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### **Rimini's Civic Museums: promoting the town's cultural heritage**

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1. In a period when discussion about tourism is farsighted in planning for the future, Rimini has rediscovered treasures from its own background able to enrich its reputation, dynamically and progressively, as a major holiday resort, in a territorial marketing context. The seaside town based its well-known image on its long, golden sandy beach, the leading attraction in advertising campaigns, highlighted in posters designed by leading artists. But beyond the sea front, Rimini can offer art treasures and historical monuments in the town centre, throughout its surrounding area or on display in the Civic Museum. These treasures foreground the town's artistic features, whose roots go back as far as Roman times, its periods of greatest splendour dating from the Roman Empire and the Medieval and Renaissance eras. Among the many symbols from Roman times the town boasts the Arch of Augustus, the monumental gate built at the end of the Via Flaminia in 27 B.C., the oldest triumphal arch in northern Italy as well as the Bridge of Tiberius, an imposing structure in Istrian stone with its 5 arches crossing the River Ariminus, from which the town derives its name, marking the beginning of the Via Aemilia. The period of Malatesta family rule was the background to the work of the original Rimini school of artists from the early to mid-14th century and the masterpieces created around the mid-15th century for the court of Sigismondo Pandolfo Malatesta, who called upon the services of major Renaissance artists. When he was in power, the Sismondo Castle was built as a fortified residence for the ruling family, on which Brunelleschi worked. Visitors are equally overawed by the shining white stone and harmonic proportions of the church known as the Tempio Malatestiano designed by Leon Battista Alberti, to the decoration of which Matteo de' Pasti, Agostino di Duccio and Piero della Francesca contributed.

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2. The custodian of this artistic heritage of the past is the Civic Museum, in its role as mediator between past and present. This inheritance comes both from the surrounding area and historic centre, enhanced by the Museum in its re-compositions of original contexts.

An emblem of the Town-Museum/past-present relationship is the Roman Surgeon's House, an archaeological site opened to the public in 2007 in central Piazza Ferrari, the result of a cooperative effort between the Rimini Savings Bank Foundation and the local authorities. This site is an imposing 'display case' in the town centre, which happens to be close to the Museum, of which it is an integral part. Following the most up to date museum display criteria, 2,000 years of history are on show to visitors.

They can admire a 700 square metre archaeological area, where the richest set of Roman surgical instruments so far unearthed anywhere came to light in a home of 3rd century A.D. *Ariminum* used partly for the practice of the medical and pharmaceutical professions. The excavation is protected and enhanced by a structure enabling passers-by to have a full view. The structure is an integral part of the garden in the square and a series of see-through walkways make the site easily visible to visitors.

Visitors feel as though they are walking over history, passing through a district on the outskirts of the ancient town site. This was where a wealthy two storey house, with a courtyard, built in the Roman Empire period stood. Its owner was a surgeon whose collection of surgical and pharmaceutical instruments numbered more than 150 items. The residential areas were flanked by a surgery or *taberna medica*, consisting of a consulting room, with a mosaic depicting Orpheus at its centre, a waiting room, and 'day hospital' room for patients. Information about the physician, his military experience and Hellenistic cultural background is supplied by the finds from the excavation now on display in the Museum, like the rare, sophisticated glass picture (*pinax*) with fish swimming in the turquoise waters of the Aegean Sea. Valuable evidence could lead to fascinating interpretations regarding the man and his professional life. This includes words scratched on the wall, perhaps by a grateful patient, identified by the name *Eutyches*, flanked by the words *homo bonus*. The physician's life must have come to a dramatic end with the destruction of his house, after the mid-3rd century, caused by a fire which probably broke out during one of the first barbarian attacks on Rimini. It is actually due to this fact that the consulting rooms and their contents at least partially survived. Human habitation only returned with the palatial building erected in two stages between the 5th and 6th centuries, leaving the ruins of the consulting rooms intact. The palace consisted of complex reception rooms, large multi-coloured geometric mosaics and a nymphaeum in the courtyard. Burials of a small cemetery are evidence of the crisis brought about by the Goth-Byzantine war, like wounds tearing through the mosaic covered surfaces indicating the onset of the Middle Ages. The remains of dwellings built with wood, clay and salvaged bricks date back to the 7th century when Rimini was ruled over by a duke. In the following century their place was taken by vegetable gardens and courtyards. From the late Middle Ages new buildings, mostly of a religious nature, covered the area up to the square-with-garden arrangement at the outset of the 20th. Century.

