

Genoa (Italy)

No 1211

1. BASIC DATA

State Party Italy

Name of property: Genoa: Le *Strade Nuove* and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli

Location: City of Genoa
Region of Liguria

Date received by the World Heritage Centre: 4 January 2005

Included in the Tentative List: 28 June 1996

International Assistance from the World Heritage Fund for preparing the nomination: No

Category of property:

In terms of the categories of cultural property set out in Article 1 of the 1972 World Heritage Convention, this is a group of buildings. It is a section of a historic city centre.

Brief description:

The *Strade Nuove* and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli, in Genoa, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, represent an innovative urban planning intervention associated with a particular system of 'public lodging', based on legislation. The Rolli palaces were residences built by the wealthiest and most powerful aristocratic families of the Republic of Genoa at the height of its financial and seafaring power.

2. ACTIONS

Background: This is a new nomination. A Site Management Plan sent by the State Party has been received on 10 January 2006.

Date of the Technical Evaluation Mission: 16-19 October 2005

Dates of request for additional information and of receipt from State Party: ICOMOS has sent a letter to the State Party on 30 January 2006 and the State Party has provided information on 31st March 2006.

Consultations: ICOMOS has consulted its International Scientific Committee on Historic Towns and Villages.

Literature: Genoa and its architecture are referred to in architectural and urban history, such as: E.A. Gutkind, *International History of City Development IV* (New York, 1969); Sir Banister Fletcher, *A History of Architecture* (Oxford, 1987); E. Poleggi, *Strada Nuova, una lottizzazione del Cinquecento a Genova*, Genoa, 1968; L. Grossi Bianchi, et al. *Una Città Portuale del Medioevo: Genova nei secoli X-XVI*, Genoa 1987; E. Poleggi, *Genoa, a Civilization of Palaces*, Genoa 2002.

Date of ICOMOS approval of this report: 10 April 2006

3. THE PROPERTY

Description

The city of Genoa is located in the region of Liguria in north-western Italy on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. The nomination consists of a section of the historic centre. It includes an ensemble of Renaissance and Baroque palaces along the so-called 'new streets' (*Strade Nuove*), on the northern edge of the old town of Genoa. The core zone (15.81ha) includes the principal palaces on two interrelated axes: a) Via Garibaldi (*Strada Nuova*), a part of Via Balbi and the linking Via Cairoli, and b) Via Lomellini and Via San Luca. The buffer zone (113ha) covers the entire historic centre of Genoa.

From the 10th to 13th century, Genoa had been tightly built with extremely narrow streets and tall buildings. By the mid 16th century, therefore, at the time of the growing commercial and financial influence, the wealthy aristocratic families who formed the oligarchy of the Genoese Republic decided to build a representative quarter in the upper part of the city. This was materialised in *Strada Nuova*, in 1551-83 (today Via Garibaldi), which was built following a public auction and parcelling of land under the hills in the northern part of the old town of Genoa. This 'new street' was 250m long and 7m wide (more than twice the width of medieval streets), and it became an exclusive area for the representational palaces and the manifestations of the leading families of the Republic (Pallavicini, Spinola, Doria, Lomellino, Grimaldi). The nearby area of Via Lomellini, formed the second group of prestigious palaces, this time renovating existing earlier structures. Following this example, a second *Strada Nuova* (1601-1618) was built further west by the members of the family of Balbi, today's Via Balbi. Finally, in 1778-86, another new street, *Strada Nuovissima* (today Via Cairoli), was built to connect the two earlier *Strade Nuove* (Via Garibaldi and Via Balbi), forming the third phase of the construction.

The grand residence palaces erected on the *Strada Nuova* (Via Garibaldi) in the late 16th century, formed the quarter of the nobility, who under the constitution of 1528 had assumed the government of the Republic and who felt the need to invest in the renewal of their properties. The design of the new street is attributed to architect Galeazzo Alessi (1512-72), who also designed several important palaces. The principal architects of the palaces in *Strada Nuova* were Giovanni Battista Castello (1509-69), known as Il Bergamasco, Bernardino Cantone, and the Ponsello brothers. They designed, e.g., the residences of the brothers Tobia and Agostino Pallavicino (1558), of G.B. Doria (1564) and of Nicolosio Lomellino (1563).

