



FARO CONVENTION IN RESEARCH-ACTION – MISSION HIGHLIGHTS

Fontecchio, Italy

9-12 October 2017

Introduction:

The Faro Convention Action Plan, in cooperation with the European and Mediterranean Major Hazards Agreement (EUR-OPA), organised a Research-Action workshop entitled “*Community involvement in post-disaster heritage revitalisation*” in Fontecchio on 9-12 October 2017 with the participation of academics from eight countries, as well as representatives of civil society organisations and community members from the surrounding area of Fontecchio.

This four-day intense programme allowed academics to share their experiences and fields of study, meet the civil society representatives to discuss challenges, visit earthquake affected areas and spend time with community members to better understand the current situation eight years after the earthquake, in order to reflect upon the possible outcomes of the workshop. Accordingly, the working group:

- produced a draft charter on the key methodological concepts to be considered in heritage-led post disaster recovery efforts for increased democratic citizenship and participation;
- produced a draft charter on the use of the Faro Convention approach in post disaster recovery approach with specific observations on Fontecchio;
- identified topics to be focused on for the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage;
- will produce a selection of opinion papers on the topics of the research before the end of 2017.

The Faro Convention in Research-Action is considered a rich experience, as it reached out to multiple stakeholders including the Ministry of Culture, the regional administrators, municipality officials, civil society representatives and community members. The constructive cooperation between the local organisation HARP and the municipality was well noted, which also made the workshop very effective. The opportunity to meet the representative from the Ministry of Culture and community members in the context of the same event provided participants with a wider perspective on the same issue.

In addition, the Faro Convention team carried out a rapid assessment of the situation and activities at the local level in order to provide the local stakeholders with feedback for future actions.

While innovative community-based initiatives were introduced by the local organisations and associations, a number of challenges were discussed among participants.

During the workshops, visits and discussions in L'Aquila and Fontecchio, particular attention was given to the local situation in Fontecchio, which represents characteristics of a rural settlement with rich cultural heritage and a gradually decreasing number of inhabitants.

The purpose of this note is to:

- Share some observations on the situation in Fontecchio, as an example of a post disaster settlement that has been going through a reconstruction process;
- Offer recommendations for possible uses of the Faro Convention approach in Fontecchio and surrounding areas;
- Further examine the role of heritage in local development, risk preparedness & response and quality of life, which could be discussed with other CoE identified practices to develop the good practices and possible workshop models to be used in the Faro Convention Action Plan.

Findings:

- Inhabitants in Fontecchio express their concerns about the repopulation of the town, as well as the revitalization of community life, both socially and economically. Historically, Fontecchio experienced emigration of its population due to the economic situation, as well as the earthquakes that periodically occurred, the most recent one causing a significant amount of damage in 2009. While the reconstruction works are planned to be finalised by 2025, the number of inhabitants remains significantly below the available buildings. If not used in a timely manner, the empty sites will require further costly maintenance in the coming years.
- There is a well-established Special Office for the Reconstruction of the Municipalities of the Crater, based in Fossa. This office coordinates the reconstruction process in 56 municipalities and presents a governance model for eight homogenous areas since 2013.
- Although 4% of the three billion euros for reconstruction is allocated to social and economic development activities, this topic seems to be left as a secondary issue, which feeds into the difficulties around revitalization of community life.
- There are quite interesting and innovative initiatives/projects in Fontecchio, as well as across the Aterno valley; however, a synergetic, integrated and structured regional plan seems to be lacking.
- The community enjoys and participates in the local events. Although there has been decrease in population over the years, the community spirit remains solid where inhabitants are genuinely interested in mobilising for the benefit of their town. In recent years, there have been examples of individuals purchasing property and beginning to develop business ideas, however, this is more based on individual relationships rather than a built reputation and attractive business opportunities.
- The practice of *casa & bottega* (home and shop) seems to be a very appropriate initiative in the given cultural context and offers a good opportunity for the returnees and new-comers; however this should be considered as part of a larger plan in order to be sustainable.
- The town of Fontecchio presents itself as a great heritage asset with its history, architecture, inhabitants and the landscape. Although the place is rich of multiple assets, the dominant narrative of the town has been shaped around the earthquake, which is not abnormal, if one takes a walk around the town. On the other hand, spending a few days in the town allows visitors to discover the multiple narratives and rich heritage assets that Fontecchio has to offer.
- The presence of the elderly care centre with 140 residents, which serves the region, and the concept of the "*spazio della memoria*" -memory space (community museum, members of ICOM¹ Italia) seem to present opportunities for future development such as heritage and risk interpretation, transmission to young generations, etc.
- While the innovative ideas around local economic development and sustainable livelihoods are being discussed, the dilemma about who should populate the area may create conflict among inhabitants.
- Agricultural work in the surrounding area already identified local development schemes including "*borghi attivi*" (active villages) that present resources for the local economy.
- Lack of a shared vision, not only for Fontecchio, but also for the region, may constitute a problem for the long-term outcome of the reconstruction and revitalization process. There might be challenges of required human resources at local level if a regional plan is put into action. This calls for a constructive dialogue to identify common interests (e.g. norms for quality of life in the area) and gradually a shared vision that could channel all the efforts with available resources in a more systematic manner.
- The hospitality services including bed and breakfast, guidance, gastronomy, etc. is present and should take an active role in the planning process.

