



Genoa Pulsar effects: 1990-2004

The Pulsar effect in Genoa
From big events to urban strategy
 Lidia Bisio, Roberto Bobbio

38th International congress of ISoCaRP
The Pulsar Effect. Coping with peaks, troughs and repeats in the demand

FULL CASE STUDY

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Lidia Bisio (*), Roberto Bobbio (**)

The 1992 International Exposition as an opportunity for urban renewal

On December 1987, the BIE (Bureau International des Expositions) accepted the submission of the City of Genoa (Italy) to be one of the seats of 1992 International Exposition dedicated to the celebration of the 500th Anniversary of the discovering of the Americas; the city was designated to host a specialised exhibit on the history of sailing (*Christopher Columbus: The Ship and The Sea*), in connection with the main one, held in Seville. Genoa had hosted the 1882 International Columbus Expo: a cluster of ephemeral pavilions was then erected on a vacant land, located between the City centre and the modern western expansions, that had to wait fifty more years to be fully built and get a complete urban appearance.

The Expo designation was received with a mix of relief and frustration.

An international exhibition has always been an important vehicle of promoting the image of a city in terms of attractiveness and efficiency; more than ever in the Eighties, when European cities were experimenting hard competition. Genoa, Columbus' birthing place, could not miss *that* particular Expo; but to get the designation, even if for a secondary exhibit, was an hard job; this sounded as a ratification that Genoa ranked poorly in the hierarchy of medium level regional chief cities.

Therefore, the designation was not a matter of pride; anyhow Genoa, that since then had been regarded as a dull industrial city, could be presented as a tourist centre on the international stage. Moreover, there was a strong commitment in making 1992 Expo something very different from 1882 one: the Twentieth century Expo was seen as an opportunity for providing the City with new public spaces and facilities and for experimenting strategies of urban renewal pointed to launch a general revival that the City desperately needed.

The City conditions before the 1992 Expo

Just a few years before the 1992 Expo, Genoa had been in big troubles and under threat of a serious decay.

Before and immediately after World War II, Genoa had been the biggest Italian port (ranking first or second in the Mediterranean) and one of the leading industrial centres in Italy, national headquarters of the major oil corporations, outstanding in shipbuilding and steel industry (both mainly owned by the State). During the Sixties and the Seventies, the City watched its economy slowly wrecking, without being capable to react. Oil corporations left for Rome; shipbuilding was affected by an international crisis and the Italian Government choose to relocate elsewhere both the general management and the production of the State controlled industry; global changes in sea transportation let deserted a port which could no longer be competitive for lack of infrastructures, shortage of space and an anachronistic, high-costly low-efficient work organisation. Then the crisis of steel industry gave the definitive stroke: the big State owned plants were closed or sold to private entrepreneurs who cut off employees.

In the Eighties, with population shrunk to two third and the number of jobs continuously decreasing, the decline seemed unending; but eventually the efforts to re-orient the tendency began to pay back. Once enlarged, equipped with new facilities and provided with a reshaped Port Authority and labour system, the port was rapidly gaining back its position in the Mediterranean; the large areas once occupied by big factories began to be redeveloped for new industrial and commercial activities; a nucleus of internationally qualified hi-tech industry, that had resisted the crisis, entered a new expansion cycle.

While experimenting such a generalised decay the City, in desperate search of opportunities, had looked at its consistent historical heritage as a potential resource under different perspectives: (i) to launch a big restoration program, in order to revitalise construction when there was no need for new buildings; (ii) to improve urban quality, so to be more attractive as a place where to live and to make business; (iii) to accede to the European network of art cities and develop tourism oriented activities. It must be remembered that in the past centuries Genoa had been a major stop of the Italian Grand Tour and until World War II it was appreciated as a place where to spend winter times in a mild climate; later on, the industrial aspect prevailed and the City put no care in maintaining an appeal for visitors; so, it was completely neglected by modern forms of tourism.

The 1992 Expo: organisation and effect

The 1992 Expo arrived just in time to be seized as a fundamental opportunity of starting the urban redevelopment.

