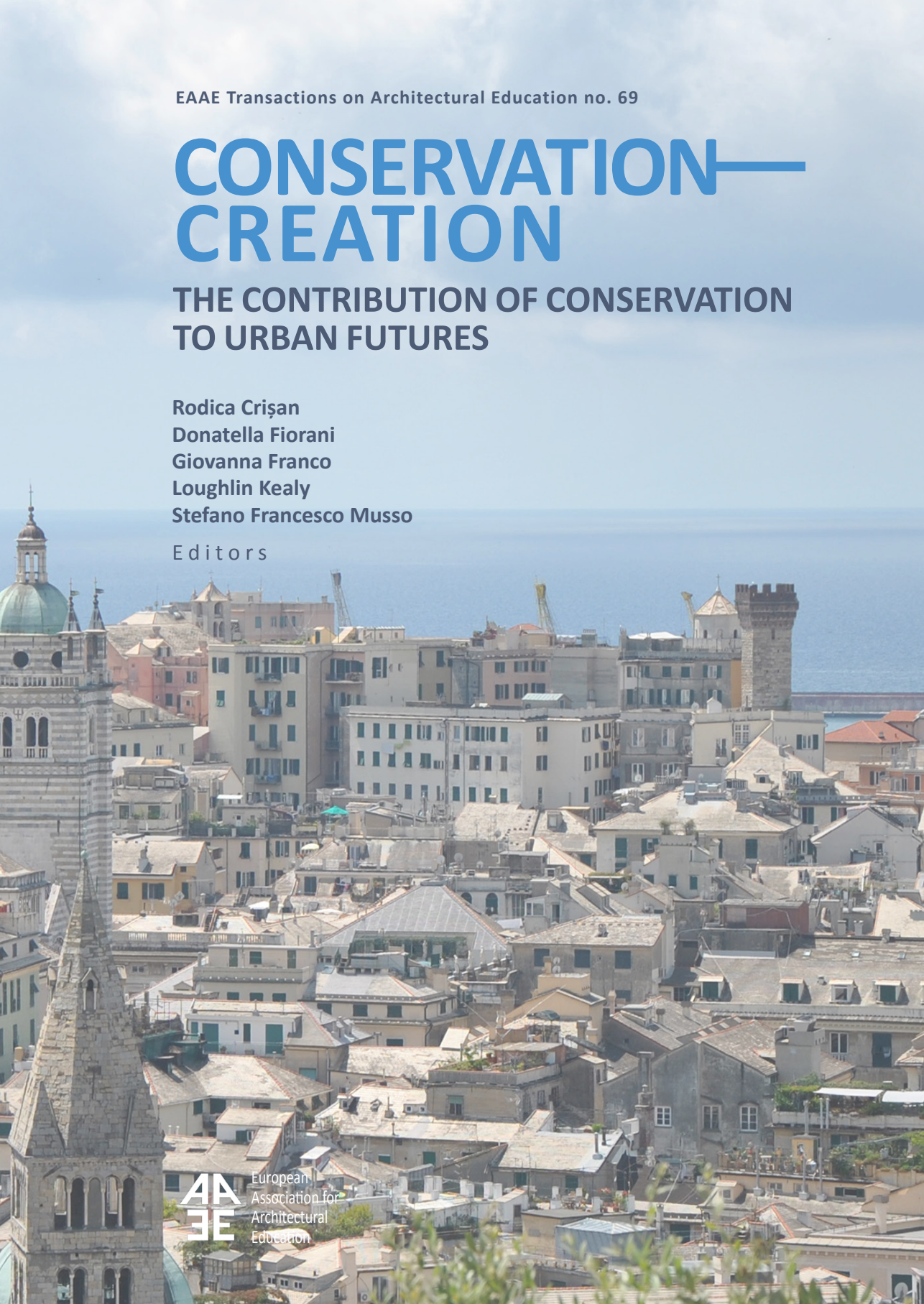
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CONSERVATION—CREATION

THE CONTRIBUTION OF CONSERVATION TO URBAN FUTURES

Rodica Crișan
Donatella Fiorani
Giovanna Franco
Loughlin Kealy
Stefano Francesco Musso

Editors



European Association for Architectural Education

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This book presents 33 papers written by some of the participants following the 9th Workshop on Conservation, organised by the Conservation Network of the European Association for Architectural Education in Genoa, Italy in 2024. All papers have been peer-reviewed. The Workshop was attended by 74 participants from the following countries: Czech Republic, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Portugal, Romania, Scotland, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom, United States.

Organising Committee
Simonetta Acacia, Marta Casanova, Luca Marasso, Sara Mauri, Cecilia Moggia, Federica Pompejano, Sara Rocco

Scientific Committee
Rodica Crișan, Donatella Fiorani, Giovanna Franco, Loughlin Kealy, Stefano Francesco Musso

Workshop Materials
The workshop materials are available at the link https://eaae-conservation2024.unige.it/it

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PROLOGUE

The workshop in Genoa was significant in the evolution of the Conservation Network. As the Network has developed over the years since its beginning in Genoa in 2007, it has explored the juxtaposition of conservation with transformation, regeneration, reconstruction, adaptation, consumption, demolition and sustainable design. The Genoa workshop theme, Conservation/ Creation was especially challenging, reflected in substantive and considered discussions during the workshop, and in the varied responses evident in the papers submitted afterwards and published in this volume.

The papers follow an alphabetical order according to the names of their authors - a structure adopted for many of our previous publications – but with a difference prompted by the provocation of the theme. To expose the differing perspectives that lay behind the provocation, and establish a context for the varied contributions that follow, an introductory section contains papers written by the members of the Scientific Committee: Rodica Crisan's paper provides an overview of signal projects in Genoa, proposing that they expose creative strengths (and, at times, shortcomings) in the interventions in that city over many years; Giovanna Franco's essay captures the tradition of study and analysis of urban fabric that has underlain the development of conservation methodologies, and extends to examination of contemporary issues; Donatella Fiorani's juxtaposition of streets in Genoa and Rome creatively demonstrates the power of fabric analysis to document impacts of social transformation of the relationship between the public realm and private space over time; Loughlin Kealy proposes that creative recognition of traces is an essential gateway through which the conservation project creates a pathway for the recovery and maintenance of memory; Paul Valery's imaginary dialogue about Architecture and construction between the shades of Socrates and his pupil Phaedrus, frames Stefano Musso's distillation of study of Genoa and reflection on the meaning and value of the "layered cities" we have inherited.

Loughlin Kealy

First Section: Introduction

THE LIMITS OF CREATION IN CONSERVATION

Rodica Crișan
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
rodica.crisan@uauim.ro

Introduction

Operating with unique cases where standard solutions are not appropriate, conservation always involves creativity to support the heritage's ongoing values and relevance. For each case, the 'minimum effective intervention' must be creatively devised to 'safeguard the quality and values of the resource, protect its material substance and ensure its integrity for future generations' (Feilden and Jokilehto, 1998). But conservation of the built heritage is not only about maintaining the physical integrity of some historic buildings. 'It is not about to contemplate and adore the ashes, but to keep alive the fire'.[1] In recent decades, we have always talked about integrated conservation 'achieved by the application of sensitive restoration techniques and the correct choice of appropriate functions' (Council of Europe, 1975).

From this perspective, conservation means creating a new life and added value for old inherited buildings by adapting them to contemporary needs, thus ensuring their sustainability through innovative approaches and community involvement. Therefore, it is not new that conservation should be understood as a continuous process of 'management of change', in which every generation brings its own contribution to the history of the built heritage by adding a new layer corresponding to new life expectations. In other words, the adaptive reuse of old buildings is currently a common practice which 'links the past to the present and projects into the future' (Heritage Council of Victoria, 2013). Adaptive reuse also requires creativity in finding the most appropriate contemporary use, so that the historic building can be adapted satisfactorily through minimal transformations, thus protecting, even enhancing, its identity.

An appropriate new use assigned to an old building often requires contemporary additions and/or partial reconstructions. Such interventions obviously involve architectural creation, which develops around the relationship between old and new. But this old-new relationship and the associated creativity should be mastered within specific limits, in order to solve contemporary requirements without altering historic values. If the new dominates the existing, the historic character might be altered, while relatively neutral modern additions might emphasise the historic qualities of the existing building. One can find here a stimulating field for creativity, provided that the designer is guided by a respectful attitude towards heritage, based on accurate knowledge and understanding of its values. In other words, creativity is beneficial for conservation when it manifests itself within the limits imposed by the identity of the inherited built object.

'Contemporary architecture increasingly recognizes that to build with the past is not to be held back by it. Heritage is no longer seen as a constraint but as an active ground for design. Within this shift, pre-existence becomes more than a physical condition – it

becomes a narrative thread, a structural and symbolic presence that invites care. Rather than asserting dominance, many architects today choose to respond with gestures that are deliberate, quiet, and precise. These interventions frame rather than replace, protect rather than obscure. In doing so, they allow history to remain visible, not as a backdrop, but as a living layer of the architectural experience' (Ferreira, 2025).

Following such a design philosophy, the new additions become part of a layered narrative about the past and present life of a heritage resource. This layered narrative is evident when contemporary design does not replicate the past, nor does it overwhelm historic heritage with ostentatious modernity. The new carefully integrates into the historic context, reinforcing heritage and giving it renewed relevance through creative, sensitive and respectful approaches. These are the successful cases. But sometimes creativity can be excessive, expressing more the strong personality of the designer than the identity of the heritage, thus diluting and mystifying historic structures.

Current conservation practice shows divergent positions, pointing out different levels and hypostases of 'creation', with better or worse consequences. On one extreme, there are overly conservative attitudes whose inflexible approach 'seems to be increasingly caught in progressive bureaucratisation of conservation' (Frampton, 2001) and which eliminate any contemporary architectural expression from the conservation of historic buildings. At the other extreme, there are excessively creative designs where essential values of the historic building are utterly annihilated by the vanity of the architect, leading to 'a kind of Disney World that nobody needs or desires' (Frampton, 2001).[2] In between, there are many cases of sensitively calibrated 'middle-ground' conservation designs, which demonstrate how, with an appropriate approach, built heritage can be suited to updated uses or new purposes, even providing alluring visitor experiences, obtained with little change to the original structure and with reversible construction, concomitantly making visible the layered narrative of the past and present life of the historic heritage.

In the following, we will critically present some examples of contemporary interventions on heritage buildings, in Genoa and in other parts of the world, intended to illustrate the necessity of keeping creativity in conservation within certain limits set by the heritage's intrinsic qualities: creativity makes a positive contribution to adapting old buildings to new uses and enhancing the contemporary values of heritage, but excessive creativity can be harmful to historic values.

Positive Creativity

Genoa is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, with a multi-millennial history. The old centre of Genoa showcases the overlapping of several historic stages, with its urban structure and buildings continuously adapted to changing needs and requirements. The city's layered story is not just about the successive physical strata of buildings and streets, but also about the cultural and historic narratives that are interwoven with its urban fabric. From its rich history of maritime power to its Renaissance splendour and its modern-day vibrancy, Genoa offers a compelling story of a city shaped by its past and continuously evolving in the present. Therefore, we may say that the creativity which supports conservation by managing change is a local tradition in Genoa, from ancient times to modern ones.



FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c. Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa converted to academic use: modern interior design and new additions with steel structure (photos: RC, 2024).



FIGS. 2 and 3. Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa converted to academic use: outdoor relaxation areas (photos: RC, 2024).



FIG. 4. Summary representation of the successive archaeological stages – from the 6th century AD to the present day – at the site of the Department of Architecture and Design in Genoa (photo: RC, 2024).

The recent interventions at the former Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa (mid-16th century) are a good example of integrated conservation, where creativity provides a new life for a redundant historic building complex through the design of new modern additions which become part of its layered narrative.

The centuries-old Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa ceased its original function as a hospice for the poor at the end of the 20th century. In 2003, the building complex was acquired, under a fifty-year concession, by the University of Genoa, which oversees the internal adaptation of the old buildings to the new requirements of academic use.

Through several stages of intervention, the University of Genoa aims to transform the Albergo dei Poveri into a new large campus of humanities and social sciences for the Ligurian capital and for the whole of Liguria. About 5,200 students from the faculties of Law, Political Science and Languages will benefit from the project, together using the historic structure adapted to the new use.

In 1994–1995, the first interventions started, initially concentrated on the first floor, with the restoration and conversion of the former Oratory of Women, which became the Aula Magna, and the creation of four new classrooms for the Faculties of Law and Political Science.

The ongoing adaptive reuse covers a total area of approximately 11,000 m². Beyond the renovation of almost a third of the roofs and the renewal of technical installations and equipment, the current intervention includes the creation of a new 2,500 m² library with 250 seats and capacity for 100,000 volumes, five new classrooms with approximately 360 seats, outdoor relaxation areas and approximately 6,000 m² of research spaces, with multipurpose studios and study rooms for students and researchers. All these works will cover about 15,000 m² from a total of 60,000 (ASP Emanuele Brignole, n.d.).

Within a sensitively calibrated adaptive reuse, the old complex of the Albergo dei Poveri received some local additions required by its newly assigned functionality, all made with contemporary materials and techniques. The interior was fitted with a minimalist modern design which brings a contemporary flair, without altering the distinctive inherited architecture. In fact, through the contrast they create, the modern accents highlight the historic architecture, simply adding an undisguised new layer to its story. Moreover, all new additions are made in steel construction, are therefore reversible, and could be dismantled without altering the historic substance (Figs. 1a, b, c). The architectural dialogue between old and new, suggesting a bridge between generations, seems to be the manifes-



FIG. 5. Old and new at the Department of Architecture and Design in Genoa (photo: RC, 2024).

to of this creative adaptive reuse design concept. The outdoor relaxation areas, carefully arranged for students' and teachers' use, allow an overall view of the old-new dialogue and give the feeling that the old Albergo dei Poveri is really living a new life (Figs. 2 and 3).

But perhaps the best example of sensitive association between old and new in Genoa is the campus of the School of Architecture itself, currently the Department of Architecture and Design (DAD), which hosted the 2024 EAAE Conservation Workshop. Set on the hill of Castello, the location of the first historic settlements of Genoa, which has witnessed numerous transformations from antiquity to the present day, the DAD campus stands as testimony to the long history of the site, gathering layers of memories and continuing the series of adaptive transformations (Fig. 4).



FIG. 6. The Edoardo Benvenuto main hall of the Department of Architecture and Design in Genoa, which once hosted meetings of the archiepiscopal curia, papal audiences and monastic meals (photo: RC, 2017).

Completed in the early 1990s, the DAD campus integrates new architectural elements with the existing historic fabric, creating a unique blend of old and new. The project included the restoration, with local reconstruction, of part of the ex-convent of the Nuns of San Silvestro, conducted by Eng. Luciano Grossi Bianchi, and a new building designed by Arch. Ignazio Gardella on the site of the convent church and of an attached oratory, destroyed by bombardments during the Second World War (DAD – Unige, n.d.) (Fig. 5).

Every pre-existing structure, even fragmentary, was incorporated into the new project. Every opportunity was exploited for a suggestive modern reconstruction of historic spaces, such as the convent galleries and the main hall which once hosted meetings of the archiepiscopal curia, papal audiences and monastic meals (Fig. 6). Spaces suitable for the specialised functions of the technical laboratories and the library were set in the newly constructed areas.

The creative design approach preserved the historic significance of the site while adapting it for contemporary use. Thus, the new DAD campus gathers a rich





FIGS. 7 and 8. The blend of history and modernity at the Department of Architecture and Design in Genoa creates a stimulating atmosphere for architectural apprentices and scholars (photos: RC, 2007 and 2018).

historic stratification in a coherent gesture of continuity, where modern architecture is perfectly integrated with historic buildings.

The restored monastery, including its cloister, raised garden and original frescoes, provides a unique and inspiring context for the university campus. The careful balance between preservation and modernisation has transformed the Monastery of San Silvestro into a thriving hub for architectural and design studies, showcasing a successful example of adaptive reuse and urban regeneration. The result creates a stimulating atmosphere for architectural apprentices and scholars, fostering a close relationship between students, faculty, visitors and the city (Figs. 7 and 8).

Another successful example of adaptive reuse of an old structure in Genoa is the new National Museum of Italian Emigration (MEI – Museo Nazionale dell'Emigrazione Italiana), opened in 2022. It is set in the medieval complex of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè.

During the Middle Ages, at the time of the Crusades, the building known as the Commenda di Prè provided accommodation to pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land. For a long time, it was also a lively meeting place for merchants, clergy, soldiers and knights who departed on one of the Mediterranean routes that led to North Africa, Asia Minor and the Holy Land, and returned to Genoa. Next to the former accommodation building stand two overlapping churches, and all the spaces of this structure are of great charm, as they house some of the best-preserved examples of Romanesque architecture in Genoa (Figs. 9a, 9b).

For this building – traditionally a historic crossroads of cultures and a place of transit over the centuries – housing the National Museum of Italian Emigration was a perfect new use, allowing visitors to retrace the numerous stories of Italian emigration from the mid-19th century to the present day.

The adaptive intervention included conservative treatments and restoration of the historic building, as well as some functional arrangements and the exhibition set-up.

The museum extends over three floors and is divided into 16 thematic areas. The interior design is contemporary, and the exhibition set-up is a non-didactic one, as the main





FIGS. 9a, 9b. The National Museum of Italian Emigration, set in the medieval complex of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè in Genoa (photos: RC, 2024).



FIGS. 10a, 10b, 10c. Contemporary interior design at the National Museum of Italian Emigration in the medieval complex of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè in Genoa (photos: RC, 2024).

goal of the architects was to convey emotion through a few scenic elements in a neutral setting (Figs. 10a, b, c). The experience is enhanced by digital technologies, which allow visitors to explore interactively and engagingly different locations otherwise inaccessible. Overall, the interior space is intended to stimulate visitors' reflection along a multimedia and interactive path, where history – of both people and the building – is discovered step by step in a modern ambience which adds a new layer to the narrative of the historic place (Gnosis Progetti S.p.A., n.d.; ETT S.p.A., n.d.).

Harmful Creativity

However, there are also cases when excessive creativity can be harmful to heritage. This occurs when an architect despises a historic building and dominates it with extensive new additions, or even completely replaces it with an 'optimised' version according to the architect's own taste and arrogant creativity.

A first example of excessive creativity concerns the complex of the former Kruisheren monastery (15th century) in the centre of Maastricht, transformed into a luxury hotel inaugurated in 2005.

The Gothic church of the former monastery houses the hotel facilities: reception, lobby, three lounge corners (in the former side chapels), three modern boardrooms, a library, a glass lift and a wine bar exhibiting unusual wine storage. The nave of the church also contains an extensive mezzanine with a restaurant area. The manner in which the hotel facilities have been designed and agglomerated in the monumental Gothic building is shocking and mind-boggling (Figs. 11–13). There is no doubt that the extremely creative design of the conversion was mainly focused on the spectacular look and on commercial attractiveness, not on the cultural valorisation of the centuries-old Gothic church. The

historic construction is assigned only the role of shelter, and its prominent murals become only a background for the futurist design which emphatically redefines the architecture of the place. The typical Gothic spatiality is discontinued by numerous partitions and by the dizzying agglomeration of strange forms and striking colours. Visual effects (recalling fun-fair amusement) deflect attention from the historic architecture. The acoustic and haptic characteristics of the historic building are altered too. Overall, the heavy and inflated interior design seems to be a gathering of stalls and amusements for public entertainment that totally clashes with the austere architectural character of the monumental church.

At other times, a lot of architectural 'creativity' is invested in historic sites in the name of tourism promotion. Valuable and significant ruins are transformed into commercial forgeries by fancy reconstructions in a 'historic style'. Obviously, authenticity is corrupted, the relation of the cultural resource with the historical timeline is falsified, and the concept of heritage is distorted. Basically, innocent visitors are presented with fakes as historic buildings.

There is no doubt that enabling ruined ensembles to be visited usually requires some additions. There are well-known cases where such additions were made locally, just to satisfy accessibility requirements, with modern materials and techniques, clearly recognisable and reversible, while preserving the overall image of ruin. A good example of this kind is the restoration of the ruined Castel Firmiano (Sigmundskron Fortified Castle) in Bolzano, Italy, converted into the Messner Mountain Museum inaugurated in 2006, according to the project conducted by Arch. Werner Tscholl (Figs. 14–17). But there are also cases of ruins that fell victim to extensive and rather arbitrary reconstructions, where creativity manifested excessively just for the sake of tourism and profit. Very often, kitsch proliferates within this kind of consumerism-led reconstruction, which in fact turns heritage sites into entertainment venues and theme parks with a historic ambience for ignorant tourists' delight. Such are the 'restorations' of several medieval fortified castles in Romania. An example can be observed in Figs. 18–21 and compared to the soft interventions of Arch. Werner Tscholl on the ruined Castel Firmiano in Bolzano.

One can also note cases of 'crass reconstructivism operating with impunity' (Frampton, 2001) where essential values of the historic building are annihilated by the vain 'creativity' of the architect. Such excessive creativity usually results in bizarre hybrids, born from the marriage of developer greed and obsequious architectural design. The historic heritage, considered just an obstacle for new real estate development, is overwhelmed by a new profitable 'addition'. Often the façade of an old house is simply embedded in a new oversized building (Figs. 22a, b). You can almost feel the humiliation of the original historic house engulfed by the new and profitable construction oblivious to the context. 'The ugliness of the outcome is a pertinent slap in the face, reminding us how blatantly any concern for architecture is being sacrificed in this approach. This disastrous hybrid is an unfortunate totem of where we are now, an object lesson for architectural students of what not to do […]' (The Gentle Author, 2018). And such projects are presented to the public as heritage conservation!

Sometimes, historic buildings are even demolished and replaced by new mimetic constructions 'in the old style', including some arbitrary transformations hidden in the overall historic appearance. An example of this kind can be observed in Figs. 23a, b. Thus, we can say that a new restoration method, through demolition and reconstruction, is about to be born … from an excess of creativity!



FIGS. 11-13. Luxury hotel facilities in the Gothic church of the former Kruisheren Monastery in Maastricht, with a dizzying agglomeration of strange forms and striking colours (photos: RC, 2015).



FIGS. 14-17. Castel Firmiano (1st–18th centuries) in Bolzano, Italy, converted into the Messner Mountain Museum (2006), with local additions made with modern materials and techniques (photos: Hubert Berberich, 2007, and Ewald Gabardi, 2014. CC BY-SA 3.0).





FIGS. 18 and 19. Rupea Citadel, Romania (14th–18th centuries), before and after the restoration works (2013), including extensive reconstructions. Overall view before the restoration (fig. 18, photo: Dana T, 2011, CC BY-SA 3.0) and after it (fig. 19, photo: Diana Popescu, 2013, CC BY-SA 3.0).





FIGS. 20 and 21. Rupea Citadel, Romania (14th–18th centuries), before and after the restoration works (2013), including extensive reconstructions. Local view before the restoration (fig. 20, photo: Carmen Ștefan, 2010, CC BY-SA 3.0) and after it (fig. 21, photo: RC, 2014).

Conclusions

To preserve inherited cultural values as well as to minimise the environmental impact of construction processes, reusing redundant buildings is always better than demolishing them. Sensitive reuse can turn buildings at risk into opportunities, as long as creativity is kept within reasonable limits and the adaptive intervention does not cause irreversible alteration to historic values. 'Those goods […] belong to our present and should arrive to the future generations as much "intact" as it will be possible, eventually enriched by new "layers" (formal, material, of meanings) instead of deprived of the existing ones' (Musso, 2019).

Contemporary creative design adds diversity and layering of architectural styles through time. Good contemporary design can complement heritage buildings without overwhelming historic values. But excessive creativity can be harmful, and essential values of the historic building can be utterly annihilated by the vanity of the designer supporting developer greed. 'Good design associated with heritage places is not a question of style, taste or replication, but of expertise, quality and skill in delivery' (Office of the Victorian Government Architect, 2025). And it is essentially a matter of knowing how to listen to the old building and giving it due respect.

FIGS. 22a, 22b. The façade of a Belle Époque house in a protected area of Bucharest, incorporated into a new, oversized building, alien to the character of the area (photos: RC, 2020).









FIGS. 23a, 23b. Historic building in Bucharest (1920s) completely demolished and reconstructed: the empty space left after the demolition of the original building (fig. 23a, photo: Adrian Balteanu, 2014) and the new reconstructed building, quasi-identical to the original (fig. 23b, photo: RC, 2017).

Architects must constantly bear in mind that adaptive reuse is about more than maintaining the physicality of a building; it is about continuing the story of a place, 'making the past relevant to the present and future' (Marchant, 2024). This goal can only be achieved when the architect bases the project on in-depth knowledge and understanding of the historic building, to add a discreet but readable new layer to it which naturally continues the story. For the architect, the adaptive reuse of historic buildings can be professional training at the highest level, an exercise in understanding and appreciation of the work of predecessors. The architect who can project himself into the exultation of another learns more than the craft of designing a building. He learns the stuff of architecture.[3]

Notes

1 Gustav Mahler quoted by Stefano Musso (Musso, 2019).

2 'Have our standards become so exacting that they inhibit a more liberal approach to the reconstitution and appropriation of antique form? The world as a whole seems to be increasingly caught in progressive beaurocratisation of conservation… with architectural purity on one side of the argument, and crass reconstructivism operating with impunity on the other: the latter leading to a kind of DisneyWorld that nobody needs or desires. Between these two poles, there surely exists an intelligent sensitively calibrated "middle-ground"' (Frampton, 2001).

3 Paraphrase after Kenneth Rexroth, 'The Poet as Translator' (1959). In original: 'The writer who can project himself into the exultation of another learns more than the craft of words. He learns the stuff of poetry'.

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GROUND FLOORS

Donatella Fiorani
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
donatella.fiorani@uniroma1.it

Introduction

Conservation and creation are a complex combination, seemingly an oxymoron, but entirely consistent for those involved in restoration in architecture. The creative component is in fact indispensable to conservation practice, because there is nothing pre-established in the issues raised by the preservation of historic buildings. This creation can be expressed in its most traditional form, consisting of the search for an appropriate configuration; this occurs with the need to fill gaps or install new visible systems – plant or structural – in historic buildings. But we must also consider the broader meanings of the term, according to which creation is understood not as the concrete production of things but as creative action, creativity.

Creativity determines different types of impact of the new on the existing, and in the best cases for restoration, material creation can be minimal in the face of a particularly sophisticated creative process.

It is also possible to reflect in terms of creativity and creation with regard to the use of buildings, where the intangible reasons and methods governing the selection of functions relate to the material level of the transformations brought about in historic buildings.

The preservation of a historic centre is intrinsically linked to the relationship between public and private and to the issue of use, matters that particularly involve common open spaces and the ground floors of historic buildings, which constitute the area of interpenetration between the two property contexts.

Comparing what is happening on the ground floors of a section of the historic centres of Genoa and Rome can provide us with a tool for assessing how contemporary demands translate, in terms of conservation and creation, into different historic building tissue. This is a small evaluation experiment that can help to focus in a concrete way on many issues that are particularly relevant today.

Genoa and Rome: a Sample Comparison

Genoa and Rome are two cities with very different histories, distinct origins and architectural characteristics, but while also sharing some similarities. The ancient layout of Genoa is less well known and probably overshadowed by the important development of the maritime republic. The architectural features of the city, squeezed between the sea and the steep hills of the Apennines, are particularly distinctive.

By contrast, the medieval layout has been extensively studied through in-depth historical and typological analysis and equally detailed material studies, as have the subsequent urban expansions, especially for Strada Nuova and Via Balbi.[1]



FIG. 1. View of Via del Campo towards the south, Genoa (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).



FIG. 2. View of Via dei Coronari towards the west, Rome (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).

The Ligurian city is almost entirely devoid of public squares – the modest open spaces still present today are the legacy of the open spaces used by the factions that fought for power in the medieval city – with few main roads – in contrast to the prevalence of winding alleys that suggest a probable Islamic influence. The historic building fabric is characterised by the presence of residential types (terraced and row houses), initially equipped with porticoes that were later filled in, and characterised by their considerable height, the result of progressive superelevation (Poleggi and Cevini, 1981, pp. 48, 52, 56–61).

Rome, on the other hand, has a historic centre with large flat and gently rolling areas crossed by the river Tiber, largely influenced by the presence of the ancient capital of the empire, which characterises much of its monumental heritage and the layout of numerous structural routes, a matrix reinterpreted, with appropriate ecclesiastical additions, by the medieval city and later Renaissance and Baroque creations.[2]

To facilitate a comparison of the state of conservation – and creativity – of urban tissue with such different histories, it was decided to analyse two continuous street routes that are similar in some respects. In Genoa, the route consisting of Via del Campo, Via di Fossatello and Via San Luca is particularly well suited to these requirements. It leads from the western entrance to the Barbarossa walls (12th century), known as Porta dei Vacca, to Piazza di Banchi, following the concave curve of the coastline along a broken line composed of three more or less straight segments (Fig. 1).[3]

For Rome, Via dei Coronari was chosen: it is a straight axis running from east to west that retraces part of the Roman route of *Via Recta*, starting from the apex of the Tiber bend to the current Via del Corso. Attesting to their strong vital and productive nature in the past, both the Genoese and Roman routes depart from the historic urban financial centre: Piazza di Banchi at the western end of the Genoese route and Via dei Banchi at the eastern end of the Roman route (Fig. 2).



FIG. 3. Via del Campo, via di Fossatello and via San Carlo route in Genoa. The building units with medieval features are coloured yellow, the replacement building units are grey. The buildings with medieval features are: a) via del Campo 3-11a building; b) newly constructed building with a medieval basement; c) building in via San Luca 23. The palaces and Rolli palaces are identified as: A) Cesare Durazzo; B) Bartolomeo Invrea; C) Antonio Doria Invrea; D) Gio. Battista Centurione; E) Gattilusio Palace; F) Cipriano Pallavicini; G) Castellino Pinelli; H) Nicolò Spinola; I) Gio. Battista Grimaldi; L) Stefano De Mari; M) Ambrogio De Nigro. The churches marked ┼ are: a) San Siro; b) San Luca (drawing by D. Fiorani).

Genoa: Via del Campo, Via di Fossatello and Via San Luca Route

The Genoese route (Fig. 3) that branches off from Via del Campo combines its narrowness – approximately 2.5–3 metres wide – with the presence of rather tall buildings – between 16–18 and 23 metres – associated with palaces of great prestige built during the Renaissance by merging pre-existing structures. The middle section of Via di Fossatello still shows terraced single-family houses with porticoes and their later transformations, while Via di San Luca, which continues on from it, forms the *Carrubeus maior* or *rectus* of Genoa, which was widened in the mid-16th century (Poleggi and Cevini, 1981, *passim*), and it is characterised by the presence of historic buildings and modern reconstructions.[4]

The route, starting from Porta dei Vacca, is about 450 metres long and is characterised by constant changes in elevation, with ups and downs that are sometimes more pronounced and sometimes gentler, leading from 13 metres above sea level at the city walls to 18 metres above sea level at Piazza Banchi. The road continues at a constant width with sudden open spaces: the widening created by a 17th-century demolition,[5] Piazza del Campo and the square that opens onto Via Fossatello, as well as the small square in front of the church of San Luca, the only religious building along the route (also close to the ancient cathedral of San Siro).

A dozen urban units demolished in the 20th century were promptly replaced with new buildings that left the road section unchanged; these building replacements are limited and close to Via del Campo, and more substantial on the port-facing side of Via di Fossatello and Via di San Luca (Bobbio and Musso, 2022, table 10, p. 47 and table at p. 85).[6]

The streets are dotted with votive shrines, mainly 17th-century stucco works. Some of the buildings, such as that of Bartolomeo Invrea, have painted façades whose non-figurative decorative elements, such as the faux rustication of the base, have been revitalised during recent restoration work, while others, such as the neighbouring building of Antonio Doria Invrea, show only remnants of the original pictorial decorations.

Along the route, there are several Rolli palaces, most of which are included in the 2006 UNESCO list.[7] In more than half of these buildings, the main façade does not face the road in question, as preference is given to overlooking small squares or the sea.[8] In this way, the need to ensure better lighting in the reception areas was met and, at least initially (16th-17th centuries), it was believed that these buildings should not share the commercial functions carried out along the internal road. This attitude soon changed over the years, as in most buildings the commercialisation of the ground floors prevailed over the intention to protect the noble residence from mixed use.

This phenomenon can be seen in Giovan Battista Centurione's palace (the Gattilusio and Centurione houses[9]), whose main façade, overlooking Via del Campo and Piazza di Fossatello, was depicted by Pierre Paul Rubens in 1612[10] (Fig. 4). The engraving highlights the similarity of the base to the ground floors of the buildings on Via Balbi and Via Garibaldi. It consists of a succession of arches modelled with rustic, imposing Finale stone, within which there are windows with stone frames and parapets. The parapets house low openings for ventilating the cellar. Today, all the arches of the rusticated front at the ground level have been opened from the ground up to the springer of the arch, the windows have been removed, the lower openings have disappeared, and new small rectangular rooms, corresponding to additional mezzanines inserted as loft spaces, have been created within the upper sections (Fig. 5).

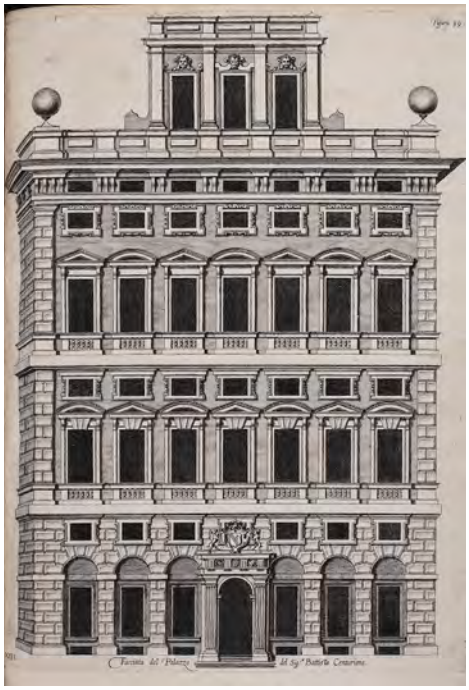


FIG. 4. Centurione Palace, engraving by Pierre Paul Rubens (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pierre_Paul_Rubens_-_Palazzi_di_Genova,_vol._II_-_Figura_39.jpg).

A similar process of transformation involving the emptying of the ground level took place in Palazzo Durazzo, at the beginning of Via del Campo: to the right of the secondary entrance, two shops on the ground floor are accessed via an entrance hall and an opening onto an empty parapet protected by a grate for ventilating the cellar, probably a conversion of an original window with a frame above an opening.

The ground floor extension on the side of the Cipriano Pallavicini building, one of the most dilapidated in Via del Campo, is also the result of a transformation of the side of the building, which opened onto the street through a secondary entrance.[11] The later opening of the internal niches and the removal of the entrance portal led to the establishment of three commercial creation, now apparently disused, with a significant alteration of the base features, although traces of faux rustication paintings have been preserved on the upper level. Yet in the past, the same building had combined its residential use with the provision of orderly commercial facilities, facing Piazza Fossatello and well documented by an engraving of Antonio Giolfi (1769). Giolfi depicts the building in its Renaissance form, with the upper floors featuring the giant order that preceded the current neoclassical stucco work: the base, which remains unchanged, housed shops with entrances and sales counters located inside the large, rusticated arches, protected by a projecting canopy supported by tie rods (Giolfi *et al.*, 1760–1770)[12] (Fig. 6).



FIG. 5. Centurione Palace (2025).

In some cases, the cutting away of the perimeter walls is accompanied by the emptying of the internal masonry structures: this is the case in the northern corner of Antonio Doria Invrea's palace, where the narrow rectangular profile remains in the northernmost room of the ground level, surmounted by a high lintel carved with a bas-relief depicting the Annunciation, in accordance with medieval Genoese tradition. The other rooms on the street, which are quite large, differ in height,[13] even affecting the parapet of the upper mezzanine windows, with an overall effect of great disorder.

Some of the Rolli palaces rise above the 'vici' (alleys) that cross the street. These were laid out in the Middle Ages and then covered with high barrel vaults during the 16th-17th century, with the reconfiguration of the residences of Genoa's leading citizens, which resulted from the incorporation of existing buildings.[14] Medieval buildings were organised with large arches on the façade, floors laid out parallel to the street and resting on walls perpendicular to it.[15] This allowed for the creation of large rooms on the ground floor (sometimes with porticoes) and large openings with polifora on the upper floors, as can be seen in the dense palimpsests brought to light by the 19th- and 20th-century restorations.[16] This sort of structural organisation, open towards the street, facilitated the enlargement of the ground floor spaces of the buildings that were subsequently reconfigured, designed, as mentioned, to allow for less permeability between public and private spaces. The original areas of shops and arcades, later transformed into entrance halls and warehouses for internal use, have thus regained their original commercial vocation and openness to the outside, while maintaining the later privatisation of the built areas.



FIG. 6. Cipriano Pallavicini Palace: engraving by Antonio Giolfi.

At the end of Via Fossatello, at the top of the hill leading to the basilica of San Siro, stands the imposing medieval building that was later transformed into Palazzo Castellino Pinelli (with its main entrance still on the other side of the road). The building reveals its ground-level arches, the corbels supporting slightly projecting pointed arches and two levels of two-coloured pointed arches which, at the end of the street, preserve some multi-light windows on columns in the last two brick spans. The infill of these arches has allowed for the creation of a free succession of large, ungainly openings, between which the external units of the air conditioning systems protrude.

Among the few Renaissance-style buildings that have not substantially altered their ground-level fronts are, at the end of Via San Luca and on Piazza di Banchi, the palace of Ambrogio De Nigro, with its painted façade, and the Loggia di Banchi, now the focus of consideration for the internal arrangement of the area, which is the subject of interesting archaeological excavations.

However, structural flexibility has not always preserved the legibility of the original construction system: in Piazza Fossatello, the Gattilusio building is characterised by the pointed arches of the high base surmounted by a slight projection with small arches on corbels, two rows of arches on the upper levels, all with two-coloured stone facing. The irreversible alterations made later, which produced new openings and infill walls as well as additional storeys, were accompanied by a more significant modification to the ground floor, consisting of marble cladding and the reconfiguration of the façade of the Pasticceria Liquoreria Marescotti, which reopened in 2008 after decades of closure and has also been preserved inside in its early 19th-century form (Fig. 7).

In the southern section of the route, the shop openings on the ground floor tend to become more regular, replicating in succession large rectangular openings that are easily obtained in buildings reconstructed with modern techniques, or otherwise derived from

the pre-existing ones through the greatest possible erosion of the masonry structures allowed by the traditional construction system. In the first section of Via di San Luca, large square shop openings follow one another without distinction, making it difficult to identify the entrances to the historic buildings, sometimes framed by precious cornices and with antique doors. This is the case of Palazzo di Nicolò Spinola, built on the pre-existing medieval buildings of the Centurione and Gentile families. It preserves the original, very worn paintings on its façade and displays a confused arrangement of openings in its base, with rectangular holes of similar width framed by thin marble slabs, in accordance with a 20th-century method.



FIG. 7. Palazzo Gattilusio with the insertion of the nineteenth-century pastry shop (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).

Along the route, the shops located on the ground floor of the buildings vary considerably in terms of what they offer: in the section closest to Porta dei Vacca, the large immigrant population[17] has led to the establishment of numerous food shops, often of an ethnic nature. As one proceeds along Via San Carlo towards Via di Fossatello, the trade in accessories, jewellery and clothing becomes more prominent, with an initial ethnic influence that 'normalises' to a more traditional consumer, opening to tourist services as one proceeds along Via di San Luca towards the Loggia di Banchi. Services such as pharmacies are also present. Historic shop windows and signs are rare, apart from the aforementioned pastry shop, although some early 20th-century signs, with black lettering on a light background enclosed in rectangular fields, can still be seen above the lintels of some shops if you look closely.

Despite the central location of the route, the only hotels in the area are a newly renovated luxury residence, which has been carefully designed to enhance the character of the building, located inside Palazzo Durazzo, and a more modest hotel in Via di Fossatello.[18]

Roma: Via dei Coronari

In classical times, the Roman road connected the Neronian river bridge (or Triumphal Bridge), which collapsed at the end of the 4th century, with the northern axis of Via Lata (now Via del Corso), crossing the flat area bordered by the river. Throughout the Republican era, it defined the northern boundary of the Campus Martius area, and its regular course remained unchanged even during the subsequent urban expansion in the early Imperial era.

The medieval layout of the road is not well known,[19] but it was renovated by Sixtus IV in the 15th century, maintaining its straight axis, essentially without any widenings, and developing a strong residential and commercial vocation that was maintained over the following centuries.[20]

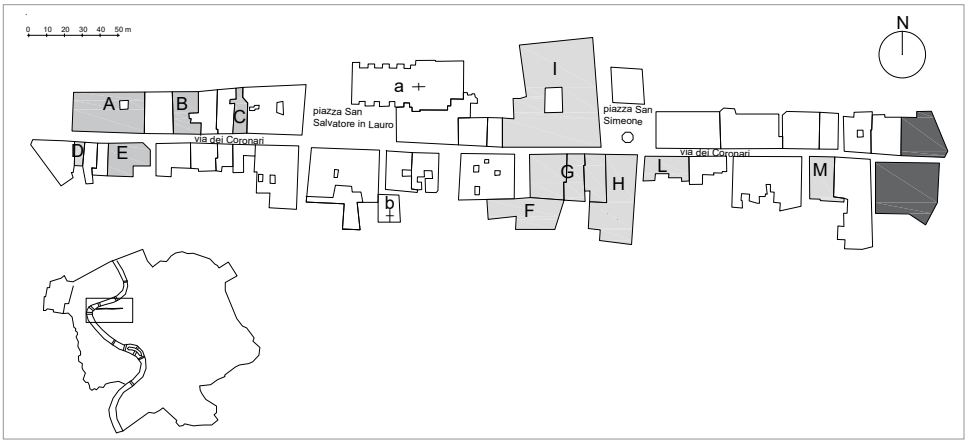


FIG. 8. Via dei Coronari in Rome. The building units with light grey filling are Renaissance palaces and houses; the others in dark grey date from the beginning of the 20th century. The first group is comprises: A) Vecchiarelli – Capodilista – Mazzei Del Drago palace; B) Prospero Mochi's house; C) Fiammetta Michaelis house; D) Raffaello's house; E) Stefano di Vincio's palace; F) Sala – Fioravanti palace; G) Del Drago palace; H) Bucelleni – Salimei Palace (ancient 'Monte di Pietà'); I) Lancellotti palace; L) Bonaventura – Latini - Valentini palace; M) Mancini Licci palace (drawing by D. Fiorani).

The last major reconfiguration dates to the 1920s and 1930s,[21] when it underwent a building clearance operation led by Gustavo Giovannoni, which led, among other things, to the creation of Piazza dei Coronari, the current layout of Piazza San Salvatore in Lauro and the opening of Piazza San Simeone.[22] The only building replacements concern the two edifices at the head of Piazza Navona, produced at the turn of the 20th century (Fig. 8).

The importance of the activities developed on the ground floor of the buildings on the street was such that it influenced its name in medieval times: the eastern section was called 'Scorticchiara' or 'Scortecchiaria', as it was home to leatherworkers, while the western section, near the Sant'Angelo bridge, was referred to as 'Immagine di Ponte' (Image of the Bridge), due to the shrine located at its end towards via di Panico (additional stucco and even wooden shrines were later placed along the street). Only later was this section of the street named 'dei Coronari', in reference to the large number of shops that produced and sold sacred objects.[23]

Today, the route, which is between 3.7 and 4.70 metres wide and approximately 500 metres long, maintains its direction and straight course, and shows an imperceptible rise in elevation from 15 metres above sea level in Piazza dei Coronari to 19 metres above sea level at Tor Sanguigna.

From west to east, there is a dense stratification of terraced houses and two-bay buildings dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries, with heights varying from 14 to 20 metres (equivalent to 3–5 storeys), accompanied by some larger Renaissance buildings, whose height reaches up to about 27 metres. Some of the latter were built incorporating pre-existing medieval structures, such as the current Mazzei Del Drago palace (formerly Vecchiarelli and then Capodilista), to the west of the street, which still has a tower inside, but there is little evidence in general of the medieval structures such as the porticoes (Fig. 9).[24]

Like other major buildings located along the route, Palazzo Mattei Del Drago does not have its main entrance on Via dei Coronari, although it does have a large, rusticated portal

flanked by square openings without frames in the masonry covered with thin rusticated plaster. The openings probably result from the enlargement of the pre-existing windows framed in tuff on knee corbels and the space below for lighting the cellar.

Similarly, the even larger Lancellotti palace faces onto the perpendicular Via Lancellotti, now incorporated into Piazza di San Simeone, which was created in the 1930s. The windows framed by knee corbels and the openings below for the basement, this time in travertine, have been preserved on the perpendicular façade, while on the front along Via dei Coronari they have been replaced by rectangular openings without frames and of equal height.[25]

Arched openings, incongruous with the late 15th-century layout of the façade, also characterise the base of the Bonaventura building,[26] while in the Bucelleni-Salimei building, home to the oldest Monte di Pietà (Fig. 10), a subtle rustication, probably dating back to the 19th century, frames the tall openings crowned with round arches flanking the central portal. Once again, these openings probably replace windows on the ground-level rooms, similarly to those still visible on Vicolo di Montevecchio.[27] Almost all single-span buildings have bases with two adjoining rooms, one original and the other added later, with a different[28] or, more rarely, similar profile[29] (Fig. 11).



FIG. 9. Depictions of Via dei Coronari by A. Viligiardi (1911-1913). The buildings in the foreground are Palazzo Bonaventura in the sketch on the left and Casa della Fiammetta in the one on the right (from Sette and Pane 2018, Figure IV.16. p. 124).



FIG. 10. The ancient 'Monte di Pietà', now Salimei Palace (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).



FIG. 11. Prospero Mochi's house (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).

All the most recent entrances from the street, as well as some of the older ones, lead to shops housed in deep rooms divided by one or two arches parallel to the façade and covered by wooden ceilings woven in the same direction (Fig. 12).

It is difficult to determine when this trend of opening up the ground floors of houses and buildings towards the street as much as possible began. However, it must have been quite remote, as the proliferation of openings on the ground floor, even with the characteristic L-shape, with the parapet flanking the entrance to facilitate the display of goods, is attested to by early 19th-century depictions such as an engraving collected by Louis-Eustache Audot (Audot, 1837–1838, vol. III).[30]

It seems more certain, instead, that this practice came to an end in the first half of the 20th century, resulting in the modification of the profiles and widths of the openings that we see today, as can be verified by comparing them with some historical photos from the beginning of the century.[31]

Finally, Palazzo del Drago offers the best example of the connection between aristocratic residence and commercial activity. Here too, the main arched entrance, framed by thick peperino rustication, is located on the open space perpendicular to the street; the secondary entrance on Via dei Coronari, of similar construction, appears to be embedded in a continuous series of shop rooms. These rooms are defined on the outside by a trilithic travertine system, in an overall image reminiscent of Roman palace ground levels equipped with *tabernae*[32] (Fig. 13).

Almost all the rooms on the ground floor, connected to the street via historic or later openings, now house commercial activities. Most of these have replaced the once dominant sale of antiques and the artisan workshops that were active until a few decades ago.[33] Clothing and accessory shops prevail, most of which cater to tourists. Bars, ice cream shops, restaurants and taverns are scattered throughout the area, although their presence is dis-



FIG. 12. Interior of a ground-floor space on Via dei Coronari (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).



FIG. 13. Del Drago Palace (photo by D. Fiorani, 2025).

creet due to the limited outdoor space available because of the narrow width of the street. Services are rare (one pharmacy) (Comune di Roma, n.d.). There are a significant number of short-term rental apartments, some of which are hidden inside buildings, while others are visible due to the presence of a reception area on the ground floor.

Conclusions

The routes analysed in Genoa and Rome have both preserved a substantial historical building heritage, albeit accompanied by post-war reconstruction in the former case and selective demolition and replacement linked to urban redevelopment in the latter. In both contexts, these changes took place in the first half of the 20th century, following the criterion of adaptation which, while not generating architecture of significant value, did not alter the coherence and continuity of the urban space.

The commercial nature of the two routes favoured, in Genoa as in Rome, the removal of access to the palaces of the nobility and facilitated the location of shops in the ground levels of the most important buildings, but also in smaller ones, where commercial and residential functions are located side by side. The openings of street-front shops were originally planned in some buildings, while in others they were imposed over time, with creativity governed above all by the pragmatic interest in making the most of the commercial potential of the site.

When comparing the outcome of the reconfiguration of the openings on the ground floor in these areas of the two cities, one gets the impression that the openings created in Rome are more in line with the compositional features of the individual building, with control of the heights of the rooms, respect for the rhythm of the upper storeys or the symmetry, the similarity of the framing systems, and the arrangement of plasterwork with

a consistent layout. In Genoa, on the other hand, it seems that the modification was freer, perhaps in line with the taste for the building 'palimpsest' that developed with the 19th- and 20th-century interventions on the historic centre.

Beyond the occasional geometries of the rooms, the opening of the fronts in the most prestigious buildings led to the modification of the floor levels and the blinding of the basement floors.

Inside the rooms on the ground floor in Genoa, the vaulted ceilings, concealed by false ceilings in the area closest to the urban walls, have been increasingly highlighted as one moves towards the centre, to the point where the plaster coverings themselves have been sacrificed. In Rome, on the other hand, the simple two-beam chestnut ceilings and the few vaults are generally left exposed with the aim of enhancing the 'historic' character of the buildings. Here too, the Roman approach appears more consistent in terms of transformation criteria, partly because the nature of the users for whom the services are intended is more homogeneous.

In both places, erosion of the walls has rarely extended beyond the façade, a worrying phenomenon that can be observed in Rome's Via del Corso, where the use of metal or reinforced concrete structures has sometimes prevailed over the typological nature and static requirements of the building (as for the anti-seismic requirements, the issue needs to be fully verified).

It is precisely in these constraints that we find the ability to resist standardisation – in terms of both construction and commerce – and the activation of creativity free from impositions, which is not always extraordinary but acceptable, allowing historic centres to be carried into the future.

We can therefore conclude that the alliance between urban planning and restoration has worked in these cases, given the substantial preservation and even improvement of road conditions in recent decades. The possibility of continuing along this virtuous path lies today in strengthening the two disciplines, both of which have been weakened by the aggressive liberalism that characterises the approach to construction in Italy and beyond.

Urban planning still has the task of highlighting the continuity and mutual interconnection of historic buildings and dictating the rules for the overall management of historic buildings and the activities they host. This includes the reorganisation of external furnishings, which, especially in Genoa, are arranged in a random manner, such as spotlights for illuminating signs, structures for retractable awnings, and commercial signage that, due to their location and size, seem to have replaced the role of the much more elegant medieval bas-relief lintels. Restoration, on the other hand, has the responsibility of ensuring the material conservation and figurative coherence of each individual piece of architecture.

This dialectical collaboration between these different approaches is primarily reflected in the fate of the ground floors, as demonstrated by the results of interventions carried out on some buildings. In a multi-layered Genoese house of medieval origin in Via del Campo 3-11a, a recent restoration project has succeeded in recomposing, at least partially, the disorderly clutter of signs that detracted from the remarkable palimpsest, ennobled by a bas-relief lintel with the HIS sign supported by angels, pointed arches on corbels and two-coloured stone arches on brick walls on the upper floors. Another careful restoration project in the second half of the last century brought to light the shops/*tabernae* that characterise the travertine base of Palazzo del Drago, whose openings appear, in some

photos from the 1950s, to be blocked and sometimes filled in, probably for reasons of internal adaptation and, presumably, structural reasons.

Although creativity is normally associated with the concept of novelty, respecting constraints can be a powerful factor in raising awareness, inspiring and supporting intervention on existing structures. In this sense, acting creatively on the historic city means implementing a cognitive process which, starting from the study of the existing built environment, can guide the most effective choices for bringing together conservation and social and economic sustainability.

Notes

1 For sources, refer to the references (for texts cited in the following notes) and the bibliography.

2 For an overview, see Insolera (1980).

3 The route was the subject of inspections and discussions during the debate that took place at the EAAE Conservation Workshop held in Genoa from 10 to 13 September 2024. I would like to thank Stefano Francesco Musso for his additional help with further research.

4 Unfortunately, the route of Via del Campo, Via di Fossatello and Via San Luca has not been the subject of historical-typological studies by the Muratorian school, which was very active in Genoa in the 1970s, as was the case for Via Maddalena. The latter, originally called Via Strata, is another important medieval axis that intersects Via di San Luca just east of the church of San Siro, providing a cross connection with the church of Maddalena (Maretto, 1981).

5 In the early 17th century, the house of Giulio Cesare Vacchero, guilty of conspiring against the doge, was demolished and the area was rearranged with the addition of a "shameful" column ("Colonna Infame") serving as a warning.

6 It should be noted that the table in the Municipal Urban Plan referring to the Conservation Area of the Historic City Centre, updated to 2020 (Comune di Genova, n.d.), shows a lower number of existing replacement building units.

7 The list contains 42 Genoese palaces (UNESCO, n.d.).

8 See the location of the palaces Cipriano Pallavicini, Castellino Pinelli, Gattilusio, Ambrogio de Nigro, Cesare Durazzo e Bartolomeo Invrea (the latter two not included in the UNESCO list).

9 The houses of the Gattilusio and Centurione families are mentioned in documents dating back to 1310 and 1314 respectively (Poleggi and Cevini, 1981, particularly p. 59).

10 Rubens' engraving differs from the current design of the base in that it lacks the rusticated arches above the portal, where the windows that must have been arranged in the neighbouring arches remain (Rubens, 1622, vol. II, fig. 39).

11 Here too, the 17th-century situation is documented by a plan drawn up by Pierre Paul Rubens, which can be seen on page 259 of the UNESCO nomination document (UNESCO, n.d.).

12 The system of canopies supported by tie rods, all of equal height, at least in the same building, is documented by other engravings by the same author. An alternative to the shops built into the arches of the buildings was to place the shops outside the walls, near the urban open spaces (in Piazza di Banchi).

13 One of the most invasive interventions on the façade is the black banded cornice of the shop at number 29, famous for its connection to the singer Fabrizio De André.

14 Medieval stone masonry can be seen in places on the perpendicular walls of the vici. A probable medieval origin (between the 12th and 14th century) can be identified inside at the entrances, with long corridors covered by lowered barrel vaults (Boato, 2004) leading to the stairs, as in the Antonio Doria Invrea palace, with brick walls. Cross vaults in exposed brickwork can now be seen in the ground floor rooms of a building on the corner of Via San Luca and Vico del Santo Sepolcro, with two-colour masonry on the front.

15 For a description of the medieval Genoese house of the 14th-15th centuries, refer to Maretto (1981, pp. 177-179).

16 A general overview of the restoration of Genoese civil buildings, starting with the work carried out by Gaetano Poggi and Orlando Grosso, which involved the extensive demolition of plaster cladding, can be found in Napoleone (2022).

17 During the twentieth century, Genoa's historic centre was not subject to "speculative renewal pressures", but the uncomfortable conditions of historic buildings were increasingly perceived as intolerable, encouraging the population to move to the suburbs (Genovesi, 1981, quote from p. 83). The residential use of buildings in the area crossed by the route is in

line with the average values for the Ligurian capital. This is favoured by the presence of the non-EU population, especially in the section of Via del Campo, whose continuation outside the walls, Via di Pré, is one of the urban areas with the highest concentration of immigrants (Vaccaro, 2022; Torre, 2022).

18 The latter is housed in a modern building that incorporates the perimeter walls of a medieval base with two-coloured stone arches; the heavy frame of the entrance is the uncritical result of a simple adaptation of a pre-existing situation.

19 The street, squeezed between the Orsini fortified complex on Monte Giordano to the south and the Tiber to the north, in a somewhat peripheral location despite its proximity to the Vatican, was to house a tower, a palace and several houses (Krautheimer, 1981, pp. 318-319).

20 The two churches of San Salvatore in Lauro and Santi Simeone e Giuda (now deconsecrated) are both adjacent and do not face the street, while a pre-existing church, dedicated to San Salvatore *de Inversis*, was incorporated into Palazzo Del Drago.

21 The street has not yet been the subject of an adequate historical-urban study; for a summary of what is known so far, see Caen (2022, pp. 145-161). Muratori (1963) records the walls of the blocks north of the street, while those to the south are missing, except for the two urban units at the head towards Piazza Navona. Brief information on the main buildings that populate it can be found in Pietrangeli (1969).

22 The story of modern demolitions in the urban context in which Via dei Coronari is located is reconstructed in Spagnesi (1994). The drawings made between 1911 and 1913 by Arturo Viligiardi on Gustavo Giovannoni's instructions on the 'diradamento' (thinning out) of Via dei Coronari have been edited in numerous publications: see for instance Sette and Pane (2018).

23 See Lotti (1966, p. 29) who still recalled the presence of the "coronari" at numbers 1, 33 and 241 on the street.

24 The porticoes that are now believed to be enclosed within the base of the house of the Confraternity of S. Maria dell'Orto (no. 17-18) must date back to the Middle Ages; here, in fact, the two columns positioned at the ends of the façade can still be seen. It is assumed that the ground floor of Fiammetta Michaelis' house also had a two-arched portico (see the reconstructions by A. Vigliardi in 1909 and in Apollonj, 1937), but its dating to the late 15th century, supported by the use of regular brickwork on the upper floors of the street-facing façade, creates some problems for historical reconstruction. In fact, in the bull *Etsi de cunctarum civitatum* issued by Sixtus IV on 30 June 1480, the same bull that initiated the reorganisation of the urban fabric of Rome, the Pope recommended the closure of urban porticoes.

25 The building, which was widely depicted during the 18th and 19th centuries due to its importance and prestigious design by Francesco da Volterra and Carlo Maderno, presumably incorporated some pre-existing structures on the street side, where there is still an entrance with a transom window and flat stone cornices. An engraving by Giovan Battista Cipriani from 1835 documents the opening of two access rooms in place of the windows, which were later restored, on Via di Lancellotti, while a drawing from 1931 by Marcello Piacentini, of unclear reliability, illustrates the presence on Via dei Coronari of a system of windows like that on the other side (Cavazzini, 1998).

26 The openings were already depicted by Viligiardi in 1909, as it can be seen in fig. 9.

27 The Stefano di Vincio's building is now heavily restored; its front at the ground level shows features alternating arched and rectangular openings extending to the ground, which are connected by rusticated plasterwork with vertical joints. Given its consistency with the openings, the cladding must have been adapted in recent times. The building is best known for housing Antonio di Sangallo's aforementioned aedicule with a painting by Perin del Vaga in the corner. Another connection of overlapping window openings can be found in the single room of the Sala Fioravanti building, overlooking a widening to the south of the street.

28 See the buildings at no. 48-49 (Prospero Mochi's house), 156-157 (Fiammetta's house), 192-193, 209-210, 225-226, 228-229, and 233-234. In the socalled "house of Raphael", whose façade was redesigned during the Baroque period, it was decided to open a new central opening and leave the door on the right blocked up, thus creating more space for the display window.

29 Such as in the building at no. 230-231.

30 The figure is also in AKG images (n.d.).

31 See the photo at Morgante (2025). The current state of the ground floors is quite similar to that recorded in a photographic campaign by the Istituto Luce dating back to 1958 (https://www.archivioluce.com/).

32 See Apollonj (1937), who highlights how the rhythmic façade on Via dei Coronari seals a building that is actually composite, the result of the fusion of pre-existing structures with an irregular layout.

33 About ten shops are still dedicated to this commercial activity, roughly one tenth of those located on the street during the second half of the twentieth century (Spadaccino, 2019).

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CONSERVATION PROCESS AND SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT FOR THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF GENOA

Giovanna Franco
University of Genoa, Italy
giovanna.franco@unige.it

Introduction: Light and Shadow in Genoa's Historic Centre

The workshop and international meeting held in Genoa in September 2024 presented participants with a perhaps more complex challenge than previous editions. One of the focuses was, indeed, the Genoese historic centre, a large and problematic area, one of the most densely populated and stratified. It is rich in values and contradictions and fraught with physical, health, social, economic, and security problems.

The theme of the relationship between physical and material conservation and creation is central to intervention in the historic city. This focus is not just on single architectural artefacts but on a consolidated and lived-in fabric. It also involves creating renewed ways of life – values, spaces, occasions and opportunities for encounter, and social and cultural growth – rather than creation as the insertion of new physical structures into an ancient context. The historic centre of Genoa, though potentially fascinating and rich in suggestions, hides dark alleys, marginalisation, undeclared work, and clandestine shelters. These aspects escape the perception of occasional tourists who visit noble palaces or admire the city from the nearby hill (Fig. 1) and are looking for the maze of alleys that once bore witness to port life (*angiporto*), with songs from a now-lost era still echoing there.

Those who live in this city and experience its historic centre have noticed sudden and momentous changes in its outskirts (towards the waterfront of the old harbour, converted into a large leisure and meeting place) and in the main commercial arteries, which remain commercial, even if the types of businesses are changing rapidly. This lifeblood, which flows along privileged axes, is unable to invigorate the innermost fabric, where housing and social hardship prevail (fifty years ago linked to immigration from southern Italy, today from northern Africa) in the darkest areas, both literally and metaphorically.

The Maddalena district, an area of drug dealing, and the Prè district, where foreign-run barber shops have replaced the old commercial shops, the ghetto and the area around Vico della Croce Bianca have been a thorn in the side of residents and different city administrations for decades, despite the recent opening of a community social centre, open until late at night and providing local services and shelter for vulnerable and marginalised people.

The city of Genoa as a whole is struggling to compete with global realities and resolve pressing issues: immigration, business relocation, climate change and the fragility of an urbanised area that is too densely populated and poorly managed. The suburbs, no longer just those on the geographical margins, are multiplying, and the high birth rate is not offset by the presence of long-standing immigrants who have lived in Genoa for generations. The city is becoming progressively poorer, adding new forms of poverty to



FIG. 1. Stunning view of the rooftops of Genoa's historic centre from the Spianata di Castelletto.

the 'traditional' impoverishment, the most worrying of which is that resulting from school dropouts. Genoa is a city that offers few opportunities and struggles to invest in young people, ageing progressively and rapidly; it is a city that is unable to make the most of its human, environmental and economic resources: suffice it to mention the number of vacant dwellings (huge properties owned by a few families or companies) in the face of a chronic housing emergency, the loss of sociality in an urban fabric where there are fewer and fewer common spaces and places of aggregation are becoming commercial spaces (Bobbio and Musso, 2019).

Building Renovation, Material Conservation and Enhancement of the Historic Centre: the Roots

Domestic and international tourism has recently offered and continues to offer new attractions and opportunities for revitalising the city and its historic centre, in response to an accelerated process of deindustrialisation. For at least a decade, tourism has become structural in the city's economy, thanks in part to a policy of conservation, restoration and enhancement of the tangible historical and cultural heritage whose roots date back to the end of the last century, in cultural and planning policies that included, among the protagonists, leading figures from the Genoese academy (Gabrielli, 2005; Grossi Bianchi and Poleggi, 1979), profound connoisseurs of the ancient fabric and urban policies, attentive to the important role of preserving tangible and intangible traces as an exhaustible and irreplaceable heritage.[1]

Certainly, UNESCO recognition in 2006 (Poleggi, 2004) and, immediately before that, in 2004, the city's designation as European Capital of Culture marked a significant turning point, relaunching its international image with a major project called 'GeNova 04', focused on the theme of travel, which led to urban redevelopment, restoration of the *Palazzi dei*



FIG. 2. Map of Genoa's historic centre, identification of the areas to be studied in depth for the drafting of the Studio Organico di Insieme.

Rolli and the façades of Via San Lorenzo, the opening of the Gallery of Modern Art and the opening of the Galata Museo del Mare (an operation that, in truth, was not entirely acceptable in terms of the conservation of the 17th-century Arsenale). A few years earlier, Genoa's designation as the venue for the G8 summit (2001) accelerated and intensified urban redevelopment, especially in the Old Port and the historic centre, with the creation of new promenades (towards the Lanterna), the restoration of the old Cotton Warehouses, the improvement of paving and the pedestrianisation of Piazza De Ferrari, until then a traffic roundabout and thereafter, together with the neighbouring Piazza Matteotti, a nerve centre for events and meetings.

Looking back at the history of urban renewal, these processes, which have seen significant public funding channelled into them, are linked, almost without interruption, to the conversion of the old port area for public use in 1992, on the occasion of the celebrations for the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's discovery of America. Huge sums of money, distributed over a few decades, have enabled the city to change its appearance,

freeing itself from the dust that covered it, restoring and renewing physical structures and returning to the colours typical of a southern city[2], not without sacrifices in terms of material conservation (the destruction of parts of the medieval piers in the old port, lamented by Ennio Poleggi himself, and the heavily invasive restoration work on the Doge's Palace (*Palazzo Ducale*), which became the cradle of the city's culture, to mention only the most famous and controversial episodes).

Nonetheless, such an important twenty-year period for the city's renewal was able to flourish thanks to the grafting of deeper roots, in a political and cultural season in which the Italian scientific community, in the years following reconstruction, questioned the meanings and methods of renovating the historical fabric of ancient cities, preserving (or not) their material traces.

Despite significant losses in cultural, historical, and material terms, a forward-looking, innovative, and, in a certain sense, antithetical vision between the city and the waterfront[3] – and therefore fully creative – proved to be a highly successful operation for the liveability of the city.

The First Extensive Public Approach to 'Conservation': the *Studio Organico di Insieme* for the Historic Centre (1982–1987)

In 1981, the municipal administration, wishing to move beyond the cultural model then dominant in Italy and proposed by Pierluigi Cervellati for the historic centre of Bologna (Cervellati and Scannavini, 1973), chose six historic areas as experimental samples and entrusted their study to external experts in order to verify their operability through architectural proposals. The study of the area around Porta Soprana was entrusted to Ignazio and Jacopo Gardella, that of Prè to Giancarlo De Carlo with ILAUD, that of Maddalena to Luciano Grossi Bianchi and Roberto Melai, that of the Molo to Renzo Piano Building Workshop, that of Carmine (the area between the old city and the 19th-century expansion) to Lodovico and Alberico Barbiano di Belgiojoso, and finally the area outside the historic centre of Borgo Incrociati to Cesare, Saverio and Stefano Fera (Grossi Bianchi and Melai, 1993, pp. 14–18) (Fig. 2).



FIG. 3. The Garaventa Don Gallo school (façade in light blue). In the foreground, a temporary installation in the Luzzati Gardens.

The six areas shared a high level of building and social degradation, construction characteristics and resident profiles. All six groups broadened the question initially posed by the administration, which was primarily technical and construction-related, to the urban scale, addressing issues of connection between the redevelopment areas and the surrounding areas, issues related to liveability, accessibility, and technical and economic feasibility, while respecting and enhancing historical and architectural features, even if, in some cases, emphasising technical innovation (as in the case of vertical connections and techniques to promote natural lighting in

the Molo neighbourhood in the RPBW projects). Specific relationships between conservation and creation reflected cultural influences and designers' approaches.

Porta Soprana

The renovation plan for the Porta Soprana area is perhaps the one that, for the most part, has turned into a successful operation, despite some questionable theoretical and methodological premises. The designers proposed, in fact, to save what was considered worthy of being kept alive ('the external parts of the neighbourhood, visible to the public and relevant to the physical face of the city, the building volumes, road layouts and sections, curtain walls and architectural façades') and to destroy what, in their opinion, had no chance of survival ('the interior parts of buildings, intended for private use and hidden from public view: unsafe partitions, rotting floors, impassable staircases, cramped rooms and foul-smelling courtyards'). In reality, other large-scale initiatives are linked to this work and its complete realisation, such as the establishment of the Faculty of Architecture (inaugurated in 1989 and designed by the same architects Gardella, together with Grossi Bianchi and others for the reconstruction and restoration work) on the ruins of the war bombings of the Castello hill (the city's monastic convent complex) and the major operation to fill another 'urban void' around Piazza delle Erbe. It is these operations, together with the construction of the new Garaventa Don Gallo school (the only truly new intervention in an ancient context), that have led to the rebirth, revitalisation and, in some ways, gentrification of this part of the city (Fig. 3).



FIG. 4. Programma organico di intervento Porta Soprana-San Donato. The larger coloured circles indicate urban-scale 'modelling' interventions, while the smaller circles indicate building interventions.

Almost simultaneously, following the enactment of Regional Planning Law 25/87, the regional authority also drew up a Comprehensive Intervention Programme (*Programma Organico di Intervento – POI*) for the Porta Soprana-San Donato area, conducted through the Public Residential Building and Historic Centre Restoration Service of the Municipality of Genoa, with the aim of experimenting with a new procedural approach to building restoration and renovation, in which public intervention plans could be implemented by mixed public-private companies. The POI was based on a careful typological, constructive, historical and technological analysis developed by representatives of Genoese university culture,[4] which forms the basis for cultural and technical progress and future restoration projects implemented by public (Regional Territorial Agency for Construction) and private owners around Via Ravecca (Fig. 4), the pedestrian axis that leads from Porta Soprana to Piazza Sarzano and the cultural complex of the Museum of Sant'Agostino and the then Faculty of Architecture (Fig. 5).



FIG. 5. Via Ravecca today, after building renovation work (number 4 in the previous figure).

It was these two significant interventions, also in terms of creative imagination (the establishment of the Faculty of Architecture in the historic centre and the filling of the large empty space around Piazza delle Erbe), that led to the renewal of this urban area, which was one of the most degraded even in the 1980s (Figs. 6 and 7).

'Sestiere Prè'

In the renovation plan for Prè, Giancarlo de Carlo[5] and his team identified the street itself as the backbone of the entire neighbourhood, which they believed needed to be intersected with a new system of perpendicular axes connecting the area to the sea and the hillside, freeing up the ground floors of the residences to create areas of mediation between public and private spaces, as well as making room for warehouses, commercial and collective activities. It was therefore decided to adapt the use to the type of spaces and the shortcomings in terms of light and health, rather than resorting to the theory of 'partial thinning' and demolitions, imagining uses that did not involve people staying for long periods of time: premises, depots, warehouses and possibly shops. This plan subsequently led to the restoration of Piazza dei Truogoli di S. Brigida, the only real space capable of connecting Via Prè with Via Balbi, together with the terrace of the Royal Palace, which today constitutes a visual breakthrough, even if it is not physically accessible.

'Sestiere Molo'

Similarly, in the renovation plan for the Molo district, Renzo Piano and his team faced problems of building deterioration and unsanitary conditions, partly due to the scale ratio between the width of the alleys and the height of the façades, which had been raised over at least two centuries for speculative purposes. The plan does not envisage reducing the volume, thus favouring conservation, stratifying the use of the buildings, ie by reserving the lower floors for commerce and services, the middle part for residential use and the upper part for collective services: in short, an imaginary and physical 'vertical section' according to use. But there is another stimulating proposal in this reinterpretation by RPBW: the invitation to reuse the large historic salt warehouse, characterised by buttresses designed to withstand powerful lateral forces, for cultural activities. The conversion was then carried out, thanks to public intervention, and the building belongs to a network of cultural spaces used for various city events.

'Sestiere Maddalena'

The renovation plan for the Maddalena area also opted for reasonable management and enhancement of existing structures, identifying accessibility, redevelopment of the commercial fabric, provision of services and, in short, combating residential 'monoculture' as areas for action. The proposal included a series of interconnected measures aimed at breaking the isolation of the area from the nearby lively commercial hub of Via Luccoli by strengthening or creating new pedestrian routes. As already briefly mentioned, the neighbourhood has its ups and downs, with important social services around the parish of Santa Maria Maddalena and its 'listening centre', which is a meeting place and source of help and contributes, at least in part, to combating illegal activities. Maddalena is an example of how the physical preservation and promotion of heritage has not been sufficient to bring about true renewal.



FIG. 6. The area where the Luzzati Gardens now stand in the post-war period. In the background, the octagonal bell tower of San Donato.



FIG. 7. A view of the caruggi in the 1970s.

Carmine

The renovation plan for the Carmine area is similarly conservative, aiming to preserve and enhance (in the words of the designers) the rich and picturesque environmental and architectural features, the gardens on embankments, the supporting walls, the unique visual perspectives, the combinations of small façades, and the variety of colours and backgrounds of the fronts, roofs, terraces, and dormers. The plan aims to preserve all this, excluding replacements and excessive 'architectural reorganisation', which would impoverish the environmental heritage. The designers' attention was focused above all on the methods of maintenance and conservation, in the relationship between public and private, rather than on major building operations. The restoration of the residential parts was, in fact, considered with limited operations for the insertion of toilets, renovation of staircases, insertion of lifts, renovation of interior finishes and some exterior finishes, accessibility solutions with aerial walkway systems, as in the city's tradition, rather than emptying spaces for the insertion of lifts.

The six projects were submitted in September 1983 for use in the *Studio Organico di Insieme*, drawn up in 1987 by the Municipal Urban Planning Office. Although never directly implemented, the plans and preparatory projects for the drafting of the *Studio Organico di Insieme* laid the foundations for a comparison between material conservation (in the international era of so-called 'facadism') and the creation of something new, understood



FIG. 8. Cover of the book edited in 2006, the result of more than twenty years of research on Genoa's historic buildings, their construction characteristics and methods of maintenance and conservation.

as new lifeblood generated by the establishment of cultural and social activities and the introduction of new social strata.

These were interventions in which the public sector, including in the residential redevelopment of the Prè district, was supported by private intervention, with a growing awareness of how to intervene (regulated by a national law in 1987 but worryingly invasive and potentially 'demolishing' for the ancient fabric).

Traces of that lively cultural season, which began with preparatory studies for the SOI and culminated in the POI in Porta Soprana-San Donato, rich in commitment on the part of the public administration and dense with study, research and experimentation on the part of scientific culture, remain in the various conferences organised on the occasion of the exhibitions at the Genoa Riabitat international fair: an exhibition on restoration, renovation and maintenance in construction in 1987, 1989, 1990, 1992, 1994 and 1995 (Galliani, 1985b; Buti and Galliani, 1989), in multidisciplinary studies that combined urban history (around the figure of Ennio Poleggi), material culture and archaeology of the elevated (around the figure of Tiziano Mannoni), architectural restoration (around the figure of Paolo Torsello), the settlement structure of urban fabrics and the structural conception of entire blocks (centred on Gianni V. Galliani) and, finally, the methods for implementing interventions and the relationship between planning and design (centred on Bruno Gabrielli). Applied research was published in volumes that still form the scientific basis of the Genoa team participating in the Conservation Network (Grossi Bianchi and Poleggi, 1979; Galliani, 1985a; Galliani and Musso, 1994; Mannoni, 1994; Galliani and Franco, 2001, Galliani and Mor, 2006) (Fig. 8).

Today's Legacy: a Public Plan for the Historic Centre with a 'Creative' Imprint (the 'Piano Caruggi' 2020–2025)

Thanks to these experiments and scientific studies on the reasons for and methods of renovating the so-called 'minor' residential fabric while preserving its material traces, to Ennio Poleggi's happy intuition to consider the noble palaces suitable for hosting, during the centuries of the republic, the royal families of Europe and their courts as a system rather than a series of individual episodes,[6] and to a cultural policy of restoring (including through prestigious interventions) and enhancing a rich and hidden architectural heritage, Genoa has benefited and continues to benefit today as a cultural and tourist destination (Fig. 9).

However, its wealth in terms of heritage is not enough to eradicate long-standing and structural problems, which were already present in the 1980s and exacerbated by the economic crisis that the city suffered during the deindustrialisation phase. The recent public initiative, another plan with far-reaching objectives, can be considered the epigone of a 'creative' approach (as opposed to the more 'conservative' approaches previously described).