Due to the sloping ground, the typology of the palaces was adjusted to the specific conditions of each site. The palaces have generally three or four stories, combining the entrance hall with spectacular open staircases, courtyards, and loggias overlooking garden layouts, positioned at different levels in a relatively tight space. As a result of the constraints, each palace has its own architectural solution and individual character. The decoration nearly always starts with the façade *quadratura* with frescoes and/or stone décor, then continues in the interior with atriums, elegant staircases, corridors and galleries, decorated with stuccos and frescoes. The residences of the *Strada Nuova* benefited from the mastery of the creative craftsmanship of

Lombardy and the conspicuous life style of the wealthy Genoese bankers. This same grand style of construction continued in the Via Balbi at the beginning of the 17th century, where the themes were further developed. The palaces of Giacomo and Pantaleo Balbi (1618-45) and of Agostino Balbi (1618-70) were designed by architect Bartolomeo Bianco. The grandest of these was the palace of Stefano Balbi (1643-55), later *Palazzo Reale* for the Savoy family.

On the basis of a Senate Decree of 1576, the aristocratic palaces built on the *Strada Nuova* were placed on an official list (*Lista dei Rolli*) of 'public lodging houses', which meant that the owners were obliged to provide accommodation, on behalf of the oligarchic Republic, for distinguished guests. Later, the *Rolli* palaces came to include buildings elsewhere in the city, reaching 150 buildings by the end of the 16th century. The number was reduced to ca 100 buildings in the 17th century, but was again raised to 200 at the end of the 18th century. The Rolli list was articulated in three categories: the most representative palaces were reserved for cardinals, princes and viceroys, the second category for governors and land-owners, and the third for guests of lesser standing. The palaces of the Strade Nuove were always in the first category, while in other cases the identification of the category could be changed from time to time.

History

An ancient Ligurian port, Genoa was conquered by the Lombards in the 7th century, and sacked repeatedly by the Saracens in the 10th century. From the 11th century onwards, often in alliance with other city states, the Genoese were able to strengthen their trade connections, becoming experts and innovators in shipbuilding, navigation, and cartography, in industrial and banking techniques, and in drafting contracts that enabled overseas partnerships and investing in lucrative trade. During the 12th and 13th centuries, Genoa developed into one of Europe's largest cities, having some 100,000 population around 1300. In the 15th century, it suffered from decline and was frequently governed by the French or by Milan.

From the Middle Ages, Genoa became "*Libero Comune*", focused on a densely populated area between the sea and the hillsides. Politically, Genoa was characterised by a system of "*Contrade consortili*", corresponding to urban quarters, so-called "*Alberghi*", i.e. divided into zones influenced by noble families. Resulting from criticism of this system, a system of "*Dogi perpetui*" was established, which remained in force until 1528. Andrea Doria (1468-1560), a renowned Genoese admiral, who had served the popes and several European kings, had built a powerful fleet overpowering the Corsairs in the Mediterranean. In 1528, he established a new social division and an aristocratic constitution in Genoa, which continued in force until 1798. Under Doria, in alliance with Spain, Genoese financiers started controlling Spanish and Neapolitan trade, and receive gold from the New World. By 1570, they were the principal bankers of the Catholic Europe, and Genoa was ruled by a stable and prosperous oligarchic government.

It is in this context that there was the need to provide new palaces for the extremely rich families, and residences that

could host distinguished guests, such as cardinals, governors, and ambassadors visiting the city. As a result of the need for such representation, the *Strada Nuova* was built starting in 1551, and the official list (*Rollo*) of palaces selected for official representation was proclaimed in 1576. The typology of these aristocratic palaces was clearly distinguished from the earlier, late-medieval typology, consisting now of grandiose spatial unities (entrance halls, vast staircases, atriums, gardens) and a rich internal decoration in the style of late Renaissance and Mannerism. This model was also applied in other parts of the city.

