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Viareggio, a report on the URBACT lead expert's study visit. 16th
February, 2009

First I would like to thank Franco Allegretti, head of town planning and environment and his team, especially Cristiana Bertucelli, for organizing an exciting working agenda devoted to URBACT Creative Clusters in February 16th, 2009.

This agenda comprised a study trip around the most outstanding projects in the city, a working lunch with the municipal staff involved in the URBACT Creative Clusters thematic network [including the town councillor in charge of spatial development, assessor Pier Luigi Cinquini] and the first meeting of the Viareggio Local Support Group.

Well, I see a **Creative Strategy for Viareggio with a very physical dimension**, deeply embraced with both the city map and the recent and on-going tangible flagship projects creating or reinforcing spatial landmarks. This approach lies in the following facts:

1.- The city is promoting a range of outstanding projects in a number of relevant fields for the city:

➤Related to tourism-leisure-culture.

A real challenge for Viareggio is to diversify the city as tourist destination beyond the sun&beach binomial. For instance, the city could offer an “urban experience” [such as in the happy 20’s in century 20th] reinforcing its waterfront, the “Passeggiata a Mare”, as an iconic space and handling the orthogonal city map and the natural spaces of the surroundings is a more active way. Sure, the renewal of the Eden theatre and the congress centre work in that way.

➤Related to carnival as mayor event in the city.

Carnival in Viareggio is rooted in the century 19th. It is symbolized in the figure of Burlamacco. The event is managed by the Foundation Carnevale di Viareggio. Behind the carnival there is a network of craft handmade workshops and creative people working in designing not just for the local carnival but for many other cultural productions nation wide: opera and theatre. The so-called "Parc della Cittadella" is a sort of thematic business park devoted to workshops related to carnival artistic production.

➤Related to the yacht building industry.

Viareggio is a world-class local production system in recreational shipbuilding industry [motoryachts and megayachts]. Only the private port of the local company Lusben [now in the Azimut-Benetti group] covers over 15,000 sq meters of water surface and moorings for about 40 yachts from 20 to 65 meters in length. The City Council is now planning a Technopole located just beside the harbour.

➤Related to culture.

The Torre del Lago's Puccini annual festival is an event entirely devoted to Puccini operas that it was inaugurated in 1930. In this area an open-air auditorium was inaugurated in 2008 as a key element in a wider project called "parco della musica", with high expectations for combining music learning and performances and nature. The "Foundation Festival Pucciniano" could play a wider role than today conducting this kind of strategy.

In addition, the Galleria d'arte moderna e contemporanea has been inaugurated in 2008, with more than 3.000 painting works, most of them coming from private collections in the city.

2.- the uniqueness of the Viareggio urban geography offers great possibilities to handle actively with the city map itself as an asset in a strategy on creativity.

➤Downtown Viareggio reminds to a sort of horizontal Manhattan, including its own central park. With this urban asset in mind there is a gap still to cover in terms of stimulating galleries, restaurants, shops... in the framework of a creative strategy to convert Viareggio in a landmark in Italy attracting creative people, entrepreneurs and firms to the city.

➤Beyond the restoration of the Eden theatre or the Centro Congressi, the Promenade di Mare demands a more extensive classical operation of waterfront revitalization, considering working spaces for the creative class, galleries and so on. A main street not just functional during Summertime but during all the year.

➤The area around the port is the heart of the city. Meeting point between the most innovative developments linked to the yacht building industry and the new tourist developments related to navigation. A meeting area between the Promenade and the cultural district. It should be the place to engine a creative Viareggio strategy.

➤Parks, green areas and public spaces have a more relevant role to play, as privileges scenarios for cultural and street life in a creative Viareggio.

➤The seashore of Versilia, the lake Massaciuccoli at the foot of the Apeninos [the same impressive natural landscape who inspired Giacomo Puccini]... is a superb natural environment where to context the urban creative Viareggio. This sort of recreational opportunities also for a strategy in eco-tourism complements perfectly with a renovated supply of Viareggio as a beach city.

3.- *The fact that the town planning office in Viareggio, headed by architect Franco Allegretti, is leading the participation of the city in the URBACT Creative Clusters network.*

➤ This reinforces the aforementioned physical dimension for a Creative Viareggio strategy. Although the participation of other departments in charge of economic development, culture or tourism has to be assured.

➤ The real challenge is to combine actively all this recent and on-going flagship projects on a cross-cutting strategy [Creative Viareggio] generating synergies beyond a simple sum of projects. For that the Local Action Plan for Viareggio should consider most of the five main sub-themes identified in the working programme for the URBACT Network on Creative Clusters.

➤ For instance, to provide facilities for entrepreneurs and the creative class [business incubators, artist residences...] already conventional in many cities in the same rank than Viareggio but still nonexistent in the city.

➤ As regards a strategy on place branding, may be it might be considered a supra-local one, at Versilia level, namely comprising Massarosa and Lucca. It could mean new assignments for the existing Versilia Agenzia per il Turismo.

➤ To enhance all kind of elements aimed at a more extensive interaction of Viareggio with the international level.

As regards the Local Support Group membership, we advise to take into consideration the association of the yacht industry, the hotel association, the association of the carnival craftsmen, Fondazione Mateozzi and the Managing Authority in the Toscana region. As well as some direct enrolment by creative local people and firms [Gionata Francesconi <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMFx-4vKpg4>, etc].

MIGUEL RIVAS - URBACT Lead Expert