The culmination of a long period of public-led efforts focused on renovating the historic centre was the recent ambitious project launched by the municipal administration in 2020 (with the aim of completing it within five years) and presented by the Councillor for Urban Planning, Mario Mascia, during the workshop. Named after the narrow alleys of the historic city, it is called the 'Piano Caruggi' (Alleyway Plan). With a total investment of approximately €137 million (state funding), the integrated plan aimed to revitalise the old city by improving the quality of life of residents and workers, traders, professionals, and employees, and its usability for those who visit it even only occasionally. The plan saw the joint commitment of all the councillors of the Municipality of Genoa, in synergy with the offices of the Urban Centre and the Urban Planning and Heritage Department, in collaboration with the Municipio Centro Est and the associations of those who live, work and operate in the historic centre.

The plan followed the logic of developing integrated actions, capable of combining concrete physical interventions with actions aimed at economic and social revitalisation through the development of cultural, tourist and commercial potential, focusing on ten areas of intervention:

- Urban projects, through the redevelopment of eleven squares, the restoration of the historic walls at the city's margins, the granting of properties confiscated from the mafia at zero rent to cultural and non-profit associations, the creation of student accommodation in public and privately owned buildings, possible demolitions aimed at creating small squares in the historic fabric, and rent control programmes for young couples and singles.
- Maintenance and technological innovation, through interventions on public buildings, schools and museums, the spread of fibre optics, support for private individuals to access tax benefits granted jointly by the Ministries of Culture and Economic Development (between 2020 and 2022) for the restoration of façades visible from public spaces, and the maintenance of pavements.
- Socio-educational interventions, through the creation of cohousing for women victims of violence and an ethical hotel run by people with disabilities, the enhancement of nursery and kindergarten services, including evening hours, and the establishment of an Immigration Observatory with representatives of the communities.
- The trade plan, which includes a mix of measures to introduce new businesses and support existing ones, including centres of excellence such as historic shops, revitalising ground floors, economic incentives in terms of zero rent for five years, the creation of new themed shopping districts, and a 'light' project providing grants to install shatterproof shop windows to replace metal shutters.
- New public lighting for streets, alleys and walls with low-energy LED lamps, artistic and scenic lighting of buildings and historic routes of interest.
- Security projects with the opening of a new Local Police headquarters dedicated to the Historic Centre department, the creation of a Historic Centre protection

unit, the installation of 200 new cameras, a plan to combat and prevent addiction, and actions to combat housing abandonment and improper leasing.

- The cleaning plan, including daily cleaning, street and bin washing, the opening of new ecological collection points, a rat extermination project and specific measures to combat the presence of birds.
- Smart mobility and accessibility, with the adaptation of pedestrian routes and spaces, new bike and scooter stations, reorganisation of access to Limited Traffic Zones and pedestrian areas, and a network of electric minibuses.
- Tourism and leisure, with the creation of a new hub for tourist information, the restoration and enhancement of 40 votive shrines, 100 attractions and inclusive games for children.
- The 'nightlife – *movida*' we want, with measures to support healthy activities, incentives for venues to purchase outdoor seating areas and noise-reducing windows and doors, and a permanent police presence.

It is therefore a potentially forward-looking, visionary plan, brimming with creativity, especially in terms of innovation in public spaces and accessibility systems, the planning of numerous folkloric events in the city centre, and artistic lighting displays in the Cathedral, Piazza De Ferrari and the Old Port. However, attention was also paid – at least in the plan – to maintenance and care, which are essential prerequisites for active conservation.

Five years after the plan was drawn up and following a change in political administration, there is greater criticism, albeit with different tones and nuances, of how much of this plan has been implemented and how much remains on paper. In order to avoid the loss of public funding, the restoration of the seaward side of the first city walls (dating back to Frederick Barbarossa) and the paving and planting of Piazza Caricamento and Piazza Sarzano have been almost completed. These are physical interventions that residents perceive as architecturally and spatially random and which are often met with disapproval by residents and traders. The renovation of Piazza Caricamento, for example, appears very basic, lacking an overall design that would enhance the function of such a strategic space. Piazza Sarzano was rebuilt without any real need or demand from the local community (Fig. 10). These interventions, in addition to consuming resources, have left the structural problems unchanged. The role of the local police has been strength-



FIG. 9. Piano Caruggi: an evocative cover.

ened and transformed, increasingly resembling that of a real police force, but without generating greater real security on the streets. On the contrary, this presence has often increased the distance between the institutions and the daily problems experienced by residents, creating more tension than solutions.



FIG. 10. Piazza Sarzano: paving and urban landscaping works almost complete.

Problems related to nightlife also remain unresolved, particularly in the *Sestiere del Molo* district, where permanent residents are becoming increasingly scarce, while the area is being progressively transformed by rentals, thus distorting the property market. At the same time, entire parts of the historic centre continue to be marked by social unrest, insecurity and petty crime, making many alleys uninhabitable and compromising everyone's quality of life. The privatisation of the municipal company that managed public lighting has led to a reduction in lux levels, fuelling a perception of insecurity among residents and tourists. On the commercial front, three businesses financed with the bonus scheme had already closed by the summer of 2024. This is not solely the result of this plan, as failures were already evident with previous incentive policies. Of those shops, craft businesses and public establishments that opened in the intricate maze of alleys, almost nothing remains, except for a swarm of businesses linked to occasional tourism and concentrated around a few routes. In short, where properties are already commercially attractive, there is no need for commercial repopulation, while in the commercially weaker parts of the alleys, from Piazza Fossatello to Principe station, there have been significantly fewer openings.

Why did this burst of creativity, at least on paper, fail? Perhaps – partly due to the financial and economic situation – the plan was approached as a series of construction sites on the one hand and specific actions on the other. However, the redevelopment of the historic centre, which should be governed by a skilful balance between conservation and creation, involves dealing with complex structural phenomena such as touristification, gentrification, social unrest and environmental degradation, which are far more complex than the management of infrastructure construction sites. The 'Piano Caruggi' has proved to be, for some, a project lacking in strategy, internal to the logic of touristification and privatisation of public space. Rather than a unified plan, it has been a collage of measures, some already in place, others new, assembled without an organic vision and without a clear idea of the historic centre as a living part of the city. It thus took the form of a 'déplan', ie a non-plan, where the institutions gave up on guiding the transformation processes, limiting themselves to accompanying them with one-off interventions. In this scheme, urban regeneration is left to the markets, transforming the historic centre into a showcase that serves tourist flows and property investors more than its inhabitants.

Because, as Luca Borzani[7] stated in an interview with the daily newspaper La Repubblica in 2024, 'the established centrality of tourism no longer corresponded to an increase in the quality of life for all, but rather favoured a trivialisation of cultural activities, spreading a pesto-green colouring (the well-known pasta sauce derived from the crushing – pesto



FIG. 11. The large urban void behind Piazza delle Erbe in the 1970s and the small playground as a meeting place.



FIG. 12. The space today, after the reconstruction of the margins and the management of Ce.Sto.



FIG. 13. The building that houses the archaeological remains, open to visitors and offering refreshments and rest areas. Although not of outstanding architectural quality, it manages to attract a considerable number of users.

– of basil) as a surrogate for the city's identity, generated an obsession with invented traditions, a logic of privatisation of public space, and processes of commercial monoculture'. These phenomena are widespread in Italy and the rest of Europe, where, as Borzani states, more and more cities are grappling with the negative repercussions of a phenomenon that not only generates resources and profits, but also changes collective living, the usability of spaces and the character of places. Genoa must take a critical look at these lessons and recognise the need for public oversight, devising models for safeguarding and, at the same time, maintaining a crucial economic segment (housing plans that support long-term rentals, relocation of valuable urban functions with generative capacity to the old districts, innovation in services, widespread building renovation).

Social Mobilisation and the Role of the Third Sector: Opportunities for Co-Creation in Conservation

However, the 'Piano Caruggi' had a strong innovative component with the creation of around twenty new social centres, places that sought to fill the urban void and build community spaces. This is where a form of active citizen participation developed, often in contrast to the dominant logic of the plan itself, which was more oriented towards 'eventification' (event factory and creation) than community building. On the one hand, collaboration agreements were activated with associations and traders, and on the other, a subsidiarity agreement was signed with the third sector, which gave rise to the Community Project under social policies.

The Subsidiarity Pact, led by the association (community cooperative) Ce.Sto (Centro Storico) is a community project that aims, through the work of all the par-

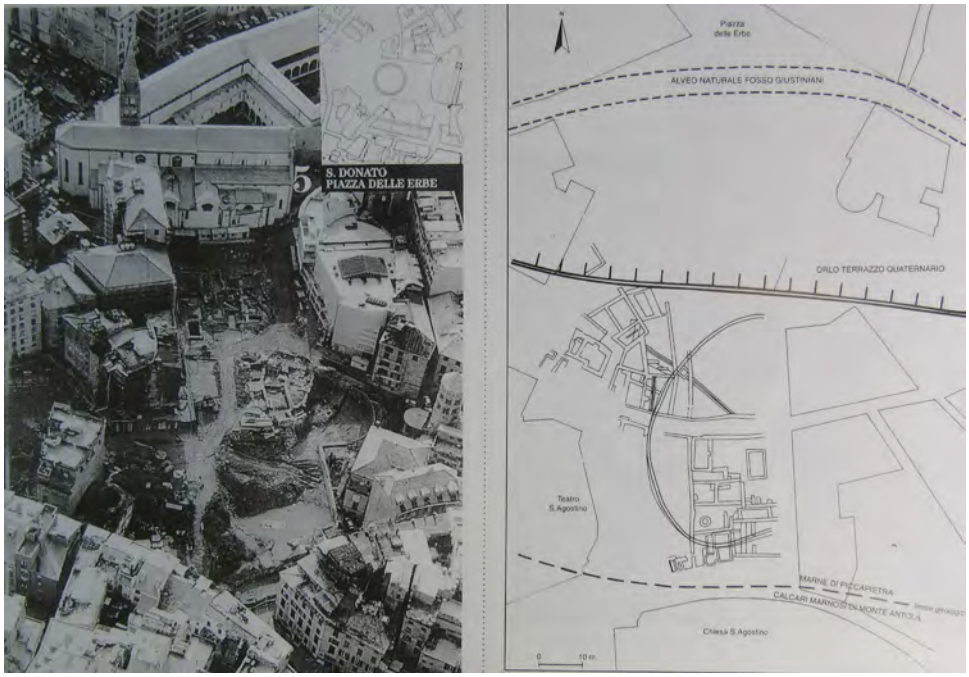


FIG. 14. Left: the large gap/wound in the ancient fabric behind Piazza delle Erbe and San Donato at the end of the 1990s. Right: the Roman find, preserved and protected, kept by the Ce.Sto association as a collective memory.

ticipating associations, to make the historic centre attractive, welcoming, intercultural and inclusive. In the few years of this social experiment, which has seen strong growth in the network of associations supporting it (today the Pact has over 90 active associations), many spaces for sharing have been opened, the lives of residents have improved, the rate of citizen participation in neighbourhood life has increased, and a model of the city has been established that opposes gentrification and over-tourism with concrete redevelopment projects.

But even this narrative must be historicised and framed within the cultural and ancient context of 'Genoa, a city of solidarity'. The Ce.Sto association was not founded with the Piano Caruggi; on the contrary, it recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, a biblical time span compared to the sudden changes in the historic city, dedicated to voluntary and cooperative activities to build citizenship (Borzani *et al.*, 2021). Today, Ce.Sto. is responsible for managing the Luzzati Gardens, after its first experiences in favour of immigrants from the south who lived in a historic centre torn apart by war damage, degraded, unhealthy and unsafe. These experiences arose from the idea of educating children, with an after-school programme in the afternoon and evening set up in the spaces of the convent of Santa Maria di Castello. The Luzzati Gardens,[8] a public space between the Museum of Sant'Agostino, the Teatro della Tosse, the Garaventa school and Piazza delle Erbe, are the most visible element of the association's ongoing work, a challenge won after the failure of commercial management, because urban regeneration processes cannot be limited to material conservation alone. Starting with the preservation of tangible and intangible common goods, the new management of the space, with creativity, has transformed the



FIG. 15. The recent opening of a flower shop (a type of business that is becoming increasingly rare in the rest of the city) managed by Ce.Sto, in front of the church of San Donato.

Luzzati Gardens, where fifty years ago children used to get lost among the rubble, a space frequented by thousands of people every month, residents, citizens and tourists, who visit the archaeological area and linger in the space in front of it (Figs. 11 and 12). The area is managed by a restaurant-commercial activity in the form of an association called 'Giardini Luzzati Nuova Associazione' (Fig. 13), whose statute stipulates that all profits must be reinvested in the area and its activities. It is a happy experience that combines the preservation of material traces, a curved Roman wall structure dating back to the 1st century AD, investigated in the period following the Sarzano-San Donato POI by Tiziano Mannoni himself and Piera Melli (Melli, 1996), whose discovery forced a change in the construction plans (Fig. 14). The area remained a large 'urban gap' for years, until the reconstruction, on its margins, of a square that had never existed in the history of the ancient city, and of the structure managed by the association that incorporates the Roman structures.

Conclusions

Genoa currently benefits from being at the initial stage of a transformation process that has already significantly altered the historic centres of other cities. This position offers an opportunity to use the current phase as a laboratory for achieving a balance among various urban functions, grounded in the city's historical foundations. However, effective leadership is required to reorient the regeneration plan, ensuring it is not limited to events, folklore, or the gastronomic promotion of local products such as pesto and focaccia (Fig. 15).

Beyond scientific and academic research on the value of tangible and intangible culture, and on the preservation of significant architecture and the so-called minor urban fabric, it is essential to consider previous political initiatives. Notably, the unsuccessful attempt to establish a 'Social Master Plan' during Mayor Pericu's Council in 2005, which was intended to complement the 'Municipal Urban Plan.' In urban development and the management of the historic centre, the conservation/creation approach must be expressed as a combination of top-down and bottom-up processes with an emphasis on creation as a means of improving the quality of life of less well-off residents. This programmatic document outlined guidelines for social infrastructure and essential services, including education, elderly care, support for vulnerable groups, housing policy, immigrant integration, and youth employment policies, around physical spaces, to be preserved and renovated, where community life can be reintroduced and where residents themselves feel compelled to take care of them, with a renewed sense of belonging. This means returning, as Bruno Gabrielli recalled in his last interviews and in his last lecture at the Faculty of Architecture in Genoa, to the lost objectives of planning: ethics, beauty, and efficiency.

Notes

1 Ennio Poleggi, professor of history of architecture and the city of Genoa, municipal councillor for the historic centre in the 1990s and architect of the promotion of Genoa's Palazzi dei Rolli as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, Bruno Gabrielli, professor of urban planning and municipal councillor for urban planning and the historic centre from 1997 to 2007 under Mayor Giuseppe Pericu.

2 According to a statement probably erroneously attributed to Goethe during his trip to Italy

3 Poleggi himself, who was a councillor at the time, lamented the city's non-existent historical relationship with the sea, a free zone and historically inaccessible,except for commercial reasons.

4 In addition to the studies by Ennio Poleggi, those by Gianni V. Galliani, Donatella Morozzo della Rocca, Tiziano Mannoni and the contributions by Bruno Gabrielli himself should also be mentioned.

5 It is interesting to note the strongly conservative approach taken by an architect known worldwide as a member of CIAM and therefore a champion of modernity.

6 Hence the recognition of the Palazzi dei Rolli as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

7 Luca Borzani is former Councillor for Culture of the Municipality of Genoa in a previous administrative cycle and past President of the Palazzo Ducale Foundation.

8 The gardens are named after Emanuele 'Lele' Luzzati, set designer and animator at the Teatro della Tosse.

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BETWEEN MEMORY AND PROJECT*

Loughlin Kealy
University College Dublin, Ireland
loughlin.kealy@ucd.ie

'In brief, forgetting is lamented in the same way as aging and death: it is one of the figures of the inevitable, the irremediable. And yet forgetting is bound up with memory'

Ricoeur, 2004, p. 426

Introduction: the Past in Question

Creativity in ensuring the survival of built inheritance through reuse skirts with paradox. Within the arguments for sustainability lie cultural dimensions, with the implicit imperative that intervention maintains authenticity and significance. The need for creativity in the pursuit of appropriate new purpose is routinely invoked, and inevitably, the role of the conservator comes under scrutiny. Beneath the prevailing optimism regarding reuse of historic buildings, there is a diffuse sense of unease – a pragmatic quasi-expectation of loss that is hard to capture. This essay explores some interlinked aspects of creative intervention: meaning, significance and the sustaining of communal memory in the face of new purposes are tangled threads in the conservation narrative (Figs. 1a, 1b, 1c).

Meanings, Appropriations, and Displacements

The Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa is cradled within an urbanised cleft in the hills above the city, its imposing mass embraced by built and unbuilt terracing, and overlooking the harbour far below. Today it conveys a sense of shock. Its scale is not purely physical, its origins in civic vision, purpose and private benefaction are foreign to contemporary understandings. The formal structure of the building mirrors the institutional and social reflections of those Enlightenment designers who, inclined to systematisation, sought to accommodate changing values within the declining classical canon (Picon, 1992, pp. 85–107). Its restrained detail reflects its sober ambition, and its utilitarian formality masks the adjustments of site and structure (predicated on the church as its centre) that were required in its construction. It is in a state of transition, emerging from near abandonment into a prospective future. The sense of its original purpose and subsequent history is juxtaposed against this, as yet partially realised, opportunity.

In common with many other institutional buildings that invite new purpose, the building evokes what Vidler terms 'the architectural uncanny' – the sense of something long lost (buried) that has, somehow, re-emerged into the light (Vidler, 1992, pp. 26–44).[1] Knowing that change is underway generates uncertainty about how the place will fit into a mental architecture based on the familiar. Changes in perceptions of the value of places over time are inevitable, but consciously induced change of purpose ensures that the mainte-







FIGS. 1a, 1b, 1c. The siting of the Albergo dei Poveri, outside the ancient city centre but within the outer defensive enclosure, today ensures that it is both semi-hidden and yet dominant in its locality. A parable, perhaps, of its historic purpose. The formal façade of the Albergo expresses its civic purpose, benefaction on behalf of social order. Photos by the author.

nance of inherited meanings depends significantly on the nature and quality of intervention. Inherited meanings risk at least partial displacement, and to an extent, such displacement is integral to the reuse project. One suspects that the antecedent narrative, rooted in the public mind, is not easily displaced or erased. Reflection on the future of the Albergo, and the conservation issues that might arise in its adaptation, cannot avoid the interpenetration of scale, evocation and meaning embodied in the physical building, and embedded in the memory and imagination.

The antecedent narrative is a powerful force in shaping the perceptual frame within which art forms are recognised, a factor strikingly illustrated by Berger in his classic work, W*ays of Seeing* (Fig. 2). He took the subject of Van Gogh's painting 'Wheatfield with Crows', and presented the image twice, the first simply with a description of what the painting depicts, the second with additional information – 'this is the last picture that Van Gogh painted before he killed himself'. The words change how the painting is perceived (Berger, 1970, pp. 27, 28) – a factor independent of their truth.[2] Discussion of the contemporary meaning of a work executed in the past, takes into account shifts in knowledge and perception that accompany societal or cultural changes over time. Speculating about how the architecture of the past conveys meaning today brings one into analogous territory, with a critical difference. We encounter in the place or monument, something akin to recognition – and recognition of this kind refers to something communally experienced, even if the narrative that surrounds it is poorly focused. In the contemporary encounter with the place, the partial displacement of historical narrative contributes to a new ambiguity of value. This is also the ground on which future meaning must build.



FIG. 2. 'Wheatfield with crows'. Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890), Auvers-sur-Oise, July 1890. Oil on canvas 50.5 cm x 103 cm. Credit: Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam (Vincent van Gogh Foundation)

Architecture itself plays a part in the maintenance or displacement of narrative. While the term, *architecture parlante*, refers to a specific intent in history, it has an enduring relevance. We will consider an application of this idea later in the essay, but for the present, one can say that, set against the power of the Albergo building and its impact on the observer, interventions to date seem like desultory, conversational exercises that do not engage the spatial equilibrium or *gravitas* of the place (Figs. 3a, 3b, 3c). Its architecture and siting are factors of resistance against which new expressions of function and of value contend. At one level, the new work can be seen as constrained by that feature of the antecedent narrative that is expressed in the physical entity. This, alongside the provisional status of the occupancy, points towards intervention as acupuncture as opposed to deeper transformative action, action that might somehow become possible, perhaps even necessary, in establishing a new life. And while the interventions in the Albergo could be regarded as respectful of the inheritance and even creative at some level, looked at more deeply, they underline the precariousness of the adaptation as an architectural project. It can be argued that change of value and of fabric are both essential if historic buildings hope to have meaning beyond their historical references.

One can contrast this resistance with institutional recreations that are facilitated by clear transformations of spatial context and fabric – by architectural interventions that create a new physical and perceptual framework within which the original work is set. In these situations, the question also arises, how does the narrative persist in the new character of the place? One instance will illustrate the points of similarity and difference.

The site of the former lunatic asylum at Grangegorman in Dublin is in the process of transformation into the principal campus of the Technical University of Dublin (Figs. 4a, 4b). This historic assembly, vast in scale and comprising the asylum, known as St. Brendan's Hospital, along with several other constituent institutions, played a key role in the social management of the population of the city. The hospital was maintained by its architecture as a place of separation, reinforced by a deep-seated historical ambivalence towards its residents, and eventually towards its function. Over 50 years ago, its effectiveness as a therapeutic institution was challenged, its role seen as custodial, almost punitive, and so







FIGS. 3a, 3b, 3c. Interventions within the Albergo have a provisional quality, perhaps awaiting a more definitive transition to a new purpose for the building. Photos by the author.

damaging both to those in its care and to the wider society which it served (Brown, 1990, pp. 151–155).[3] The institutional element of that role came to an end some time ago, and large-scale demolitions took place in the late 20th century, not without controversy (Casey, 2005, p. 256 et seq., Quinlan, 2021, pp. 133–134). The present campaign of regeneration involves the addition of new buildings to the complex as it had emerged from this process, and the question now arises as to whether the remaining historic buildings, and what they represent, will continue to be a factor of recognition of the new ensemble into the future. The former institutional landscape is no more, even as transformation unfolds, impacting retained buildings and its defining enclosing elements (Fig. 5). It is impossible to know in what ways experience in the future will be informed by the antecedent narrative here – at most one can speculate that the narrative may endure to the extent that its physical evidence is recognised as such within its new context.[4]





FIGS. 4a, 4b. The complex at Grangegorman hosted buildings that served as hospitals, a prison and military barracks. The austere buildings were a public declaration of the need to ensure public order by sequestering those regarded as the mad and the bad. The experience of such institutions in Ireland has much in common with that of other countries but was also overlain by political and military colonial governance. Photos courtesy of Colm Murray.

Recognition and Memory

Neither the reliability of memory nor the persistence of meaning is guaranteed for the individual, still less for society, although public discourse on heritage seems at times to assume that memory and meaning can provide foundations for creative action. In the face of continuous change, contemporary societies consciously set out to create islands of stability, through the conscription of enduring monuments and places. Often, the drive to enrich the experience of today involves identifying events from the past that have contemporary resonance, and providing for public engagement with the places associated with them. Inherited environments lend themselves to the task. Contriving encounters with the past, whether through scholarship or through other forms of narrative, through storytelling, and expressed through art forms of many kinds, is central to the celebration of 'heritage' – such expressions can be organic expressions of community connection. Whether spontaneous or organised, they take place as distinct from, or even in parallel with, public processes of commemoration. These latter have been subject to critical examination, for example, with a focus on the role played by interpretation.[5] The recent past has given rise to concerns about the versions of history that can achieve public acceptance through the conscription of monuments. There is an increased awareness of the role played by selections that are inspired by political or cultural purpose. Decisions to celebrate or commemorate events from the past involve the prioritisation of certain aspects of events, while other aspects (perhaps those close to the experience of participants) can remain in the background.[6] Ideally, robust and refined exposition and understanding of the inherited fabric will underpin the basis for choice, but the processes of memorialisation generally have particular, and often short-term, agendas. Public perception is an arena in which the authenticity of historic environments fights for survival. The challenge of reuse takes account of, and goes beyond, the inter-weaving of narrative and place.

Boyer's critique makes the point, theatrically, that the celebrations of inherited environments by officialdom 'reek of omissions and suppressions' (Boyer, 1979, p. 371). Her assertion focuses on the selective appropriation of meanings.[7] Acknowledging the truth in her assertion, and the paradox of retaining significance and transforming meaning that



FIG. 5. The transformation of the Grangegorman site into the campus of the Technical University of Dublin, while also reusing what remains of the historic endowment, involves the construction of new buildings, including a library and student accommodation. The genius loci will have changed as a result, the new life offering hope rather than repression. Photo courtesy of Colm Murray.

is part of the reuse challenge, one can observe that attempts to rescue the meaning of places with a dark history, derive significantly from those who have been affected, or from their descendants, and that the focus of their concern relates to memory. But there is also reference to the communal milieu within which this 'heritage' flourished. The drive is to secure and maintain memory associated with places – memory that can be displaced, or overwritten by time, or by aligning intervention with a crafted narrative of the related place.

The reflections of Ricoeur bear heavily on the nuance of this relationship. He quotes Bergson: 'In this sense, the brain contributes to the recall of the useful recollection, but still more to the provisional banishment of all the others'; and later, 'We cannot see how memory could settle within matter, but we do clearly understand – according to the profound saying of a contemporary philosopher (Ravisson) – materiality begets oblivion'. (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 440) While the passage appears to raise issues regarding the dynamic functioning of memory that is specifically related to the physical world, Ricoeur argues for a more nuanced understanding: '…. no longer oblivion that materiality begets, forgetting by the effacement of traces, but forgetting in terms of a reserve or a resource'. Rather than the material world underpinning an inevitable process of forgetting – '[…] recognition, which is paired with that of the survival of images, presents itself as just such a lived experience along the path of the recollection of memories'. (Ricoeur, 2004, p. 439) In the light of this necessary persistence of images with respect to the process of remembering, a related question must come into focus: how this persistence might impact on decisions made in adapting environments to radical new uses. There is a form of reciprocity at work here, and it could be argued that the challenge for reuse has less to do with direct retrieval of what had been forgotten than with enabling the emergence of a framework, built on the persistence of meaningful images, that creates a path to remembering.

The corollary, however, should not be set aside. Ricoeur is careful to say that there is not a contradiction between his view and that of Bergson. The persistence of the materia*l per se* is not the guarantor of memory. Indeed, it is its qualit*y as a trac*e that is significant – a trace of what? If that connection to recognition is missing, the memory is displaced through substitution, or oblivion. In this sense, the reuse of a building, even where its fab-

ric is retained, could lead to the obliteration of at least part of its meaning. We will return to that consideration at the conclusion of this essay.

The inherited buildings of Grangegorman are representative structures of rejected or displaced social realities. As Torre puts it, 'like monuments to conquest […] they may be doomed to fall into oblivion, their original purpose forgotten and their intended message ignored' (Torre, 2002, p. 343). Conventionally, the description of the reintroduction of structures like these to contemporary society is that of 'adding another layer' to the building's story. It is worth bearing in mind that, in the case of many such buildings, the need for closure goes beyond the adding of a layer to the building's history, and relates primarily to the need to experience places in ways that lead to recovery of personal and communal meaning – a process of recovery in which the inherited building is a key element. In the absence of protagonists with direct experience, the burden falls upon those who intervene to reanimate it.

At the heart of the discussion in this essay is the assertion that intervention in the architecture of places is among those art forms that reset perception. If this is to be so, then in each instance, the art of creation precedes the intervention, shapes it and extends beyond it. It lies in the identification, the selection process, and the utilisation of traces that can create the conditions for transition in narrative, making the building complete in a new sense, and thus memorable. Buildings communicate through their physical architectural presence, and so one asks, how the sense of recognition can be captured in the intervention.

Connective tissue

Critical discussions over recent years within the field of heritage studies have touched on designation, on the identification/selection of what society deems to be 'heritage' (Apaydin, 2020, p. 7). To have a productive role in shaping the future of built heritage, discussions of designation, sociological and psychological in nature, have to be grounded in knowledge of the specific physical artefact in itself, its genesis, its architecture. The juxtaposition of perspectives has, at the heart, divergent disciplines, bearing different 'ways of seeing'. The word 'recognition' straddles the divergent perspectives. It connects concepts such as signification (attributed to the artefact) with the sociological and psychological processes through which it is accorded value as a facet of experience (by the onlooker, the seer). We shall return to the concept of recognition later.

The survival of traces is essential to the functioning of memory. However, their effective role in that regard does not arise from mere existence, but rather from the recognition of their power to create a path to action, through which memory assists transformation – an essential creative recognition that within the fabric are elements that can extend its meaning, both in terms of its history and in terms of its relation to contemporary life (Figs. 6a, 6b). The case of the Church of the Assumption in Booterstown near the city of Dublin will serve to illustrate the point. The church is a modest, elegant, 19th-century neo-classical building. It has served as a parish church from 1813 and continues to do so. The parish itself was established in the 17th century and the present building replaced an earlier structure on the site. It forms the major element in an extensive complex that includes a house, former presbytery, a large, multi-storey building and a residential block constructed in recent years. The multi-storey building was formerly St. Anne's Industrial School

for Girls, established in 1870 and administered by nuns who lived in their convent in the nearby house.[8] The building now houses the Parish Centre, while St. Anne's Industrial School has faded from view. The nationwide controversies surrounding the experience of residents of such institutions are prominent in the public mind. St. Anne's was among the institutions covered by the provisions of a state redress scheme, through which former residents were compensated by the state for the sufferings they experienced while in care.

Behind the sanctuary of the church is a substantial space that connects the church to the multi-storey building, the former Industrial School. The space was almost a sub-chapel. It accommodated the children from the School, who could attend church services separately and out of sight of the parish congregation. It may be that most of the present-day congregation, engaged in processes of religious renewal, is unaware of the history of the complex, or of the Industrial School that once underpinned its social role. The narrative of how such places are perceived today, and understandings of historical social context, exist in the context of widespread rejection of the underlying ethos that supported these institutions. To say this is not to assert that experiences at St. Anne's mirror the horrors experienced in other places, but rather to say that the argument for the preservation of traces can be situated in each circumstance, however minor. In the case in point, behind the altar in the church sanctuary are two doors that opened into the space that accommodated the children during worship (Fig. 7). Today the doors are silent traces but they could be otherwise. They offer an opportunity to re-establish connection, to reinstate a spatial relationship that reflected the values embodied in the juxtaposition of spaces, and to the experience of the girls who lived there. And, one can speculate, that by so doing, the doors can open the possibility of a broader understanding of the heritage of the complex, and in the process, also support the renewal of the community of faith.

At a broader level, the antinomies associated with conserving and reusing places and constructions that evoke troubling memories have become established as an area of discourse.[9] The questions are addressed at different levels – among them the issue





FIGS. 6a, 6b. The complex at Booterstown, County Dublin. It comprises the Roman Catholic Church of the Assumption, a Parish Centre and residential accommodation. Photos by the author.

of 'dark' or 'dissonant' heritage. Academic discourse runs parallel, both to the deep emotions evoked and expressed across media[10], and also to the 'normalisation' of such inheritance within the ambit of 'heritage'. One is faced with the broader context in which societies come to terms with troubled histories embodied in their environments. The meaning of places to the broader society comes sharply into focus when one thinks of the potential of such environments to support resolution and psychological growth.



FIG. 7. The interior of the Church of the Assumption. The doors at either side of the altar connect to the back chapel, now part of the facilities of the Parish Centre. Photo by the author.

If one is intent on articulating meaning and significance of the physical environment, then one has to speak of a kind of co-existence of understanding, of maintaining a juxtaposition rather than of achieving a resolution in favour of one conception over the other. The goal in reuse goes beyond avoiding 'displacement of meaning'. The assembly of structures in Booterstown is small in scale and of minor significance architecturally and socially. Its historic importance is recognised and the complex is protected under heritage legislation. However, as we have seen, certain physical elements that express its complex past remain in the shadows, in the space between remembering and forgetting.[11] The element of recognition is critical at many levels, and interventions can be assessed against how they address the intrinsic potentials of the fabric in supporting recognition. A trace has to be recognised as such.

As an antidote to the omissions and suppressions in celebrations of inherited environments, Boyer proposes that 'traces of the past would open on difference […] they would be the memory of rejected parts' (Boyer, 1996, p. 373). Monuments have been described as tropes of memory, in that they say one thing by means of another. What is in question here is meaning as social, rather than personal, memory, a communal construct of historical experience, and the role of the built artefact in evoking and sustaining that construct. Here, the architecture of the place is significant, insofar as it sustains a particular characteristic of 'trace', its recognition as integral to the fabric.

'Let the building speak to you'. The phrase was coined to encourage the conservator to stand back, to let the evidence of the building as it has aged, provide the direction for intervention to prolong its life.[12] But the phrase reaches beyond that purpose, to embrace the nature of the given object and its potential connection with the imagination, and so to memory and future-making. As such it relates to architecture, how its material being becomes integral to conscious human purpose. The architecture of a place has itself a type of narrative, witnessed in its physical form, abstracted as plan, section, elevations, and expressed in its materiality. These were the means that expressed aesthetic drive and social purpose. Each had its conventional, hierarchical relationships and coherences, to be recognised today as elements of its authenticity, but also as holding the key to its pos-

sible new life. The monumentality of the principal façade of the Albergo is echoed in the coherence of the planform, predicated on an internal order that culminates in the plan of the church and its antechamber. This determinant establishes coherence in the face of the incompleteness of the suggested form.

So one can ask how the construction of an inclusive narrative could be expressed in the physical envelope that presents itself, what new coherences can be evinced as evidence of a new purpose, what elements of the whole can serve as the connecting tissue between the (almost) hidden past and the hoped-for future? From the perspective of the distant onlooker, the architectural question is how the new uses can be part of a more nuanced set of spatial relationships. This is an architectural challenge certainly, but one that presumes that the new use can establish clarity in the spatial relationships related to its functions. The challenge for conservation lies in contributing positively (creatively) to the exploration of nuanced relationships that respect the hierarchies of what exists, while relating these to its new purpose.

In Conclusion: 'Memoria non moritur'

The case of the Albergo is both complex and compelling. It is complex, not just because of its history, the scale of the building, its condition and the resources required to rehabilitate it, but because its future identity seems provisional. It appears to stand at a crossroads, where its new function has yet to consolidate. Its partial occupancy bears witness to a type of creative institutional opportunism – the recognition that disused spaces can be colonised to alleviate current shortfalls. It fits Rossi's designation of buildings that have lost their primary functions, as 'containers' that have the potential to exploit their historical presence in reuse with new functions, according to the needs of the city. There is recognition of the building's potentials, and some have been proposed that could accommodate an urbanistic transformation of its site. But at present it is unclear to the observer





FIGS. 8a, 8b. The formal vestibule of the Albergo dei Poveri is adorned with plaques and commemorative busts of benefactors and other luminaries, among them the memorial bust of Tomas Roncalli; its inscription 'Memoria non Moritur' asserts the monumental function of benefaction. Photos by the author.

from outside whether the process of colonisation will continue and expand, or how the future governance of the site may unfold.[13] Thus, the possibility of a fresh architectural project capable of addressing the scale of what has been inherited, remains uncertain. Earlier, it was observed that the challenges of reuse went beyond the inter-weaving of fabric and narrative. To become architecture, such an inter-weaving requires a vision for the building's future, one that explicitly accommodates the building's former life. To paraphrase Bergson, without that vision, the surviving fabric may become an active agent in the erasure of the memory of its past.

Within the severe vestibule of the Albergo, grave portrait busts of historical luminaries gaze upon the visitor (Figs. 8a, 8b). The words 'Memoria non moritur' are taken from an inscription to one of them, Tomas Roncalli.[14] As seen today, they are an expression of confidence, the anticipated immortality a sharp counterpoint to the deep uncertainties of transformative reuse. There may be little desire on the part of those determining the building's future function to evoke the association with poverty and social control. But the association with civic responsibility lends itself to being celebrated, providing motivation of a kind much needed at this time. At the heart of that responsibility lay a perspective on social life that was rooted in belief. At the heart of the building lies the church, nexus of the architectural form, past and perhaps, future. This returns us to the central paradox of the reuse of material inheritance: the articulation of new purpose as integral to the maintenance of meaning and of communal memory.

Paradox needs to be unravelled in each instance. On a general level, there is a need to look critically at interpretations of environments that have survived, to explore the relationship of communal remembering to new narrative, the role of forgetting in that respect also. The critical question facing the Albergo dei Poveri is how a vision for its future can be created, one that ensures that the architecture of the place plays its part in establishing a sustained understanding of what has been inherited (Fig. 9).



FIG. 9. From memento to prospect, re-reading sculpture in the vestibule of the Albergo. Photo by the author.

Notes

* The words of the philosopher, Chris Younès, describing the challenge posed for contemporary society by the built inheritance, borrowed from Younès, C. 2016. Proceedings, Colloquium Post Trauma Reconstruction. ICOMOS International Secretariat, Paris. http://openarchive.icomos.org/1707/.

1 Vidler's discourse touches on the psychological roots of the unease that such places evoke – his discussion of the 'unhomely' places the understanding of the modern experience of dislocation in the works of Schelling, Freud and Hoffman. One notes that he quotes Freud as referring to the experience of Genoa as a site of Piranesian claustrophobia.

2 Later studies have indicated that it is not, in fact, Van Gogh's last painting. While that lessens the dramatic impact of Berger's juxtaposition, the underlying point about narrative context remains valid, nonetheless.

3 The author, Ivor Browne, was Professor of Psychiatry at University College Dublin and Chief Psychiatrist of the Eastern Health Board, the authority with responsibility for health services in the region. In his autobiography *Music and Madness* (2009) he recounts his efforts in the 1960s to change the model of care from one based on institutional facilities to one with community-based care.

4 The transformation of major institutions that catered for health and social needs of the past usually offers extraordinary opportunities for development, because of their siting in places that have become significant in terms of urban regeneration. As well as an historical exposition, Picone explores this aspect with regard to the Psychiatric Hospital Leonardo Bianchi in Naples. Picone, R. 2017. 'The change in meaning of built heritage bearing social value. The case of the former psychiatric hospital 'Leonardo Bianchi' Naples (Italy) and the mining sites of Genk (Belgium): management strategies' in *Conservation-Adaptation. Keeping alive the spirit of the place.* Fiorani, D., Kealy, L., Musso, S.F. EAAE Transactions No 65. Hasselt, Belgium

5 One of the critical factors in reconstruction of places damaged through conflict is the tendency for the surviving built heritage to be appropriated by groups that become dominant, in terms of supporting claims to legitimacy.

6 The Irish state launched a 'Decade of Centenaries' to mark the 100th anniversary of its foundation. Over a period of 10 years, the state and its institutions marked the centenary of an equivalent period of time, critical to the foundation of the society and body politic of today. That period, from 1912 to 1923 saw political and social transformation. The state commemorations generated creative, scholarly and social initiatives, shedding new light and generating fresh discourse.

7 Boyer's critique is also a prelude to her thesis that such appropriation leaks into the creation of models for new environments.

8 The Convent of the Sisters of Mercy at Booterstown was founded in 1838. Its foundation is attributed to Sidney Herbert, 1st Baron Herbert of Lea. St. Anne's Industrial School was established by the nuns in 1870 and continued in operation until the 1970s. At its peak, it catered for over 100 girls. The institution was among those covered by the Residential Institutions Redress Act 2002, administered through CARANUA: Support for survivors of institutional abuse. https://www.childrenshomes.org.uk/BooterstownStAnneIS/ (accessed 17 July 2025); https://www.Caranua.ie>useful-resources/institutions-covered (accessed 17 July 2025). Industrial Schools were established through the Industrial School Act 1868 to cater for children orphaned, abandoned or at severe risk of poverty or a life of crime. The Act was superseded by the Children Act 1908.

9 Internationally, the cultural milieu owes much to the extreme example of the inscription of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp on the list of World Heritage sites in 1979. The Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum was initially established on the grounds of the concentration and extermination site in 1947 on the initiative of some of the survivors, with the aims of preservation, commemoration and research. It was inscribed on the World Heritage list through the initiative of Poland in 1947. https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/31

10 These reflections open the question of memory treated as an element of immaterial inheritance. A recent online seminar on dissident heritage featured a presentation on Vallo Alpino fortifications, built mainly in the 1930s by the Italian authorities in Tyrol. The project reported on perceptions of local residents towards this heritage: older respondents focussed on unwelcome memories best left in the past: younger respondents 'more open' to future potential, seeing the remains as resources to support change in the locality. Ref. ICOMOS. 2021. In *Restauro. Post-War Heritage of Art and Architecture in Central and Eastern Europe. Integrated Approaches to Dissonant Monuments and Sites*. International ICOMOS Conference of the Bulgarian and German National Committees in cooperation with the Municipality of Kazanlak, the Buzludzha Project Foundation and the Iskra History Museum. Editorial work: Jörg Haspel, Jana Weydt, John Ziesemer.

11 The complex is listed as a Protected Structure in the Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council Development Plan 2022–2028.

12 The phrase is borrowed from the title of a lecture delivered on 19 May 1993 by the late Sir Bernard Feilden to an audience of architects and postgraduate students at University College Dublin.

13 The proposition has been made that 'Given the significance of the complex, not only for Genoa but also on a national level, any future actions shouldbe overseen by a joint committee comprising the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio, the University of Genoa, ASP Emanuele Brignole, the Genoa City Council, and the Liguria Region'. ADP Brochure, *L'Albergo dei Poveri di Genova*. 2024. Musso, S.F., Franco, G., Casanova, M., Acacia, S. DAD, Università di Genova.

14 Taken from the inscription under the bust of Thomas Roncalli: 'THOMAE RONCALLI A REGENTE-ORUM TRIB MILLIB OFFICIO PAUPERUM IN MORTE LAGATIS MEMORIA NON MORITUR'.

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GENOA BETWEEN CREATIONS AND DESTRUCTIONS

Stefano Francesco Musso
University of Genoa, Italy
stefano.francesco.musso@unige.it

In 'Eupalinos or the Architect' (Valéry, 2011, p. 15) Paul Valéry imagines a dialogue between the shadows of Socrates and his pupil Phaedrus about architecture and construction. Near the beginning of the debate, Phaedrus asks: 'Where can that taste for the eternal that is sometimes evident in the living come from, Socrates?' Socrates replies: 'Phaedrus, you see clearly that it is madness' and, in turn, asks him: 'And where do you think they got the first idea and the energy for those immense efforts that gave rise to so many cities so illustrious and so useless monuments that reason, previously incapable of conceiving them, now admires?'. This amazement at man's senseless desire for eternity and the admiration for the products that this madness has generated, with acts of 'creation' and 'creativity' comparable only to those of the Demiurge, marks the entire dialogue and can also explain our attachment to cities and our desire to preserve them, despite inevitable changes. Phaedrus then declares his admiration for Eupalinos, the Greek architect of the temple of Megara, which, in his opinion, had to 'move men as the beloved object moves them' (Valéry, 2011, p. 16), and adds: 'Destroying and building are of equal importance, and souls are needed for both; but building is dearer to my spirit' (Valéry, 2011, p. 17). These words underpin the brief journey this essay proposes through the 'distinguished city' of Genoa (Fig. 1) and its complex history of creation, destruction, restoration, and conservation, as a contribution to the workshop organized by the EAAE Conservation Network in September 2024.

Creative Destructions and Destructive Creations

Genoa's more than two thousand years of history cannot be synthesised in a few pages. However, starting with Paul Valéry's suggestions, we can identify an interpretative thread that, at least in part, answers the workshop's questions.

This intricate history, populated by more or less famous figures, political institutions, social, religious, and economic realities, constantly changing over time, is reflected in the multi-layered physical city that we live in and perceive, partly know, understand, interpret, and would (perhaps) like to preserve and enhance, as a Common Good of cultural interest, not just local. Genoa is the result of a sometimes-inextricable intertwining of diverse types and ways of conceiving and implementing the process of creating a city, a place where many human beings have lived and worked for centuries, and the object of their uncertain rational, cultural, and emotional reflection. This prolonged process, neither linear nor governed by a unitary and coherent plan, responds in part to what the French urban historian Pierre Lavedan called the 'implicit plan' in the history of every city (Lavedan, 1944). For Genoa, this plan, never drawn, has always been governed by the cru-



FIG. 1. Genoa, panorama of the historic centre.

cial problem of mobility, that is, its crossing from east to west, or vice versa (Fig. 2). What has been constructed from scratch, changed, transformed, demolished, or preserved over the centuries, for various reasons, on the basis of that plan, is the subject of reflection here, through some emblematic examples.

Genoa's history, in fact, is studded with many diverse types of creation of its spaces and buildings, monumental or otherwise, the fruit of unprecedented creativity or the confirmation of ancient trends.

There have been cases of actual creation and construction of new buildings, in spaces open to creativity, free from constraints other than those imposed by the characteristics of the sites (morphology, orography, soil consistency, exposure, etc.). However, these are limited cases and can be traced mainly to ancient and early medieval times.[1] When, starting in 1155, the new city walls were built to defend the city from the feared siege of Emperor Frederick II, known as Barbarossa, many spaces within them were still empty (Fig. 3). The names of some streets and squares recall this: Via Luccoli (from *lucus*, Latin for 'wood'), Piazza Campetto – 'small field', Piazza delle Vigne, with its medieval monastery, where there were vineyards, Via del Campo, which until the early 16th century ran through cultivated fields, or the Via di Prè neighbourhood, incorporated into the 16th-century city walls, where there were meadows and a few buildings. Only in these areas were buildings truly constructed from scratch, as would happen afterwards, but outside the oldest city walls. In many other areas of the current historic centre, however, as the population, economy, and trade grew, along with the parallel demand for new homes, religious buildings, production spaces, or other urban functions, many of those early buildings were demolished and replaced by new constructions, which were affected by the site, road layouts, and neighbouring properties and buildings. Other structures were profoundly changed and adapted to new uses, tastes, needs, or requirements (including safety). Therefore, to create new streets, squares, clearings, and open spaces, extensive demolitions were conducted. In other cases, the desire to create (construct) new buildings led to the destruction

of existing structures, not always with the desired or immediate results. Finally, there have been cases in which destruction was creative, revealing a buried and forgotten reality, sometimes correcting or even inventing it, as in the restorations conducted between the 19th and 20th centuries. It is impossible to give an extensive account of such diverse types of creation, or expressions of creativity, but they can offer a key to understanding what we saw during the workshop, in keeping with the equal importance Phaedrus places on building and destroying in his dialogue with Socrates. Moreover, we can only focus our attention and projects, concerning their outcomes and intangible impacts, on what remains of the pre-existing structures.[2]



FIG. 2. Map of Genoa in the early Middle Ages.



FIG. 3. Map of the first city walls.

Construction and New Creativity

The 'Albergo dei Poveri' ('Hostel for the Poor') is a vast architectural complex listed and protected by the Italian 'Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape' (Fig. 4). For its size, the compound can be considered a part of the city, more than a simple building, a true urban infrastructure. The 'Albergo' was built between the second half of the seventeenth and the middle of the 19th century, but it was never completed according to the original plan and design. Further, it underwent several modifications, adaptations, and deep transformations, mainly in the inner spaces, due to the changing, over time, of the social asset of the town, of the sensitivity and the evolution of the scientific, social, and political thinking, and of the methods of hosting the poor and taking care of them. It also underwent many repairs after the damage caused by the bombing during the Second World War.

The complex was built in a natural valley, outside the urban settlement and its 16th-century city walls, and it remained isolated until the second half of the 19th century, when those walls were demolished to allow the growth of the city towards the north, on the slopes of the hills that surrounded the place (Fig. 5). This means that the architects had to conceive and realise the modification of the site by re-modelling the valley and its rock-sloping



FIG. 4. Aerial view of the Albergo dei Poveri.

sides, covering two rivers and filling the basin to obtain a platform upon which to build the complex. These actions were impressively 'creative', technically challenging, and have resulted in a true new 'creation', in an almost free place.

The 'Albergo' was an institution of public charity that, under the label of a charity body, hid a strong programme of social control over the poor, the unemployed, strangers and the homeless considered as a separate part of the city. Emanuele Brignole Sale, a representative of one of the richest noble families that ruled the Oligarchic Republic of Genoa, founded and financed it. The main steps of its construction date between 1656 and 1696, when the main parts were completed (church, inner cross wings, eastern, northern, and part of the south wings). The last phase of construction ended in 1832, with the completion of the west wing, the main façade with the eastern tower, and the new scissor stairs in front, which allow the connection with the newly reformed streets around.

During the periods of maximum expansion and activity, the 'Albergo' hosted almost three thousand people, and the administrators closed its doors every night. It thus represented for centuries, until its recent abandonment, and because of its strategic position and dimensions, an important urban and territorial infrastructure. The model assumed for its design was common to several welfare complexes and derived from Antonio Averlino's (named 'Il Filarete') architectural theories, and his Major Hospital in Milan. It also recalls the Monastery and Royal Palace of the Escorial, for Emperor Charles V, and anticipates, in a sort of reverse way, the idea and the forms of the 'Panopticon' that in the 19th century changed the concept of architectures devoted to the control of prisoners or sick people, by ensuring the chance to see every part of the complex from a single central point. Here, the visual, symbolic and functional centre of the complex is the main altar of the Church that was visible from all the arms of the cross formed by the internal wings: one used as ante-church (towards south, the monumental atrium, and the city), the two Oratories, for males and females (towards west and east), and the infirmary (towards north).

The owner of the complex is now an Institution of Service to the Person, heir of the founder, but the University of Genoa has bought its surface rights for a period of 50 years. The agreement provided that the University would take care of the complex, allocating its empty and abandoned spaces to its institutional activities, maintaining its monumental parts open to the public, particularly the monumental atriums and staircases, the ante-church, and the church, which is a parish church.

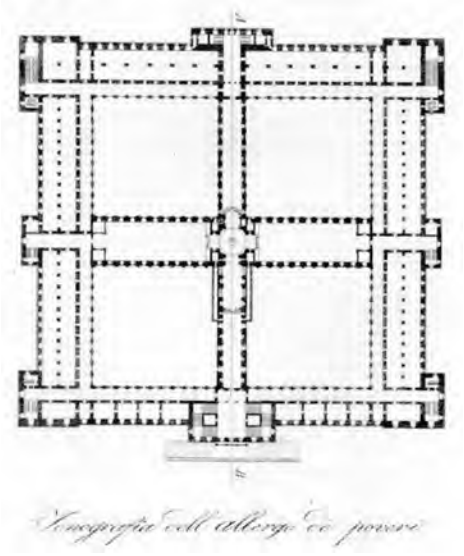


FIG. 5. Historic map of the Albergo dei Poveri.

The original idea of the Athenaeum was to transfer into the 'Albergo' the Faculties of Humanities, Social, Political, and Legal Sciences hosted in some monumental palaces of nearby 17th-century Via Balbi, around the ancient Jesuit convent where the Rectorate of the University is hosted. For several reasons, this original programme was developed only in part over the past decades, with several stops due to economic and technical problems, which in part derived from a lack of consistent and reliable knowledge of the complex, its real consistency, and state of conservation. In the meantime, the impossibility of occupying and reusing the entire complex caused uncontrolled decay phenomena and structural diseases that affected the complex, its roofs, frames, windows, doors, plasters, installations, finishes, external spaces, and inner courtyards. Infiltrations of rain waters, animals, homeless and vandals, the disordered growth of infesting vegetation, and other similar phenomena were clear when the University took under its own responsibility the 'Albergo', but they continued worsening after that moment. The limited parts that have since been restored, rehabilitated, and refurbished to host teaching activities, a library, administrative and academic staff offices, are now already in critical conditions, in functional and comfort terms, regardless of the evaluation that we could express about these interventions, from the point of view of their architectural quality, creativity, and cultural premises.

Another difficulty the University faces is the recent changes in technical regulations concerning the protection of buildings against fire and seismic risks, as well as the safety of workers and workplaces.

The University thus decided that a strategic plan was necessary, based on a sharp vision of the future of the architectural compound and on a rigorous knowledge of its status and conditions. It was also necessary to conceive it as part of the town, a resource of life that could maintain the values of its layered history, forgetting the sense of sadness, suffering, and imprisonment of its spaces, with the students as protagonists of the city's life. In this perspective, the University cannot face the fate of this complex alone. For these reasons, a coherent and sustainable strategic plan of restoration, reuse, and management of the complex was proposed, involving the Municipal and Regional Administrations, along with other local actors, and the Ministry of Culture. Given its impressive size and location close



FIG. 6. Strada Nuova.

to the city's heart, the 'Albergo', in fact, is an opportunity for urban renewal, regeneration and valorisation. The strategic plan has been prepared by the technical offices of the Athenaeum, with the support of the School of Specialization in Architectural Heritage and Landscape (under the responsibility of Stefano F. Musso, with Giovanna Franco). At present, only 45% of the available spaces has been restored and reused. The remaining parts, especially the north wing and a large part of the upper floors of the eastern one, are exposed to the actions of aggressive agents and are affected by material degradation. Furthermore, the ancient inner spaces have strong morphological and organisational features that make it difficult to adapt them to new uses, saving their architectural values and characters: large and tall rooms, in some cases fragmented during the past decades, covered with complex structural vaults in the lower levels and mainly with flat ceilings in the upper ones, monumental stairs, lack of safety exits, etc.

Some projects, announced by the master plan, have been completed in recent years, such as the library's depot in the east wing. Others are under realisation, even if with some changes: the restoration of the Men's Oratory as a main classroom, in the west inner wing, the students' residence in the upper floors of the east wing, a Cafeteria, a Gymnasium, other facilities for the students, and new offices for the Departments. The reuse has also been completed, according to the suggestions of our Department of the inner road in the underground floor, which originally served as a functional infrastructure for the life of the 'Albergo' (with kitchens, laundries, laboratories of different nature, depots), as a new urban street connecting the upper part of the city with its historic centre downtown.

However, the unused spaces remain extensive and numerous, and for these reasons, the complex requires new forms of respectful creativity and new creations, directly involving its built matter, spaces, interior and exterior finishes, as well as the ways of using and inhabiting it.

Destruction and Creation of Urban Spaces

About a century before the construction of the 'Albergo' began, the northern part of the city, enclosed within the medieval walls, was demolished to make the construction possible of Via Aurea or Strada Nuova (now Via Garibaldi) (Fig. 6). Ennio Poleggi, the most eminent scholar of Genoa's urban history, considered it a real estate operation, almost a building speculation (Poleggi, 1972). It was a dead-end street, serving a closed neighbourhood between Piazza Fontane Marose to the east and the garden of the pre-existing but expanded

Palazzo Grimaldi to the west. It stayed so until the second half of the 18th century, when Via Nuovissima (now Via Cairoli) was built by demolishing and remodelling the pre-existing buildings in the area. In this way, Strada Nuova was connected to Largo Zecca, Piazza della Santissima Annunziata del Vastato, and then to the Strada Balbi, built in the 17th century based on its model. A first section of Genoa's 'implicit plan', governed by the problem of mobility, was thus implemented towards the west and the tendency towards creative destruction, gave rise to a model destined to last until the beginning of the 20th century, with the opening of other New Streets and squares within the ancient urban fabric, even at the expense of monuments that were certainly not useless, despite Socrates' words. Via San Luca, to which Donatella Fiorani dedicates part of her essay, as well as Via della Maddalena, also underwent partial changes in section between the 15th and 16th centuries aimed at easing the transversal crossing of the dense medieval urban fabric. In 1584, Via di Scurreria was opened, demolishing parts of the existing medieval buildings, to allow the transit on horseback from San Lorenzo to Piazza Campetto and provide scenic access to the Imperial Family Palace (Fig. 7). Despite these and similar interventions, at the beginning of the 19th century, the medieval structure of Genoa was substantially intact, even if the buildings had been adapted to the changes, over the centuries, of the ways and needs of living, architectural languages, and construction techniques. After the Congress of Vienna, however, the Republic of Genoa lost its independence and was annexed by the Kingdom of Piedmont and Sardinia, before finally merging with the Kingdom of Italy in 1861. The city experienced a period of economic and demographic growth, and profound and extensive transformations affected the urban fabric confined within the medieval and 16th-17th century defensive walls, which were progressively demolished to allow the city to expand onto the hills behind and towards the Bisagno River plain to the east. Starting from the second decade of the 19th century, the radical reform of the present city centre began, with the opening of via XXV Aprile, between piazza Fontane Marose and the new square (De Ferrari) that the city architect Carlo Barabino was building, after having demolished the convent of San Domenico and the hill on which it stood, to construct the neoclassical Carlo Felice opera house (1827) and the palace of the Ligustic Academy of Fine Arts (1831). In 1839, the construction of the 'Carrettiera Carlo Alberto' (Carriage Road) was completed, connecting Piazza Principe to the west with the area of Palazzo San Giorgio, later renamed Piazza Caricamento, with the arrival here of the railway serving the port. After centuries, a coastal route was thus created to traverse the city, giving new impetus to the implementation of the 'implicit plan' for mobility, towards the east. Piazza Caricamento was



FIG. 7. Via di Scurreria.



FIG. 8. Cathedral and Via San Lorenzo.

afterwards connected to the new Piazza De Ferrari, upstream, by straightening and levelling Via San Lorenzo and opening the square in front of the Cathedral. Here too, some medieval buildings were demolished, others cut down by removing parts to allow the widening of the road and by building new neoclassical facades that hide the surviving parts of the pre-existing buildings. It was a colossal and creative undertaking, made possible by demolitions that Phaedrus considered as important as the buildings themselves (Fig. 8). Along Via San Lorenzo, the current Piazza Matteotti was also opened, demolishing the building that closed the inner courtyard of Doge's Palace off from the city. Thus, the route towards the east continued through Piazza De Ferrari (completed at the end of the century) and Via XX Settembre, which straightened and replaced the 16th-century Via Giulia. Therefore, even at the beginning of the 20th century, the city seemed to renew itself by following the undesigned rules of the 'implicit plan' in its history. Around this new road, in the 1960s and 1970s, the sixteenth-and 17th century neighbourhoods of Piccapietra and Madre di Dio were demolished, after the destruction dating back to the mid-19th century necessary to realise in part Carlo Barabino's Building Expansion Plan, towards the Bisagno River. Nevertheless, the 'hidden or implicit plan' continued to live on, and new answers to the mobility problem were provided in the Thirties, with the construction of two tunnels behind the historic centre, towards the north, and in the Sixties, with the realisation of the elevated road on the waterfront. Furthermore, it is even alive, if we consider the announced construction of a tunnel under the waters of the historic harbour and the various hypotheses to enable more efficient circulation around the historic Genoa, in the two valleys of the rivers Polcevera (East) and Bisagno (West). It remains only to say that all the new streets still followed the model of the 16th-century Strada Nuova, even if their block buildings, lacking monumental courtyards, were now divided into apartments for the new emerging bourgeois class, rather than noble palaces.

Destruction and New Buildings

To make things even more complex, a few years ago, a fragment of medieval history unexpectedly resurfaced from oblivion and the city's underground underbelly, during a preventive archaeological activity conducted in the 'Loggia dei Mercanti', in Piazza Banchi (Fig. 9). It is a part of the ancient city that was thought to have disappeared forever and was only hypothetically reconstructed in some urban history studies (Grossi Bianchi and Poleggi, 1980). The Loggia, originally open, is a monumental building constructed between 1589

and 1595 in Renaissance style by Andrea Ceresola, known as Vannone, behind the ancient Ripa Maris, to house the money changers and commercial exchanges that, until then, had been held under its porches. The recent excavations, necessary to approve a project to reuse the large interior space, have uncovered sections of massive walls, underground rooms, pathways, and outdoor spaces, remains of a goldsmith's workshop, other remains related to fabric dyeing, lime kilns, abandoned building materials, drainage channels, and sewers. These are traces of the 'Alberghi' (residences) of the Usodimare families, demolished to make space for the 'Loggia', and underneath, of the Roman settlement. These remains of immense value, surveyed, studied, and partially restored, reveal new important aspects of Genoa's history (Fig. 10). Therefore, they should not simply be preserved for the benefit of scholars, covered over, and forgotten again, but rather demand to be enhanced, made accessible (in various ways). Genoa, on the other hand, has always been a gateway between different worlds, civilizations, cultures, and ethnic groups, as its name suggests, which derives from the Latin term 'Janua' and recalls 'Janus', the two-faced pagan deity. It has always been a place of passage, not only physically, between the Mediterranean and continental Europe, East and West, South and North (Musso, 2016). For these reasons, the 'Loggia' can become a new gateway, or a modern hub, that introduces visitors to the historic city and invites them to discover its riches of art, culture, and social life, supporting a conscious, unhurried, and attentive form of tourism. Modern multimedia technologies and the smaller spaces next to the large internal hall can contribute to this. The first project envisioned the inclusion of a large, multi-storey metal structure to create a Museum of the History of Genoa. Archaeological discoveries, however, have prompted the abandonment of that choice, which would have effectively negated the evocative spatiality of the Loggia. In conclusion, the 16th-century destruction made possible an innovative architectural creation, and today the new destruction resulting from archaeological excavations can offer the opportunity for a new, careful, and sensitive design creativity. The Loggia could be the gateway to a city that is not an open-air museum, but rather one that must be visited and traversed with its myriad mazes of light and shadow, sounds and smells. It would be something different and more powerful than a formal, yet limited, space in which to present a sort of summary of Genoa's thousand-year history. The Loggia, moreover, stands near Palazzo San Giorgio, the original seat of the Capitano



FIG. 9. Loggia dei Mercanti.



FIG. 10. Interior of the Loggia dei Mercanti.

del Popolo, then the customs house, and finally the Banco di San Giorgio, close to the Palazzo Ducale with its Torre Grimaldina and the Cathedral. In this limited space, the symbols of the civil, political, religious, and economic government of ancient Genoa are thus condensed. These hubs of interest should be connected, sparking a physical and virtual dialogue that recounts the extraordinary past of the city, considered a symbol of European civilisation: tolerant, open, contradictory, noble and rich, elegant and poor, courageous and innovative, and at the same time uncompromisingly conservative. For this, new creativity is necessary, expressed through physical interventions and how the monument is used and appropriated by the local community and visitors.

Revealing Destructions

Between the mid-19th century and the early decades of the 20th century, numerous medieval buildings in Genoa underwent extensive restorations.[3] From their deteriorated plasters, sections of squared stone block walls, traces of mullioned and multi-mullioned windows, hanging arches, infilled arcades, and bas-reliefs from the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries appeared. Between 1846 and 1847, the historian Federico Alizeri published an artistic guide to the city (Alizeri, 1846-1847), full of information on its past, which inspired other scholars, including Alfredo D'Andrade, a true protagonist of that period, ideally close to Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-Le-Duc. Thus, restorations defined as 'stylistic' or 'analogical' arose, characterized by the perfect similarity of the new parts (added, repaired, completed, or rebuilt) to the surviving ancient ones. Buildings of supposed medieval foundation were then subjected to the removal of plaster and the demolition of vaults and more recent structures, considered incongruous. It happened to religious and civil architecture, including Palazzo San Giorgio, the city gates 'Porta dei Vacca' and 'Porta Soprana', the last freed from the buildings that had incorporated it after its construction, integrated and modified with the creative insertion of the helical staircase in the southern tower. D'Andrade, his collaborators, and his successors also restored important churches dating from the medieval age. It is not possible to examine all these works conducted during that period, but the Cathedral of San Lorenzo is a prime example. It had maintained some visible Romanesque and Gothic elements, despite the transformations of the 16th and 17th centuries designed by architect Galeazzo Alessi, and it was only at the beginning of the 19th century that it was freed from the buildings in front of and surrounding it.[4] The wall connecting the southern bell tower to the 15th-century 'Loggia dei Canonici' on the north tower was demolished, the central rose window was restored, and the openings in the second order of the towers, semicircular and more recent, were replaced with four-light windows. Also, the sides were changed by restoring the Romanesque portals, filling in existing windows and opening others, extending the blind loggias, and demolishing the Fieschi chapel to the north.

Following this same concept of restoration, the removal of more recent plasters in other buildings of the historic centre revealed, or unveiled, sometimes in creative, not to say inventive ways, many medieval details and structures, such as the lodges on the ground floors, in some cases reopened and used for commercial purposes. This is the case of the Piazzetta delle Cinque Lampadi, between Via San Lorenzo and Piazza Banchi, which encompasses various forms of creativity, both physically destructive and reconstructive, or creatively intangible, such as the reuse of the monumental atrium of the building on

the seaside to host a food supermarket (Fig. 11). This is not an uncommon case. The internal courtyard of the Palazzo del Melograno, in Piazza Campetto, covered by a 20th-century skylight, houses a large clothing store amidst its columns, exedra, and fountain with a monumental statue. The frescoed atrium of the nearby Palazzo Imperiale hosts an antiques gallery, and many monumental atriums have been subdivided and repurposed for various uses. For some, these uses are expressions of harmful and disrespectful creativity, which, however, contribute to the historic centre's vitality. Even the Ghetto, north of Via del Campo, a poor and rundown part of the historic centre, is struggling to revitalize itself thanks to its few residents, mostly from diverse cultures, with events organized in open spaces decorated with murals, street art expressions, and furnished with plants and benches. An analogous situation has occurred in the Prè neighbourhood, thanks to municipal incentives, or tax exemptions for the creation and maintenance of commercial, artisanal, design, hospitality, welfare, or personal services activities, to make the area vibrant and safe. This was the aim of the Pilot Recovery Plans of the 1980s and 1990s, based on a Comprehensive Study of the historic centre, and thanks to a specific State Law for the recovery of historic centres, as Giovanna Franco recalls in her essay. The recent PINQUA Urban Redevelopment Projects, funded by the National Resilience and Recovery and Resilience Plan, funded by the EU, have also attempted to bring to life similar forms of functional and architectural creativity, even with new, controversial demolition proposals aimed at creating open spaces and illuminating the buildings most affected by the density of the built environment.



FIG. 11. Piazzetta Cinque Lampadi.

Destructive Creations

In the 1950s, with the post-war Reconstruction Plan, many new buildings were constructed in the historic centre to replace those damaged by air raids, or sometimes to take the opportunity to demolish what remained and increase the volumes and number of floors for speculative intentions. These are often new buildings devoid of any architectural quality and are examples of dubious creativity, with few exceptions, such as the building that borders Piazza Campetto to the east. Much debated since its construction, the so-called 'Switzerland' skyscraper, named after the Insurance Company, which commissioned it, had been hailed by the local press as an expression of modernity. This reinforced concrete building, with terraces and large windows, replaced houses damaged but not destroyed by the war, breaking the continuity of the Ripa Maris building complex, near Palazzo San Giorgio. Its structure and composition were intended to recall the architecture of Le Corbusier, particularly the Unité d'Habitation in Marseille, but in questionable ways.

In the following decades, other buildings arose in the historic centre, sometimes with problematic outcomes. Among them, an emblematic example is the headquarters of a branch of the CARIGE bank, in Piazza Santa Sabina, above the medieval 'Porta dei Vacca', the western entrance to the old city, adjacent to the seaward façade of the monumental Palazzo Belimbau, in Piazza della Nunziata. The building is new and modern, an expression of the technological creativity typical of the 1970s: a parallelepiped with a flat roof, enclosed by a continuous wall of dark glass and metal frames. The problem is that this building, in reality, conceals the side wall and three apses of the Romanesque church of Santa Sabina (founded in the 6th century AD), which survived the wartime bombings, with questionable, if not destructive, consequences for the ruins and the site. To its right, set back, stands the 17th-century Oratory of Death and Prayer, of which only the façade is visible. Damaged by the war, it was partially rebuilt and later incorporated into the 'Casa della Giovane' ('House of Young Ladies'), inaugurated in 1960, a modern multi-storey building with reinforced concrete structures that interfere with the surviving ancient walls. The oratory is thus no longer perceptible; its architectural autonomy has been denied with an act of destructive creativity that, perhaps, was not felt as necessary (Fig. 12).

Examples of this nature could continue for a long time. Still, the cited ones are perhaps sufficient to highlight the risks inherent in designing new buildings in densely built and consolidated contexts, even if the opportunities for similar operations, in the future, will certainly be limited, provided that a different and more balanced idea of creativity is developed to which the culture of conservation offers its productive contributions.

Closing the Circle

Finally, let us return to the dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus, to give meaning to the brief journey we have proposed. Explaining why the potential architect within him remained at the stage of an idea or a potentiality, Socrates explains, in detail, the reasons why this happened. In short, he argues that he had to choose between being a spirit and a philosopher, dedicated to 'knowledge', or being an architect and a builder, who is capable of 'acts.' As a philosopher, he intended to know everything about nature and the world. The builder, on the other hand, did not need to know much more about them than is strictly necessary for his undertakings. For this reason, he decided to dedicate himself to knowledge. Well, we can partially disagree with these words. Even the builder, or the Architect, needs knowledge, and the richer and deeper it is, the more his 'acts' (projects) will be, perhaps, more sustainable and richer in meaning and values for the benefit of all, today and for the future of our 'multi-layered cities.'



FIG. 12. Piazzetta Santa Sabina.

Notes

1 For a comprehensive urban history of Genoa, see Poleggi and Cevini (1981) and Grossi Bianchi and Poleggi (1980); for the city's most ancient history, based on archaeological and documentary evidence, see Melli (2014).

2 For a description of the current conditions of the historic centre and its problems, see Bobbio and Musso (2020).

3 For an extensive and in-depth analysis of these interventions, see the volume by C. Dufour Bozzo (1984).

4 For the overall history of the Cathedral, see the volume by A.R. Calderoni Masetti and G. Wolf (2012). For the 19th-century restorations, see Di Fabio (1984).

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Second Section: Essays

CREATIVITY IN ARCHITECTURAL RESTORATION: *CHŌRA* AND *TOPOS*

Marta Acierno
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
marta.acierno@uniroma1.it

1. Introduction

'In recent years, the most ambitious goals within the architectural profession have increasingly shifted towards the preservation and maintenance of the existing built environment, rather than the creation of new constructions' (Otero-Pailos, 2022, pp. 6–7; Otero-Pailos, 2023, pp. 18–19). Within this evolving paradigm, the discipline of architectural restoration is increasingly engaged in direct and often contentious dialogue with contemporary design-led approaches. These tensions frequently emerge in debates whose consequences are ultimately borne by historic architecture itself.

Against this backdrop, the present article investigates the role of creativity in architectural restoration. Specifically, it aims to critically examine the conceptual contours of *creativity* in this context, as well as to define the epistemological and operational boundaries between restoration practices and other disciplines within architectural design.

2. Framing Creativity Within Restoration Practice

Creativity in restoration design is traditionally associated with the critical decisions that shape each intervention: what to preserve, what to remove, and what to reintegrate. These decisions are not merely technical or procedural; rather, they express a broader, nuanced dialogue between the existing fabric and the new contribution. In this sense, restoration is inherently a creative act – a complex interpretative process that negotiates between continuity and transformation. Thus, restoration should not be regarded as a purely technical endeavour. On the contrary, it requires close engagement with the idea of creativity itself. But what do we mean when we speak of a 'creative act'? As noted by philosophers Elliott Samuel Paul and Dustin Stokes, the term 'creative' is typically applied to three different referents: a person, a process, or a product – where a product may take the form of an idea, a performance, or a material artefact (Paul and Stokes, 2024). Most theoretical frameworks focus on the product. In this view, people or processes are deemed creative to the extent that they yield creative products. A product, in turn, is considered creative if it satisfies two essential criteria: it must be both novel and valuable.

Novelty alone is insufficient; something may be entirely new yet devoid of significance (such as a random sequence of letters), and therefore unworthy of being called 'creative'. This understanding echoes Immanuel Kant's notion of (artistic) genius, which he defines not merely as the capacity to generate original works – since, as he argues, 'there can be original nonsense' – but as the ability to produce works that are also exemplary (Kant, 1790 [2000], §§43–50, pp. 182–197). In this view, the creative product is not only new but meaningful, a judgement that necessarily arises within a given cultural framework.

Without engaging in an extended philosophical inquiry, it is nonetheless important to emphasise that creativity must be situated within a context of meaning. A creative act, especially in the field of restoration, must be responsive to the cultural, historical, and symbolic values of the context in which it is embedded. This position challenges reductive approaches that frame creativity in restoration as existing on a linear spectrum. At one end lies the risk of excessive creativity, where contemporary interventions dominate or obscure the historical substance, reducing heritage to a mere stage set for present-day architectural expressions. At the other end lies the threat of creative inertia, where fear of compromising authenticity results in an inability to engage the present through design.

Focusing on the value of creative acts requires a parallel focus on the attribution of meaning, and therefore on the cultural contexts within which these meanings are constructed. Of particular interest is the relationship between design methodology and the identification of heritage significance. Divergent conceptualisations of historical architecture – or of ancient urban fabric – generate fundamentally different frameworks for creativity in restoration. These differing frameworks often lead to radically incompatible design outcomes. To understand the specificity of the restoration project and, consequently, the scope for creativity – not just innovation – this article first explores the nature of the project site and then examines the role assumed by the architect in the design process.

3. The Site of the Restoration Project: *Chōra* and *Topos*

In contemporary architectural discourse, the notion of *locus* is frequently linked to the Platonic concept of *chōra*, as articulated in the *Timaeus* (Deregibus, 2013).[1] Here, *chōra* is described as a formless, receptive space – neither entirely intelligible nor perceptible – serving as the matrix of becoming. Devoid of fixed identity, it represents the potential for transformation. This elusive and generative character has prompted extensive philosophical reflection and interdisciplinary engagement, particularly within fields where the understanding of place is central, including architectural restoration.[2] At the core of this debate lies the philosophical tension between Plato's *chōra* and Aristotle's concept of *topos*. In Book IV of the Physics, Aristotle, while acknowledging the ontological ambiguity of space, opts for the more clearly defined *topos*: the 'immobile boundary of the mobile body' (Berti, 2014).[3] This understanding grounds spatiality in physical terms – as the interface between container and contained – thus opposing the metaphysical dynamism of *chōra* to a more static, geometric interpretation.

This dichotomy provides a useful framework for examining the *locus* of restoration practice. On one hand, Aristotle's *topos* aligns with the tangible, material presence of the architectural artefact, reinforcing measurable, spatial, and temporal distinctions between the pre-existing structure and the intervention. On the other hand, *chōra* – in its indeterminate and transformative nature – better reflects the layered, historical, and interpretative complexity of built heritage, where boundaries between past and present are often fluid and contested (Deregibus, 2013).

Giorgio Mangani develops this line of thought through his exploration of the *chōra-topos* opposition within the history of cartography (Mangani, 2007). He highlights how this distinction has been appropriated by geographers and architects alike to articulate the tension between the physical, quantifiable dimension of space (*topos*) and its immaterial, symbolic, and identity-based dimension (*chōra*). As a principle of form, *chōra* enables the

emergence of place as lived and meaningful experience – mutable and invisible, akin to the unformed matter that receives the imprint of the idea.

This conceptual distinction underpins both landscape studies and chorography, which address regions not merely in geographic terms, but through their historical, anthropological, and affective dimensions. When transposed into restoration design, this framework may yield two contrasting orientations: conceiving the site as *chōra* permits radical reinterpretation, sometimes privileging contemporary narratives over historical continuity; conceiving it as *topos*, by contrast, promotes a cautious engagement with the existing fabric, favouring preservation over transformation. It is therefore unsurprising that architects inclined towards innovation often associate the project site with *chōra* – a space that contains all, yet retains nothing.

4. Architect as Demiurge or Interpreter?

The interpretative complexity surrounding *chōra*, as defined by Plato, highlights the difficulty of identifying the *locus* of a restoration project. Its elusive, polysemic nature resists precise definition, yet it remains central to understanding the conceptual space where design takes form. The Aristotelian opposition between *chōra* and *topos* provides a critical framework for exploring this ambiguity: while *topos* offers spatial clarity, *chōra* suggests a generative but unstable openness. The concern here is not to define architecture as an object of restoration, but to recognise how the site itself becomes subject to conflicting interpretations – some of which may undermine the integrity of the intervention.

This tension is intensified in Derrida's interpretation of *chōra*, which he frames as 'an anachronism of being' – a condition prior to reality and the binary of intelligible and perceptible. Such an interpretation, if applied directly to restoration, risks destabilising the project's epistemological and material grounding (Derrida, 2019). Identifying the site purely with *chōra* could, therefore, lead to irretrievable consequences in both conceptual and practical terms.