The City, in association with other local administrations (Region, Province, Port Authority, Chamber of Commerce), created an Agency (Ente Colombo '92) that was charged to promote the event; a dedicated City department was also established to organise it.

The Expo project was entrusted to Renzo Piano, the Genoese architect who designed world known buildings like Centre Pompidou in Paris or Menil Collection Museum in Houston. More than one decade before, Piano had been put in charge of a rehabilitation project for the medieval neighbourhood of Molo ("the Wharf"), so named from the jetty that protected the ancient port. That project was never accomplished, but Piano could implement some of his ideas with the newly received appointment. The Expo covers an area of about 13 hectares (more than 50% built), located in the inner part of the Old Harbour; the spaces for the exhibition were obtained inside existing warehouses, some of them dating back to the Seventeenth Century. The new buildings are only two: the Aquarium and a long block for plants and facilities, flanking the existing 370-metres long warehouse where a permanent multi-halls, 1800 seats Congress centre has been accommodated. A group of big firms joined in a temporary association (Consorzio Expo Genova '92) to carry out the project; the main contractor was Italmimpianti (a State owned society, with its headquarters in Genoa); then the works were subcontracted to a large number of medium and small local entrepreneurs.

The Exposition was focalised on a precise task, connected to the general endeavour of rehabilitating the Old City (that until then had produced many proposals but no remarkable result) and presumably able to make it start; thanks to the international event, the State was involved and provided the money that had been impossible for the City to collect.

The Exposition attracted less public than expected and when it closed the Old Harbour looked empty and desolated. Fortunately, the idea of setting an Aquarium proved to be a good one: the number of visitors boomed to 2-3 millions per year (it is still the third more visited place in Italy after Rome's Vatican Museum and Florence's Uffizi).

Pivoting on this success, in 1994 the City and the Chamber of Commerce established a Company (Porto Antico s.p.a.) to find new uses for the Old Harbour; the Company rent the old warehouses selecting the activities deemed more appropriate for revitalising the area and used the proceeds to add new facilities and improve the quality of public spaces. So the Old Harbour has become a place alive and is propelling a moderate but steadily increasing tourist growth.

How the Expo was made possible: area, procedures, local co-operation

Located on a narrow coastal strip dominated by the mountains, in the last two centuries Genoa has filled up every building lot; to find an area suitable for new development is almost impossible and profitable land owned by the City is scarce. The location chosen for the Expo was one of the potential few, but ports are public domains in Italy; a special State law (L 373/1988) was needed to make it possible the occupancy for the period of the Expo.

Incidentally, at that moment there was no evidence that the City could later maintain the control of the land; eventually, taking profit from the State program of handing over public properties, the City obtained its Old Harbour to be included among them and could get the definitive possession at a very low price (L 579/1993).

Once the area was chosen and the project outlined, another big obstacle remained: the complexity of the approval procedures. First of all, the City Master Plan had not forecasted such a big intervention in the Old Harbour (and such a radical change of functions); so the City had to change it and obtain the Region approval. Moreover, to start the works it was necessary to get permissions from many different offices and administrations: in normal conditions, that would have requested years of discussions.

There had been a precedent of quickened procedures, related to another pulse: the organisation of Football World Championship that took place in Italy in 1990. For that event, in every city that had to tackle big works, a *Conferenza dei servizi* was formed, as a permanent committee, where any concerned Administration had its own representative; a project was held approved by every Administration as soon as approved by this Committee.

It is worth to mention that since then the *Conferenza dei servizi* had become an ordinary device in Italy, used also out of pulses; it has later been included by national and regional laws in current approval procedures and modified to ease a broad and simple application. Besides the immediate need of quickening approval procedures, carrying on the project was possible thanks to a general deal already signed by the City, the Region and the Port Authority, as a result of a long confrontation. In 1985 a Committee had been established, constituted of three officials and three architect/planners (one for each Administration) to discuss how to redevelop the Old Harbour. The interest of the Port Authority was to find new profitable uses for an area no longer appropriate for modern cargo handling; the City looked forward to acquire land where it could be possible to locate the facilities necessary for the rehabilitation of the Old Town.