Recommendations:

- Fontecchio could begin a process of reflection with an integrated and intergenerational approach in order to decide about its **current image** and whether it wants to change or add to this image. Considering the size and location of the town among many Italian and European towns with similar historical and architectural characteristics, Fontecchio will need to distinguish itself from other places and give a reason for people to move to Fontecchio and/or visit. Existing local resources would be the greatest and most sustainable way of approaching this issue.

¹ ICOM – International Council of Museums / Italian National Committee.

- The dialogue process should also lay out the issue of the **demographic composition of the inhabitants** if the town begins to repopulate, it will need to be open to newcomers (including refugees and migrants) with consideration of issues around human rights and democratic participation. Having a long term plan would help the town to constructively work with the Italian government in their resettlement scheme and the role of Fontecchio in this process.
- Taking an active part in the **network of heritage communities** in order to exchange views and develop bilateral or multilateral projects might be useful to prepare the local community for interaction with diverse groups.
- Development of a **regional heritage plan** may help to put all elements in a perspective. This exercise requires an extensive consultation process with the community members in Fontecchio and in the region of the Aterno valley. The Faro Convention methodology may be helpful in this process.
- Community-based development of a heritage plan is an act of cooperation, therefore the plan is constructed together with community members, as opposed to being planned by a few and others participating in the decision making. It is important for community empowerment and ownership of the process where it essentially sets a **social contract** for the community members. This plan can be put forward for elected bodies to be considered in their action plans, which would also strengthen the democratic participation and active citizenship processes.
- The elderly care centre could be a good resource for local activities. This already well-functioning centre could increase its capacity to 250 persons with the planned reconstruction activities. In cooperation with the University of L'Aquila – Department of Life, Health and Environmental Sciences – a **small campus** (therapy centre; e.g. physical, occupational, herbal therapy, homeopathic, etc.) could be initiated in Fontecchio where students could live and follow their specialized courses, working with elderly and other vulnerable groups. In addition, some elderly people who are interested and able to work with herbs could become resource persons, which could eventually lead to an educational and income generation programme of this initiative.
Expanding on the previous idea, Fontecchio could also build on its narrative as a good practice/example town for post-disaster community revitalization – creating a **centre for community resilience and revitalization** with a specific focus on vulnerable groups. The resources of the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement might be useful to further reflect on this idea: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/europarisks/publications> .
- EUR-OPA could also be a source of inspiration for local and international actions through its network of Specialised Centres, in particular; the European University Centre for Cultural Heritage in Ravello (Italy) and the European Centre on Prevention and Forecasting of Earthquakes in Athens (Greece).
- Moreover, EUR-OPA could provide tools to **develop resilience of local communities** living in this risk-prone area by promoting risk culture among population and fostering citizens' active participation in disaster risk reduction. Teachers, children, women, elderly, vulnerable groups, local farmers, etc. should be involved in disaster prevention, preparedness and emergency planning in order to increase their resilience. The utilization of already initiated work around **sustainable local agriculture and local products** could be furthered within the context of the regional heritage plan. With an integrated approach, educational, economic, local know-how and social aspects of agriculture could be an essential part of this work where 70,000 inhabitants of the Aterno valley could constitute a local market for products from the region. In addition, with a good marketing strategy, some alternative and organic food oriented/socially responsible business circles could be attracted for short term local programmes.
- There seems to be solid **network of human resources** in the area, which should be tapped into in the development of new activities.