Thanks to the enthusiasm of artists, e.g. Peter Paul Rubens, who surveyed and published the drawings of the palaces, as well as Giorgio Vasari, Vincenzo Scamozzi and Joseph Furtenbach, the model of Genoese palaces was carried to other European cities, especially the Low Lands and Britain. From the end of the 17th and through the 18th century, the economic and political influence of the city of Genoa declined, and it was occupied first by Austria and then by Napoleon. In the unified Italy, Genoa has again emerged as a major port city, and has also succeeded in keeping its historic urban fabric.

Protection and Management

Legal provision:

A part of the nominated properties are privately owned, some are in public ownership, and others are in mixed ownership. The owners have established the *Association of Palazzi dei Rolli*, which has been confirmed by a protocol of Agreement and approved by the City Council Resolution in 2002. The purpose is to promote the enhancement and management of the palaces.

All palaces included in the nomination are protected under the Italian law on the conservation of cultural heritage (decree no. 42 of 22 January 2004).

Management structure:

The principal management instrument is the revised Urban Master Plan, approved by Regional Council Decree no. 44 of 10 March 2000. The palaces of Rolli are classified either as category A (major importance) or category B (typical with significant characteristics). The master plan is implemented through an Operational Plan, which is continually updated and redefined in the light of events that occur. An Urban Traffic Plan for the central area of the city of Genoa was adopted in 2000-01.

There is a management plan for the nominated properties, which is operated by a working group including representatives of the Genoa City Council, *Soprintendenza* for Architectural Heritage and the Ligurian Countryside of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, and formalised by a protocol of 22 January 2004.

Resources:

The municipal resources are mainly allocated from the budget of the Operational Programme, which aims at the functional and qualitative rehabilitation of the whole historic centre. Additional funds for conservation and restoration are also raised. For example, 2001-03, an important part of the conservation work was financed from a special state budget referring to the nomination of Genoa

as the European Cultural Capital 2004. Furthermore, 2002-03, the City, the State and private owners jointly contributed some 10 million euros for the conservation of the Rolli palaces.

Justification of the Outstanding Universal Value by the State Party (summary)

The nomination recognizes the political and economic development of the Republic of Genoa as the principal foundation for the construction of the ensemble of the Strade Nuove and the establishment of the lists of Rolli. It further stresses that the urban planning and the architectural solutions were entirely new, experimenting innovative residential models that took into account the contemporary culture and the requirements of official representation of the republic.

Criterion ii: Strada Nuova in Genoa (1551-1583) constitutes the first example in Europe of an urban development project with a unitary framework, where the plans were specially parcelled out by a public authority and reserved for the major aristocratic houses. The influence of this urban design model is witnessed by the prominence which was given to it in the succeeding decades by important Italian and European treatise writers. Indeed, in the first twenty years of the 17th century, Strada Nuova appeared to four experts, Schickhardt, Rubens, Scamozzi and Furtenbach, as an original residential model, for the concentration of the palazzo in a single rectilinear precinct, for the complexity of the various residential solutions, for the sumptuousness of the decoration and the furnishings, and for the gardens rich in ornamental trees: an unprecedented urban structure, which the singular and archaic nature of the city made more evident.

Criterion iv: The Strade Nuove are a monument and document of the *siglo de los Genoveses* (1536-1640). The palazzi situated on the Strade Nuove, built over the 16th and 17th centuries, and the palazzo which with greater difficulty adapted the new architectural models to the dense layout of the historic city centre have as reference the European horizon of the most spectacular residential culture. Through the quality and accessibility of the entire scene, they exhibit a precise organisation in terms of space, structure, materials, forms and functions of a group of buildings that directly reflect a civilisation or succession of civilisations. The palazzo are laid out in a tripartite scheme, offering an extraordinary variety of different solutions, based on experience gained in the preceding century with villas on the outskirts of the city. The palazzo achieve a universal value in adapting to the particular characteristics of the site and to the residential and entertaining requirements of a peculiar social and economic organisation.