Meanwhile, politicians, entrepreneurs, planners and architects were looking at the cases of Waterfront redevelopment in US cities, in order to evaluate the possibility of repeating the success of Baltimore (twin City of Genoa) and Boston; the proposal of an Aquarium, later included in Piano's Expo Master Plan, originated from those examples.

The Year 2000 Catholic Jubilee

After the Expo a pulse which, though of a minor impact, nevertheless gave the City some opportunities was the Year 2000 Jubilee proclaimed by the Catholic Church. Genoa was a leg of the pilgrimage to Rome, the centre of the Jubilee and the main place for getting indulgences.

Pointing out pilgrimage legs aimed to emphasise the devotional value of holy places, to promote the restoration of religious buildings of monumental and historical importance and to improve services to travellers.

In Genoa, the local Diocese and Superintendence for Architectural Heritage worked together and provided money (with the help of a major national Bank) in order to carry out the restoration of eminent religious buildings in the Old Town (among them the Cathedral) and in the City surroundings (above all, the very popular Madonna della Guardia sanctuary that attracts pilgrims from an area much larger than the Genoa region). These works created the condition for a further tourist promotion (specially in the case of the Cathedral).

Moreover, some interventions were made to ameliorate some critical road junctions.

The G8's Meeting

While reshaping its waterfront, after the 1992 Expo, the City reinforced the attempt to revitalise the Old Town, based on plans and projects that had been developed since the Fifties and had produced some remarkable results in the Eighties, in connection with a spontaneous process of gentrification that was concentrated in a few areas and (in a City with a decreasing population) was oriented to occupy spaces left empty by former inhabitants in the best areas. The revitalisation had been sustained by relevant public expenditure both in housing and intervention aimed to confirm the centrality of the Old Town (e.g. new settlements of University Faculties, reconstruction of the Opera House, transformation of the Palazzo Ducale, former seat of the Government of the Republic of Genoa, in an art centre). In the Nineties, the expenditure capacity of the City was rapidly dwindling, but the agenda of scheduled public works was swelling and far to be completed.

So, when the Government proposed Genoa as the place of the G8's Meeting to be held in 2001, the City accepted willingly, with a double intention: first, spending in lasting public works most of the money provided by the State with the aim to better host the international guests; second, taking profit from the massive presence of the mass media in order to promote the image of Genoa as a world city and a major tourist resort.

To finance the Meeting and the correlate works a dedicated State law (L 149/2000) was issued just an year before in order to assure a first level of expense capability to be added to the municipal and regional investments. The law included derogations from usual procedures, shaped to quicken the approval of the projects (a long list, the approval of which, in normal conditions, should had required about three years) and settled a task force Committee including the *Prefetto* (Chief representative of the State in Italian main cities), the City Major, the Provincial and Regional Presidents, the Regional Public Works Manager, the Regional Authority for Historical and Architectural Property, the President of the Port Authority and the Chief of the Fireguards (who, in Italy, is charged with a wide responsibility about safety controls and project approval).

The Committee, entrusted with the powers of a *Conferenza dei Servizi* (see above), begun to work unofficially two months before the issuing of the law and used to meet weekly; the technical management of all the projects was assigned to the Regional Public Works Office (*Provveditorato Regionale alle Opere Pubbliche*: the regional office of the Ministry of Public Works); the *Prefetto's* Office took care of the whole financial aspects.

The State spent about 62 millions euro for the City; as a whole, about one hundred projects were completed, for a total expenditure of about 119 millions euro. 70% of the money passed through the Committee; the main contributors for these projects were the State (55%), the City (11%) and the Port Authority (9%); other contributors were the Region, the Province, the Railways and the main local Bank (unfortunately, data are missing on private expenditures, mainly used for buildings facades restorations).

The Committee proved to be effective also with regards to public works that were not related to the G8'S Meeting but were particularly needed: the public Administrations submitted to it projects of more than 30 millions euro worth, in order to take profit from the acceleration of the procedures¹.

