

The Boboli – Belvedere Manifesto

February 2021

Florence local Administration seems to have approved a massive development plan proposed by a wealthy investor in the heart of Florence's Unesco historical centre. The plan, which involves a so-called "simplified" variation of the urban plan and disregards Strategic Environmental Evaluation, is set to impact the area next to Renaissance Boboli Gardens, Pitti Palace and Belvedere Fort, situated on the hill housing the Bardini Villa and garden. The case has now been brought to the attention of national public opinion. The transformation could lead to a deep building renovation and to a radical change of use for a vast complex of former convents with high architectural quality, dating back to Medieval times. For decades, these buildings have been the seat of the Military Medical School, located among the most prized treasures in Florence and in the world. Nearly 90% of a 16,000 square metres area is expected to be converted into a large luxury hotel. Judging by the plans presented to the local Administration, extensive underground excavations would take place on the hill, which in the past was called 'Poggio delle Rovinate' ("Hill of the collapsed houses", a toponym due to its hydrogeological fragility), in order to create so-defined "essential" parking lots, a driveway tunnel, warehouses and facilities. Furthermore, for the benefit of 300 rich clients (according to the planned number of beds), mechanised transport links (funiculars? railways? elevators?) would supposedly be erected to connect the resort to Pitti Palace and Boboli Gardens (with easements incompatible with these museums, which are properties of the Italian State), and to Belvedere Fort along or on top of the stone wall flanking Boboli Gardens.

In exchange, the public would gain admission to the restored areas, the ones provided with historical, artistic and architectural values. However, the endorsement by the Municipality contains no specification on when or how these possible openings would take place. Even the municipal transportation bureau categorically excludes any intervention in this part of Florence, which would become the epicentre of a heavy, unsustainable construction site. Besides, in nowadays Florence the Belvedere hill is a lucky exception: the steep slope of Costa San Giorgio along the ridge, the sweet and winding Via San Leonardo, far from tourist areas, extending from Belvedere Fort to the alleys built by Giuseppe Poggi, allow a peculiar experience: here you can still walk letting your senses enjoy perceptions linked to the history of the place, to its artifacts and walls, plastered and decorated with geometric graffiti patterns. It is fundamental to preserve and defend these values against the speculative mass tourist model that - up to the eve of the pandemic - has unfortunately marked Florence.

So far, the Municipality of Florence has failed in informing the citizens on the characteristics and scope of the proposed transformation and the community has been prevented from intervening with their own observations and proposals. For all these reasons, we urgently ask that the local Administration suspend the procedure of the current variation of the urban plan, and open a public debate which will allow the citizens, the associations and the intelligentsia to obtain the necessary knowledge, transparency and participation when making decisions that would have such a deep impact on the Unesco area of the historical city.

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