

## Workshop

### **Protection of Venice and Byblos against maritime risks**

28-29 June 2011, Byblos (Lebanon)

#### *Background, Summary and main results*

The events organised within the “Making cities resilient” campaign in occasion of the Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction (Geneva, 8-13 May 2011) represented an unique occasion for many city’s representatives to meet and exchange their own experiences in the field of risk reduction.

One of the strengths of the campaign is to allow learning processes from city to city, ensuring at the same time the support of international expertise. A network structure, instead of a hierarchical pyramid, makes easier the promotion of spontaneous collaboration among cities.

This has been the case for Venice (Italy) and Byblos (Lebanon).

At the Mayors’ Lunch organized during the Third Global Platform, the delegates of Venice and Byblos had the occasion to share their concerns regarding the safeguarding of cities owning an important cultural heritage. Both cities are part of the UNESCO World Heritage list, have a local economy related to tourism and to the port activity, and present similar water-related risks. Culture is not often considered when dealing with risk reduction, nevertheless it is an important part of risk management for cities that consider the cultural heritage an essential asset of their development.

Venice has been recognized by the UNISDR as a Role Model City for Cultural Heritage Protection, demonstrating valuable competencies in taking measures aimed at safeguarding cultural and historical assets. The municipality of Byblos decided, thus, to consider Venice Byblos’ Role Model City.

An exchange visit was organized the 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of June in Byblos aiming at finding solutions to safeguard Byblos against maritime dangers, learning from Venice’s case.

The Venetian delegation, composed by Mr. Pierpaolo Campostrini (focal point of the City of Venice in the Campaign Making Cities Resilient) and Mr. Maurizio Milan (from the engineering enterprise “Favero & Milan Ingegneria Spa”), made a presentation entitled “Safeguarding Venice: Culture, Nature, Sustainable Development”.

The presentation gave an overview of the environmental, geomorphic and historical venetian context and stressed on the frequent flooding problem, its causes and the measures taken to prevent disastrous floods to happen and to mitigate the

consequences of less severe but more frequent floods. The risk governance was also described, highlighting how the local case of Venice is taken into account at National and Regional level, through a multi-level and multi-task dedicated Committee, chaired by the President of the Council of Ministries, which approved a General Plan of interventions for the safeguarding of the city. The plan of intervention includes: coastal reinforcement, morphological restoration, reclamation of polluted sites, mobile sea barriers system, city pavement rising, urban maintenance and social revitalisation. Local municipality invests also in monitoring, flooding forecast and communication activities in order to make citizens aware and ready to react to any flood event.

The second day consisted of a workshop where representatives of the Lebanese public sector, the Byblos Municipality, and Lebanese engineers, along with the Italian delegation sat together and discussed ways to protect Byblos from sea storms.

The risk profile of Byblos was explained, and the different prevention and mitigation measures regarding the local harbor and the archeological site have been presented by the competent public structures (i.e. Directorate General of Land and Maritime Transportation, Mr. Mohamad Nahleh and Mr. Patrick Suleiman, and the Architectural Department of the Ministry of Culture, Ms. Martine Francis) .

The experience of Venice suggests that the city of Byblos should be declared as a national interest, not only local. As an important sign in that sense, at the workshop the Lebanese ministries of Environment, Culture and Public Works and Transport were represented.

The venetian example demonstrates how relevant is the coordination between the different ministries and local authorities: the different expertise, local and international, must work together and a multipurpose project should be drawn, targeting both economic, cultural and environmental objectives. The principal consideration is that the full picture must be taken into consideration by the involved subjects, while sectoral points of view, aiming at solving problems one-by-one, could create more and bigger troubles.

This perspective is relevant in particular regarding the measures that are currently being studied or already implemented for the protection of the ancient harbor of Byblos, placed in front of a marine archeological site and beside the archeological area with Phoenician, Romans and medieval remains. Such engineering measures, as described, risk to worsen some environmental problems and to be scarcely effective. The Venetian case suggests instead that they should be integrated in a comprehensive and holistic plan, based on appropriate scientific knowledge, able to integrate different disciplines. The local administration could be the “glue” that put together the scientific community, the public sector, the citizens and the enterprises.

The attendance of engineering expertise from both side (from Lebanese public sector and Italian private enterprise “Favero & Milan Ingegneria”) have made possible to discuss concretely about the solutions regarding Byblos’ harbor.

Governance issues have been particularly deepened on the basis of the relevant Venice’s experience. The event itself has been an important step towards a better collaboration among different Lebanese public structures.

What it seems to be missing in Byblos’ case is an appropriate and comprehensive involvement of the scientific community, that is necessary to carry out the interdisciplinary assessments of alternative prevention/mitigation measures. In Venice there is a dedicate structure, i.e. CORILA, which promotes and coordinates research on the Venice lagoon in an integrated and multidisciplinary way.

The exchange visit has been evaluated positively by both cities’ representatives and all the participants, and the will to continue the collaboration has been renewed.