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Port Lympia: construction, transformations and preservation

by Elena Masala

Tutor: Maria Grazia Vinardi

The picturesque *Port Lympia*, mooring place of fabulous yachts and landing place of many vacationers who meet at the piers of Nice, has been subject to century long debates and work, that have led to its current shape. The choice of studying a seaport, place where ideas, people, culture, goods and materials meet and mix, responds to a personal interest, developed during an educational exchange programme abroad, in investigating an international context. An additional reason for this interest is that, due to its geographical position and its peculiar historical evolution, Port Lympia has been subject to constant international comparison with what was held to be more "modern" and functional.

This study explores the overlap of historical and planning developments, utilizing several publications and the vast archival records scattered between Italy and France, in order to consider what has been preserved of the various layers and is part of the urban structure of the port today.



Aerial view of the port and its district, 2003. Published in *Le port de Nice des origines a nos jours*, Acadèmia Nissarda, Nice 2004

The city's vocation as a port, attested to from its foundation by the primitive port of call *anse Saint-Lambert*, was recognized by Angevin and Savoy maritime policy, and culminated in the decision to build a real port and in the international debate in the seventeenth-century on where to situate it. In the mid eighteenth century Lympia site was chosen and the first construction works started with a massive use of manpower and construction machinery, under the direction of De Vincenti and Borra, authors of a project, which was strictly geometrical, influenced by classical culture and revolved around a symmetrical correspondence between the port and the square overlooking the sea. Their plans had an impact on subsequent proposals.

The thesis continues by considering the expansion of the port and the first urbanization of its district, managed by Di Robilant and Michaud between 1778 and 1784, the maintenance interventions carried out from 1792 to 1860, and the new reflections on architectural and urban quality, culminating, in 1832, in the first Master Plan of Nice and in the institution of the Consiglio d' Ornato.

The period after *Rattachement* reveals significant changes to Nice, which became a predominantly tourist city, and to the port, as measures were taken and new equipment installed in order to reconcile its commercial function and the new recreational activities with a limited berthing capacity.

Close examination of the present layout, leads us to consider that the aesthetic demands made of the port and the holistic coastal image of the plans proposed, is evocative of the baroque urban conception, in its theatricality and in the whole city composition, and to reflect on the conservation the important stratification found at the port of Nice and its entire coast. Although the port lay-out has had to reinvent itself steadily, to adapt to the new requirements of maritime transport, the port district and the coast of Nice have specific architectural and urban features worthy of preservation.

French practice, different from the strict Italian culture of preservation, responds to the question of the relevance of choices with naturalness and spontaneity in terms of heritage protection, which is significant in a context driven towards modernization. Port Lympia, which has always been a place of concentration of innovative impulses for practical and aesthetic reasons, has its own specific character in its continuous transformations, as a space for experimentation and continued modernization. Furthermore, although perennial innovations and constant revisions, appear to clash with conservation issues, these represent the unavoidable condition for the needs of man, a key player in the heritage conservation strategies.

For further information, e-mail:

Elena Masala: elenamasala@tiscali.it