

Omani Cultural Heritage Resources Enhancement (Ochre)
Italian Proposal for an Omani-Italian cooperation for the enhancement and rehabilitation of part of the 500 Fortresses and Castles of the Sultanate of Oman

With reference to the Omani-Italian Joint Committee and the subjects outlined in the *Omani Agenda*, a preparatory workgroup composed by Italian institutional and entrepreneurial partners (Italian Ministry for Cultural Heritage - MIBAC, "La Sapienza" Università di Roma, Italian Association of Restorers - ARI, Chamber of Architects of Rome, Italian Construction Contractors' Association - ANCE) has been set up in order to examine possible cooperation actions in some of the indicated fields (particularly 5th, 7th, 8th and 10th). Italian level of expertise in the field is actually very well known; besides all partners composing the preparatory workgroup were able to cover, at the highest level, the majority of aspects concerning documentation, preservation, restoration, rehabilitation and economic valorisation of cultural assets.

The workgroup is presently considering the opportunity to establish a Consortium, called the "Omani Cultural Heritage Resources Enhancement (Ochre)", which would like to present to the Omani Delegation its availability in studying **practical terms of cooperation for the enhancement and rehabilitation of part (currently not quantifiable) of the 500 Fortresses and Castles which rise on the territory of the Sultanate of Oman**, 60 of which have already been renovated.

Cultural Heritage has more and more become an important issue in all countries' political agendas: mostly because of its economic potential but also for its relevance as a support for social cohesion. Any tangible or intangible pieces of heritage become in fact *cultural* only if *culture* itself is able in granting them this particular status; and it generally happens when a society becomes aware of the uniqueness and authenticity of the values (neither repeatable nor replicable) expressed by the civilisation that created them.

Besides, human development and quality of life are by now widely considered as the ultimate goals of the conservation and sustainable use of cultural and landscape heritage being key resources to be transmitted to future generations (as well as energy and natural resources).

The **enhancement and improvement of sites** would in fact determine an increase of their relevance as tourist spots and consequently a higher chance of entering tourists' circuits (with evident advantages for local economy and social well-being); the management of the "pressure" created by this possible flow of new visitors according to each site potentials would on the other hand minimize their overall impact; the increasing relevance of each site would finally stimulate the "educational" process (through visits, lessons, stages, etc.) and determine a wider consciousness also in local populations, especially in young generations.

From this point of view *Ochre* welcomes the ongoing effort of Omani Government and People in order to study, document, preserve and enhance its unique cultural heritage aiming, in particular, at merging the **preservation and the rehabilitation of the 500 Fortresses and Castles**, 60 of which have already been renovated, **together with their valorisation as an economic resource and the eventual reconstruction of the transportation and telecommunication routes which may connect the structures.**

As a result of the preparatory workgroup activity, all partners involved have declared their willingness for an eventual formalisation of a Consortium aiming at the **Omani Cultural Heritage Resources Enhancement (Ochre)**. This step could be the instrument for starting a sound and lasting co-operation between Italian and Omani organisations in the field of cultural heritage both extending and improving on-going activities as well as designing new joint researches and interventions. Even if the archaeological studies (both ongoing and new) should maintain their central role, nevertheless a particular attention should be drawn to an additional typology of structures that show a great potential: the Omani castles and fortresses.

These particular structures, in fact, represent an extraordinary heritage of Arabian civilization, not only from an architectural point of view, but also for the political, military and even symbolic role they have been playing for more than a millennium.

The considerable **number and geographical distribution** of the Omani castles and fortresses is an ideal condition to plan a disseminated management model for the cultural, natural and economic resources of the whole Oman, based on a network which can **balance the risks and damages due to concentrated man-made pressures** on the spot places which attract tourism, **distributing the economic and social benefits along the whole territory.**

Since there is no universal solution for the management and enhancement of cultural heritage because each site is specific and diverse, Ochre Consortium would work to develop the most suitable structure for Omani

sites, considering also existing laws and specific situations. Ochre would like to express its availability in working out, in cooperation with the competent Omani Institutions, a common strategy which will follow a sort of “complexity growing” approach. In other words it would be necessary a **preliminary general recognition** on the spot, the design of a **pilot project** of limited dimensions able in **testing procedures, methodologies and outcomes**, and finally the **set up of a more extensive intervention**. In all these steps the Ochre Consortium would ensure its scientific and operational support through its background of acquaintances, competences, resources and collaborations.

