

A call for bids, to revive the shops in the centre

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Finally something seems to be moving, in an attempt to change what appeared to be the inevitable **“hollowing out” of business** in the centre of Varese.

Hope could come thanks to a regional call for bids that helps councils to combat this very phenomenon, which the town of Varese has decided to join. This call may grant a “symbolic” sum (€100,000 for a project for which this amount represents half of the investment), but it is the first step for further calls (a municipal call will subsequently be made) and may bring about a healthy turnaround.

The council’s participation in “STO@2020 – innovation initiatives to support and relaunch trade in urban areas, by reclaiming vacant spaces” was presented this morning, 22 November 2016, by the Councillor for Productive Activities, **Ivana Perusin**, together with **Alessandro Ceccoli**, the council’s representative at the Urban Commercial District and representatives of various trade associations, particularly retailers and estate agents.

The details of the STO@2020 call

The call aims to relaunch commerce and crafts, and support the redevelopment of currently vacant retail spaces; and the goal of Varese council is to give new opportunities for redevelopment and increase the attraction of a town area.

The sum indicated in the call is **€200,000: half of the sum** will be made available by Lombardy Region,

and €50,000 will be provided by Varese Town Council. After the end of the regional call, the Varese Town Council will issue a specific call, for the redevelopment of the commercial spaces that are currently vacant.

“The project stems from the need to improve areas that have deteriorated, that businesses have left, that, once redeveloped, could attract new commercial, tourist and craft businesses,” Councillor Perusin explained. “The final goal is to revitalise some central areas of Varese that have great potential to attract, first of all by reviving existing vacant spaces and creating new commercial and craft activities.” The objectives to reach this end include increasing the commercial, social and investment attractiveness of the most abandoned areas in the town, also by creating profitable collaboration among the operators in the sector, the authorities and local associations.

The methods also include **a portal the combines the supply and demand of commercial areas** in the interested zones, so that anyone looking for a space in the town centre can find it easily, and anyone offering one has a definite showcase.

However, sorting out the commercial spaces alone is not enough. “So, in the project, we’ve included a number of activities, from sorting out public spaces, to lighting, to dressing the windows of vacant shops, to greater synergy among those involved,” Councillor Perusin explained. “Because commerce is a strategic sector for Varese, that we’re going to concentrate a lot of effort on, over the next few years, to relaunch the whole town.”

COMMENTS OF THE PARTNERS IN THE CALL

The partners include **Confcommercio and Confesercenti, AIME and UBI Banca, the Federation of Estate Agents FIMAA, and even the association VG ART**, of the **Urban Canvas** project, which has already improved the appearance of many parts of the town, with top quality street art.

“Of course, we aren’t trying to attract new chain stores, but individual shops, or at least franchises. The logic of chain stores is determined by people who live thousands of kilometres away and they won’t help life in the centre of Varese,” said Marco Parravicini, the fiduciary of the shopkeepers’ association, ASCOM Varese.

“The real estate market is determined by economic factors, but also by the attractiveness of the town,” said **Dino Vanetti**, the Vice Chairman of FIMAA Varese, “It’s a very bad sign that there aren’t more people who work in Milan and who come to live in Varese. A call of this kind focuses on the attractiveness of the town, and, for this reason, is important for the market.”

“Liberalisation has penalised small businesses. Today we need confidence and we have it in these initial steps,” said **Alessandro Milani**, a representative of AIME for trade. “It will allow us to understand if we can achieve a positive synergy among shopkeepers.”

di Translated by Agostino & Ipri A. (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)