An average cost of 1 million euro per project (the biggest ones costing about 4-4.5 millions each) means a great number of small interventions. This could be considered as an evidence of weakness (money dilapidated in irrelevant project, each of them unable to produce a visible effect) but actually, it was not so. The effort was put in producing a lasting overall result like a mosaic of small pieces connected to each other accomplishing a unique project. Eventually, the G8's Meeting financed projects decided and planned in the precedent years from the City and – in some cases – long expected by the citizens.

The works were specially concentrated on the rehabilitation of the central spaces (restoration of old palaces, new lighting and re-pavement of squares and streets) all around the Palazzo Ducale, the Opera House and the Cathedral; the area was largely reserved to pedestrians, as a first step to implement the new Traffic Master Plan.

The main historical buildings and sites, the best retailing areas, the City cultural centre and the Waterfront have been connected in a beautiful pedestrian walk, a born-again main street of historical and cultural interest (this street is part of a three kilometres pedestrian walk that

is next to be completed and crosses the City centre from the Railway station to the Ferry and Cruise ship terminals).

So the City got a renewed core that could appeal tourists and attract city users and that immediately has fascinated the Genoese, who discovered a more beautiful and more friendly urban environment. The initial enthusiasm dropped as the City Centre was occupied by the police to prevent acts of terrorism as G8's meeting approached; things got worst when tragic riots and violent police reactions occurred; but when all that passed, the citizens seized their old/new centre with enthusiasm.

A few interventions have been located outside the City centre. The most important one under the representative point of view was the opening of a pedestrian walk to the "Lanterna"; this ancient lighthouse, that is the City symbol, during the years became unreachable being progressively surrounded by the modern commercial port.

Another significant intervention was the re-design of the waterfront and the main square of Pegli, a former resort town on the western coast (see below).

A new pulse: Genoa European Capital City of Culture

In 1998, just before being chosen as the 2001 Meeting place for the G8, Genoa got also the designation, together with Lille, France, to be 2004 European Capital City of Culture. As usual, a Committee on purpose has been set up (April 2001) by the City and the other public administrations; in this case, also the University is part of the Committee; State administrations representatives participate to the meetings. The Committee is in charge of the general co-ordination; every administration will take care of the interventions of its competency. On September next the local administrations will form a limited company in charge of the organisation of the cultural events.

The 2004 program has "the voyage" as a *leit-motiv* and the projects are based on three main themes: the historical and artistic City heritage, the art and the technical know-how of navigation, the urban and social quality.

Not surprisingly, the City is now trying to manage this new pulse in order to complete unfinished projects and launch others. According to an agreement with the Italian Ministry of Culture, the main object of intervention is the City Museums network. The network was created in the Thirties, when Genoa chose to decentralise its collections, using existing monumental palaces and villas instead of new, dedicated building and so giving a kind of compensation to the towns that (in 1925) were incorporated in the City; this network is now obsolete both in its single components and as a whole.

To re-qualify the network, the City Administration intends to concentrate the actions on four objectives:

1. the Classic Art Centre, in the Old Town. It consists of several museums that boast important art collections (paintings, sculptures and furniture, mostly of the Renaissance and Baroque periods) in ancient building of great architectural quality but need a better equipment in order to make the collections enjoyable to a larger range of public and to offer comfortable facilities to the visitors. The goal is to create an integrated system of museums connected in a tour that can promote the Old Town as an international tourist attraction.
2. the Sea-Nature-Adventure Centre, in the Old Harbour, consisting of the Aquarium, the Antarctic Museum, the Navigation Museum (opened for the 1992 Expo) and the new Museum of the Sea (under construction). Here the goal is to consolidate definitely the Waterfront as a resort area of international level, that can combine culture and amusement congruent with the specific traditions of Genoa.
3. the Museum Centre of Pegli (see behind) and Voltri. Pegli already hosts two small Museum (an Archaeology and a Naval Museum) in historical buildings surrounded by parks; in Voltri it is intended to create an Experimental Art Production Centre inside an old factory. These two localities are situated in the western suburbs which in the recent past have been devastated by heavy industry and poor hillside housing expansion, but still have the possibility to recover; the establishment of a centre of culture is part of a

wider project of regeneration oriented to improve the residential quality of a large section of the City.