Actions:

- Set up a coordination centre for community revitalization (social development), which could be based in Fontecchio and work with a regional approach. This centre could either use the governance model of the Special Office for the Reconstruction of the Municipalities of the Crater or initially focus on a smaller area. In any case, it should have a regional perspective.
 - a. A physical open office space could be made available in Fontecchio with transparent terms of reference for the centre and its staff where it is perceived as a regional office for

- the region, like the office in Fossa. (The Strange Office initiative could be resourceful in the process)
- b. It is essential that this centre is a coordination office and does not implement actual projects, but rather ensures that projects are aligned with the regional heritage plan.
 - c. This centre could seek the use of 4% allocation for socio-economic development and also seek further funding from other sources.
 - d. The centre could initiate an extensive community consultation process with the objective of developing a shared regional vision and regional heritage plan. Please visit <https://rm.coe.int/16806ae6b4> for an example of a regional heritage plan. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/pcdk-publications> offers other publications on the same and similar topics. Also check two documentaries on Local Economic Development at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/pcdk-documentaries>, which explains the process in a specific context.
 - e. Based on the shared vision, all existing and new projects could be elaborated within the context of a regional plan where involved towns find their distinctive contribution to the process in a complementary manner. This includes the involvement of the artistic community, promotion of casa and bottega, etc.
- Initiate a process of programming with the Elderly Care Centre
 - a. Together with the University of L'Aquila, possibility of opening a therapy unit/department in Fontecchio.
 - b. Use of herbal therapy, homeopathy, etc as a vehicle to work with elderly (intergenerational work). A colleague from Austria is specialized in this issue and has already begun discussions with colleagues from Italy on a summer school idea on museology, which could be further explored.
 - c. Explore setting up the structure on this specialized issue and organise periodic workshops, conferences, training sessions, internship opportunities, etc.
 - Build on the scheme of Borghi Attivi – an integrated programme on agricultural organic produce, primarily targeting the Aterno Valley.
 - a. Education programme (intergenerational work groups working in the fields)
 - b. A regional production and marketing plan
 - c. Branding
 - d. Contact specialized restaurants, schools and households for a “farm to table” programme (L'Aquila, Pescara, Rome, etc.)
 - e. Interpretation centre of local know-how (handicraft, local heritage, territories, etc.) with a boutique
 - Based on the dialogue sessions with communities, discuss the idea of a centre for community resilience and revitalization with a specific focus on vulnerable groups. The first-hand experience of Fontecchio and surrounding areas could be turned into an opportunity on how to approach post-disaster revitalization. This initiative could take an international dimension in a relatively short period.
 - Focus on the encouragement of newcomers and the human dimension
 - a. Preparation of local communities (this should be an essential part of the dialogue sessions)
 - b. A heritage plan will also indicate the need for human resources
 - c. The second settlement programme of the Italian government will play a role in this process. Once identified, preparation for the newcomers will also be important and the necessary time should be dedicated to this.
 - d. Attention to social inclusion and human rights while welcoming newcomers. It is essential that they are not introduced as solely a work force, but rather an essential part of the community with their culture, heritage, dignity and identity. In order to prepare local communities for the presence of diverse groups, short term actions including workshops, summer activities etc might facilitate the interaction and preparation.
 - Keep active exchange with the Faro Convention Network (FCN) and organise bi-lateral or multilateral visits to exchange views and use the knowledge and resources already available

in the network. The FCN gathering in the first half of December 2017 could be a good opportunity to share your views.

- Continue to collect stories and record them over time through publications, documentaries. It is essential to set up the itineraries to share community life and stories with the visitors.
- Contact the Faro Convention expert, Prosper Wanner and the CoE Secretariat to introduce good practices to the Faro Convention Network.