In this context, two dominant architectural attitudes emerge. The first approach bypasses the cultural or historical value of the existing structure, treating it as a neutral basis for new design. Here, the building is conceived as *chōra*, and the architect assumes a kind of demiurgic role, reshaping matter freely. Yet this reflects a highly specific – and reductive – interpretation of *chōra*, which departs significantly from the Platonic notion of a dynamic, generative space. Instead, *chōra* is treated as a passive, inert medium: formless, receptive, and ultimately stripped of its potential to hold or transmit shared memory and meaning. In contrast, the second approach is grounded in a reflective process that engages critically with the historical and cultural significance of the existing architecture. Restoration becomes a way of producing knowledge – an epistemological practice involving interpretation and discovery. Within this framework, the full complexity of the *chōra–topos* dialectic is revealed: *chōra* allows for multiplicity but risks interpretive dissolution; *topos*, understood as the 'immobile boundary of the mobile body', offers a clearer threshold between the past and the restoration, establishing a more stable foundation for design. However, it could lead to a reductive interpretation that considers only its material aspect, neglecting its historical and aesthetic significance.

Rather than advocating one model over the other, this article seeks to illuminate the conceptual structures underpinning these divergent approaches. A deeper understanding

of their respective epistemologies is essential to framing creativity in architectural restoration today. While the first approach operates outside traditional restoration logic, the second remains open, layered, and in need of further critical investigation.

4.1 Restoration as a Creative Premise: Posing as Preservation

Rem Koolhaas and Jorge Otero-Pailos capture a significant shift in contemporary architecture with the notion that 'preservation is overtaking us' (Koolhaas and Otero-Pailos, 2014). This change stems partly from a reaction against overtly iconic, 'starchitect'-driven architecture and partly from an expanding definition of what merits preservation, now encompassing modern and contemporary structures. Consequently, the locus of architectural intervention is increasingly identified as *chōra,* where reinterpretation or re-signification of existing buildings becomes the dominant mode, while neglecting the material substance of the building and what it can convey in terms of historical and aesthetic layering. In practice, this has given rise to 'experimental preservation', which challenges conventional conservation by broadening the architect's role beyond mere material protection to embrace active, creative engagement with time, material and socio-political context (Otero-Pailos *et al*., 2016). Such practices reconceive preservation as an ethical act of care, involving reuse and relocation of materials as deliberate cultural gestures (Fig. 1).

Simultaneously, Koolhaas provocatively reframes preservation itself as a thoroughly modern invention, emerging alongside technological and scientific advances such as photography and the blueprint. He argues that preservation now shapes architectural production, especially visible in cities where historic centres are frozen in stasis while peripheries undergo rapid change, resulting in an urban fabric defined by the tension between permanence and transformation. The example of Hernán Ruiz I's cathedral in Córdoba – initially perceived as a work of new architecture, yet fundamentally an act of preservation masked for political safety – illustrates how preservation can serve as a foundation for architectural innovation. According to Rem Koolhaas, today's cultural consensus regards the wholesale demolition of historic buildings as unacceptable; the old carries greater symbolic weight than the new (Koolhaas and Otero-Pailos, 2014). Koolhaas notes that by the early 21st century, preservation became the primary criterion of architecture's cultural relevance, displacing the formerly accepted notion that new architecture could



FIG. 1. London, Westminster Hall, east wall. The Ethics of Dust by Jorge Otero-Pailos: a 50-metre translucent latex cast, capturing centuries of dust and pollution in this site-specific installation.

fully replace the old. This idea has inspired approaches that Rem Koolhaas provocatively describes as architecture 'posing as preservation' – interventions that adopt the appearance or rhetoric of conservation while fundamentally transforming the original structure (Koolhaas and Otero-Pailos, 2014).

4.2 Knowledge as a Reflective Process Guiding Creative Practice in Architectural Restoration

Knowledge forms the basis for recognising value, which in turn guides the restoration project. As philosopher Remo Bodei suggests, knowledge is inherently relational – a dialogue between subject and object (Bodei, 2014). In the context of conservation, the subject is the architect or conservator, while the object is the historic building. Meaning arises through this dialogic relationship – not from passive observation, but through active and creative engagement. This shift in perspective redefines conservation not as a conclusive act, but as a generative process of interpretation and transformation.

Central to this approach is the emphasis placed on the values that knowledge reveals – particularly the material substance of the building and the capacity of its fabric to continue to convey meaning. These elements serve to guide the design process. What proves decisive, however, is the attitude adopted towards knowledge itself – how it is interpreted, and the role assigned to it within the restoration project. It is therefore crucial to consider the nature of the site of the project, even prior to addressing creative work, as it is this very nature that justifies creative action. Without such grounding, the outcome risks being merely innovative, rather than truly creative.

What ultimately legitimises the restoration is a well-articulated framework of values – one that functions as an arbiter of creative potential. As Donatella Fiorani has aptly observed, the restoration project must function as an exegesis of a text (Fiorani, 2016). In this light, the *chōra-topos* debate, by prompting a reflection on the nature of place, provides an opportunity to explore the theoretical and methodological tools that can guide this exegetical process.

5. Interpreting the Existing Through *Topos* and *Chōra*: Dialectics in Urban Practice

The conceptual duality between *chōra* and *topos*, also explored in geographical thought, offers a nuanced lens through which to interpret place beyond its physical and measurable aspects. As Giorgio Mangani notes, this opposition gained renewed relevance in postwar geography under Heidegger's influence: the Platonic *chōra*, a space of becoming, resonates with Heidegger's *Ort*, the meaningful and originary place; *topos*, by contrast, aligns with *Stelle*, the fixed, measurable site.[4]

Heidegger's distinction between material and immaterial dimensions of place remains central to contemporary landscape theory. In planning and cartography, however, there is growing concern over the erosion of *chōra* in favour of *topos* – a shift that commodifies space and flattens its cultural and experiential depth.

This framework is particularly valuable for understanding urban restoration today. Two key lines of inquiry have emerged. The first reframes heritage not only as a cultural or mnemonic asset but as a relational force driving creativity, cohesion, and development (Vitale, 2024). The second line of inquiry responds to data fragmentation and the unchecked growth of digital platforms. While intended to centralise information, these tools

often worsen disconnection between local contexts. In reaction, attention is shifting toward interoperable models that can better support integrated urban planning and management (Fiorani, 2019).

Both perspectives remain rooted in *topos*, yet aim to re-engage with *chōra* – seeking to recover the differentiated, relational spaces eroded by globalisation, technocratic planning, and economic rationalism since the post-war period (Fiorani, 2019, pp. 223–245).

In response to this ongoing phenomenon, the idea of porosity – as described by Walter Benjamin in his 1924 reflections on Naples – has re-emerged as a critical lens for interpreting the spatial logic of such cities and for informing strategies of urban regeneration. This lens may also prove useful in investigating whether the historic urban fabric is considered a *topos* or a *chōra*. For Benjamin, porosity meant more than architectural permeability; it referred to a condition in which boundaries between public and private, interior and exterior, sacred and profane are fluid, negotiated, and continuously reconfigured through use. Such a condition can serve as a kind of metric – an indicator capable of measuring the balance between an interpretation of the urban fabric as *chōra or as topos.*

The city of Genoa, though absent from Benjamin's writings, offers a compelling case through which to investigate the relevance of the *chōra-topos* dialectic and the operative potential of porosity in restoration and urban renewal. Genoa's historic centre, with its compact linear form and stratified fabric, exemplifies a porous urbanism that operates across scales – from city-wide morphology to the minutiae of architectural detail. Its accessibility, even from more marginal districts such as Maddalena, Pré and Molo, reinforces a spatial continuity that supports both circulation and inhabitation.

This porosity is expressed materially through architectural features such as painted Renaissance façades, vaulted arcades, narrow alleyways (*caruggi*), and votive shrines – elements that not only shape the built environment but actively structure the rhythms of everyday life.

Porosity in Genoa is not merely spatial but ontological – rooted in *chōra* as the interplay of temporal and relational forces shaped by the city's layered history and lived spaces. Far from being a static or 'frozen' historic core, as Koolhaas describes in his critique of heritage-driven stasis (Koolhaas and Otero-Pailos, 2014), Genoa functions as a generative matrix where architecture becomes part of a living urban text (Fig. 2).

This underlines the relevance of the *chōra-topos* dialectic in contemporary restoration, calling for approaches that move beyond formal conservation to re-engage with the deeper logic of place. Restoration must reconnect the material presence of *topos* with the experiential depth of *chōra*, restoring not just buildings but the porous condition that sustains urban life.

Yet Genoa's porosity has been weakened by the uneven outcomes of late 20th-century regeneration policies, which, despite aiming to reconnect fragmented spaces, failed to fully revive the city's spatial and social continuity. Among the most notable efforts was Giancarlo De Carlo's pilot plan for the Pré district – a historically marginalised area west of the medieval walls – envisioning restored continuity between the historic centre and the waterfront (Capurro, 2020). Alongside this large-scale project, smaller-scale restorations also played a key role: the renovation of the Faculty of Architecture, Santa Brigida washhouses and the development of a museum network including Sant'Agostino, Porta Soprana, Palazzo Reale and the Strada Nuova museums. Other projects aimed to increase accessibility, such as those at Palazzo Senarega, Scuola delle Erbe and Giardini Luzzati, which

are now open to the public.[5] However, as Andrea Vergano notes, the effectiveness of these policies was hindered by fragmented property ownership (Vergano, 2020). The 1980 urban plan relied on detailed zoning tools (*piani particolareggiati*), which proved unsuitable for Genoa's heterogeneous and stratified character. As a result, the projects remained piecemeal, often limited to isolated private actions, contributing to architectural and social decline. De Carlo's vision of integrated urban connectivity was never fully realised, reinforcing the need for renewed public leadership, especially in vulnerable districts like via Balbi, Maddalena, Pré, Ghetto, Le Grazie and Vigne (Capurro, 2020).



FIG. 2. Genova. Via di Porta Soprana.

Despite the resilience of Genoa's built fabric, the historic centre reveals growing vulnerability. Recent projects have often failed to engage with the deeper spatial qualities rooted not just in *topos* as material site, but in *chōra*, or more precisely, Heidegger's *Ort* – neglecting the lived, relational dimensions of place. This shift has privileged measurable aspects (*Stelle*) at the expense of experiential and cultural depth.

Historic streets, while still home to artisan shops and services, are increasingly characterised by vacant ground-floor units (Bobbio and Vaccaro, 2020, p. 27).[6] The restoration of painted façades – though signalling a commitment to visual identity – at times exceeds simple care, with a tendency toward spectacle, largely for perceptual effect and perhaps overemphasis, compromising the layered temporality central to Genoa's character. Similar concerns apply to recent waterfront projects, which in some cases have erased historical stratification and disrupted the temporal-spatial interweaving that defines the city's porosity.[7] The restoration of the Palazzi dei Rolli, while instrumental in promoting heritage tourism, risks privileging monumental narratives over the everyday urban fabric. Though votive shrines still decorate public spaces, new forms of fragmentation – such as the spread of gates and barriers (*cancellizzazione*) – increasingly undermine spatial permeability and symbolic continuity.[8]

These contradictions expose a deeper epistemological rift: the inability to sustain an integrated understanding of place as both materially grounded and relationally produced. Restoration that ignores the ontological depth of *Ort* risks reinforcing surface aesthetics while neglecting the complex lifeworlds that give space its meaning and continuity. Within this complex and often contradictory landscape, the *Piano Integrato Caruggi* – developed by the Municipality of Genoa under the PINQuA programme and funded by the NRRP – offers a renewed opportunity for meaningful regeneration. Targeting the historic *sestieri* of Maddalena, Molo, and Pré, the plan focuses on improving public space, services, and connectivity, while preserving the existing built fabric and avoiding land consumption.

Its strength lies in multi-sectoral governance and community involvement, promoting a coordinated, participatory approach. In this sense, the plan shows sensitivity to the specific qualities of place and aligns with the spatial logic of *chōra* as a field of social, historical, and symbolic relations. Nevertheless, the role of built heritage and the integration of architectural restoration within the plan remain unclear. While the social objectives are well-defined, the prioritisation of economic revitalization risks overlooking the city's historical and spatial specificity. Without addressing the unresolved tension between *chōra* – the lived, relational dimension – and *topos* – its material foundation – there is a danger of repeating past errors, such as monument-focused approaches or ineffective projects. A balanced strategy is needed; one that aligns preservation with social regeneration. Otherwise, vulnerable areas like via Balbi, Maddalena, and Pré may continue to be excluded. Genoa's porosity endures, but its future depends on how this quality is reinterpreted through culturally sensitive urban action.

6. Interpreting What is Through *Topos* and *Chōra*: Dialectics in Architectural Practice

On an architectural scale, the case studies considered here compare the recovery of the former medieval shipyards in Seville by Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra and the restoration design of the *Loggia dei Banchi* in Genoa.

The medieval shipyards (Atarazanas) in Seville, built in 1252 under Alfonso X, form a historically and architecturally significant complex. Originally spanning six hectares, the site consisted of seventeen vaulted naves set perpendicular to the Guadalquivir River, allowing for efficient ship transfer and maintenance. These naves featured ribbed groin vaults supported by pointed arches. For three centuries, the site operated as royal shipyards. With the port's growth and Seville's exclusive role in trade with the Americas, it evolved into a key warehouse. Over time, it served multiple functions – as a prison, customs house, and market. From the 17th century, the structure was progressively divided: one section became the Hospital de la Caridad, another the customs offices, and a third the Maestranza de Artillería (Sala de Armas) – the portion restored by Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra.

The project concerns a relatively well-preserved section composed of seven naves, some covered with brick vaults, others with 19th- or early 20th-century iron-and-glass trusses. The longitudinal ends were enclosed by buildings constructed between the 16th and 20th centuries. The current ground level of the complex matches that of the city, whereas originally it was five metres lower. The project involved selective demolitions and the addition of new architectural elements (Fig. 3) to transform the complex into a covered cultural plaza – a multifunctional civic space aimed at fostering public engagement with art and knowledge. The ground level was mostly preserved, except for removing infill walls along the arcade facing Dos de Mayo Street (Fig. 4), creating a direct connection to the urban fabric and opening the exhibition hall fully onto the city, strengthening the link between building and civic life in Seville.[9] Exhibition spaces occupy the former Sala de Armas and artillery workshops, while a new auditorium was inserted transversely to the original naves, reflecting 18th-century design logic. It is covered by a subtle, folded roof with angled planes designed to blend unobtrusively into the renovated building. Additional functions are distributed on the upper floors and within new buildings on the eastern side, where some demolition occurred. The first-floor layout emphasises visual



FIG. 3. Seville. Atarazanas. Exhibition hall realised in direct connection to the urban fabric.



FIG. 4. Seville. Atarazanas. The main hall, during the reconstruction works

and spatial ties with surrounding monuments, with the restaurant and auditorium offering privileged views. A tall volume connects the building's levels, linked by a long, gently sloping ramp descending to the covered plaza below.

The project sparked significant debate. Key decisions – such as making the complex subsoil stratigraphy inaccessible and demolishing parts to improve exterior continuity and add vertical circulation – were defended by the architects as necessary to restore public space and reconnect citizens with the site's heritage.[10] However, this approach effectively erased or obscured the site's layered history, built over centuries. Contrary to the architects' intentions, the project 'froze' the most evocative elements within a new, alien envelope, prioritising a single contemporary vision rather than an 'accumulation of worlds'. This critique is not about fossilising the past but about ensuring historic architecture remains intelligible and usable, creatively integrated into contemporary life and responsive to public needs.[11]

To consider an approach that contrasts with the previous case, the ongoing restoration of Genoa's Loggia dei Banchi – a Renaissance loggia built in 1595 – offers valuable insight (Fig. 5). The project, led by the *Segretariato Regionale per la Liguria* and the *Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio* for the city of Genoa and the province of La Spezia, exemplifies a different preservation strategy. Located at the city's commercial core, the building rests on medieval foundations and reveals six historical phases through archaeological excavation, spanning from the Roman era to the 16th century. This palimpsest embodies Genoa's mercantile identity and centuries of urban life (Caraffini, 2002). Although the restoration project is still in its preliminary phase, its goals are clear: to create a museum that connects the site's physical fabric with its urban history, preserving its archaeological complexity without adding new volumes. While comparing a completed project to one in progress has limits, the contrast between the two reveals important insights. Despite originating from differing premises, both projects share a commitment to reinstating the urban and symbolic centrality of historic sites. However, they also provoke concerns regarding the nature of restoration practice and its role in preserving historical architecture and passing it on to future generations.

Consuegra's project not only leaves the five metres of archaeological stratigraphy beneath the building unexplored but also appears to disregard the above-ground traces of successive transformations accumulated over the centuries since the building's initial construction. His architectural approach neglects the historical reading of the pre-existing



FIG. 5. Genoa. Loggia dei Banchi. General view of the ongoing works.

structure upon which it is based, thereby decontextualizing it. It denies the porosity that characterizes the site – while fostering permeability between interior and exterior, it simultaneously severs its connection with the past.

In contrast, the *Loggia* project risks falling into the opposite trap. Here, the restoration may be reduced to a mere archaeological reading, potentially failing to communicate the site's architectural and historical value to the public. The complexity inherent in architectural restoration cannot be exhausted by stratigraphic analysis alone, nor by attempts to reconstruct the sometimes ambiguous and opaque relationships among a building's formal and spatial components. Rather, it lies in the project's capacity to re-establish a critical nexus between the material substance of the work and the historical meanings embodied, sedimented and transmitted through that material over time. In this sense, restoration cannot be limited to the preservation of physical evidence, nor to a singular, linear narrative of the past. It must instead act as an informed interpretation of a multifaceted historical memory, translated into a design synthesis that binds together material presence and cultural intelligibility.

Yet, despite its long-established methodology, the discipline today risks falling into one-dimensional approaches that fail to grasp the complexity of historic contexts. On one side, there is an almost obsessive focus on exhaustive documentation; on the other, a reluctance to engage with historical depth. This paradox invites reflection on the dichotomy to clarify the boundaries between data collection and meaningful interpretation. Tools must not only support documentation but also foster connections, interpretations, and the emergence of deeper historical and spatial insights.

7. Restoration as a Means of Bridging *Chōra* and *Topos*

In the context of architectural restoration, the site of design and creative action is the historic built environment itself – a space in which the dialectic between *chōra* and *topos* becomes particularly pronounced. This conceptual opposition offers a critical framework for understanding the complex epistemological processes underpinning the attribution of value to architectural heritage. The dialectic between *topos* and *chōra* – rather than constituting a binary opposition – reveals a mutual stratification in which each informs and

deepens the other. While *topos* necessitates the preservation of physical substance, it derives meaning only when activated by cultural, historical, and symbolic layers. Conversely, *chōra*, though immaterial, is not abstract; its meanings – memories, identities, uses – are made intelligible through their inscription in the tangible fabric of architecture and urban space.

The interplay between these two dimensions is not only necessary but constitutive: each informs and completes the other, resisting reductive interpretations that isolate form from meaning or substance from experience. Certainly, restoration cannot be reduced to a retrospective act of preservation. Rather, it must engage dynamically with the present, addressing contemporary needs while remaining anchored in historical specificity. This process entails a synthesis between the temporality of the existing fabric and the evolving realities of future inhabitation. It avoids becoming either an act of mere conservation or a projection of novelty and instead emerges as a critical practice of interpretation.

This interpretive dimension closely parallels the act of translation. Like translation, restoration does not seek literal equivalence between past and present but instead constructs conceptual correspondences that reconcile divergent perspectives and functions. The challenge lies in achieving an interpretive coherence that balances formal rigour with contextual sensitivity. In this light, the success of a restoration project is measured not by fidelity to the past alone, but by its capacity to 'say almost the same thing' – to articulate the enduring significance of place through a new, yet resonant, language of design (Eco, 2003, pp. 37–56). In the absence of a thorough investigation into the original meaning, the process becomes prone to failure or to producing outcomes lacking in conceptual clarity and integrity. A telling example is the case of the Atarazanas: while they may now be walked through, the loss of surface texture and subsoil stratification has rendered them experientially opaque.[12]

In conclusion, the decision to focus on the notion of place in the context of restoration was not driven by a desire to engage in theoretical or philosophical speculation, but rather by the increasingly evident disconnection between restoration projects and the specific contexts to which they relate. This disjunction is becoming ever more frequent, as contemporary architectural practice tends to overlook the need for a deep, critical understanding of place. Even when such understanding is acknowledged, it is too often confined to a preliminary role – serving merely to legitimize the work – rather than forming the substantive basis upon which design decisions are made. This approach risks compromising the specificity of restoration, which instead requires a conscious rooting in the historical, material and cultural context of the work. This rootedness in place constitutes a preliminary and essential operation for the construction of a horizon of values within which an authentically meaningful project can emerge. It is this step that enables the activation of *bauen* – that is, 'building in order to dwell', according to Heidegger's conception – in clear contrast to *herstellen*, understood as construction in the sense of mere technical production. Such a design approach opposes the reduction of space to a mere object of consumption, which is the outcome of a lengthy historical process wherein technical production has become the dominant mode of engaging with the world. Conversely, what is advocated is a creative project capable of rooting itself within the context and developing within a meaningful framework, thereby avoiding arbitrary or self-referential deviations that risk producing results lacking coherence and significance – what might provocatively be described as a 'random sequence of letters' or an 'original nonsense'.

Notes

1 For a more in-depth discussion, see Platone (1994).

2 For a detailed discussion of the different interpretations of *chōra*, see Derrida (2019).

3 For a more in-depth discussion, see Aristotele (2012).

4 The concept of Ort, as understood by Heidegger, refers to that which gives place – that which makes space possible as a meaningful experience of dwelling. It is not merely a position within physical space, but the point from which space acquires meaning, as it emerges from the relationship among the fundamental elements of existence: earth, sky, divinities, and mortals (see Heidegger, 1976, p. 102). Giorgio Mangani's position is set out in Mangani (2007).

5 For a critical overview of the projects carried out in Genoa over the past decades, an insightful contribution can be found in the text by Giampiero Lombardini (Lombardini, 2020).

6 See in particular Table 2, *Axes and polarities* (p. 30), Table 6, *Commercial activities and personal services* (p. 38), and Table 8, *Craft and trade activities* (p. 42).

7 For a critical account of the restoration works carried out in Genoa in recent decades, see Musso (2020). It is also worth recalling here that the concept of porosity, as employed by Walter Benjamin, refers to the interpenetration (*Durchdringung*) and the interweaving of spatial and temporal dimensions (see Messori, 2011, p. 275).

8 For an analysis of votive shrines in Genoa, reference may be made to the work of Rita Vecchiattini and Cecilia Moggia who explore their historical significance and urban role (Vecchiattini and Moggia, 2023). The phenomenon of 'cancellizzazione' ('gating') has been insightfully examined by Agostino Petrillo and Sebastiano Benasso. with particular attention to its cultural and spatial implications (Petrillo and Benasso, 2020).

9 For further information on the project, see the following websites: Vázquez Consuegra (2016) and (2024).

10 'At a time when public spaces are being relentlessly eroded – due to privatisation, commodification, or inadequate use – the Atarazanas Cultural Centre could represent a remarkable opportunity to offer Seville a covered cultural agora: the Plaza Atarazanas. Its vocation is to become a space for encounter and exchange around the worlds of art, culture, and knowledge' (Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra in Bulnes, 2024).

11 'I […] understand continuity in architecture as a succession of ways of seeing the world – a kind of accumulation of worlds' (Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra in Bulnes, 2024).

12 The concept of porosity, as theorised by Walter Benjamin in his reflections on Naples and later extended to the urban fabrics of Mediterranean cities, provides a valuable heuristic for such an approach. Porosity – understood both as physical permeability and as a mode of spatial and temporal interweaving – offers an alternative to interventions that tend towards impermeability and homogeneity (Benjamin and Lacis, 2000).

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CONSERVATION AND CREATION: A REALISABLE OXYMORON

Carla Bartolomucci
University of L'Aquila, Italy
carla.bartolomucci@univaq.it

Introduction

Although theoretical reflection on conservation and the concept of cultural heritage has made notable progress over the last sixty years – thanks also to the awareness of values in historical urban contexts aroused by the Venice Charter – many misunderstandings still remain about the role of restoration and the purposes of architectural and urban heritage conservation.

The artificial contrast between development and conservation continues to manifest itself through the proliferation of misused new terms, revealing numerous ambiguities and obsolete preconceptions. This is evident, for instance, in the frequent reference to urban regeneration in historic centres (rather than in contexts to be redeveloped), often associated with very vague ideas of 'smart cities' in which technologies appear as objectives to be achieved rather than as tools to improve the management of urban complexity.

In such circumstances, restoration is still seen as a retrospective act (see the overused reference to the original state and the narratives on the 'return to ancient splendour' generally created ad hoc), while several redevelopment initiatives are aimed at contexts whose qualities remain unknown or are erased by projects and constructions that are entirely unaware of the values of the places, and are therefore damaging and disfiguring.

Starting from an extreme case of destructive 'valorisation', this paper reflects on the outcomes of some 'creative' choices made in historical contexts – at both urban and architectural scales – which, in some cases, have proven to be significantly degrading and, conversely, on examples of creativity that have produced appreciable cultural outcomes.

In particular, it aims to highlight the innovative (and therefore also creative) role that conservation can have in recognising the potential of places whose cultural values appear neglected or unknown. Creative activity in conservation consists in producing new knowledge, thus developing and promoting greater awareness of heritage, directing urban and territorial planning through the historical reading of transformations, supporting the conservation management of assets, and contributing to the understanding of urban and territorial complexity from the perspective of enhancement, protection and safety.

Incompatible Contrasts

A significant example of degrading creativity is the city of Shahrisabz in Uzbekistan, inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List (UNESCO, 2000) and subsequently subjected to a degrading and destructive 'valorisation'.

In recent years, this country has been focusing heavily on tourism as an economic resource (and on 'creative tourism' – defined as a subset of cultural tourism – as a 'mode of sustainable development of the national tourism sector') (Negri, 2023, pp. 11, 16).

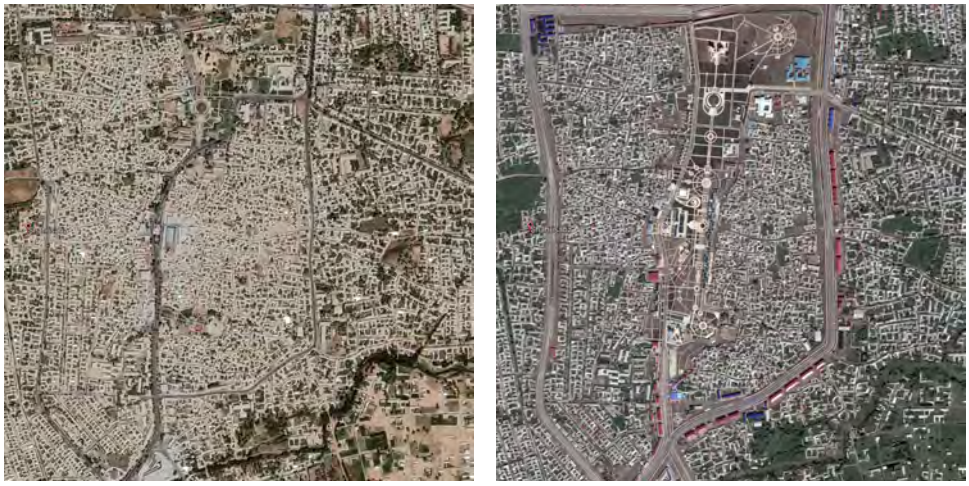


FIG. 1. The aerial views of the city of Shahrisabz show recent transformations (Google Earth, 2011 and 2016). The creation of a new, unreal tourist environment with avenues and gardens, which began even before 2011 near the remains of the Amir Temur Palace, has destroyed the historic urban fabric around the monumental buildings.

The Asian country has undergone significant urban transformations due to the 1966 earthquake and the process of 'modernisation' of the former Soviet republic (1924–1991), which significantly altered the major Uzbek cities.

The capital, Tashkent, currently presents itself as a decidedly modern city, in which even the monuments of the past appear brand new. In the post-Soviet decades, in addition to renovations, many restorations and reconstructions in style have sought to recreate a new national identity in the country, together with attractive tourist destinations.

Among these, Shahrisabz (where the founder of the Timurid Empire, Amir Temur, was born in 1336) represents a particularly significant case of degrading 'creativity'. Here, indeed, a redevelopment project carried out in 2016 (called State Programme for Complex Measures for Building and Reconstruction of Shakhrisyabz City) demolished 70 hectares of the central area – which at the time of inscription were considered 'to bear witness to centuries of the city's history and to reflect town planning practices and the socio-cultural identity of an important historical period' – to create a new imaginative monumental context with avenues and gardens created specifically for tourists.

In this case, the contrast between the conservation of the 15th-century monumental remains (carried out with greater attention to authenticity than that observed in other historic cities, that is, avoiding reconstructions in style) and a disproportionate destructive enhancement and 'beautification' is extremely evident: it has erased every trace of the history and urban fabric of the city, as well as distancing the inhabitants from the city centre (Figs. 1 and 2).

Consequently, in 2019 the city was moved from the previous list to the List of World Heritage in Danger (UNESCO, 2024a), but the 'options explored for the potential recovery of attributes' seem to indicate the path of typological restoration (demolition and reconstruction of traditional housing areas, regeneration of the mahalla fabric of the traditional quarters) (UNESCO, 2024b), as if the damage were reversible, without addressing in any way the problem of what is now lost around the monuments, which remain isolated in an unreal space (UNESCO, 2019, pp. 9–10).

Even in the case of Samarkand, the UNESCO recognition as a 'Crossroad of Cultures' (UNESCO, 2001) appears intangible and not aimed at the physical preservation of historical remains. Here, the monumental sites are in different zones of the city: some have been extensively transformed by recent planning (see the area of Registan Square, isolated by avenues and green spaces from the rest of the urban fabric), while others, where the historical structure appears better preserved, are substantially excluded from tourist visits.

In other cities, such as Khiva (the first Uzbek citadel to obtain inscription on the UNESCO List) (UNESCO, 1990) and Bukhara (whose historical centre was declared a World Heritage Site) (UNESCO, 1993), the urban fabric appears quite well preserved and the monumental sites (even if in some cases excessively restored) do not appear alienated from the historical context.



Fig. 2. Shahrisabz: the remains of Amir Temur Palace are isolated today, due to the urban fabric destruction (photo: Bartolomucci, 2024).

In general, the permanence of the mahalla (traditional neighbourhoods) and of the inhabitants themselves determines greater social and cultural vitality, in addition to safeguarding the urban characteristics and preserving their values.

The numerous nominations for new UNESCO inscriptions (thirty-one Uzbek sites are currently on the 'tentative list', in addition to the thirty-five already recognised in the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor of the Silk Road, a cross-border site that also includes Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) (UNESCO, 2023) reveal ambivalent intentions, since the interest in protecting the sites seems to correspond to a manifest desire to promote tourism.[1]

It has recently been observed that 'while the rhetoric advocates urban heritage and cultural identity to be a driver for city's development that engages with broader population and its residents as opposed to tourist-driven heritage preservation, the question of implementation and practice remains' for urban heritage along the Silk Roads (Arefian and Moeini, 2020, p. 2).

Creativity and Regeneration, between Misunderstandings and Rebirths

Regeneration and creativity have long been discussed in different contexts, often very distant in their cultural premises, generating considerable misunderstandings. While the concept of regeneration should apply to projects and interventions that, by addressing the existing building heritage in the suburbs, limit land consumption and ensure the safeguarding of the landscape and the environment,[2] and is therefore different from urban renewal interventions carried out through the demolition and reconstruction of historic buildings,

the term 'creativity' is generally associated only with contemporary art and architecture, as if this concept were inappropriate in other circumstances and, in particular, in the context of the conservation of cultural heritage.

Yet, if creativity means the 'ability to create with the intellect' and a 'process of intellectual dynamics that has as characterising factors: particular sensitivity to problems, ability to produce ideas, originality in conceiving, ability to synthesise and analyse, ability to define and structure one's experiences and knowledge in a new way' (from the Treccani Dictionary) (Treccani, n.d.), the same word appears fully congruent with the cognitive process that characterises the conservation project, not only with creation ex novo.

An example in which the comparison between ancient and contemporary becomes the object of a design 'experiment', in which creative intentions are combined with conservation concerns, can be identified in the Rhinoceros building that houses the Alda Fendi Foundation in Rome, on the slopes of the Palatine. In this case, the conservation of the historical sedimentations of the residential complex, together with the reinterpretation of the qualities that characterise the spaces, distinguishes the project of the Atelier Jean Nouvel for the new exhibition and commercial use, without denying the signs of time on the surfaces of the architecture (Acierno, 2020).

On the contrary, it is evident that some redevelopment intentions reveal the most complete insensitivity to the place where they are carried out, as, for example, in Avezzano (AQ), in the case of the 'restyling' proposed in the former Chiusa Resta (a residual area of an ancient noble estate, then uncultivated and destined to host itinerant circus activities and funfairs) (Il Faro 24, 2017). In this case, the project presents as 'an ambitious redevelopment' the creation of a square with flower beds and a playground, completely ignoring the history of the place and the pre-existence of a 17th-century cemetery (where victims of a plague epidemic in 1656 were buried), which then became the city's first cemetery until 1881 (when it was moved elsewhere) and was finally used as a cemetery for the burials of more than five hundred foreign soldiers captured during the First World War and interned in the city's concentration camp, which was also abandoned to oblivion (Cipriani, 2015).



FIG. 3. Luigi Bartolini, Cemetery of War Prisoners in Avezzano, 1920 (drawing on paper and etching, National Gallery of Art, Washington). Available at: https://www.luigibartolini.com/acqueforti-1909-1930/cimitero-dei-prigionieri-di-guerra (Accessed: 15 April 2025)

Awareness of the history of these sites could have stimulated a far more interesting cultural project for both places, considering that the prisoners themselves were employed in removing rubble after the disastrous earthquake in Marsica in January 1915.

The cemetery is now attested only by a drawing, preserved in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, by the artist and poet Luigi Bartolini (Ronci, 1962), who depicted it in 1920 (Fig. 3); it is surprising to note that its final removal took place rather recently (in 1991), without leaving any material traces in situ, except for a small memorial stone placed along Via Piana.

On the other hand, the incongruous use of historic buildings and contexts of cultural interest – through interventions completely indifferent to their multiple inherent values – is unfortunately attested everywhere by numerous examples; for instance, churches transformed into restaurants or marketplaces (Crişan, 2017; Fiorani, 2017).

For the sake of brevity, we limit ourselves to two cases observed in the historic centre of Genoa, where historic buildings of undoubted interest are occupied by disqualifying commercial establishments (a supermarket and a department store) without any attention to the architectural spaces that house them, the perception of which is obstructed and misrepresented (Figs. 4 and 5). Even when the commercial activities are of a higher level, such as the many high-end shops observed in the historic buildings of many Italian and European cities (see the Fondaco dei Tedeschi in Venice, transformed into a shopping mall and reduced to an evocative shopping scene, as well as many other historic buildings disfigured by the insertion of stores and other activities serving tourism), respect for the conservation requirements of architecture still poses important problems of compatibility – structural, material and semantic – that must be addressed with clarity of objectives and consistency in their implementation.



FIG. 4. Genoa, Cinque Lampadi Square. The use of the building where Tommaso Pendola lived (as a plaque on the façade recalls) as a supermarket demonstrates complete insensitivity to architecture, reduced to a banal container of goods for sale (photo: Bartolomucci, 2024).

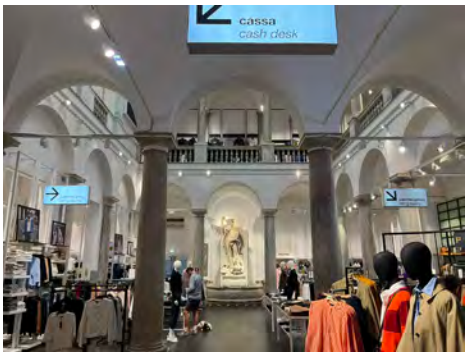


FIG. 5. Genoa, Campetto Square. The double-height courtyard of a historic building has been transformed into a department store. In this case too, the architecture appears ignored and reduced to the function of a scenic setting for shopping (photo: Bartolomucci, 2024).

While the commercial use of monumental sites can contribute to conservation management and maintenance, the risk of incongruous adaptations and damage caused by interests other than cultural ones (see the possible pressures exerted by important patrons and wealthy clients) exposes such places to harmful actions that should be carefully evaluated in a cost-benefit analysis (Fig. 6).



FIG. 6. Genoa, the Imperiale Palace in Campetto Square, built in 1560, is one of the 'Palazzi dei Rolli' designated to host high dignitaries on official visits. Today it has become an upscale restaurant and an atmospheric venue for hosting events, but the building's history appears to recede into the background (photo: Bartolomucci, 2024).

Numerous initiatives involving the creative transformation of historic buildings (for commercial purposes) or redevelopment in degraded contexts (motivated by building speculation) have produced harmful outcomes both in terms of material damage to architecture and in the resulting gentrification phenomena, with negative urban and social implications. One example is Mercato Mayfair, created in St Mark's deconsecrated church on North Audley Street in London, which transformed the church into a crowded street-food restaurant for tourists (Fig. 7).

Otherwise, initiatives and creative activities in the historical contexts of cities can foster cultural vitality and the permanence of inhabitants in places at risk of marginalisation and depopulation, as can still be observed in Genoa in Via Pré – a route connecting the station and the port, in an area heavily frequented by immigrants – where the Commenda di San Giovanni (ancient hospitale for pilgrims) now houses the Museum of Italian Emigration, opened in 2022. This significantly contributes to the cultural life of a part of the city at high risk of urban and social decay.

While the area of the old port, already redeveloped in 1992 (on the occasion of the Columbian celebrations), is today an iconic waterfront and a highly popular place because of its role in connecting the historic centre and the sea, the surrounding areas are the subject of the recent Innovative Programme for the Quality of Living (PINQUA)[3], which proposes a framework for the regeneration of the historic centre through a series of coordinated interventions for the redevelopment of some buildings and urban spaces, the construction of connecting infrastructure, the creation of green areas and new cultural spaces, and the improvement of accessibility and safety.

The project aims to integrate architectural interventions with social and participatory ones (quality of living, social and cultural spaces) through a series of specific actions for the conservation and reuse of abandoned or underused spaces, including the large complex of the Albergo dei Poveri (so far the subject of partial recovery to house university headquarters). The size of the complex and its urban position, together with its history over time, reveal the importance of a project aimed at the conservation of the architecture and its compatible reuse, but this can be achieved only by basing the design choices on cultural and conservation-oriented intentions that go beyond the simple refunctionalisation of the spaces.

Traces of new vitality – born in this case through grass-roots initiative – can also be observed in the square named after Don Andrea Gallo, located close to the port area within

the urban fabric, where the 17th-century Jewish ghetto stood. Here, in the ill-famed neighbourhoods described by Fabrizio De Andrè, where the rubble left by the bombing of the Second World War remained until recently, the work of the 'street priest' and the poetics of the Genoese singer-songwriter have favoured processes of social rebirth and a new awareness of the identity of places that had long been neglected.



FIG. 7. London, Mayfair Market in the Grade I-listed St Mark's Church. The Anglican church was built in 1825, listed in 1958 and deconsecrated in 1974. Its current transformation into a 'food and cultural hub' (since 2019) appears completely indifferent to its architecture, history and significance (photo: Bartolomucci, 2024).

The Creation of New Values through Conservation

Among the cases in which creativity has produced concrete achievements and positive initiatives for cultural enhancement, one can point to the site of the Saline Royale of Arc-et-Senans in France (Fig. 8).

The salt factory, commissioned by Louis XV, was built between 1775 and 1779 by the architect Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. The Great Saltworks of Salins-les-Bains was active for at least 1,200 years, until production ceased in 1962. In 1982 the Saline Royale of Arc-et-Senans became a UNESCO World Heritage Site, making it the 12th site in France and the 150th site worldwide to be listed (UNESCO, 1982). It was the first industrial site in the world to receive this recognition, which was then extended to include the Grande Saline in Salins-les-Bains in 2009.

In this case, conservation appears to be applied at a territorial and systemic level, also encompassing several surrounding places linked to salt production (Salins-les-Bains, La Chaux forest). Through a process of 'cultural reconversion', an important place of knowledge has been created. Here, the architectural complex designed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux hosts exhibition spaces on the history of the site and of salt production, illustrating both the technical and productive aspects and the cultural ones linked to the visionary urban project (Ledoux Museum). All this without forgetting that, in that place – as a special plaque recalls – numerous families of Gypsies were interned during the Second World War, from 1941 to 1943.

The ideal city of the Enlightenment architect, which remained unfinished, has therefore become a real place in which the buildings of the historic complex, together with the surrounding green spaces and plant architecture (which recall the missing part of the circumference), effectively achieve the aims of conservation and enhancement of the architectural complex through the new cultural use (museum, permanent and temporary exhibitions, library, conference centre, spaces for concerts and performances).

Enhancement here appears to be understood primarily as the communication of values, in addition to producing economic revenues from tourism. On the contrary, when



FIG. 8. Arc-et-Senans (France), Saline Royale. A view of the semicircular space that characterises the complex designed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux. Today the site is a major cultural centre, with buildings used as a museum on the history of the salt factory and Enlightenment architecture, as well as spaces for temporary exhibitions, concerts and cultural events (photo: Bartolomucci, 2022).

the refunctionalisation of spaces ignores the peculiar values of the place and any activity aimed at their recognition (as, in general, does any intervention that is independent of the cultural purposes of conservation), the new use assigned to historic buildings can lead to harmful and devastating actions.

A very different example for reflecting on the 'peaceful coexistence' between creativity and architectural conservation was the studio of the artist Marcello Mariani in the deconsecrated church of Santa Caterina, inside the former convent of Santa Maria della Pietà in L'Aquila; here he located his studio-workshop from the early years of his activity until the 2009 earthquake (Berengo Gardin, 2008). The space of the church – which remained unused for a long time – became a creative laboratory for decades, fully preserving the characteristics of the historic architecture, left exactly in the state in which it was found after decades of abandonment (Fig. 9).

Today, the functional recovery of the complex (owned by the Municipality) seems to ignore the history of the place, its multiple uses over time – after the suppression of religious orders and the consequent confiscation of ecclesiastical assets – as well as the memory of the artist who recently passed away (Simongini, 2017). Yet he himself dedicated much of his work to the conservation of material traces and to the recomposition of the sublime in abandoned sacred spaces, choosing to exhibit his works both in deconsecrated churches and in the abandoned former prison, also established in a disused convent space (the former convent of San Domenico), which was restored by erasing every trace of its previous use as a prison (D'Antonio, 2011).[4]

The cases cited, although very different from each other, exemplify possible creative acts of restoration – to be understood, therefore, not only as maintenance without any alteration of the historicised aspect, but also as a creative proposal for new uses that favour knowledge and conservation – avoiding banal and anachronistic restitutions of previous configurations.

The interpretation of urban contexts and stratified buildings, the understanding of unknown values in places hitherto ignored, the search for new meanings connected to architecture in its figurative complexity and constructive concreteness, the production of new knowledge, the creation of new spaces for culture in cities, social involvement through

cultural promotion activities, and the diffusion of greater awareness of heritage – which goes beyond the logic of mere reuse or tourist consumption – are creative activities that fully fall within the purposes of conservation and cannot be carried out without a direct connection with it.

Therefore, initiatives for the enhancement of historical and landscape contexts, cultural promotion activities (including the coveted awards of the so-called Italian and European 'Capitals of Culture'), and the creation of 'Creativity Workshops' (see the calls for proposals from the Ministry of Culture, Directorate-General for Contemporary Creativity, currently in its seventh edition, with funds from the 2021 National Recovery and Resilience Plan) are all activities in which creative ideation must necessarily be achieved through close collaboration between those involved in knowledge production and conservation.

Conclusions

Conservation and creation are often seen as irreconcilable opposites, but this opposition hides several misunderstandings.

On the one hand, conservation implies creative actions and choices, since the history of restoration and its theoretical evolution have long demonstrated that there are no situations that remain unchanged over time, nor 'neutral' choices (Musso, 2012; Fiorani, 2016). Obviously, this is not intended to legitimise creative interventions that ignore the surrounding architecture and urban or territorial contexts, reducing both to bombastic backdrops for new self-referential creations (let alone reducing and trivialising them as if they were merely building containers).

On the other hand, even those who are in favour of retrospective orientations – conceptually anachronistic, but still widespread in practice – cannot deny that restoration also involves creative actions (supported by philological documentation, or by pure fantasy).

Extending the gaze beyond interventions on individual works of architecture and observing urban and territorial contexts, the balance between conservation and planning becomes even more critical, both because the disciplinary fields and areas of expertise remain very distant from each other (neglecting the common purpose of safeguarding the natural and built environment), and because actions of enhancement or regeneration become excessively creative, since they are indifferent to the values to be preserved, and



FIG. 9. L'Aquila, former monastery of Santa Maria della Pietà on Via Sassa: the artist Marcello Mariani portrayed in a photograph by Gianni Berengo Gardin in his studio, located inside the deconsecrated church (Berengo Gardin, 2008, pp. 142–143).

are therefore disproportionate and inconsistent. In short, the reflection on examples of valuable creativity and the comparison with different cases in which conservation choices have revealed creative outcomes aim to highlight the contribution of conservation to the creation of new knowledge and new values, stimulating cultural attitudes and planning that welcome conservation requirements together with the management of inevitable transformations.

Notes

1 On the harmful effects of UNESCO recognitions on heritage conservation, see Musso (2015) and Clari (2025). See also the 'Eternal City' (it is actually a luxury shopping mall) built specifically for tourists outside Samarkand, in Silk Road Samarkand (n.d.).

2 See the EAAE Conservation Network Workshop on the topic (Crişan et al., 2013). The term 'regeneration' is also used in areas requiring protection, such as depopulated mountainous regions, to refer to initiatives that can encourage the return of new residents through minimal interventions commensurate with the values of the places (Azzoni and Cotti Piccinelli, 2025).

3 The 'National Innovative Programme for the Quality of Living' (Law No 160 of 27 December 2019, art. 1, paras. 437 et seq.) involved several Italian cities, among which the projects for Cornigliano Rossano (CS), Cuneo, Genoa, Lecce, Mantua, Milan, Rome and Teramo were deemed particularly significant. See the Report (Brisku, Capone et al., 2022).

4 On 'difficult heritage' and conservation choices, see Sulfaro (2017).

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OLD AND NEW IN THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF GENOA: EXAMPLES AND REFLECTIONS

Anna Boato
University of Genoa, Italy
anna.boato@unige.it

Introduction

To conserve the architecture of the past is akin to preserving a historical document. It means preserving architecture as a record of its own history and of the history of those who commissioned it, built it, and inhabited it. Architecture is a material document, rather than a written or drawn one, yet no less eloquent for that reason.

To conserve a historic centre in all its complexity is to preserve an environment, a fabric, a texture, together with the multiple individual histories interwoven within it. Each thread is a building, whether large or small, whether monumental or modest, whether acknowledged as Architecture or regarded as mere Building. To remove threads from the fabric is to damage the whole; it is to create voids within a continuum. When such voids have already formed, for a variety of reasons (war, fire, abandonment, or deliberate demolition), and when other voids, despite our intentions, will come to interrupt the historical weave, it becomes necessary to stitch up the gap. This mending is the task of technicians, but also of politicians and communities. Not all repairs are equally effective. Much depends on the threads we choose. It depends on how these threads relate to the adjacent ones. We may insert a new thread capable of giving meaning, vitality, and solidity to those nearby. Yet if we act without considering the fabric and without understanding its characteristics, the void will be filled by a thread that fails to bind with the others and remains curled in upon itself.

This is the challenge of the project; it is the moment when contemporary creativity must confront history. The choice of the new thread is no less important than the careful and integral conservation of the fabric that receives it. To conserve also means to accept new threads within one's own weave. To stitch up is to acknowledge the value of what history has handed down to us and to preserve it as a precious cultural heritage, one we do not wish to forgo, yet which we may enrich with new contributions.

Such 'enrichment' concerns not only parts of the city, entire buildings, or portions thereof that have been lost, but also all those 'minor' interventions that continually affect historic buildings and artefacts when they are adapted to new uses and requirements (for example, commercial shopfronts), to new opportunities and tastes (for example, new materials for window frames and new finishes), and in the many other circumstances that lead to modifications of their external appearance.

What follows seeks to address the question of the relationship between new and old, discussing it in light of the interventions carried out in the historic centre of Genoa and its surroundings from the post-war period to the present day.

The Wounds of the Second World War

During the Second World War, Genoa – an industrial city and a port of primary importance – was heavily bombed from both sea and air. In addition to raids intended to render industries, strategic infrastructure, and administrative headquarters inoperative, there were also bombings aimed at terrorising the population, in order to weaken the enemy psychologically. As a result, extensive and localised destruction also affected the urban fabric of the historic centre.

Most of these wounds were repaired during the war years or in the period immediately thereafter. In the case of the most significant buildings, when only partially damaged, reconstruction was often carried out in a mimetic manner (as can be seen in the photographs of the palaces on Via Garibaldi before and after reconstruction). Where entire elements of the urban fabric had been lost, new building volumes were instead introduced. There are therefore many buildings, or parts of them, often concealed within the labyrinth of narrow streets in the historic centre, whose external appearance clearly distinguishes them from the surrounding constructions.

These interventions are more or less explicit in revealing their nature – through their construction techniques (reinforced concrete frame structures), their envelope (undiffer-



FIG. 1. The southern part of the historic centre of Genoa in an aerial photograph from 1974. In the Castello–Sarzano–Piazza delle Erbe area, the numerous sites destroyed by Second World War bombing and not yet redeveloped are clearly visible (Liguria Region Photographic Archive, Flight 2 – Lower Coastal Strip, 1973/74, frame 025-0285, detail; freely available and reproducible at https://srvcarto.regione.liguria.it/geoapps/viewer/pages/apps/fototeca/).

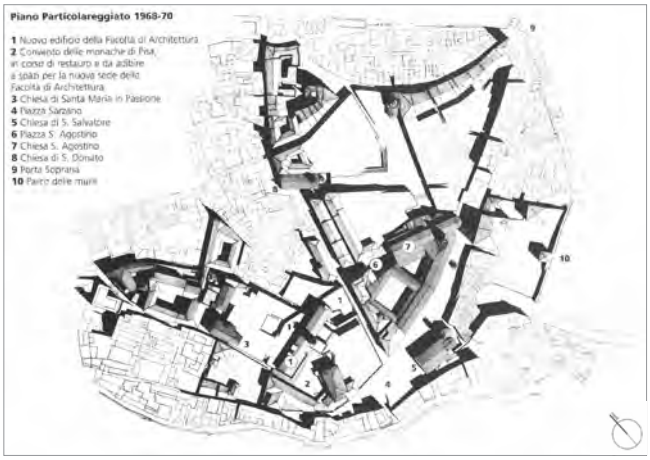


FIG. 2. Piano Particolareggiato per i nuovi insediamenti universitari di San Donato e San Silvestro (Detailed Plan for the new university developments of San Donato and San Silvestro), designed by I. Gardella and S. Larini (from Moriconi, 2005, p. 14; courtesy of the author).

entiated storeys and openings; rectangular windows fitted with roller shutters rather than traditional shutters; flat roofs), and their architectural language – and often do no more than respect the pre-existing volumes. At times they allude to the past through the free use of isolated formal elements (such as the stone balustrades at first-floor level on the 20th-century façade of the building at 1, Piazzetta Jacopo da Varagine); at other times they depart from it even in scale, to the extent of being labelled 'monstrosities' (as in the 1950s building at Piazza Caricamento/Via Sottoripa 1, whose conspicuous visibility and height have drawn repeated criticism).

Some ruptures remained unhealed until relatively recent years (Fig. 1). By then, well beyond the immediate emergency of post-war reconstruction, there was greater opportunity for reflection on the modes of intervention. Nevertheless, these later projects – shaped by the passage of time and by the differing extent of the areas affected by reconstruction – reveal markedly diverse aims, strategies, and outcomes. A few examples will be examined below.

New Insertions and Stitching: the Faculty of Architecture at Sarzano

The upper part of the Castello hill, prominent and overlooking the sea, was subjected during the war to bombing that caused severe damage to the buildings, some of which became unusable or uninhabitable. The wartime destruction was followed by abandonment and progressive decay, as well as by the stripping of structures by homeless people who occupied the area, erecting makeshift shelters until their eviction by the Municipality in the mid-1950s.

From 1965 onwards, the area – of great importance for the city's history – was subject to systematic archaeological investigations, which also involved the remains of surviving buildings. At the same time, the municipal administration was addressing the question of regenerating this area, marginal in relation to the new urban centre but by no means negligible. In 1972 the Municipality adopted the Piano Particolareggiato per i nuovi insediamenti universitari di San Donato e San Silvestro (Detailed Plan for the new university developments of San Donato and San Silvestro) (Fig. 2), designed by Ignazio Gardella and Silvano Larini (Gardella and Larini, 1974[1]; Buzzi Ceriano 1992, pp. 201–210; Cavallo, 2022).

The Plan envisaged what might be termed an early example of 'urban regeneration' for an urban sector extending over several hectares, including the bombed areas of Santa Maria in Passione, Sant'Agostino, Piazza delle Erbe, Piazza Sarzano, and the intervening built fabric. This occurred at the height of the debate on historic centres and the 'issue' they represented. In the report accompanying the Plan, after commenting on the scale and extent of the lacerations in the urban fabric within the intervention area, the authors stated:

'In this situation, it is clearly impossible to reconstruct the character of the city in its original terms, unless one were to undertake an outright falsification. Any intervention aimed at creating urban spaces and values modelled on those of the ancient city, 'healing over' the fabric on the basis of the memory of its layout and of the buildings as they were before destruction, must therefore be excluded. In this part of the Historic Centre (and, in principle, only here) the city must be radically reconfigured [...] The task is to develop a solution grounded in the language of our own time, yet one that takes as its reference the persistence of ruins and monuments, and the meaning of places and buildings'[2] (Gardella and Larini, 1974, p. 10, author's translation).

A few years after the approval of the Plan, preliminary designs were developed for some of the plots in the San Silvestro area (the so-called plots P and Q), intended to house the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. However, both the Plan and the projects remained unimplemented, partly owing to the lack of support from the university bodies concerned. The projects were revived only in the mid-1980s, when – at the initiative of Professor Edoardo Benvenuto, then Dean of the Faculty of Architecture – they were used to secure funding to relocate Architecture from its inadequate and peripheral premises (Moriconi, 2005).

The architectural design of the new buildings to be constructed in the area by then devoid of standing remains (plot P), again by Gardella, followed the footprint of the destroyed convent church. It proposed a decidedly contemporary building volume that recalled the church's massing without replicating its features literally. The result, visible to the entire city, appears successful in its intention to engage in dialogue with the ancient without imitating it (Fig. 3).



FIG. 3. The Faculty of Architecture, University of Genoa. In the background, the new building (part of plot P) designed by I. Gardella. To the left, in the foreground, the Bishop's Palace and the roof garden (part of plot Q), restored according to a design by L. Grossi Bianchi (photo: F. Capolupo).

Part of the adjacent plot (plot Q) was designed by engineer Luciano Grossi Bianchi, professor of architectural composition at the Faculty of Architecture. Together with Ennio Poleggi, he had previously authored a major study on Genoa's historic urban centre (Grossi Bianchi and Poleggi, 1979) and had contributed to the historical research preliminary to the Detailed Plan.

In plot Q, the substantial presence of ruins of great historical significance required an intervention aimed at stitching them back together and restoring them as con-

servatively as possible (Grossi Bianchi, 1998). Decidedly contemporary insertions (such as the glass pyramids providing light to a new underground space beneath the cloister) stand alongside reconstructed portions executed in continuity with the surviving building, yet distinguished by a different surface treatment (for example, the new reinforced-concrete vaults, recognizable by the imprint of their formwork).

Grossi Bianchi – highlighting his multiple and inseparable roles as designer, historian, and teacher – explained this approach in light of his desire 'to offer students a repertoire of forms, technical solutions, and, above all, possible spatial experiments'[3] (Melai, 1995, cited in Moriconi, 2005, p. 9, author's translation). The aim was thus to create a sort of didactic workshop for future architects. The intervention entailed the removal of unstable or excessively deteriorated portions of masonry, substantial masonry reintegrations, the application of plaster to both new and old surfaces, and the pointing (at times inappropriate) of exposed historic masonry. Nevertheless, given the inevitable compromises arising from the adaptive reuse of the spaces and from available resources, and despite certain shortcomings in terms of stratigraphic legibility, it may be said that the relationship between new and old was handled with care.

Between Protection and a New Image: the Archaeological Area of Santa Maria in Passione

In the adjacent area of Santa Maria in Passione – whose condition was similar to that described above – it was only in the 1990s, within the framework of the Civis Sistema project, that a decision was made to arrange the ruins as an archaeological area and to establish, in part of the site, the headquarters of the Osservatorio permanente sull'ambiente urbano (Permanent Observatory on the Urban Environment) (Rocca, 2015[4]). The design of the 'archaeological park' was developed by the architect Bruno Gabrielli, with structural engineering by Filippo Lagomaggiore (Gabrielli *et al.*, 1993).

In outlining the design intentions, Gabrielli described it as 'a sort of 'garden of ruins', to be used also as a 'laboratory' for the restoration courses of the adjacent Faculty of Architecture'[5] (Gabrielli *et al.*, 1993, p. 555, author's translation), a role that, unfortunately, it did not ultimately fulfil. From outside the area, the most visible elements are a series of 'archaeological shelters' in steel trusses and glass, and a sail vault erected to protect the quadrangular apse of the church (Fig. 4). For this presbyterial covering, Gabrielli proposed, on the intrados, the development of the lost vault using contemporary technologies and materials (metal and timber). The external form and copper cladding evoke the idea of an extradosed dome. Its placement – at the summit of the apse



FIG. 4. The 'archaeological area' of Santa Maria in Passione with the protective shelters designed by B. Gabrielli (photo by the author).

– is undoubtedly unusual and has a certain impact on the urban landscape. Nevertheless, this contemporary insertion succeeds in completing the lost sacred space with lightness and spatial openness, while effectively fulfilling its protective function.

It is regrettable that, for economic reasons, the construction of the contemporary vault and the other protective coverings was not accompanied by a systematic and comprehensive programme to consolidate the underlying wall stuccoes. Several years after the intervention, when repeated reports led to an assessment of the necessary measures in consultation with the Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle Arti e Paesaggio of Genoa[6], a portion of the stuccoes collapsed (Rocca, 2015, pp. 102–103).

A second, contemporaneous intervention concerned the façade of the building facing Piazza Santa Maria in Passione. Wartime damage and subsequent abandonment had revealed the medieval loggia of the house that predated the church (Bonora, 1982). While the counter-façade of the building was conserved with its stratigraphy left visible, the exterior wall was replastered. However, selected 'windows' were left open to expose the squared stone masonry of the loggia, and stylised outlines of certain historical traces identified by architectural archaeologists were incised into the plaster. This approach may have been influenced by the intervention carried out a few years earlier in the nearby church of Santa Maria delle Grazie la Nuova (see the following paragraph), in an attempt to define Piazza Santa Maria in Passione through a coherent overall strategy (Fig. 5). In his account of the project, Saul Alcantara Onofre writes: 'having renounced any hypothesis of reconstructing a previous state, the only option remaining was how to re-present the 'archaeology' of the façade' (Gabrielli *et al.*, 1993, p. 558, author's translation).

Even this choice reveals a degree of 'creativity': decisions about what to reveal, which traces to incise, the white plaster finish, and the design of certain new window frames. Guided by the aim of preserving the ruin, the project gives the building a new image (Fig. 6). The façade remains a palimpsest, yet without the richness that such a condition might imply; it aspires to simplicity but appears impoverished and somewhat graphic in effect, and it fails to achieve an immediately legible synthesis (not to mention the unfortunate deterioration caused by rainwater, which, channelled by the irregular profile of the wall crest, produces broad dark streaks of biological growth across the whiteness of the mortar).



FIG. 5 . The proposed (and implemented) solution for the façade of the former church and monastery of Santa Maria in Passione (from Gabrielli *et al.*, 1993, p. 558).

The façade solution seems to me one of the less successful aspects of the intervention, where the material reality ultimately undermines the apparent poetry of the drawn design.

Windows onto the Past and New 'Ancient' Claddings

The historical significance of the medieval remains incorporated into many of the buildings of Genoa's historic centre has consistently led restorers to leave 'windows' open onto this past, as

was also done at Santa Maria in Passione. By rejecting the formal unity long pursued by architects, the exposure of such remains between the late 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century contributed to the rediscovery of the medieval city (Napoleone, 2015). At the same time, it enabled the preservation of buildings and urban areas that might otherwise have been subject to demolition or urban clearance.

This inclination to leave isolated traces of the past visible has persisted over time and continues to guide the hand of many restorers. One of the many examples concerns the façade of the former church and monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie la Nuova, also located in Piazza Santa Maria in Passione.

In the 1980s, when the building was acquired by the University of Genoa, it was largely unoccupied and in poor condition. The façade plaster clearly showed signs of patching and infill, as well as advanced deterioration, and it likely no longer retained visible traces of the decoration that must once have characterized the religious building. In any case, the decision was made to remove it entirely.

The removal of the plaster revealed a complex and significant masonry stratigraphy, within which it was possible to identify 800 years of architectural transformation: from the early 12th-century tower and the medieval Embriaci houses to their late medieval alterations; from the successive phases of the female convent (15th–18th centuries) to its suppression and subsequent uses (Boato, 2005). In the absence of an overall restoration and adaptive reuse project, the façade was reclad with a uniform yellow plaster. The outlines of some of the oldest openings – by then infilled – were marked, and four 'windows' were cut into the plaster to expose selected historical elements: a linteled opening with a marble columnette; a single-light stone window of the tower, later transformed into a multi-light opening; a stretch of the tower's stone



FIG. 6. The façade of the former church and monastery of Santa Maria in Passione today (photo by the author).



FIG. 7. The façade of the former church and monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie la Nuova in the 1980s (photo by the author).



FIG. 8. The façade of the former church and monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie la Nuova today (photo by the author).

masonry; and the flank of the brick bell-gable (Fig. 7).

The subsequent project to convert the building into university residences and a lecture hall (Francesco Saverio and Stefano Fera Architects, 1995–2000) entailed a further intervention on the façade (Fera, 2007). Once again completely stripped of plaster, the building was, on this occasion, given a solution rather unusual for Genoa: an entirely invented fresco 'in the antique manner' (Fig. 8). A single 'window' now reveals only the marble columnette, while the painted decoration draws freely on the arrangement of the interior spaces, in a kind of learned divertissement that bears little relation to Genoa's authentic painted façades. This experiment, at least according to a cursory survey of online sources and the literature, appears to have elicited neither significant criticism nor particular resonance.

The new painted façade has by now entered the urban landscape and is in the process of becoming 'historicised.' One may nevertheless wonder how it is read and interpreted by residents and visitors, as well as by students of the nearby Department of Architecture and Design. How many perceive it as genuinely historic, and how many recognize it as an entirely contemporary project?

Voids in the Continuum of a Street Front

As a result of wartime bombing, the street front of Piazza Sarzano, at its junction with Via Ravecca, was disrupted by several ruptures. One of these, on the uphill side of the street, remained unresolved until the early 2000s. In place of the former houses, there was a sloping area – initially unpaved, later asphalted – temporarily used as a car park. Only in the 2000s did a substantial reconstruction project finally fill this void, restoring continuity to the street front.

Five newly constructed units now line the square (Fig. 9). Varying in height and width, and finished in plaster tinted in shades of yellow, pink, orange, and red, they appear, to the casual observer, to have 'always' been there. White window surrounds, traditional Genoese shutters, simple metal railings, 'marble' balustrades, and other elements of the local architectural vocabulary, carefully alternated and distributed, contribute to the mimetic effect and to their contextual assimilation. Perhaps the most discordant feature is a tall, narrow arched passage of unusual proportions, accommodating the staircase leading to the open space behind the buildings. Even here, however, stylistic motifs derived from historic architecture are employed (corbels and an internal groin vault).

In the report accompanying the above-mentioned Detailed Plan, one finds a comment that anticipated, by many years, the criticism that can still be levelled today:

'Many architects have believed they could resolve the difficulty of designing within the historic city by proposing, in essence, a new architecture 'in style'. [...] To us it seems beyond doubt that new interventions… must employ an architecture that is clearly and frankly modern; for us, the question of contextual assimilation of a building into a given context, understood as adapting it linguistically to that context, arises only as a misconceived issue'[7] (Gardella and Larini, 1974, p. 10, author's translation).

Gardella's courageous vision did not prevail. 'Contextual assimilation' remains a widely adopted approach, implicitly encouraged by planning regulations[8] and, perhaps, by heritage authorities themselves. Moreover, it is far less exposed to criticism than reconstruction projects that adopt overtly contemporary forms.

An example that did not set a precedent is the building at the corner of Piazza Sarzano and Via Ravecca, reconstructed before 1970 (Fig. 10). In this case, the building volume respects the street alignments, yet the perimeter walls are set back to accommodate small trapezoidal balconies and window openings. A horizontal recess at mid-height creates a more extended balcony overlooking the alley. Although some solutions may be open to question (the somewhat unresolved detailing of the base, the lateral entrance neither emphasised nor architecturally articulated), taken as a whole, the building displays a quality superior to much of the contemporary construction of its time. It also offers interesting responses to some of the habitability issues typical of housing in the historic centre: above all, the limited distance between facing façades and the capture of the scant raking light that penetrates the narrow street at certain hours of the day.



FIG. 9. Piazza Sarzano. On the right, behind the Pozzo di Giano and the covered market, the street front rebuilt in the 2000s; in the background, the building constructed between the end of the war and 1970 (photo by the author).



FIG. 10. The building at the corner of Piazza Sarzano and Via Ravecca, reconstructed before 1970 (photo by the author).

When Conservation Entails the Denial of Historical Traces

A final chapter in this survey of examples concerns two interventions that may, in certain respects, be considered comparable: the first an instance of urban renewal, the second of architectural transformation and adaptive reuse.

The first example relates to the central Piazza De Ferrari (visible in the upper right of the aerial photograph in Fig. 1), created between the 19th and 20th centuries and refurbished between 1992 and 2001 on an initial design by Bernhard Winkler. The refurbishment involved the pedestrianisation of much of the square, new paving, and the installation of additional water jets around the pre-existing central fountain. The latter, eclectic in character, was built in 1936 to a design by the Genoese architect Giuseppe Crosa di Vergagni.

The urban space, thus given over to pedestrian use, undoubtedly represents a benefit for residents and visitors alike, as demonstrated by its constant and lively occupation. One may judge the scenography effect of the new water jets more or less successful. However, in the relationship established between the historic structure and the new installation, several critical issues arise (Tomasinelli, 2014).

I will highlight only one detail which, in my view, reflects limited respect and insufficient attention to the monumental pre-existence (Fig. 11). The lower stone basin of the historic fountain is now encircled by a new basin, into which the water overflows from the older one. To create this spillway effect, the rim of the historic basin has been scored – one might almost say 'wounded' – by a dense sequence of small channels. As a result, the water level within the original basin has risen slightly and now cuts across the final line of the dedicatory inscription carved on the exterior of the intermediate basin ('TENACE AFFETTO DI LIGURE / SUPERANDO IL DESTINO / ALLA SUA CITTÀ DONAVA / XXIV-V-MCMXXXVI'[9]), rendering it truncated and less legible. The intervention thus negates the very purpose of the dedication, whether deliberately or, more likely, through simple design oversight. Moreover, the new radial array of water jets directed towards the historic fountain alters the proportions of the original structure, obscures not only the inscription but also decorative details, and may, over time, compromise its conservation.

The second example concerns a palazzo in the historic centre: the 16th-century Palazzo Grillo in Piazza delle Vigne. Renovated and restored between 2012 and 2015 to a design by Pinna-Viardo Architects, it now houses a luxury hotel. At the corner of the building, along Vico alla Chiesa delle Vigne, one notices a large contemporary metal gate, composed of two central sliding leaves with a square grid pattern, set within a wide asymmetrical frame of similar design (Fig. 12). Visually striking, it marks the entrance – otherwise understated and difficult to identify – to the Primo Piano di Palazzo Grillo (First Floor of Palazzo Grillo), an exhibition space associated with the hotel but open to the public.



FIG. 11. Piazza De Ferrari. Detail of the 1936 central fountain, modified between 1992 and 2001 (photo by the author).



FIG. 12. a) Palazzo Grillo. Entrance to the exhibition space; b) detail of the entrance: behind the metal grille, a medieval portal can be glimpsed (photos by the author).

The intention here is not to discuss the design or architectural quality of this gate, which may or may not be appreciated and which has the advantage of being largely reversible. Rather, it is to observe that, when closed (and even more so when open) it conceals an interesting arched portal in carefully squared stone. This portal, located not far from the present entrance, belonged to one of the medieval houses predating the 16th-century palace: if not unique, it is certainly significant evidence of Genoese 13th-century architecture. It has now been effectively caged in. Poorly visible and difficult to photograph, the historic element is diminished. Those who study these material traces and their typological and dimensional transformations can examine it only with difficulty; those in search of the city's historical layers may not even notice it.

One may therefore ask whether an alternative solution might have been found, one capable of meeting functional requirements and the architect's aspirations without losing sight of the deeper reasons for conservation.

Notes

1 The article reproduces those excerpts from the Relazione illustrativa (Explanatory Report) of the Plan that are of broader relevance.

2 'in questa situazione, evidentemente, è impossibile ricostruire i caratteri della città nei termini originari, a meno di compiere un'opera vera e propria di falso: è quindi da escludere qualsiasi tipo di intervento, che tenda a creare degli spazi e dei valori urbani ricalcati su quelli della città antica, 'rimarginando' il tessuto in base alla memoria dell'impianto e degli edifici com'erano prima della distruzione. In questa parte del Centro Storico (e in linea di massima solo in questa) la città deve essere radicalmente riconfigurata. […] Si tratta di elaborare una soluzione fondata sul linguaggio del nostro tempo, ma che assuma a proprio riferimento la permanenza dei ruderi e dei monumenti, il significato dei luoghi e degli edifici'.

3 ‘proporre agli allievi un repertorio di forme, di soluzioni tecniche e più ancora di possibili sperimentazioni spaziali’.

4 For an analysis and history of the building (including its more recent phases) and for the complete bibliography, see the cited master’s thesis.

5 ‘una sorta di ‘giardino delle rovine’, da usarsi anche come ‘laboratorio’ per i corsi di restauro della adiacente facoltà di Architettura’.

6 Local office of the Ministry of Culture responsible for heritage protection.

7 ‘Molti architetti hanno creduto di risolvere la difficoltà di progettare all’interno della città storica, proponendo in sostanza una nuova architettura ‘in stile’. […] A noi pare fuor di dubbio che i nuovi interventi… debbano ricorrere a una architettura… chiaramente e schiettamente moderna; per noi non si pone, se non come problema deteriore, il problema dell’ambientamento di un edificio in un certo contesto, nel senso di adeguarlo ad esso da un punto di vista linguistico’.

8 In the regulations governing the Ambito di conservazione del centro storico urbano (Conservation Area of the Historic Urban Centre) in the current Piano Urbanistico Comunale (Municipal Urban Plan), it is stated that: ‘Reconstruction and new construction interventions must be carried out in accordance with the following provisions: – they must conform to the architectural and environmental values of the surrounding context, pursuing the creation of buildings that are dimensionally and architecturally harmonious with those nearby’ (author’s translation). Such harmony is certainly more easily achieved by reintroducing forms and materials that are generically ‘traditional’.

9 ‘With steadfast Ligurian devotion, defying fate, he offered (this fountain) to his city’. The dedication refers to Erasmo Piaggio; the fountain was commissioned and funded by his son Carlo.

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CREATIVITY TO MAKE A FUTURE FOR THE PAST: HOW THE GENOA EXPERIENCE CAN CONTRIBUTE TO URBAN CONSERVATION IN A BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

Analu Cadore
Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
a.cadore@stud.iuav.it

By viewing conservation as an active practice, the discussions held at the EAAE Workshop in Genoa on 24 September offered a new horizon for thinking about historic urban centres, offering a provocative perspective on the role of heritage conservation in contemporary cities. By proposing to overcome the dichotomy between conserving and creating, the event positioned conservation as an act of design closely linked to the social, cultural and territorial dimensions of urban heritage.

The historic centre of Genoa offers a paradigmatic example of heritage as urban infrastructure, which imposes responsibilities for rigorous material conservation and responding to demands for housing, mobility and social reactivation. In this sense, the projects discussed during the workshop engage directly with the idea of conservation that creates the future, incorporating policies of inclusion, decent housing and the redesign of public spaces as preservation strategies. Conservation, as understood here, does not concern only façades or styles, but also the social function of the historic urban fabric.

By integrating programmes such as PINQuA[1], the city is investing in projects that are not limited to material restoration but also involve urban requalification as a conservation practice: creating active public spaces, improving housing infrastructure and implementing social cohesion policies. In this way, conservation becomes a driver of urban regeneration. The workshop reinforced this vision, proposing that the historic centre needs to be treated as a living urban infrastructure and not as a museum enclave.

Despite their different contexts, the dynamics presented in the workshop in relation to Genoa resonate in many cities in Brazil. The southern and south-eastern regions have a strong presence of Italian immigrants, who helped form and build a large part of the territory, including Curitiba, capital of the state of Paraná. In a conservation and valorisation study for one of its oldest streets, Barão do Rio Branco Street, the issues raised in the workshop offer a timely critical reference for thinking about the challenges faced in the historic centres of Genoa and Curitiba: two distinct contexts, but traversed by common tensions between memory, use and transformation.

This paper aims to present and discuss the convergences and differences in the conservation dynamics presented by Genoa and Curitiba, with the aim of constructing an analytical framework for the proposed study. This examination of the contexts of these two cities, so different from each other and yet so close, requires creativity to be placed at the service of creation, which is the dichotomy that guided the discussions at the workshop. Conservation needs to find a place as a space for creation, for the genesis of a process that recovers the vitality of the urban centre and makes the past a solid foundation for the future.

Curitiba: Tensions between Urban Planning and Constructed Memory

Curitiba was founded in 1693, and its occupation was based on the circulation of goods across the country, with Curitiba serving as an important transit point. This factor represents a connection between the city and the territory and has defined its initial urban structure. The modernisation process began when Curitiba became the state capital in 1853, marking a period of rapid economic growth with the industrialisation process and the arrival of European immigrants and technicians – mainly Italians – who were responsible for the transformation of the old village into a modern city (Fig. 1).

With the Italian engineers[2] who worked on the construction of the railway linking Curitiba to the port of Paranaguá, the end of the 19th century marked a significant period of urban development for Curitiba, which led to the consolidation of its cultural and urban heritage. Later, in the middle of the 20th century, two urban plans (Figs. 2 and 3), aligned with modernist ideals, promoted strong decentralisation by removing the main administrative and economic functions from the city centre, with the objective of relieving it of traffic congestion. That moment marked the starting point of the process of abandonment of the urban centre.

Curitiba's urban centre features buildings with symbolic value, directly linked to the origin of the modern city. Their conservation is often limited to isolated actions and aesthetic revitalisation, which leads to a current tendency to treat heritage as an isolated object, disconnected from a larger plan of occupation and urban use. The relationship between the historic centre[3] and the urban structure is more fragile. The so-called Historic Sector is spatially restricted, surrounded by modernist axes and commercial and administrative zones that, throughout the 20th century, gradually stripped the centre of its integrative function. Since the 1970s, conservation has focused on specific revitalisation actions, often guided by a logic of 'historical scenography'[4] (Fig. 4).

