

St. Catherine Hermitage, lift will be ready in spring

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☒ The Culture Committee of the Lombardy Region has visited the Saint Catherine Hermitage, to monitor the work carried out, and to assess the possibility of other interventions and collaborations. The reason is clear, the Hermitage, which overhangs Lake Maggiore, is a gem in the artistic heritage of the Varese area.

On entering the Hermitage, it is immediately apparent that this is a magical place; “clinging” to the overhanging rock, it has a breathtaking view of the lake. It is a small corner of Paradise, whose value the Province and the Region are trying to enhance, and the purpose of today’s visit was to monitor the work carried out so far.

In the long-term plans of Varese Province, the Hermitage and all of the surrounding area must become a top attraction for art tourism in the Varese area. To this end, foundations have already been laid, and a number of important projects have begun. The Province has purchased the two villas that stand above the Hermitage, and have upgraded the surrounding area. Moreover, the lift, whose construction began in 2007, should be operational next spring.

A lot has been invested in the lift, and its realisation has certainly been difficult. The shaft is 53m deep, and the tunnel that goes from the lift to the gardens of the Hermitage is 43m long. The total investment has been €3,100,000. The work has been carried out on areas that are undoubtedly difficult, employing continuous monitoring with seismic instruments. The work will mean that the 267 steps that separate the site from the car park can be bypassed. The interventions are aimed at increasing the accessibility to the site (which, until now, has only been accessible by two long flights of steps, one from the lake, and one from the car park of the Quiquio farmhouse). These are undoubtedly major interventions, and collaboration with the Region appears crucial, particularly in view of future projects.

The feasibility of the work was assessed this morning (Wednesday 20 January) by the Region’s Culture Committee, led by the regional councillor, Daniele Belotti, local councillors, Luciana Ruffinelli, who organised the “inspection”, and Stefano Tosi, the provincial councillor, Francesca Brianza, Vice President of the Province, Gianfranco Bottini, President of the Culture Committee Franco Binaghi, and the person doing the honours, the mayor of Leggiuno, Adriano Costantini.

Deadlines are fast approaching; at the end of February, the call for bids to upgrade the cultural treasures will begin; this is the first chance to guarantee part of the funding necessary to improve the area, but, as the immense potential around the Hermitage suggests, it will be important to organise the projects within a long-term plan, and the Region is ready to get involved.

The biggest question appears to be about what is going to happen to the two villas purchased by the Province. "We bought them, in order to prevent any speculation by outsiders," explained Councillor Brianza. "We now need to upgrade them and prepare them for tourist purposes, to create a more welcoming environment around the Hermitage."

The St. Catherine Hermitage can be visited during the opening times of the spring season. From March, every day from 9 a.m. to 12 a.m., and from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. And it is already an extremely important attraction, "visited by about 100,000 people every year," Vice President Belotti explained.

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