Criterion vi: The original example of the Strade Nuove was matched by a process of emulation so new and representative of a society of bankers and shipowners that out of it was created a network of public hospitality for visits of state (the Palazzi dei Rolli or 'Public Lodgings'. This residential heritage peculiar for its architectural characteristics of particular value, was indeed transformed, by a Senate Decree of 1576, into a public system of private residences which carried the obligation of hosting State

visits, thus contributing to the dissemination of knowledge of an architectural model and a residential culture which attracted famous artists and travellers, and of which a significant example is the collection of drawings by P.P. Rubens.

4. EVALUATION

Conservation

Conservation history:

Genoa was subject to bombardments during the Second World War. Fortunately however only minor damage occurred in the historic centre area. The Rolli palaces that are included in the nominated area survived fairly intact, except for the Palace of Francesco Grimaldi (1593), where the upper floor was destroyed. The palace has since been restored and is now used as a museum illustrating the system of the *Rolli*.

In the period following the Second World War, the historic centre of Genoa experienced various development trends, as well as facing social problems. Much of the building stock was also dilapidated due to the post-war lack of maintenance. Modern reconstructions were however only marginally touching the historic centre. In the 1980s and 1990s, the situation has much improved in terms of the state of conservation and the social-economic situation in the historic town. The City is now actively investing in sustainable development, and considers that the historic centre and the port area are special assets in this process.

Modern research on the historic palaces of Genoa started in the post-war period. In the 1980s already, the city of Genoa and the Superintendence of Monuments carried out a programme on the historic façades, illustrated in a conference, and resulting in conservation works, which have continued till today. In the 1990s, the City was able to undertake restoration works, benefiting from the G8 meeting in 2001. The works have continued as a joint effort of the City, the State and private property owners and sponsors.

State of conservation:

As a result of the initiatives undertaken particularly from the 1990s, the palaces included in the nomination have been surveyed, and their state of conservation verified. The façades and the interiors of many have been carefully restored. Some of the palaces are still used as private family residences, while others house museums or cultural institutions (e.g. *Palazzo Reale* is the seat of the *Soprintendenza* of Monuments), or are owned by banks and commercial firms or offices. The palaces are in good state of conservation, and their condition is monitored by the state authority.

Protection and Management:

The core zone encloses an ensemble consisting of the *Strade Nuove* with their *Rolli* palaces, and includes also a part of the medieval area, where palaces were renovated in the same period and included on the list of *Rolli*. The core zone contains the most representative part of the Renaissance urban renovation, and a part of the medieval fabric, which was renovated on the same model. ICOMOS considers that this definition responds adequately to the significance of the nomination. The buffer zone encloses

the entire historic centre. This area is defined as a conservation area with appropriate regulations in the Urban Master Plan, and the city has adopted a Conservation Management Plan for it. ICOMOS considers that the buffer zone is appropriately defined.

The municipal regulations for the management of the historic area are initially from 1986, but the norms have since been updated in *Piano Regolatore Generale*, which specifies the management of the places of Rolli, the Urban Master Plan (*Piano urbanistico generale*, 2000), as well as in the general urban and environmental master plan (1999). Together these plans form an adequate basis for the management system of the entire Old Town area included within the buffer zone.

There exists a coordinating committee for the management of the nominated property, and all stakeholders, including the relevant municipal and state authorities as well as private property owners, have signed an agreement to unify forces with shared objectives. The management system is operational and has demonstrated its efficacy. The results are not only shown in the successful conservation and restoration of the major palaces, but also in the more general improvement of the social, economic and physical conditions in the Old Town area. As a result, in many areas, the municipality has been able to provide incentives for new investments.