Unlike Genoa, Curitiba has not yet consolidated a practice that integrates heritage conservation into urban management. There is a lack of coordination between housing,



FIG. 1. Curitiba, 1855.





FIGS. 2 and 3. Agache Plan (1943) / Wilheim–IPPUC Plan (1964) – The black lines show the central region of the city.

mobility, land use and heritage. Thus, the historic centre tends to be more a space for tourist appreciation and sporadic cultural events than a space for daily life. Vacant or underused properties, changes in the use of historic buildings, low-quality commerce and the occupation of urban space by socially vulnerable people accentuate the current state of degradation of the centre of Curitiba.

Barão do Rio Branco Street and the Urban Dimension of Heritage

To build a strategy for the recovery of the central region of Curitiba, a Recovery and Enhancement Plan for Barão do Rio Branco Street is being drawn up. The street is a place of extreme historical importance that can be seen as a reference point for Curitiba's historic architecture, from its foundation to the present day (Fig. 5).

With the construction of the Curitiba–Paranaguá railway in 1980, the Italian engineer Antonio Ferrucci[5] decided to build the station approximately 800 metres from the urban centre at the time (Sutil, 2009), generating a connecting axis between the city and the station. This axis was known as Liberty Street[6], which, in the city's Expansion Plan drawn up by Ernesto Guaita[7], provided the structure for the checkerboard pattern that consolidated the city's expansion and modernisation.

The new urban layout created by the Expansion Plan contrasts directly with the original urban centre – and with the successive plans as well – leaving a clear distinction in the urban composition of the different historical periods (Fig. 6). It is history materialised: this urban fabric can be read and, together with the architecture that remains today, enables us to understand the dynamics that took place there as a reflection of different political and historical contexts.

The severe level of physical and social degradation observed on the street is the result of a process that is not only related to its materiality, but mainly to the lack of a legal basis that effectively safeguards the cultural heritage and, at the same time, encourages the reuse and occupation of the site. The lack of legal support, combined with the fact that



FIG. 4. Generoso Marques Square: the landscape of the central region with its historic buildings.



FIG. 5. Barão do Rio Branco Street at the beginning of the twentieth century. In the centre of the image, at the end of the street, is the railway station.

the central region is consistently given secondary importance in urban planning processes, shows that the entire centre loses its integrative function, transforming it into a place of passage where time seems to be merely a stationary element.

In this dynamic, the processes of gentrification and irregular occupation of the central region are accentuated, which invariably leads to widespread degradation. The loss of meaning of this area hinders attendance at the various museums on the street, reduces pedestrian circulation and reduces investment in the area. This panorama does not concern only Barão do Rio Branco Street, but also the central region as a whole. What happens on the street reflects the situation of the whole centre and, due to its relevance, becomes an expression of its critical situation.

The recovery and valorisation proposals cannot be disconnected from an analysis of the overall area, considering the street as a generator of urban dynamics and part of a broader context. To think about Barão do Rio Branco Street, we must first understand the urban centre as an element of cultural integration; thus, a proposal for its recovery can also serve as an incentive for the recovery of the entire central region.

The experience of the workshop can contribute precisely to the construction of a more accurate view of the dynamics of an intervention on Barão do Rio Branco Street in Curitiba. Despite being geographically and contextually distant, these dynamics converge with the discussions about the city of Genoa, showing that degradation processes occur in a relatively uniform way in many large urban centres around the world, despite their location and economic and cultural contexts. It is a global process and therefore requires a broader discussion.

Curitiba: the Historic Centre as a Symbolic Enclave

The conservation of urban cultural heritage faces the challenge of balancing material preservation with the social, economic and functional dynamics of historic centres. The centre of Curitiba reveals a series of structural problems that compromise both the physical integrity of heritage and its integration into everyday urban life. In light of the guidelines of the workshop, which discussed integrative, participatory and creative approaches to the conservation of urban heritage, it is possible to establish a critical dialogue between the reality of Curitiba and the experience of Genoa, using conservation as a means of creating a consistent context for the conservation of its urban heritage.

To build a parallel between the discussions held in the workshop regarding Genoa and Curitiba, it is possible to highlight some converging issues:

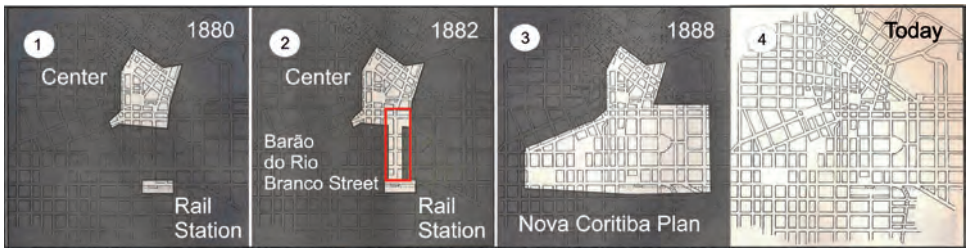


FIG. 6. The urban development of the city centre, starting with the creation of Barão do Rio Branco Street as a connecting axis between the old centre and the railway station.





FIGS. 7 and 8. Two examples of the process of gentrification and abandonment in the centre of Curitiba.





FIGS. 9 and 10. Genoa and Curitiba: the challenges of physical conservation.

Gentrification and abandonment: there is a tension in both cities between heritage preservation and the interests of the real estate market. In Genoa, the historic centre is losing its local population; in Curitiba, properties are being abandoned due to a lack of incentives and infrastructure. These problems directly result in not only material but also social degradation and cause the centre to lose its integrative function (Figs. 7 and 8).

In this regard, it is clear that the active participation of public administration and cultural heritage protection bodies is essential to promote discussions and encourage the centre's recovery and reappropriation. Society's involvement in the decision-making process is essential, as its members are co-participants in heritage conservation through the recovery of a sense of belonging to the place, which directly combats abandonment.

Difficulty integrating with the contemporary city: both historic centres face a certain 'functional isolation', seen as areas mainly for tourism or services, but with little daily life. Heritage preservation does not always engage with the dynamics of the contemporary city. This is an aspect in which creativity, in the service of conservation, comes into play more forcefully, as the interpretation of heritage reuse is limited to a narrow range of functions that do not favour the plurality of attractions and activities that guarantee the cultural vitality of urban space.

Physical conservation challenges: in both cities there are deficits in the conservation of buildings, either due to a lack of resources or to disputes between owners and public bodies. This is perhaps the most important critical aspect observed in this process, especially because the lack of maintenance and physical conservation, whether of the architectural repertoire or of urban space, accentuates the other obstacles to the conservation of cultural heritage. It is through proper physical conservation that cultural and historical values can be transmitted and the identity of the place preserved (Figs. 9 and 10).

This issue is also reflected in the limited supply of housing in the city centre. Due to a lack of maintenance, many properties are not suitable for housing. The same applies to businesses, which are generally of low quality and whose uses are incompatible with the place, increasing the degenerative process. As far as public spaces are concerned, social fragility finds refuge in degradation, leading to a problematic panorama that reinforces the emptying of city centres.

Urban discontinuity and fragility of use: one of the main problems faced by the centre of Curitiba concerns functional and urban discontinuity. Over the years, the area has undergone processes of depopulation and fragmentation, resulting in a central area that, although symbolic, has become marginalised in relation to contemporary urban dynamics. The shortage of housing, the limited provision of night-time uses and the mismatch between heritage and daily life create a scenario of physical and symbolic vulnerability. Combined with the deterioration of the urban structure and the loss of meaning for the population, this factor contributes to the loss of historical reference and sense of belonging (Fig. 11).

In contrast, the historic centre of Genoa seems to preserve its diversity of uses and urban density, which keeps the spaces alive and active. Urban creativity, understood as the ability to imagine and experiment with new uses and formats for historic buildings, is a strategy for heritage resistance and renewal. Curitiba, in this sense, lacks institutional mechanisms that encourage the creative use of its heritage, such as public calls, residencies, cultural concessions or partnerships with local collectives.

Conservation as a process, not an event. Limits of isolated actions: another fundamental obstacle is the need for a continuous and structured conservation policy. Heritage



FIG. 11. View of Barão do Rio Branco Street from the railway station building. The lack of attractive activities, life and new uses has accentuated the deterioration of urban spaces.

interventions in Curitiba are isolated in character, often limited to façade restoration and disconnected from their social function, transforming the urban space into a stage with little life. Furthermore, there is a gap in the instruments for effective conservation management.

Genoa, on the other hand, has conceived conservation as a process of continuous transformation, in which creativity plays an essential role: adaptations of use, affordable housing projects in historic buildings, the insertion of contemporary functions into old structures and architectural reinterpretations that engage with memory without fossilising it. This vision, deeply discussed at the workshop, proposes that conservation is also about creating the future of the past, with historical sensitivity and design freedom.

In this sense, the Genoese examples seen at the workshop can be of great value in the Brazilian scenario, where heritage is still seen as a heavy burden to be carried, destined solely for cultural uses. Therefore, the discussions, the field visits around the city and the presentations of projects such as PINQuA provide a set of references that help inspire changes in the way cultural heritage is thought about, conceived and given meaning in Curitiba.

Creativity and participation – heritage as a social platform: low community participation in the management and use of heritage in Curitiba is a recurring limitation. The population, in general, does not recognise itself as a participant and co-author of the historic centre. As a result, heritage is perceived as something external or institutionalised, often distant from everyday reality.

The population's relationship with the city centre is fragmented; the lack of conservation and attractions is commonly associated with the decentralised urban planning model that divides the city into small peripheral hubs, and whose slogan for a long time was 'you don't need to go downtown anymore'. Another important matter is the discontinuity of the memory of the place. As a result of the gradual process of material and social degradation of the city centre, people have abandoned the place and preferred to live in the peripheral region. This can be illustrated by Barão do Rio Branco Street: eighty years have passed since the beginning of the abandonment process; generations have passed and

the connection with the place has been neither maintained nor transmitted. Therefore, current generations show no interest in living in the city centre, as they show no connection, social participation or integration with the city's heritage.

The EAAE Workshop defends an approach in which collective creativity – involving residents, artists, students, artisans and architects – is mobilised as a means of heritage reappropriation. Genoa, as seen in the workshop, offers concrete examples of collaborative processes in which historic spaces are activated by creative economy projects, cultural occupations or civic design initiatives. Such experiences reveal the potential of heritage as an infrastructure for social innovation, something that is still little explored in Curitiba, but that could be activated through cultural development policies, urban laboratories and calls for proposals aimed at experimenting with heritage.

Technical creativity: forming local knowledge: from a technical perspective, Curitiba faces many challenges related to the physical conservation of heritage, aggravated by the scarcity of qualified labour and the lack of ongoing training in traditional techniques. In this sense, creativity should also be understood as technical and pedagogical innovation, capable of generating solutions that are adapted to the local context and economically viable.

Genoa stands out for maintaining the link between universities, technical centres and master craftsmen, allowing material conservation to continually reinvent itself on the basis of its historical foundations. The workshop reinforced this dimension of creativity as a bridge between tradition and innovation, something that Curitiba could explore by integrating universities, technical schools and practical workshops into restoration programmes, promoting creativity applied to preservation techniques.

Symbolic rehabilitation: heritage as scenario or experience? The tendency to aestheticise the centre of Curitiba – usually focused on tourism or isolated events – has created a paradox: heritage is valued as an image, but not as a living urban experience. The risk is the construction of an urban centre that functions as a scenario, without effective symbolic or social appropriation.

On the other hand, the IX EAAE Workshop defends heritage as a space for the continuous creation of meanings, open to interpretation, hybrid use and confrontation between different times. In Genoa, this is expressed in actions that combine restoration, contemporary art, housing and public space. In Curitiba, there is still a lack of a policy that stimulates this creative dialogue between heritage and contemporaneity, capable of restoring to the historic centre its capacity to narrate the present on the basis of the past.

The aspects of preservation and conservation of historic centres will be presented below, through a visual, summary comparative table between Genoa and Curitiba, focusing on the problems of preservation and conservation of historic centres (Table 1).

Barão do Rio Branco Street as a Breeding Ground for Experimentation

Barão do Rio Branco Street in Curitiba is seen as an experimental site for conservation and preservation actions concerning the city's architectural and urban heritage that can influence positive action in the wider context of the centre. For this purpose, the experience of the workshop, associated with the activities and discussions, can provide relevant conceptual and methodological foundations to support an intervention proposal (Fig. 12).

The workshop argued that historical heritage should be understood not only as an object to be preserved, but also as an interpretative and creative resource capable of

Categories	Genoa	Curitiba
Origin and Scale of Heritage	Center with medieval layout and ancient (Roman) origins; heritage recognized by UNESCO.	Urban heritage from the 19th and 20th centuries; local and regional importance.
Legal Instruments	Strong national protection laws (e.g. Codice dei Beni Culturali); European incentives.	Municipal and state heritage protection laws; dispersed and less effective legislation.
Active Institutions	Superintendence of Cultural Assets, Comune di Genova, European organizations.	IPPUC1, FCC2, Iphan3 (partially); more urbanistic than heritage focus.
Main Challenges	Gentrification, abandonment, difficult conservation of old buildings.	Gentrification, abandonment, uncontrolled commercial use, conflicts with urban development.
Urban Conflicts	Difficulty in integrating the historic center into contemporary everyday life.	Preservation is seen as an obstacle to development, mischaracterizations.
Public Perception	High cultural and historical value; tourist pressure.	Symbolic value but limited in practice; occasional tourism.
Housing and Social Function	Exodus of residents; increased tourist and commercial use.	Low attractiveness for housing; some spaces with specific renovations.
Financial Support and Incentives	Projects with EU funding and restoration incentives.	Few direct incentives: high costs drive away owners.

TAB. 1. Comparative table between Genoa and Curitiba to better understand the preservation and conservation of historic centres.

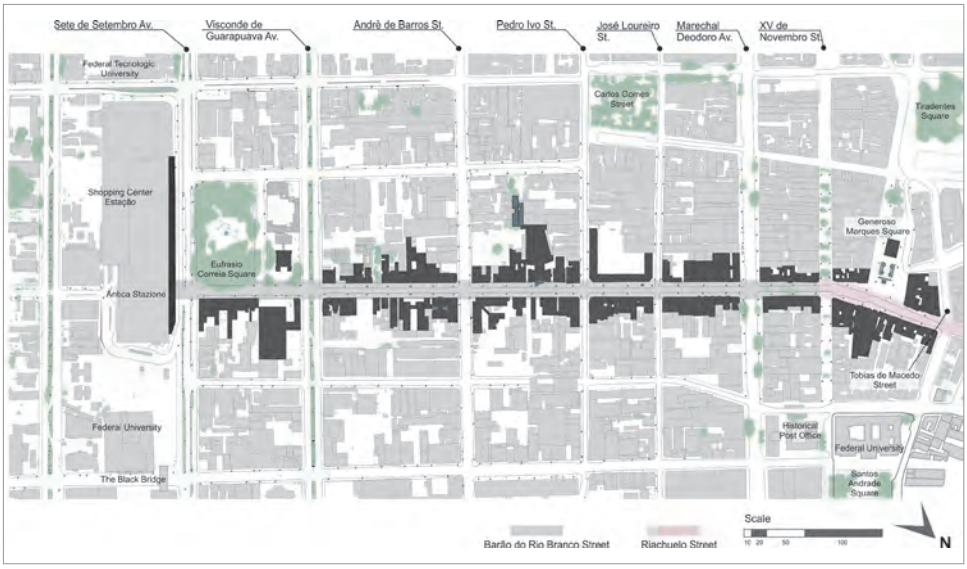


FIG. 12. Map showing the urban context of Barão do Rio Branco Street in Curitiba, Brazil.

generating new meanings and uses. Applied to Barão do Rio Branco Street, this could mean encouraging innovative uses for preserved properties (workshops, co-working spaces, galleries), valuing sensitive contemporary interventions that engage with the past and promoting a new urban narrative that integrates memory and contemporaneity.

The street has great potential to become an exemplary axis of contemporary heritage intervention. The discussions at the EAAE workshop indicate that this will happen not only through physical restoration, but through creative, participatory and integrated processes, in which urban memory is transformed into a driving force for the future. Based on these guidelines, Curitiba can build its own innovative model of urban conservation.

The study seeks to recover not only the street's architectural repertoire, but also its urban components. Barão Street, as it is known, has a highly symbolic character because it was the first street to be designed in the city, and it regulates the city's urban fabric. Its importance in the urban landscape was such that it came to be known as 'The Street of Power'[8], due to the location of the headquarters of the municipal and state administrative authorities along the street. The urban plan of 1946 proposed the creation of a so-called Civic Centre to centralise all the public administration bodies that had previously occupied Barão Street. This factor subsequently led to the deactivation of the train station and to the decline of the place, which was once a symbol of urban development. Urban functions were also affected; the electric tram that had previously run along the street was also deactivated and replaced by bus lines that were later, in the 1980s, moved to the parallel street, also causing the loss of its function as a connecting road (Fig. 13).

Since then, the process of abandonment and degradation has been consolidated. The loss of symbolic value profoundly affects the sense of belonging and the spirit of the place, as these are intangible values reinforced by material heritage. A project is needed that includes not only restoration and material recovery actions but also a profound review of the current heritage protection legislation, as well as instruments that encourage the appropriation of space by the population, transforming people into active agents in the conservation process. Through the material recovery of its architecture and urban space, Barão do Rio Branco Street can recover its urban dimension and its symbolic value, bringing new opportunities to think about urban cultural heritage in an integrated way.



FIG. 13. Image from the 1980s, when large buses still passed along Barão do Rio Branco Street. At the end of the street, the railway station can be seen.

The presentation of the PINQuA project at the workshop provided interesting input into the development of the Barão Street study, outlining a series of strategic interventions aimed at the urban regeneration of the historic centre. By adapting the strategies of Genoa's PINQuA, Curitiba can



FIG. 14 and 15. Barão do Rio Branco Street. Loss of urban quality and historical continuity.. Map showing the urban context of Barão do Rio Branco Street in Curitiba, Brazil.

transform Barão do Rio Branco Street into an example of urban regeneration that values historical heritage, promotes social inclusion and strengthens local cultural identity.

PINQuA's experience in Genoa offers an inspiring model for Curitiba, demonstrating that material heritage restoration is not limited to repairing buildings but also includes recovering traditional knowledge, integrating sustainability and promoting creativity. Barão do Rio Branco Street could become an example of revitalisation that combines physical conservation with social and cultural innovation, based on participatory and sustainable processes (Figs. 14 and 15).

Learning from Genoa

Both Genoa and Curitiba face the challenge of making their historic centres habitable and relevant spaces in the present, without implying mischaracterisation or intensifying destructive gentrification processes. The workshop proposes that this balance can be achieved through hybrid approaches, which consider heritage as a platform for innovation and inclusion. While Genoa is experimenting with tools such as adaptive use, participatory redesign and European funds as drivers of heritage-led urban regeneration, Curitiba can benefit from these examples to develop policies that associate preservation with citizen participation. Conservation, therefore, would no longer be a barrier to development, but a lever for it.

From the perspective of physical heritage conservation, Genoa demonstrates consolidated potential, with technical, human and financial resources that enable sustainable and integrated actions. Curitiba, on the other hand, presents a scenario of emerging opportunities whose activation depends on the creation of a continuous heritage policy, associated with the valorisation of traditional techniques and the encouragement of professional training. The dialogue between these two realities allows us to identify ways to formulate physical conservation policies that combine material authenticity, current use and urban design.

The physical conservation of the historic centres of Genoa and Curitiba highlights how different contexts can offer specific – and equally valuable – responses to the contemporary challenges of urban preservation. Genoa can be seen as a consolidated model of qualified conservation, anchored in historical knowledge and robust public policies. Curitiba, on the other hand, presents a fertile field for training initiatives, integrated management and the reinvention of conservation practice in Brazil. For Curitiba, the possible

paths inspired by the experience of Genoa include the formulation of transversal heritage policies, the social activation of cultural assets, the strengthening of technical training and the appreciation of everyday use as a form of conservation. Considering contemporary guidelines, conservation is more than preserving the material: it is about reorganising the city on the basis of its memory, in dialogue with its present and its possible futures.

The issues analysed in the centre of Curitiba, compared with the experience of Genoa and with the reflections proposed in the EAAE Workshop, show that creativity is an indispensable vector for the contemporary conservation of urban heritage. More than an aesthetic or artistic value, creativity becomes a mediating tool between memory and transformation, materiality and function, technique and community. In Curitiba, strengthening heritage conservation will depend not only on expanding protection and restoration instruments, but also on institutional openness to invention, experimentation and participation. Creativity, in this sense, is not opposed to preservation – on the contrary, it sustains, renews and projects it over time.

A comparison between the contexts of cultural heritage preservation in these two cities shows that, despite historical and institutional differences, the problems of preservation and conservation reveal similar patterns of conflict between development and memory, market and culture, housing and preservation. Genoa, with its global heritage, faces problems typical of large historical European cities; Curitiba, on the other hand, is an emblematic case of how preservation in Latin American cities is still trying to consolidate itself in the face of the pressures of urban growth.

From the perspective of the urban dimension, the EAAE workshop offered a transformative reading for cities such as Genoa and Curitiba: conservation also means planning the city, redistributing access, reactivating central areas and creating new links between memory and everyday life. For Curitiba, this perspective can open paths for the regeneration of the historic centre as a space for permanence, housing and diversity, and not just as a cultural showcase. For Genoa, it reaffirms the urgency of aligning conservation with housing policies and collective use, so that the historic centre does not become exclusive or merely touristic.

Regarding Barão do Rio Branco Street in Curitiba, the contributions of the workshop and the experience in Genoa bring valuable observations and questions, allowing the development of a practical framework that can be situated within the urban dynamics of the city's preservation. A change in the perception of the dimension of urban cultural heritage is necessary, through an understanding of its intrinsic value as an economic resource and its great potential to promote cultural, social and economic development. Changing the way conservation is thought about and understanding the dimensions of heritage are fundamental factors in promoting the conservation of urban cultural heritage not only in Curitiba but also in Brazil.

These questions are accompanied by references to the process of the physical recovery of architecture and its urban elements. It is necessary to regenerate spaces so that they can regain their symbolic value as cultural references, as material recovery provides the basis for enabling the recovery of urban life, attracting people, reinforcing values and strengthening ties. Offering conditions for urban life through social engagement, public participation and the preservation of local identity can enable and ensure the transmission of society's values, guaranteeing that the past gains space in the future.

Another important matter is to create spaces for discussion and encourage studies of the real dynamics that resulted in the current situation of historic centres. The workshop experience shows how technical discussion is essential to form a critical basis capable of thinking about cities in a consistent way and ensuring their future. With this in mind, this experience will lead to a proposal to create a Permanent Research Group on Heritage in Curitiba, aiming to establish teams to think about the city in an objective way, involving public authorities, technicians and universities in a continuous effort to improve approaches, reinforce heritage education for new generations and guarantee the transmission of the city's values and history, along with the participation of society in general. It is conservation as an act and a means of creating new values and new understandings, and thus ensuring a more consistent future.

Genoa and Curitiba offer fertile contexts for contemporary experiments in the field of urban conservation. Their potential lies not only in the materiality of their heritage assets, but above all in the possibility of articulating memory, social function and urban design. In this sense, the valorisation of historic centres can cease to be a merely preservationist action and become an active strategy for the regeneration of the city, in line with current guidelines on preservation theory and practice.

Notes

1 (Innovative Quality of Living Programme) in our Prè and Maddalena neighbourhoods.

2 With the construction of the railway, several teams of engineers came to Curitiba (mostly Italians) and actively participated in the city's modernisation process. Therefore, the population was not only composed of immigrants, but also of technicians, a fact that contributed to its rapid urban development.

3 In Curitiba, there is no legally defined concept of a historic centre. There is a delimitation of a Historic Zone or Sector within the area that comprises the city centre, but this does not cover most of the city's historic heritage. Therefore, in this paper, we will refer to the study area as the 'central region' or 'central zone' to be more comprehensive in addressing issues of conservation of the city's cultural heritage.

4 This term refers here to the trend that has taken hold in Curitiba and in Brazil of treating the restoration and recovery of historic urban architecture as mere façades, without considering the function and symbolism of the site. In this way, most restoration actions end up functioning as lifeless scenes that quickly return to their initial state of abandonment.

5 (Macerata, 1829 – Rome, 1906) Italian engineer, graduated from the University of Pisa, worked on the construction of the Bologna–Ancona railway in Egypt, on the construction of the Suez Canal and the Port Said–Suez Railway.

6 In Portuguese: 'Rua da Liberdade'.

7 Ernesto Guaita (Turin 1843 – Curitiba 1916). An engineer, he came to Brazil as a member of the railway's technical team and, after the works, lived in Curitiba and was responsible for several important buildings in the city. He was a Consular Agent, an Engineer for the City Council and drew up the 1885 street plan and the city's first urban plan, the Nova Curitiba plan, in 1888.

8 In Portuguese: 'Rua do Poder'.

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PUBLIC SPACE IN TRANSITION: AN INTERPRETATIVE APPROACH TO CONSERVATION IN GENOA'S HISTORIC CENTRE

Giulia Cherchi

La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
giulia.cherchi@uniroma1.it

Abstract

Public space in historic European cities is the result of long-term processes in which spatial form, social practices, and collective meanings have been continuously negotiated. In this perspective, public space can be understood as a stratified condition shaped by differentiated regimes of access, use, and control. Within such contexts, conservation plays a crucial role not as a purely preservative act, but as an interpretative and creative design practice capable of engaging with inherited structures while addressing contemporary needs.

Focusing on the historic centre of Genoa, this paper explores the transformation of public space through the analysis of three selected urban episodes, each representing a distinct historical configuration. From the medieval institution of the *Alberghi dei nobili*, to contemporary practices of enclosure through fences and gates, and finally to the symbolic re-signification of Piazza Don Andrea Gallo, the cases highlight how public space has been repeatedly produced and redefined over time. These episodes reveal shifting spatial logics and meanings rooted in social, institutional, and cultural processes.

The paper does not aim to propose definitive solutions. Instead, it reflects on how conservation-oriented design can operate creatively through selective, reversible, and context-sensitive actions, supporting vitality, accessibility, and legibility. By framing conservation as a situated form of creativity, the contribution positions historic public space as both an expression of collective memory and an open field for future urban practices.

Introduction

Public space has historically represented a foundational component of European cities, serving as the backbone of collective life. It is the setting where social relations, economic exchanges, cultural and recreational activities intersect (Rogers, 2010). It is not merely a physical location, but a dynamic interface between urban materiality and community, where behaviours and uses influence the configuration of space and vice versa (Perrone, 2017, p. 38; Battisti, Mussinelli and Rigillo, 2020, p. 19). As Gehl (2010, p. 9) observes, 'first we shape cities, then they shape us'. Thus, the organisation of urban space plays a role in shaping practices, behaviours, and everyday life, contributing to the conditions for urban liveliness. Within this perspective, designing quality public spaces could contribute to a better urban life (Rogers, 2010).

Public space in historic cities is a living synthesis of past and present, a stratified result of functions and meanings that have evolved over time (Battisti, Mussinelli and Rigillo, 2020, p. 19). It is traditionally a place of both stasis and movement, but also a climatic control device and a generative element of the historic built fabric, shaped by empirical

rules rooted in the local context. Each historic settlement, with its unique characteristics, becomes a tangible expression of a community in a specific time and place (Vitiello, 2012).

Thus, within conservation theory, public space holds a form of collective historical memory that calls for preservation, not only in its material form, but also in the immaterial meanings that the community attributes to it. For this reason, every intervention in historic centres should be based on recognised and shared values (Pane, 1964, p. 213, as reprinted in *Conversaciones…*, 2021). As Settis writes (2017, p. 52), 'urban architecture becomes a privileged window on the world, organises cultural memory, creates hierarchies, sets values'.

Nonetheless, despite the widely recognised link between the quality of public space and individual and collective well-being, a growing body of literature has highlighted how, in many European cities, public spaces are increasingly perceived as disconnected from everyday civic life. Studies in urban design and social research emphasise the role of physical and symbolic barriers, limited accessibility, safety concerns, and inconsistent or fragmented interventions, in weakening everyday use and social interaction in public spaces (Gehl, 2010; UN-Habitat, 2020; Qi, Mazumdar and Vasconcelos, 2024). This situation is compounded by the pressure exerted by global phenomena such as gentrification, demographic and social changes. In such a context, rather than be seen as a limit to change or a relic of the past, public space can become a key resource for addressing contemporary challenges, a laboratory for the future (Perrone, 2017, p. 38).

Within this process, conservation plays a fundamental role. It must be capable of reading the complexity of the historic city, generated by its vitality and plurality, finding a balance between conservation and transformation (Ceccarelli *et al.*, 1992). What must endure, such as the sense of place, historical stratifications, urban landmarks, must confront what changes: the needs of society and the complexity of contemporary phenomena.

It can therefore be stated that the preservation of the historical city cannot take place without a corresponding transformation that ensures its adaptation to a constantly evolving world. The physical and/or functional evolution of heritage is what guarantees its survival. As Pane writes (1964, p. 216), 'while it is always possible to ensure the preservation of a movable object […] this is much more difficult for works of architecture, which, on the other hand, derive their sole possibility of subsistence precisely from constant participation in environmental and historical evolution'.

In urban restoration, then, identity should be understood as a dynamic construct, the outcome of the dialogue between permanencies and transformations, between the past and what is yet to come (Ceccarelli *et al.*, 1992). In this sense, conservation is a creative act: there is no single 'recipe', each case must be evaluated and addressed differently through critical interpretation. As Dalla Negra argues (2016, p. 94), conservation is a specific form of architectural design, oriented by the relationship with the material traces of the past. Accordingly, knowledge and critical interpretation of the historical landscape can provide the basis for imagining new identities in territories that today appear fragmented. The care of this landscape is not only a conservative gesture, but also an instrument of social cohesion, capable of generating a renewed sense of belonging (Bobbio, 2020, p. 18). Public space, in particular, becomes the privileged arena of this tension: a place of historical stratification and, at the same time, a device open to transformation, capable of embracing contemporary challenges and contributing to the creation of new urban quality.

This contribution explores public space in the historic centre of Genoa, a European city emblematic of morphological, spatial, and social stratification. Drawing on the critical

reading developed during the experience of the workshop, the paper analyses transformations in the use and meaning of public space through three case studies representing different historical moments and spatial regimes. The selected cases are read as manifestations of a condition in which accessibility, control, and collective use have been continuously negotiated over time. From early-modern institutional arrangements to contemporary forms of enclosure and reactivation, these episodes reveal how public space in Genoa has been repeatedly reshaped. The aim is not to propose definitive solutions, but to reflect on how conservation, understood as a selective and creative practice, can engage with this stratified condition, working with existing spatial logics and social practices to support forms of use, recognition, and continuity between past and present.

1. The Evolving Role of Public Realm in Genoa's Historic Centre

Genoa developed in constant negotiation with the constraints of its territory, adapting the narrow strip of land between the sea and the mountains to human settlement. Its expansion followed river basins, using topography as the primary layer upon which successive urban stratifications were grafted, giving rise to a linear urban model common along the Ligurian coastline (Quaini, 2006, p. 10). The primary objective of this process was to equip the city with infrastructural systems capable of supporting growth, often privileging continuity of movement, construction, and use over symbolic or representative urban forms. As Viganò observes, '*the coastline is the great ordering element of the Ligurian landscape along with the line of flight towards the horizon.* […] *The habitability of the line is made possible by infrastructure works on the soil, from centuries-old terracing to the more recent reclamation of the stream mouths*' (Viganò, 2004, p. 213). Within this reading, Genoa can be interpreted as a city-infrastructure itself: a spatial system in which built form, circulation, and public space are inseparable, oriented towards enabling inhabitation and continuity rather than emphasising episodic urban elements (Badano, 2005, p. 25; Fior, Fradegrada and Maglio, 2021, pp. 69–72).

This layered physical structure generates a complex and dynamic perception of the city, which constantly changes according to movement and position. As one shifts location, the relationship between urban scale, built form, and individual buildings is continuously reconfigured, producing a spatial experience based on sequences, transitions, and partial views rather than on stable compositions (Fig. 1). Gabrielli (2005, pp. 32–36) identifies three main modes of movement that structure the experience of Genoa: vertical movement, characterised by level changes, tunnels, lifts, and stairways; diagonal movement, following the inclination of the terrain through funiculars and the traditional *creuze*, which gradually integrate into the urban fabric; and horizontal movement along contour lines, producing sequences of façades and visual fragments that resist isolated interpretation. At times, however, the individuality of the urban image emerges unexpectedly, when turning a corner reveals an unforeseen spatial perspective.

Within Genoa's infrastructural and morphologically complex structure, unitary yet polycentric, public space is predominantly articulated as part of a continuous and interdependent spatial system, closely intertwined with circulation, building form, and topography (Gabrielli, 2005, pp. 40–43). Rather than being organised around singular and hierarchically central elements, the public realm is embedded within the dense residential fabric and takes shape through a network of distributed spaces.



FIG. 1. The view of Genoa from the Belvedere di Castelletto (photo by the author).

In the historic centre, a substantial portion of this public realm consists of urban voids that cannot be understood as deliberately composed focal points. These spaces often take the form of street enlargements, residual voids, or interstitial conditions whose configuration is the outcome of successive processes of adaptation and adjustment. When interpreted through conventional criteria of urban centrality, such spaces may appear secondary or incidental. However, their persistence and spatial definition can be read as material traces of social and infrastructural dynamics, shaped through evolving patterns of inhabitation, access, and everyday use (Bobbio and Musso, 2020, pp. 15–17). At the same time, they perform essential environmental and operational roles, such as enabling light, air, movement, and stasis within an otherwise compact urban structure (Badano, 2005, p. 27).

Alongside these interstitial conditions, several 20th-century squares in Genoa, such as Piazza della Vittoria and Piazza Rossetti, exemplify a different but related mode of public space production. Despite being formally designed and characterised by monumental scale and strong compositional clarity, these spaces do not primarily operate as autonomous civic arenas. Rather, they are conceived and function as integral components of broader architectural and infrastructural systems, within which their spatial role is largely defined by surrounding building complexes. In these cases, the public character of the square is mediated by representational and organisational logics that structure movement, visibility, and symbolic meaning. The square thus acts less as an independent focus of collective life and more as a spatial device embedded within a larger urban framework (Scelsi, 2005, pp. 74–76).

A more ambivalent condition can be observed in Piazza De Ferrari, now widely recognised as one of Genoa's most prominent urban spaces (Fig. 2). Positioned at the edge of the medieval fabric, the square functions as a threshold between the historic centre and the 19th- and 20th-century expansions. While the presence of a central fountain and the circular layout express a clear intention towards formal centrality, this role is continuously redefined by strong directional flows and by the institutional character of the surrounding buildings. As a result, Piazza De Ferrari does not operate exclusively as a civic arena, but as a space in which representational, symbolic, and infrastructural functions coexist. Its



FIG. 2. Piazza Raffaele De Ferrari, the central fountain and the institutional buildings (photo by the author).

public character emerges precisely from this condition of tension, where centrality and transition overlap (Scelsi, 2005, pp. 76–79).

A different, yet equally significant, spatial configuration emerges in Piazza Banchi, the city's commercial hub during the 19th century (Fig. 3). Raised above street level and aligned with the church of San Pietro, this 'suspended' square is defined by conditions of compression and enclosure, intensified by the ashlar bases of the surrounding buildings. Piazza Banchi operates as a transitional and relational space, mediating between circulation, commerce, and representation. In this sense, it exemplifies a long-standing tendency within Genoa's public realm for formally recognisable spaces to assume hybrid roles, shaped by their position within broader spatial, economic, and symbolic systems (Scelsi, 2005, pp. 79–81).

In a stratified city such as Genoa, reading the urban fabric already constitutes a projective act, as the interpretation of form, continuity, and layers necessarily entails selective choices that orient transformation (Gabrielli, 2005, pp. 18–20; Fior, Fradegrada and Maglio, 2021, pp. 87–90). From this perspective, conservation is understood as a selective and interpretative practice, operating within existing conditions to guide change without compromising spatial and cultural coherence (Bobbio and Musso, 2020, pp. 23–25). Within Genoa's historic centre, creativity therefore emerges through situated architectural processes of spatial reinterpretation.

2. Selected Urban Episodes: Spatial Transformations and Shifting Meanings

Building on the interpretative framework outlined in the previous chapter, this section examines three selected urban episodes that exemplify different historical configurations of public space in Genoa. These episodes are read as situated manifestations of a long-standing condition in which public space has been shaped by differentiated regimes of access, use, and control.

Each episode is rooted in a distinct phase of the city's urban and social history and highlights how spatial forms, institutional arrangements, and everyday practices have interacted to produce specific modes of inhabitation. Considered together, they do not de-



FIG. 3. Piazza Banchi and the San Pietro in Banchi church (photo by the author).



FIG. 4. Piazza di San Matteo, once part of the Doria Albergo dei nobili (photo by the author).

scribe a linear evolution of public space but offer a comparative reading of shifting spatial logics and meanings across time.

The episodes are not analysed with the aim of proposing direct architectural solutions to complex social or regulatory issues. Rather, they are used to explore how architectural reading and conservation-oriented design can contribute to interpreting, revealing, and selectively re-signifying spatial conditions shaped by broader social, political, and institutional processes.

2.1. The Medieval Institution of the Alberghi dei Nobili*: Negotiated Spaces between Private and Public Domains*

The *Albergo* was a socio-topographic and political institution, comparable to a noble confraternity, through which aristocratic families were organised around a shared surname (*cognomen*). Although originating as a private form of association, the *Alberghi* were officially recognised by municipal law and codified within the city's statutes, becoming instruments of elite consolidation and political control in response to emerging democratic pressures (Pandiani, 1929; Grendi, 1975, pp. 241–245).

This form of social aggregation found direct expression in the urban fabric, establishing a close correspondence between social hierarchy and spatial organisation. The *Alberghi* were translated into recognisable spatial configurations, articulated around loggias, reference churches and, in some cases, adjacent open spaces, collectively managed by the member families. While not all *Alberghi* were associated with a square, each was characterised by the presence of a loggia: a semi-public space used for gathering, negotiation, and social representation, where access and use were regulated according to status and affiliation (Grendi, 1975, pp. 263–265).

The first documented *Alberghi* date to the second half of the 13th century, although earlier examples attest to the early consolidation of this system. Notable cases include the Doria complex in San Matteo (1125), where the use of bichromatic stone continues to express a strongly codified noble identity (Fig. 4), and the *Albergo* Volta in the area of San Torpete (1180). With the law of 1576, the Republic formally abolished the *Alberghi* as an institution (Ascheri, 1846, pp. 47–48). However, many of the spatial arrangements they generated remained embedded in the city's morphology and continued to structure patterns of access and use.

The *Alberghi* thus represent an emblematic example of how specific forms of social organisation produced collective spaces that were neither fully private nor fully integrated into the public realm but governed by selective and hierarchical principles. Over time, several of these spaces were incorporated into the public domain without undergoing substantial spatial transformation. Today, they function as ordinary urban squares, lacking distinctive features that might directly convey their original conditions of use and control. As a result, the historical specificity of these spaces is not immediately accessible through spatial experience alone but depends largely on prior knowledge and historical interpretation. This limited accessibility of information contributes to a form of public space that is formally open yet detached from the layered social and institutional processes that shaped it.

2.2. Fences and Gates: Contemporary Regimes of Enclosure and Access

The progressive enclosure of public space has significantly marked the historic centre of Genoa since the late 20th century. Alleys, passageways, courtyards, and small squares, traditionally characterised by high permeability and informal collective use, have increasingly been closed through the introduction of gates, fences, and other physical barriers. This process intensified from the late 1980s onwards, in parallel with broader social transformations and growing concerns related to safety and urban management, giving rise to what has been described as a 'culture of the fence' (Fig. 5) (Petrillo and Benasso, 2020, p. 152).

While these measures were often justified as responses to specific social issues, including drug trafficking and perceived insecurity, their spatial consequences extend beyond emergency-driven rationales. The introduction of physical barriers has progressively altered patterns of access, movement, and use, contributing to a fragmented urban condition in which spaces that were formally public have become selectively accessible or entirely closed.

This tendency became particularly visible during the G8 summit held in Genoa in 2001, when large portions of the historic centre were subdivided into areas with differentiated levels of security control, commonly referred to as 'red' and 'yellow' zones. During this period, access and circulation were heavily restricted through fences, checkpoints, and temporary security infrastructures, making explicit a condition of spatial segmentation that would later persist in more ordinary and permanent forms (Binetti, 2007).

From the early 2000s onwards, the enclosure of public space through gates and fences gradually normalised and became increasingly justified by a range of functional arguments, including safety, construction site management, and urban hygiene. Notably, this process has not been confined to the micro-scale of individual streets or blocks but has extended to entire portions of the historic centre, compromising spatial continuity



FIG. 5. A public passage blocked by a gate in Genoa's historic centre (photo from the Purple Group final presentation, EAAE workshop).

and obstructing established urban flows (Petrillo and Benasso, 2020).

In this sense, fences and gates constitute a contemporary layer in the ongoing redefinition of public space. Beyond their immediate functional role, they operate as spatial devices that reorganise accessibility, permeability, and social interaction, reinforcing differentiated regimes of access within the stratified urban fabric of Genoa.

2.3. Piazza Don Andrea Gallo: from Post-War Urban Void to a Re-Signified Civic Space

Piazza Don Andrea Gallo is a relatively recent urban space, created after the 1943 bombing during the Second World War, which destroyed part of the built fabric in the Santa Sabina district. For decades, the area remained without an official name and was commonly referred to as 'the nameless square', lacking a historically consolidated toponym. As in other comparable situations, the space was eventually named after a contemporary figure of strong local significance. In 2014, it was dedicated to Don Andrea Gallo, a priest known for his social activism and long-standing engagement with marginalised communities in the surrounding area, historically associated with forms of social exclusion.

The attribution of a name marked a symbolic shift in the interpretation of the space, redefining an area long perceived as marginal, insecure and informally appropriated for residual uses. This process primarily operated through symbolic and narrative means, supported by spontaneous, small-scale initiatives promoted by local inhabitants, such as murals and the planting of trees and plants, aimed at reactivating everyday use and visibility (Condiviso, n.d.). In this sense, the figure of Don Gallo functions as a cultural mediator through which a new collective meaning has been ascribed to the space.

Spatially, the square is located within a dense urban fabric defined by major circulation routes (via del Campo, via Lomellini, piazza della Nunziata, via Bensa and via Fontane), where it appears as an open interruption within a system of narrow streets. The surrounding context incorporates layered historical elements, including medieval loggias embedded within later constructions, offering a clear example of the city's stratified morphology and capacity for adaptation over time (Fig. 6) (ETT, 2023).

Since 2021, the square has been involved in a formal urban regeneration initiative, including a light-based installation and the construction of a circular bench around the tree planted by the community in 2014. This intervention, part of the *Lighting for Genoa* programme, employs lighting design as a tool to enhance visibility and convey symbolic values associated with the space, projecting key terms such as 'inclusion', 'solidarity' and 'community' in multiple languages (Fig. 7). The project reinforces the role of the square as



FIG. 6. Remains of loggias and medieval porticoes in piazza Don Andrea Gallo (photo by the author).



FIG. 7. Piazza Don Andrea Gallo and the circular bench created by the Lighting for Genoa project around the symbolic tree (photo by the author).

a site of symbolic re-signification, where meaning is constructed through narrative, representation and selective design actions within the existing urban framework.

3. Towards an Interpretative Approach to Conservation in Genoa's Public Spaces

The three urban episodes discussed above reveal how public space in Genoa has been continuously redefined through different regimes of access, control, and meaning. From the selective and hierarchical spaces produced by the medieval *Alberghi*, to the contemporary proliferation of fences and gates, and finally to the symbolic re-signification of Piazza Don Andrea Gallo, public space emerges not as a stable category, but as a negotiated and historically contingent condition. These transformations point to a fragmented and stratified public realm, shaped by both deliberate interventions and unregulated processes.

Within this context, conservation cannot be conceived as a purely preservative practice, nor as a set of standardised solutions. Instead, it operates as an interpretative and projective act, in which creativity is expressed not through formal invention or iconic gestures, but through the critical reconfiguration of existing spatial, social, and symbolic conditions. Here, creativity emerges through selective design actions that translate existing spatial logics and everyday practices into new conditions of use and recognition, without resolving their inherent complexity. The following reflections outline a set of principles that may inform future conservation-oriented interventions in Genoa's historic public spaces, without claiming to resolve the complex challenges the city currently faces.

A first critical issue concerns the risk of reducing historic public spaces to aesthetic or economic assets. Processes such as commercialisation (Agostini, 2015), disneyfication (Zukin, 1996), and museification (Salerno, 2018) tend to simplify urban identity by

privileging visual appeal and touristic consumption over everyday use. The episodes analysed in Genoa suggest that public space should instead be understood as a place to be lived rather than merely visited. As observed by Petrillo and Benasso (2020), the historic centre of Genoa has long displayed forms of unplanned *mixité* that, while contradictory and sometimes conflictual, continue to sustain a level of urban life that has largely disappeared in more regulated contexts. Vitality, in this sense, does not result from prescribed uses, but from the design of conditions that allow new practices to emerge in response to real and evolving needs.

Recognising vitality as a central value also requires acknowledging the profound social transformations that have affected Genoa in recent decades. Gentrification, depopulation, immigration, and changing patterns of residence and mobility have altered the social composition of the historic centre, producing fragmented and often weakly connected communities. In this scenario, rethinking public space is a cultural and social process. Participation and co-creation become essential as practices that must confront real conditions of social fragmentation, unequal power relations, and conflicting interests. From this perspective, creativity is located in the ability to construct spaces of dialogue, negotiation, and shared interpretation. As the experience of fenced and enclosed spaces shows, the absence of such processes often reinforces perceptions of insecurity and legitimises further restrictions. Conversely, participatory practices, when carefully structured, can contribute to redefining public space as a shared domain rather than a contested or controlled one.

This shift also implies a redefinition of the role of architectural design and of the architect. Rather than acting as the sole author of spatial solutions, the architect operates as a mediator and facilitator, coordinating transformation processes and providing interpretative tools. Design becomes a means of listening as much as of proposing, guiding practices without imposing fixed uses. In this sense, creativity coincides with an interpretative form of design agency, capable of translating observations, constraints, and informal practices into spatial strategies. The experience of Piazza Don Andrea Gallo illustrates how observing existing patterns of use and informal care can inform light, reversible interventions that support everyday practices without fundamentally restructuring space. Reversibility and flexibility thus emerge as key principles, allowing creative actions to remain open to future change and to avoid definitive or exclusionary outcomes.

Finally, the analysis highlights the importance of narrative and legibility in historic public spaces. While Genoa's built fabric often displays visible layers of historical stratification, in many cases the social and institutional processes that shaped public space are no longer readable through spatial form alone. This is particularly evident in former *Alberghi* squares, whose origins remain accessible primarily to those equipped with historical knowledge. Conservation-oriented interventions can therefore play a role in improving access to information by creatively activating forms of storytelling that reconnect space, memory, and contemporary use.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that conservation in Genoa's historic public spaces should operate through context-sensitive actions, attentive to use, accessibility, and meaning. Conservation can work incrementally, supporting vitality, facilitating dialogue, and enhancing the legibility of stratified urban narratives. Understood in this way, creativity is not opposed to conservation, but constitutes one of its essential modes of operation, enabling the continuous reactivation of public space as a shared and evolving urban resource.

Conclusions

The urban episodes discussed in this paper have shown how public space in Genoa is continuously produced and redefined through differentiated regimes of access, use, and meaning. Public space emerges as a stratified and negotiated condition, shaped by historical forms of control, contemporary practices of enclosure, and selective processes of symbolic re-signification. Taken together, these dynamics point to a fragmented field of public space experiences, whose coherence must be actively constructed.

Within this framework, conservation cannot be reduced to the preservation of forms or to the enhancement of heritage value for aesthetic or economic purposes. The cases analysed suggest that conservation operates most effectively when understood as an interpretative and creative design practice, capable of engaging with existing spatial structures, social practices, and inherited meanings. Creativity, in this sense, does not lie in formal invention, but in the capacity to mediate between permanence and change, enabling new uses and forms of recognition to emerge without erasing historical complexity.

This perspective calls for a critical approach to public space that prioritises everyday vitality over image-making and resists reductive processes such as museification or touristic commodification. Inclusion, accessibility, participation, and flexibility do not function here as abstract principles, but as operational dimensions through which conservation-oriented interventions can respond to fragmented social contexts and uneven conditions of access. As shown in the Genoese context, designing public space requires attention to the narratives, practices, and forms of knowledge that shape how space is perceived and inhabited.

Ultimately, the contribution of this paper lies in framing conservation as a situated and responsible form of creativity, grounded in the present and oriented towards future transformations.

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USE. ABANDON. REUSE. REPEAT? THE ROLE OF CREATIVE ACTS IN CYCLICAL NARRATIVES OF ARCHITECTURAL REUSE

Giorgio Danesi
Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
gdanesi@iuav.it

1. Introduction: Conservation/Creation and Cyclical Reuse in Monumental Complexes

The relationship between conservation and creation has progressively shifted from opposition to interdependence, positioning conservation as an interpretative and thus inherently creative practice. Within contemporary architectural discourse, particularly since the second half of the 20th century, the notion of a rigid dichotomy has given way to the recognition of conservation as an inherently creative and interpretative process (Varagnoli, 2007; Carbonara, 2011; Di Resta, 2016; Balzani and Dalla Negra, 2017). This shift aligns closely with the broader thematic framework of the EAAE Conservation Network Workshop 2024, which invited participants to explore the nuanced interdependence of these two domains through the overarching theme: *Conservation/Creation: The contribution of Conservation to urban futures*. Among the three focus areas proposed, this paper primarily aligns with the third axis *(Old and new as dimensions of the future: the embrace of hybridity*) while maintaining a strong connection with the other two, namely *Conservation as a medium for creation* and *Conservation as a condition for social and cultural vitality*.

Hybridity, understood as the operational coexistence of inherited fabric and contemporary layers, has become a key lens for addressing the continuity of use in historic urban environments. Architectural conservation today faces the challenge of navigating this hybridity, negotiating between historical authenticity, contemporary demands, and the stratifications accumulated over centuries. This negotiation process is particularly evident in the case of large, monumental complexes whose size and social significance have historically subjected them to cycles of use, abandonment, reuse, and reinterpretation.

This paper adopts the former San Giovanni Hospital in Turin to interrogate cyclical reuse in monumental complexes, with the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa providing a structured counterpoint discussed throughout the workshop. Over the course of its long lifespan, the San Giovanni Hospital has undergone multiple phases of use, adaptation, and transformation, culminating in a significant reuse intervention during the late 20th century. However, this trajectory cannot be considered complete: following a period of renewed abandonment, the site is currently undergoing further reactivation, reflecting the ongoing and cyclical nature of its reuse. In particular, the late 20th-century project – originally conceived to address the building's obsolescence and to introduce a new cultural function – now provides fertile ground for reflecting on the evolving role of architectural conservation within hybrid contexts. What makes this case study particularly relevant to the theme of hybridity is not only its architectural stratification but also the trajectory of its conservation process, which mirrors the broader questions addressed during the workshop. Of particular interest is the current condition of the complex: after the explosion of

a cylinder in the fire-suppression system, the museum remained closed for more than a decade and reopened partially in 2024; some key components of the previous intervention remain unused and disconnected from the current public narrative of the building. This paradox raises broader questions about the longevity and recognition of conservation efforts themselves and reflects a more general phenomenon in the management of large historic complexes: the difficulty of sustaining coherent and inclusive strategies over time.

Within the workshop, the Albergo dei Poveri repeatedly surfaced as a paradigmatic case where heritage value, partial reactivation, and governance constraints intersect. This paper therefore adopts a deliberately asymmetrical comparative lens: it develops the former San Giovanni Hospital in Turin as an in-depth case study, while using the Albergo dei Poveri as a structured counterpoint to sharpen interpretation and to test the transferability of key issues emerging from the workshop setting.

In particular, workshop discussions repeatedly framed conservation not as a neutral technical practice, but as a sequence of situated choices: choices about what to remove, what to retain, what to reinterpret, and how to stage compatibility between old and new over time. In this sense, 'creativity' is not reduced to formal invention; it is understood as the capacity to translate cultural significance into material, spatial, and programmatic decisions, and to negotiate new meanings without erasing the legibility of inherited layers.

In light of these considerations, this paper aims to critically analyse the conservation path of the former San Giovanni Hospital, framing it within the themes of hybridity, adaptive reuse, and the evolving meanings attributed to architectural heritage. It seeks to contribute to the ongoing debate by addressing not only the technical and architectural aspects of the interventions, but also their broader implications for contemporary conservation practices, particularly concerning 'the conservation of conservation efforts' themselves and the necessity for sustainable, community-centred strategies.

2. Theoretical Framework: Conservation as Creation, Hybridity, and the Management of Change

Recent conservation discourse increasingly rejects a preservation-innovation dichotomy, emphasising instead conservation as a creative process grounded in interpretation and change management. Building upon the theoretical foundations on the relation between 'old and new' developed during the second half of the 20th century (Perogalli, 1954; Bonelli, 1954; Pane and Rogers, 1957; Brandi, 1963), conservation is no longer conceived as a static act focused solely on material safeguarding but is instead recognised as a creative and dynamic process. This theoretical repositioning underscores the concept of conservation as creation: a process that inherently involves interpretation, adaptation, and transformation, rather than the mere freezing of heritage in a singular historical moment. As Giovanni Carbonara stated: 'The integration of the work of art and its restoration leads to that creative restoration capable of reintegrating major lacunae' (Carbonara cited in Pierotti, 2016).

Several working groups during the workshop engaged with this idea, stressing that each conservation intervention is, by nature, a creative act. Historic buildings, especially those with complex stratifications, are seen not as finished artifacts but as palimpsests, open to reinterpretation by each generation. The reflections highlighted that the meanings attributed to built heritage are not fixed; they evolve through time, shaped by shifting

socio-cultural, economic, and functional contexts. In this view, conservation is a form of continuous negotiation, where the architect's task is not merely to preserve but to reinterpret and extend the life of the architectural legacy.

A key concept is 'hybridity': the productive coexistence of old and new within a shared architectural and urban framework. Hybridity is understood not as a compromise or as contamination but as a strategic design condition that allows heritage to remain relevant and functional. It facilitates the insertion of contemporary layers that dialogue with the historical fabric, fostering both continuity and innovation. The layering of interventions over time should not be perceived as a dilution of authenticity, but rather as a manifestation of vitality, ensuring that heritage sites remain adaptable to contemporary and future needs.

One of the central challenges in the embrace of hybridity lies in the necessity to balance creative freedom with respect for the existing cultural and material substratum. Conservation, in this sense, requires a deep ethical responsibility: it demands a critical evaluation of what to preserve, what to adapt, and what to transform. This selective process, as theorized by Cesare Brandi and later elaborated by Giovanni Carbonara, emphasizes the role of the conservationist as an interpreter (Brandi, 1963; Carbonara, 1996). It is not about restoring a monument to an idealised past, but about recognizing the value of each historical layer and making conscious choices based on a judgement of significance.

This notion of stratification, where each intervention becomes part of an ongoing architectural narrative, has to be considered central in the conservation path: the workshop discussion stressed the importance of managing change consciously, avoiding the risk of 'freezing' heritage in a specific moment while allowing for the emergence of new layers. The conservationist thus assumes the role of a mediator, responsible for ensuring continuity while fostering transformation. It is this dialectic process that sustains the vitality of heritage sites, making them relevant across generations.

Equally critical in this framework is the recognition of conservation's role in supporting social and cultural vitality. Conservation efforts must extend beyond the physical envelope of buildings to address the social inclusivity and accessibility of heritage spaces. Adaptive reuse strategies, when conceived inclusively, can play a pivotal role in reconnecting heritage sites with the urban fabric and fostering a renewed sense of belonging among local populations. This aligns with the broader shift in conservation practices toward a people-centred approach, as also emphasized by contemporary scholarship on urban heritage management.

Moreover, it is important to underscore the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration in managing these complex processes. The successful negotiation between old and new requires the involvement of architects, historians, engineers, policymakers, and – critically – the communities who inhabit and interact with these spaces. However, as Paolo Torsello pointed out in 2005, this must be achieved without overlooking the central role of conservation and of the conservation specialist: 'Today we can say that the conservation of the historical and artistic heritage is invoked by a plurality of actors, yet with a contradictory plurality of positions and objectives' (Torsello, 2005, p. 11), which risks undermining the ultimate aim of restoration: that of transmitting the material testimonies of the past to the future, while maintaining a meaningful relationship with the evolving conditions of human life. The lack of long-term, inclusive management strategies often results in fragmented interventions, a condition that was recurrently critiqued during the workshop. It is through sustained dialogue and shared responsibility that heritage sites can avoid

cycles of abandonment and partial reuse, instead achieving integrated, adaptable, and sustainable futures.

Against this background, San Giovanni Hospital in Turin offers a concrete setting in which the promises and vulnerabilities of conservation-as-creation can be traced across successive reuse cycles. The intervention history of the building reflects precisely the challenges inherent in negotiating the relationship between conservation and creation. It exemplifies how hybridity, understood as both an architectural and a cultural condition, offers opportunities to reinterpret historical structures while simultaneously accommodating new functions and societal expectations. Furthermore, this case study raises pertinent questions about the longevity and sustainability of conservation decisions. The late 20th century interventions, celebrated at the time for their innovative integration of old and new, are now partially marginalised in the current use of the building. This phenomenon reveals the inherent tension between the permanence of material interventions and the fluidity of institutional, social, and cultural contexts.

Taken together, these positions inform the analytical lens adopted in the following sections. The former San Giovanni Hospital in Turin is discussed as an in-depth case study in which creativity becomes legible through design decisions on fabric, spatial sequences, and adaptive insertion. The Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa is used as a counterpoint that highlights another, equally decisive register of creativity: the construction of viable programmes, the management of long timeframes, and the governance conditions required to keep hybrid value operative beyond the moment of intervention.

3. Turin as In-Depth Case Study: San Giovanni Hospital between Reuse and the Obsolescence of Conservation Layers

The San Giovanni Hospital in Turin stands as a monumental architectural landmark, deeply rooted in the city's 17th-century urban development. Designed by Amedeo di Castellamonte, one of the leading architects of the Duchy of Savoy, the building reflects the Baroque principles of symmetry, clarity, and functional hierarchy. Constructed at the end of the 17th century, it was conceived with a distinctive cruciform layout, featuring four large courtyards symmetrically arranged around intersecting axes (Cerri, 1985, pp. 93–103). This typological clarity was not merely a formal device; it responded to the functional requirements of a modern hospital, as understood at the time. The spatial organisation, with its open courtyards and regular distribution of volumes, was designed to promote ventilation, hygiene, and efficiency, anticipating principles that would later become standard in hospital architecture across Europe. The monumental scale of the complex, combined with its strategic urban location, positioned it as a significant element within Turin's welfare system, serving the city's population for over two centuries.

The durability of its original typology attests to the effectiveness of Castellamonte's design. However, it also foreshadowed the challenges that the building would face in later periods, as successive generations grappled with the need to adapt the structure to evolving medical practices and societal expectations.

The second half of the 20th century marked a turning point in the building's history. With rapid advances in healthcare infrastructure and medical technologies, the San Giovanni Hospital increasingly struggled to meet contemporary standards. Instead of comprehensive modernization, the interventions carried out throughout the century were

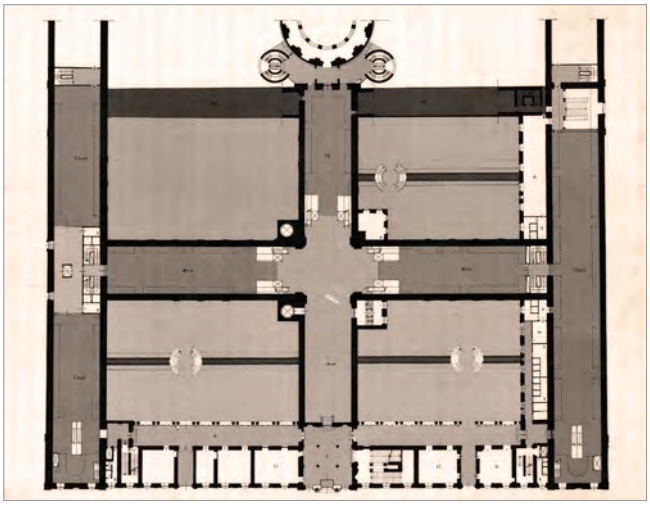


FIG. 1. Former San Giovanni Hospital, Turin. Reuse project for the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences, ground floor plan, 1981 (AP, fondo Andrea Bruno, Scatola 77).

largely piecemeal and functionalist, driven by the immediate need to expand services rather than a coherent vision for the site's long-term evolution (Momo and Ronchetta Bussolati, 1980, pp. 132–134).

These modifications took the form of additive structures, small-scale constructions in masonry, often of low architectural quality, which were attached to the historic fabric without consideration for the building's typological and aesthetic coherence. Many of these accretions occupied the courtyards, disrupting the carefully calibrated balance between solid and void spaces, while others obscured or damaged the original façades and interior loggias (Momo and Ronchetta Bussolati, 1980, pp. 54, 56, 73). By the 1970s, the hospital had become not only functionally obsolete but also aesthetically compromised. The cumulative effect of these additions fragmented the legibility of Castellamonte's original design, undermining both its architectural value and its operational efficiency. This pattern reflects a broader issue commonly observed in historic hospital complexes worldwide: the tension between the need for modernization and the preservation of typological integrity.

In 1978, the Regione Piemonte established the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences and selected part of the former San Giovanni Hospital as its seat. The decision marked a shift in the building's trajectory, presenting both challenges and opportunities for reinterpreting its significance within Turin's urban landscape. The reuse project for the San Giovanni Hospital was entrusted to a multidisciplinary team of faculty members from the Politecnico di Torino, with architect Andrea Bruno playing a key role as an expert in monumental restoration. Bruno's intervention can be understood as a paradigmatic example of conservation as a creative act, balancing respect for the historic fabric with the insertion of new functions necessary for the building's future sustainability.

Bruno's first move was the selective removal of the 20th-century additions, described in those years by Maria Grazia Cerri as 'superfetazioni' (Cerri, 1985, p. 102), according to the lexicon used by Gustavo Giovannoni since the 1930s. These accretions, mostly consisting of temporary service structures, were considered not only functionally obsolete but also detrimental to the building's aesthetic coherence. Bruno's approach did not aim at a nostalgic return to an idealised past; instead, it reflected a critical reading of the stratification, adhering to the principles articulated by Cesare Brandi and further developed by

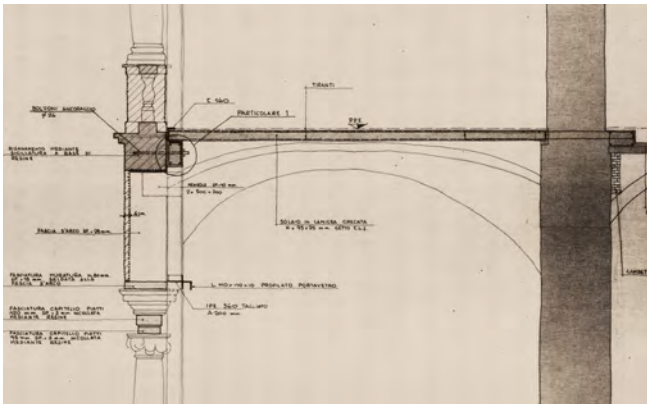


FIG. 2. Former San Giovanni Hospital, Turin. Renovation of the loggia facing the courtyards, part., 1981 (AP, fondo Andrea Bruno, Scatola 77).

Giovanni Carbonara, where the removal of incongruous additions is justified by a judgement of value (Carbonara, 1996, p. 342). By liberating the courtyards and façades from these intrusive elements, Bruno sought to restore the typological clarity of Castellamonte's design, while simultaneously acknowledging the building's layered history (Fig. 1).

One of the most innovative aspects of Bruno's intervention was the restoration of the loggias flanking two of the four courtyards. Originally characterized by three-tiered colonnades in white Chianocco marble, these structures had been compromised by hastily constructed masonry partitions during the hospital's operational years (Momo and Ronchetta Bussolati, 1980, p. 152). Bruno's solution involved the design of a 'glass-arch' system (vetrata-centina): a steel framework integrated with the restored columns, supporting glass panels that re-established the permeability between interior and exterior spaces (Figs. 2 and 3). This system served a dual purpose: structural consolidation – addressing the static weaknesses of the original loggias – and architectural reinterpretation, creating a transparent boundary that maintained visual continuity while introducing a contemporary layer. Bruno's solution is characterized by its physical and formal integration with the historic fabric. It exemplifies a nuanced approach to hybridity, balancing mimicry and explicit expression, and aligns with later developments in structural consolidation strategies (Donato, 1990, p. 165).

In keeping with his philosophy of 'minimum impact, maximum effect', Bruno proposed the creation of a new subterranean level beneath the courtyards to house the museum's accessory functions, including technical facilities, archives, and public spaces for conferences and exhibitions. A comparable strategy had been adopted a few years earlier in Bruno's project for Palazzo Carignano in Turin (Mastropietro, 1996, pp. 220–231). The underground intervention, constructed using both cast-in-situ reinforced concrete and prefabricated reinforced concrete rings, also served as a means of reinforcing the building's foundations, addressing concerns about structural stability (Donato, 1990, p. 165). The design incorporated longitudinal skylights, strategically positioned cuts in the courtyard slabs, to provide natural light and establish a visual connection between the subterranean spaces and the historic façades above (Fig. 4). Furthermore, the introduction of circular concrete staircases within each courtyard, explicitly modern in form and materiality, served as a clear marker of the contemporary intervention, asserting the presence of the new within the framework of the old (Fig. 5).



FIG. 3. Former San Giovanni Hospital, Turin. Current view of the glazed arch of the loggia (photo: Giorgio Danesi, 2024)



FIG. 4. Former San Giovanni Hospital, Turin. One of the slab openings in the courtyard, originally designed to allow light into the underground level, now temporarily covered with wooden panels as the hypogeal spaces are not in use (photo: Giorgio Danesi, 2024).

Despite the significance of Bruno's intervention, the present-day condition of the complex reveals a partial distancing from his original vision. In 2024, after more than a decade of closure following the 2013 explosion of a cylinder i the fire-suppression system, the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences partially reopened to the public. The reopening, however, focused primarily on the reconfiguration of the exhibition layout, without involving a broader reconsideration of the architectural spaces (Fig. 6). The 'glass-arch' loggias – a key element of Bruno's conservation strategy – were preserved due to their good state of conservation but remained outside the scope of the renovation works. More critically, the subterranean spaces, originally designed by Bruno to accommodate public and technical functions, were excluded from the new museum itinerary. These areas have been provisionally adapted to storage use, while a later phase of the Regione Piemonte's programme envisages the reopening of the underground level to the public. Until that phase is implemented, this part of Bruno's intervention remains inaccessible to visitors and largely absent from the museum's public narrative. This condition reflects a broader pattern already observed in other works by Bruno – such as Palazzo Carignano – in which past conservation efforts risk being forgotten, or at best, decoupled from the evolving narrative of the site, as 'a strikingly modern piece of submerged archaeology' (Quaglieni, 2017).

The case of the San Giovanni Hospital invites comparison with the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa, not simply as an analogous 17th-century monumental complex, but as a complementary scenario that makes the workshop's theme of conservation/creation opera-



FIG. 5. Former San Giovanni Hospital, Turin. Aerial view of a courtyard during the construction of the new underground floor slabs. At the centre, the circular structure concealing the vertical circulation core, ca. 1981 (AP, fondo Andrea Bruno, Scatola 77).

tional. Founded around 1656 and developed over the long term between the 17th and 19th centuries, the Albergo dei Poveri has undergone successive adaptations, repairs, and partial reactivations. Today, however, only a limited portion of its extensive surface has been upgraded and brought back into stable use, while substantial areas remain abandoned and exposed to progressive deterioration. This condition foregrounds the central dilemma of large-scale heritage: how to move from partial, sectorial actions to a coherent programme capable of sustaining everyday life, maintenance, and future re-occupation.

Read through this Genoese counterpoint, the Turin case highlights both the strength and the vulnerability of comprehensive reuse strategies. Bruno's intervention at San Giovanni demonstrates how conservation can operate as a creative act through selective demolition, structural rationalisation, and the invention of new spatial sequences that remain legible as contemporary layers. Yet the later marginalisation of key parts of that intervention also shows that creativity requires continuity: without stable governance, narrative integration, and long-term adaptability, even high-quality projects may lose recognition and functionality.

However, significant differences also matter for interpretation. While the San Giovanni Hospital benefited from a relatively unified and design-driven intervention logic, the Albergo dei Poveri exemplifies a condition in which ownership, responsibilities, and functional agendas are distributed across multiple actors, making programme-building and long-term management the primary creative arena (Musso *et al.*, 2024). The comparison therefore clarifies that 'creation' in conservation may reside as much in governance, phasing, and the construction of feasible programmes as in design decisions on fabric and form (Fig. 7).

Andrea Bruno's intervention at the San Giovanni Hospital exemplifies a careful negotiation between historical preservation and contemporary innovation, embodying the principles of hybridity, even though – as an intervention conceived in the 1980s – it is necessarily rooted in the cultural and disciplinary frameworks of its time. His selective approach to removing, restoring, and adding layers reflects an understanding of the building as a dynamic entity, open to reinterpretation. Moreover, the decision to introduce new functions in a subterranean level, preserving the volumetric integrity of the original complex,

demonstrates an acute awareness of the compatibility between old and new, both in material terms and in functional terms. This approach resonates with the broader discourse on sustainability and adaptive reuse, emphasizing that conservation strategies must be designed not only for the present but also for future adaptability. At the same time, the current marginalization of Bruno's subterranean spaces, excluded from the museum's reopened public itinerary, raises critical questions about the sustainability of conservation interventions over time. It calls attention to the need for flexible, community-centred management frameworks capable of accommodating evolving social, institutional, and cultural conditions.

4. Discussion: Hybridity and the Long-Term Sustainability of Conservation Layers

Large monumental complexes make visible that creativity in conservation is exercised across time: in design choices, in programming, and in the capacity to keep conservation layers intelligible and usable. Beyond formal design, creativity here concerns the capacity to articulate compatible programmes, to stage incremental transformations, and to govern long timeframes in which knowledge, needs, and technological possibilities continue to evolve. When read alongside the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa, the former San Giovanni Hospital in Turin becomes a productive testbed for discussing how hybrid outcomes are not only designed, but also maintained, narrated, and renegotiated over time.

At the heart of Bruno's intervention lies a profound awareness of the hybrid nature of architectural heritage. The San Giovanni Hospital, like many historic complexes, is not a fixed artifact but a stratified entity, shaped by successive layers of construction, use, and modification. Bruno's approach consciously embraced this stratification, applying principles of selective conservation. His removal of incongruous 20th-century additions, the restoration of the loggias through the innovative '*vetrata-centina*' system, and the creation of a subterranean level all reflect a clear intent: to restore the building's clarity, while introducing new functions compatible with contemporary needs. This careful balancing act mirrors the core argument discussed during the EAAE workshop in Genoa, particularly the idea that conservation and creation are intrinsically linked processes. Conservation is not merely the preservation of static forms but an active, creative reinterpretation of heritage, continuously shaped by evolving cultural, functional, and social imperatives. Bruno's intervention at San Giovanni embodies this approach, demonstrating how architectural hybridity can become a vehicle for sustaining relevance and usability over time.



FIG. 6. Former San Giovanni Hospital, Turin. One of the exhibition halls of the Regional Museum of Natural Sciences reopened in 2024 after a ten-year closure (photo: Giorgio Danesi, 2025).

However, the current condition of the San Giovanni Hospital also exposes

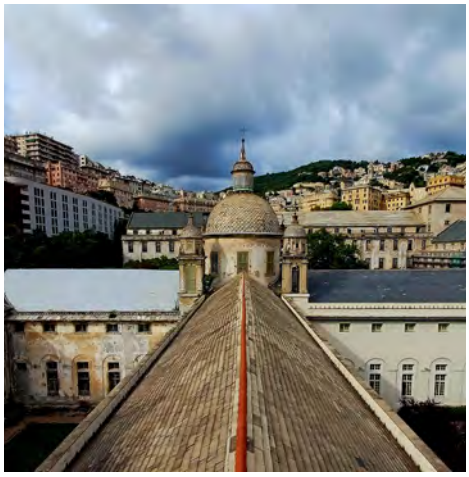


FIG. 7. Albergo dei Poveri, Genoa. Courtyard view during the EAAE Workshop site visit (September 2024). The case is used in the paper as a counterpoint to discuss governance, partial reactivation, and the programme-building dimension of creativity in large-scale heritage reuse (photo: Giorgio Danesi, 2024).

the fragility of such interventions when confronted with shifting institutional priorities and management structures. The marginalization of Bruno's subterranean spaces, excluded from the museum's current itinerary, exemplifies a phenomenon that could be termed the obsolescence of conservation works. What was once considered a forward-thinking solution has, within a few decades, been sidelined, raising critical questions about the long-term sustainability and recognition of conservation efforts themselves. This issue parallels the situation at the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa, where despite the building's monumental significance and partial reuse by the University of Genoa, large portions of the complex remain in a state of abandonment (Musso *et al.*, 2024). Both cases underscore a key challenge: the difficulty of maintaining coherent, inclusive strategies for the management of large-scale historic complexes over time.

Reflecting on Bruno's intervention, it becomes evident that compatibility between new functions and historic structures is not a one-time achievement but requires continuous reassessment, especially when contextualised within the specific cultural and disciplinary frameworks of its time. While Bruno's subterranean level was originally conceived as a solution to integrate museum functions without compromising the historic volume, the subsequent exclusion of these spaces highlights how evolving operational needs and institutional decisions can erode the coherence of even the most carefully planned interventions.

The San Giovanni Hospital also illuminates the broader issue of social and cultural vitality. Bruno's project was not solely focused on physical restoration; it sought to reinsert the building into the city's cultural and institutional landscape, transforming it into a public museum accessible to the community. Yet the recent history of the site, marked by periods of closure and the underutilization of key areas, demonstrates that physical conservation alone is insufficient. Heritage sites must be supported by flexible, community-centred management frameworks, capable of adapting to changing societal expectations and ensuring that spaces remain active contributors to the city's cultural life. In this regard, the comparison with the Albergo dei Poveri is instructive. Both complexes reveal the difficulty of sustaining public use across extensive historic structures, although their governance conditions differ. At San Giovanni, the underground level forms part of a phased reopening programme but remains inaccessible; at the Albergo dei Poveri, the partial occupation by University of Genoa coexists with extensive unused areas.

The conservation of monumental complexes cannot be confined to technical interventions; it must encompass broader socio-political and cultural considerations. The lessons drawn from Bruno's intervention suggest that adaptive reuse strategies need to be conceived not as finite solutions but as open-ended frameworks, responsive to evolving

community needs and urban dynamics. Moreover, the reflections from the workshop underscore the need to embrace stratification and hybridity as conditions of vitality rather than obstacles to authenticity. The San Giovanni Hospital and the Albergo dei Poveri both exemplify how layering – whether architectural, functional, or institutional – can serve as a catalyst for future transformations, provided that conservation policies are sufficiently flexible to accommodate these layers without erasing or marginalizing them.

5. Conclusions: Creativity as Design and as Governance Capacity

San Giovanni in Turin demonstrates how monumental complexes embody cyclical reuse, where each phase of reactivation inevitably reframes prior conservation decisions. Its trajectory (from a 17th-century hospital to a 20th-century site of fragmentation and obsolescence, to its adaptive reuse under Andrea Bruno's guidance, and finally to its current marginalization) exemplifies the cyclical pattern of use, abandonment, reuse, and reinterpretation that characterizes many large-scale heritage complexes.

