

## **From knowledge of the past, towards opportunities. The enhancement of Venetian Villas.**

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### **Abstract**

The Institute for Venetian Villas, of which is now President Giuliana Fontanella, during its 55 years of activity, has promoted more than 1.900 interventions and public funding for more the €290 million and has cataloged a "system of values" made of about 4.300 buildings among them 400 of public owners. A cultural uniform heritage of "riches", an identity economic resource, typical of the Venetian and Friulian territorial "system". Most of these villas require significant activities of starting value, enhancement and preservation. The project CULTEMA propose to verify in practice, through open discussions and information gathering, possible courses of actions to encourage private investment in respect of cultural heritage. It was drawn up a list of 67 villas owned by local public governments and have been promoted specific relational focus with the participation of scholars and technicians. The results of this project have suggested the R.I.V.V. to activate a series of initiatives aimed at overcoming the logic of mere "cataloging" - understood as an analytical tool own by the protection - promoting the activation of a dynamic "Observatory" relative to the public Venetian Villas, which can become a tool for the study and planning of excellence initiatives.

### **The civility of Venetian Villas**

As argued more than fifty years ago - among others - pioneers like Silvio Negro, Renato Cevese, Giuseppe Mazzotti, Gilberto Muraro, Venetian Villas "not only reflect the fleeting whim to escape from the city, but end up hiring an independent and durable nature, ..., raising an eternal hymn to the wealth of the fields and the richness of the earth. "

The villa was born as productive agricultural center, at a time in history when Venice, industrial city ante litteram, commercial metropolis, which had directed since then the target market to the east, directs the prow of his ship inland, at the same time with a policy of dialogue and oppression, conquest and confrontation.

A territorial "system" arises, the so-called Venetian model, which leads to the definition of an entity which, surpassing the characteristics of an exclusively urban economy, it becomes the Region.

The villa is thus the outcome, in the "realized" level, of a planning activity that owns a civilization that projects on the territory a coherent economic strategy, according to an original model, though not indifferent to the influence of the Roman "villa" and then to the "yearnings for the holiday."

Over time the villa is increasingly becoming a "single economic unit" of noble kind, even if feeding a complex system of social stratification that has characterized the history of the Veneto Region.

A process that, on and off, it develops until the end of the eighteenth century, when the villa, with the advent of industrial civilization, is subjected to a sort of progressive forgetfulness and decline that took its peak after the two World Wars: arise of the Veneto Region of reconstruction first, that of the "hangars" then.

### **From the Agency to the Regional Institute for Venetian Villas**

The battle in defense of the state of degradation, in which the Venetian Villas were, began at the end of the forties of the twentieth century on the initiative of some worthy men of culture, local bodies and associations. They began a public information campaign on the need to recover this huge heritage: the villas recognizable, in fact, were more than 4.000, most of them of considerable size; monumental complexes consist of barns, oratories, gardens, rustic and artistic relief devices. A big "shows complaint" for years went to the major cities of Europe and America, from Milan to Rome, Paris and London, and in twelve other British cities, from Dusseldorf to Vienna.

Consequently, for the effect of the results of the work that public awareness had obtained, was formed with the Law n. 243 dated 6<sup>th</sup> March 1958, the Agency for Venetian Villas, as a consortium of Provincial Administrations for Tourism of the province of Belluno, Padua, Rovigo, Treviso, Udine, Verona, Venice, Vicenza, to which the State delegated the task of providing specific direct interventions of restoration and indirect - support individuals in the protection - through loans and funding.

After the dissolution of the Agency for the running of time, in 1979 the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia Regions gave birth to the Institute, since then, engaged in the promotion of knowledge and for the best use of the Venetian Villas. The conservation and enhancement activities have promoted in fifty five years more than 1.900 interventions and funding for more than 290 million. The two Regions, taking advantage of the Regional Institute, aim not only to ensure and support the preservation of the cultural heritage constituted by Venetian Villas, but also to promote the accessibility and the public use.