3. After attracting great interest among scholars, the Roman house was at the centre of attention by the media. The fame of the excavation was soon widespread: from the New York Times to the London Times dozens of foreign newspapers and periodicals wrote about the house, devoting renewed attention to Rimini, in the light of the small scale 'Pompei' in Piazza Ferrari.

Thanks to an article in the magazine of the Sunday Telegraph the fame of Rimini's Roman house reached as far as India and other Asian countries. We should also mention articles by journalist Tracey Davis in Metro, the free newspaper with the largest circulation the world over, Simon Edge in the Daily Express and Nadia Durrani in the specialist magazine Current Archaeology. Not to mention TV network reports: *Service Reisen*, a well-known German TV travel programme, *Mondo PleinAir*, *Sky-Canale Marco Polo*, *SAT 2000*. Even before the

opening of the site, the collection of surgical instruments was honoured by an appearance on the Italian Public TV documentary programme *Ulisse (Rai Tre)*. The house was featured by the leading Italian newspapers and magazines specializing in archaeology, architecture, heritage and travel, as well as a great number of websites.

As well as attention from the media the house immediately attracted the general public: just over the first 4 days after opening it was visited by more than 10,000 people. Up to the present there have been more than 105,000 visitors. This considerable number revealed the town's interest in its ancient heritage, interest that had been pursued for years in local cultural activities but never foregrounded to this extent. In 2008 the number of visitors to the Museum increased by 130% compared with the previous year. Monthly statistics show increasing numbers of local people and school parties (by + 160%!).

4. The Surgeon's House, a 'display case' linking the nearby Museum and the town, is an attraction, on the one hand capable of reawakening local sensitivity towards the town's heritage and, on the other, introducing Rimini as a cultural centre to tourists. This role has increased visibility, visitor numbers and pride in the local heritage. The Civic Museum, a mediator *par excellence* of the area's historical and artistic heritage, takes on the role of the leading seat of memory, where objects express time past by opening windows on history, so as to understand the present better and think about the future. So the Museum represents a stage packed with meaning along the traveller's itinerary, a departure point for recovering (in the case of local residents) or discovering (in the case of visitors) the identity of place. The town appears to be reflected in the Museum and explain why it has changed and what the future has in store. Preserving what events have removed from an area - the main purpose of any museum - restores fragments of history, experience and life to local residents as well as tourists.

If for many a visit to the archaeological area in Piazza Ferrari is a prelude to a visit to the Civic Museum, it is also the case that a visit to the Museum is a prelude to a stroll round the artistic-historical sites of the town itself: its historic buildings, piazzas and mansions. This can then be followed by a tour of the museums in the surrounding area, which for a long time have been providing food for thought, exchanging ideas and common experiences, like the 'Festival of the Ancient World'.

Part of this stimulating panorama is the *Museum of Gazes Rimini's Ethnographic Collections*, an introduction to cultural otherness. The museum is housed in Villa Alvarado, on the hill of Covignano, along an itinerary where art and history (consider the cases of the shrine of Santa Maria delle Grazie and the church of Santa Maria di Scolca) encounter the pathways of nature.

And where the town, with the complicity of the Surgeon's House, encounters the Museum, new energy between the private and public spheres is activated, intent on rethinking the quality of town life and what the town has to offer to visitors. A new sensitivity is emerging, where the Museum's mission, visitor expectations, and the needs of those involved in the tourist industry meet. With the purpose of integrating this new resource into a system, a network in which what is on offer overall is more than the sum of the single components, right from its opening the house has been the object of internal marketing, starting with its presentation, initially to those involved in the tourist industry, who are the main source of visitor information and interaction.