One of the central reflections emerging from this study is the necessity of approaching conservation not as a finite act but as an ongoing, process-oriented endeavour. Bruno's intervention demonstrates how conservation can serve as a creative act, balancing the removal of what were identified by the project itself as 'incongruous' additions with the careful insertion of contemporary elements. His approach – developed over forty years ago – still resonates strongly with the broader perspective discussed during the EAAE workshop, emphasizing the role of the conservationist not merely as a guardian of material authenticity but as an interpreter, continuously negotiating between past layers and future possibilities.

A key theme throughout the paper has been the productive potential of hybridity. The San Giovanni Hospital's intervention illustrates how new and old can coexist in ways that enrich the architectural and social fabric, provided that the relationship is carefully managed. This echoes the workshop's emphasis on embracing hybridity as a means of ensuring both continuity and innovation. Yet, as the subsequent marginalization of Bruno's subterranean spaces reveals, hybridity must be supported by sustained, flexible governance frameworks. Without long-term, shared management strategies, even the most thoughtful interventions risk falling into obsolescence.

The comparative perspective with the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa reinforces this point by clarifying what 'creativity' may mean when design control is only one part of the equation. Both complexes show that monumental heritage is especially vulnerable when governance and functional responsibilities are fragmented across actors and timeframes. The Turin case demonstrates the generative potential of a coherent intervention strategy yet also reveals how quickly parts of a project can be marginalised when long-term management and public narratives fail to incorporate them. Conversely, the Genoese condition highlights that, in contexts of partial occupation and extensive abandonment, the most decisive creative acts may lie in programme-building, phased reactivation, and everyday management policies capable of minimising loss while keeping future options open. In this sense, creativity becomes a durable operational capacity: the ability to sustain hybrid value through time, rather than a one-off moment of architectural invention. Another crucial insight drawn from this analysis is the interrelation between conservation and social and cultural vitality. Both case studies demonstrate that physical preservation alone is insufficient; heritage must be actively reinserted into the urban and social fabric to remain relevant.

Ultimately, the discussion encourages a shift from project-based thinking to long-duration stewardship, where creativity is the capacity to sustain reinterpretation over time. The in-depth reading of San Giovanni in Turin, placed in dialogue with the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa as a structured counterpoint, shows that cycles of reuse are governed as much by design decisions as by programme-building, institutional coordination, and the maintenance of coherent public narratives. In both cases, the risk is not only material decay but the progressive invisibility of prior conservation layers when responsibilities fragment and strategies lose continuity. A durable conservation/creation agenda therefore requires governance capacity as a form of creativity: the ability to keep hybrid value operative through time, minimising loss while preserving future options for meaningful reactivation. In this sense, conservation/creation is less an event than a negotiated continuity across time, actors, and uses.

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URBAN FABRIC AND EXPRESSIONS OF CREATIVITY WITHIN THE HISTORICAL CITY CENTRE OF GENOA

Carolina Di Biase

Former Professor of Architectural Restoration, Politecnico di Milano, Italy
carolina.dibiase@polimi.it

Creation, Conservation, Historical City

Playing on a contraposition of terms, the series of conservation workshops organised by the EAAE set itself a basic question: Within the approaches and tendencies identifiable in the management of the urban and rural landscapes/environments in 21st-century Europe are there features which may be said to conflict with or hinder the practice of conservation? Adopting a shifting point of view that embraced major cities and capitals in Europe from East to West, the most obvious manifestations of change and transformation in each territorial context were brought into focus through the lens of terms ('demolition', 'regeneration', 'reconstruction', etc.) that seem the very opposite of 'conservation' (itself a notion which is notoriously open to a whole range of interpretations). Thus, for the 2024 workshops held in Genoa, from where the whole project began in 2007, the pairing Conservation/Creation was adopted as a framework for further examination of the present state and future prospects of our cities.

I myself would have avoided the word 'creation' here. Heavily evocative of the divine *afflatus* which the Christian tradition sees as literally 'inspiring' human life at the origin of the world, it seems too high-sounding for the task of architectural planning and design; after all, today more than ever, that endeavour is the result of teamwork, drawing on a range of skills (including the input of digital technologies). Nevertheless, setting aside that nowadays one seems to find 'creatives' primarily in the ephemeral worlds of fashion, advertising and communication strategies, the notion of 'creation' is still integral to that of artistic endeavour, and architecture, after centuries of debate and cavilling, still aspires to the status of art. The new or, for its champions, the 'modern' is defined as such because it abandons prevailing forms and concepts; it marks a rupture and a change in taste and the beginning of a new chapter in the history of architecture. Similarly, as seen by those who actually use it, new architecture erupts within a city against the background of what already exists, transforming how it is both perceived and used. And it is often the case that the measures taken by the bodies responsible for the operative efficiency of infrastructures and urban spaces often highlight the public role of new buildings and constructions.

By the last decades of the 19th century there was an open clash between tradition and innovation – between what already exists and is to be conserved because of its artistic and historic value, and the new which will change the urban space and affect how it is perceived. The issue came to a head largely because of far-reaching schemes of urban renovation and the introduction of new building materials and practices – all of which triggered a radical change in the urban landscape. One witness to these great transformations was Federico Alizeri, who in his 1875 *Illustrated Guide to Genoa* (Alizeri, 1876, p. XII) would both regret the loss of so many historical buildings and express his fascination with

the outcomes of redevelopment. Thus, while pointing out the new beauty of the city, he also invites the reader to consider:

'the damage and changes of fortune that we have witnessed over the past three decades. Private and public buildings have been razed to the ground or, for a variety of reasons, their character has been distorted; oratories and churches have been demolished or closed; across the city there have been changes of various kinds. Yet in the middle of all this upheaval affecting things that are part of our national heritage, many new edifices have been raised and new civic institutions have flourished; broad streets have been opened up for the convenience and well-being of the public. And one cannot say if all this is to be viewed as a misfortune for valued monuments or as a contribution to shared prosperity [...]. The two suburban areas that once offered delightful retreats for our ancestors have now practically become part of the city centre [...]. And the same is almost true of the pleasant hills of Albaro, the slopes of Sturla, the sombre tumuli of Staglieno and its magnificent necropolis, and of the splendid ample coastline of Sampierdarena [...]'.

It is no coincidence that in the early years of the 20th century Alois Reigl, who as *Generalkonservator* oversaw policies for conservation within the whole of the Austro-Hungarian empire, noted a sharpening conflict between the architecture that embodied the contemporary world (as was inscribed upon the façade of the famous *Secessionsgebäude* [Secession Building]: *Der Zeit ihre Kunst, der Kunst ihre Freiheit)* and the architecture of the past. Yet in doing so, he also noted how, whilst the 'value of the new' had always had its attractions, a growing perception of the 'value of the old' was one of the gains of modernity itself. The debate regarding the opposition between modern architectural creation and the protection of the historical fabric of 'old cities' would continue throughout the early decades of the 20th century, to then flare up again in the period after the Second World War, when the need for rebuilding generated massive property speculation in response to the demand for new housing stocks, the spread of industrialisation and internal migration. But given the unprecedented levels of construction work within our cities during the second half of last century – levels which show no signs of declining – can we still pose the issue in terms of such a clear-cut contrast? Furthermore, will we be able



FIG. 1. The historic centre of Genoa as seen from the Spianata di Castelletto. past the buildings on Strada Nuova/ Via Garibaldi and as far as the harbour arch.

to go on using the term 'creation' when, due to daily advances in such technology, it will be A.I. that generates the new models and designs for our architecture and our cities?

Meanwhile, 'conservation' has its own associations. It not only evokes ideas of economic sagacity, continuance of old customs and attachment to glorious ancient traditions, it also brings to mind other attitudes and practices: adaptation to situations of need or limited resources; the household virtues of saving, repairing and re-using (in all of which the generations that preceded our own gave ample proof of their acuity and inventiveness). Within the domain of the cultural heritage – of historical/artistic artefacts – conservation is primarily seen as concerned with the maintenance of objects, sites and environments which are a precious resource that must be preserved as a shared inheritance to be handed on to future generations. Nowadays, this focus is in part inspired by ecological concerns about reducing wastage and the loss of resources that cannot be renewed – a category which certainly includes historical cities - whilst at the same time striving to exalt the beauty, old and new, to be found within such cities.

The discussions of the group of scholars that made-up the EAAE conservation workshop in Genoa reached conclusions which are in line with the above comments. For example, with regard to the association between the idea of creativity and a range of different practices, the Final Presentation by Group A commented: 'Creativity in the built legacy's transmission [is expressed] through use, reuse, adaptation, transformation, and preservation', so there is 'circularity between conservation and creativity'.

Bearing in mind that a city is both the site of centuries-old permanence and the result of an unbroken process of change, the return of the Workshop to Genoa seems particularly significant. Not only does Genoa – perhaps more than any other city – clearly illustrate the interweave of these two phenomena, it has figured as a veritable *topos* in discussions of the developing history and culture of Italy's historic cities (Bobbio and Musso, 2020). Over the period from the 1970s to the early 2000s, the work of committed scholars and competent public administrators promoted a range of cultural and policy initiatives, research projects and urban redevelopment schemes in the city; think, for example, of the Old Port, which is now an open maritime area enhanced by the presence of new and inventive creations by renowned architects. At the same time, there was also a focus on the 'maintenance' of the historic city centre and the viable exploitation of its architectural heritage. An example of this latter came in 2006, when UNESCO recognised as a World Heritage Site the entire system of the so-called *Strade Nuove* – from the original Strada Nuova (now Via Garibaldi), which opened in the 16th century, to the late-18th century Via Cairoli that finally linked it up with Via Balbi, itself the fruit of a public-private initiative in the early 17th century; the entire project had guaranteed road access to the city from the west. That UNESCO recognition also included 42 of the 163 aristocratic *palazzi* mentioned in the famous *rolli* [rolls] that had listed such residences; the various lists date from 1576, 1588, 1599, 1614 and 1644. It was these *palazzi* that, depending upon their size, magnificence and comfort, were included in lotteries to decide which should provide accommodation for the Republic's high-ranking guests and their entourages (an honour whose costs were to be borne entirely by the building's owner)[1].

As it has come down to us, the 'urban artefacts' of Genoa itself – as defined by Ennio Poleggi, who was its great historian – also comprises the work carried out over the last few decades. Thus, instead of talking of 'conservation' and 'creation' as contraposed, we should think of them as forming another rhetorical figure: a hendiadys, defined as 'a com-

bination of two words to express a single concept'. This, it seems to me, better captures the spatio-temporal mosaic that makes up the historical city, which is the result of a centuries-long process of additions, elevations, demolitions and substitutions. In Genoa, the core affected by this process dates from the Middle Ages and still forms a compact area around the waterfront of the port. As one can see from the panoramic vantage-point of the Castelletto esplanade – the name records the presence of a medieval castle, ultimately demolished in the mid-19th century – the more ancient buildings in the city appear huddled within a central area in a mere jumble of slate roofs, interspersed with bell towers and church cupolas. Beyond these are the outsize forms of the Piazza Dante 'skyscrapers' and the Piacentini Tower (1935–40), the Stage Tower of the Teatro Carlo Felice (completed in 1991), with, to the right, first the so-called *Matitone* (Big Pencil) designed in the 1980s, and then the famous *Lanterna* [Lighthouse]. Tracing a line further uphill, the sequence of *palazzi* along the former Strada Nuova marks a boundary between the medieval urban fabric and the modern city.

Exploring the Streets of the Old City Centre

Drawn up as part of Workshop 2024, the map entitled 'A Walk through the Historical Centre of Genoa' was intended for our international group of visitors; it charts various routes through the dense weave of the medieval city, along the old narrow streets, small squares, alleyways and flights of steps that link up with the roads and piazzas of the contemporary city. The focal points of these routes – churches, private and public *palazzi*, museums, theatres and other public-use spaces – form a sort of catalogue that combines the architecture of the past and the major public and private schemes that right up until a few decades ago were transforming the layout of Genoa. Photographs and brief captions provide information regarding the date of buildings and the events in popular culture with which they or their locations might be associated. Illustrating how creative forces have been at work within the city over time, this information covers: the aristocratic *palazzi* that defined the public space around the core of the medieval streets; the buildings of various sizes and dates which were created within an already existing urban fabric; the structures that were rebuilt after clearance of obsolete structures or the damage caused by bombardment (from the sea in 1684, from the air in 1943). The map also gives an idea of the spaces 'torn apart' to make way for new or re-aligned roads in the 19th and 20th centuries, and the massive destruction which led to the emergence of radical plans of urban renewal in the early 1900s and in the 1950s–60s.

Before architectural creativity actively engaged with the more democratic understanding of 'conservation' that has come to prevail in Italy over the last fifty years, it found expression alongside a more 19th-century practice of conservation, which focused on the restoration of historic monuments. This latter approach involved exploration and recovery of the medieval past either as reappraised at the end of the 19th century by such great connoisseurs as Alfredo D'Andrade (see the work at Porta Soprana and Palazzo San Giorgio) or as recovered by work of *debadigeonnage* and veritable 'excavation' within the exterior walls of buildings; in the 1930s and even later, these interventions brought to light columns, capitals, arcades and medieval windows. Subsequently, in Genoa as elsewhere, the 20th century saw a change in building styles and techniques, a move away from traditional methods, from design 'in the style of'. This shift meant that, from the

post-war period onwards, the work to rebuild or complete buildings that had been damaged or destroyed by bombing clearly eschewed the anachronistic in favour of the contemporary (see, for example, the Falcone Theatre and the University Library in Via Balbi). Restoration envisaged as the recovery of what had been lost, the revival of a supposedly uncontaminated 'original', was by then restricted to a much narrower field.

The Rediscovery of the Medieval City

In his rich range of publications, Poleggi drew upon his years of research into the history of the material fabric of Genoa to illustrate the resilience shown by the oldest core of the city as it took on its present heavily stratified form, in which each architectural feature and building bears witness to the history of the city. Such work made an essential contribution towards the protection and correct exploitation of that fabric. Indeed, when in the late 1970s, the building boom had run out of steam but its irreversible impact on the city was plain for all to see, Poleggi called for a focus of attention on the city centre, by then surrounded and almost overwhelmed by newly constructed areas. That ancient urban fabric, he argued, was neglected not only by the city's inhabitants but also by the scholars, and as a result it seemed to be abandoned to its fate. In order to rectify this state of affairs, new research was required, drawing upon both the wealth of material available in the Genoa archives and the techniques of post-classical archaeology in order to acquire a well-grounded understanding of the extant physical traces of seven centuries of urban history. The work *Una città portuale del Medioevo* (Grossi Bianchi and Poleggi, 1979), published in 1979, examines the various phases in the formation of Genoa, charting the periods of and motivations for the changes it had undergone right up to the modern age. The book comes complete with a number of graphics in which archaeological and archive information is 'projected' onto urban planimetries that are based on late-18th-century cadastral maps This makes it possible to chart the development of plot ownership, size, combinations and boundaries over the course of time; there are also contemporary images of the places described (even if these are often sites in which it is difficult to get meaningful photographs of buildings). Now, almost 50 years later, all of this material forms a visual document of the condition the old city centre was in before its recovery. As the Introduction to the book puts it, this publication was less an urban history of Genoa than 'a synthesis of information from all available sources, intended to demonstrate how the historical centre of Genoa is a physical entity whose every component bears the marks of the urban changes which, from the Middle Ages right up to the modern age, have helped to form it; how the various factors that determined those changes are all an expression of the culture of the city'. And what emerges from this account is 'an extremely dynamic process [...] in which the material results of previous phases [in the city's life] may change in import but continue to have an effect upon the phases that come after them, generating a compound of depth and complexity'. In other words, 'the image of the city arises from the diachronic interaction of successive superimpositions and substitutions within a layout that remains fundamentally medieval' (Poleggi, 1989; Grendi, 2000).

Poleggi stressed that the layout of the city should be approached as a complex whole; overcoming the limits of studies predicated primarily on the major monuments, any analysis should also look at the residential and collective (Poleggi, 2001) use of the urban fabric. Such uses, in fact, reflect the multiple facets of the society that had occupied the city,

charting the changes therein and the vicissitudes of the different forms of government that had existed in Genoa (from the time of the medieval *consoli* to the oligarch-ruled Republic). It is safe to say that, in Northern Italy at least, these considerations of method have made their mark on the approach to conservation, which in the case of Genoa also profited from advances in archaeological knowledge of the urban fabric thanks to the important work of Tiziano Mannoni and his research team.

The history of Genoa as a port begins with its links to the major maritime markets in the Mediterranean. First came trade with Sardinia, Corsica and Provence, then, stimulated by the Crusades, with the Holy Land, Syria and Morocco. Ultimately, Genoese vessels were sailing to the centres of Atlantic trade (from Cadiz to England and the Netherlands) and further East (from Constantinople into the Black Sea, Crimea and even as far as China)[2].

There were various projects that one might describe as decisive for the form of Genoa's urban fabric. One of these was the construction of the houses within the long arcades of the *Ripa Maris* (nowadays known as Sottoripa), which, according to the regulations by the *consoli* (who laid down requirements regarding their size, building materials and structure) were to be occupied by workshops and commercial premises; another comprised the different phases in the building of the city walls, which began with the Carolingian walls, were expanded in 1155 to embrace the eastern district (the modern-day area from Via San Luca to Porta Santa Fede) and then in successive phases were extended further east and north to contain the ever more densely-populated areas that lay outside existing defences. And, of course, there were the *Torri* [towers] that served a military and residential role for the powerful noble families competing for supremacy in different areas of the city (for example, the Guelph families of the Fieschi, De Volta and the Grimaldi, and the Ghibelline families of the Doria and the Spinola). For centuries, in fact, there were violent clashes between the old feudal nobility and those families of more humble origin that had only recently gained access to public office, merchants and craftsmen called *popolari* 'who by virtue of wealth, personal qualities or prestigious marriages had, from the 12th century onwards, begun participating in government' (Petti Balbi, 1985; Guglielmotti, 2022). The resulting alliances and conflicts would make their mark on the morphology of the city and the processes of construction and land appropriation.

Una città portuale nel Medioevo outlines the mechanisms at work in the settlement of the city, charting a topography that illustrates the various stages through which the city expanded and consolidated. In doing so, the book examines: the outlines of territorial boundaries, of the *compagne* (areas of the old nobility) and *conestagie* (occupied by humbler families); the fragmented road network that spread out from the port, carrying traffic along roads whose very names reflect the characteristics of their layout and the morphology of the terrain they occupied (*carrubeus, platea, crosa* ...); the various seats of the different organs of government; the parish and cathedral churches of the secular clergy and the convents and monasteries of the various religious orders; the sites of production and trade (arcades and markets); the nuclei of neighbouring houses that were occupied by the members of the various aristocratic 'clans', each with their *curie* (small private squares), loggias and churches. These conglomerations, identified in the 1414 registry of land ownership (the *Possessionum)* can be associated with the *alberghi*, a famous feature of historical Genoa. A social structure bound together by common economic interests, an *Albergo* was intended to defend an extended noble family against pressures that might have undermined its wealth and status. Crucial to an understanding of the physical fabric

of the city, these *alberghi* have been a focus of interest for scholars in Genoa and beyond (Heers, 1962; 1974; Owen Hughes, 1975; Balard, 2019), one of the most often cited works on the subject being by Edoardo Grendi, who described them in these terms: 'An *albergo* was an institution defined both demographically and topographically. In other words, it was based upon the principle of organising the population on the basis of a shared cognomen, hence it also served as a principle for the organization of urban space, and ultimately of socio-political differences' (Grendi, 1975). In fact, all of the households that gathered around a powerful noble family adopted its surname (adding their original surname prefaced by the adverb *olim* [formerly]) and were obliged to reside in the immediate vicinity of the house of the dominant family; they were also forbidden to sell their homes to outsiders. Fiscal records for the year 1459 make it possible to number the registered properties within the city at 5,650, 3,660 of which were within the walls of 1155 and belonged to noble families, who thus controlled the central area of the city.

Over the period from the 14th to the 16th century, the number, wealth and demographical structure of Genoa's *alberghi* varied: from a maximum of around 90, they fell to 74 (registered in 1414) and then declined to just 28 (only five of these belonging to families of *popolari*) in the constitutional reform introduced by Andrea Doria in 1528. That reform, which saw the French protectorate over Genoa replaced by Spanish hegemony, marked the birth of the oligarch republic: doges were elected for two years rather than life, and to put an end to the struggles for political dominance that had undermined civic coexistence and caused extensive harm to the city's interests, the factions of *nobili* and *popolari* were abolished and replaced by a single rank of 'noble citizens', between whom the various public offices were shared. However, it was not long before the old rivalries re-emerged between the 'old nobility' and the 'new nobility', respectively identified with the Portico di San Luca and the Portico di San Pietro (their points of assembly), and these conflicts were only resolved with the passing of the *Leges Novae* in 1576.

The weakening of religious prohibitions on lending at interest saw the beginning of the 'Century of Genoa', with the city's aristocratic bankers involved in massive financial transactions that supplied the coffers of the Spanish monarch whilst also making them key presences in the money markets of Besançon, Piacenza, Bruges and Antwerp. It was these profound political, economic and social changes which triggered what Poleggi calls 'the Metamorphosis of the Medieval City' at the start of the Modern Era. The public body known as the *Padri del Comune* [City Fathers] undertook projects that involved thinning out some areas of the urban fabric to improve the road network and enhance public spaces. At the same time, privately funded construction work added new floors to small houses, thus increasing the housing stock available to the humbler classes, whilst aristocrats asserted their prestige through the construction of opulent palaces, both within and without the medieval core of the city. When created inside the old medieval city, these *palazzi* involved: the combination of a number of existing residential properties; the walling up of street porticoes; the closure of street-level trade premises and workshops (the reform of 1528 actually forbade those enrolled in the Book of the Nobility to practise the 'mechanical arts'); the creation of a new façade to form a unified street front. The interiors and decorative features considered suitable for such noble *palazzi* comprised: a layout of atrium, monumental staircase and loggia providing access to the various reception spaces that made up the *Piano di Sala*; other floors for business activities, winter accommodation and servant lodgings; extensive decorative schemes of frescoes, paintings, sculpture and

precious furnishings for the reception rooms. These were the private aristocratic residences whose opulence and comfort so impressed Peter Paul Rubens that he stressed they should not be overlooked, adding that 'their number means they make up the body of the city'; he himself had been the guest of numerous patrician families in Genoa, producing sumptuous portraits of opulently dressed lords and ladies. Taking their homes as a model that might be adopted in the 'Northern Provinces', Rubens illustrated these *palazzi* in the drawings of floor plans and elevations in his *Palazzi di Genova*, published in 1622[3]; a second edition, perhaps published in 1626, would also include the opulent houses built by families of the New Nobility. In his Introduction to the work, Rubens informs 'the Gentle Reader' that 'Just as this Republic is made up of Gentlemen, so the Structures they build are of great beauty and comfort.' The *palazzi* took the form of compact blocks, most without an internal courtyard, and comprised a large central hall leading on to neighbouring apartments; even when they housed numerous families, they still maintained the scale of a private residence. In effect, therefore, they were very different in scale and use to the type of massive palaces being built for 'absolute monarchs' and their courts. Rubens' drawings do not even give the name of those who commissioned the *palazzi* 'because in this world *permutat dominos & transit in latera iura* [the owners change and the property rights pass to others]'; indeed, by the time the book was published some of these buildings had already been sold on by their original owners.

Continuity and Change in the use of Housing Stocks in the Old City Centre

The discussion in Poleggi and Grossi Bianchi's *Città Portuale* benefits a great deal from the work of historians of the Medieval and Early Modern periods that had been produced in the 1960s–70s. Following up various lines of research that had emerged over previous decades, scholars reconsidered various issues, aiming to explore: the dynamics at work in the behaviour of different social groups; processes of land appropriation and settlement; methods of capital investment in commercial and financial operations. Another matter they explore is the quality of aristocratic residences built within the city and on country estates, and one point here of great interest is that the transformation that turned Genoese merchants into financiers with highly developed tastes in art and interior decoration was largely the result of their experience in the cities of Flanders (Petti Balbi, 2003), the very places that were the target market for Rubens' own *Palazzi di Genova*.

Extensive archaeological and archive research has also made it possible to correct estimates with regard to the number of towers that existed in the city. Located within the first ring of city walls, these *torri*, which made a profound impression on visitors to the city, dated from the 11th to the 13th century. We now know them to have numbered around 80, of which just 18 have survived; most of the demolitions occurred from the 14th to the 16th century; some of the towers simply underwent a drastic reduction in height which made it possible for them to be incorporated into new buildings. What also emerged from the research was that the tower traditionally identified as the *Torre degli Embriaci* had actually belonged to the De Castro family; the Embriaci family's tower and adjoining house were actually located a little further east (Cagnana and Giordano, 2024).

Subsequent archive research has also provided information on the *alberghi* formed by aristocratic residences, which are now understood to have been more flexible in their relation to public space and in their architectural composition than would appear in *Città*

Portuale. For example, it appears not to have been the case that a *domus* and associated *domunculae* were always combined with a *domus magnae*: only around fifteen *alberghi* declared to have had the latter in 1414, whilst there are also cases of isolated *domus magnae* (Bezzina, 2022).

When strolling through the old city centre, this historical research provides a precious guide, enabling one to recognise some of the signs left by successive phases of construction work. Perhaps regarding the layout of public spaces in relation to the height and density of buildings, this evidence also provides a 'key' for reading the facades and elevations of individual structures, which combine various features: cantilever arches that project from the first floor of buildings; squared blocks of stone in basement walls and pilasters now stripped of stucco; surfaces in two colours of stone; *trifore* (three-light windows) co-existing with cheap modern windows; plasterwork in white and black stripes; key bosses that are sometimes placed one above the other, indicating the resort to truss rods to counteract the thrust of vaulted roofs or the weight of additional floors. As for the decorative features, there are numerous refined overdoor sculpted reliefs, some of them attributed to the Gaggini family; sometimes these are to be found on the facades of centuries-old aristocratic residences, but they can also be seen marooned above an aluminium doorframe in a building that is only a few decades old.

Religious life in the city is reflected in the numerous votive aedicules that have survived the vicissitudes of city life; most of them are dedicated to the Virgin and originated in the memorable Coronation of the Madonna as the Queen of Genoa in 1637, when she was recognised as 'overseeing' the government of the city[4]. There are also churches and small squares belonging to a particular aristocratic clan and surrounded by their *palazzi* or opened up as public spaces (for example, Piazza San Matteo, which from the 12th century onwards was the enclave of the Doria family) (Guglielmotti, 2021). Further traces of aristocratic developments in the city can be seen in the imposing stuccoed or painted facades which, from the 16th to 17th century, were inserted within the medieval urban fabric; there are also facades created in the 19th century for *palazzi* that had been left without a frontage when new roads were cut through the heart of the medieval city.

The coexistence of different worlds, of past and present, concerns not only the material fabric of the city but also the ways in which public and private spaces are used. In attempting to chart a new topography of the city, Roberto Bobbio observed: 'On the one hand one finds the survival of forms and situations of city life that, apparently, have remained almost unchanged for generations, whilst on the other there are sites that have changed profoundly, even with respect to the recent past' (Bobbio and Vaccaro, 2020, p. 27). One example he gives of this second case is that of the new Faculty of Architecture, built in 1990 by a team headed by Ignazio Gardella and located in the eastern area of San Silvestro, a part of the old city which suffered severe bomb damage in the Second World War. The presence of students here has led to the creation of new shops and entertainment/hospitality facilities that have breathed new life into the Sarzano area, one of the oldest and poorest districts in the city.

The discussions held during the Genoa Workshop raised the present-day use of the arcades of Sottoripa as a significant example of change and continuity: very few of the present-day owners who inherited the shops within these arcades have carried on the

businesses that used to occupy these spaces, which still serve as shops but now provide cheap products, often imports from the native countries of the present-day tenants. Following the itinerary charted by the EAAE Conservation Workshop along such streets as Via San Luca and Via Cairoli, one often encounters empty shops still displaying 'Closing Down' notices. However, in Genoa, which is of course not the only city affected by the disappearance of traditional local businesses and craft workshops, real attention is being paid to the survival of 'historic shops', their refined furnishings and characteristic shop signs being recognised as a key part of the urban landscape, and an important factor in promoting better-quality tourism.[5] Protection of such features is always easier in areas frequented by the more affluent.

Registering impressions of what has changed and what has remained unchanged in the use of city spaces may not prove that useful when it comes to understanding the mechanisms at work in what is the oldest area in the city. More is to be gained by drawing upon population statistics for this area, studies of demographical dynamics and sociological research into the composition of the local population over the past few decades. For example, the studies published in the 2020 *Genova Centro Storico* provide many answers to questions regarding the provenance of the individuals and families that make up a shifting population, and the periods of growth and decline in the occupancy of accommodation in the old city centre (obviously excluding the palaces of the city's *Magnifici,* which in these democratic times are almost entirely occupied by public or private institutions). Such information makes it possible to evaluate the impact that plans and projects for urban redevelopment have had on trends in occupation densities and the use of public spaces. For example, a map in the text (plate 9, p. 45) highlights the almost total separation between the so-called *Movida*, 'nightlife places', and the 'places frequented by foreigners'. The latter – concentrated around Via Prè and Via Maddalena, the arcades of Sottoripa and the nearby Canneto il Curto – are, unlike Via del Campo, yet to find their own Fabrizio de André.

Memories of my own research in Genoa, carried out many years ago, make me realise that the poor and disinherited of the present day, most of whom are African immigrants, are now concentrated in some of the areas of the city which centuries ago housed the poor members of the population. As one goes up Via Maddalena to Piazza Fontane Marose one still encounters female sex workers, often young immigrant women, in an area which was for centuries occupied by brothels (the same area along whose upper boundary the 16th-century *Strada Nuova* was created for 'the masters of the city'). Similarly, in the past as well, the houses along Via Prè; those that belonged to the Balbi family and extended from behind their aristocratic *palazzi* all the way to area of the *Roso* or clustered around the Church of Sant'Antonio Abate (demolished in the 19th century); those in Via della Pace – all were rented out one or two rooms at a time, with accommodation occupying the first, second, third – until the last one *ad tectum* – floors. The rents were minimal but, even though short-term, the contracts were rarely completed, with each room or 'floor' having to be rented out again because the initial tenant could not pay their bills (Di Biase, 1993, pp. 113–114).

To end on an optimistic note. During the 2024 Workshop our colleagues in Genoa did not fail to point out the occasions and means whereby the population that inhabits the old city centre manifests its sense of belonging to the place; their desire to 'reappropriate' their surroundings. These find expression in such simple gestures as the potted plants

laid out along Via Prè, or in the 'Joint Supper of the Historic Centre' of Genoa. Held every spring, this involves laying out trestle tables that stretch across three districts of the city, from Via Prè to the Molo and on along Via Fossatello and Via San Luca up to Piazza San Giorgio. It is an event open to all members of the community, both Genoa-born and immigrants, each of whom brings food that is an expression of their culture of origin. For an evening at least the barriers of inequality are broken down.

Notes

1 Indeed, there were three different urns (*bussoli*) for the lotteries, concerning three different categories of *palazzo*, respectively deemed suitable for: kings and popes, princes and dukes, or lesser noblemen.

2 See the papers delivered at the conference '*L'Impero di Genova. Dal Mar Nero all'Atlantico, la grande espansione nel Medioevo*', Genoa, 19–20 January 2024. L'Impero di Genova, (first part): *Early Expansion* ; L'Impero di Genova, (second and third part): *Eastwards and Westwards*; L'Impero di Genova, (fourth part): *The Black Sea*. Concluding comments by Alessandro Barbero, and round table discussion.

3 Following the exhibitions *Rubens e Genova* in 1977–1978 and *L'età di Rubens* in 2004, the four-hundredth anniversary of the Antwerp publication of the volume was marked by a large exhibition held in Genoa's Palazzo Ducale and entitled *Rubens a Genova* (October 2022 - January 2023), curated by A. Orlando e N. Büttner; exhibition catalogue published by Electa, Genoa 2022.

4 These votive aedicules - the so-called *madonnette dei carrugi* [Madonnas of the Alleyways] - have been the subject of recent in-depth research aimed at guaranteeing that at least part of them are restored and included within tourist itineraries (Vecchiattini and Moggia, 2023).

5 The web site *Botteghe Storiche di Genova* (n.d.) gives images, information and itineraries regarding the oldest and most famous shops in the city, as well as regarding *osterie* and other premises typical of popular culture.

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OLD AND NEW AS DIMENSIONS FOR CREATING THE FUTURE: ARCHITECTURES AND COMMUNITIES
A PARALLEL BETWEEN THE CASE OF ALBERGO DEI POVERI, GENOA, ITALY AND THE SAXON FORTIFIED CHURCH FROM DEALU FRUMOS, SIBIU, ROMANIA

Elena-Codina Dușoiu

'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, Romania
imuau_relations@yahoo.com

I. Introduction. Architectural Heritage as a Resource for Creation: A Perspective on Functional Regeneration through Education

The topic of building rehabilitation and urban regeneration involves a complex series of terms, arranged in a gradual sequence that starts with preservation and concludes with the concept of reconstruction. While 'preservation involves the minimal repair and maintenance of remains in their existing state, restoration involves the removal of accretions to return a building to an earlier state. Reconstruction also involves returning a building to an earlier state but involves introducing new – or old – materials to the FABRIC' (Forsyth, 2007, p. 1). On the other hand, the same author observes that conservation is a polyvalent operation, able to combine more than one of the previously defined concepts and cover the need to adapt buildings to new uses. 'Conservation is fundamentally a European concept, arising from a reaction to the scraping and stylistic rebuilding tendencies of early "restoration" and built upon a growing appreciation for modern historical thinking' (Jokilehto, 1999, p. 78). We can deeply question this culture of conservation, so characteristic of our world, in terms of authenticity, usefulness, traditional values and personal experience of space, with all senses involved.

The complex experience of space, not dealing only with abstract concepts such as 'function' or 'structure', is defined by Christopher Alexander using a model of several layers of patterns, in an attempt to 'feel' the quality of a space. We can consider patterns of space, defined by the 'patterns of relationship among the elements' of a building, patterns of events, 'living patterns, patterns that can be shared' (Alexander, 1979, p. 85). 'Each pattern is a rule which describes what you have to do to generate the entity which it defines' (Alexander, 1979, p. 182).

Harmony is created when patterns in the world manage to 'collaborate' with one another, allowing an ineffable construction of life spontaneously, inspired by nature. 'A flower cannot be made but only generated from a seed. […] The quality of life is just like that: it cannot be made but only generated' (Alexander, 1979, pp. 157–160).

In the same way, we have to consider the fact that building rehabilitation must take into consideration several layers (patterns) for architectural intervention: functional, structural and constructive approaches (the classical definition of architecture), but also aesthetic, decorative, conceptual and symbolic patterns, which constitute a basis for future creation.

'Solutions for the future must be sought in the past. No transformation is so irreversible as to destroy the experiences of the past, united in the core of tradition. Those come to light whenever favourable opportunities arise. History decants the true values, and the layers "written" behind the current function of a building survive in the most unexpected

forms. The possibility of reading these layers depends on the effort that we are willing to make, as interpreters of architectural discourse' (Dușoiu, 2022, p. 10).

As architects, we may ask ourselves what the correct way is to transform a building and whether it is legitimate to create something new, according to our own personality, in an old building. Alexander advocates a simple, personal approach: 'The power to make buildings beautiful lies in each of us already. […] We are afraid, perhaps, that without images and methods, chaos will break loose; worse still, that unless we use images of some kind, ourselves, our own creation will itself be chaos' (Alexander, 1979, p. 14). Following the same line, Peter Zumthor emphasises architectural space as perceived atmosphere. 'We perceive atmosphere through our emotional sensibility – a form of perception that works incredibly quickly, and which we humans evidently need to help us survive' (Zumthor, 2006, p. 13). Zumthor proposes as guidelines for the creation of the new project the 'magic of the real', 'material compatibility', listening to the 'sound of a space', feeling 'the temperature of a space' and feeling 'layers of intimacy'. He also refers to the need for 'surrounding objects', perhaps the same 'things of your life' defined by C. Alexander.

From this perspective, we may ask ourselves what the correct approach is in the conservation of architectural heritage, in order to respect the layers of values of the past and at the same time allow the creation of a new sustainable life in rehabilitated spaces. What is the proper function for a redundant building? What are the issues that define a good architectural intervention (architectural scale, the needs of existing communities, and the structure and shape of the existing building)? What are the new functions that we usually prefer? Do we tend to choose 'creative' functions for the adaptive reuse of redundant old buildings? In fact, most present building conversions refer to cultural or educational uses, which constitute natural environments for creation, understood in several dimensions (art, crafts, knowledge and spiritual creation). Education serves as a proper catalyst in the regenerative process of buildings. When students learn within historic environments, they engage with history in a tangible way, gaining a deeper understanding of place, identity and continuity. 'People cannot maintain their spiritual roots and their connections to the past if the physical world they live in does not also sustain these roots,' observed Christopher Alexander (Alexander, 1977, p. 132). Education clearly helps to preserve these community roots and ensures a creative environment in which to perpetuate them in the future. At the same time, Alexander advocates open, flexible educational space, especially in universities. 'Concentrated, cloistered universities, with closed admission, policies and rigid procedures which dictate who may teach a course, kill opportunities for learning' (Alexander, 1977, p. 232). Rather, he imagines the 'university as marketplace', a continuous, enthusiastic exchange of knowledge and information. This perspective is very useful when conceiving a new architectural life for a heritage building.

This discourse is supported by the deep analysis of two case studies, with apparently different destinies: a Saxon fortified church from Transylvania, Romania (13th century), and a huge social building from Genoa, Italy (17th century). Though they belong to different historical periods and places, the two buildings have in common their functional rehabilitation solutions, both related to university education, as well as their initial purpose to be conceived for and destinated to communities . We consider this association of functions not to be random, but to emerge as a natural solution for the resilient preservation of such unique architectural ensembles.

The creative perspective in conceiving a new function for a heritage building intersects with the pragmatic one. Functionally regenerating heritage buildings through education promotes environmental sustainability by default. Reusing existing structures reduces the need for new construction and minimises the environmental footprint. At the same time, it supports local economies, preserves traditional skills, and strengthens social cohesion by fostering inclusive and meaningful public spaces. In essence, architectural heritage should not be seen as a relic of the past but as a platform for the future. Through educational reuse, we can unlock its full potential – not just as a physical resource, but as a source of knowledge, inspiration and community empowerment.

II. The Challenge of the Saxon Fortified Churches from Transylvania: A Heritage Still in Search of Its Users

Saxon fortified churches are unique architectural complexes whose history begins in the 12th century, when the Saxon population was brought from Germany to settle on the borders of Transylvania, with the aim of defending it against invasions by migratory peoples (especially the Tatars). Starting in the 14th century, this new population created one of the most elaborate defence systems in Europe, represented by a series of fortified churches, basically characterised by their complex functionality: religious space, fortress, food storage, workshops, emergency housing, shelter for domestic animals, etc. In fact, in case of siege, it was assumed that the entire village was able to move and continue living its normal life in the citadel.

'Around the middle of the 14th century, in the Saxon cities, the construction of parish churches begins, which, in terms of size, far exceed the previous Romanesque churches (...) In the 15th century, the municipal activity also included the rural area. It can be seen how technical solutions and architectural details were taken over from urban defence constructions and applied to church fortresses' (Fabini, 2012, p. 18).

'O quam beata res publica, o quam felix communitas, quae temporae pacis considerat bella', says an inscription found in the tower of Senereuş (Mureş district) – 'What a joyful congregation, what a happy community, which in times of peace thinks of war!' (Dușoiu, 2019, p. 519). The Saxon community had a cooperative character. 'The way of working the settlement's lands, that of the triennial rotation, required, to a large extent, a unitary approach, the individual being obliged to subordinate himself to the work rhythm of the others' (Fabini, 2012, p. 17).

The truth is that few fortified churches have actually faced wars or battles. In most cases, their robust appearance was able to deter potential enemies and convince them to renounce any conflict. For this reason, the 150 fortresses still existing in the areas of Târnave, Hârtibaciu, Sibiu, Rupea and Țara Bârsei had the opportunity to become landmarks in the landscapes of the places where they belong, creating an architectural identity for the communities that developed their lives around them until the 20th century. The fortified Saxon churches contributed to the creation of a specific landscape, translated into various layers of understanding: the relationship between the dominant volumes of the buildings and nature, a specific profile for the medieval dwellings, the creation of a typical urban fabric around the fortresses, and a strong anthropological component illustrated by tradition and community.

Unfortunately, in the 20th century, during the communist regime, Transylvania faced a huge problem of depopulation, with the majority of Saxons emigrating to Germany.

This fate was the origin of the current difficulties in revitalising this exceptional heritage (recognised as part of UNESCO). Without an Evangelical community capable of using and caring for the fortified churches and facing the natural problems caused by their physical decline and ageing, this heritage needs a coherent strategy to be given new life, the only reasonable solution being a change in architectural use. Some of the more than 100 Saxon fortified churches, still existing in an integral shape, have already had the chance to undergo a deep rehabilitation process, becoming European examples of good practice. The most outstanding case is the citadel from Alma Vii, which became a real centre of socialisation and a keeper of tradition for the local community, for the Saxon community established in Germany, which visits the place annually, and for tourists. The rehabilitation of the Alma Vii church, realised by the Mihai Eminescu Trust, has become an international example and won the prestigious Europa Nostra prize for heritage in 2024.

Together with Alma Vii, the Saxon fortified church from Dealu Frumos also had the chance to be regenerated for a new life, becoming the Centre of Studies for Vernacular Architecture founded by the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism from Bucharest, through the concession of the building to the University for 30 years.

III. Albergo dei Poveri from Genoa: A Singular Building for Its Context

Albergo dei Poveri is a singular building in the coherent context of the urban fabric of Genoa. What the analysis of the 'Green Group' that worked during the IX EAAE Conservation Network Workshop (Conservation/Creation) pointed out was that it is 'out of scale' and constitutes a 'microcosm' in itself (EAAE, 2024). However, what can also be observed is its adaptation to the landscape and topography, its upper part and terrace offering splendid perspectives towards the whole Gulf of Genoa.

Here is some historical information about the building:

'In 1653, the small valley of Carbonara, behind the centre of Genoa, was chosen as the site for the Cyclopean factory of the Albergo dei Poveri: a gigantic citadel of charity – as it was understood at the time – which, in its early stages, from 1655 onwards, was largely financed by the commitment and income of the nobleman Emanuele Brignole. The complex was conceived as a grandiose quadrilateral intersected by a cross, with the church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception at its centre. The enormous cost of the construction, which was financed entirely by charitable bequests deposited in the Banco di San Giorgio and by private donations, prolonged the work for more than two centuries. In the middle of the 19th century, the socio-cultural conditions of the city changed radically and the Albergo was left unfinished for at least half of its western wing' (Montanari, 2023, p. 79).

In order to understand the architectural model of the building, we can continue with some considerations on the architectural composition of Albergo dei Poveri and its possible sources of architectural inspiration:

'The Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa, the first building in Italy to be constructed from scratch to accommodate the indigent, found its stylistic references in the contemporary Hospice de Nôtre Dame de la Charité in Lyon (1614–16) and Hôtel Dieu in Paris (1656), although "the improbable volume, the articulation in four large bodies dominated in the centre by an elongated cross-shaped church and the imposing façade [...] are striking features inspired by the great monastic complexes of the time or by the Escorial, concealing

side uncommon and more original effects than one might expect or know"' (Altavista, 1999, pp. 505–506).

This is a brief architectural analysis of a building which is unique not only by its shape, scale, dimensions and landscape, but also because of its particularly conceived function: a shelter for the city's poor: single women, widows, orphans, people with various illnesses, etc. This singular approach embodies a specific Genovese conception of 17th-century society and community. This vision solved specific social problems but at the same time brought a dramatic vision of segregation.

'The chronicles of the time tell us explicitly that between the 16th and 17th centuries Genoa was the European city that best understood the unbridgeable abyss that opened between the infinite mass of the many poor and the few, very rich aristocrats. A social inequality that was reflected in the creation of places like this, where men like Brignole, with a rich and philanthropic vision of the world, no doubt wishing to do good, thought of segregating for re-education all those who were not perfectly integrated into society' (Montanari, 2023, p. 82).

Especially in the first years of construction, the building was, however, used for other purposes, especially after the naval bombardment by the French fleet in 1684. Representatives of the Genoese Republic took refuge here, temporarily transferring old and valuable Genoese public goods such as the treasure of San Lorenzo and the ashes of Saint John the Baptist inside the building. It took almost two hundred years for the complex to acquire its modern appearance, as the building was expanded several times, notably in 1667, 1689 and 1702. It was not until 1835 that the building acquired its current appearance. In the last decade of the 20th century, the building was given a more inclusive use, due to the birth of a new type of assistance for elderly people in need.

Part of the complex in the east wing of the building has also been used as classrooms and offices for the various faculties of the University of Genoa. However, it was not possible to rehabilitate the whole building, nor to find a proper strategy to make it function as a whole.

'Based on a programmatic agreement signed in 1991, between 1994 and 1995, the University began the first refunctionalisation works, initially concentrated on the first floor with the restoration of the former Oratory of the Dames, now the Aula Magna, and the creation of four new classrooms for the Faculties of Law and Political Science. Between 1998 and 2001, a series of further works were carried out, leading to the construction of additional classrooms on the ground floor, while the University's presence in the hotel coexisted with the maintenance of social activities, albeit disused and gradually relocated. Finally, in 2001, the final deed of transfer of surface rights was signed between the University and the Brignole Institute, initiating the planning and execution of the works for the global and definitive re-functioning of the entire complex, which is currently nearing completion' (Montanari, 2023, p. 82).

The improvements carried out in the last decades 'cover less than 30% of the available surface area (approximately 60,000 sqm). The remaining areas are still abandoned, left to natural decay and deterioration' (Musso *et al.*, 2024).

Having been originally built for social control, to isolate and segregate, the building now needs to be transformed into the opposite: a response to contemporary social needs and a connecting element with the surrounding built environment (socially and physically). Given its huge scale and dimensions, finding a proper new coherent function for the whole building remains a major challenge at present.

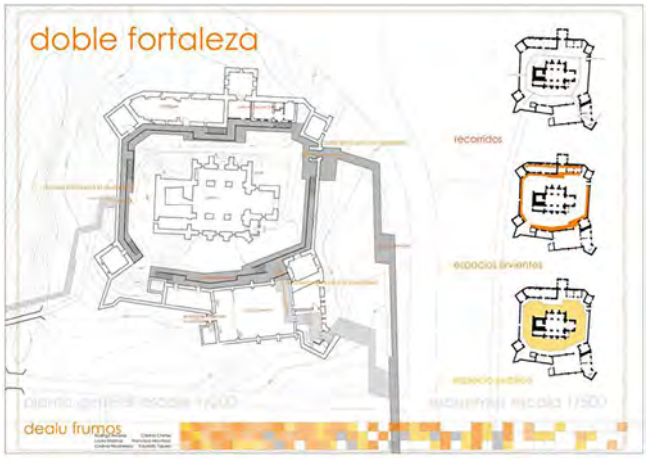
IV. Proposals and Strategies for Rehabilitation: a New Reality

Both case studies, the Dealu Frumos (Schönberg) citadel and Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa, have a common destiny regarding their reuse as educational centres associated with universities, either for studies of vernacular architecture and traditions or as the headquarters of an extended campus, with educational spaces and other connected facilities. While the citadel of Dealu Frumos was conceived for defence and worship, being a fortified spiritual centre and a symbol of Saxon heritage dating back to the Middle Ages, Albergo dei Poveri was conceived as a socio-charitable refuge, a social institution for marginalised people, housed in a massive quadrangular volume with a central chapel, reimagined as university and senior housing. Despite their divergent origins – one built for protection, the other for social welfare – both buildings have endured by evolving in function while retaining their architectural and cultural integrity. They transitioned from serving daily community needs to preserving collective memory, balancing conservation with contemporary purpose.

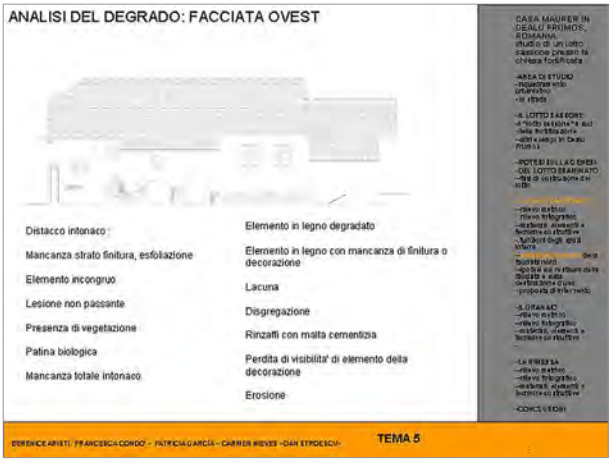
IV.1. The Saxon Fortified Citadel from Dealu Frumos, Sibiu: from the First Architectural Rehabilitation Proposals towards a New Reality

Dealu Frumos (Schönberg in German), initially a Romanesque basilica attested since the 14th century, was one of the approximately 160 surviving Saxon fortified churches in Transylvania: huge defensive ensembles generated around local Evangelical churches that remained completely empty after the depopulation of the rural areas and especially after the emigration of the Saxons to Germany at the end of the 20th century. However, the year 2003 completely changed its destiny. The historic ensemble was then leased for 30 years to the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism from Bucharest.[1] The University transformed it into the 'Centre of Studies for Vernacular Architecture' (in Romanian CSAV), which became a venue for numerous events dedicated to research, heritage education, summer schools, etc. In recent years, the citadel has benefited from important restoration funds, so it became a continuous construction site which constitutes a valuable practice-based environment for architects and students working in heritage.

The Romanian-Spanish Architecture Workshops, a long-lasting initiative of the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism and Escuela Técnica Superior de Arquitectura de Madrid, began with a first edition in Dealu Frumos in the summer of 2006.[2] The first proposals generated by the participants in the workshop included the citadel, the urban space (the main square of the village) in front of it (Figs. 1, 2 and 3), and some houses in the surroundings, considered to be emblematic of the Saxon dwelling typology. At that moment, the proposals seemed utopian for the abandoned, depopulated village. However, after approximately 15 years they began to become reality, due to the projects developed by the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism in partnership with several associations dedicated to heritage (Monumentum, The Ambulance for Monuments – Ambulanța pentru Monumente) and the Romanian Order of Architects. Now Dealu Frumos hosts practical workshops on restoration techniques, traditional crafts and heritage architecture, offering participants real-world experience in conserving the Transylvanian Saxon fortified churches. These activities aim to train young professionals, artisans and students in traditional construction methods (such as lime plastering or timber framing), to ensure that specialised knowledge is transmitted across generations and to support the sustainable maintenance of the church and surrounding buildings. The



FIGS. 1-3. Rehabilitation projects for the citadel and surroundings, carried out during the 1st Romanian-Spanish Restoration Workshop organised by UAUIM and ETSA Madrid, July 2006, by students Rodrigo Alvarez, Cristina Chirţaş, Laura Marinas, Francisco Montoya, Cristina Nicolaescu, Eduardo Tajuelo; Berenice Aristi, Francesca Condò, Patricia Garcia, Carmen Nieves, Dan Stroescu; Ana Fernandez del Prado, Adrian Ibric, Jaime Ripoll, Miruna Stoicescu and Maite Torres. Source of the images: https://www.uauim.ro/evenimente/atelier-de-restaurare-romano-spaniol/





most outstanding construction sites, organised in the form of summer schools, were entitled 'Tradition and Technology' (2022, 2023, 2024).[3] The main task for the construction site was securing and restoring the roof of the north-west and south-east towers of the fortified Evangelical Church (13th–16th century).

The summer schools benefited from theoretical sessions on wood selection, joints, occupational health and safety regulations, restoration interventions and modern scanning methods.

Practical activities consisted of the installation of scaffolding and supporting structures, the dismantling and restoration of handmade tiles, repairs to masonry with hydraulic lime mortar, and the carving and processing of oak (and fir) wood to replace degraded beams. Works were coordinated by specialist restorers Ionuț Dobra and Ștefan Vaida, Arch. Jan Hülsemann, together with local craftsmen (carpenters, blacksmiths and masons) and 60 volunteers, selected from over 200 applicants (Figs. 4 and 5). Together with the citadel, a series of facilities for the accommodation of teachers and students have been renovated.

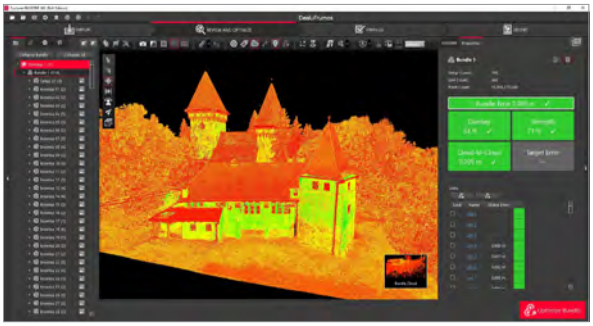
We can therefore observe that we are in the fortunate situation in which the first creative visions for the future of an almost abandoned citadel (started in the 2006 workshop)





FIGS. 4 and 5. Preparation of the building site for restoration works and a lesson about construction with wood, 2023 (architect Jan Hulsemann). Source of the images: https://www.uauim.ro/cercetare/traditie-si-tehnologie/





FIGS. 6 and 7. Digital documentation and virtual reconstruction of the citadel from Dealu Frumos, by the team guided by Andreea Iosif (2022). Source of the images: https://www.uauim.ro/cercetare/traditie-si-tehnologie/

became reality: a restored medieval citadel with many extensions containing educational facilities that proved necessary over time.

Other outstanding results at Dealu Frumos consisted of the digitisation of the volume of the citadel, through several summer schools (2022, 2023). The activity consisted of lectures and photogrammetry, as well as 3D scanning (Figs. 6 and 7). Heritage digitisation was carried out through photogrammetric fingerprints and laser/drone scanning carried out since 2022, but continued and integrated into the 2023 interventions, for the identification of degradation and digital documentation. A complex virtual interactive 3D model of the whole historic ensemble was finally created, under the guidance of Assoc. Prof. PhD Arch. Andreea Iosif. This precise visual documentation also required creative innovation in terms of creating a suitable environment for composing images and achieving a complete experience of navigating the space for the virtual visitor.

We can affirm that the Dealu Frumos project represents the exemplary model of an integrated school and construction site, which combines traditional and modern technologies; encourages professional training through practice; capitalises on architect-craftsman-community collaboration; and documents digital and cultural heritage for the future. This unique mixture of activities created a specific pattern in perceiving and understanding the place, in the sense of the theory developed by Christopher Alexander, cited in the Introduction of this paper.

This pattern of heritage intervention can be extended to other situations of endangered architectural heritage and adapted to each case, according to specific needs.

IV.2. In Search of a Future for Albergo dei Poveri, Genoa

Within the framework of the discipline 'Functional Conversion of Architectural Space' (2024–2025), I asked the fourth-year students of the Faculty of Interior Architecture ('Ion Mincu' University, Bucharest) to submit some proposals for the future regeneration of Albergo dei Poveri, after having presented the case of this remarkable building to them. The results were inspiring, so I considered some of the projects worth presenting in this paper. The collection of proposals can be divided into six basic categories, generically dedicated to:

- education – essentially an upgrade of the present spaces belonging to the University of Genoa, but also spaces for alternative education (for instance, integration spaces dedicated to all categories of immigrants from Genoa) (Figs. 8–10, 11, 12, 25 and 26);
- creative hubs (diverse activities addressing the local communities) (Figs. 11 and 12);
- amusement, performance and leisure spaces (even a circus) (Figs. 13, 14, 23 and 24);
- interactive museum spaces (mainly dedicated to the secular navigation tradition of Genoa) (Fig. 19);
- green buildings and spaces dedicated to urban agriculture and specific training in the field (Figs. 20–22, 25 and 26) ;
- production spaces dedicated to the textile industry and fashion (traditional for Genoa) (Figs.17 and 18).

The creative approach lies both in the complexity of the proposed function, which has to allow an appropriate occupation of the entire building space, and in the relationship between the new activity pattern and the original spatial model of the building, generated by the initial function for which it was designed and to which its history was dedicated. Some of the most rewarding proposals are presented below. In some cases, AI rendering programs were a valuable tool in depicting the atmosphere created by the projects.



FIGS. 8-10. Proposal for educational functions (for students or pupils) in the interior and inner courtyard of Albergo dei Poveri, by students Bianca Andronescu and Zâna-Maria Popa, tutored by the author (Figures were generated using a combination of AI programs).

In most of the proposals, the church in the middle of the composition has a special role, encouraging the generation of a core of activities in the geometric centre of the volume. Unconsciously, the proposals follow the idea of Christopher Alexander: 'A public space without a middle is quite likely to stay empty' (Alexander, 1977, p. 606). From this perspective, the church is an intrinsic core (middle) of the whole spatial volume, with activities organised around it.

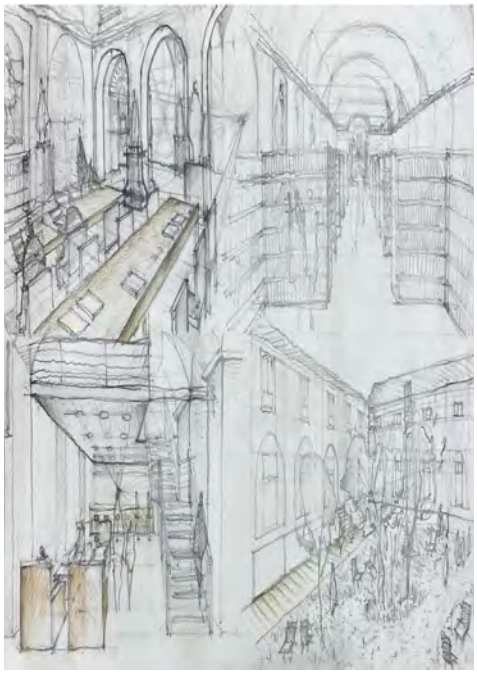
In addition to the spaces already arranged at present for the University of Genoa, the building still has plenty of room to expand and enrich its academic vocation in an educational, cultural and community-based way. Current city projects envisage the enlargement of the Humanities Campus (Campus delle Scienze Umanistiche) (Barsanti, 2024), with the conversion into classrooms, a library (2,500 m², 100,000 volumes), a canteen, a gym and residences for 5,200 students. These are supposed to be completed with interdisciplinary co-working spaces and thematic laboratories (data analysis, journalism, theatre, art history) in sections that are currently unused, giving new life to teaching and research. The building benefits from a permanent heritage exhibition in the space of the Galleria Uomini (ASP Emanuele Brignole, 2020) and in the Oratorio, but still offers generous spaces for temporary art or science exhibitions.

The proposals of the students of the 'Ion Mincu' University generate a variety of cultural and educational spaces in the building, for the students of the University of Genoa or for children (Figs. 8, 9 and 10), and for inhabitants of the city or tourists. Such spaces are art studios, libraries (Figs. 11 and 12), community centres for immigrants and refugees (Figs. 15 and 16), and museums dedicated to the traditions of the city (navigation, naval construction, geographical discoveries, manufacturing, etc.). Actually, considering the original use as a social building, conceived for disadvantaged people, the social approach cannot be omitted from a complete present-day architectural proposal.

After shipbuilding and maritime industry, textile manufacturing became the most outstanding Genoese industry. Genoa was historically renowned for its textile industry, especially the production of velvet and silk during the Renaissance. Genoese velvet became a luxury good, prized throughout Europe. Later, the city became one of the birthplaces of jean fabric, originally known as 'blu di Genova' (blue from Genoa), which was exported widely and eventually became the fabric we know as denim. Considering this fact, one of the proposals consists of a large textile and fashion centre, with large production capacity, functioning in Albergo dei Poveri. The project was entitled 'Blue Genova' (Figs. 17 and 18). A future maritime museum of navigation, including all the related complex functions that such a proposal requires, would undoubtedly become a valuable opportunity to bring resilient life to the building (Fig. 19).

Sports activities have already been proposed by the city authorities to take place in the building. The students mainly considered the idea of creating swimming pools and SPA facilities, both in the interior and in the four courts of the building (Figs. 13, 14). Leisure, of course, cannot be forgotten. The idea of organising a circus in the interior courtyards of the massive volume of the building, with all the related performance activities that such a function entails, is original and inspiring (Figs. 23 and 24).

A consistent part of the proposals is related to the specific landscape in which the building is set (topography, vegetation, views and relationship with the sea). Albergo dei Poveri is located on the slopes of Castelletto, standing on the side of the splendid Valletta San Nicola (or Carbonara), a green area of about 25,000 m² adjacent to the complex. This





FIGS. 11 and 12. Proposal for cultural functions – library and exhibition spaces. Students: Loredana-Mihaela Bărbulescu, Daria-Maria Gugui and Teodora Bică; hand drawings, tutored by the author.



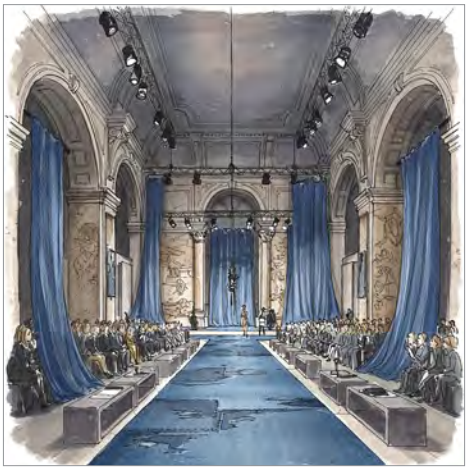


FIGS. 13 and 14. Proposals for sport and leisure activities (swimming pool and SPA). Students: Catrinel Amitrului and Bianca Andronescu; hand drawing versus computer rendering, tutored by the author.





FIGS. 15 and 16. NODO – Community centre for immigrants and refugees. Students: Raghd Al-Iryani and Estera Petre, tutored by the author.





FIGS. 17 and 18. Blu Genova – centre dedicated to fashion and the Genoese textile tradition: museum, fashion house and production spaces. Student: Andreea Enache, tutored by the author.

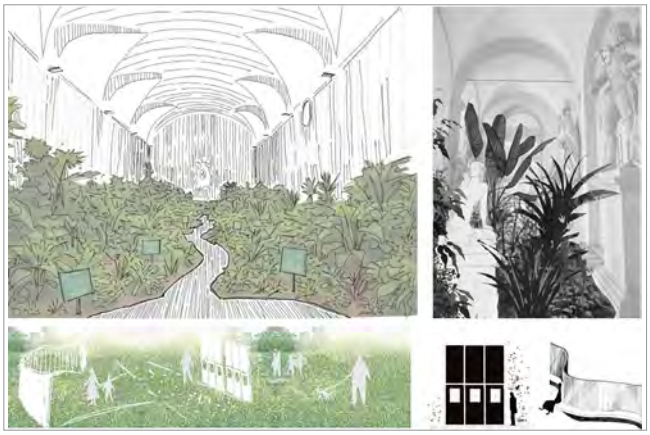


FIG. 19. Interactive Museum of Genoese navigation and the sea – Cittadella del Mare. Student: Erika-Silvia Guiman, tutored by the author.

valley has already seen a splendid rebirth thanks to private and community initiatives: the Serre di San Nicola and the collective garden, started by local volunteers, citizens and refugees, have transformed brambles and ruins into spaces for cultivation, socialising, environmental education and even an urban beehive. Activating the development of organic, permaculture urban gardens (as already realised in the Orto Collettivo project) promotes biodiversity, food security and environmental awareness. The proposals of the students from the 'Ion Mincu' University include a series of interior gardens and greenhouses that can transform the building into an







FIGS. 20-22. Green proposals: centre dedicated to urban agriculture and botanical research. Students: Anna Noni and Ioana Toma, tutored by the author.

outstanding centre for biodiversity. Such an intervention is supposed to improve the microclimate of the urban area of Castelletto and even create a new ecosystem around the building (Figs. 20, 21 and 22). The focus on green (exterior and interior) areas can be combined with education and culture. A well-conceived proposal proposes organising an educational institution related to the Mediterranean landscape, entitled the International Academy for Architecture and Mediterranean Landscape (Figs. 25 and 26).

V. The Paradigm of Creative Adaptive Reuse: What Will Heritage Look Like in the Future?

The theoretical foundations for preserving heritage evolved from classical restoration (moving between the interventionist doctrine of Viollet-le-Duc and the absolute anti-interventionism promoted by John Ruskin) to rehabilitation (considering the necessity of a new sustainable function for the restored object). In recent years, rehabilitation and building conversion have been transformed into the term 'adaptive reuse'. The concept

of 'adaptive reuse' – repurposing existing buildings or heritage sites for new uses – has emerged as a critical paradigm in 21st-century conservation and urban development. It represents a shift from static preservation to dynamic, living heritage, where historic structures are not merely relics of the past but active components of contemporary life. The challenge is to add creativity to adaptive reuse, and to define the layers in which creativity can intervene (new architectural structure, supporting the original one, new finishes, materials, furniture, changes in spatial scale, adaptable dynamic use brought by a new community, etc.).

Traditionally, heritage conservation emphasised preserving the original form and function of buildings. Adaptive reuse challenges this perspective by suggesting that value lies not only in form, but in continuity – the ongoing relevance of a site to its community. In the case of the Dealu Frumos fortified church, the historic Saxon community has been replaced by an academic and local community wishing to reconnect with the traditions of the past and transform them into challenges for future evolution. At Albergo dei Poveri, a former disadvantaged community (poor or disabled people, marginalised people of the city) has been replaced by the young community of students and inhabitants wishing to solve the problems of the city centre and make it resilient.

In an age of climate crisis, adaptive reuse aligns with principles of sustainability. It reduces the need for demolition and new construction, thereby lowering carbon emissions and material waste. At the same time, adaptive reuse fosters cultural sustainability, allowing buildings to evolve with the needs of society while maintaining tangible links to the past. The heritage of the future will not be frozen in time – it will be adaptive, participatory and fundamentally alive. From this perspective, we may state that creation means life in itself. And the immediate needs of life will transform our buildings in order to become:

- more hybrid. Mixing old and new architectural languages to reflect layered histories is a design challenge that brings indisputable added value;
- more inclusive. Recognising everyday and marginalised histories, not only monumental or elite heritage, is a lesson in ethics applied to historic architecture. Albergo dei Poveri was conceived for disadvantaged people, originally separated from the city, and now has the vocation to do the opposite: to unify and include all communities from Genoa. The citadel from Dealu Frumos can be included in the category of rural architecture (a certain type of minor heritage), and any rehabilitation proposal should address the local community to a significant extent.





FIGS. 23 and 24. L'Arca. Performance centre including a circus. Student: Iustina Elena Banu, tutored by the author.





FIGS. 25 and 26. International Academy for Architecture and Mediterranean Landscape – creation of green connections between several areas of the building. AI generated images. Student: Ştefania Drăgan, tutored by the author.

Actually, all summer schools and other events organised here provide a specific component for the existing community;

- more functional. Spaces will serve present-day needs while retaining historical significance, both from the perspective of the urban vision (the relationship with the surrounding territory) and through architectural design;
- more digital. Augmented reality (AR), artificial intelligence (AI), digital twins and virtual archives will enable interaction with heritage in ways that are immersive and accessible, as the experimental workshops concluded in the citadel of Dealu Frumos demonstrated.

Adaptive reuse is not without tensions, and the challenge for creativity has to adapt to the need to preserve the historical and architectural values of the building. Another challenge is the capacity to navigate between stakeholder interests. In the case of Dealu Frumos, the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism had to convince the local Consistory of the Evangelical Church, the current owner of the historic ensemble, in order to obtain a long-term concession of the ensemble. Meanwhile, Albergo dei Poveri still has to fight with a negative historical image caused by its initial function (refuge, and even prison for disadvantaged social categories of the city of Genoa). Yet these tensions also open up creative possibilities, pushing architects, students, planners and communities to co-create heritage in ways that are meaningful for future generations. The inspiring projects dedicated to the future of Albergo dei Poveri, realised by the students of the 'Ion Mincu' University without having physically visited the site, clearly illustrate creative possibilities for a promising future.

Notes

1 Text based on information extracted from the website of the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism (UAUIM, n.d.-a).

2 The Spanish-Romanian (or Romanian-Spanish) architecture workshops were a common initiative of the 'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism and the Superior Technical School of Architecture from Madrid (ETSAM). Twelve successful editions have been organised both in several heritage places in Romania and Spain. The promoters of the workshops were the professors Javier de Cárdenas (ETSAM), Elena-Codina Dușoiu and Beatrice-Gabriela Jöger (IMUAU).

3 More information can be found in UAUIM (n.d.-a, n.d.-b).

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THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE CZECH LIGNITE MINING LANDSCAPE AND ERASED MEMORIES. THE RK 5000 BUCKET-WHEEL EXCAVATOR AS A HISTORICALLY VALUABLE TOOL OF DESTRUCTION AND A BRIDGE BETWEEN PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Tomas Efler, Mario Barra

Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Republic
tomas.efler@fa.cvut.cz; mario.barra@fa.cvut.cz

From 'the ČSA large-scale mine in the Most coal basin (Czech Republic) – landscapes of erased memories and the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000 – a historically valuable tool of destruction, a bridge between past, present and future in the brown coal mining landscape beneath the Ore Mountains' to 'Conservation / Creation – The contribution of Conservation to urban futures' (DAD UniGe, 2024). In most cases, present-day heritage conservation concerns appropriate interventions in the historical environment of settlement structures or cultural landscapes, primarily those subject to some form of protection under heritage conservation law or nature and landscape protection law. These interventions, however controversial they may be perceived to be, mostly enter environments that are gradually evolving; their essence, however, remains fundamentally preserved. Many such examples can be found within the territory of the Czech Republic alone: modern extensions to the Baroque building of Prague's Invalidovna (Fig. 1) (NPÚ, 2020), a building comparable in size and historical purpose to Genoa's Albergo dei Poveri, or the still unresolved decision regarding the fate of the railway bridge below Vyšehrad Castle in Prague from the early 20th century (Fig. 2) (Nebourat.cz, 2022). These heritage cases are entirely different, yet they have one thing in common: they touch the past, present and future of Prague's historical core, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. '[T]he management of change often seems to set in opposition the need for conserving the physical inheritance, with all the values embedded in its buildings and spaces, against those of novelty and new solutions. Conservation is seen as a reactive response, at the opposite pole to creative action' (DAD UniGe, 2024). This sentence from the Call for Abstracts of the Genoa workshop can be applied precisely to both of the above-mentioned heritage-related cases in Prague. This is a historical settlement that has existed for centuries, where a planned intervention affecting only one of the monuments forming this protected ensemble does not change the very essence of protecting the larger whole. The historical Old Town, with houses that have Romanesque or Gothic cores, Baroque palaces and remnants of the Jewish ghetto, which disappeared at the end of the 19th century during comprehensive sanitation works, will still exist. Only if a comprehensive reconstruction of the city were repeated, and if entire blocks or districts were to disappear, could we speak of a significant transformation of the environment in which we live and, in a certain sense, of the erasure of one (or even more) layers of memory that we and preceding generations have gradually created.



FIG. 1. Proposal for the visualisation of the Invalidovna building in Prague 8 – Karlín after the restoration of the Baroque building and the construction of two modern extensions (NPÚ, 2020).

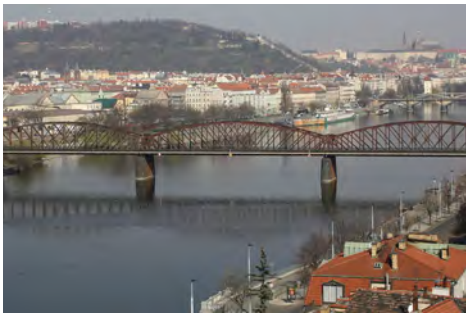


FIG. 2. Current appearance of the riveted structure of the railway bridge below Vyšehrad, between Smíchov and Výtoň – condition in 2012, still largely unchanged (Wikipedia, 2025b).



FIG. 3. Current state of the interrupted former road I/13 between Horní Jiřetín and Jirkov below Jezeří Castle, leading to the ČSA large-scale quarry, in November 2023 (Barra, 2023).

Introduction to the Issue of Landscape Transformation in the Coal Basins of North-Western Bohemia

If we move just under one hundred kilometres north-west of the capital city of Prague, we reach the foothills of the Ore Mountains, a range separating the Czech Republic from the Federal Republic of Germany. With the exception of larger settlements and a few isolated, primarily industrial areas, in the basin preceding this mountain range we do not see many monuments or objects of heritage value, nor historically valuable or heritage-valued cultural landscapes, but rather a desolate area of open-cast brown coal mines which, because of their resemblance to extraterrestrial landscapes, similar to photographs taken by rovers on the Moon or Mars, have earned the designation 'lunar landscape' (Fig. 3) (Černá, 2020). In its original meaning, the real 'lunar' landscape is perceived by scientists as a valuable source of information for research in many disciplines[1]; here in the Ústí nad Labem and Karlovy Vary regions, however, it is a reminder of radical human interventions in the landscape, which have been devastating for hundreds, or rather thousands, of square kilometres and, in the case of brown coal mining, also for 80 settlements (Barra, 2023). Primarily in the second half of the 20th century, between 1950 and 1992 (the demise of the last village, Libkovice – the church in this settlement was demolished as late as 2002 (Fig. 4) (Sýkorová, 2006)), these settlements gradually gave way to the expansion of open-cast mining; along with them, not only the landscape between individual municipalities disappeared, but also a number of objects of heritage value that formed part of the identity of the local inhabitants. This is a region in which, over less than 100 years, the composition of the population changed significantly, as did people's relationship to the local landscape. From time immemorial until the end of the Second World War, the area was inhabited predominantly by German-speaking residents, which was reflected not only in the names of individual settlements but also, for ex-

ample, in the characteristics of vernacular architecture. However, as a consequence of the war, the German-speaking population was displaced from the entire territory of Czechoslovakia, and from the second half of the 1940s it was partially replaced by Czechoslovak citizens from the interior. In addition to a significant reduction in population, the demographic structure of the region changed: a completely new layer of inhabitants arrived in the Ore Mountains and their foothills, bringing with them a fundamentally different relationship to the territory, the cultural landscape and individual heritage-valued objects. This was subsequently reflected in the newcomers' approach to conserving the old versus creating a new appearance for the region. Yet even this group of inhabitants did not remain in present-day brown coal mining areas; as will be discussed further, because of the expansion of open-cast mining, they too were forced to leave selected places in the region once again after only a few decades – this time definitively.

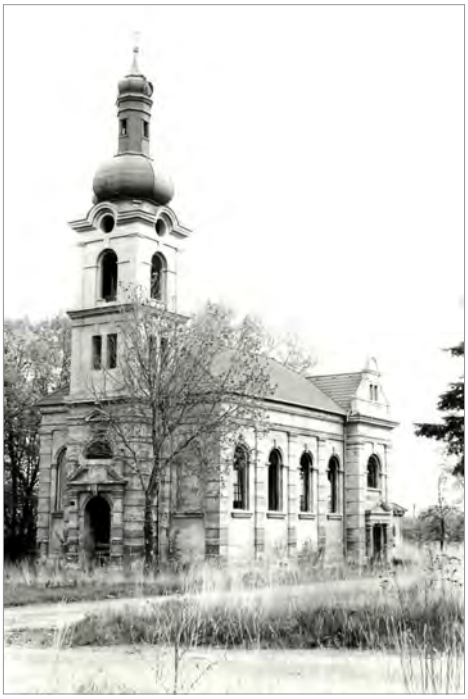


FIG. 4. View of the Church of St Michael the Archangel in the village of Libkovice near Most in 1998 (demolished in 2002), before the demolition of the settlement in the 1990s (Wikipedia, 2025a).



FIG. 5. Excerpt from the map of the Imperial prints of the Stable Cadastre of the municipality of Ervěnice (Seestadtl) from 1842 (Archiv ČÚZK, 2025).