The Regional Institute for Venetian Villas, set up following regional Law n. 63 dated 24<sup>th</sup> August 1979, took over the task of providing, together with the owner or on behalf of it, the "consolidation, restoration, as well as to the most appropriate use, even by study and research, of the Venetian Villas" subjected to the provisions stated in part II of Legislative Decree n.42 dated 22 January 2004 and subsequent amendments.

Much of the heritage is concentrated in the Provinces of Treviso, Padua, Venice, Verona and Vicenza, as well as in Belluno Valley and along the rivers of Polesine. The Villas surveyed are 573 for the Province of

Venice, 195 for the Province of Belluno, 638 for the Province of Padua, 251 for the Province of Rovigo, 787 for the Province of Treviso, 676 for the Province of Verona, 683 for the Province of Vicenza .

The R.I.V.V., of which is now President Giuliana Fontanella, has cataloged a "system of values" consisting of 4.237 buildings of which 3.803 are located in the Veneto Region and 434 in Friuli. Around 86% are privately owned, 5% owned by ecclesiastical bodies and the remaining 9% of public property. A "system" of values, a united heritage of cultural "riches", but at the same time point, widespread and discontinuous, and therefore profoundly Venetian.

### **The Regional Institute for Venetian Villas and the European Project CULTEMA**

The numerous Venetian Villas of public property constitute a real specific identity economic resource, belonging to the territorial "system" of Veneto Region, whose process of development - that must be ensured in accordance with the provisions of the Code of cultural assets - cannot apart from an adequate cognitive capacity, from a test of the structural components, from an analysis of the potential transformative factors, the development of strategic plans and feasibility studies and the consequent activation of the appropriate territorial marketing actions, because of the specificity of the individual contexts.

Many of these villas require significant actions of protection and enhancement, able to "compete" for preserving the memory of the regional community, enhancing it with culture and economic development in all sectors connected. During 2012, the Veneto Region has therefore set up a working relationship with the Regional Institute for Venetian Villas for implementing the Community CULTEMA project, which aims to see concretely, through open discussions and information gathering, possible lines of action in this direction, to encourage private investment in respect of cultural heritage, identifying plans, programs and / or innovative projects aimed at the recovery and reuse of "heritage" Venetian Villa of public property.

The project was initiated with the development of strategies that can ensure the greatest possible involvement of operators potentially interested in the development of the project, with the elaboration of a list of 67 villas owned by local governments and promoting specific relational focus with the participation of scholars and technicians, representatives of the properties, members of associations and numerous professionals and interested economic operators.

The CULTEMA project has then allowed us to focus attention on the specificity of this unique network of public "infrastructures", made up of villas which are distinguished not only by the architectural, functional, historical-document and typological size, but also to the way in which relate to the services, to the productive and economic system and to the culture it expresses.

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Were collected useful information that allowed - starting from the knowledge of the past - the elaboration of 25 planning questionnaires of maximum accompanied by plans of feasibility and financial sustainability, containing evaluations about the possible outcomes transformative and therefore offer an opportunity to significant new investment opportunities.

### **From the catalog to the dynamic Observatory for Venetian Villas**

The results of this project have suggested R.I.V.V. to activate a series of initiatives aimed at overcoming the logic of mere "cataloging" - understood as an analytical tool own by the protection - promoting the activation of a dynamic "Observatory" concerning public Venetian Villas that can become a proactive tool of study and planning of excellence initiatives, enabling collaborative arrangements to accompany the enhancement process with innovative experimental proposals of re-use, which will ensure the observance of the law, but from which can produce a new dialogue, coordination and integration between the skills required of all institutions involved, the Superintendents, the Region and the owners.

It may be a test case in this direction the enhancement program of Villa Poiana in Poiana Maggiore, and the outcome of the competition called "Venetian Villas Prize for Europe", announcement for the financing of extraordinary interventions of conservation and innovative projects of enhancement, reserved to the villas selected by the CULTEMA project, to grow even more an integrated system, able to act as a driving force for recovery, along the roads of culture, of economic development in Italy and in Europe.

### **Author profile**

Carlo Canato, architect and doctor of law, since 2007 heads the Regional Institute for Venetian Villas.

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