. All achievements coming from these activities (scientific, methodological and operational) as well as the Ochre Consortium different expertises could represent the core of a “capacity building” activity in the field of Cultural Heritage. This could be set up at different levels (university, public administrations, companies and also workers) according to a **“training of trainers” strategy that would actually maximize the impact of the whole project.**

To the extent of elaborating the aforesaid pilot project for the rehabilitation of part (currently not quantifiable) of the 500 Fortresses and Castles of the Sultanate of Oman, **Ochre would be available to visit the Country with an Institutional and entrepreneurial working mission during** which it could detect more information, firstly, on the specific characteristics of the main Fortresses and Castles on which the Omani Government would like to intervene and, secondly, on the quantity and modality of public financial resources that the Sultanate would channel into the rehabilitation of the Fortresses and Castles and according to which time schedule.

Brief Ochre Partner Description

The Ochre Consortium jointly collects the extensive Italian expertise and knowledge of the tradition carried on in Italy in the field of redeveloping and restoring (rather than destroying). It actually represents a multi-tasking ensemble being composed by the scientific and research, the governmental and policy for safeguarding and enhancing of cultural heritage and the enterprises sectors.

Here his a brief description of each organisation.

The **Mibac Ministry for Cultural Heritage** (www.beniculturali.it), is the governmental authority responsible for the protection, conservation and preservation of Italian cultural heritage and landscape. Trough its extended network of central, regional and local offices (Soprintendenze), and research institutes (Superior Institute for Conservation and Restoration), Mibac covers all the fundamental elements of a national heritage policy: identification and inventory, legal protection, sanctions, integrated conservation strategies, research, survey, excavation, site management, dissemination, awareness-raising and training.

La Sapienza University of Rome (www.uniroma1.it) carries out the mission of contributing to the development of a society of knowledge through research, excellence and quality education as well as international cooperation. It offers a wide range of fields of study (370 first cycle and second cycle degrees, over 300 professional university masters) carrying out scientific research covering every field of knowledge. In the Cultural Heritage sector, it can count on the activity of several Departments dealing with archaeology, architecture, landscape.

The **Italian Association of Restorers** (Associazione Restauratori d'Italia – Ari, www.ari-restauro.org) , a national association founded in Florence in 1985 and charter member of the European Confederation of Conservator Restorer's Organization (Ecco) created in 1991 in Brussels, which gathers many European Conservator Restorers' associations. Ari's members are all professionals qualified as “Restorers of Cultural Heritage”.

The **Chamber of Architects of Rome and Province** (Ordine degli Architetti di Roma e Provincia – Oar, www.architettiroma.it) is a public institution representing more than 16.000 architects, restorers, urban planners and landscapers. It carries out its activity both at a national and international level by participating in European representative organizations, agreements and MoUs with European and non-European institutions. Oar is a hub of international connections, fostering cultural exchanges and creating opportunities of collaboration among professionals from different countries, providing each project with the best skilled professionals under the supervision and with the help of the Chamber's structure and authority.

The **Italian Construction Contractors' Association** (Associazione Nazionale Costruttori Edili – Ance, www.ance.it), composed of 102 Local associations and 20 Regional associations, represents 20,000 Italian construction companies which contribute 52.1% to Italian gross fixed capital formation, 10.9% to GDP and 28.3% to Italian industrial employment. Ance is also member of the main Italian and European entrepreneurs' organisations (Eic and Fiec) and is growing in number and strength on international markets: between 2003 and 2007, Ance's enterprises have more than doubled their overseas turnover, moving from 2.4 billion euro up to almost 5.5 billion euro in 2007, while global contracts' amount reached about 34 billion euro, with 512 construction sites in 80 countries employing 50,000 workers.

More information on each partner is available in the presentation brochures attached herewith.