In the territories of the two northern Bohemian regions, Ústí nad Labem and Karlovy Vary, there are still several active open-cast brown coal mines today (Tramba, 2015). However, if we delve deeper into history and focus on one of today's best-known examples – the ČSA large-scale quarry (Jednou stopou Českem, 2023) – we find several settlements connected by a road (and later also railway) network, initially passing through the landscape of Komořany Lake, after which the nearby Jezeří Castle was named[2] (Hloušek, 2006). Over time, the lake was replaced by agriculturally cultivated land, which persisted in some form until the second half of the 20th century, as is evident from several maps of the Stable Cadastre[3] (Fig. 5) (Archiv ČÚZK, 2025). The focus of heritage conservation here included a number of objects of heritage value, including castles, farmyards and churches, as well as a number of folk-architecture monuments from the foothills of the Ore Mountains in the Sudetenland (such as half-timbered buildings) and industrial monuments, reminders of iron-ore mining, which is still reflected in the German name of the Jezeří settlement (Eisenberg)[4].



FIG. 6. Map of the ČSA large-scale quarry area from 1963 (Army Map Service, 1963).



FIG. 7. View, in 1882, of the landscape of the area of the present-day ČSA large-scale quarry, including Jezeří Castle, with Komořany Lake in the background (Wikipedia contributors, 2025).



FIG. 8. Photograph of the remnants of vegetation from the most valuable parts of the Jezeří Arboretum in September 2023 (Barra, 2023).

Let us return to the North Bohemian coal basins in the not-too-distant past. We are at the beginning of the 1950s, when surface mining had not yet become the main tool for transforming the landscape. According to the first Czech heritage law from 1958 (Zákon č. 22/1958 Sb. o kulturních památkách, 1958), several objects in this territory were officially declared cultural monuments, including, for example, the castle and the Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Nové Sedlo nad Bílinou, or the Church of St Michael in Libkovice (NPÚ, 2025g). Several objects, especially various smaller objects or folk-architecture buildings, however, were not registered as 'official' cultural monuments and remained only within the bounds of some form of informal protection as elements of memory of the past. If we try to examine the transformation of the region from the perspective of heritage conservation, it is therefore appropriate to speak of 'objects of heritage value' rather than monuments in the sense of those registered under the applicable laws at that time.

Conservation vs. Transformation of the Cultural Landscape below Jezeří Castle – Reckoning with a Stratified Past

What remained entirely outside the scope of professional interest at this time was the issue of cultural landscapes and the potential area-wide protection of this phenomenon: an exceptional bearer of distinct historical layers and a testament to the transformation of society, which over the centuries (and even more rapidly in the second half of the 20th century) was rewritten here as a kind of palimpsest. Although, as mentioned earlier, the landscape in the area of the ČSA quarry had undergone significant development by 1950 (Papeš, 2008), this was still a gradual transformation of the territory[5] (Fig. 6), located between two noble residences – Jezeří and Nové Sedlo nad Bílinou castles. From the perspective of disciplines such as heritage conservation or landscape protection, exceptional features could undoubtedly be identified here, which in other areas of Czechia

became subject to heritage or nature protection at different levels. Many noble families – the Valdštejns in the Jičín region, the Lichtensteins in the Lednice-Valtice area, or the Schwarzenbergs in the Třeboň region (Ehrlich *et al.*, 2020) – created composed cultural landscapes around their residences, and it can be assumed that the Lobkowiczs were no exception in creating a similarly interesting landscape at the site of today's ČSA quarry (Fig. 7). Even today, some features can be found here: for example, the never-completed Lobkowicz tomb near Jezeří, called the Count's Chapel (NPÚ, 2025d), comparable to the Schwarzenberg tomb in Domanín near Třeboň, or the so-called Jezeří Arboretum, a park composition below Jezeří Castle with a number of exotic trees (NPÚ, 2025a), which in its heyday could have rivalled the arboreta in Průhonice or Žampach, most of which were established in the second half of the 19th century or the early 20th century (Barra, 2024), while at Jezeří, the Lobkowicz family began the first landscape modifications around 1836[6]. These are just a few of the many examples that demonstrate the historical significance of the landscape, which nevertheless remained outside the scope of heritage conservation and nature protection and gave way to open-cast mining in the area without major obstacles. For example, a brief excerpt from the Jezeří Castle website speaks volumes: 'The Jezeří Arboretum could boast several valuable specimens of trees. These included weeping beeches, hornbeams, edible chestnuts, Japanese raspberry trees, tulip trees, variegated plane trees, service trees, and stately magnolias. A rarity was the so-called "Oak from Albrechtice", which grew at the lower edge of the castle park'[7] (SZ Jezeří, 2025c).

If we return to the subtitle of the Genoa workshop, 'Conservation / Creation – The contribution of Conservation to urban futures' (DAD UniGe, 2024) (and replace the word 'urban' with 'settlement' or 'landscape'), we can observe in this case that the term 'Creation' (in the sense of creating something new without a direct connection to heritage conservation issues) led not to sensitive interventions in settlement units or cultural landscapes, but to their complete destruction and erasure from the face of the earth. Except for a few relocated smaller monuments, almost nothing has been preserved from the historical landscape at the site of today's ČSA large-scale quarry. Hundreds of millions of tonnes of brown coal were extracted from the area, and the terrain relief changed by hundreds of metres above sea level: in some places, deep pits appeared after coal mining; in other areas, spoil heaps with surplus soil or other mining waste piled up. The effort to protect monuments here clearly gave way to the national energy concept, which could be planned over a slightly longer interval, although these were still significantly shorter time periods than those needed to create the current form of the local cultural landscape.

With the disappearance of the cultural landscape in the area, the memory of both the landscape itself and its gradually displaced inhabitants, connected with the area and individual objects, slowly faded away. It is therefore worth examining the issue from the perspective of one of the subtitles of the workshop, 'Physical conservation as a condition for social and cultural vitality'[8] (DAD UniGe, 2024). Would the protection and preservation of individual objects or tangible monuments, of any scale, or the characteristics of the cultural landscape across the entire area, really benefit the region's social or cultural flourishing? Had the area of the ČSA large-scale quarry and, in fact, the entire Ore Mountains region already been historically 'uprooted' multiple times, and would social or cultural life or flourishing affect only one layer of the local population? After the end of World War II in

1945, millions of people were displaced from the territory of Czechoslovakia following the issuance of the 'Constitutional Decree of the President on the Adjustment of Czechoslovak State Citizenship of Persons of German and Hungarian Nationality' (PSP ČR, 2015), which primarily affected the Sudetenland, in this case, the entire Ore Mountains region. Entire families that had farmed in the region for centuries were forced to relocate to today's Germany, leaving townhouses or village homes that had been passed down through generations before this period. This moment marks the first erasure of the 'memory of the landscape and its inhabitants'. It could be argued that only one perspective was erased, since people living outside the region in other parts of the republic, who had no direct relationship with the region, might have seen a certain change here, for example in the approach to land development, the way the landscape was managed, or the condition of individual heritage objects; however, due to the absence of emotional or other historically given ties, this did not significantly affect them, although exceptions would certainly be found.

Shortly after the previously described events, a significant turning point occurred: the settlement of the borderlands by new inhabitants who had previously lived in the Czechoslovak interior, which continued even after the unfortunate events of February 1948 and into the 1950s (Čapka, Slezák, and Vaculík, 2005). People from various parts of the country came to the recently abandoned buildings with the vision of a new, perhaps better, life. Their motivation could have been better job prospects or the acquisition of better property at a significantly lower financial cost than would have been possible further inland. Not only in the area of the ČSA quarry but throughout the area of today's North Bohemian coal basin, thousands of inhabitants (ČSÚ, 2015) arrived with the vision of a better future, but with, in the vast majority of cases, little or no connection or sentiment towards the region's past. They approached the places to which they came with little respect and tried to transform the places and landscapes in which they lived more in their own image. At this moment, we can witness parallel phenomena: the 'older' layer of landscape memory continued to be erased, overwritten by a new memory layer written by Czechoslovak immigrants. The paradox is that many people moving to this area came with the vision of employment in the mining areas – thus, an increase in population can be seen in the statistics (ČSÚ, 2015); however, no one realised that this was happening for the last time in a long period. Future risks were probably not recognised at this time; everyone was dazzled by the prosperous present and the prospects of a bright future associated with employment in the coal district. Although the mining of strategic energy resources had been ongoing here for a long time, significant changes in the landscape were not yet visible; in the examined example of the ČSA quarry, during World War II and the immediately following period, the main development was the emergence and gradual expansion of the chemical factory in Litvínov-Záluží (kudyznudy.cz, 2015). Objects of interest to heritage conservation, whether registered and protected according to the applicable laws at the time, or considered valuable by the professional public or within social perception, remained mostly untouched at this time compared with their later fate.

The second half of the 20th century in the coal basin areas is associated with the massive expansion of open-cast brown coal mining and the gradual transformation of the landscape's relief. It is during this period that the complete erasure of tangible remnants of earlier settlements occurred, both in the locations of individual settlement structures and in the wider landscape. Just as we can observe individual layers of coal in today's exposed surfaces, deposited here over millions of years, we can also find a rich stratification when

examining the history and memory of the entire area, which has only recently been subjected to broader and more detailed research, especially with regard to various considerations about the restoration of the area after the decline of surface mining. The preceding layers, of which almost no traces remain today (except for a few smaller monuments transferred to towns and villages outside still-active quarries), can now be seen primarily thanks to extensive photographic and film documentation, produced in the 1960s–1980s (NPÚ, 2025b) in cooperation between regional heritage conservation bodies and a public film company. Its aim was to document not only settlement units located in the area of future coal mines but, in certain cases, also individual monuments, especially those officially registered in the list of cultural monuments, often in an advanced stage of degradation caused by neglected maintenance or inappropriate use (agricultural buildings or spaces, etc.). For viewers watching such footage approximately 50 years later, it evokes sadness for the fate that befell many monuments of immense value, but at the same time it is one of the last opportunities to see these objects before their complete disappearance. Other valuable sources, which also continue to carry the memory of the now-extinct area, include drawn and photographic documentation (Fig. 9), carried out by ethnographers and now stored in public archives (Etnologický ústav Akademie věd ČR, 2025; Národní muzeum, n.d.), together with a number of official documents of the then state heritage conservation system (SOA Litoměřice, 2025), documenting the approach to national cultural heritage in the second half of the 20th century, particularly in this industrial area.



FIG. 9. Example from the Ethnographic Image Archive of the National Museum, depicting a two-storey timber-framed granary at farm No. 9 in the village of Bystřany, Ústí nad Labem Region, in 1959, by Josef Vařeka – comparative example (Czech Technical University, n.d.).

As mentioned above, between 1950 and 1990, most objects of heritage value were demolished or otherwise destroyed. Only a few were saved through transfer – and for those that experienced this miracle, it was rarely an action carried out by official authorities; often, it may have been an uncoordinated action by residents who took on the role of saviours of the region's memory. One of the best-known cases, which we would like to mention only briefly (mainly due to the extensive research already conducted on this matter), is the relocation of the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in the old town of Most (Fig. 10) to a site 841 metres outside the area later affected by surface mining (Správa kostela Nanebevzetí Panny Marie v Mostě, 2025). However, this was only one case made visible to show that, despite the need to massively expand brown coal mining in the North Bohemian basin, there was some interest in cultural heritage and its preservation for future generations. Even in the case of such a well-known example – which is still admired today and regarded as an exceptional demonstration of the positive attitude of the then government and regional administration towards cultural monuments (and, moreover, of a sacral nature) – a number of questions nevertheless arise: What values does a



FIG. 10. Photographic documentation of the relocation of the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in old Most in 1975, from the Kostel Most website (Kostel Most, 2025).



FIG. 11. Depiction of Ahníkov Castle in Antonín Lewý's book 'Bohemia, Volume X. The Ore Mountains and the Ohře River Basin' from 1896 (Wikimedia Commons, 2025).

relocated monument possess in relation to its new location? Could the initiators of the relocation even have imagined what the church would represent for the inhabitants of its new setting? Has the monument, conversely, acquired new qualities or values – ones that will, however, be perceived in the same way by local residents and by visitors from other parts of the Czech Republic?

However, if we look at the number of monuments that disappeared due to the expansion of mining and compare these numbers with those representing transferred monuments or those located in places where mining did not reach by the 1990s, we come to different conclusions. Some monuments were at least partially preserved, as demonstrated by the fate of the castle in Ahníkov (Fig. 11), from which selected stone elements were removed and later deposited in the grounds of today's Chomutov Zoo (Zoopark Chomutov, 2025). Subsequently, a plan was prepared for the possible reconstruction of the entire monument outside the surface brown coal mine area (Antošová, 1982), which has not yet been implemented. We can thus imagine a completely unique approach in the Ore Mountains area, whose implementation is being considered for the future (Zábranský, Chalupová, and Dolejš, 2025), and which combines the preservation of the memory of the monument through the rescue of its selected, probably most valuable parts, while at the same time not preventing the overall disappearance of the object. In a sense, a newly constructed structure – partly composed of the remnants of a now-vanished monument – could, on one level, preserve the 'old' values through an approach based on 'Conservation', while remaining in harmony with 'Creation', whereby traditional and new technological procedures may be combined in the reconstruction of what has disappeared. The functional use of the monument may also be transformed.

The fate of Jezeří Castle through time – new destinies for an abandoned chateau and the revival of the 'Baroque pearl of the Ore Mountains'

A separate chapter could, and undoubtedly should, be dedicated to the fate of Jezeří Castle, historically referred to as the 'Baroque pearl of the Ore Mountains' (SZ Jezeří, 2020). The first modern blow to the castle came during World War II, when one of the Lobkowicz residences became the headquarters of part of the Nazi army and simultaneously a camp for prominent war prisoners[9] (SZ Jezeří, 2025a). Fortunately, during this period, there were

no significant interventions affecting the integrity of the monument, and the building returned to the hands of the nobility after the liberation in 1945. The apparent return to the previous state did not last long; after the previously mentioned communist coup in February 1948, the castle was nationalised, and a decade of abandonment and gradual decline began, with the aim of allowing the castle to deteriorate to such a state that its demolition would be an act of mercy towards the monument, allowing state coal-mining enterprises in the sub-castle area to continue mining without facing criticism (SZ Jezeří, 2025a). The vision of light at the end of the tunnel and the rescue of the castle, in addition to the activities of heritage conservation experts, came in the 1970s because of the poor geological situation of the castle's foothills, which threatened the collapse of the entire massif between the castle and the surface mine (SZ Jezeří, 2025a). The risk of landslides thus became Jezeří's salvation. In the following decade, landslides caused, for example, the interruption of the I/13 road connection between the administrative centres of the region, the towns of Litvínov and Chomutov; the railway connection, initially only relocated, finally ceased operating in 1971, while the Horní Jiřetín–Litvínov section remained in operation until 1992 (Jelen, 2009). The so-called Ore Mountains highway, built in the 1970s, was closed due to landslides after only three years of operation (Mapy.cz, 2025). Jezeří, however, remained in very poor structural and technical condition until the 1990s. Following restitution in the 1990s, the monument returned to the hands of the Lobkowicz family, but in 1996 (SZ Jezeří, 2025a), it was transferred for a symbolic amount to the heritage conservation organisation in the Ústí nad Labem region, in whose ownership it effectively remains to this day, specifically as an organisational part of the regional heritage administration in Ústí nad Labem (NPÚ, 2025e).

But let us return to the castle as a monument and its dismal state. After its opening in 1996 (SZ Jezeří, 2025a), the first visitors began to come to the castle, and in recent years it has even become one of the most visited monuments in the Ústí nad Labem region (NPÚ, 2025f). A monument at the very 'end of the world', the last building on a dead-end road from the town of Horní Jiřetín and an object saved in the last years of its life: this is how Jezeří Castle and its current form could be described. Undoubtedly, these are the reasons that attract many visitors not only from the Czech Republic but also from other European countries (especially Germany), who have the opportunity to see Jezeří Castle and the so-called 'lunar landscape' below it in almost the same form as the first visitors saw it after the castle's opening at the end of the 1990s (Fig. 12). Selected castle interiors, most recently the famous theatre hall (Fig. 13), are undergoing gradual restoration under the supervision of heritage conservation authorities, and the landscape in the area of the ČSA quarry is preparing for primarily natural reclamation, which is expected to begin after the extraction of the last available brown coal deposits, currently anticipated for 2025–2026 (MŽP ČR, 2025). Standing on the lookout above Jezeří Castle today, we see a kind of 'hybrid' between the former lunar landscape and the gradually revitalising region. 'Conservation as a medium for creation (or an expression of creation).' Can this idea work in the case of Jezeří Castle and the wider landscape below it? Will the castle, after complete restoration, become just another publicly accessible noble residence in state ownership, of which we have more than 100 in the Czech Republic (NPÚ, 2025c), and the landscape another revitalised area, comparable to many others, known, for example, from the Upper Lusatia area (the so-called Lusatian Lakes) or other countries? Already, some visitors to the area express the opinion that the current form of the lunar landscape is no longer the attraction that draws



FIG. 12. View from the lookout above Jezeří towards the castle and the adjacent ČSA large-scale quarry – the local lunar landscape – in 2022 (Barra, 2024).



FIG. 13. View of the restored theatre hall at Jezeří Castle after the presentation of M. Barra's diploma thesis in September 2024 (Barra, 2024).

people to the region. And with the currently known plans for the future form of the region, we can very probably expect them to be implemented through the gradual smoothing of the consequences of mining activities and the associated erasure of the new (memory) layer that has been written here over the past approximately 70 years.

Although it is undeniable that the entire area deserves to forget the devastation that occurred, it is necessary to carefully consider whether the creation of a new layer (the 'creation') is a public interest that outweighs the erasure of an entire chapter of the region's history. Just as we still remember the dark chapters of our national history and the history of the international community (world wars, oppression by totalitarian regimes, and many others), the past that existed here until recently should also be remembered by future generations. This issue should be addressed especially now, when spontaneous reclamation has already taken place in a certain part of the ČSA large-scale quarry, bringing many exceptional species of animals and plants to the area (AOPK ČR, 2025), while part of the area still resembles the lunar landscape – a recent historical layer, created by humans in the second half of the 20th century, which erased the history of previous centuries – this territorial 'palimpsest' – but at the same time gave rise to something new that today is undergoing gradual transformation and disappearance as a result of natural reclamation. Jezeří Castle could be preserved according to sensitive heritage conservation approaches, and its past could be remembered both through already restored interiors (or their parts – I. tour (SZ Jezeří, 2025d)) and through modern technologies such as augmented or virtual reality. This is a new trend, but it is increasingly being considered, especially for heritage objects significantly affected by devastation in the second half of the 20th century. An example of this could be the South Moravian Uherčice Castle (SZ Uherčice, 2025), where certain parts of the interiors have already been restored, but part of the castle is still waiting for its future, and one approach being considered is to carry out basic conservation of the structures but leave the interiors in a 'pre-reconstruction' state, which could distinguish the monument from those that have been fully restored in recent decades and have become 'typical' noble residences, presenting the appearance of interiors and furnishings from various stylistic periods, including the stories of the nobility who lived in the respective castles or chateaux. Jezeří and the landscape of the ČSA quarry below it could thus remain unique in a Czech, and even European, context, and retain their attractiveness for visitors from all

corners of the country. It should also be noted that the landscape below Jezeří Castle can never be returned to its form before approximately 1950, or even approximate it, unless it is decided to backfill hundreds of millions of cubic metres of extracted material, not to mention the nearly ten settlement units[10] (Barra, 2024) that were destroyed during the expansion of surface brown coal mining. Even in the case of Jezeří Castle, irreversible interventions were carried out (especially the reinforced concrete structures of the ceilings in the upper floors of the castle, and the disappearance of the external staircase and the northern annex of the main castle building), which, on the other hand, are evidence of an inappropriate approach to national cultural heritage, typical not only of the second half of the 20th century and the socio-political conditions in Czechoslovakia. Suddenly, we see terms such as 'Place Identity', 'Palimpsest', 'Knowledge' or 'Spatial and Time Connections' on opposite sides of a divide from topics such as 'Re-creation', 'Landscape Revitalisation', 'Transformation' or 'Industrial Heritage Conservation'[11] (DAD UniGe, 2024). While the terms in the first group can, from a certain perspective, represent the former and current form of the region around the ČSA large-scale quarry, the latter represent an image of the possible future towards which the entire area is heading with the gradual decline of mining and the simultaneous beginning of reclamation.

Bucket-Wheel Excavator RK 5000/R 10 – a Tool of Layered Historical Destruction vs. a Bridge between Past, Present and Future

Currently, however, it is necessary to address not only the questions of whether to conserve Jezeří Castle and the landscape below it, or to try to erase the consequences of activities over the past seventy years and present a brighter future for the entire region. Approximately in the centre of today's mining area, closer to the town of Horní Jiřetín, we can see one of the last remaining mining machines, the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000/R 10 (Fig. 14), a monumental 'stripping machine, originally part of a technological unit with a conveyor belt, which has already been removed. It weighs 5,500 tonnes, and its movement is ensured by a walking crawler chassis. The machine was assembled between 1980 and 1982 and then moved to its operating location in the surface brown coal mine'[12] (Regional Commission of the Territorial Professional Workplace of the National Heritage Institute in Ústí nad Labem, 2022). This machine has not yet been dismantled, although a similar fate has befallen many other excavators, stackers or conveyor belts located in the area, because of the quantity of iron structures from which the machines are mostly made. Although the current owner, a private joint-stock company, acquired it for 'only' several tens of millions of crowns from the previous corporation that conducted mining here, the current selling price of the excavator is in the lower hundreds of millions (Beneš, 2024). However, the reason is not only the increase in the market price of



FIG. 14. View of the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000/R 10 during a tour for employees of the National Heritage Institute and the Agency for Nature Conservation and Landscape Protection of the Czech Republic at the ČSA large-scale quarry in September 2023 (Barra, 2023).

iron, which the current owner could obtain by dismantling and selling the machine, but also the prospect of large financial resources allocated through both public grant calls intended for the post-industrial transformation of the area and in the fund to which individual industrial entities must contribute for the extracted coal in order to finance subsequent reclamation activities.

According to the statement of the regional commission for assessing proposals for the declaration and revocation of the declaration of items as cultural monuments at the Ústí nad Labem office of the National Heritage Institute, the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000 is one of the last machines of its kind and scale in the world, certainly at least within the territory of the Czech Republic (Statement of the Regional Commission of the Regional Office of the National Heritage Institute in Ústí nad Labem, 2022). Because of its dimensions, the unique technologies installed in its interior, allowing the machine to be restarted after minor adjustments and checks (Beneš, 2024), and its preserved appearance, which looks as if the miners had just left the machine yesterday (Fig. 15) and had taken only a day or two as a technical break (Uhelné safari, 2025), a proposal has emerged in recent years to declare the machine a cultural monument of the Czech Republic (UMBAU, 2022) and to relocate it using its unique 'walking' technology outside the area where the lake is expected to be restored for recreational or energy use in the coming decades (Tereba, 2023). 'It has been preserved with a high degree of authenticity, which later modifications did not negatively affect. It is an exceptionally valuable technical work, both in terms of dimensions and quality of execution. Due to its monumental dimensions and execution, this machine cannot be denied certain aesthetic values'[13] (Regional Commission of the Regional Office of the National Heritage Institute in Ústí nad Labem, 2022). This is how the NPÚ commission, which assessed the proposal to declare the excavator a cultural monument in mid-2022, described some of the values that could be considered exceptional from the perspective of heritage conservation, and the large machine could thus become another piece in the still limited collection of industrial monuments in the Czech Republic.

At that moment, however, the proposal to declare it a cultural monument encountered obstacles at the Ministry of Culture, partly due to the current location of the excavator in an area that is expected to be flooded by the restored Komořany Lake in the coming years (Česká televize, 2022). Declaring the large machine a monument that would be submerged a few years later simply did not make sense at the time. However, there is still the possibility of reactivating the unique walking technology and moving the excavator outside the anticipated flooded area, but this relocation could only be realised if the Ústí nad Labem region or another public or private institution decided to invest in the relocation and subsequent maintenance associated with the new function of the machine. It therefore seems simpler to consider not moving the machine, and thus not declaring it a cultural monument, which would allow its dismantling. In connection with the grad-



FIG. 15. View of the interior of the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000/R 10 – part of a virtual tour of the machine; screenshot taken from the Uhelné safari website (Uhelné safari, 2025).

ual decline of mining activities and the upcoming reclamation of the area, many concepts are emerging, representing the future of the region from the perspective of nature conservation (AOPK ČR, 2025), tourism and recreation, or industry more broadly (Fig. 16) (Green Mine, 2025). There is often inconsistency between the individual concepts, arising from the collision of, and lack of clarity regarding, the many public interests entering considerations about the future of the area. The speed at which the new lake will be filled also remains open, as does the question of whether there will be enough water in the area that can be redirected to the new water body without endangering industrial operations in the vicinity (such as in Litvínov-Záluží), which depend on the minimum flow of both the Bílina River and smaller streams diverted from the slopes of the Ore Mountains around the ČSA large-scale quarry (Klimecká, 2024). This inconsistency also significantly affects the future of the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000, which, according to some recent considerations, might not need to be moved the originally planned distance of 1 km (Beneš, 2024). If the final level of the new lake is at a lower altitude, with a proposed shorter filling period, the entire transfer of the large machine could be more acceptable even from an economic perspective, which could motivate local and regional self-government authorities to reconsider the purchase of this monumental technical work and thus preserve it for future generations. The prospect of preserving the bucket-wheel excavator could then be a key factor in a renewed proposal to declare it a cultural monument, which, in light of new facts, could have a greater chance of success.



FIG. 16. Example of the potential future of the ČSA large-scale quarry area with the implementation of the Green Mine project (Green Mine, 2025).

If heritage protection were granted to the RK 5000 excavator, a paradoxical situation would arise. A machine with undeniable technical uniqueness would be given the same form of protection that was often enjoyed by objects that were located at the site of the ČSA large-scale quarry in previous centuries and which the excavator itself literally mined down to the foundations. Many of these objects, which can be seen in historical photographs or in the many audiovisual materials mentioned above, never received heritage protection, and the bucket-wheel excavator would thus 'overtake' them. A tool of historical destruction from the dark second half of the 20th century, which transformed an area the size of a district town beyond recognition, is evaluated as a heritage-worthy artefact that should be preserved for its uniqueness for future generations. A decision to preserve the machine (as an example of 'Conservation'), while introducing new functions aligned with considerations of integrating this technical uniqueness into the future structure and operation of the area (the 'Creation' component), could, if implemented, serve as an illustration of the interconnection between these concepts, which otherwise appear to be obvious opposites: 'physical conservation as a condition for social and cultural vitality' (DAD UniGe, 2024).

However, technical uniqueness should not be the only reason to grant heritage protection to the excavator. Another, and from a certain perspective perhaps even more



FIG. 17. Example of the proposed new use of the bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000/R 10 as a multifunctional object, including a lookout from the upper 'terrace'. Part of M. Barra's diploma thesis – background for the visualisation in the form of a screenshot taken from the Uhelné safari website (Barra, 2024).

important, reason should be the preservation of the memory of the region's past, especially if reclamation activities are carried out as planned, and the character of the 'lunar landscape' is replaced by overgrown or grassed areas, supplemented by artificial water bodies in the deepest parts of the brown coal quarries. At least in this case, another layer of the region's memory would not be completely erased but would appropriately complement the planned future. 'In what ways can conserving something be described as a creative act?'[14] (DAD UniGe, 2024). It can be described in this way, for example, because the rescue of the excavator supports the preservation of memory in the region, even assuming that the excavator will no longer serve brown coal mining operations but will serve as a tourist attraction: an information centre and a lookout (Fig. 17), a mining museum, an exhibition space for remembering the extinct landscape and settlements that once stood there (Barra, 2024). Simply preserving the monument can become a creative act, which does not have to be represented by the construction of new objects but by the conversion of this machine with heritage values. Undoubtedly, the preservation of the bucket-wheel excavator will evoke different emotions, especially among people who still remember the now-extinct settlements, whether as occasional visitors or permanent residents. Therefore, we must realise that heritage conservation, like many other disciplines, does not consist of a single stream of opinion but rather a multi-track space for discussion and mutual consensus-building, where individual opinions or tracks should run as parallel as possible, creating space for a cultivated exchange of views and debate without escalating the situation. Based on developments in the final months of 2025, however, it now appears very likely that the excavator – an exceptional technical monument – will sink forever into the abyss of history, and for future generations, who will see the area of the large-scale ČSA mine once it has already been reclaimed, it will remain preserved only in the form of a virtual tour (Otcovský, 2025).

In this article, we have at least briefly introduced the grim history of the landscape below Jezeří Castle in Most and revealed some of the topics that contemporary Czech heritage conservation must address. Even the decision to preserve a certain form of cultural landscape in its current state for future generations can represent a step towards shaping something new, which, without the involvement of human agency, might take an entirely different direction. The aim was not to provide answers to the reader but rather to open several questions for reflection. Some of them may be answered by local, regional or state political representatives, considering factors other than the principles of heritage conservation and without recalling or building on some of the layers of the area's past and the memory that has gradually accumulated in the region over centuries, just like the layers of coal. Many of the elements that were erased from the area in the past 70 years and can

now only be seen in archival materials will never be found in the area again. Nevertheless, we should strive not to repeat the mistakes of the past that gradually erased the memory layers of earlier periods and try to preserve some of those still existing for the generations that will come after us. With a certain degree of exaggeration, we might perhaps choose the often-mentioned bucket-wheel excavator RK 5000/R 10, perceived decades ago as a tool of destruction, today as a technical monument, and, in a few centuries, perhaps as having the same value for future generations as Jezeří Castle has for us – a monument that the bucket-wheel excavator almost engulfed. In the area of the ČSA large-scale quarry, even after 2025, we will find many questions and unresolved topics from the perspective of heritage conservation that may be waiting for us to try to solve.

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Notes

1 A valuable source of information for research in astronomy, geology or other disciplines; today it is also partly examined and protected by conservationists or cultural heritage experts, as it raises an interesting reflection on the need to protect traces of the first astronauts in connection with the development of interplanetary research, industrial missions in space and other activities.

2 Lake = in Czech 'Jezero'; thus, the term *Jezeří* can be derived from the designation of the lake area that once existed below the castle.

3 The original maps of the Stable Cadastre and the Imperial prints of the Stable Cadastre maps for this area (individual settlement units and their cadastral territories), which was part of the Žatec region, were processed in 1842.

4 It is worth noting that throughout the territory of the Ore Mountains, we find many local names, in both Czech and German variants, referring to the historical mining of valuable mineral resources – Měděnec (copper mining) (Oficiální stránky obce Měděnec, 2025) or Cínovec (tin and iron-ore mining) (Město Dubí, 2025).

5 Considering this fact from the perspective of the local inhabitants and their perception of time.

6 For completeness, it is essential to add that, of the historically documented area of the Jezeří Arboretum, covering over 50 hectares, only a small part that brown coal mining in the neighbouring large-scale quarry did not reach in the 1980s exists today (Fig. 8). However, with the prospect of the complete disappearance of the arboretum, the most valuable parts were pre-emptively felled, as can be retrospectively traced in the 1980 inventory (Hušek, Dosedla, and Mládek, 1980), including financial valuation, prepared for the then state heritage protection authorities to support a positive decision on the removal of heritage protection from the arboretum.

7 In the topography of Bohemia by Bedřich Bernau from 1896, this tree, along with three others, is described with great respect and admiration: 'it is a true giant both in volume and growth. They call this oak the 'boundary oak' and its circumference at a height of 1 metre above the ground is 11.6 metres, thus a diameter of 3.7 metres. The age of this venerable giant is estimated at 1000 years' (SZ Jezeří, 2025c).

8 Website with Workshop Topics – Call for Abstracts (DAD UniGe, 2024).

9 It was a branch of the concentration camp in Flossenbürg, Germany, 'as a special camp for 100 to 200 French officers' (Gedenkstätte Flossenbürg, n.d.).

10 Two towns – Ervěnice, Dolní Jiřetín; five villages – Albrechtice u Mostu, Dřínov u Komořan, Kundratice u Chomutova, Podhůří u Vysoké Pece, Komořany u Mostu; and two hamlets – Jezeří, Čtrnáct Dvorců (Barra, 2024).

11 Final Presentation of Group B – Yellow, 13 September 2024 (DAD UniGe, 2024).

12 The dimensions of the excavator are height 35.6 m, width 33 m, length 156.5 m. It was in operation until 2016. Currently, it is still in good technical condition and is occasionally accessible for tours as part of the so-called Coal safari (on the website related to these tours, the mine owner states that it is the last machine of its type in the world)'. (Regional Commission of the Territorial Professional Workplace of the National Heritage Institute in Ústí nad Labem, 2022).

13 'The excavator is the largest of the preserved stripping and mining machines within the North

Bohemian brown coal basin. It demonstrates the prominent level of Czechoslovak technical construction and production in the 1980s, evidenced, among other things, by the fact that it was suitable for operation even at the beginning of the 21st century'. (Regional Commission of the Territorial Professional Workplace of the National Heritage Institute in Ústí nad Labem, 2022).

14 Final Presentation of Group C – Red, 13 September 2024 (DAD UniGe, 2024).

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FOR A SEMANTIC REDEFINITION OF HISTORIC URBAN FABRICS. PRESERVING AND INHABITING THE EXISTING CITY

Mariacristina Giambruno, Sonia Pistidda

Politecnico di Milano, Italy
mariacristina.giambruno@polimi.it; sonia.pistidda@polimi.it

Introduction

The historic centre of Genoa represents, as direct observation confirms, a rare and inherently dichotomous case of what is occurring in the oldest parts of cities, not just in Italy but also beyond. It is not yet fully gentrified, although some areas already are. It is undeniably shaped by tourism, yet it is still inhabited by long-standing residents and supported by traditional neighbourhood commerce. In some stretches, it appears *over-restored,* while just a few steps away, it seems *fané.*

Genoa serves as the backdrop to the issues that this brief paper aims to outline. Walking through its labyrinthine *caruggi* with a gaze different from that of the tourist has brought to light the themes that must be addressed to trace the current trajectories and dynamics affecting historic centres today. Among these is confronting an increasing degree of social complexity, which is reflected in urban dynamics. Genoa offers a heterogeneous geography of dwellings that, despite undeniable conflicts, ensures vitality in the historic centre. The major events of recent decades have brought an injection of substantial economic resources, from which both opportunities and critical issues emerge, opening interesting avenues for reflection.

Some of these themes are only briefly touched upon, while others are explored in greater depth, as they may be more urgent now. Today, the challenges, compared to a traditional debate largely focused on finding the right balance between conservation and transformation, appear increasingly complex, intersecting with crucial issues such as global dynamics, environmental risks, the housing crisis, and overtourism. What clearly emerges is that the debate surrounding the oldest parts of our cities is far from exhausted and, indeed, should be resumed with urgency and renewed vigour.

Preserving Historic Urban Fabric to Create New Meanings. Some Introductory Remarks

The city is a stratified organism *par excellence* (an assumption that is certainly neither original nor new), in which time has imprinted the diachronic signs of its passage, both in the sequence of buildings and the urban structure that orders them. Each period has left traces of its passage, more or less destructive. Until a certain period, they took the form of spontaneous micro-transformations; later, the traces became large-scale projects that profoundly altered the substance of an entire portion of the urban layout. Although this statement may appear banal, reiterating it at the outset of the forthcoming considerations is useful, as it reaffirms some key concepts that will remain implicit throughout the narrative. The first, and most fundamental, is that preservation is, by its very nature, an architectural project. This point will be revisited later.

Since the Industrial Revolution, the recognition of the past's unrepeatability has opened new perspectives on the restoration of historic fabrics. Nevertheless, this has not always altered the long-standing processes through which cities are continuously overwritten, as evidenced by the major demolitions of the 19th and 20th centuries across Europe.

Turning to the post-war *reconstruction* years and the so-called economic *boom*, often referred to in Italy as the era of the *vandali in casa* (internal vandals), we observe that significant changes took place. This context, combined with a sensitivity matured over time, marked a particularly fruitful season, drawing attention, debate, and policy initiatives towards the oldest parts of cities. Nevertheless, the outcomes were often neither conclusive nor entirely successful. The recently introduced measures – including the *Bonus Facciate*, *Ecobonus*, *Renovation Bonus*, *Super Bonus*, and the debated so-called *Salva Milano* decree, which, fortunately, remains stalled in the Senate as of December 2025 – have dealt a significant blow to the built heritage. The consequences for historic centres, although only partially assessed, will become fully evident – and severely damaging – over time.

For example, the boundaries of what we conventionally call the *historic centre,* primarily for communicative convenience rather than for any other reason, are by no means definitive. Their delineation changes across different urban planning frameworks, ranging from the boundaries of the walled city and areas built up by the 18th century, to the early historic periphery, and extending even to portions of the city dating to the early 20th century.

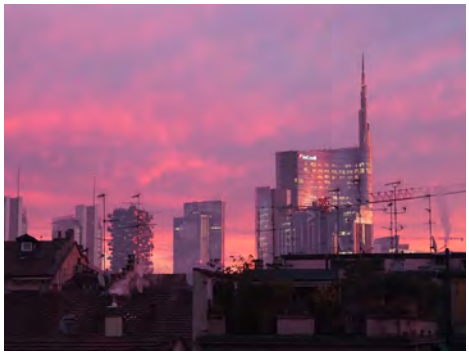


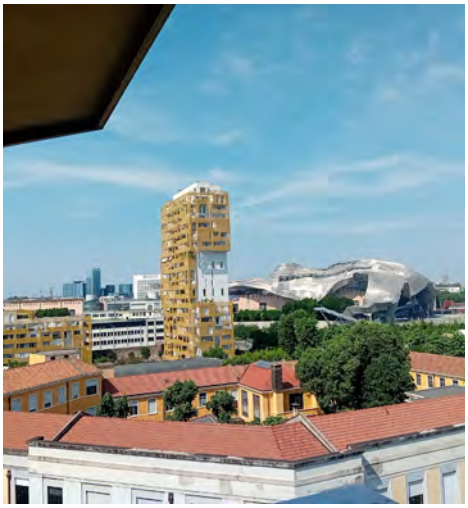
FIG. 1. Milano, the neighbourhood of Porta Nuova, with the new skyline seen from the roofs of the old urban fabric © Photo Sofia Brandinali, 2025.



FIG. 2. Milano, the neighbourhood of Porta Nuova, with the surviving existing buildings © Photo Mariacristina Giambruno, 2025.

The long-standing debate among experts – from urban planners to conservation architects – has certainly moved beyond the boundaries of the so-called Zone A. Nevertheless, it remains, in practice, the primary reference point for the majority of *Piani Regolatori* (General Master Plans). This does not imply that there are no differences (whether in history, urban fabric, or architecture) among the various parts of the city, nor that planning regulations should ignore them. However, it refers to the practice of confining the historic centre within a wall, albeit an invisible one, that separates it from the rest of the city, along with its processes and dynamics. This is precisely what, since the 1960s, has been intended to be avoided – despite the proclaimed inviolability of historic centres while awaiting *Piani di risanamento conservativo* (conservation-based rehabilitation plans) (ANCSA, 1960) – namely, advocating for a close integration with general master plans.





FIGS. 3 and 4. Milano, the recent transformations with the new neighbourhood of City Life © Photo Roberta Mastropirro, 2025

In practice, however – and there are many such cases in our country – the historic centre often corresponds to a *postcard image*: frozen in its historicity, separated from the more recent parts of the city, deprived of its functional *mixité,* and stripped of its character as a palimpsest of eras and cultures. In such cases, the hybridization between the new and the old is denied, thereby also negating one of the city's defining characteristics: its nature as a diachronic organism par excellence, as previously mentioned.

Such necessary contamination inevitably gives rise to methodological questions.

Where should the *New* be inserted? Upon the *Old*, or within it? A *New* that, as the heritage of tomorrow, embodies 'high architectural quality' (ICOMOS, 1975), and that 'does not seek to proclaim to the public: admire me!'[1] (Giovannoni, 1925).

Is this high architectural quality truly ensured when international architectural stars are commissioned to design new buildings within an existing, dense historic city? (Figs. 1 and 2). A long list of questions could be raised, potentially leading to an extensive discussion of these much-debated and perhaps scarcely codifiable themes. The training of architecture students is just one of the areas that could enhance the relationship between old and new in the existing city. It should devote greater attention to these topics, starting with the knowledge of historical fabrics, leading to a conscious project centred on the old rather than on languages that disregard it. After all, the need – now more urgent than ever – to avoid land consumption should push us in this direction. Too often, however, it is interpreted as the demolition of existing urban fabric to make way for new construction (Figs. 3 and 4). This refers to the so-called *urban regeneration*, which, although it does not consume new land, still erodes scarce resources, even when buildings are constructed with materials labelled as *sustainable* and *recyclable*. The teaching of *Urban Restoration* has become little more than a memory in schools of architecture.

Today, after a long period during which policies and tools for managing the existing city seemed consolidated, and the debate on historic centres had consequently lost some of its strength, new contemporary challenges have brought the issue back to the forefront, making it urgent to reconsider the very meaning of the project.

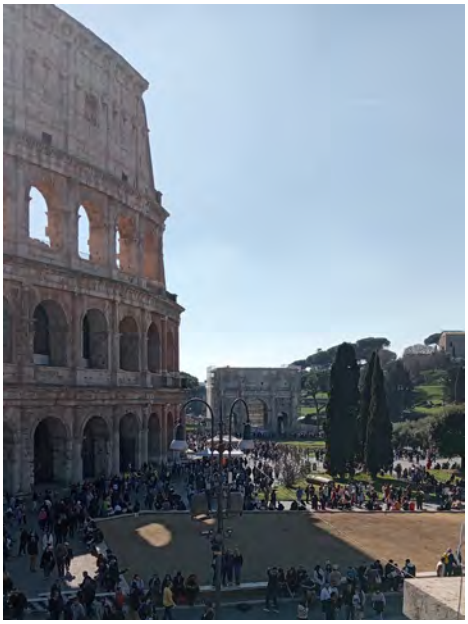


FIG. 5. Roma, the tourist overcrowding of the historic centre © Photo Sonia Pistidda, 2025.

Among the key issues shaping today's urban agenda are gentrification, tourist overcrowding (Fig. 5), abandonment, the *freezing* of historic characteristics, and the demolition of entire urban neighbourhoods to make way for new buildings, often designed by prominent architects.

It is therefore crucial to understand the role of a conservation architect in addressing these new challenges, as well as the relationship between conservation and creation in a context that has changed significantly from the past. Such awareness is essential in the evolving scenario, as the clear risk lies in altering the substance of the oldest parts of cities.

Preserving the existing is, in itself, a design action. Conservation is, in fact, an architectural project in every respect, or more precisely, it is the conception of something that did not exist before, created through the *design act*.

But what exactly do we mean by design conception and intervention? The issue becomes misleading when *Creation* and *Creativity* become entangled. Restoration is not a creative act; it must stop where the hypothesis begins (ICOMOS, 1964), as stated more than half a century ago. However, the conservation of the existing can foster the creation of new meanings by using the substance of the old to transmit them.

The *historic centre* constitutes the ideal setting for practicing the conservation of a stratified palimpsest, fostering the creation of new narratives that bridge past and present, and accompanying it towards a future in which its role as a driving force and qualifying element for the entire city may be further enhanced. For sixty years, a considerable debate has explored the themes, actions, and tools to consolidate this role for the oldest parts of cities. Perhaps everything has already been said. Among the actions that we might recall as aspirational best practices are the following: avoiding the separation of the historic centre from the rest of the city; preventing its transformation into a sort of open-air museum for tourists; maintaining residents and neighbourhood services; preserving the *mixité* that has always characterized it; and adopting place-based and community-centred approaches. All these principles have been reiterated on several occasions. However, despite the extensive discussion, concrete results remain largely absent, still too confined to academic debate with minimal impact on urban governance.

Among these multiple topics, this contribution focuses particularly on the issue of residence, investigating the potential effects that different types of residential occupancy may have on the oldest parts of cities. This trend has been widely debated in recent years. Several major cities, both in Italy and abroad, have attempted to impose limits on the indiscriminate use of housing for tourists, despite tourism remaining the primary focus of many administrations regarding the future of their historic centres.



FIG. 6. Genova, historic centre. Neighbourhood shops still open stand alongside closed shutters © Photo Mariacristina Giambruno, 2024.



FIG. 7. Genova, Vico alla Posta Vecchia. One of the construction sites funded by the PINQuA project © Photo Mariacristina Giambruno, 2024.



FIG. 8. Genova, historic centre. A supermarket opened within a historic building © Photo Sonia Pistidda, 2024.



FIG. 9. Genova, historic centre. Neighbourhood shops still open stand alongside closed shutters © Photo Sonia Pistidda, 2024.



FIG. 10. Genova, Via del Campo. New residents and tourists © Photo Mariacristina Giambruno, 2024.

The city of Genoa, which straddles tourism, gentrification, and the coexistence of old and new residents in its historic part, served as a valuable training ground for these reflections (Figs. 6–10). With the intent of a *semantic redefinition*, this contribution seeks to explore a new narrative through the physical and meaningful conservation of life in the historic centre.

Residence without residents. The impact of short-term rental deregulation

In Italy, as in many cities beyond national borders, both in Europe and elsewhere (Figs. 11 and 12), the housing crisis in large cities has reached such significant proportions and consequences that it is shaping the boundaries of a genuine emergency. Milan, Rome, Florence, Venice, to mention only the most familiar examples, are becoming increasingly attractive, yet ever more inaccessible. The issue stems from real estate values that have reached prohibitive levels in both the housing purchase and rental markets, and, above all, from the mechanisms of real estate financialisation (Aalbers, 2020) that operated in previous decades. These processes, widely explored by urban economists, have in fact transformed housing rights and, consequently, the home, from a collective good into a mere source of investment and profit[2]. Despite widespread protests, such as the recent and well-known Tende in Piazza movement, which spread from Milan to various Italian cities, no concrete responses have yet emerged.

These phenomena have accelerated significantly with the rapid growth of short-term rentals, driven primarily by the rise of digital platforms, with Airbnb foremost among them. These dynamics have disrupted not only access to housing but have also exerted, and continue to exert, considerable impacts on the built heritage, particularly in historic centres. The extensive proliferation of short-term rentals has had significant repercussions for the real estate market, leading to a general increase in both property values and rental prices, as documented by multiple studies. A July 2023 report by the Italian think tank Tortuga, composed of students, researchers, and professionals in economics and social sciences, estimates that a 1% increase in platform listings in a given area corresponds to a 5.7% increase in rental prices[3] (Tortuga, 2023).

The short-term rental market is far from marginal, even in a city like Genoa. In the historic centre, particularly in the Molo, Maddalena, and Prè neighbourhoods, the highest density of tourist accommodations is concentrated. In 2025, according to data from AirROI, an analytical platform specialised in the short-term rental market, over 1,400 tourist units were located in the historic centre. Between 2017 and 2025, the number of residents in these three neighbourhoods decreased by 13.6%, accompanied by a corresponding increase in the cost of regular rentals (Mastrolonardo, 2025).

Long-term rentals, in addition to being increasingly unaffordable, have also become progressively scarce, reflecting a broader trend towards the marketisation of cities, where the short-term rental market is considerably more profitable. These are all homes effectively withdrawn from the permanent residential market.

The Airbnb platform originated as an urban phenomenon (Gainsforth, 2019) and targets large cities, creating competition with traditional hospitality providers. It aims to establish a market based on *trust networks* and *reliability*, fostered through user reviews and guaranteed by the platform itself. Data analysed by the *Inside Airbnb*[4] platform for several major cities shows that most rentals involve entire apartments, immediately contradicting the original Airbnb's founding principle of home-sharing[5]. Many hosts are not private homeowners but property managers (frequently agencies specialised in the short-term rental market) who oversee multiple properties. Multi-hosts (those with more than one listing and thus more than one property) represent a minority, but they generate the highest revenues, thereby confirming the business-oriented nature of the platform.

Spending power has become a crucial factor in the housing search. These discouraging dynamics force the lower-middle class to seek alternatives elsewhere, as the most strategic areas of the city are increasingly turning into gated communities for upper-income groups, while the historic centre, economically inaccessible to residents, is overrun by tourists. This phenomenon is commonly known as gentrification, a distinctive feature of many urban scenarios (Semi, 2023). As a result, ways of living are undergoing profound changes, and urban inequality is rapidly increasing. What initially appeared to be a positive process, the growth of tourism, ultimately benefits



FIG. 11. Havana, Cuba. The occupation of some buildings for residential use in the historic centre © Photo Sonia Pistidda, 2025.

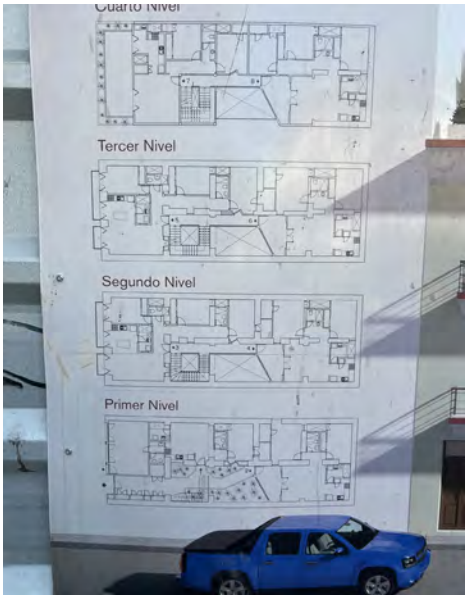


FIG. 12. Havana, Cuba, historic centre. The construction-site sign for one of the renovation projects of a historic building aimed at adapting the housing units for social residence © Photo Mariacristina Giambruno, 2024.



FIG. 13. Como, historic centre. Old shops are being replaced by new services intended exclusively for tourists © Photo Sonia Pistidda, 2025.

only a small group of property owners. The city thus becomes a consumer product, with its historical and cultural heritage reduced to a simple backdrop. The more attractive the location, the more the tourism market can multiply, even to the detriment of genuine local authenticity, which is instead artificially reproduced through marketing strategies.

This is not all: tourism has ultimately made historic centres unliveable, forcing even those who can afford it to seek housing elsewhere. The average length of tourist stays in cities is becoming progressively shorter, resulting in a changing flow of *hit-and-run* consumers in historic centres, preying on both the city and its heritage. As a result, the latter is placed under considerable stress, generating new challenges for its physical preservation, without having any positive impact on services or on the quality and liveability of public spaces. This may be an effective strategy for selling a product, but certainly not for inhabiting a place. Social housing remains scarce compared to the growing demand, and new public initiatives struggle to attract market attention, facing difficulties in securing investments. The most evident risk is the emergence of a significant gap between the city's image and its reality.

Many place rebranding operations follow the same logic: the name is changed, the image is refreshed, and in a short time, property values start to rise. This is what happened in Milan with the NoLo (North of Loreto) district or the newly coined SouPra (South of Prada) in the southern suburbs. In both cases, property values increased by approximately 60% (Pagliuca, 2025; Vincenti, 2025).

In parallel with these dynamics, local neighbourhood shops are closing and giving way to new hospitality and food-service businesses, supported by new commercial deregulation measures (Fig. 13). These actions push the historic centre towards *homogenization*, further driven by *mega-events* such as Expo, the Olympics, or designation as Capitals of Culture. The latest scenario in residential transformation, often presented as urban regeneration, is student living, which is currently attracting many international investors.

What happened to that *right to the city* once central to intense political and social debates? These trends have a significant impact on the physical structure of cities, with profound effects not only on private spaces but also on public ones and the built environment, reshaped according to a consumption-driven model. As a result, the *care* for our heritage is placed in the hands of large financial actors. built heritage is continuously reshaped through extensive renovations to adapt spaces for profit maximisation: demolitions, subdivisions, and the multiplication of auxiliary services all aim to extract the highest possible return[6].

While several cities in the United States have managed to regulate Airbnb activity, in Europe, the rise of the platform has been marked by total deregulation. Some cities are now seeking to regulate the phenomenon by introducing *ad hoc* legislation. Barcelona, for

example, has frozen the issuance of new licenses for short-term rentals in the historic city centre. Mayor Jaume Collboni announced that 10,000 currently valid tourist apartment licenses, set to expire in November 2028, will not be renewed (Euronews, 2024). In Italy, the city of Florence, as a pioneer, is attempting to regulate and restrict short-term rentals by introducing several obligations for property owners[7] and prohibiting new permits in the UNESCO area, which is approximately equivalent to the historic centre (IlPost, 2025).

Some attempts to regulate these processes are also emerging at the national level. On 18 March 2024, the new EU regulation on short-term rentals was introduced, establishing a single European database to monitor tourist accommodations. Hosts will be required to register to obtain an identification number, and in September 2024, Italy implemented its own national identification code (CIN).

The analysis of these data and processes shows that the issue of residency in historic city centres can no longer be postponed. The dynamics that have taken hold over the past decade have produced the paradox of *residence without residents*: historic centres have lost their character as places to live and have become mere backdrops for profit-driven use. The city's built heritage is what is ultimately suffering. 'Perhaps, to get out of this situation, what we need is a change in perspective: it is not *sustainable* tourism that will make cities *liveable*, but the possibility for everyone to live in cities, including their historic centres'[8] (Gainsforth, 2019, p. 9).

Martin Heidegger stated: 'what is the state of dwelling in our precarious age? On all sides we hear talk about the housing shortage, and with good reason. Nor is there just talk. There is action too. We try to fill the need by providing houses, by promoting the building of houses, planning the whole architectural enterprise. However hard and bitter, however hampering and threatening the lack of houses remains, the real plight of dwelling does not lie merely in a lack of houses. […] The real dwelling plight lies in this, that mortals ever search anew for the nature of dwelling, that they must ever learn to dwell' and, as the philosopher argued again, 'the basic character of dwelling is to spare, to preserve' (Heidegger, 1971).

Preserving the Historic City: Is Permanent Residence Enough?

Living permanently in the historic centre could therefore be one possible strategy to maintain its vibrancy and to preserve its historical character and substance, although this is not necessarily a direct consequence.

The adaptation of buildings for temporary residential use, as discussed in the previous paragraph, entails continuous transformations and subdivisions that can also affect the façades. Furthermore, the frequent redesign of public spaces to make the historic centre more tourist-oriented erases the identity of the place. This is accompanied by the transformation of the buildings' base level due to the change in use of spaces once dedicated to local neighbourhood services. These processes occur due to the absence of specific protection tools, but as widely acknowledged, only a few buildings are protected at the national level, and local planning instruments are increasingly unable to manage these transformations.

The crisis of permanent residence in the central parts of the city, and the consequent displacement of low-income citizens, had already begun in the 1960s and 1970s, a period when major banks and large tertiary-sector companies began to settle in historic centres.

The more recent phenomenon of short-term rentals has therefore amplified and extended this trend, even to cities that had previously been only marginally affected, continuing a process that has been underway for over fifty years. In this regard, it is worth noting that even southern cities, which were initially under less pressure compared with northern cities at the end of the 20th century, are now fully engaged in these dynamics[9].

The 2017 study on the historic centres of Italy's 109 municipalities, conducted by ANCSA and CRESME (ANCSA, 2017), although somewhat dated and therefore not fully reflective of the more recent and intensifying trends, provides a diversified overview of the Italian historic centre, highlighting the decline or shift of residents. The population remained essentially stable, showing a slight decrease of 0.1%, a non-alarming figure in itself but significant compared to the 0.6% increase recorded in areas outside the historic centre.

Housing costs vary significantly across the country, with areas, particularly in northern Italy, where property values are much higher in city centres than in the surrounding urban areas, and others, mainly in the south, where these values are considerably lower. Beyond these indicators, the most critical figure is that 21% of properties are either unoccupied or occupied by non-residents.

The data presented in the same report regarding Genoa show some differences compared to the national figures, demonstrating once again how the city is shaped by distinctive and even contrasting dynamics that make it an exceptionally interesting case study. In Genoa's historic centre, given the very high number of single-person households, the population is increasing, in contrast to the overall decline in residents across the city. The elderly population is decreasing, the number of foreign residents is high, vacant buildings are few, and more than 80% of the organisations involved in tourism are located outside its boundaries.

Retaining permanent residency, as happened in the past, could support care processes that are crucial for preserving the built heritage. Such actions, carried out by the residents themselves, could help to mitigate the impact of transformations affecting services and public spaces, thereby promoting the preservation of the historic urban layout, a fundamental component of the ancient urban structure. Many cities are taking action to mitigate the negative impacts of mass tourism on their historic centres by regulating short-term rentals. The debate surrounding these issues has expanded beyond the narrow circle of specialists to reach the mainstream media. It remains unclear whether these measures are genuinely aimed at preserving urban heritage or how effective they will be. However, the issue of permanent residency is undeniably crucial, especially in maintaining a *mixité* of inhabitants and avoiding the displacement of economically vulnerable groups. The *Programma Innovativo Nazionale per la Qualità dell'Abitare* (National Innovative Programme for the Quality of Living, PINQuA) might have been an excellent opportunity. The programme, launched in 2020 by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Sustainable Mobility, aimed to implement social housing and urban regeneration initiatives. The purpose was to regenerate public social housing, promote urban regeneration, address housing needs, enhance the socio-economic context, and improve accessibility and safety in different parts of the city.

The programme was not specifically intended for historic centres or built heritage. Nevertheless, if properly used, as demonstrated by some cities, it could have promoted stable social residence within the historic centre, which has more than sixty thousand inhabitants, thereby contributing to the preservation of the historic buildings involved. Instead of the 159 funded projects, only a few took advantage of the opportunity to in-

tervene in historic centres through systemic strategies. The projects initiated in Genoa are among these few. A small proportion of the total focused on the built heritage, but they mostly targeted large individual historic buildings (such as convents and monasteries, barracks, former prisons or psychiatric institutions), not necessarily located within the historic centres[10].

It is still too early to assess the impacts on the historic centres involved in these projects, which are contained in the PINQuA programme. Likewise, it is not yet possible to fully understand the intervention strategies in relation to the effective preservation of the buildings and urban spaces targeted by the programme. What is interesting, however, is that some local administrations tried to provide a concrete response to the long-standing issue of living in the historic centre. This topic, consistently addressed by scholars and experts in urban planning and preservation, finds in the PINQuA programme a significant first attempt to relaunch the role of historic centres within broader cities. From this perspective, it is urgent to realign urban policies and conservation/transformation strategies for historic cities around the human dimension, placing people at the centre. This is essential for envisioning a realistic future for inhabited and liveable places, fostering political frameworks and visions capable of supporting urban plans that prioritize citizens (Carrera, Di Palma and Storchi, 2024, p. 11). Social housing alone is not enough[11], if the appropriate tools are not in place to support it. The instruments must guide the process and encourage collaboration between the public and private sectors in implementing interventions.

The Historic Fabric for the Contemporary City: the Interplay between Temporary Measures and Urban Planning Tools

If permanent residency, while undeniably essential, is not sufficient to preserve historic centres and make them an active part of the city, what set of actions could prove significant in achieving this goal? On the one hand, it could be strategic to develop certain quick, targeted devices capable of sparking activity in specific parts of the historic centre, acting as catalysts for the spread of their positive effects to the surrounding areas. These are interventions on individual buildings aimed at promoting, for example, intercultural and intergenerational housing, or projects on public open spaces, designed to transform these places into gathering spaces for community practices, thereby strengthening the sense of belonging. Alternatively, venues for cultural events and temporary installations could help to consolidate relationships among residents from diverse cultural and traditional backgrounds (Carrera, Di Palma and Storchi, 2024, p. 5).

Many of these temporary initiatives place civil society at the forefront. While urban policies and planning instruments guide development, it is undeniable that active citizenship plays a fundamental role, despite difficulties and contradictions, in stimulating recovery processes. In Genoa, for example, the shared management between active citizenship and institutions has found concrete expression in interventions at the Giardini Luzzati, in the Neighbourhood Houses (*Case di Quartiere*), in various initiatives promoted by the Maddalena Residents' Association, and in the numerous events organized to foster networks and community building (Calbi, 2020, p. 143).

A review of national and international experiences offers multiple sources of inspiration, highlighting key principles that can revitalize historic centres. One of the most important lies in the capacity to create strategic community hubs. The effectiveness of

interventions often depends on the ability to combine social, cultural, and economic objectives, using existing buildings in strategic locations as instruments to foster community engagement, promote cultural activities, and provide social services. The capacity to involve residents, cultivating a sense of ownership and belonging, is central to the success of initiatives, which can have a significant impact even in the city's most critical areas[12]. The promotion of social diversity by integrating different resident groups (by age, structure, culture, and social background) represents another challenge to maintain a mixed neighbourhood, contrasting gentrification and the negative effects of tourism[13]. The separation between site management and the implementation of activities can sometimes favour general economic sustainability, ensuring flexibility and responsiveness to local needs[14].

However, such sparks are destined to extinguish if not supported by long-term strategies, which must necessarily rely on urban planning instruments capable of addressing the multifaceted and evolving dynamics currently shaping historic centres. For this reason, urban plans, in addition to supporting the preservation of the historic fabric through specific regulations based on a deep understanding of the existing, must also promote the permanence or reintroduction of neighbourhood-based commerce, limit short-term rental housing, enhance historic buildings in accordance with the needs expressed by residents, and initiate policies that support permanent and socially mixed residency. These plans should also include systematic tools for understanding the ongoing dynamics of change within historic centres.

Notes

1 Although Giovannoni's statement is here completely taken out of its original context, the essence of it seems to fit well with certain buildings recently constructed in the historic contexts of our cities.

2 In Milan, between 2015 and 2023, housing prices have grown by 58.1%, rental rates have increased by 45%, while average wages grew only slightly and less than the consumer price index, outlining a significant gap between housing costs and economic capacity. OCA elaboration on ISTAT data (Bricocoli et al., 2025).

3 See also a recent report by Sky TG24, which revisited the key issue of the topic (Orengo, 2025). The data refers to 2019.

4 Inside Airbnb is an independent platform and, as declared on the website's home page, is «a mission-driven project that provides data and advocacy about Airbnb's impact on residential communities. We work towards a vision where communities are empowered with data and information to understand, decide, and control the role of renting residential homes to tourists» [https://insideairbnb.com/, accessed 10 May 2025].

5 In Milan, 87.3% of hosts rent out entire apartments, while only 12.3% offer private rooms. In Rome, 75% of homes for rent are entire apartments; in Florence, the figure rises to 84.1%; in Venice, it stands at 78.2% [Inside Airbnb data, accessed 10 May 2025, https://insideairbnb.com].

6 In New York, in 2016, the city administration granted an exemption to the zoning regulations, allowing permits for residential units smaller than 40 square meters. This move marked the beginning of a new trend: *micro-residences*, the so-called studios. (Marchesini, 2017).

7 The rooms must respect minimum dimensions, at least 28 m² for an apartment, a single room with 9 m², double rooms of 14 m², a kitchen of minimum 9 m², and bathrooms of 2.5 m². This measure is valid not only for the new apartments, but it is a requirement for the existing properties too (IlPost, 2025).

8 Translation from the Italian by the author.

9 Palermo represents a paradigmatic example (Manfredi, Abate and Giubilaro, 2024, p. 26). Despite the urban renewal initiated with the 1993 Piano Particolareggiato for the historic center, long-standing vulnerable residents and ethnic communities settled since the early 1980s are being displaced, as public policies have failed to counter market-driven private interventions. The situation worsened with rising tourist flows following the city's inclusion on the World Heritage List in 2015. Similarly, Bari's historic center has become a hub of local nightlife, particularly between the old and new city, while persistent security issues in the narrow streets contribute to depopulation or occupation by economically dis-

advantaged groups lacking sustainable alternatives (Amendola, 2024, p. 16).

10 Among the main projects focused on historic centers are Pigna Up, promoted by the Liguria Region for Sanremo's old town. The project tackles building decay and housing needs while enhancing public spaces and integrating advanced technologies into the historic fabric. Another notable example is Abitare i Borghi, developed by the Metropolitan City of Bari for towns in disadvantaged areas. In Liguria, the Marinella di Sarzana project includes the restoration of buildings for social housing and the activation of neighborhood-scale commercial and service functions on the ground floor. In Puglia, the Riabitare la città vecchia di Taranto project supports the rehabilitation of public housing, the City Hall, and public courtyards. Sassari is also advancing an integrated strategy for its historic center, involving the reuse of disused public buildings and the reorganization of public spaces (Brisku *et al*., 2022).

11 Milan, for instance, has 35 buildings in Municipio 1 (essentially the historic core of the city), mostly intended for social housing, out of a total of 850 housing units. Nevertheless, Milan is a clear example of gentrification in the historic core. Rents and property prices in the central areas are among the highest in Italy, and since EXPO, the growth of tourist flows has further accelerated a sort of separation between the center and the periphery.

12 An interesting example was implemented in the historic center of Lisbon, with a project in one of the city's most critical neighborhoods, La Mouraria. The restoration of a building into a community center symbolically constitutes a true programmatic Manifesto, a clear declaration of intent: an integrated rehabilitation model, with social, cultural, and economic purposes, directly involving residents, including activities with the schools. The strategic pillars of the project rest on a few key elements: an ordinary building located in a strategic part of the historic center, a simple restoration funded by donors, community involvement since the beginning, and a mix of social and economic functions (Revés, 2013).

13 In Milan, in viale Padova, a challenging area of the city due to the significant multiethnic population, an initiative gave rise to the *Maison du Monde* (MdM) social housing project. Launched in 2011 and expanded in 2014, the project restored a historic building in the heart of the neighborhood. It now accommodates, alongside existing residents, several housing units for immigrant families, others for individuals with social vulnerabilities, and some units allocated to selected families, serving as a connection and reference point for all residents. In this case, the model is the integrated management based on the sharing principle. See the website https://viapadova36.it/progetto.htm. A more recent model, intergenerational cohousing, already common in many countries, notably Denmark (Larsen, 2019), is also beginning to spread in Italy. The principle allows for diverse family compositions, including single individuals, elderly people, young couples, and others, so that everyone can contribute their time and abilities to support one another.

14 In Turin, a paradigmatic example is the *Casa del Quartiere di San Salvario*, which represents a reference space for the neighborhood. The managing body, in fact, offers spaces, services, technical and organizational support, as well as assistance with fundraising. The project began with the support of Fondazione Vodafone and the city of Turin for the rehabilitation of an old building located at Via Morgari 14. [https://www.casadelquartiere.it/casa-del-quartiere-di-san-salvario-torino/].

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RATIONES SEMINALES. CONSERVATION FOR THE RE-CREATION OF HETEROTOPIC SPACES

Caterina Giannattasio
University of Cagliari, Italy
cgiannatt@unica.it

Introduction

As is well known, a series of places were conceived by Michel Foucault as 'heterotopias', that is, 'other places', some of which were born to accommodate segregative functions. Specifically, these are heterotopias of deviation, of which psychiatric hospitals and prisons are emblematic. These are architectures that, due to their position in urban space, as well as their size and shape, were able to play a role of 'confinement' for that segment of the 'uncomfortable' community (which is inside), and at the same time – especially concerning detention facilities – a role of 'intimidation' for the rest of the community (which is outside). In the contemporary world, and with specific reference to the Italian context, similar artefacts, following the application of the 1978 Basaglia Law in the former case and the 2009 Prison Plan in the latter, are no longer in use and require new forms of functionalisation, capable of providing renewed responses to the contemporary world.

Starting from these assumptions, drawing on the experience gained during the workshop at the former Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa – another category that can be associated with the concept of heterotopia – the contribution reflects on the possible forms of reuse suitable for such buildings, understanding conservation and re-functionalisation as a tool for creating new scenarios, both in terms of design and, above all, cultural and social, while respecting the typological and architectural characteristics that distinguish them. In this specific case, and as is always the case in the design of pre-existing buildings, the term 'creation', or rather 'the act of creating, of bringing to life from nothing', is understood as an act through which to give life to renewed visions of ways of living that respect the principles of conservation, as well as sustainability and accessibility. The background to this contribution is also the relationship between 'conservation' and 'creation', through the revival of Augustine's doctrine, which, with regard to matter created by God, assumes the existence of *rationes seminales*, or original seeds from which the various realities evolve, until the completion of their being, through a process of 'continuous creation', or 'conservation'.

Conservation as a continuous creation

The concept of *rationes seminales*, a Latin expression meaning 'seminal reasons', translated from the Greek *λόγοι σπερματικοὶ*, was introduced by the Stoics, taken up by the Neo-Platonists and adopted and developed by Augustine of Hippo. This theological theory posits that the world emanates from the seed, which harbours latent potentialities that can evolve, manifest, and reproduce over time, thereby giving rise to novel life forms. In essence, Augustine's argument, as outlined in his treatise on the *rationes seminales*, seeks

to establish a harmonious reconciliation between the temporal emergence of individual beings and the primordial creation of humankind[1].

His thought develops from the inability, expressed in the *Confessions*[2], 'to be able to explain prime matter absolutely formless', which is 'inconceivable to both sense and intellect' (Mazzarella, 1978, p. 3), and resolves the issue by 'appealing to the mutability of things, which, as they become, cease to be what they were and begin to be what they were not, and this transition from form to form occurs through something formless and not really through nothingness', without, however, explaining what matter is (Mazzarella, 1978, p. 4). It is only later, in *De Genesi ad litteram*, that Augustine states that 'God (...) did not first create matter and then form, but created the entities that are composed of matter and form, since there cannot be in God's immutable eternity a succession of moments, which would imply time, which instead marks the reality of all created entities'; this, unlike the creative moment, which is instead timeless and eternal (Mazzarella, 1978, p. 5).

Augustine's passages on 'How God created all things simultaneously and yet works without interruption'[3] and 'Potentiality and causality in creation'[4] clarify the relationship between creation and evolution, with the metaphor of the plant, which springs from the seed to become a tree, through a process of continuous development. The *rationes seminales* are, therefore, latent forces from which different entities originate in actuality and that 'are maintained in being by God, and develop according to that order established by God and preserved by his immutable power'. As Mazzarella points out, echoing Gilson's thought: 'Created activities only utilise God's creative efficacy; whatever man's causal activity, it produces nothing new but develops the hidden energies created by God, arranged in the rhythm of their becoming and preserved in matter' (Mazzarella, 1978, p. 8; Gilson, 1949, pp. 270–274).

Ultimately, the conception of the universe is attributed to God, a process which undergoes a series of changes over time, emerging from pre-existing potentialities, or 'primordial casings'. The formation of novel entities is thus the consequence of a perpetual process of growth and, consequently, of conservation, until the fulfilment of their existence, which is expressed in matter, 'ontologically possible and discernible to the intellect'[5]. Creation and conservation are, therefore, closely connected. The act of creation, in this context, is understood to signify 'bringing into being from nothing', with reference to God, and by extension, humankind. Within the domain of physics, the process of creation entails the 'formation of particles due to the transformation of energy into matter'[6]. In the field of nuclear physics, the creation of particles is defined as a 'process in the end products of which particles are present that were not present at the start of the process'[7].

Transferring this concept to the discipline of Architectural Restoration, we can affirm that creation can produce, through actions of conservation, reintegration and re-functionalisation, the same effects evident in nuclear physics when it aims at revealing meanings through matter, as well as giving life to renewed visions of ways of living. In this case, creation arises from a desire for conservation, becoming a continuous innovation that, echoing Augustinian foundations, is conservation governed by the architect-restorer.

Disused heterotopic architectures in the contemporary city

Conservation, reintegration – where applicable – and re-functionalisation are actions that, in the contemporary world, must be carried out in the presence of buildings that have

lost their function. Among these, the most complex are heterotopias, according to a term coined by Michel Foucault to indicate 'other places'[8]: 'There are some places that are in some way different; places that are opposed to all the others and their purpose is to erase them, compensate them, neutralise them or purify them. These spaces are counter-spaces. [...] Adult society has also, and well before children, organised its counter-spaces, its situated utopias, its real places outside all places. These include gardens, cemeteries, asylums, brothels, prisons, Club Méditerranée villages, and numerous others', such as cinemas, museums, libraries, ships, and hotels for economically disadvantaged individuals (Moscati, 2020, pp. 12–13).

Among them, asylums and jails, prisons of the mind and body, are defined by the French philosopher as 'heterotopias of deviation', designed to accommodate uncomfortable segments of society, to be confined 'inside', to protect, but above all to intimidate the rest of the community living 'outside'. To achieve these objectives, they were located outside urban space, adopting oppressive forms and dimensions (the latter also for functional reasons), especially in the case of detention facilities.

In addition to Foucault, Erving Goffman also reflects on total institutions and the dangerous consequences of their creation, identifying among the places of social ostracism other 'closed sub-systems', ie concentration camps, boarding schools and military institutions, such as ships and training camps, and enclosed religious institutions, such as monasteries, abbeys, cloistered places, as well as institutions for the elderly, orphans, and blind people.

These are 'places, spaces or sets of spaces, buildings, constructions, where a certain activity happens regularly. [...] Each institution seizes part of the time and interests of those who depend on it, offering in exchange a particular kind of world, which tends to encircle its members in a sort of encompassing action', implemented by preventing social exchange and exit to the outside world, through 'closed doors, high walls, barbed wire, rocks, streams, forests or heaths' (Basaglia, 2010, pp. 33–34). In other words, they are a sort of control machine, even for those 'outside'. George Orwell anticipated this thought in 1984, in which he associated the figure of the overseer with the institution, both of which know and dominate 'human multiplicities', capable of making them docile and subjugated (Manferlotti, 2016). In the contemporary world, with specific reference to the Italian context, psychiatric hospitals, following the application of the 1978 Basaglia Law, as well as prisons after the promulgation of the 2009 Prison Plan, are disused and require new forms of utilisation, capable of providing renewed responses to the contemporary world.

A conscious project certainly needs a deep knowledge of these systems, starting from their architectural, typological and functional features[9].

The initial focus is on the wall: 'The high wall, no longer the wall that surrounds and protects, no longer the wall that shows off its prestige, power and wealth, but the carefully closed wall, impassable in one way or another, which hides the mysterious work of punishment, will be, very soon, and sometimes in the centre of 19th century cities, the monotonous figure, material and symbolic at the same time, of the power to punish' (Tarchetti, 2014). This will be particularly evident in the centre of 19th-century cities. This element systematically characterises prisons, whereas in asylums it is replaced by seemingly permeable systems, ie the gates, which deceive the inmates into believing they have contact with the outside and the community (Guglielmi, 2018, p. 19). In both cases, these

heterotopic sites, made up of physical margins for socially marginalised groups, emphasise the concept of bidirectional inaccessibility (Giannattasio, 2024, pp. 75–84) and subvert the concepts of space and time. The enclosure elements are also foundational to such artefacts, and no project should disregard them. For prisons, they are the guard posts, the crossing spaces, the prison wings, the cells, the system of openings, and the gratings; just as for asylums, they are the pavilions, the rooms, the open spaces, and the gardens, the latter representing true heterotopias within heterotopias. For these buildings, it is necessary to define appropriate ways to intervene, respecting their memory values and opening them up to the community.

Taking up the theme of the conflicts expressed by Alois Riegl about memory and topical values, there are numerous examples, both in material and immaterial terms. Specifically, concerning the former, the first question to ask in defining their reuse is whether it is legitimate to eliminate the elements of confinement, which certainly have an impact and evoke a sense of closure. With regard to the latter, it is necessary to reason about the most appropriate functions, while also respecting their nature, rich in history and stories, arousing in users – excluding enthusiasts of 'dark tourism' – emotions and states of mind of suffering and disquiet. Therefore, it is suitable to reflect on possible contradictions, cohabitations, and complementarities, guided by the will of an authentic cultural re-appropriation.

To move in this direction, a methodical path should be followed, starting from the recognition of the values of each building – historical, urban, typological-architectural, technical-constructive, functional – to define solutions aimed at their conservation and reuse, capable at the same time of giving valid answers to the rewriting of urban policies, the recomposition of fabrics and the reconstruction of cultural and economic strategies with a long-term vision, capable of considering the monument as an 'urban architecture'[10].