This archaeological site is gradually proving to be a resource for tourism, a cultural component of the travel agents' package holidays and local itineraries promoted both in Italy and abroad. The third generation tourist is a sophisticated traveller looking for unique, stimulating experiences, for what makes a particular place different. Carefully following this evolving demand, travel agents have taken up the challenge of the Surgeon's House to diversify what they have on offer.

*The Surgeon's House stood in a district on the edge of the ancient town, which, in Roman times, gave onto the sea front and was part of the network grid of minor streets (in Latin 'decumani' and 'cardines').* These are the words we used to describe the position of the House in the town of *Ariminum* when the waters of the Adriatic reached as far as the line followed by present day railway tracks. Natural surroundings, consisting of sand dunes shaped by sea breezes in the salty air were certainly very different from the present day area. Nowadays, 2,000 years later, the coastline stands at a distance of about 1 ½ km. from the ancient town walls. This distance has given rise to a division of the town into two parts i.e. the historic centre and seaside resort area, the division being clearly marked by the railway lines. As a result, local residents tend to belong to two categories: those who make their living from the seaside and those who have no professional connections with this area and are even irritated by it. This attitude has also affected holidaymakers, who did not normally venture into the heart of the old town, identifying Rimini with the seaside. It is only in recent years that an integration process between the town's two faces has begun; they are becoming less watertight and less influenced by seasonal divisions.

5. The Surgeon's House is a phenomenon that has accelerated the unification process between the traditional spirit of hospitality and pride in the presentation of the local ancestral heritage, something that can be encouraged by a permanent educational programme involving local residents and interested parties, as a follow up to the enthusiasm generated by the official opening of this archaeological site.

The number of visitors to the House is evidence of ever more diversified types of tourism: from seaside holidays, heritage visits, wine and food, meetings and conferences, school parties and sports events... a reflection of a general trend in Italy and Rimini's role as an 'open town' ready to welcome new developments.

So many varieties of tourism contribute to the process of season diversification, at the same time promoting the sea front area, historic centre and hinterland in an area marketing context involving various institutions in cooperation with local commercial concerns, ranging from crafts to catering and shops... One example is the cooperative marketing venture named "An Archaeological Itinerary in Emilia Romagna" undertaken by the "Città d'arte" project, a joint venture by local and provincial authorities on the one side and consortia, travel agents, and hotel chains on the other, as well as another mixed history/art/wine and food project entitled "Una città da gustare. Percorso tra storia arte enogastronomia ed economia" sponsored by the Civic Museums involving links between historic monuments and local catering concerns. Something that can contribute to making one of the most popular destinations for heritage tourism is the fortunate combination of hospitality complexes and the local heritage sites and museums.

One important type of tourism is the school trip to the Museum in the period October-May. 39% of the students who visited the Museum this year came from outside the Province of Rimini: a trend on the increase. This was partly thanks to promotional campaigns, but above all to the variety and quality of what we have to offer, with specific visits designed for different age groups, from the earliest age, to the interest of the items on display and the educational abilities of our guides.

For third generation visitors the encounter with the Surgeon's House, Civic Museum and ancient monuments is a unique experience, an original, stimulating form of education involving western civilisation from its very origins.

At the core of this experience lie the heritage of antiquity and enhancement of items in the permanent collections, including reconstructions such as the *taberna medica* in the Archaeology sector on a scale near to the original. One task of the Museum staff, in their role as cultural mediators, in cooperation with the tourist industry is to diversify presentations in view of various kinds of visitor, though maintaining certain common characteristics of the items on view. One of the most important features is the high level of specialist knowledge of

university graduates combined with educational skills enabling our staff to maintain visitors' interest and attention without oversimplification. Another important point is the care taken over time allowed for guided tours (for example, for a combined visit to the House and Archaeological sector more than one hour is considered necessary, just as a minimum of 45 minutes is required for a tour of the Tempio Malatestiano). Another distinguishing feature is the intention to combine learning with entertainment, by means of the excitement of discovery, play, artistic creativity and use of the five senses.