Risk analysis:

- Development

The present efforts of the City administration have significantly contributed to the control of development, which is currently managed taking into account the heritage potential of the historic town. There are still social problems in certain areas of the historic town (part of the buffer zone), but the City is taking initiatives to improve the situation. Also, part of the medieval building stock is still in need of repair and rehabilitation. After the Second World War, a motorway was built separating the historic centre from the port. However, in recent years, a pedestrian connection has been re-established. In the 1990s, the port was rehabilitated, and it has now become a favoured target for visitors. In the future, the aim is to eliminate the section of the motorway in front of the historic centre by building it into a tunnel.

- Tourism

Genoa established some of the first modern museums in Italy in the 1950s, using two Rolli palaces in Via Garibaldi (*Palazzo Bianco* and *Palazzo Rosso*). However, tourism was not the main focus until the 1990s. In the Management Plan, special attention is given to the active development of visitor facilities, sustained by the national law of 2001 on the development of local tourism systems. The area of the *Strade Nuove* forms one of the important focal points for tourism, while the rehabilitated port area is another. As a result of these efforts, Genoa has now much improved its capacity to manage reception of visitors.

- Natural hazards

The City has paid particular attention on monitoring environmental factors linked with the coastal climate. Steps have been taken to reduce air pollution (e.g. from traffic). The region of Genoa is not considered to be of special seismic risk.

Authenticity and integrity

Authenticity:

The nominated area encloses the ensemble of the *Strade Nuove*, and part of the medieval fabric. The area includes 42 palaces of those that were on the list of Rolli. These palaces include those that were the most representative and have best preserved their authenticity. Only one of the palaces was partly damaged during the war. The damaged upper story has since been rebuilt. This palace and other two palaces in Via Garibaldi are used as museums. Many of the Rolli palaces are privately owned, and some are in office or commercial use. However, the owners have made the necessary adaptations with due respect to the original structures and the historical authenticity of the buildings.

Integrity:

The ensemble of the *Strade Nuove* was built as a sequence of interventions in the 16th and 17th centuries, subsequently linked through another street in the 18th century. This ensemble was integrated with the medieval part of the city, and has retained its relationship with this context intact. In addition to the Rolli palaces, the nominated area also includes other historic buildings, including medieval houses but also buildings of more recent date. As a whole, the urban fabric of the medieval centre of the town has well kept its integrity. Modern interventions (e.g. the addition to the city's theatre) are relatively limited and do not disturb the overall character. As a sea power, the city of Genoa has always been closely associated with its port. In the post-war period, the port was separated from the historic centre by a motorway elevated on pillars above ground. The connection between the port and the centre has now been partly re-established by removing the railway and storage structures, and repaving the area for pedestrian use. In the future, the motorway is planned to be put into a tunnel in this section.

Comparative evaluation

The opening of the *Strada Nuova* for the construction of the residential palaces of the extremely rich Genoese noble families was in itself the first example in Europe of a new type of urban development with the plots parcelled out by the public authority and reserved for the major aristocratic palaces. This project was recognized as an important reference for principal architectural writers, such as Vincenzo Scamozzi and Joseph Furttenbach, but also Peter Paul Rubens who published the drawings of the palaces in their treatises. Several Italian cities have palaces of the 16th and 17th centuries, such as Florence, Venice, Ferrara, and Rome. However, the palaces of the *Strade Nuove* in Genoa introduce new qualities in the spatial articulation of architecture. They form an exceptional ensemble of aristocratic palaces, not found in other Renaissance plans. They were also built within a limited period in the second half of "cinquecento", giving them a unity difficult to find elsewhere. The palaces were all recognized for official representational use by the Republic of Genoa, being the basis for the system of Rolli. Examples of similar practice can be found in Europe, e.g. in Rome for Synods and Papal conclaves, and the *hôtels particuliers* of Paris used as part of the anti-feudal policies of Louis XIV. However, Genoa is distinguished by institutionalisation of the system based on the republican law.