Furthermore, the project should consider three different scales: the first is urban and metropolitan in nature; the second is architectural; the third is psychological and social. On a large scale, these buildings, both because of their location and monumental dimension, can constitute functional centralisers, whose selection requires a reinterpretation of the dynamics of urban development, coming to constitute new centralities of material and immaterial nature. In this sense, the project should reconstruct a renewed system of physical and social relations that would reinterpret their rejectionist character. It should fully express how the interventions would allow the urban dimension to be considered on a large and small scale, in a relationship of interdependence between architecture and the city. On the architectural scale, it would be a matter of measuring the project against the values that each structure expresses through the elements that make it up while experimenting with design solutions that are open to a renewed present. From a psycho-social point of view, the aim is to ensure that the new functions are welcomed by the users, not only in the two directions mentioned above but also by verifying that they are experiencing a state of well-being despite being in a place historically associated with pain.

Concerning the reuse, functions should be appropriate to the needs of contemporary life and respect the principles of modern critical-conservative restoration theory (reversibility, minimal intervention, compatibility, distinguishability, authenticity). In this sense, the possibility of public-private cooperation should be considered, especially for large artefacts, to make the costs of restoration, maintenance and management economically viable in the short, medium and long term.

To understand the functionality of each typology – circular, courtyard, and star-shaped –, it is imperative to reflect on the significance of each feature, particularly: the enclosure, which functions as a liminal element designed to separate the 'inside' from the 'outside', ie the individuals deemed 'protected' from those to be 're-educated'; the open space, which is designed not as a residual space, but rather as a component of the building to ensure daily pedestrian activity; the central space, as a point of obligatory crossing, whether covered or uncovered, to reach the wings, which metaphorically demarcates the transition between freedom and coercion; the corridor, in its various forms – linear or curved, single, double, central, suspended – as the space serving the cellular apparatus; the cell, ie the unit of measurement of the prison form, in its different forms, single, double or triple, etc.; the window, a serial element, yet the sole instrument of potential contact with the world, both visually and acoustically, in its variations linked to height and the presence or absence of the 'wolf's mouths' (a pervasive functional detail associated with the grille)[11].

Furthermore, the arrangement of these components is instrumental in defining the architectural character of the building, as evidenced by the composition of the prison wings. Additionally, the reiteration of these elements, such as the system of openings from an external perspective and the system of cells from an interior perspective, facilitates the physical measurement of each monument by delineating its size[12].

The creation of a taxonomic superstructure of the founding architectural elements of the prison space therefore represents an effective tool to identify variants and invariants and to assess the possible need for, or possibility of, permanence or modification. It is only through such attention that the definition of an appropriate reuse project is possible.

Conservation vs. creation?

Drawing upon a series of implemented projects, it is possible to formulate observations, beginning with a distinction between favourable and unfavourable projects, that is, those that demonstrate adherence to, and conservation of, the foundational principles of penitentiary architecture.



FIG. 1. Boston, former Charles Street Jail, current Liberty Hotel: a) main entrance seen from Cambridge Street Avenue; b) hotel hall; c) access area to the new wing housing the rooms (photo C. Giannattasio, 2015).



FIG. 2. Valencia, former Cárcel Modelo, current Ciudad Administrativa Nou d'Octubre: a) the only remaining section of the boundary wall in Calle Lluís Lamarca; b) view of two wings of the star-shaped structure and of the new floor below the level of the same street; c) view of the new building volumes and urban landscaping following the demolition of the walls along Calle del Nou d'Octubre (photos C. Giannattasio, 2024).

With regard to the latter, a pertinent example is the former Charles Street Jail, designed in the second half of the 19th century by Gridley James Fox Bryant and regarded as one of the most notable examples of the 'Boston Granite School' of architecture (McMaster, 2015). Following its decommissioning in the 1990s, the site was converted into the luxury 'Liberty Hotel'. The design was by Cambridge Seven Associates, Inc. Achyut Kantawala (Project Team Architect). It consisted of the shortening of some wings, the demolition of the boundary wall and entrances, as well as the east wing of the prison – replaced by a fifteen-storey building volume housing the rooms and by a tower housing the Yawkey Centre for Outpatient Care, completed in 2004. Inside the building, actions of spectacularisation dominate the space, emphasising some elements of the original architecture (Fig. 1).

Another questionable case study concerns the former Cárcel Modelo in Valencia, designed by the architect Joaquín María Belda between 1889 and 1903 (García Corachán, 2005). In 2010, a reuse project was undertaken to accommodate the headquarters of the 'Ciudad Administrativa 9 de Octubre'. The designer was Juan Añón, who demolished the boundary wall to integrate the old building into the surrounding urban landscape. Additionally, the dividing walls between the cells were demolished and two towers between two consecutive arms were built to optimise the new functional performance. These actions compromised the historic architecture, denying the correct relationship with the urban space, the continuity between old and new, and the memory values (Fig. 2).

By contrast, two other projects in France are positive. The first refers to the former Saint-Michel prison in Toulouse, which was designed by the architect Jacques-Jean Esquié in 1855 and was the first in France to be built according to the panoptic model (Foucaud, 2003, pp. 114–123; Esquié, 1868, pp. 313–330). The edifice boasts a monumental entrance in neo-medieval style, characterised by angular towers and battlements, known as a 'little castle'. Internally, the building exhibits a central rotunda from which five detention wings branch. In 2009, the castle was closed, and in 2011 it was declared a Historical Monument. In 2020, part of the building was reused as cultural and memorial space, to allow visitors to know the prison's history through exhibitions. The project focused on the preservation and enhancement of the former architecture, conserving the two crenellated towers and the arched galleries bordering the Honour Court. In 2024, the French gov-

ernment announced that the entire former prison would become the seat of the Ministry of Justice (Fig. 3).

The second is the former prison of Autun, located in Bourgogne, France. Built in 1855 according to a design by the architect André Berthier, it was listed as a Historical Monument in 2017 (Foucart, 1971, pp. 11–24). As the subject of an international competition launched in 2018 and won by the Parisian architecture firm Atelier Novembre, it is part of a larger project scheduled for completion in 2025. This project involves a 'federation' of buildings intended for museum activities. The former prison, named after the chancellor Nicolas Rolin, is the centrepiece of this federation. It lends itself to hosting exhibition spaces without difficulty while preserving its 19th-century nature (Fig. 4).

Considering the findings from the Genoa workshop focusing on the former Albergo dei Poveri case study, conservation and re-functionalisation can serve as a tool for creating new scenarios, encompassing both design and, most notably, cultural and social dimensions. This approach aims to preserve the typological and architectural characteristics that are hallmarks of such heritage assets. In particular, the discussion highlighted the necessity of incorporating the principles established within the Faro Convention regarding the concept of the heritage community. The conservation and reuse project for the Genoese heterotopic complex, initiated as early as the 1990s with a forward-looking vision and refined over the years through the development of a masterplan prepared by the Postgraduate School of Architectural and Landscape Heritage of the University of Genoa, has proven to be fully consistent with these principles. Indeed, it demonstrates that choosing an appropriate new use – the headquarters of the Humanities University Hub – accompanied by innovative design decisions grounded in precise historical, spatial, formal, and technical-constructional knowledge of the building, and therefore respectful of its tangible and intangible values, can return to the city and the community places that had historically been alien to them. Regarding this latter point, the project has also shown great sensitivity to reconnecting the building with the city, both through the choice of function and through infrastructural interventions.

Starting from the antinomy between 'conservation' and 'creation', going beyond any prejudice, the reasoning conducted has made it possible to ascertain that there is not an



FIG. 3. Toulouse, former Maison d'Arrêt Saint-Michel, current museum venue: a) Le Castelet, main entrance on Grande Rue Saint-Michel; b) detail of the boundary wall at the corner of Rue Robespierre and Rue du Gorp; c) internal view of the wing used as a museum space (photo M. Porcu, 2024).



FIG. 4. Autun, former panoptic prison, current Musée Rolin: a) project plan; b) project sections; c) rendering of the entrance from Place Saint-Louis (© atelier Novembre).

oppositional relationship. On the contrary, starting from the assumption that every architecture is a living organism, being a place of dwelling, the interconnection and the right balance between these two acts can be a sound way to achieve satisfactory results, when conservation moves towards creation, and vice versa; ie, the former is not understood as a mere freezing of what exists, and the latter seeks a profound dialogue with what exists. On the other hand, taking us back to Augustine's thought, creation can only derive from conservation.

Conservation can be considered as a creative act, or rather as a medium for creation (or even as a creative expression), when it can combine, both in aesthetic and functional terms, the old and the new, ie the reasons for the past and the present, according to a far-sighted, future-oriented gaze, proposing hybridisation solutions that stand the 'test of time'. Any act of conservation/creation cannot (and must not) be neutral, but the outcomes can (and must) be controlled through a methodological approach that sees the knowledge and interpretation of the work, as well as the recognition of its values, as a phase of analysis and criticism that itself becomes a project, followed by the management phase. This last phase is very delicate and exposed to numerous variables, especially over time, which is why particular attention must be paid in the design phase. This process is a mode of 'reaction' to the past, of 'action' in the contemporary, of 'proaction' for the future, whereby: 'conservation' serves to reveal the meanings of the architectural work and 'creation' to enhance them; 'conservation' allows the heritage to be handed down to future generations and 'creation' to be experienced from the present day; 'conservation' safeguards the collective memory and 'creation' responds to contemporary social dynamics; 'conservation' guarantees the material and cultural accessibility of the artefact and 'creation' the physical and sensorial accessibility.

On the other hand, as Marco Biraghi states, '(...) what conservation as conservation observes together with the effects of time on form, through them, is the vitality of form itself. (...) And if the proper of the form is to become in time – is to be life –, conservation as conservation must want precisely its becoming, its life. What is at stake with the term 'preservation', therefore, is neither the 'reactionary' backward turn of conservatism/restoration, nor the immobilising freeze of preservation, but neither any supposed technique, or theory, or methodology, or even simple predilection of taste, hand or eye that can disguise itself under the name of 'preservation', but rather the recognition of the existence of life in all things – and only from this the recognition of the necessity that this life must be preserved in its continuous evolution' (Biraghi, 1998, p. 3).

Notes

1 Enciclopedia Treccani, item '*rationes seminales*'.

2 S. Agostino di Ippona, *Le Confessioni* (Landi, 1987; Stump, Kretzmann, 2003).

3 Agostino di Ippona, *De Genesi ad litteram*, 401–415, V, 23–44, (Carrozzi, 1982), pp. 277–283, https://disf.org/agostino-ippona-rationes-seminales): 'We, on the other hand, whose steps are guided by the same divine providence through sacred Scripture so that we do not fall into that error, should endeavour to inquire, considering the works of God with his help, where he had simultaneously created these things when he rested from the works he had completed and of which he produces up to the present time the visible forms through the succession of times. Let us therefore consider the beauty of an ordinary tree in its trunk, branches, leaves and fruit; this form certainly did not suddenly emerge from the earth as it is in all its grandeur, but rather because of a process of growth that is known to us.

It in fact sprang from a root that a germ had previously planted in the earth, and then all those elements grew after taking their form and developing into their different parts. The germ also came from a seed: formerly in the seed were all those elements, not as to the size of their bodily mass, but as a causal force and power; that is because the dimensions [attained by the tree] were formed by a quantity of earth and humidity.

But more marvellous and more excellent is the energy inherent in a little grain, thanks to which the surrounding moisture, mixed with the earth, forms – so to speak – a matter capable of changing itself into wood of such a nature, into spreading branches, into green and appropriately shaped leaves, into attractive and abundant fruit, all in an orderly diversity of all its parts. Indeed, what sprouts or hangs from a tree that has not been extracted or derived from the sort of hidden treasure that is the seed? The seed, however, derives from one tree, though not from that one but from another, and that one derives from another seed; sometimes, however, the tree derives from another when one takes off a sapling and transplants it.

Not only therefore does the seed derive from the tree, but also the tree derives from the seed and the tree from the tree, but the seed can never derive from the seed except through a tree; a tree, on the other hand, can derive from a tree even without the medium of the seed. Thus, the one derives from the other through alternate generations, but the one and the other come from the earth, whereas the earth does not derive from them, to which, therefore, the earth that generates them is prior. This is also true of animals: there may remain doubt as to whether the germ comes from the animals or vice versa, but whatever the former, it is nevertheless certain that it comes from the earth'.

4 *Ibid*., 23–45: 'In the grain, therefore, all the elements that over time would develop to form the tree were already invisibly present; in the same way, we must imagine that the world, when God simultaneously created all things, simultaneously contained all the elements created in it and with it when the day was made: that is to say, it contained not only the sky with the sun, moon and stars – whose specific form remains unchanged during their circular motion – but also the sea and the abysses which are subject to movements – so to speak – inconstant and being situated below [the sky] constitute the other part of the world; it also contained the beings which water and earth produced virtually and causally, before they appeared over time and which we now know as works which God continues to perform up to the present'.

5 *Ibidem*.

6 Vocabolario Treccani, item 'Creazione'.

7 Enciclopedia Treccani, item 'Creazione'.

8 Further details on Foucault's thought can be found in the following publication: Vaccaro *et al.*, 2010; Sebastianelli, 2004, pp. 13–34.

9 About shared methodological reflections between the disciplines of Architectural and Urban Design and Architectural Restoration see Cocco, Giannattasio, 2017.

10 For more detailed considerations developed in relation to the decommissioned Sardinian prison system, see: Cocco, Giannattasio, 2016, pp. 71-98; Giannattasio, 2020, pp. 133–137; Cocco, Giannattasio, 2023.

11 For more general insights into fundamental theoretical concepts of morphology and semantics see Ottolini, 1997. With reference to prisons, see Basso Peressut, 2018, pp. 35–67; Lanz, 2019, pp. 173–188.

12 On the concept of repetition Guglielmi, 1971.

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THE COMMENDA OF SAN GIOVANNI DI PRÈ IN GENOA: FROM THE CONSERVATION OF A MEDIEVAL LANDMARK TO THE CREATION OF THE *NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ITALIAN EMIGRATION*

Sara Iaccarino, Renata Picone
University of Naples Federico II, Italy
sara.iaccarino@unina.it – renata.picone@unina.it

The Museum of Italian Emigration (MEI) in Contemporary Genoa

The urban area of Genoa extending from *Piazza Banchi* to the *Principe* railway station and towards *Ponte dei Mille*, behind the harbour, still retains its symbolic and social core in the small Piazza della Commenda. Historically characterised by intense flows of people and goods, this area has long been associated with migration, hospitality, and transience. Over time, however, it has also become one of the most fragile and marginalised parts of the historic centre, marked by physical decay and social vulnerability.

Within this context, Piazza della Commenda represents both a critical urban node and a symbol of the close relationship between heritage conservation, social memory, and contemporary reuse. This meaning emerged clearly during the *EAAE Conservation/Creation Workshop* held in Genoa in September 2024, where the area emerged as both highly multicultural and deeply neglected. Several groups visited the area of the Commenda, gaining an opportunity to assess how it is perceived through direct engagement. The area has been identified as one of the most multicultural in the city, yet simultaneously as one of the most abandoned and degraded. The establishment of a museum dedicated to migration in such a setting inevitably raises questions concerning urban regeneration, social impact, and the risk of gentrification, issues that must be addressed alongside architectural and conservation concerns.

As the Commenda di Prè is one of the most prominent historic buildings overlooking the square[1], its adaptation into the *National Museum of Italian Emigration* reflects a broader institutional strategy, initiated in 2015 by Ligurian authorities, to anchor narratives of Italian migration within an authentic historical setting (Fig. 1). Throughout its history, the Commenda operated as a place of arrival, departure, and temporary residence: founded in 1180[2] as a hospitaller complex for pilgrims and travellers heading to the Holy Land, it later became a strategic stop for the mass emigration of Italians – particularly Ligurians – towards the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia from the 19th to the early 20th century.

This continuity of uses associated with mobility and displacement makes the Commenda di Prè a particularly meaningful site for the MEI. Often described as an Italian 'Ellis Island', the building embodies a tangible connection between architecture and migration history, where the material permanence of stone structures intersects with the fragile, immaterial memories of departure, hope, and loss (Fig. 2). The museum project, promoted by the *Ministry of Culture* (MiC) and the *Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation* (MAECI), sought to create both a physical and a digital space to preserve these memories while engaging contemporary audiences[3].

The MEI forms part of a wider museum network coordinated by Mu.Ma – *Istituzione Musei del Mare e delle Migrazioni*, which addresses themes related to maritime culture



FIG. 1. The main façade of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè after the conservation intervention carried out for the establishment of the MEI (photo by E. Fiore, September 2024).

and transoceanic movements. Rather than relying on the display of original archival documents, the museum adopts a predominantly digital and interactive approach, presenting photographs, letters, oral histories, and audiovisual materials through multimedia installations. This curatorial choice responds to the need to minimise physical impact on the historic fabric while enabling an inclusive and emotionally engaging narrative.

The architectural and museographic design, developed by *Gnosis Progetti* in collaboration with the Municipality of Genoa and *ETT S.p.A*. – a company specialising in multimedia productions for heritage sites across Italy – was conceived as a reversible and clearly recognisable system of panels, lighting devices, and small-scale installations (Fig. 3). These elements establish a deliberate dialogue with the ancient walls, avoiding imitation or formal overlap. At the same time, the conservation project adopted a strictly preservation-oriented approach, ensuring the safeguarding of masonry, vaults, wooden ceilings, and spatial configurations. In this sense, new cultural values could be created only by first recognising and safeguarding the building's historical and material authenticity, through a well-conceived museographic pathway and the tools offered by digital humanities.



FIG. 2. Social traces of the relationship between the city, migration, and identity: 'Genoa, I left in order to find these "carruggi" in my hands' (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

In this sense, the adaptive reuse of the Commenda di Prè represents an interdisciplinary challenge, in which conservation, museography and digital humanities converge. The 'new MEI' project (2019) demonstrates how new meanings can



FIG. 3. Interior spaces of the Commenda di Prè after the musealisation process (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

emerge from historic architecture not merely through transformative actions, but through a critical process of interpretation, selection, and restraint. Here, the 'creation' lies not in altering the building, but in redefining its role within the contemporary city and reactivating its capacity to convey shared memories and identities. The experience gathered during the project is fully consistent with the themes that emerged during the *EAAE Conservation/ Creation* workshop held in Genoa, in which conservation concerns and the creation of 'something new' coexist in the same space, in an interdisciplinary process in which social and architectural dimensions come to the fore (Fig. 4).

The Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè within the Historical Development of Genoa

The historical evolution of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè is inseparable from that of the city of Genoa itself[4]. Founded in the late twelfth century, the Commenda is one of the oldest surviving hospitaller complexes in Europe, and represents a paradigmatic example of how architecture can embody long-term processes of mobility, hospitality and social transformation associated with the great migrations of both medieval and contemporary times. Understanding this evolution was a fundamental premise for the conservation project, as each historical phase left tangible traces that informed both diagnosis and design strategies.



FIG. 4. Interior spaces of the Commenda di Prè after the musealisation process. Lighting system designed by Gnosis Progetti (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

Originally conceived as a hospitaller structure for pilgrims, merchants, and travellers heading to the *Holy Land* (Fig. 5), the complex consists of two superimposed halls associated with a double church, later complemented by additional residential and administrative spaces. Its



FIG. 5. Plan of the San Giovanni di Prè complex (1774). Source: G. Rossini (ed.), La commenda di Pré. Un ospedale genovese del Medioevo, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1992, p. 38.

design, consisting of a large hospital hall divided into two naves, appears to share features with muristans and caravanserais of the Muslim world. Hospitality facilities of this kind were already widespread in the East and may have been introduced to the West by the Crusaders, even before their subsequent adoption by the Cluniac and Cistercian orders. In this respect, the Commenda offers a unique opportunity for an investigation into the architectural heritage of the Hospitaller religious orders (Fig. 6). The building is also a significant example of Genoese Romanesque architecture, characterised by exposed masonry made of carefully squared blocks of Promontorio stone – typical of buildings in the 12th-century Genoese historic centre – narrow mortar joints, and a clear structural articulation. These features not only define the architectural identity of the Commenda but also testify to construction techniques deeply rooted in the local tradition.

From its earliest phase, the Commenda operated as a place of reception and care, closely linked to Genoa's role as a major Mediterranean port. In the Middle Ages, the hospital of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè was a symbol of the close ties binding the Christian West, the Muslim East, and the city of Genoa, which was then an important crossroads on the routes to the Holy Land (Rossini, 1992, p. 146). Its location, between the harbour and the inland routes, made it a strategic node for mobility in the Middle Ages. This original function strongly influenced the layout of the complex: large halls divided into two naves by stone columns, a system of openings designed to ensure light, ventilation, and hygiene, and service spaces integrated into the overall design. These elements

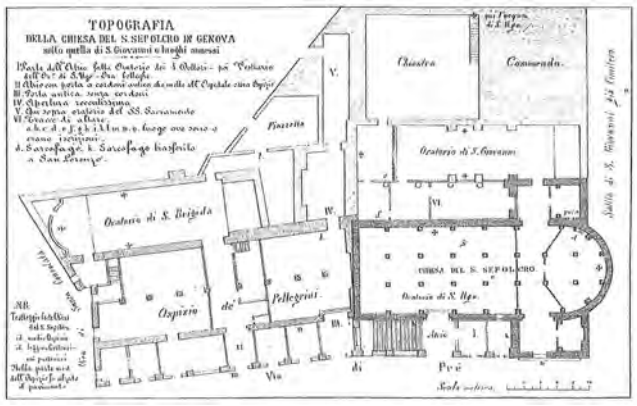


FIG. 6. Plan of the San Giovanni di Prè complex at the end of the 19th century, designed by the Jesuit Luigi Persoglio (1877). Source: G. Rossini (ed.), La commenda di Pré. Un ospedale genovese del Medioevo, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1992, p. 48.

remained readable despite later transformations and constituted a key reference for the conservation project.

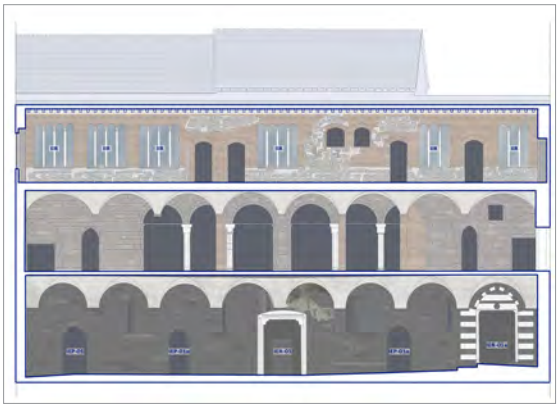


FIG. 7. Section of the loggia of the Commenda di Prè (drawing by S. Iaccarino for the conservation project led by Gnosis Progetti, with scientific supervision by R. Picone, 2019).

Between the 15th and 16th centuries, the Commenda underwent substantial modifications reflecting both broader changes within the Order of Hospitallers and the shifting role of Genoa in Mediterranean trade. The vertical extension of the complex, the introduction of brick masonry in the upper levels, the addition of decorated wooden ceilings, and the reorganisation of interiors marked a transition from a purely hospitaller function to a more representative and administrative one. One of the major redesigns of the overall layout of the *Commenda* took place during the 16th century, providing the building with a new, enhanced monumental quality. Decorative wooden ceilings – later restored in the 1970s – were added to the first floor, following the demolition of the reed ceilings. Furthermore, the two halls were partitioned through the addition of rows of circular columns topped with cubic capitals, running longitudinally across the hall while supporting a series of transverse brick arches (Cagnana, 1992).

Rather than erasing the medieval structure, these interventions layered new meanings and materials onto the existing fabric, generating a complex architectural palimpsest.

This stratified condition is particularly evident in the loggia (Fig. 7), built in 1508, where the juxtaposition of medieval stone masonry and later plastered brickwork clearly reveals successive construction phases. In the conservation project, this area was interpreted as a 'section in elevation' of the building's history, whose legibility had to be preserved rather than simplified[6]. The decision to maintain visible discontinuities, infills, and material contrasts stems directly from this historical reading, acknowledging transformation as an integral part of the building's identity.

Further alterations occurred during the 19th and 20th centuries, when the Commenda was affected by expropriations, changes in use, and partial fragmentation into separate properties. In the post-war years, Carlo Ceschi, head of the Superintendence of Monuments, began the first recovery project of the complex, expropriating the numerous private properties into which the hospital had been split. Much of the restoration work carried out during these years involved consolidation and underpinning work on the hospital's structures, which had become overloaded and were founded on moisture-rich tuffaceous soils due to the proximity of the building to a riverbed (Rossini, 1992, p. 146). Bold decisions, rooted in a philological approach to restoration that was prevalent in the early post-war years, included the clearance of the southern loggia – previously proposed in drawings from 1915[7] – sometimes considered to be 'excessive'[8]; the reconstruction of missing structural parts, such as the stone pillars of Promontorio, rebuilt in hammered concrete; as well as the reproduction of decorative elements inspired by others made of

the same material but rendered in a stylised form, such as the small columns of the biforas and the columns of the upper loggia (Rossini, 1992, p. 146).

Other restoration campaigns carried out between the 1970s and the 1990s – by architects Mario Semino and Giorgio Rossini – aimed at recovering the architectural unity of the complex while introducing new structural elements and flow-management systems (such as the new staircase structure next to the oratory of Santa Brigida) to meet contemporary safety and accessibility standards. These actions, although sometimes marked by materials and techniques distinct from the historic fabric, created new ways of inhabiting the building and now form part of its layered history; for this reason, these actions were critically assessed rather than removed from the adaptive-reuse project.

From a conservation perspective, the historical analysis of the Commenda di Prè was not intended as an exhaustive reconstruction, but as an interpretative tool to guide design choices. The recognition of multiple building phases, construction techniques, and past adaptations supported a project approach based on material authenticity, legibility of stratification, and compatibility of new insertions. In this sense, history was not treated as a static reference, but as an active framework within which contemporary conservation and reuse strategies could be meaningfully translated into new creative opportunities.

Architectural Project for the Commenda di Prè as an Act of 'Creation' through 'Conservation'

A thorough understanding of local building techniques and materials represented a fundamental premise for the conservation project of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè. The architectural language of the Commenda is deeply rooted in the Genoese Romanesque tradition, widely recognisable throughout the historic centre of Genoa[9] (Fig. 8). Exposed masonry composed of squared blocks of Promontorio stone, the chromatic contrast between dark limestone and lighter marbles, and the extensive use of slate slabs for roofing and protective elements all reflect construction practices closely linked to the local context. This condition emerged clearly during the *Conservation/Creation* workshop, in which a strong material coherence was identified within the historic centre of the city (Fig. 9).



FIG. 8. Main architectural features of the historic centre of Genoa (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

Given the importance of the Commenda for the local community, the analytical process began with a careful study of its architectural elements and of the materials used in its construction, with the aim of fully understanding the building techniques employed in such a complex and articulated structure.[10] While the original

components of the building remain clearly legible, the Commenda has undergone a considerable number of transformations and substantial redesigns over time, which have added multiple layers to the original fabric, resulting in a structure that can be understood as a collection of past and present signs and meanings. Accordingly, the conservation proposal for the Commenda was developed through a gradual and progressive understanding of the techniques and materials employed throughout its construction history, beginning with a thorough reconstruction of its building phases. Special attention was devoted to the transformations and restoration work carried out on the complex using heterogeneous techniques and materials, each typically associated with a specific historical phase, in a process of multi-layered sedimentation (Cagnana, 1992, p. 139).



FIG. 9. Façade details of San Lorenzo Cathedral in Genoa (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

Above all, the work carried out during the 16th century radically reshaped the Commenda in terms of both finishes and structural elements (Cagnana, 1992, p. 140): from the addition of an entire brick-built upper level – clearly recognisable through the contrasting masonry texture when compared with the medieval Promontorio stone – to the introduction of new finishes, including the plastering of exterior surfaces and the decoration of interiors with elegant friezes; from the installation of richly decorated wooden ceilings and new interior partitions, resulting from the construction of round columns with cubic capitals and the arches above them, to the redesign of the portico through the addition of plastered vaulted roofs and the enclosure of selected openings.

However, as discussed in the previous section, the Commenda as it appears today is also the result of multiple restoration and adaptation interventions. The interpretation of each construction phase of the Commenda relied heavily on the materials and building techniques employed, ranging from the original structure, dating back to the 12th century – closely connected to local Ligurian building traditions – through the 16th-century additions and brick-built modifications with decorative features, to the more recent use of reinforced concrete during restoration campaigns in the 1980s and 1990s. In other words, building technology, as interpreted and applied during each historical phase, weaves together the threads of knowledge guiding the conservation project towards informed and coherent outcomes.

Accordingly, during the conservation project for the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè, a material characterisation was conducted, focusing primarily on the analysis of wall surfaces, in which Promontorio stone and brick masonry – often associated with later



FIG. 10. Slate roofing tiles on the dome of the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

insertions – coexist. Promontorio stone, a distinctive grey-black marly limestone extracted from the historic Promontorio quarry, represents one of the defining materials of the complex. Another characteristic material of the Commenda di Prè is slate, particularly in the form of thin slabs, used mainly for roofing and in areas exposed to rainwater. This extensive use of slate, deeply rooted in Genoese architectural tradition – as also observed in the second case study, the *Albergo dei Poveri* (Fig. 10) – especially for exterior finishes and roofs, is due to its intrinsic properties, including insulation capacity, impermeability, resistance to mechanical stress, low porosity, and ease of workmanship. As in the case of the Commenda di Prè, slate is generally cut and installed in very thin slabs.

The horizontal structures of the building likewise possess significant historical value. The wooden roof, supported by a Piedmontese truss, located above the main hall on the second floor, recalls construction systems typical of northern Italian pitched roofs, while the finely crafted wooden coffered ceilings decorated with tempera painting provide clear evidence of the 16th-century phase of embellishment.

These elements played a decisive role in shaping the conservation approach, which prioritised the preservation of original materials and construction logic over replacement or visual homogenisation. Overall, the study of local building techniques functioned as an interpretative framework guiding the conservation project. By analysing building technologies and historical documents, the project was able to define targeted, compatible, and reversible actions, thereby reinforcing the legibility of the building's material history while ensuring its continued use.

Diagnostic Investigations and Conservation Strategies

Preserving the layered nature of the Commenda di Prè required conservation strategies grounded in detailed diagnostic investigations. These were conceived not as a purely technical phase, but as a critical tool to support informed decision-making and to calibrate the level of intervention. Diagnostic analysis focused primarily on architectural surfaces, including plasters, mortars, stone masonry, wooden structures, and previous consolidation systems.

A first round of investigations was carried out with the aim of identifying and verifying the chemical composition and matrix of the plasters and mortars applied in various areas of the building. The company appointed to conduct these analyses, *Tecnikos Srl*, worked closely with the project managers and conservation designers in order to obtain technical, historical, and scientific data and to corroborate the results of exploratory tests carried

out in the 1990s. Accordingly, three stratigraphic tests were commissioned on the plasters of selected interior walls on the second floor, in order to identify any traces of pre-existing wall paintings or decorated plaster layers consistent with those previously uncovered. In addition, four plaster samples taken from the exterior façades were analysed using optical microscopy under polarised light and X-ray diffractometry, with the aim of establishing the mineralogical and petrographic characterisation of the materials.

The lime-based decorations uncovered on the second floor following the removal of whitewash layers proved to be consistent with those already restored, all belonging to the same pictorial and decorative cycle characterised by faux architectural motifs and grotesques, likely dating to the late Renaissance period. Analysis of the decorative bands further revealed that several restoration campaigns had been carried out during the 1990s to reinstate their original chromatic values. By contrast, the examination of paint layers adjacent to the decorative bands did not identify any historical strata predating the 20th century, revealing instead more recent paint applications consisting of titanium white in the upper layer and zinc white in the underlying layer.

Additional samples of stratified plaster were taken from the northern, eastern, and western façades, confirming that 20th-century renovation work on the exterior elevations was carried out using modern materials, with the replacement of the original historic plasters and paint layers, which are therefore no longer recoverable. These findings directly influenced conservation choices.

Rather than extensive replacement or reconstruction, the project focused on ensuring the long-term preservation of existing materials, improving their performance where necessary, and enhancing their legibility. In this sense, diagnostic investigations were instrumental in avoiding over-intervention and reinforcing a conservation ethic based on minimum action and maximum respect for material authenticity.

Conserving the Façades: Preservation, Appearance, and Urban Impact

The conservation of the façades of the Commenda di Prè played a crucial role in maintaining the building's relationship with the city of Genoa. As a landmark deeply embedded in the urban fabric of the historic centre (Musso, 2020, p. 107), the building required an approach capable of addressing both material conservation and perceptual continuity.

Detailed geometric and material surveys of the southern, western, and northern façades provided the basis for mapping decay phenomena according to UNI 11182/2006 standards. This systematic analysis enabled the identification of material-specific deterioration patterns and their causes, allowing for targeted and differentiated interventions (Fig. 11).

Cleaning strategies were carefully calibrated according to material sensitivity. Exposed Promontorio stone was treated using misted water and soft brushes to avoid surface damage, while more resistant encrustations were addressed with controlled chemical treatments. Mortar joints were repointed using compatible lime-based mortars, respecting the original narrow joints characteristic of medieval Genoese masonry. Protective treatments were selected to be breathable and visually neutral, preserving both the chromatic qualities of the stone and the patina accumulated over time.

A key design choice concerned the coexistence of exposed masonry and plastered surfaces. Rather than enforcing visual uniformity, the project preserved this duality as evidence of historical stratification, reflecting both medieval construction practices and

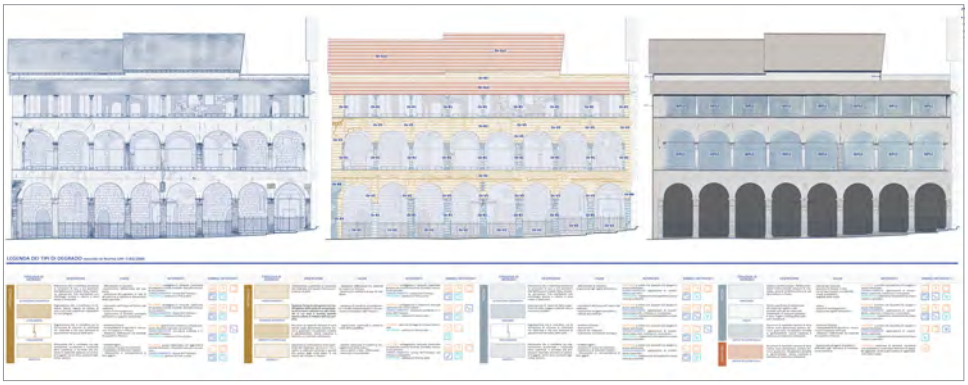


FIG. 11. Study and design of the conservation interventions carried out on the main façade of the Commenda di Prè (drawing by S. Iaccarino for the conservation project led by Gnosis Progetti, with scientific supervision by R. Picone, 2019).

later 16th-century interventions. This decision reinforced the façade's role as a palimpsest, narrating the building's transformations while maintaining its recognisability within the urban landscape.

Interventions on slate roofs, window frames, and metal elements followed the same principles of material compatibility and minimum intervention.

'Creating' the National Museum of Italian Emigration inside the Commenda di Prè

The architectural project for the reuse of the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè as the National Museum of Italian Emigration was conceived as a critical process in which, rather than introducing formal novelty through architectural transformation, the project sought to generate new meanings, uses, and narratives by carefully interpreting the existing historic fabric and redefining its relationship with contemporary society.

The intervention was grounded in the recognition of the Commenda as a stratified architectural organism, whose value lies not only in its medieval origin but also in the successive layers of use and transformation that have shaped its identity over time. Within this framework, architectural design was understood as a mediating practice, tasked with enabling new functions while preserving the legibility, material authenticity, and spatial integrity of the monument.

The exhibition design represents one of the most explicit manifestations of this creative process. In the absence of a traditional object-based collection, the museum adopts a predominantly digital and multimedia narrative, allowing the historic spaces to remain physically unencumbered. Exhibition elements were deliberately designed as lightweight, reversible, and autonomous devices, clearly distinguishable from the historic structure. This strategy avoids any form of permanent alteration, affirming a hierarchy in which the medieval architecture retains its primacy while actively participating in the visitor experience. In this sense, creation emerges not from addition but from subtraction and restraint, enabling the historic fabric to acquire new interpretative potential.

The integration of building services further reflects this approach. Mechanical, electrical, and multimedia systems were designed to meet contemporary standards of comfort, safety, and accessibility while minimising visual and material impact. Their discreet insertion within floors, walls, and technical voids transforms infrastructural necessity into an

opportunity for architectural mediation, in which technological innovation supports the architectural heritage rather than competing with it. Lighting design, in particular, plays a key role in articulating the relationship between conservation and creation: calibrated to enhance spatial perception and architectural features, it contributes to the construction of meaning without imposing a dominant visual language.

Overall, the architectural project operates through a logic of interpretative creation. By working within clearly defined constraints – material compatibility, reversibility, and respect for stratification – it transforms the Commenda di Prè into a contemporary 'place of memory'. The project demonstrates that creation in conservation does not reside in visible transformation, but in the ability to promote new narratives, social functions, and cultural values through a critically informed and restrained design process (Buonfantino, De Stefano, 2022).

At the urban scale, the transformation of the Commenda into the National Museum of Italian Emigration also produces significant social and symbolic effects. Located in a fragile area of the historic centre, the project inevitably intersects with broader processes of regeneration and re-signification. While the introduction of a cultural institution carries the risk of triggering gentrification dynamics, the museum's thematic focus on migration, displacement, and marginality acts as a counterbalance, fostering inclusion rather than exclusion. The building thus becomes a space not only for remembrance, but for contemporary reflection on identity and mobility.

Conservation as Creation: Critical Reflections and New Values

Architectural conservation is not a neutral or purely technical practice, but an interpretative process that inevitably involves selection, hierarchy, and critical judgement. In this sense, conservation can be understood as a creative act, not because it introduces formal novelty, but because it redefines meanings, uses, and relationships between architecture, memory, and contemporary society. The conservation and adaptive reuse of the







FIGS. 12, 13 and 14. Hybridity in the historic centre of Genoa: the architectural palimpsest of building façades (photos by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè exemplifies this condition, highlighting how restraint, rather than transformation, can become a generator of new values.

The project deliberately rejected approaches based on visual reconstruction, stylistic homogenisation, or expressive architectural insertions. Alternative design strategies – such as the introduction of permanent exhibition structures or the transformation of interior spaces to accommodate traditional museum displays – were consciously set aside due to their potential impact on the medieval fabric and on the legibility of the building's stratification. Instead, the choice to adopt a predominantly digital and multimedia museographic model allowed the museum narrative to unfold without materially occupying or altering the historic spaces.

This decision represents a critical act of creation. By prioritising reversibility, lightness, and recognisability, the project establishes a clear hierarchy between historic architecture and contemporary installations, allowing each to retain its autonomy. The medieval walls, vaults, and wooden ceilings are not treated as a neutral backdrop, but as active elements of the visitor's experience, whose material presence anchors the immaterial narratives of migration. In this dialogue, creation lies in the capacity to activate new interpretations while preserving the integrity of the architectural substrate.

While preservation aims to maintain and affirm the historical and cultural identity of the building, the introduction of innovative concepts – particularly in the context of museum development – brings about new cultural and social meanings. The integration of a predominantly digital museum experience within the medieval spaces of the Commenda exemplifies this hybrid approach. This fusion of ancient architecture with advanced digital and multimedia technologies marks a new paradigm for the city of Genoa, embracing a state of hybridity in its cultural expressions and urban fabric.





FIG. 15 and 16. Hybridity in the historic centre of Genoa: coexistence of buildings designed in different centuries (photo by S. Iaccarino, September 2024).

In Genoa, the coexistence of 'old' and 'new' – whether tangible, as in its historic buildings, or intangible, as in its evolving cultural values – is particularly evident. During the various site visits conducted throughout the workshop, multiple expressions of this layered urban identity emerged: the city's façades reveal a stratified history shaped by successive periods and architectural languages (Figs. 12, 13 and 14). Another manifestation of this coexistence can be observed in the buildings erected during the second half of the 20th century (Figs. 15 and 16), which consciously maintained continuity with the medieval urban fabric, reflecting a renewed approach to urban adaptation and historical continuity. Likewise, contemporary interventions aimed at improving accessibility – such as the new external staircase at the *Albergo dei Poveri* or the annex adjacent to the Garaventa School – establish a dialogue between historic masonry and modern design language, creating a tangible and meaningful connection between past and present.



FIG. 17. The Commenda di Prè after the conservation and adaptive reuse project for the National Museum of Italian Emigration (photo by E. Fiore, September 2024).

From a disciplinary perspective, the project demonstrates how conservation can function as a critical framework for contemporary design. The historical analysis, diagnostic investigations and material studies were not pursued as ends in themselves, but as tools to inform choices, define limits and modulate action. In this process, creation emerges from the ability to work within constraints, transforming them into opportunities to attribute new meanings.

The case of the Commenda di Prè ultimately suggests that the creative dimension of conservation resides in its capacity to negotiate continuity and change. By safeguarding the material and evidential values of the building while enabling new forms of use and interpretation, the project reaffirms conservation as an active cultural practice, generating new relationships between past and present, architecture and society, memory and the future.

Notes

1 This contribution is the result of joint work by the two authors, who provided scientific consultancy and design support for all conservation-related aspects of the former Commenda di Prè in Genoa, within the architectural project *Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè. Adeguamento funzionale, restauro e risanamento conservativo. MEI | Museo dell'Emigrazione Italiana*, developed by Gnosis Progetti on behalf of the Municipality of Genoa in 2019. Renata Picone authored the following sections: *The Museum of Italian Emigration (MEI) in Contemporary Genoa and The Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè within the Historical Development of Genoa.* Sara Iaccarino authored the following sections: *Architectural Project for the Commenda di Prè as an Act of 'Creation' through 'Conservation' and Conservation as Creation: Critical Reflections and New Values.*

2 This information is derived from an inscription on the bell tower reading: ACTOR WILLELMO

DOMINI DOMUS EX HIC / PRO QUO QUESO PATER QUI TRANSIS DIC / MCLXXX TEMPORE WILLELMI INCOATUM EST. However, the complex may have existed prior to this date. The historian Carlo Giuseppe Ratti (1737–1795), for instance, suggested that the Commenda was founded in 1098, when the relics of Saint John the Baptist were believed to be kept on the site. (Ratti, 1980).

3 For a book presenting the architectural design process, see Buonfantino and De Stefano, 2022.

4 An initial historical assessment has been synthesised in Picone, 2022.

5 Further information on the history of the Commenda di Prè, particularly in relation to medieval survivals in the historic centre of Genoa, can be found in historical guidebooks: Alizeri, 1875, pp. 345–351; Poleggi, 1818; Ratti, 1780, pp. 221–222.

6 During the restoration work carried out in the 1990s under the direction of Giorgio Rossini, detailed stratigraphic and mensiochronological analyses were conducted on the upper levels of the loggia in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the construction phases of the Commenda. The results of this research are summarised in Chapter 9 of the volume Rossini, 1992, pp. 139–142.

7 The project developed in 1915 by Alberto Terenzio, a student of Alfredo d'Andrade, envisaged the restoration of the complex, including the reopening of all the hospital loggias and of the ground-floor portico. See Rossini, 1992, p. 145.

8 In the case of clearing the niche on the second level: 'When the reopening of the stone arches is technically possible, bold static solutions are proposed, even reaching the paradox of depriving the relapses peducci of the 16th-century times of the underlying supporting wall, to be able to reopen the light of the back medieval arch' (Rossini, 1992, p. 146).

9 Numerous Romanesque churches are located in the city of Genoa and in its surrounding area. Notable examples include the Church of San Siro di Struppa (1025), the Church of San Donato (1189), the Church of Santi Cosma e Damiano (1049), the Church of Santa Maria di Castello, the Church of Santo Stefano (972), the Church of Santa Maria del Prato (1172), the Church of San Giovanni di Prè (1180), the Monastery of Santa Maria in Valle Christi in Rapallo (1204), the Church of San Bartolomeo Apostolo (1090), the Basilica of San Salvatore dei Fieschi in Cogorno (1244), the Church of San Nicolò di Capodimonte in Camogli (12th century), and the Church of San Nicolò dell'Isola in Sestri Levante (1151).

10 An initial analysis of the construction materials and techniques of the Commenda di Prè has been synthesised in Iaccarino, 2022, pp. 65-72.

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‘EXUBERANT DIVERSITY’: SHARED HERITAGE AND COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Merlo Kelly
University College Dublin, Ireland
merlo.kelly@ucd.ie

Introduction

This essay seeks to examine creativity within conservation practices, with a particular focus on the process of documenting and understanding a place. Not only is the meticulous process of learning about a place a creative act, but it fosters more thoughtful creativity in design approaches and design thinking. These explorations of shared heritage and collaborative learning are framed in response to the experiences, activities and discussions at the EAAE Conservation/Creation workshop in Genoa in September 2024. This is part of a wider study examining contributions from conservation practice to early architectural education in the context of the climate and biodiversity crises, and the changing role of the architect.

Understanding the Place

Though the act of surveying a place is fundamental to the architectural design process, it is arguable that conservation practice offers a rigorous methodology that elevates the act to a creative endeavour. An architect specialising in conservation brings a particular set of skills and principles to the act of measuring and recording a site. It is the forensic nature of this period of observation that sets it apart from the routine survey, characteristic of a process driven by curiosity and a desire to learn from the experience. The understanding that each structure or site is unique in its composition and its character informs this learning phase. The creativity lies in the application of prior knowledge and critical judgement to a specific situation, whereby the history and narrative of the place can be revealed. As such, critical evaluation is a necessary skill for understanding and evaluating tangible and intangible heritage, but also in the process of creative decision-making. The very endeavour to discover concealed layers or hidden values, leads to a new reading of place, a new creation. Aside from being an innately creative act, this careful interrogation of a site leads to a more creative and considered design response that is rooted in place. The importance of understanding the place is set out in the Burra Charter which states: ‘Work on a place should be preceded by studies to understand the place, which should include analysis of physical, documentary, oral and other evidence, drawing on appropriate knowledge, skills and disciplines’ (ICOMOS, 2013).

A site visit, for the purposes of observing and interpreting the character and value of a place, is typically preceded by scholarly investigation, research and mapping. In the Genoa workshop, this took the form of introductory lectures, where experts presented the historic port city – its past and present, and visions for its future. This included a chronology of the urban morphology, with rigorous studies accompanied by archival maps, drawings



FIG. 1. 'Genova – Castrum, Civitas and Burgus', sketch from Professor Roberto Bobbio's lecture, 2024.

and images. Shared materials included the publication *Genova. Centro storico problemi e prospettive*, in which Bobbio and Musso (2020) compile a series of richly illustrated essays that describe the layered history and urban morphology of the city of Genoa, an ancient settlement on the Ligurian Sea. A sketch outlining the structure of the medieval city in the form of Castrum, Civitas and Burgus allowed for a reading of the contemporary city, the broad form of which remains unchanged despite considerable interventions and expansion in subsequent eras (Fig. 1).

Walking and Learning

The complexity of a layered and vibrant urban setting can render it challenging to read and record. A direct experience of the place is needed in order to understand it, and heritage walks can serve to address this need, in accordance with the 2005 Faro Convention (Fairclough *et al.*, 2015). Heritage walks are presented as a Faro Convention Tool and an example of good practice in the promotion and protection of cultural heritage. With a study based in New Delhi, Chauhan and Anand (2023) consider the role of heritage walks in the promotion of 'inclusive heritage learning' among members of the public. They present the walks as a creative and innovative learning tool, which helps to foster greater sensitivity towards urban heritage in all its forms, alongside 'a sense of pride and appreciation' (Chauhan and Anand, 2023, p. 264). The authors also cite the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005), which promotes the placement of people and communities at the heart of heritage, highlighting the need to raise public awareness around the value of heritage.

As part of the EAAE workshop, the groups spent a morning exploring the historic centre of Genoa, or Centro Storico, on foot. The walks were led by expert Genoese colleagues within the groups, and the structure and pace allowed time for diversions, discussions and local interactions. The itinerary was clear, but this method of meandering from site to square meant that we, as visitors to the city, could observe layers of urban life that may not have presented themselves on a more formal guided tour. This method of exploration could be termed a semi-structured walk, echoing the form of those promoted by Canadian-American urbanist and activist Jane Jacobs, which came to be known as 'Jane's Walks'. Referencing Jacobs' legacy, Husar *et al*. (2020) endorse urban walks as a tool to engage a community in informal discussion, and to promote local involvement in historic areas. The authors outline a methodology for the design of shared walks, illustrating their insights with case studies, including one in Rome which was carried out in cooperation with Sapienza University of Rome, as part of the Jane's Walk International Festival.



FIG. 2. Borgo Lanaiuoli and Piazza Ponticello, 1920 (https://www.museidigenova.it/en/borgo-lanaiuoli-and-piazza-ponticello).

Describing the shared walk as 'an interactive approach between the environment and people', the authors note that such walks have a role to play in preserving heritage and developing urban education (Husar *et al.*, 2020).

Patterns and Systems

This informal collective walk through the historic centre of Genoa allowed us an observation of the life of the city in all its complexity. Woven through the narrative of the urban morphology are descriptions of human settlement that were defined by defensive strategies, productive waters and landscapes, cultural influences, socio-economic shifts and urban infrastructure. These patterns of settlement and occupation, past and present, form part of the intangible heritage of the city, and hence its cultural significance. The Burra Charter brings the concept of cultural significance to the heart of conservation practice, expanding the definition of significance to embrace the social and spiritual values of a place. Defining conservation as 'all the processes of looking after a place so as to retain its cultural significance', the Burra Charter promotes a cautious approach employing multidisciplinary knowledge and skills, and a process that exemplifies protective care. Similarly, the Faro Convention (Council of Europe, 2005) advocates a broader interdisciplinary concept of heritage, in recognition of the critical importance of cultural heritage to society, and 'the right to participate in cultural life, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'. Fairclough *et al.* (2015) observe how the Faro Convention differs from the earlier charters and conventions that focused on the protection of physical fabric, in that it prioritises people's values and needs.

Indeed, this focus on the connection between cultural heritage and people represented the beginnings of a shift from a primary emphasis on tangible heritage in legislative texts, to intangible values as interpreted by society, and more specifically by individual communities. Included in the definitions presented in the Faro Convention is a heritage community which 'consists of people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations' (Council of Europe, 2005). The acknowledgement of diverse cultures and broader, more inclusive interpretations of heritage was further consolidated in the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO, 2011). Following on from

the Vienna Memorandum on World Heritage and Contemporary Architecture – Managing the Historic Urban Landscape (UNESCO, 2005), and building on years of global discussion, the document formalised a systems-thinking approach to the treatment of historic environments. This became known as the Historic Urban Landscape or HUL approach, and was intended to serve as a tool to integrate this thinking into practice (Bandarin *et al.*, 2012). The definition of urban heritage extended beyond the physical, to encompass intangible heritage and a layering of natural and cultural values. The reality of human migration and growing urban centres was acknowledged in the text, as was the pressure these patterns exert on fragile historic centres such as Genoa.

Exuberant Diversity

In her seminal publication The Death and Life of Great American Cities, Jacobs (1961) examines the elements that contribute to a thriving urban centre. She adopts a holistic view, pre-empting the values embedded in the HUL approach, acknowledging and celebrating the environmental, social and economic factors that contribute to successful, liveable cities. Though written in the context of the North American metropolis, the concepts and concerns she lays out are directly applicable to European cities and towns. She refers to exuberant diversity, describing a concept which encompasses the issues that are vital to urban life, and proceeds to describe the conditions necessary for such diversity. These include diversity in function, short urban blocks, buildings that 'vary in age and condition', and a dense concentration of people (Figs. 3 6). She notes that these conditions represent the most important message of her book, and reflects on what this diversity brings to urban life: 'The diversity, of whatever kind, that is generated by cities rests on the fact that in cities so many people are so close together, and among them contain so many different tastes, skills, needs, supplies, and bees in their bonnets' (Jacobs, 1961). The Nara Document on Authenticity (ICOMOS, 1994) brought the topic of diversity to the fore, highlighting the role of cultural diversity in heritage management (Bandarin, 2020). This document promoted a broader interpretation of cultural heritage and cultural diversity, calling for an objective consideration of authenticity when evaluating places of significance. In many senses, the Nara Document sought to address the perceived 'Eurocentric' values inherent in earlier charters, by placing the concept of cultural diversity firmly within conservation practice.

'In a world that is increasingly subject to the forces of globalization and homogenization, and in a world in which the search for cultural identity is sometimes pursued through aggressive nationalism and the suppression of the cultures of minorities, the essential contribution made by the consideration of authenticity in conservation practice is to clarify and illuminate the collective memory of humanity.' The Nara Document (ICOMOS, 1994).

When carefully considered and managed, a wide range of historic buildings, varying in age and condition as described by Jacobs, can lend itself to diverse and dense occupancy (Figs. 7 and 8). However, there are many other factors at play in a rapidly evolving maritime hub such as Genoa, and our Genoese colleagues shared some concerns. Writings by Vaccaro (2020) and Torre (2020) describe the shifting demographics of the historic centre, and the socio-economic conditions that have shaped much of the urban change in recent decades. Walking along the narrow streets that are characteristic of the port area, a wide



FIGS. 3–6. Street life, Genoa, 2024 (EAAE urban walk; photos by author and workshop group).

range of historic and contemporary buildings is very apparent, however the exuberant diversity of the occupation is less evident. There are concerns regarding the homogenisation of the streetscape, in response to tourism and subject to increasing economic demands. Many traditional craft shops and artisan workshops have disappeared, and with them the intangible cultural heritage associated with historic Ligurian traditions.





FIGS. 7 and 8. Local shopfronts, Genoa, 2024 (photos by author).

The palatial residences, constructed in the 16th century, now exist within a transformed urban context. The adaptive capacity of such buildings to alleviate housing pressures is undoubtedly a priority, but so too is the capacity for new readings of significance as the cityscape develops. In some instances, historic form determines the trajectory of urban development. The narrow width of Via di Pré rendered it unsuitable for carriages historically, and so it never prospered, remaining an area where less privileged citizens rented apartments from the nobles. Today it is home to a multicultural community, and though it is located within the historic core, to date the area has resisted the plight of gentrification. Referring to census studies and socio-economic data from recent surveys, Vaccaro (2020) writes that the areas along the axis of Via di Pré, where the majority of immigrant communities reside, are among the most neglected. This remains the case despite urban recovery efforts and interventions in recent decades. High levels of vacancy are reported in these areas, with Vaccaro noting that many properties would be considered unfit for habitation, while other structures reported to be vacant often conceal activities connected to a hidden economy. Genoese colleagues advised that attractive low-rent incentives had been made available to address the shopfront vacancies, but uptake was slow or non-existent. In contemplating the conditions of this particular neighbourhood, the group surmised that without physical conservation, it is very difficult to cultivate social and cultural vitality.

Collaborative Learning

It is certainly more challenging to foster a sense of belonging and civic responsibility in neglected areas with high levels of vacancy and dereliction, and an apparent lack of investment. The cycle of neglect is perpetuated by antisocial behaviour, which drives out residents and leads to further vacancy. The need to address this social disconnect is part

of the broader ambition of urban conservation, as defined by Kealy (2024), which involves 'maintaining living environments in historic urban areas.' To achieve that, he argues, we need to collaborate with the inhabitants of these areas. The importance of building adaptive capacity within urban communities, enabling dynamic response to change while encouraging meaningful engagement with heritage is at the core of urban resilience theory. Resilience thinking in the context of ecological systems was introduced as a concept by Canadian ecologist C.S. Holling in 1973. Resilience thinking in urban terms can be understood as 'the ability of people, communities, societies, and cultures to live and develop with change, with ever-changing environments' (Folke, 2016). This involves consideration of people, communities and cultures, and the ecosystems and urban settings in which they coexist. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 (United Nations, 2015) relates to cities and urban settlements, and the impacts of rapid global urbanisation and mass migration. The need to build urban resilience is highlighted as a priority, with over half the world's population (8.3 billion at time of writing, 2026) living in urban areas. In his contribution to the book Perceptions of Sustainability in Heritage Studies, Van Oers (2015) describes how diversity and creativity can generate urban resilience:

'Developing a more sustainable urban environment means striving for a continuum between past, present and future, where productivity increase and resilience are generated by harnessing the population's diversity and creativity. Citizens' welfare and quality of life can only be enhanced when development respects and builds on urban communities' ecological balance and social identity, both embedded in the natural, cultural and immaterial heritage of the city.' (Van Oers, 2015)

Themes of meaning and value dominated much of the group discussions in the Genoa workshop, echoing this intention to build on 'ecological balance and social identity'. There was general agreement that the act of conservation had to prioritise interpretations of meaning alongside concerns of aesthetics and function. Efforts to interpret meaning within changing urban landscapes, with layered social and cultural contexts and shifting demographics, were identified as a particular challenge. The understanding that a place, with its natural and cultural features, may have diverse values for different individuals, is a principal message within the Burra Charter (ICOMOS, 2013). This reinforces the notion of common heritage as presented in the Venice Charter, and the belief that cultural heritage is the property of all peoples, and not just the society that gave rise to it. The text describes how heritage can nurture valuable connections: 'Places of cultural significance enrich people's lives, often providing a deep and inspirational sense of connection to community and landscape, to the past and to lived experiences' (ICOMOS, 2013). The challenges of navigating diverse communities, many of whom do not have a voice, are acknowledged in theory and literature. Jokilehto (2015) identifies the empowerment of community as a critical factor in the management of historic urban territories, a dynamic process which he argues should be based on a system of 'communication and informed involvement'. He identifies a new phase of awareness raising and community involvement with reference to the 'integrated conservation and sustainable development of the historic urban landscape at large' (Jokilehto, 2015).

Collective Memory and Co-Creation

The aforementioned 'empowerment of community' through engagement with heritage provides exciting opportunities for creative urban interventions. In their studies in Urbino,

Aureli and Del Baldo (2022) focus on participatory practice, highlighting the importance of involving community stakeholders in the light of limited financial resources within the municipality. The authors refer to local governance that is 'multi-actor in nature and rests on social dialogue and socio-economic inclusion', as being critical to the process. Vacancy is not an issue within the historical centre of Urbino; however, there is pressure on accommodation due to the large influx of tourists, and students attending the university. The authors followed the six steps of the HUL approach (UNESCO, 2011) to explore an awareness of cultural heritage amongst the community, and ways in which to enhance this. A one-year municipal experiment was put in place, whereby public spaces were used for cultural and commercial events, and vacant properties were temporarily occupied by local craftspeople who sold their wares and explained their techniques. Areas within the centre were pedestrianised and greened on a temporary basis. Several other smaller-scale initiatives were implemented as part of this wider venture, with the full support of the local municipality. This support was reportedly fundamental to the success of the project, which included efforts to involve participants in awareness-raising measures such as the cleaning of disfigured or vandalised buildings. The authors conclude that cultural projects must be based on dialogue and collaborative dynamics in order to succeed, highlighting the importance of the support of local public administration in the process. They claim that the project demonstrated how 'heritage conservation is not in opposition to development and can contribute to the quality of life of communities', referring to what they describe as multidimensional results. The use of participatory governance to empower community members as 'co-creators and co-implementers' in cultural initiatives is key, endowing local actors with deliberative power to determine the future of their historic centres (Aureli, Del Baldo, 2022).

In the context of Genoa, the PINQuA proposal comprises the regeneration of cultural and natural heritage within the historic centre, with the aim of providing shared cultural spaces for its inhabitants (European Commission, 2019). In addition to a survey of activities at street level, and the introduction of green spaces and shared amenities, there is an aspiration to introduce co-design processes. This would allow community members to be treated as equal collaborators in decision-making, whereby their diverse values and opinions would be respected. This strategy reflects the aspirations of the HUL approach (UNESCO, 2011) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015), both of which promote participatory processes and shared learning. The practice of engaging with the community requires and inspires innovative and creative thinking. It also calls for skills of listening, observation and critical evaluation on the part of the practitioner, skills that are inherent in the practice of conservation.

On reflection, two elements were central to the success of the EAAE workshop in Genoa – an engagement with real sites, and the promotion of open debate. Amid the debate within the group, one conclusion was that the very act of revealing the narratives or histories of a place led to the creation of new meaning, rendering the process of investigating and documenting a place a creative act. The importance of cultivating responsibility for a place within the community was identified as a priority. For this to happen, local governance is essential, and the inhabitants of a place must feel that they are part of the decision-making. This engagement can engender a sense of belonging, and hence responsibility. Opinions on the effectiveness of participatory processes and co-creation were varied within the group. However, it was agreed that engagement with the local

community was an essential step in ascertaining diverse interpretations of value in heritage terms, and that it was a process that is best managed by experts.

In Architecture and the City, Aldo Rossi describes the city as a representation of collective memory, shaped by the continually changing ideas and values of its citizens:

'One can say that the city itself is the collective memory of its people, and like the memory it is associated with objects and places. The city is the locus of the collective memory. This relationship between the locus and the citizenry then becomes the city's predominant image, both of architecture and of landscape, and as certain artefacts become part of its memory, new ones emerge. In this entirely positive sense great ideas flow through the history of the city and give shape to it' (Rossi *et al.*, 1982).

This perception that ideas and values have an impact on urban form over time further reinforces the interpretation of conservation practice as a creative process. The practice of researching and documenting the cultural significance of a place establishes a dynamic whereby in-depth knowledge of the past and present allows the creation of something for the future. This reinforces the idea that we are acting within a wider continuum, making these evaluations at a particular moment in time, with specific priorities and perspectives. These considerations dominated much of the group discussions regarding the historic centre of Genoa, with diverse communities and changing values: how do we overlay new interpretations of meaning over historic patterns?





FIGS. 9 and 10. Excavations at Loggia di Banchi, Genoa, 2024.

The Nara Document (ICOMOS, 1994) makes reference to 'the collective memory of humanity', bringing to mind Rossi's city as 'locus of the collective memory'. This concept is tied in with social value, urban identity and belonging. In a comprehensive guide to conservation principles, Historic England notes that the social value of a place may indeed have 'no direct relationship to any formal historical or aesthetic values that may have been ascribed to it' (Historic England, 2008).

This is why an engagement with present inhabitants and past traditions is so critical to the evaluation of significance. As an example, the culinary traditions that are part of Genoese, and indeed Ligurian intangible heritage, are still thriving in the small-scale trattorie and focaccerie, despite economic pressures. New communities of city dwellers bring new culinary traditions, and this is particularly true of a maritime port. Despite challenging urban conditions, connections with such intangible heritage can contribute to community identity, or sense of belonging, and so need to be recognised. The same is true of musical heritage. The songs of Fabrizio De André evoke the gritty atmosphere of the port, as he challenges the listener to 'brave the narrow alleyways along the old wharf', and summons dark goings-on in the sun-deprived streets of the città vecchia. In 2024, several cultural events were organised in Genoa to mark the 25th anniversary of De André's passing. Alongside this, multicultural music and theatre in the city is celebrated through cultural initiatives such as Suq Genova, which takes place in the city every June. Such creative initiatives to share cultural values allow interactions between diverse sections of the urban community, in keeping with the spirit of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO, 2002): 'In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together'.

Incremental Development

So how do we integrate this intangible heritage, historic and contemporary - in all its diversity, into new urban interventions? Sennett (2018) writes about the 'craft of reconfiguration', from the perspective of the climate crisis and its impact on fragile urban centres. An examination of the morphology of any historic urban setting will bring to light incremental layers of development, where existing forms are amended and adapted to respond to contemporary needs. The introduction of new elements or layers to a historic site allows novel perspectives and can inspire new readings of significance. Such interventions are most meaningful when they represent a creative response to existing conditions that are respectful of the layered heritage of the site. On this theme, the Scottish planner and polymath Patrick Geddes promoted the practice of what he termed 'conservative surgery' (Geddes, 1968). In reaction to the obliteration of entire districts, he instead promoted the material improvement of the area based on survey, while balancing the complex and specific needs of the community in question. The critical judgement required in ascertaining what such 'surgery' should entail is at the heart of conservation practice, raising discussions around interpretations of creativity in design thinking. This dilemma is perhaps best illustrated by the discoveries at the Loggia di Banchi, in the historic centre of Genoa (Figs. 9 and 10). Prior to the discovery of the archaeological site beneath the 16th-century structure, there was a proposal for a contemporary insertion within the space that had little relationship with the building form, or its cultural significance. Archaeological investigations revealed several interconnected layers of historic urban development and occupation beneath the loggia, inviting an entirely new reading of the place. In terms of creative possibility, these discoveries offered an exciting connection to the past, and fresh insights into past human endeavours and settlements. Such knowledge can potentially inform a more site-responsive or place-based design approach, where the narrative of the site and the values of its inhabitants, from past centuries to the present day, are celebrated.

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MATERIAL CONSERVATION FOR THE CREATION OF NEW MEANINGS. THE CONSERVATION OF THE INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE OF THE SAN CRISTOFORO DISTRICT IN CATANIA AS A STRATEGY FOR URBAN REGENERATION

Martina La Mela
Università degli Studi Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria, Italy
martina.lamela@unirc.it

'It is the choices of men that enhance a site […],
transforming the stones brought out of oblivion
into ruins with cultural significance.
Without our work the remains of the past
would remain mere rubble.
Ruins arise from a human intervention
that shapes a space for present use'
Marc Augé

Conservation as a Tool for Creation: Industrial Heritage and the Urban Fabric

The relationship between 'conservation' and 'creation', which emerged during the workshop held in Genoa, is close and, in some respects, essential.

Any action aimed at conservation – whether it concerns a built structure, urban interventions, intangible heritage or communities – generates creation, both in material terms and in terms of meaning and new interpretations.

Conservation, therefore, in all its possible expressions, consists of actions that add value, both in a tangible and intangible sense. From this perspective, conservation and creation should not be seen as opposing forces, but as deeply interconnected dimensions.

Once it is established that creation is an integral part of the conservation process, it is possible to expand this reasoning beyond the single building, to the scale of the urban fabric, richly stratified and composed not only of a physical and material dimension, in which the transformations over time are often legible, but also of a social, cultural, and community dimension.

At an urban scale, particularly in historic centres, conservation can therefore serve as a tool to create the conditions for material, urban and social regeneration and revitalisation.

Starting from reflections developed during the workshop on the historic centre of Genoa – and on how conservation efforts have enabled the creation of new meanings and uses within that context – this paper aims to explore the case of San Cristoforo, a neighbourhood in the historic centre of Catania.

In particular, the aim is to illustrate a possible strategy for the rehabilitation of former industrial buildings – now abandoned – that still reflect the neighbourhood's historic industrial identity, by assigning new functions and meanings to these ancient structures.

The abandoned industrial buildings located in the neighbourhood appear to us today as functional voids, absorbed by urban expansion, while at the same time revealing their transformative potential (Di Toppa, 2023).

Given this, it is possible to envisage a process of reuse for these structures that operates at both architectural and urban scales. In cases such as this, it is essential that the transformation process does not operate merely through isolated interventions, but rather systematically, engaging the broader urban fabric.

These artefacts are, in fact, already an integral part of a larger system. They stand as witnesses to a history that no longer exists, but remains present in the collective memory of the inhabitants, becoming bearers of important social values (Di Toppa, 2023).

The challenge of conservation and reuse lies in transforming these buildings into public and socially inclusive spaces, generating new meanings and seeking to move beyond mere musealisation. This involves assigning new uses capable of re-establishing a connection with time, with the city and, above all, with the local community: not by 'recreating around the "factory" an artificial aura or dignity, but rather by retracing a historically grounded path, one that can propose a socially meaningful use within a broader project for reconstructing the "memory" of […] the area's industrial history' (Di Toppa, 2023).

In light of this, the industrial heritage present in the historic centre of the city of Catania should be viewed from a different perspective: as a resource, particularly for the design of new public spaces. In the case under consideration, the former industrial structures should no longer be seen as an obstacle that is difficult to manage, but rather as an opportunity to be valued, a resource that forms an integral part of our heritage, with significant potential value.

Genoa–Catania: Some Data on Two Historic City Centres

The historic centres of Genoa and Catania – particularly the San Cristoforo neighbourhood – share many similarities in terms of the social conditions of their inhabitants. Both cities, along with twelve others, are subject to a commission of inquiry into the safety and state of degradation of urban areas[1].

An examination of the data and reports published by ISTAT reveals several similarities between the two cities and highlights certain aspects of particular interest, especially for the development of strategies aimed at the regeneration of historic centres. These strategies should place material conservation at their core, with actions focused on care and 'communities'.

One of the most relevant data points – directly linked to a range of needs and critical issues in both historic centres – is population density.

Population density is indeed high: in Genoa, the historic-centre neighbourhoods reach a density of 21,000 inhabitants per km², compared with the city's average of 2,332 inhabitants per km² (Fig. 1). Similarly, in the historic centre of Catania, the density is 10,133 inhabitants per km², while the city average is 1,647. In both cases, population density in the historic centres is therefore approximately ten times higher than the municipal average.

These data reveal an interesting aspect: both historic centres have managed to retain a stable resident population and have not been entirely given over to exclusive tourist use.

At the same time, however, such high population density is also indicative of challenging housing conditions and highlights the need for new spaces to be allocated for residential purposes and public services.

Other indicators are also worth comparing, such as the percentage of foreign residents, which shows its highest concentration in both historic centres compared with the rest of each city. In the historic-centre neighbourhoods of Genoa, the figures range be-

tween 203 and 291 foreign residents per 1,000 inhabitants. In Catania, although the overall value is lower, the historic centre still records the highest proportion among all the city's districts, with 100 foreign residents per 1,000 inhabitants.

Other comparable indicators – which also represent the highest values among the neighbourhoods of both cities – are those related to education and unemployment.

In the historic centre of Genoa, the percentage of residents who have not completed lower secondary education ranges between 4% and 5% – twice the citywide average. The unemployment rate is between 13.7% and 10%, nearly double the municipal average. The number of young people who are neither studying nor working varies between 24.8% and 21%.

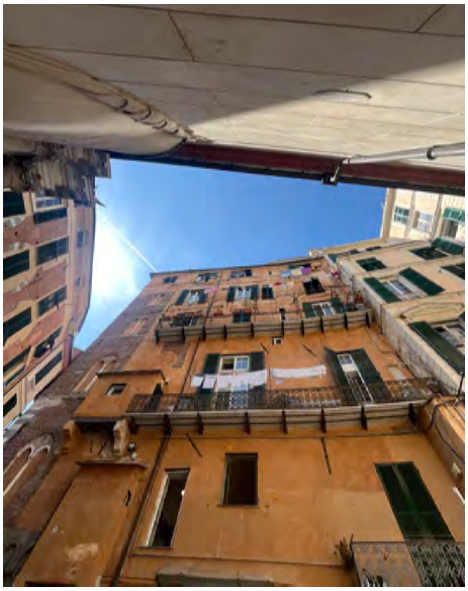


FIG. 1. Housing in the historic centre of Genoa (photo: Martina La Mela, 2024).

In the historic centre of Catania, the unemployment rate stands at 22.3%, and the share of young people excluded from both the labour market and educational opportunities is also very high, at around 46%. Educational conditions in the historic centre of the Sicilian city are particularly concerning: 8.3% of residents between the ages of 15 and 52 do not hold a lower secondary school diploma. The historic centre is also the area with the highest rate of early school leaving among young people, reaching nearly 40%.

In some areas of Genoa's historic centre as well, 25.2% of young people do not progress beyond lower secondary education, while in other neighbourhoods the percentage of those holding only a lower secondary school diploma ranges between 21% and 25%.

Along with high population density, other indicators suggest disadvantaged living conditions, as well as potential economic hardships for families; these factors point to overall vulnerability. In Genoa, 14% of elderly people live alone in non-owner-occupied homes and in disadvantaged conditions, while in Catania the figure is 12.8%. In Catania, 45% of families do not live in owner-occupied homes, and a similar situation is found in Genoa's historic centre, where the percentage of families living in rented homes ranges between 39% and 43%, depending on the neighbourhood.

These data, if read systematically and not as bare figures decontextualised from other aspects, present an interesting picture of the conditions of the historic centres of the two cities, highlighting a series of critical issues, primarily related to social conditions, that are central to the development of strategies for the regeneration of the historic fabric.

PINQuA Programme: Strategic Approaches to the Regeneration of Genoa's Historic Centre

As became clear during the workshop sessions and from the surveys conducted by ISTAT, the historic centre of Genoa presents a series of issues related both to its buildings and to the population that inhabits it.



FIG. 2. Ancient shop in the historic centre of Genoa, where historical stratification is evident (photo: Martina La Mela, 2024).

Widespread degradation affects both residential and commercial buildings, many of which require conservation and regeneration interventions. Similarly, streets and public spaces are often in a state of neglect and decay, characterised by poor, insufficient and ineffective services, as well as a lack of green areas and limited accessibility.

At the same time, the population suffers from widespread housing hardship, largely due to extremely high density. These conditions often result in social distress, fostering the emergence of criminal activities and making integration between the local population and other cultures present more difficult.

So far, these dynamics have not compromised the historical stratification of the urban fabric, allowing for the continued establishment of new commercial activities that serve the resident community, rather than catering exclusively to tourism (Fig. 2). These defining aspects can be observed and compared with the Sicilian case study examined in this analysis. However, the city of Genoa has taken action to address the existing issues, developing design strategies specifically targeted at the historic centre.

In recent years, in order to address these issues, the historic centre of Genoa has become the focus of a National Innovative Programme for the Quality of Living (PINQuA)[2], which has led to the development and implementation of targeted actions. These initiatives aim to reduce housing hardship by increasing the stock of public residential buildings, regenerate the socio-economic fabric of urban centres, and improve the accessibility, functionality, and safety of degraded spaces and areas.

The two main plans developed within this framework are the Piano 'Caruggi' and the Piano 'Ghetto/Prè'.

The proposed initiative encompasses the entire perimeter of Genoa's historic centre and includes 19 interventions aimed at improving urban greenery, public spaces, and the safety and accessibility of pedestrian pathways. All planned interventions are designed to enhance and expand a variety of public spaces, including circulation routes, in order to improve the quality of living and increase safety within the selected area: the historic centre.

The project also aims to reconnect the medieval urban fabric with the 19th-century city, in order to return to inhabitants spaces that are often unknown or forgotten, which are today difficult to read and enjoy, and to ensure that the quality of greenery and public spaces in the historic fabric also improves.

The projects developed focus primarily on the regeneration of existing heritage and on initiatives dedicated to social housing, aimed at improving and increasing the stock of residential buildings. These include the creation of new residential hubs and related services, places and spaces designed to support the social and residential fabric of the historic centre.

In addition to the theme of housing, the project also focuses on the regeneration of other types of degradation and fragility that characterise the historic centre.

This is achieved through actions that can bring about transformations, without altering the characteristics of mix and coexistence between different functions and cultures, a mix that characterises the historic centre of Genoa.

To achieve these goals, the project is structured around three strategic axes:

- Co-living: to increase and improve the supply of social housing and encourage the housing mix, through widespread and concentrated interventions;
- Culture: with interventions for the creation of spaces intended for services for the neighbourhood, in particular for services dedicated to housing, to foster bonds of social cohesion;
- Commons: to increase and improve the supply of public spaces by equipping and transforming them in order to increase the quality of living and safety in the area, as well as encouraging social interaction.

Thanks to this programmatic initiative, but also to other less structured citizens' initiatives, the historic centre of Genoa is managing to carry out actions that can introduce new meanings into the historic urban fabric, thus creating new urban and social vitality.

San Cristoforo in Catania – What It Was

Like the historic centre of Genoa, the historic centre of Catania, particularly the San Cristoforo district[3], is currently characterised by a series of issues related to both its urban fabric and its social fabric. To address these issues, it is useful to start with the origins of the district and its historical industrial vocation, now lost but still visible in the urban stratification of the area (Fig. 3).

The San Cristoforo district originated as a result of two devastating natural events that affected the city of Catania in the 17th century: the lava flow from the 1669 eruption of Mount Etna and the 1693 Val di Noto earthquake.