4. the Modern Art Centre of Nervi, one of the older Italian sea resort, in a prominent landscape area on the east coast, where three existing museums, dedicated to the XIX and XX Centuries art, are located in contiguous villas. The project is aimed to give the public the possibility to better appreciate the pieces of art in a context of great appeal: a series of exotic gardens and parks, siding the rocky seashore. Together with the project for a new pleasure boats port, this intervention can help Nervi to regain its appeal and be the Genoa gate to the East Riviera (Portofino is on view, and boat services are already available).

2002-2004: intense programs for a close deadline

The machine for transforming emergencies in permanent achievements has quite been tested in Genoa and has got a certain degree of efficiency; but as regards the fuel to keep the engine working, the City depends on external providers.

On occasion of the 2004 event, the Italian Government (now ruled by the Right) showed a bias for containing expenses and reducing the autonomy of the City (ruled by the Left) to decide how to spend. The City representatives (being leftists or rightists) in the National Parliament lobbied to get as more money as possible from the State, according to a traditional habit: Genoa, former City of the State industry, tends to bring its problems in Rome to be solved.

Eventually, the State promised about 38 millions euro; about 27 million have already been allocated for interventions in roads and infrastructures².

The City can so implement a new program of public works, oriented to restore a series of public owned monumental buildings. The restorations will include the "Palazzi dei Rolli", the XVI and XVII Centuries mansions that the government of the Republic of Genoa City selected for their sumptuousness to host the important persons who officially visited the City – kings, ambassadors, chief representative of the Church – and the "Ripa", the row of medieval buildings lined along the seashore that overlooks the Old Harbour.

It is evident that in coping with big events the City has progressively enlarged the target from its core to its boundaries; to strengthen this line, the 2004 agenda foresees a program of restoration and re-use of the ancient country villas and of the fortification system scattered in the suburbs. These two typical remains of the past countryside landscape, now mark and qualify the urban environment and are considered a primary resource: villas and fortresses, frequently surrounded from large green areas, can be used for urban services and administrative functions, to increase the quality of life of the neighbourhood residents.

While the City was struggling to get money enough to complete its ambitious programs for 2004, another minor "pulsar effect" has occurred, that confirms a re-orientation of the urban strategies towards the suburbs. On 26 July 2002, it has been held in Genoa an important rowing event: the World Under 23 Rowing Regatta (formerly known as the Nations Cup), with 40 participant countries. Thanks to this regatta, Genoa has collected the money (15.5 millions euro) to complete the arrangement of a basin dedicated to water sports, on the coast between Pegli and Voltri. This is a new important facility, conceived to reinforce the image of Genoa as a place for international meetings of every kind; but it is also a reparation given to the inhabitants of the western suburbs, who suffered more the damages caused by the industry in the past and have lately lost their beaches due to the construction of the new containership port that made possible the present trade boom of the City.

Reasons of success and weak spots of the Genoa case study

This case is somehow a model: in the most difficult times of its recent history, Genoa looked at international events as opportunities of improvement; having got the occasion, the City was able to rise to it and convert pulses in propellers to urban renewal. We will try to examine the conditions and the limits of this success case.

First of all, it must be remembered that "pulsar effects", as important as they can be, are simply a component of a much more complex process; generally they can improve the offer

of urban quality to citizens and tourists; in Genoa, they played a complementary role in a redevelopment process based on the growth of the port and on a generalised conversion of the activities.

Proceeding from the case of Genoa, the success seems to be connected to some fundamental requirements:

- the availability of an archive of projects; Genoa could give consistency to the volatile effects of big events picking up projects from its agenda; the projects that were carried out matched the occasion (or have been modified to match it), but they were not exclusively due to the occasion;
- a general strategy; an attitude to take advantage from pulses and connect them in a coherent sequences of actions does not extinguish the need for developing more complex strategies; the projects carried out in Genoa were integrated and collocated inside a general frame – even if urban policies are still feeble (see below);
- the capacity to quicken the project approval procedures to face emergency;
- the capacity of the City Administration to find agreements and to collaborate with all other local and central Administrations;
- the creation of *ad hoc* Agencies; in some case (say the Waterfront redevelopment) when the temporary ad hoc Agency has accomplished its task, a new permanent Agency is requested to consolidate the gained results;
- the capacity to extend the renovation on a portion of the City larger than the area, generally a small one, actually concerned with the event; the spatial and temporal effects are connected and their extension create synergies and give consistency to the actions.

