmont municipal councils.

The data from these councils was checked in the Regional Information System. Then searches were carried out on manuals, building regulations and detailed sector plans (plans for building colours, plans for urban fixtures –street lighting – pavements – trees etc.) regarding the protection of the environmental and architectural heritage in alpine areas and on the relevant regional laws and regulations. Moreover, graduate studies and theses on typical types of buildings in the relevant areas were also collected.

In about 300 historical centres of regional interest, photographs were taken of selected characteristic places. In some cases, 360° panoramic pictures were taken, in others where routes of particular interest were identified, sequences of photographs were taken.

As part of the CulturAlp project, a database of Historical Settlements (BDIS) has been created to store the above information and a web tool created to access it. The database has been designed to allow for the future insertion not only of a greater quantity of information but also different types data. In the same way, it is possible to create new functions in this tool as and when necessary.

Using CulturAlp it is possible to find information on historical centres and cultural and environmental heritage in a way that integrates such data with territorial data (roads, water resources, local boundaries, digital land models, 3-dimensional aerial photogrammetric images from the year 2000, etc.).

All the information is georeferenced: every geographical level is made up of territorial items linked to alphanumeric data.

The BDIS contains "multiform" data (vectorial, 2-dimensional raster images, documents, pictures). To access them it is necessary to render the required geographical level "active", select one or more items in the map and activate one of the search or query functions.

At the moment the database has the following functions:
• map navigation ("zoom in", "zoom out", "previous zoom", "pan", etc.) and visualization at predefined scales;
• search queries at the "current" level;
• consultation of files containing the alphanumeric data related to the municipality shown on the map
• "simple searches (queries predefined by town, historical centre, thematic area, documents and images);
• "complex" searches (query builder for creating query strings using logical operators);
• spatial analysis (buffer);
• printing of maps and images (IGM, CTR and aerial photographs of the floods of the year 2000).

At a municipal level it is possible to consult information concerning environmental location (classification of altimetrical zones), geographical location (Province, Mountain Community), structural system (as classified by Prof. G.Vigliano – Turin Polytechnic -1979-80), plans and photographic documentation. Moreover, it is possible to consult images showing sections of maps of old town centres (IGM, CTR, 3-D aerial photogrammetric images). A classification of both tools (manuals, building regulations, detailed sector plans) and bibliographic documents (graduate studies and theses) has been carried out. The information available in the tools files are: geographical area, territorial limit of application, type of plan, title, year, organizer, author, product, annexes, contents (with eventual links) and search parameters. The files on studies and theses contain information on author, title, edition, type, classification, georeferencing, abstract and images. With

regards historical settlements, for the municipalities involved in the experiment, one can obtain information about their boundaries, the classification between the main and secondary centres and in which municipality they are located.

For all the Piedmont old town centres the ICCD data is available. This has been acquired and georeferenced from the historical IGM maps and from the census of the same period (name of historical centre, municipality in which they are located, whether it's the main part or a suburb of the municipality, ISTAT title, number of inhabitants of the historical centre from the most recent census and from past censuses, IGM panel containing the historical centre in the cases where a cartographic check has been carried out, etc.).

As regards photographic documentation, beyond the images themselves, there is information on where and in what conditions they were taken. With the aim of creating a "historical" photographic archive, such information is important for taking subsequent photographs under identical conditions so that they can be validly compared with previous ones and thus document any changes in the land or landscape.

The heritage items classified in the already cited work of Prof. G. Vigliano are all georeferenced:

• urban and archaeological heritage (remains of structures, sites, Roman cities, porticoed streets or squares, alpine centres, rural centres, etc.)

• environmental and architectural heritage (churches, monasteries, chapels, towers, castles, fortresses, palaces, mills, etc.)

The following information is available on items registered in the census carried out under Law 35: where they are and which municipality carried out the census.

The structure of the BDIS and the inputting of information supplied by the Piedmont Region were carried out by CSI-Piemonte. As part of the CulturAlp tool it is planned to provide for the inputting and updating of data directly by the Region and local authorities (following verification of the information by the Region).

The Piedmont Region, beyond the planning tools whose objective is the protection and recovery of the territory, intends, with Regional Law n.9 of 29 April 2003 – Rules for the functional recovery of rural buildings –to promote the protection and recovery of agricultural buildings.

Limiting the use of land goes hand in hand with protecting and utilizing the architectural heritage in rural areas which, with the change in economic conditions, in building techniques and materials, is changing its features especially in areas close to urban development.

The utilization and protection of those elements that characterise the Piedmont rural environment, which includes the historical "cascine" or farmhouses, logically passes through the documenting of the heritage that has survived urban growth and speculative building.

Such experience of the rural pre-existence, still to be seen in Piedmont, is the target of a specific census project, which was presented at the convention "Rustic is Better" and has already been the target of a previous regional initiative "A census of the isolated farmhouses of Piedmont"; the result of the work, still being updated, is available on the online service "Cascine del Piemonte" (farmhouses of Piedmont), whose aim is the publication of this information by modern methods.