Outstanding universal value

General statement:

The outstanding universal value of the ensemble of Genoa can be seen in relation to several themes, including the political-economic leadership of the Genoese, the originality of the urban planning solution, the innovative architectural solutions in further developing Renaissance ideas, and in the international recognition of influence of this architecture already at the time of construction.

Together with Venice Genoa was a major seafaring power commanding especially the western Mediterranean as well as being an international banking centre in the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1528, Admiral Andrea Doria, who saw himself as the Augustan founder and restorer of the 'ancient' republic, established a new constitution, under which the Republic was ruled by the principal aristocratic families and who made Genoa one of the principal mercantile cities of the world.

Within this political and economic context, the ensemble of the *Strada Nuova* was born as an elite quarter, placed in a panoramic position overlooking the old town, and symbolically representing the new governing class of the republic. In urban planning terms, this provided the leading aristocrats an exclusive compound, which had an important influence on the development of residential architecture in the rest of the city, and was extended to Via Balbi in the early 17th century. Architecturally, and particularly in spatial arrangements, the palaces represent innovative approaches based on Renaissance ideas then flourishing in Italy, and are already leading towards the baroque. The quality of the architecture of the *Strada Nuova* was highly claimed in contemporary treatises e.g. by Scamozzi, Furttenbach, Vasari, and Rubens. The establishment of the lists of Rolli was itself a recognition to the quality of the palaces.

Evaluation of criteria:

The property is nominated by the State Party on the basis of criteria ii, iv and vi:

Criterion ii: The nomination is referred to the influences that Genoa received from other Italian Renaissance centres, such as Florence and the Papal State, but also the examples that the urban and architectural examples of the *Strade Nuove* and the aristocratic palaces then offered through architectural treatises to others. Sustained and motivated by the economic and political power that the Genoese merchants and bankers had achieved by the mid 16th century, they were able to follow the major trends and provide themselves with highly representative residences. Through the architectural treatises of the time, these examples were brought into the consciousness of others making the *Strade Nuove* and the late-Renaissance palaces a significant landmark in the development of Mannerist and Baroque architecture in Europe. ICOMOS considers that the property thus exhibits an important interchange of values in the 16th and 17th centuries on the development of architecture and town planning, and thus that the property meets this criterion.

Criterion iv: The ensemble of *Strade Nuove* in Genoa represents a new approach in the 16th century urban planning, creating an exclusive quarter where the aristocratic palaces are concentrated, and which then

becomes the scenery for life and costumes representing the *siglo de los Genoveses* (1563-1640). The architecture of the palaces uses late-Renaissance and Mannerist language, translating this into an extraordinary spatial play of different levels, courtyards, and gardens that formed the framework for the official representation of the Republic of Genoa, established with the lists of Rolli. ICOMOS considers that the property is an outstanding example of an urban ensemble of aristocratic palaces of high architectural value, illustrating the economic and political power of the mercantile city of Genoa at the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries, and thus that the property meets this criterion.

Criterion vi: The State Party has proposed this criterion in reference to the idea of the legally established system of Public Lodgings, called Rolli. As a justification of the importance of this system the State Party has referred to the publication by Rubens. ICOMOS considers that the work of Rubens is more appropriately related to the criterion ii, referring to the influence of the *Strada Nuova* and the Rolli palaces. While recognising the interest of the system of Rolli, ICOMOS considers that the property does not meet this criterion.

Criterion i: The nomination has not been presented in reference to this criterion. ICOMOS has discussed this criterion, but considers that quality of the *Strada Nuova* and the Rolli palaces is sufficiently covered in the other criteria. ICOMOS considers that the property does not meet this criterion.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

