

FLORENCE EYES 'ECO ACUPUNCTURE' REVOLUTION

By Elisa Cecchi

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Participants in the Eco Acupuncture conference in Florence in September 2012

(ANSA) - Florence, September 28 - In the year 2035 Florence will have become a worldwide model for low energy consumption and prosperity based on renewable resources - a city of the future as well as the past. That is if an ambitious project that academics and the Tuscan city are working on comes to fruition.

An international group of professors and students in architecture, urban design and urban planning from New York University Florence, the universities of Melbourne and of Florence and the Technical University of Delft believes this revolution is possible through small-scale interventions.

And they are working on a plan with the city of Florence to kick start the project.

The group recently gathered in Florence to hone a project called 'Eco Acupuncture', a term coined to describe a step-by-step process to identify key areas of the city in which minor interventions can help achieve environmental sustainability while safeguarding the city's history.

'The big thing about the process we are working on is to project an image of Florence that will have a new Renaissance in 25 years' time, a city driven by progress with a history which survives the changes of the future', Chris Ryan of the University of Melbourne's Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab told ANSA. Ryan is coordinating the ambitious plan.

Right now the sites the researchers and city council - for whom deputy mayor Dario Nardella is following the project - are considering for interventions include the central market square, the area of San Lorenzo, the 'Lungarno' along the Arno river in the city and tram routes that connect the historic centre to the city's outskirts.

Talks are ongoing with owners of a number of 'ghost buildings' in the city centre which are currently empty.

The aim is to give them a new function, making them economically viable and sustainable while preserving their beauty. Another issue currently under examination is how to make the existing tram system more effective by improving connections with other forms of public transport, as there is a plan to develop five new lines, as well as reducing the impact tramlines have for prams and

wheelchairs.

An interesting aspect of Eco Acupuncture involves the 15th century Villa La Pietra, where NYU Florence is based.

It is one of the most magnificent villas in the city and Ryan said it could become an example for the 'reduction of energy consumption and the introduction of renewable energy in an historic site'. Also under examination are measures to reduce the possible impact of flooding. Florence was severely damaged by a massive flood in 1966. Florence, the Renaissance city par excellence, can become a symbol of innovation, with creativity not only traced in its history but also seen in a new story for the future that would give it a role as a lead to follow for other historic European cities.

And the promoters of the Eco Acupuncture project, whose final results will be presented in March-April next year, believe taking one small step at a time will take them far. 'Small changes can act as a catalyst for the city', said Ryan.

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