Managing pulsar effects can permanently influence the local government as a whole: in Genoa the new general Master Plan, conceived in the Nineties and approved in 2000, shows an elastic structure fitted to incorporate local and occasional transformations in rehabilitation programs.

Of course, the way Genoa managed pulsar effects shows also deficiencies; the main weaknesses seem to be:

- fortuity of occasions; the City did not have a program to promote itself: it simply caught what was passing by (1992 Expo because it is Columbus birthplace, the G8's Meeting because of the personal favour of a former prime minister);
- feeble attitude of the City Departments to face emergencies; as a whole, the technical offices have reacted well, but the success of the operations was too frequently entrusted to the individual will and capacity; the recent detachment of some Departments and the establishment of service companies has created better conditions (for example, the new Company for roads was able to finish in a few months the big works for the G8's Meeting);
- excess of dependence from the decisions and the financing of the National Government; this aspect is strictly correlated to the following one:
- feeble involvement of the private sector in the operations; the development of public-private partnership and the accordance on separate actions is necessary to (i) widen the City potential, (ii) reduce its dependence from higher level of government (the present composition of the Regional and National Governments puts the City under the constant threat of being deprived of financing and excluded from development programs), (iii) increase its attitude to attract investments from outside; in this latter respect, being the City not (only) a business community, other form of participation are requested (see just below);
- absence of the population from the decisional process; it is true that the City Administration moves according to principles that have been discussed and largely known and approved (in the local election after the G8's Meeting the Mayor was confirmed with a rate never obtained in Genoa); nevertheless, it is the Administration on his own that analyses the situations, interprets the needs and propose the solutions.

Conclusions

It is evident that the deficiencies listed above are not limited to the occasion of coping with peaks: they affect the capacity of local government as a whole.

Now Genoa is demanding to itself how can be possible to find out new occasions to trigger urban renewal in a frame of sustainability after 2004 and actually has applied for the 2009 Mediterranean Sport Games; but shocking the urban system with other pulsar effects is not the answer. The City need urban policies conceived with a large consensus and carried out in a context of partnership; in other words, a strategic action that could be able to involve the forces of trade and industry, that have always been the real propellers of the City development.

The “Piano della città” presented by the City Administrations on April 2002 is a novelty under many points of view; for example, for the first time it contains suggestions collected in public discussions; but it is still far to be a real strategic urban plan: local actors are completely absent from the plan –or worst: their participation is not declared.

Definitely, the challenge for Genoa is now not to improve ability in coping with peaks, but to develop the capacity of co-ordinating actions in the context of a shared vision.

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¹ Source: Provveditorato regionale alle Opere Pubbliche per la Liguria, Genova, July 2002; Prefettura di Genova, July 2002

² Source: *Il Secolo XIX*, Genova, 27 luglio 2002

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FULL CASE STUDY

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| <i>main events</i> | <i>Football world championship 1990</i> | <i>Expo 1992</i> | <i>Giubileum 2000</i> | <i>G8 meeting 2001</i> | <i>European Capital City of Culture 2004</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|--|---|---|---|
| fields of development | | | | | |
| urban renewal | | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •re-lighting and re-paving of central urban spaces •planting of trees in public spaces all around the city | |
| old city restoration | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Old Port Waterfront Redevelopment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •restorations of monumental buildings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •restoration of ancient buildings facades | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •restorations of old fortresses •restorations of 16th- 17th century villas |
| culture, leisure, sport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •renewal of the City Stadium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •improvements of the City Museum System •opening of the Sea and Sailing Museum •new Aquarium •new Congress center | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •restoration of the Cruise Ship Terminal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •improvements of the City Museum System |
| transportation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •new Stadium car park •new motorway connection | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •car tunnel by-passing the Expo area | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •improvements in the road system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •new road inside the Old Port | |