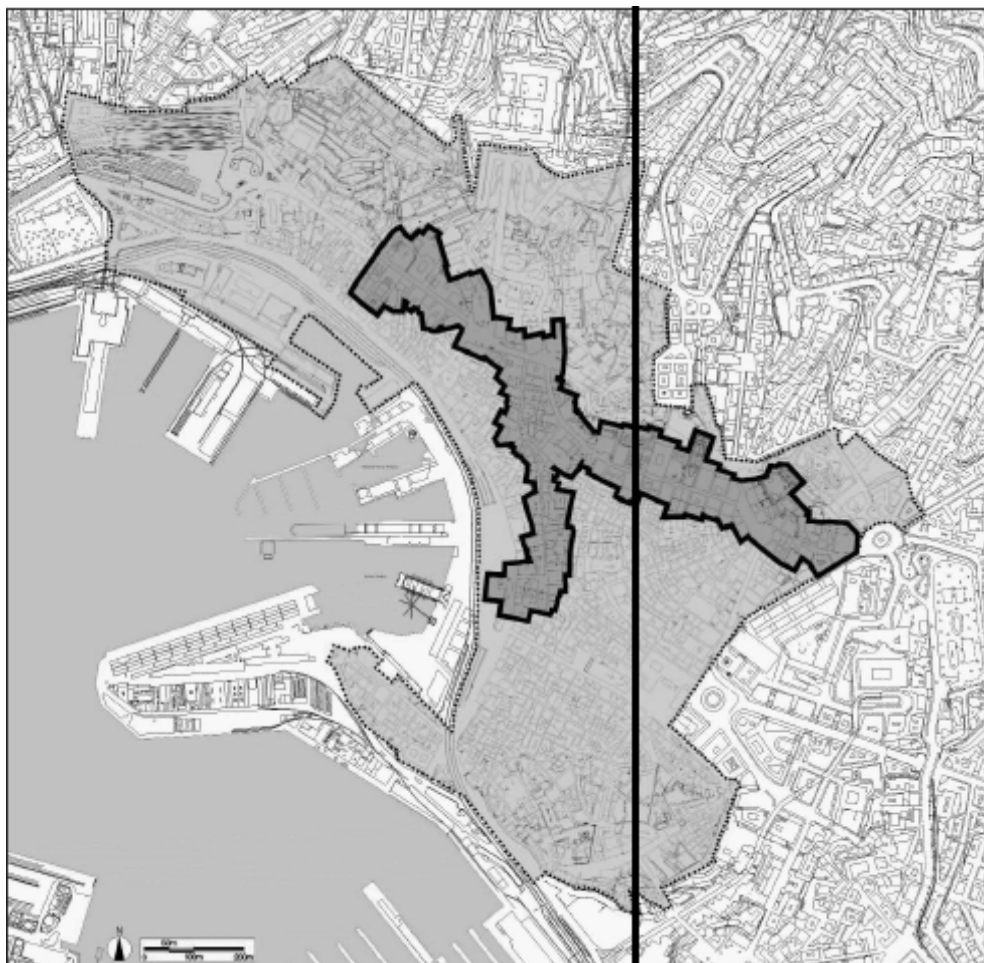
Recommendation with respect to inscription

ICOMOS recommends that Genoa: *Le Strade Nuove* and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli, Italy, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of **criteria ii and iv**:

Criterion ii: The ensemble of the *Strade Nuove* and the related palaces exhibits an important interchange of values on the development of architecture and town planning, in the 16th and 17th centuries. Through the architectural treatises of the time, these examples were publicized making the *Strade Nuove* and the late-Renaissance palaces of Genoa a significant landmark in the development of Mannerist and Baroque architecture in Europe.

Criterion iv: The ensemble of *Strade Nuove* in Genoa is an outstanding example of an urban ensemble consisting of aristocratic palaces of high architectural value, illustrating the economy and politics of the mercantile city of Genoa at the height of its power in the 16th and 17th centuries. The project proposed new and innovative spirit, representing the *siglo de los Genoveses* (1563-1640). In 1576, the Republic of Genoa established a legally based list of Rolli recognizing the most outstanding palaces for official lodging of distinguished guests.

ICOMOS, April 2006



Map showing the nominated Palazzi and the buffer zone



Aerial view of Strada Nuova (via Garibaldi)



Palazzo Stefano Balbi



Palazzo Rosso