The Past/Present Event, Festival of the Ancient World, already mentioned, is an exceptional opportunity for trying out new activities for adults, adolescents and young children, on special occasions or as part of the annual programme for schools: a visit to an ancient Roman army camp reconstructed following experimental archaeological criteria, taking part in evening tours of Roman monuments, with the surprise of meeting the Emperor Augustus reading passages from writers of his time, children vs. their parents playing the ancient board game of *latrunculi*, talking to the Surgeon's wife, who is willing to satisfy the curiosity of visitors to her house, or the astonishment of hearing lions roaring or birds twittering as depicted in the Orpheus mosaic, getting to know finds and items represented on domino and memory game cards, watching actors playing the parts of the people depicted on mosaics, entering the workshop of a Roman mosaic craftsman and putting together a mosaic using ancient techniques... these are some of the unforgettable experiences for people from the ages of 3 to 90 in the Museum, Surgeon's House or around town.

Sport also has a role to play in bringing people closer to the area's history and artistic heritage sites, cycling and walking among the traces of the past... activities promoted in cooperation with the "La Pedivella" Rimini sports club.

6. The Museum confirms its educational role in relation to students involved in a period of practical training who are keen on seeing how things work backstage. For many years there has been official cooperation with universities – especially with the Rimini Campus of the University of Bologna – and the nearest faculties of arts and heritage conservation, but also with the Universities of Trento, Milan and Rome – as well as local high schools for school-work switching and teaching projects.

The core of these activities, which, in some cases, have influenced youngsters' school or work options, is museum education, a field we have been working in for more than 30 years and which has been the subject of thesis research on more than one occasion.

Periods of practical work experience have covered popularisation and promotion, the economics of tourism, statistics etc., addressing the world of museums, highlighting the complexity of the institution ranging from cultural purpose, social function, economic concerns, and web technology.

This interaction has had positive results, both for the Museum, which in exchange for the investment of human energy is stimulated by contact with the younger generation, and for the students who have the opportunity to face up to a new challenge, put their choices to the test and establish useful contacts for their future, albeit one that is fraught with uncertainties and lack of encouragement at the employer end.

The relationship with the Rimini campus of the University of Bologna has been of particular significance over the last few years both with the degree course in the Economics of Tourism and that in Fashion Studies.

Several events have been organized jointly with the Civic Museum and Museum of Gazes in Rimini, ranging from the setting up of Master of Arts courses, Summer Schools and exhibitions centring on our collections. We hope that this tie will become even more productive and involving for the university sector.

Despite the central vocation of the Museum in the areas of conservation, research, promotion and education, further links need to be developed with the surrounding area and

its tourist industry. The Museum's potential must meet the expectations of travel agents, hotel owners etc. encouraging an encounter between supply and demand in the light of the most up to date marketing strategies.

These promotion strategies regard, on the one hand, web based communication alongside the local media and an ever increasing distribution of brochures and posters and, on the other, a series of collateral activities, aiming at various targets. These involve the organization of conferences, publication of guide books, academic and press articles, books for younger readers, and participation in seminars and thematic events. Examples are the making of documentaries such as "L'arte breve. Il chirurgo di *Ariminum*" (on the famous Roman surgeon), which has received important awards - promoted by the Rimini Museums in the context of the European project entitled "Adrias Kolpos", this film being directed by Adolfo Conti with specialist advice from the scholars working on the Surgeon's House.

The basis of enhancement of the cultural heritage is the conviction that cultural itineraries generate itineraries of economic as well as social growth. A more developed area will thus be the result of effective communication of its past.



**Pict. 1: The Surgeon's house (Rimini, Italy)**



**Pict. 2: Students to visit the Surgenous house (Rimini, Italy)**



**Pict. 3: The reconstructions of the taberna medica (Museum of Rimini, Italy)**



**Pict. 4: The Museum of Gazes Rimini's Ethnographic Collections**



**Pict. 5: Urban Cultural Cruise of Old World Festival (Rimini)**