

City wall parks in Italy: an opportunity to strengthen the city's identity

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Recent research on the European green belt has ignited consideration of some of the less extended, circular, green perimeters of historical centres as potential city wall parks. In most places, especially in Northern Italy, cities carry out renewal projects such as architectural restoration and functional recovery.

These projects include complete and well-maintained city walls, like in Lucca (the most famous Italian example) and Ferrara. City walls are a place to cultivate social relationships, places where people visit daily and spend their free time jogging, walking, or relaxing.

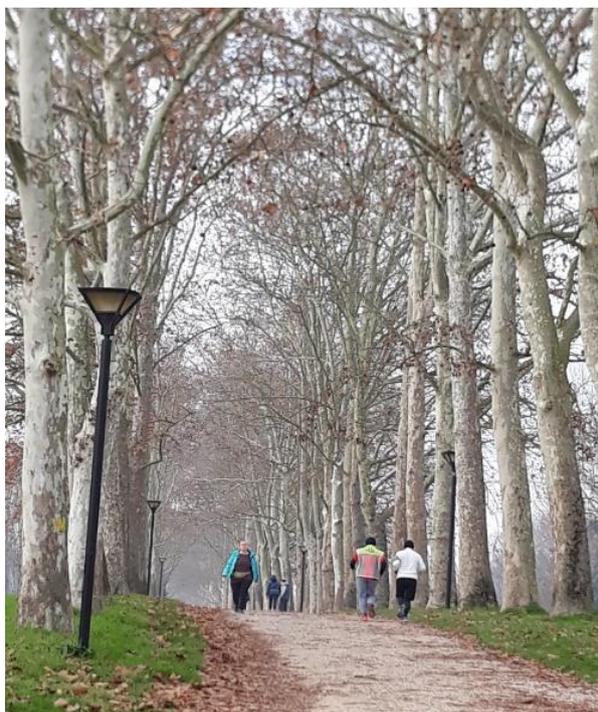
Lucca is a well-known representation of what these walls can offer as a cultural footprint. Frequented by citizens and tourists alike, they have been a lovely promenade since the 19th century. However, the weight of cultural and commercial opportunities has negatively impacted accessibility and the public experience of the walls.

During the last decade of the previous century, the local authority in Ferrara initiated wall renovation. Ferrara saw its historical walls built between the 12th century and the Renaissance. A beautiful path over the walls offers the population a better relationship with the city centre. Thanks to the European HICAPS program, historical information has been

placed along the walls, which enriches the experience, education, and appreciation of the city walls for local citizens and visitors alike. The city wall park also provides access to outside of town, including neighborhoods and more nature (like the green belt).

Fig.1 - City wall park in Ferrara

Source: Photo Donata Castagnoli



Modena used to have city walls, but they were finally destroyed at the beginning of the 20th century to allow for construction and infrastructure usage in the area. Therefore, human activity there is different; people used to frequent the walls as a promenade, and they continued doing so after the demolition

because there are a lot of trees and beautiful nature along the cycle path. Everyone still enjoys their leisure activities in that area.

For this reason, during the last decade, the administration decided to regulate the presence of street stalls that had increasingly popped up without permission. The association Legambiente and some citizens attempted to challenge the construction of permanent sites out of a fear that park conditions would deteriorate. Now, a few of them have a definite concrete site. As it turns out, most park users are happy to have them, saying they consider them a safe place to spend their free time.

Fig. 2 - City wall park (or Rimembranza park) in Modena

Source: Photo Donata Castagnoli



Verona's wall park provides Legambiente with a different role, where the administration is slowly defining parts of it, making it quite challenging to enjoy walkable paths for lack of signs, information, and illumination. Legambiente volunteers play an essential role in ordinary maintenance, gardening, cleaning, and publishing several books on the topic.

In Siena, an interesting European program called URBINAT is helping restore connectivity between the upper historical centre and the suburbs. Volunteers of the citizen's association "Le Mura" are now cleaning the walls and the paths that pass through the Green Valleys - the sudden urban nature surrounding the city.

In the reconstruction after the earthquake of 2009, L'Aquila has considered restoration of the medieval city walls as an opportunity to strengthen the citizens' relationship and identity with the place.

Many other examples are emerging these days, such as in Lecce, where the State and the municipality recently concluded a written agreement: the 'State cultural federalism' allows the local administration to restore city walls even when they were national and not local properties (as was the problem in Verona).

In conclusion, these and other renovation projects proposed for historical towns are an architectural revitalisation of ancient heritage to allow citizen access and public interaction. Above all, they also improve the use of the city centre (which is often a tourist area with little social connection for citizens), and they link the inner city to the outer town. People display diverse responses to these areas: enjoying a stroll, meeting people, attending cultural events, making it all worthwhile to work for better use of these vital spaces; the same importance has the involvement of citizens' associations in restoration projects.

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