The devastating lava flow of 1669 covered the land in the western area of the city (Fig. 4), where the medieval city walls partially stopped it, although at certain points the lava overwhelmed them and caused them to lose their defensive role (Panvini, La Fico, Guzzo, 2020). Ultimately, the lava flowed into the sea at Catania's Plaja, causing the coastline to move approximately five hundred metres further out (Pagano, 1992).

Following the exceptional event, the main external routes that had existed previously were restored, and along the line of the ancient city walls, the street known as Via della Vittoria was constructed, now called Via Plebiscito. During the same period, the route of a coastal road was also laid out, which today is known as Via Domenico Tempio.

In 1693, another devastating natural event, a violent earthquake, struck the city of Catania, causing significant damage and over 16,000 casualties (Nicolosi, 1982).

Following the disastrous event, the city was rebuilt on its ruins,



FIG. 3. Ancient industrial building in San Cristoforo, now abandoned (photo: Martina La Mela, 2025).



FIG. 4. Building erected on the 1669 lava flow (photo: Martina La Mela, 2025).

with a largely new road system characterised by a wide and regular grid that overlapped the previous medieval streets.

The reconstruction, however, was complex and gave rise to numerous controversies, which were resolved through amicable settlements (Aprile, 2011), leading to arbitrary interventions based on personal interests, far removed from any urban-scale design logic.

With the reconstruction, the bourgeois city expanded to the north, while to the south, the land that had previously belonged to the Bishop of Catania, now destroyed by the lava, was donated to the community. Inhabitants from the Etna region settled there, with the opportunity to make use of land subject to low emphyteutic rents (Dato, 1983).

The new San Cristoforo district, despite what might initially appear from a historical reading of the events, was not created with the primary aim of housing the working class (which later became a consequence), but rather emerged from pressure from the bourgeoisie, who appropriated much of this land, building palaces and, most notably, the first industrial buildings (Aprile, 2011).

It was in the mid-18th century that the first factories began to be established, finding their appropriate space in the southern part of the city, which had not yet been built up. Alongside these factories, housing was provided for the workers, allowing for the coexistence of working-class and bourgeois social classes within the district (Coco and Iachello, 2024).

The condition that developed is also evident in the organisation of the urban fabric, where case terrane (Fig. 5) are interrupted by bourgeois palaces (Dato, 1983). This type of housing, created to accommodate workers, represented the majority of the built environment and is still easily identifiable today. The case terrane consisted of a single room, often lacking basic sanitary facilities, arranged side by side with façades that alternated between a door and a window, often placed quite high to facilitate ventilation (ibid.). A defining feature was also the presence of courtyards (many of which are still present), shared spaces for social gathering that became extensions of domestic activities, where clothes were hung, children played, and water was collected from the communal well (ibid.).

With the construction of this new district, small churches also arose, such as the Church of San Giuseppe al Transito, the Church of the Angeli Custodi, and the Church of San Cristoforo, built in 1843 by the Confraternity of San Cristoforo alle Sciare, which also gave the district its name. For the first time, in the civil registry of 1820, the district is identified by the name of San Cristoforo (Ferrara, 1984).

The area continued to be populated by artisan workshops, factories, and workers, becoming, along with other industrial zones of the city of Catania, one of the most important

commercial and productive hubs in Sicily (see De Luca Carnazza, 1879; Calabrese, 2007; Calabrese *et al.*, 2012).

The neighbourhood continued its demographic growth until the first half of the 20th century, despite the difficult housing conditions, especially those related to the lack of drinking water, the absence of sewage systems, and proximity to marshy areas (Ferrara, 1984). For this reason, Bernardo Gentile-Cusa in 1888 proposed the project for a master plan for the city, which also included an expansion and redevelopment plan for San Cristoforo, in order to redevelop the area and regulate the excessive population density and the poor conditions of the neighbourhood (Gentile-Cusa, 1888). The master plan, however, was never approved and the housing conditions of the neighbourhood remained complex for a long time.



FIG. 5. Case terrane (photo: Martina La Mela, 2025).

Despite this, the population continued to grow, as during those same years numerous factories of various kinds were active, where many workers found employment. Among the many industries, the production and processing of silk were particularly developed, as evidenced by the street name 'Consolato della Seta', where several factories were located, now lost to time (Torrisi, 2007).

In the mid-19th century, a large cotton mill was also in operation, located in the area adjacent to the port. Later, it was converted into the headquarters of the Federation of Agricultural Consortia of Catania and is now abandoned (Fig. 6) (Scollo, 2013).

During the same period, up until the early years of the 20th century, many other industrial buildings were established, such as the Santa Lucia Mill, the Slaughterhouse – now transformed into a sports centre – the gasometer, and the Italcementi cement factory (Fig. 7) (Garozzo, 2024). Other types of production were also present, such as the liquorice factory 'Fratelli Caflisch' (Spadaro di Passanitello, 1987), which today houses a contemporary art foundation owned by the Brodbeck family (Fig. 8), along with many other smaller manufacturing facilities.

This historical reconstruction clearly highlights the industrial vocation that has long characterised San Cristoforo, marked by significant and flourishing economic activity that began to decline in the 1960s. The progressive failure of industrial enterprises led to rising unemployment and increased criminal activity, plunging the district into a state of both social and physical degradation.

This now-defunct industrial history is still legible today in the abandoned industrial buildings scattered throughout the district's streets.

San Cristoforo in Catania – What It Is

However, both the built fabric and the social structure have profoundly changed over time.

The neighbourhood still retains a resident population, but the social conditions are, in many respects, critical.



FIG. 6. Former Federation of Agricultural Consortia of Catania (photo: Martina La Mela, 2025).

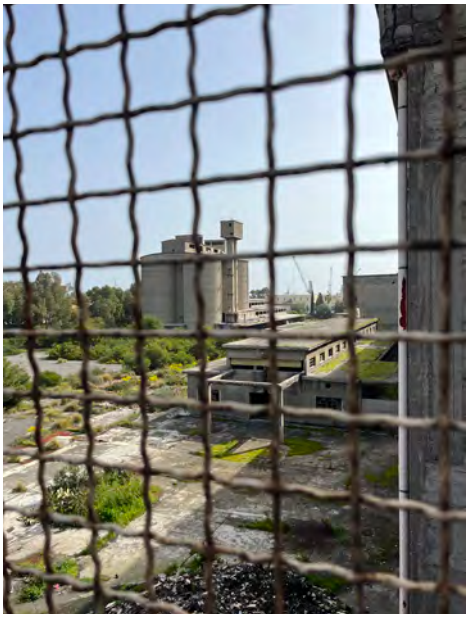


FIG. 7. Former Italcementi cement factory (photo: Martina La Mela, 2025).

Studies carried out over the years show that the inhabitants of San Cristoforo are particularly attached to their neighbourhood and would not move elsewhere. Despite this, however, they complain about the lack of services, cleanliness and meeting places that are safe and well kept, critical issues very similar to those found in the historic centre of Genoa.

These same issues also emerge from a study based on questionnaires administered to middle-school children (Di Caro, Ferrara and Giacobbe, 2023), which reveals that even at a young age, problems such as the lack of recreational facilities, a perceived lack of safety, the presence of waste, and widespread urban decay are already considered critical concerns.

Local news also paints a critical picture regarding safety and illegal activities in the neighbourhood. Criminal activities, especially those related to drug dealing, are widespread.

As for the urban fabric, it is particularly noteworthy that all activities – such as commercial enterprises, restaurants, schools, and services – are concentrated along just three main axes: Via Plebiscito, Via della Concordia, and Via Garibaldi. It is also significant that half of the commercial establishments, excluding those related to food retail, are betting shops, an exceptionally high proportion that indicates the frequent use of such places by the local population.

It is also worth noting the significant presence of hospitality facilities, particularly B&Bs and Airbnb accommodations, which are all concentrated in the northern part of the district – closer to the historic core of the city, which naturally attracts a greater number of tourists. In contrast, such facilities are entirely absent beyond the axis marked by Via Plebiscito.

The current layout of the neighbourhood still contains numerous buildings formerly used for industrial production, many of which are now in a ruined state – abandoned and never subjected to conservation or reuse interventions. There are only three exceptions: the former Caflisch Brothers Liquorice Factory, now the Brodbeck Foundation (a contem-

porary art foundation); the former slaughterhouse, now a sports centre (Fig. 9); and the former tobacco factory, which is currently undergoing restoration to be transformed into a museum. The remainder of the industrial heritage – representing more than 20% of San Cristoforo's total surface area – remains abandoned.

Furthermore, it is essential to provide some observations on the state of conservation of the buildings in the neighbourhood. Overall, approximately 70% of the buildings retain their full functionality, with the presence of minor degradation phenomena and possible superficial cracks, which, however, do not compromise the overall stability of the buildings.



FIG. 8. Brodbeck Foundation, former Fratelli Caflisch liquorice factory (photo: Martina La Mela, 2024).

Of greater interest, however, are the functional adjustments that the buildings have undergone over time. The inhabitants have attempted to adapt their homes to better living standards, arbitrarily and without any form of regulation. In many buildings, it is possible to identify added floors (one or more), constructed with different technological systems: masonry, reinforced concrete, or dry construction methods (Figs. 10 and 11). There are also common volumetric additions for the creation of sanitary facilities, initially absent in most homes. Furthermore, the creation of balconies is widespread, also made with various construction techniques.

These adjustments should be closely monitored both in terms of their compatibility with the pre-existing structures and at the material and structural levels. Indeed, these could lead to static problems, for example, due to an unbalanced distribution of loads. These elements, born out of practical needs, are, however, characteristic features of the built environment of San Cristoforo, as they represent unconscious traces of transformation and the creation of new functions and meanings by the inhabitants. Therefore, they deserve appropriate conservation attention wherever possible.

San Cristoforo in Catania – The Reuse of Industrial Heritage as a Strategy for Creating New Meanings

The San Cristoforo district is characterised by two systems: one composed of abandoned industrial buildings that appear as spaces

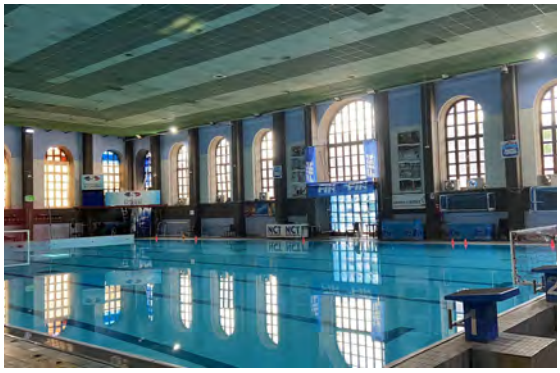


FIG. 9. Former slaughterhouse, now a sports centre (photo: Piscina Francesco Scuderi).

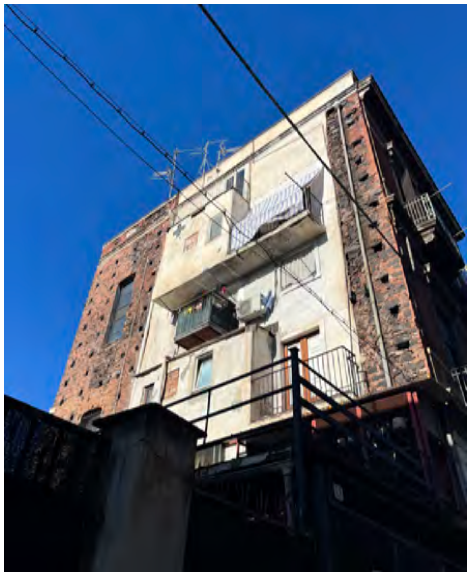
to be preserved, where new functions can be introduced to meet the needs of modern society, consciously creating new meanings. The other system is that of the widespread fabric, which in most cases still allows the historical stratification to be read. In this case, conservation has a responsibility to act on this fabric to preserve these transformations, as they are unconscious acts created by those who lived there and capable of generating new meanings.

As in Genoa, it would also be essential to develop strategies for the historic centre of Catania, focusing in particular on the actions that conservation can undertake for industrial heritage, whose ancient industrial vocation still manages to manifest itself through the numerous material traces present (Fig. 12). However, in the absence of care, these traces risk being lost, given the state of preservation in which many of them are found. At the same time, the clear social challenges facing the neighbourhood's fabric present issues and objectives that can only be addressed through an integrated process, one that begins with the conservation and reuse of industrial heritage.

Through what has emerged from a phase of understanding the neighbourhood, it has been possible to determine its characteristics and potential, along with its critical issues and social needs, thus understanding what it has been over the course of its history and what it is now. This type of process, which stems from a comprehensive understanding of the object of study, allows for the precise identification of the goals to be pursued and for the development of a possible strategy for achieving them. It specifically identifies the needs of the population and how these can be addressed through actions related to the conservation and reuse of existing heritage.

Given the state of conservation and the risk of losing the material traces that still convey the industrial past of San Cristoforo, one of the primary objectives of a project for the neighbourhood, alongside its revitalisation, would certainly be the conservation of industrial heritage, with the development of a strategy that addresses the needs of residents,





FIGS. 10 and 11. Buildings with added floors and additional volumes for facilities (photos: Martina La Mela, 2025).

places former industrial buildings at the heart of design actions, and focuses on the process of reuse and the creation of new meanings for this abandoned heritage.

Given the complexity of the issues present in the San Cristoforo area, which involve vulnerabilities affecting various aspects, particularly society as well as the built fabric, it is clearly reductive to develop a project that limits itself to the conservation and reuse of disused industrial buildings. In such a case, it is essential to implement an integrated strategy that combines actions of different kinds, involving not only public administrations but also institutions and associations, and, most importantly, the local community.

The strategies attempted over time for the redevelopment of the neighbourhood have proved unsuccessful, mainly because the community has never been included in the planning processes that have been promoted.

To make all possible strategies and actions aimed at the social and urban revitalisation of San Cristoforo truly effective, it is necessary to initiate a process that requires the central and active participation of the population. This can be achieved through what is known as 'Human-Centred Design' (Jeon, 2019), a process capable of actively involving multiple stakeholders in the design process, from the needs-identification phase to the generative phase, with particular attention to the end user.

This type of process has never been implemented in this area and, together with the reuse of the available industrial heritage, could represent the appropriate methodology to follow in order to activate an effective process of revitalisation and re-signification.

The identification of a system of disused structures (Fig. 13), in this specific case a system of former industrial buildings, highlights the availability of buildings to be repurposed for new functions, such as new residences, gathering spaces, services, or areas dedicated to education.

The introduction of new uses becomes the main tool for reintegrating these buildings into a vital urban network and, at the same time, allows targeted interventions to be carried out for the conservation of the structures as evidential traces of activities that once characterised the life of the neighbourhood (Fig. 14).

An effective revitalisation strategy thus proceeds through conservation, which serves as the engine for a new functional, physical, social, and economic vitality.

In this way, physical recovery would allow for re-inhabitation and a different perception of the neighbourhood, ensuring that the population participates in the creation of new activities and in the attribution of new meanings not only to the abandoned industrial buildings but to the entire urban fabric, encouraging a care-oriented approach to the places they inhabit.

In this specific case, the available structures to be re-signified and reintegrated into a new network of use are very different



FIG. 12. Chimney visible among the streets of San Cristoforo (photo: Martina La Mela, 2025).



FIG. 13. Identification of abandoned former industrial buildings (light purple) and reused ones (dark purple) (elaboration by Martina La Mela).

from one another, and these characteristics mean that not all of them are suitable for hosting any of the necessary new functions to be assigned. Therefore, in order to maximise the conservation and permanence of the pre-existing structure, by adopting a design approach that minimises the invasiveness of the intervention while preserving the industrial building as much as possible, compatibility becomes fundamental.

For this reason, in the design process, it is important to implement an integrated approach that focuses on the degree of adaptability and transformability, as well as the feasibility in terms of management and maintenance (Valentin, 2022).

This ensures that the reuse project does not force the building into a new function, but consciously introduces the most compatible one, adopting a mindset of care towards the existing structure.

It is precisely the 'care-based approach' that shifts the conservation project from a dimension in which it is seen as a one-time action, an end in itself, to a dimension that frames it as a 'process', in which communities play an active role.

The aspect of care is indeed fundamental, not only for issues directly related to the project in a strict sense, but also in the relationship that communities have with the territory, so that they play a constitutive role in the processes of recognition and construction of both old and new meanings.

The concept of care[4] therefore presupposes an active and long-term role, which does not end with the physical execution of the reuse project, but continues with the use of and interaction with the building, in line with the view of 'Cultural heritage as a world of interdependencies, [...] of density of relationships, in which social involvement [...] becomes an important factor for sustainability, developing co-evolutionary practices in intervention programmes on heritage and with heritage' (Della Torre, 2023).

This type of approach, based – as mentioned – on care and a co-evolutionary vision (ibid.) of the conservation process, helps to avoid the conflict that often arises between cities and their historic centres, which are frequently perceived by the communities themselves as a past 'without a future', distant and disconnected from the rest of the city, while the latter is seen as a 'future without a past' (Pinotti, 2023).

Only a process that integrates and reinserts disused heritage into a network of use and actualisation, creating new connections with the urban fabric while still preserving the signs that have stratified over time and protecting its transformations, can make it possible to overcome this conflict and give new meaning to abandoned structures.

This type of design approach, based as mentioned on the insertion of new functions, if applied to the system of abandoned industrial buildings in San Cristoforo through the activation of an integrated process that engages different entities and expertise, could lead to the recovery and regeneration of the neighbourhood, creating new physical, social and cultural meanings through heritage-care measures.



FIG. 14. Suggestion for a possible new use for a former workshop (elaboration by Martina La Mela).

Concluding Remarks

The workshop experience proved valuable as a means of developing reflections on a possible strategy for the reuse of industrial heritage aimed at the regeneration of part of the historic centre of Catania.

Reflections on the theme of creation in relation to conservation highlighted how conservation is, and must always be, a creative act. The case of the historic centre of Genoa, here compared with that of Catania – given the interesting similarities – served as a central example for rethinking the role and responsibilities of conservation, which today has the task of creating new spaces with new meanings, both physical and social, in order to ensure the vitality of our historic centres. This is achieved through the management of change, allowing all the historical and material stratifications present to coexist as a manifesto of the hybridisation produced by the passage of time and by the succession of the communities that inhabit these places.

Notes

1 The data reported form part of the preliminary studies carried out by ISTAT for the Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulle condizioni di sicurezza e sullo stato di degrado delle città e delle loro periferie and are available at: https://www.camera.it/leg19/99?shadow_organo_parlamentare=3903; https://www.istat.it/audizioni/sicurezza-e-stato-di-degrado-delle-citta-e-delle-loro-periferie/ (accessed 14 April 2025).

2 For PINQuA, see the following reports: https://www.investingenova.com/sites/default/files/archivio/download/PINQuA%20%28Programma%20Innovativa%20Qualita%CC%80%20dell%27abitare%29%20Caruggi%20-%20Centro%20Storico.pdf; https://www.investingenova.com/sites/default/files/PINQUA-PRE.pdf; https://www.mit.gov.it/nfsmitgov/files/media/notizia/2022-06/Report%20PINQuA.pdf (accessed 14 April 2025).

3 The San Cristoforo district is located in the south-western area of Catania, part of the city's I Circoscrizione (First District), which coincides with the historic centre of the city and represents its most populated area, effectively creating a 'city within a city'. Today, San Cristoforo extends between Via Garibaldi, Via Domenico Tempio, Via Acquicella, and Acquicella Porto. Within this area, it is possible to identify several smaller neighbourhoods: Angeli Custodi, Santa Maria delle Salette, Fortino, San Cosimo, and San Cristoforo proper. Key nodal and symbolic points in the district include the Fortino, the former Tobacco Factory, the Church of the Angeli Custodi, Castello Ursino, Via Garibaldi, Via Della Concordia, and Via Plebiscito, one of the main axes of the district, which traces the ancient medieval city walls of Catania.

4 For some reflections on the theme of care for built heritage, see Oteri, 2019.

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URBAN-SCALE ARCHITECTURAL HEALTHCARE COMPLEXES OVER TIME: BETWEEN CHANGE, PERSISTENCE AND INNOVATION

Pietro Matracchi
University of Florence, Italy
pietro.matracchi@unifi.it

Old hospital complexes are sometimes associated with a sizeable volume that represents a vast portion of the city. Originally, such complexes were usually located in a peripheral area able to accommodate a large building, but today they are part of the ancient centre. Their size is sometimes due to the original layout, or is the result of profound changes, additions and phases of resizing that have occurred over time.

Between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, countless hospitals were built in Tuscany alone, some of which, such as Santa Maria Nuova in Florence and Santa Maria della Scala in Siena, were considered models in Italy and the rest of Europe (Henderson, 2006, pp. 17–18). Florence had more than fifty ancient hospitals (Artusi, Patruno, 2000). When these architectural structures assumed an imposing form, the purpose they set out to achieve was of the utmost importance to all sections of society: the health of the city (Henderson, 2006). Alongside social and charitable motivations, the need to maintain public order also satisfied political and economic needs.

Hospital care is, by its very nature, subject to the substantial innovations that medicine – the care of human beings – has brought about over time. In the modern era, this constantly evolving factor has created the conditions for profound changes to be implemented in ancient complexes, or has led to their abandonment because of the impossibility of meeting current guidelines on the requirements for hospital facilities, including in terms of sustainability.

At the 2024 EAAE workshop held in Genoa, the particularly interesting case of the Albergo dei Poveri was presented. It was founded around the mid-17th century by Emanuele Brignole to provide shelter for the poorest people, those on the margins of society, and the sick. Exercising control over issues associated with the destitution of a large section of the population, preventing the exacerbation of social contradictions, was not a secondary aim. The various actions taken to support the poorer sections of the city's population were emphasised by Giuseppe Banchero (1846, p. VII):

'[…] in Genoa there is an Albergo de' Poveri (Hotel for the Poor), based on the idea that in almost all cities poor people have somewhere to lodge and feed themselves. Let us disregard the grandeur of the building, and the concept of such a vast work, the brainchild of a generous patrician who dedicated his entire being and his wealth to it, but let us read those inscriptions, and the testamentary provisions of the pious benefactors, and we will convince ourselves that the benefit is not only restricted to the poor who are admitted there. Each year various provisions are handed out to poor spinsters; from here, thousands of pounds of bread are delivered each day; rents are paid for houses inhabited by poor people, and thin mattresses are provided for beds, etc. In the first four months of the year, cooked and uncooked soups are provided; in short, the poor who are not admitted to the

Hotel also enjoy the benefits afforded by the city's charity in times when luxury did not rob the poor of "quod superest date pauperibus"'.

In 1653, Emanuele Brignole was commissioned by the 'Deputati al Lazzaretto' health officials to identify a site for purchase on which to build the Hotel. He chose the area known as Carbonara, between the first and second city walls: a very steep site confined between two slopes converging into a useful rushing stream. Given the orographic conditions, the layout developed for the Hotel, consisting of a central cross surrounded by four courtyards, required extensive excavations, in addition to the creation of a conduit on the axis of the complex to receive the stream water (Banchero, 1846, p. 4). Emanuele Brignole's initiatives were carried out promptly: work on the foundations of the complex began in 1656, and the foundation stone of the church was laid in 1657. Some extraordinary events played a part in slowing down the work, which was particularly complicated due to the size of the project and the complexity of the setting. As a result of the spread of the plague, in 1657 ten thousand corpses were buried in the excavated areas of the Albergo. During the war between the Republic and Duke Emmanuel of Savoy, part of the Hotel was used as officers' quarters around the beginning of the 1670s (Banchero, 1846, pp. 6–8). The building attained its current appearance in 1834 with the construction of the west tower on the façade and the corridor bordering the complex on the same side (Musso *et al.*, 2024, p. 8).

The Albergo dei Poveri's long history underwent a critical phase of abandonment, which evolved towards a new, albeit still partial, use in the 1990s. Space was allocated to the University of Genoa, the church and ante-church remained under the responsibility of the Archiepiscopal Curia of Genoa, while the Public Health Agency (ASP) of Brignole has its offices in the west wing of the façade. However, this reorganisation of functions affects only about 30% of the entire area of the complex (Musso *et al.*, 2024, pp. 8, 3).

Within a few years, the University of Genoa launched the first projects in parts of the east and front wings, providing classrooms, spaces for the lecturers' institutional activities, and study areas.

This first design approach seems to suggest a nautical theme, fully legitimised within the scope of creativity and reinterpreted through different evocative solutions. The entrance to the lecture hall is fronted by a prow which forms a filter zone and, at the same time, guides the flow of users along the two longitudinal sides (Fig. 1). Alternatively, diagonally stretched 'sails' are inserted between arches on pillars that divide two parallel spaces of considerable length and height, according to a two-aisle plan, now divided into several classrooms (Fig. 2). This may have resolved the acoustic problems that could occur in the original structure



FIG. 1. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: a structure has been placed at the entrance to the lecture hall allowing glimpses of the whole room.

covered by under-pitch vaults. The acoustic issue, however, appears to recur in many classrooms, where different types of shielding have been used. In some cases, opaque panels placed at a distance from each other and from the walls have been used, leaving views of the vaults in the central and perimeter parts. An unusual solution has been adopted for the vaulted ceiling of the lecture hall, with a jute cloth placed just above the ties; the cloth, with its irregular stitching and colour variations, seems to evoke, on a much larger scale, the jute cloths used by Alberto Burri in his works. In the lecture hall, the decision to extend the cloth up to the walls conceals the formation of the vaults, which are only visible for a short distance above the corbels (Fig. 3). In this case, if the study of the room's acoustic problems had allowed it, it might have been advantageous to leave the vaults more visible at the edge of the room. Alternatively, relying on the transparency of the jute cloth and on appropriate lighting above it, it would have been possible to appreciate the extent of the entire vaulted system.



FIG. 2. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: two large parallel rooms converted into classrooms in the spaces to the right.

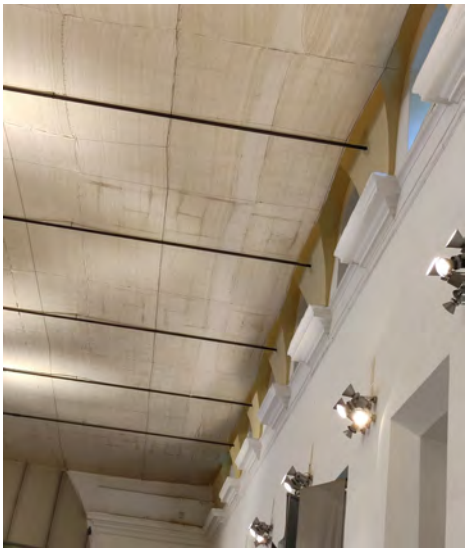


FIG. 3. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: detail of the ceiling of the lecture hall.

The solution implemented in the library on the first floor has an almost visionary intent; in the double-volume space, there is a new intermediate level with a planimetric profile evoking a hull hanging from tie rods anchored to the longitudinal walls. This area, used as a reading space, is reached by a staircase at one of the two ends. The separation between this 'floating' plane and the surrounding walls ensures that the perception of the volume of the room in which the library is located is not lost (Fig. 4).

The decision to support this new intermediate level of the library by means of tie rods generates an inward tensile component in the anchor walls, significantly changing the static regime of the structures. This problem arises in still more complex terms in the outer wall due to the presence of closely spaced windows that interrupt the continuity of the walls; here, the wall anchors are also fixed at the edge of the windows themselves. Given the very high loads implied by the function of a library, even if only in terms of accidental loads, one can imagine that the lateral connection areas, where inward tensile stresses are created, required specific and considerable masonry reinforcement solutions, which are not visible but necessarily had a strong impact on the consistency of the masonry,



FIG. 4. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: intermediate level created in the volume of the library.

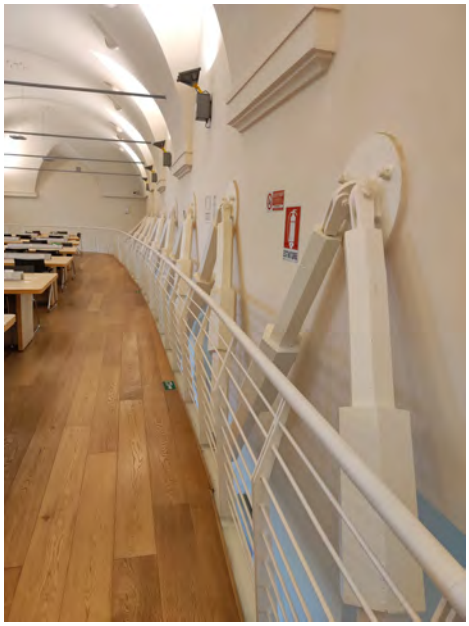


FIG. 5. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: detail of the supporting structures of the intermediate floor of the library.

changing its very nature. A double alteration was therefore introduced: in the static regime and in the consistency of the masonry. Imagining the structure of the room in section, it can be seen that just below the springing of the vaults, fitted with ties, are anchors that generate an inward tensile stress.

An important aspect of the intermediate level of the library seems to be that it communicates the idea of creating a new study area on a floating hull in the space of the great hall, using thin steel rods anchored to the walls and assigned a dual function: the upper rods supporting the structure and the lower rods preventing its oscillation. However, fire safety must have required a protective shell of suitable fireproof materials for the former. These tie rods thus take on a considerable volume and have a dissonant, crude design compared to the refined details of the project. They appear to be a solution introduced during the works, perhaps in the testing phase, developed for a merely technological purpose, almost for pure regulatory compliance, an outcome that calls into question the salient character of the design (Fig. 5).

From a more general viewpoint, the design of the library has been affected by an approach related to the idea of acting in a 'container' whose cultural value is recognised, but where the overall construction context of the wing of the Albergo dei Poveri in which the work was carried out was not understood or fully considered. The design idea seems to have been uncritically inserted into the context, ignoring its specific distinctive features, which could have fostered and guided its constructional and formal solutions.

Focusing on the mere space in which to intervene, considered as an unrelated monumental 'object', without analysing the relationships between the parts and the whole, has also led to the questionable visual separation of the lecture hall from the church, thereby erasing a pivotal element of the 17th-century project in terms of cultural value (Fig. 5). In fact, the church is at the centre of a cross system that allowed people to participate in religious services according to clearly defined social and functional hierarchies. This generative cross core provides access to the perimeter wings, where the destitute were

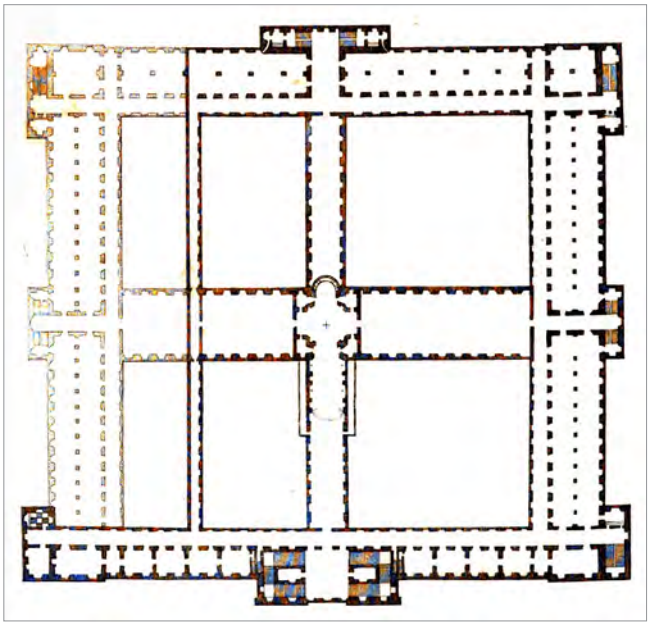


FIG. 6. Plan of the Albergo dei Poveri, with the unfinished part indicated in outline on the left (from Banchero, 1846, p. 2).

accommodated, creating a symmetrical four-courtyard layout, later partially implemented in the western area.

Our understanding of an architectural structure cannot be limited to a general diagrammatic vision, as may be expressed by the schematic plan published by Giuseppe Banchero (1846, p. 2), where a hypothetical symmetrical solution is also shown in a different diagram (Fig. 6). This would mean relying on a primarily intuition-based approach, which adopts an overly superficial approach to understanding the cultural values of the context in which work is to be carried out. The need to undertake a reliable, complex cognitive process to support and guide the design choices was fully grasped through the decision to launch an extensive survey campaign in 2011 in the Albergo dei Poveri through the teaching and research activities of the School of Specialisation in Architectural and Landscape Heritage of Genoa and the University Laboratory 'Analytical Methods for Restoration and History of the Built Environment' (MARSC), directed by Stefano F. Musso (Franco, 2020, pp. 117–126). The results of the investigations into the structures, materials and construction history of the complex also made it possible to plan works on the basis of the priorities identified.

The Continuous Use of Two Hospitals in Florence up to Modern Times

The hospital of Santa Maria Nuova and the hospital of San Giovanni di Dio were used continuously up until modern times, when the two facilities met different fates. The former underwent extensive redevelopment work, while hospital operations were discontinued at the latter in 1983.

The hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, founded in 1288 (Passerini, 1853, pp. 284–290), soon assumed such an important civic role that it became a landmark comparable to the cathedral. It was important not only as a place of care, but also because of its artistic

value, the size of the complex and its commissions of works of art. The growth of the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova, built between the second and third city walls of Florence, was frenetic if one considers that it initially had only 12 beds. After the Black Death (1348), the institution benefited from countless testamentary bequests, becoming one of the city's ecclesiastical bodies with the largest land assets (Pinto, 2005, pp. 13–19; Diana, 2005, pp. 56–64; Henderson, 2005, pp. 34–36).

Work resumed intensively at the end of the 14th century (c. 1395) and lasted until around 1479, gradually giving rise to a cross-shaped layout, which later became a typological model, but initially consisted of a 'Tau' layout. The fourth arm of the cross, with the Chapel of the Sacrament at the end, was started in 1574 to a design by Bernardo Buontalenti (Diana, 2005, pp. 67, 77–81; Diana, 2004, pp. 37–71).

With the works carried out in the 17th century, the hospital doubled in size, in particular following the construction of the new women's hospital in the form of a cross, begun in 1657, to which the patients previously housed in the ward of the Oblate convent, located on the opposite side of the square, were transferred. The nuns played a fundamental role in providing care; to facilitate this, they used a private route via a corridor under Piazza Sant'Egidio (Fig. 8).

The double cross layout, which survived until the mid-19th century, placed the church of Sant'Egidio in an axial position between the two crosses and, in the 17th century, it was screened by the new loggia on the façade (Giorgi, Matracchi, 2005, pp. 101–114; Carrara, 2005, pp. 423–431). The size reached by the hospital at the urban scale is effectively represented in a plan from 1707 (Fig. 7).

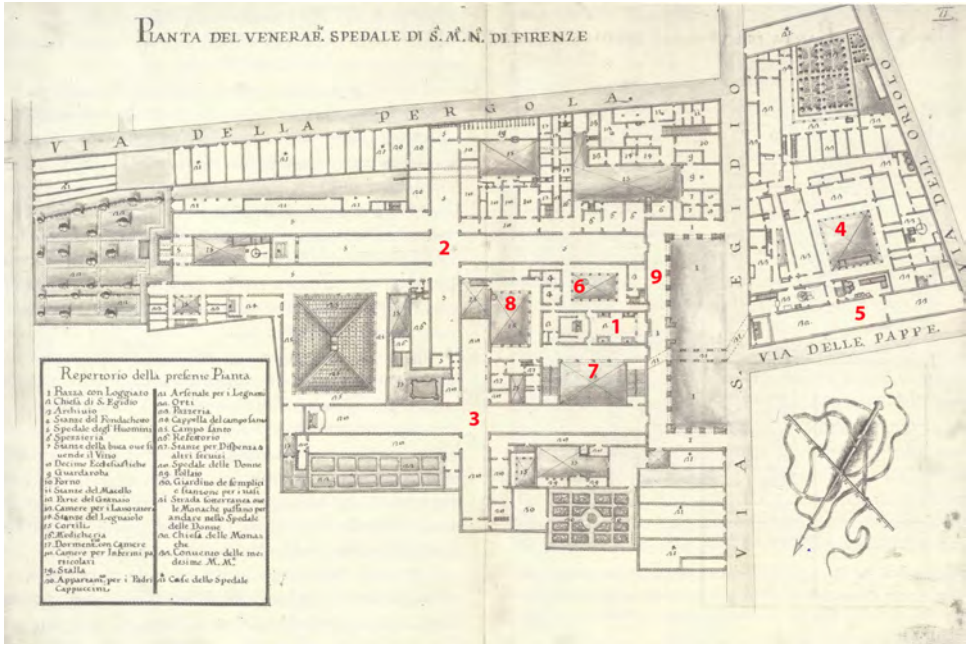


FIG. 7. Floor plan of Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence (1707) showing: the church of Sant'Egidio (1), the men's cross (2), the women's cross (3), the Oblate convent (4), the women's ward (5), the Medicherie Cloister (6), the Cloister of Bones (7), the Samaritana Cloister (8), the loggia of the façade in front of Piazza Sant'Egidio (9) (plan from Diana 2012, p. 17).

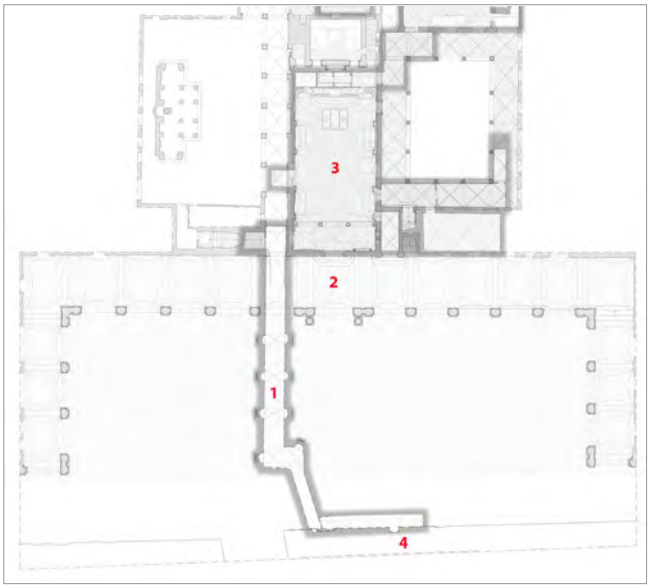


FIG. 8. Florence, Santa Maria Nuova Hospital: overlap between the ground floor and basement; the passageway under Piazza Sant'Egidio that joined the hospital to the Oblate Convent can be seen (drawing by Elena Costa 2023).

The most recent events that have created different scenarios of change for Santa Maria Nuova began in 1988, when the prospect of funding led to the decision to maintain the hospital function, initiating a profound innovation plan that was now imperative in relation to the new regulations.

In addition, care activities had to be interrupted only marginally. Temporary relocation of these activities to other places was ruled out for several reasons, including the difficulty of predicting the timing of such a complex operation. The decision to retain Santa Maria Nuova Hospital was based on several evaluations. One was the identity value of a facility that had provided health services continuously since medieval times. Moreover, almost half of Florence's approximately 376,000 inhabitants in 2000, relied on this facility; the population included a high proportion of elderly people with substantial healthcare needs. In the old centre, the rise in the temporary population linked to the mobility of tourists, workers and students was also a consideration and a factor that almost doubled the number of people present. Moreover, the continued presence of the hospital would have, if not counteracted, at least slowed down the abandonment of the old city centre; it provided services and jobs that encouraged the population to stay.

Thus, a redevelopment programme for Santa Maria Nuova Hospital was drawn up in 1997–1999, finally approved in 2000, and in 2003 work began, lasting for about fifteen years (Geddes da Filicaia, 2012, pp. 551–560). The project was drawn up with an awareness of the distinctive features of a hospital located in a historical centre, inevitably with limited services and beds, to be considered in many cases as part of a care pathway that is part of a hospital network extending into the metropolitan area (Geddes da Filicaia, 2005, pp. 498–501).

The preliminary design of the hospital complex was summarised in a general plan with an urban-planning approach to a historical district and general guidelines (Massa, 2005, pp. 115–124). The plan indicated the parts intended for 'Scientific restoration based on a historical-critical analysis', which essentially corresponded to the part considered to be

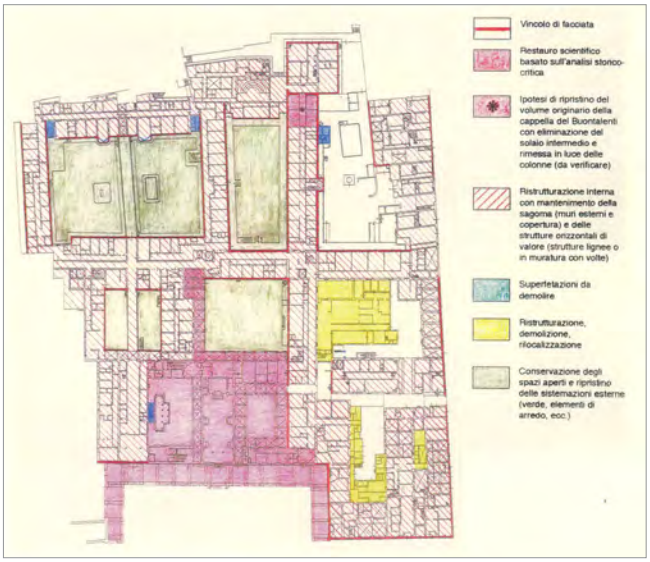


FIG. 9. A preliminary project from 1999 for the renovation of Santa Maria Nuova Hospital in Florence (from Massa 2005, p. 558).

of monumental value; no alterations were planned for the cloister system, except for gardening and furnishings (Fig. 9). A 'façade constraint' was indicated in the elevations of the courtyards and street frontage. The parts earmarked for demolition were limited and essentially involved volumes within the courtyards. For the remaining parts of the complex, which constituted all the rooms used for hospital purposes, 'Internal renovation with preservation of the outline (external walls and roof) and valuable horizontal structures (wooden or masonry structures with vaults)' was indicated. There is an obvious lack of circumstantial information; however, the objective difficulties of investigation in a functioning hospital should be considered, where false ceilings, wall linings, floating floors and other devices had been added over time for a variety of reasons, preventing access to the physical substance of the building. In a case like this, the necessary investigations could only have been carried out during the operational phase of the work, necessarily planned in stages so as not to interrupt hospital activities. This condition represented an additional element of complexity in the project. However, it would have been possible to access the extensive monumental part in order to carry out the necessary preliminary investigations properly.

While recognising the difficulties of acquiring in-depth knowledge in a context in which continuity of use had to be maintained, a major simplification was made in identifying the monumental area. A centuries-old palimpsest, of which a substantial part of the men's cross forms part, disguised by the clustering of rooms and representing a salient morphological character in the context of ancient hospitals, was excluded from the assessment of high cultural value.

It was easier to carry out preventive archaeological investigations in the cloisters and some unused rooms (Salvini, Lelli, 2006, pp. 21–25; Lelli, 2006, pp. 20–21). In the Samaritana courtyard, excavations revealed 14th-century structures at lower levels than today's floor levels. In the former radiology department, the pillars of one side of the Ossa Cloister (15th century) were found, thus identifying its original perimeter. The identified



FIG. 10. Florence, Santa Maria Nuova Hospital: archaeological investigations in the former radiology department revealed some pillars of the Ossa Cloister (15th century), later incorporated into a wall of the women's cross, as well as some tombs underneath the same wing of the cloister (from Giorgi, Matracchi 2006, p. 38).

pillars were incorporated (17th century) into the walls of the cross-shaped structure that accommodated the women (Fig. 10).

With hospital activities continuing, the objective of enhancing the rich heritage of objects acquired by Santa Maria Nuova from the 13th to the 19th century – works of art, sacred and secular furnishings and medical instruments – required an approach different from that of museum settings, scientific reconstructions or realistic reconstructions, just as it was not feasible to pursue a unitary project to redevelop large, abandoned areas as museums. The visitor route had to be integrated with a functioning structure, which had found new vitality; at the same time, interaction between the religious and caring aspects, a pivotal element to be recalled through specific proposals for interpreting the complex, had weakened within the historical palimpsest. A particularly innovative museum goal would have been to provide access to the heritage of objects starting from within, that is, involving patients, visitors and relatives of inpatients, as well as the healthcare workers themselves (De Benedictis, 2005, pp. 469–475; Coppellotti, De Benedictis, 2006, pp. 91–94).

The project, in addition to the reorganisation of hospital activities (Fig. 11), identified the connections between continuity of use, enhancement of the architectural and artistic heritage, and the city as a key point. Thus, the hospital's new entrance hall is conceived as a public space in continuity with the portico and Piazza Sant'Egidio in front of it; further interior connections continue with the adjacent Cloister of the Medicherie, creating a sequence of internal and open spaces accessible to all, continuing past a room used as a bar, featuring a painted coffered ceiling, up to the Samaritana Cloister; this is where the areas specifically related to healthcare services begin (Diana *et al.*, 2019, pp. 27–33).

The project also entailed the redevelopment of the square, as well as some necessary adaptations to the loggia: the creation of a ramp that makes the entrance accessible from the old hospital door, with the addition of new seating at the edge of the loggia; and the closing of three bays of the loggia with glass walls to create an immediately visible access point to the emergency room that can be reached from outside. In the latter case,



FIG. 11. Florence, Santa Maria Nuova Hospital: new pathway created on one side of the Samaritana Courtyard.



FIG. 12. Florence, Santa Maria Nuova Hospital: the entrance to the emergency room was created by closing off part of the façade loggia with glass walls.

when proposing the use of glass, there is sometimes an indulgence in the rhetoric of transparency, but this condition exists only from inside the loggia, since from outside the glass surfaces covering the entire archways are opaque and reflect the buildings opposite (Fig. 12).

The hall is a place for taking a break and where works are displayed in showcases; a staircase leads up to an exhibition area. In order to emphasise this aspect, paintings were placed on the wall flanking the staircase, and on the entrance side of the double volume, where the staircase ends, three openings allow a glimpse of some of the works of art on display, among which the Crucifixion corresponding to the central opening is particularly prominent (Fig. 13). The character of this space, open for walking around, taking a break and visiting, with no hospital features, is complemented by a bookshop and a conference room directly connected to the hall (Bellini, Setola, 2019, pp. 57–66).

The location of the hall is of particular historical significance, as it corresponds to the entrance to the men's cross built in the second decade of the 14th century. However, this connotation is completely lost when crossing the hall, as the design did not position itself as a meeting point between the old corridor and the new architecture, but rather as an insertion within a neglected container, with no history, imperceptible and lacking evidence recalling the material and spatial qualities of such high cultural value. The new design establishes a dialogue with the works of art belonging to the hospital, but not with the architectural palimpsest, which is not perceived, except in the views afforded by the openings towards the Medicherie Cloister.

This approach also undermined the decision to place, on the wall opposite the entrance, a copy of the painting *Pope Martin V Consecrates St Egidio* (1424) by Bicci di Lorenzo[1], a very important work also from an iconographic perspective, as it depicts the front of the hospital before the construction of the present-day loggia, showing the entrance to the church of Sant'Egidio, a vaulted passageway to the Medicherie Cloister and the entrance to the men's cross surmounted by a large mullioned window. This work is thus set apart, lacking a connection to the context (Fig. 14); it also loses the historical

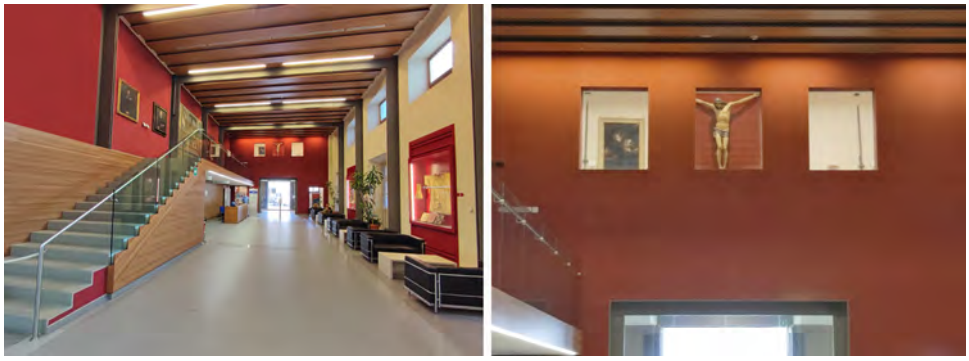


FIG. 13. Florence, Santa Maria Nuova Hospital: new entrance displaying part of the hospital's artistic heritage.

value associated with the cross-shaped layout of the men's ward (Henderson, 2016, pp. 51–57). The decision to exhibit, with the necessary safety devices, not a copy of the detached fresco of the consecration of St Egidio, but the original now placed in a room above the loggia would have warranted separate consideration.

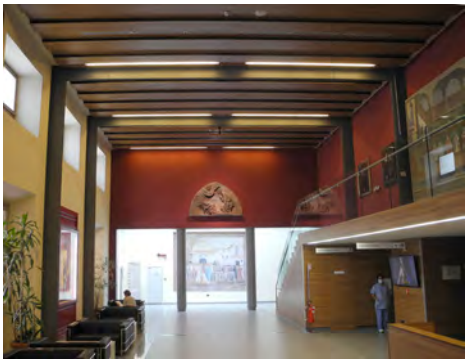


FIG. 14. Florence, Santa Maria Nuova Hospital: a copy of the Consecration of St. Egidio (1424) was placed in the new entrance.

The mutual enhancement of works of art and architecture was fostered by allowing for guided tours. In the former chancel of the Oblates on the side of the Church of St Egidio, which also provides access to the counter-façade chancel, visitors can appreciate the display of art objects and enjoy spaces that were once exclusive to the nuns, with very interesting views of the church's interior from above (Fig. 15).

The chancels provide an understanding of the devotional and functional machinery in relation to the role of the Oblates. Passing through this corridor, most of which is still passable even though it has been unused for a very long time, was part of the devotional ritual, with an altar in the final section where the staircase begins and a shrine with a sacred image in an intermediate position.

The Fondazione Santa Maria Nuova continues to promote the enhancement of the heritage of objects and the architectural complex, also with the intention of restoring the staircase and basement corridor of the Oblates, connected to an additional unused room below the church of Sant'Egidio (Fig. 16, A), which in turn is lined by vaulted spaces with large monolithic stone basins; according to tradition, the latter were used by Leonardo da Vinci for dissecting corpses. The large room underneath the church, in the context of an itinerary visiting the many underground spaces, has been identified as the place where digital devices could be installed to illustrate the palimpsest of spaces, functions and meanings of the hospital complex.

In this context, research has begun on the church, with a particular focus on the 15th-century layout and the adjacent underground spaces[2]. One of the particularly chal-



FIG. 15. Florence, Church of Sant'Egidio: the chancels of the Oblates, placed on the side and counter-façade of the church, were furnished with art objects belonging to Santa Maria Nuova Hospital.



FIG. 16. Excerpt of the longitudinal section of the Church of Sant'Egidio; the church façade (in red), the room below the church (A), the Oblate chancel (B), the Spedalingo chancel (C) with the adjacent corridor (D), the 17th-century loggia (E) are indicated. On the right, a section of a truss with details of the pictorial decoration; these painted trusses could be made visible by a new floor (F) placed above corridor D (drawings by Elena Costa 2023).

lenging issues, which has already been studied (Giorgi, Matracchi, 2006, pp. 39–50), concerns the accessibility of the trusses in the Church of Sant'Egidio. This is a unique case of wooden carpentry due to the richness of the architectural details and polychromatic pictorial apparatuses, also treated with gold leaf (Fig. 16). The uniqueness of the trusses also lies in the fact that almost all of the wooden and pictorial apparatuses have been preserved, as their location within a hospital, which has never ceased its activities, has allowed for regular and continuous maintenance. In addition, the 17th-century false ceiling further helped to protect the pictorial parts in particular. Indeed, candle smoke had blackened the intrados of the plastered-reed vault.

The study of the area connecting the church façade and the loggia identified an alternative means of access to the trusses, which can now be reached through attics accessible only to maintenance personnel or scholars.

The living quarters of the 'Spedalingo', the rector of the hospital, were located above the loggia, in the part corresponding to the front of the church, while the adjacent stretch of corridor and the Spedalingo's chancel were created inside the church, above the Oblate chancel (Fig. 16, D&C). Also, with the aim of encouraging visits that could illustrate the original use of the spaces, it would be possible to reopen access from the corridor to the Spedalingo's chancel, which is now inaccessible. The corridor between the chancel and the rector's quarters is of considerable height, extending to the church's roof slopes, concealed by a false ceiling in the form of an arch that is probably made of plastered reed. This space would allow for the creation of an intermediate floor level from which

the trusses could be observed (Fig. 16, F): it would be necessary to create an opening in a half-brick wall (Giorgi, Matracchi, 2006, pp. 43–44). Appropriate lighting of the attic would enable small groups of guided visitors to view the substantially intact trusses and pictorial apparatuses, which are unparalleled in the city of Florence.

Continuity of use usually favours minimal, or at least modest, impact in old buildings. In the case of hospital facilities, this condition does not apply, as the adaptation requirements linked to developments in medicine, health services and evolving standards have strong implications for the need to redevelop architectural spaces.

This condition has also had a major impact on the hospital of San Giovanni di Dio, also located in Florence. It developed from an initial modest unit created between the late 14th and early 15th centuries, known as the 'Spedale del Vespucci'; however, the welfare function strengthened in 1587 when the Order of St John of God, or Fatebenefratelli, took over. At the end of the 17th century, a radical programme of works began, involving the church, the rooms available to the religious community and the healthcare rooms, with works lasting well into the mid-18th century (Figs. 17 and 18). The relatively small size of the complex posed significant limitations in terms of services, such as hospitalisation limited to men and mostly on a payment basis. Only in the years 1932–40, by using the width of the double volumes on the first floor, was it possible to obtain an additional floor for the women's ward. This arrangement was maintained until 1983, when hospital activities at San Giovanni di Dio ceased (Diana, 2012, pp. 31–45; Bartoli, Biagini, 2012, pp. 58–61).

The difficulty of finding answers to emerging functional needs is well exemplified by the solution found for ambulance access, which had to be identified in a highly constrained urban context and within an architectural complex of limited size, with few open spaces, consisting of a courtyard with a four-sided loggia and an additional residual area between the hospital and other neighbouring properties.

In fact, only this residual area could have accommodated the ambulances, albeit with severely restricted access, as it is located in the innermost corner of the hospital complex, which could only be reached from the Borgo Ognissanti side. The dialogue between conservation and creativity in the technical solution devised to address the problem was complex. The courtyard and the street were connected by a passageway that narrowed

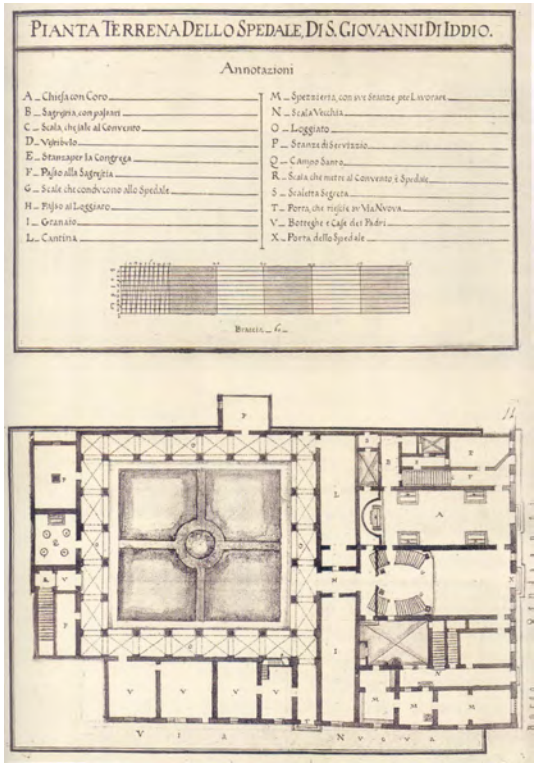


FIG. 17. Plan of the ground floor of San Giovanni di Dio Hospital, 18th century (from Diana 2012, p. 39).

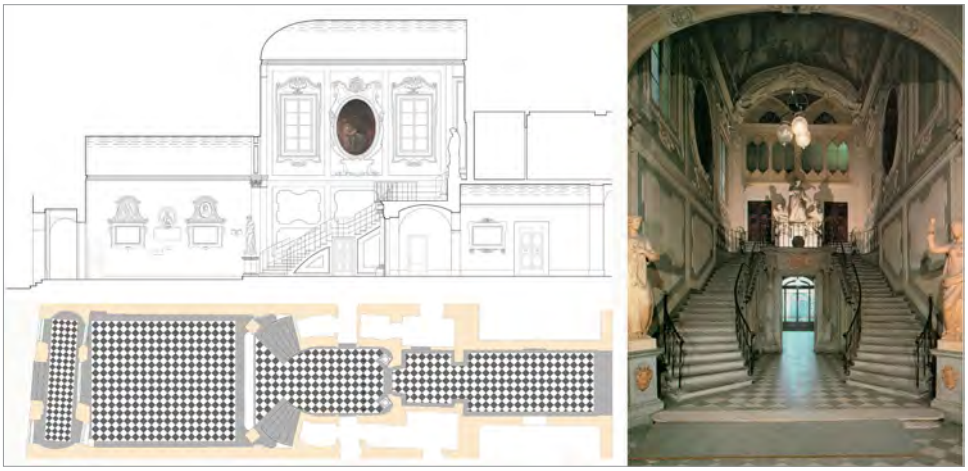


FIG. 18. Florence, San Giovanni di Dio Hospital: plan, section and view of the monumental entrance hall (Federica Bertini, Felicita Caravetta, Liliana Ceragioli, 2015).

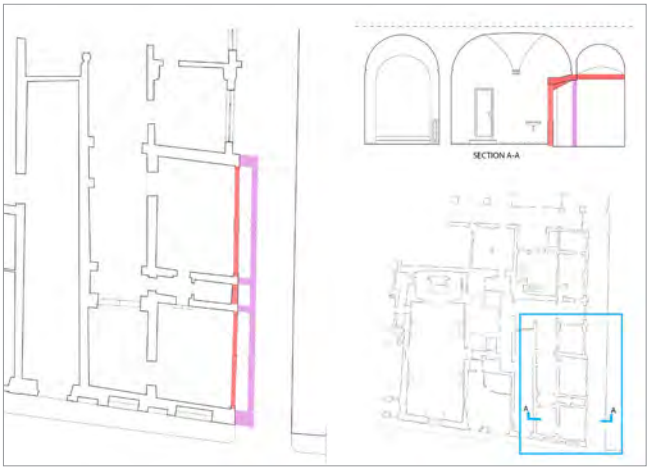


FIG. 19. Florence, San Giovanni di Dio Hospital: excerpts from the ground floor plan and one section highlight the plan to create a new driveway entrance, the demolition of a large part of the wall of the adjacent vaulted rooms (in purple), and the new wall with reinforced concrete and steel structures (in red).

where it corresponded to two rooms covered by under-pitch vaults. An L-shaped steel and reinforced concrete structure was created (1972–73) to support the highest part of the walls where the vaults rest, while, at the same time, the demolition of the lower part of the masonry made it possible to widen the driveway (Fig. 19). The integrity of the vaulted systems was preserved by reducing the volume of the rooms below in favour of extending the adjacent corridor. This was an extreme solution that raises the question of how much adaptability it is legitimate to demand of a historical context. The question also relates to whether such a choice was based on an appropriate planning timeframe, given that after just ten years the entire complex was declared no longer suitable for hospital functions.

Conclusions

In the architectural complexes examined, the Albergo dei Poveri and the hospitals of Santa Maria Nuova and San Giovanni di Dio, the approach of considering the context as a con-

tainer to be adapted and moulded to new functions and different conditions of use seems to prevail in some contemporary interventions. Persistence and innovation, conservation and creation are dyads that, in these old hospital facilities, whether disused or not, can offer new opportunities for public use within these structures, understood as an extension of urban spaces; this connotation can be observed in the hall of Santa Maria Nuova Hospital, connected to the Medicherie and Samaritana Cloisters, and in the proposal put forward for the vast basement area on the axis of the Albergo dei Poveri. No less significant are the collections of art objects amassed by the hospitals, to be made accessible in the public spaces themselves and in additional rooms set up for guided tours, which at the same time introduce an understanding of the uses that have taken place over time in such complex buildings, where a close relationship was established between the spiritual and healthcare dimensions.

In these same public exhibition contexts and in the vicinity of the art objects, a space should be added to enhance the knowledge acquired about the architectural complexes. In the case of the Albergo dei Poveri, this should start with the recent studies carried out by a group from the University of Genoa and rely on interactive digital tools that can be implemented with the results of further research. A permanent laboratory would thus be created: an open-access digital archive aimed at developing awareness of the cultural values of such dense and complex architectural heritage assets; a place of knowledge available to all, experts, students and ordinary citizens, created in an environment where one can also appreciate and touch the material of the built environment transposed into the digital dimension. A place where use and intervention scenarios can be freely prefigured, and where the wealth of information persists, evolves and is made available to guide and suggest solutions for future projects as well.

Notes

1 See https://catalogo.beniculturali.it/detail/HistoricOrArtisticProperty/0900190226 (Accessed: 29/04/2025).

2 An agreement was signed in 2022 between the Fondazione Santa Maria Nuova and the Department of History, Archaeology, Geography, Art and Performing Arts (SAGAS), with Andrea De Marchi as Scientific Director, and the Department of Architecture (DIDA), with Pietro Matracchi and Giorgio Verdiani as Scientific Directors, of the University of Florence.

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CONSERVATION AND CREATION AS INVISIBLE PRACTICES WITHIN LIVING HISTORIC URBAN CONTEXTS

Cecilia Moggia, Marta Casanova
University of Genoa, Italy
cecilia.moggia@edu.unige.it; marta.casanova@unige.it

1. Conservation / Creation in Historic Urban Contexts

Historic urban areas are increasingly recognised as living organisms, shaped by long-term processes of transformation, adaptation, and care. Their continuity does not depend on immobility, but on the capacity to preserve what is recognised as value while managing inevitable change (UNESCO 2011)[1]. Within this perspective, conservation cannot be understood as a practice aimed at freezing the past, nor can creation be reduced to an act of autonomous formal invention. Rather, conservation and creation are deeply intertwined and must be addressed together when reflecting on the future of historic cities.

Drawing on Edgar Morin's concept of permanence as active organisation (Morin 1977)[2], applied here to historic urban contexts, permanence does not imply inertia, but a continuous effort to maintain a system subject to internal and external perturbations, such as physical decay, social change, and transformative pressures. Permanence thus requires care: an organised, conscious, and ongoing practice. Care is never neutral, as it is directed toward what is recognised as meaningful. Only through an act of recognition can permanence be pursued, and this can occur solely through awareness and responsibility[3].

Within international heritage theory and policy frameworks, this dynamic understanding has progressively emerged. Cultural heritage is widely recognised as a non-renewable resource carrying identity, memory, and cultural values, and as a fundamental component of sustainable development (Zancheti, Jokilehto 1997, p. 47; UNESCO 2016). From this perspective, conservation does not merely respond to existing damage but also includes preventive and future-oriented actions aimed at avoiding the loss of material and social structures.

Creation, in this framework, does not arise from nothing, but from knowledge, recognition, and renewal of the values embedded in the existing city – a relationship that became particularly evident during the EAAE Conservation / Creation workshop held in Genoa in 2024.

Understanding conservation as a creative process implies recognising its interpretative nature, grounded in the critical mediation of values through knowledge and practice: 'Creativity does not have to be defined in Nietzschean terms of destructive creation/creative destruction' (Kealy 2008). The identification of values is not a purely objective operation, but the outcome of a cultural process. In this sense, conservation becomes inseparable from creation, understood not as formal invention, but as the capacity to interpret and transmit the values embedded in the existing city.

It is within this perspective that the EAAE Conservation/Creation workshop held in Genoa constituted a privileged context for reflection, in which observation, walking, and discussion enabled the exploration of conservation as a situated creative practice. The

workshop became a field of experience and learning, bringing together local knowledge and external perspectives, and highlighting both the richness and the fragility of Genoa's living heritage.

The workshop was structured around direct observation of the historic centre – specifically the *sestieri* of Molo, Maddalena, and Pré – where dense urban fabric, everyday uses, and social conditions are closely linked. This was complemented by the analysis of selected sites at different locations and scales: within the historic centre, the Loggia di Banchi and the *Strade Nuove*, where a shift in scale highlights the contrast between their monumental order and the surrounding medieval fabric, emphasising the relational character of the UNESCO site; at its margins, the Porto Antico, examined as a reference for reflecting on the long-term effects of large-scale urban regeneration; and beyond the historic centre, the former Albergo dei Poveri – a 'city within the city' – considered in relation to processes of partial reuse and its connections to the broader urban context. This experiential trajectory provided a shared ground for addressing the historic centre as a living system, within which the role of specific urban elements and ensembles – such as Via Garibaldi – can be more precisely examined.

2. Via Garibaldi as Part of a Living Historic System

Via Garibaldi (Fig. 1) represents a particularly significant context for exploring conservation and creation as intertwined processes within a living historic system. The street was inscribed in 2006 as part of the UNESCO site 'Genoa: Le Strade Nuove and the System of the Palazzi dei Rolli', recognised for its Outstanding Universal Value as an innovative urban and architectural system developed between the 16th and 17th centuries.

The UNESCO site is articulated through a core area, corresponding mainly to the *Strade Nuove* – Via Garibaldi, Via Balbi, and Via Cairoli – and a Buffer Zone that broadly overlaps with the historic centre. This configuration highlights a key aspect of the Genoese case: the values of the *Strade Nuove* cannot be fully understood in isolation from their surrounding urban fabric. The Buffer Zone is not merely a protective perimeter, but an essential bearer of meaning, allowing the monumental regularity of the *Strade Nuove* to be read in relation to the dense medieval city that frames them (Moggia, Vecchiattini 2025).



FIG. 1. Via Garibaldi, Genoa, today (Casanova 2025).

The *Strade Nuove* were conceived as part of a deliberate urban strategy promoted by the Genoese aristocracy to express political power, economic prosperity, and cultural ambition through architecture and urban form. The system has been described as a 'republican palace', in which private buildings assumed a public role within a shared urban representation. The palaces were conceived not as isolated monu-

ments, but as components of a coherent urban scene governed by common rules of alignment, scale, and decorum (Poleggi 1998; Poleggi 2004).

From this perspective, authenticity cannot be reduced to the material conservation of façades or decorative apparatuses alone. Rather, it resides in the continuity of relationships between buildings, the street, and their uses and meanings over time. Via Garibaldi has historically accommodated a plurality of functions – residential, institutional, cultural, and commercial – reflecting a long tradition of both public and private domains. This continuity of use constitutes a fundamental component of authenticity, as values are transmitted through everyday practices rather than through static preservation.

At the same time, this living condition introduces specific vulnerabilities. Transformations occurring at the scale of individual buildings and uses can cumulatively affect the character and meaning of the site. Incremental micro-transformations – often driven by economic pressures, tourism, or functional adaptation – tend to operate below the threshold of visibility, yet over time they may erode not only material consistency, but also the relational, functional, and perceptual structures that underpin the system as a whole (Vecchiattini, Moggia 2025).

These gradual dynamics coexist with phases of more profound transformation linked to exceptional circumstances, such as wartime destruction and post-war reconstruction. These moments deeply affected the building fabric and urban structure, opening a particularly sensitive field of negotiation between conservation requirements, safety concerns, and creative choices oriented toward the continuity of the historic city.

In more recent decades, the historic centre of Genoa has also been shaped by periods of intensive intervention associated with large-scale restoration campaigns, concentrated public funding, and major urban events. While these phases enabled significant improvements to monumental buildings and public spaces, they also reveal the risks inherent in accelerated transformation processes, in which concentrated resources and decision-making may generate forms of homogenisation or imbalance if not embedded within long-term, critically informed management strategies (Bobbio, Musso 2020).

Via Garibaldi thus constitutes a bridge between theoretical reflections on conservation and the concrete historical processes of transformation through creativity. It exemplifies the continuity of the historic city not as immobility, but as the capacity – sometimes fragile and contested – to integrate both diffuse, incremental change and more intensive, strategically funded interventions within a coherent urban framework. This perspective provides the basis for examining moments in which transformation became particularly intense, such as the post-war period, when conservation and creation were negotiated under conditions of urgency and necessity.

3. Post-War Damage and Emergency Reconstruction: Technical Choices as Creative Acts

The aerial bombardments (Fig. 2) that struck Genoa between 1940 and 1945 had profound effects on the historic centre, resulting not only in material destruction but also in a widespread crisis of the structural and functional conditions of the urban fabric. A total of 234 buildings of artistic interest were affected (Ceschi, 1949), and the white crosses painted on the roofs of churches and monumental palaces in accordance with international conventions[4] proved ineffective.

Destruction did not occur uniformly but rather through the accumulation of discrete events – collapses, fires, and structural damage – which made it necessary to adopt an

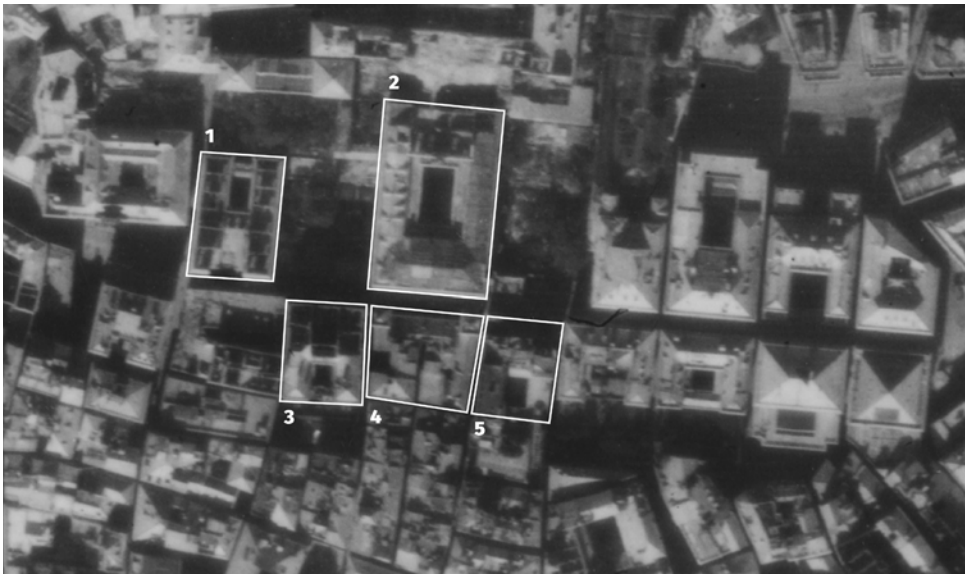


FIG. 2. Aerial view of Via Garibaldi after the bombings. Palazzo Bianco (1), Palazzo Doria Tursi (2), Palazzo Rosso (3), Palazzo delle Torrette (4), Palazzo Serra Campanella (5) (4220, 2 March 1944, Mediterranean Allied Photographic Reconnaissance Wing (MAPRW), Aerofototeca Nazionale, ICCD).

articulated approach to reconstruction, based on differentiated interventions and the technical management of emergency conditions rather than on a unified urban project.

Along Via Garibaldi, the bombardments affected a number of palaces in a selective yet severe manner – Palazzo Bianco, Palazzo Tursi, Palazzo delle Torrette[5], Palazzo Rosso[6], Palazzo Tursi, and Palazzo Serra Campanella[7] - causing the extensive destruction of roofs, the collapse or serious compromise of timber floor structures, damage to masonry walls, and, in emblematic cases, the loss of significant portions of façades and decorative apparatuses. In many buildings, the direct effects of the explosions were compounded by fires, which led to the destruction of upper-floor interiors and the near-total loss of timber structures.

In the historic centre, the post-war period represented a critical threshold at which heritage conservation was forced to confront the necessity of transformation. Reconstruction could not be limited to the formal restoration of damage, but required technical choices capable of ensuring structural stability, safety, and continuity of use within a context of limited resources and widespread urgency.

Within this framework, the Genio Civile assumed a central role as the technical body responsible for the design and implementation of emergency stabilisation and reconstruction interventions[8].

Within this complex scenario, Via Garibaldi is a specific case. Unlike other areas of Genoa's historic centre, where destruction led to the complete replacement of the built fabric or to the introduction of new building forms (Arcolao, Napoleone 2023), post-war interventions along the Strada Nuova were predominantly oriented toward preserving the continuity of an already strongly recognised monumental urban sequence. Although in 1943 Carlo Ceschi clearly stated the impossibility of reconstructing a completely lost monument without incurring a stylistic falsification (Ceschi, 1943, p. 11), this principle

did not preclude the possibility of extensive reconstructive interventions in cases where, despite severe damage, the total loss of the building organism had not occurred.

It is within this framework that the post-war interventions along Via Garibaldi should be situated. Here, buildings that had suffered severe damage still retained significant portions of masonry, façades, and decorative apparatuses, making the reconstruction of walls and roofs not only possible but, to a certain extent, necessary as a condition for the conservation of the monument and for the urban continuity of the Strada Nuova. This approach is explicitly confirmed by Ceschi in his report of 19 August 1946 on Palazzo Serra, now Campanella, in which he states that the building's pre-eminent role within the Via Garibaldi system, together with the presence of surviving artistic elements, renders the reconstruction works 'necessary and unavoidable'[9].

In the cases examined, reconstruction did not stop at the reinstatement of load-bearing structures but also involved the complete re-composition of both external and internal decorative apparatuses. In the case of Palazzo Bianco, the façades were faithfully reconstructed on the basis of photographic documentation and still-legible material traces, reproducing the architecture and stucco decorations without introducing elements of formal distinction. Similarly, the interiors were reconstructed with reference to pre-bombardment plans and sections, leaving no visible traces of the war damage[10] (Fig. 3). More than seventy years later, these interventions are largely indistinguishable through direct observation, effectively erasing any material memory of the destruction.

While perceptual and figurative continuity was pursued with great consistency, the constructional and technological choices adopted by the Genio Civile introduced profound transformations within the building organism. The reconstructed external masonry was predominantly built in stonework with two regular brick courses[11], reusing the irregular stone from demolition, while ensuring greater executional regularity and improved mechanical performance. Although compatible in terms of thickness and structural behaviour with the historic buildings, this masonry typology represents a clear discontinuity with respect to pre-existing construction techniques.

Even more significant was the systematic adoption of reinforced concrete structures for the reconstruction of floors and roofs. In the palaces along Via Garibaldi, the timber structures destroyed by bombardments and fires were almost exclusively replaced by reinforced concrete floor systems and roof structures, unlike what occurred in other con-



FIG. 3. Palazzo Bianco: wartime damage (left) and the building today (right). The post-war reconstruction faithfully reproduced façades and interiors based on archival documentation and surviving material traces, resulting in an intervention now largely indistinguishable through direct observation (right: Cresta, E., Genoa, Palazzo Bianco, photograph, after 1942, gelatin silver print, Archivio MPI, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Fondo Danni della Seconda Guerra Mondiale, Musei di Strada Nuova, Genova, inv. MPI6020713; left: Casanova 2026).

texts of Genoa's post-war reconstruction, where metal roof structures were sometimes employed[12]. The choice of reinforced concrete responded to requirements of durability, fire resistance, and structural reliability, but was almost always accompanied by a recovery of the geometries and forms of the original timber structures. The new roofs thus reproduce the configuration of the pitches, the structural layout, and, in some cases, the spacing of the pre-existing trusses, translating a traditional construction system into a modern material. This technological substitution, deliberately not displayed, made it possible to preserve the spatial and volumetric perception of the buildings while simultaneously enhancing their structural performance. Post-war reconstruction along Via Garibaldi thus emerges as a process in which the continuity of the urban image is ensured through a profound and invisible transformation of structures, entrusted to the technical choices of the Genio Civile.

Taken together, the interventions carried out by the Genio Civile along Via Garibaldi demonstrate how post-war reconstruction operated through a selective management of change. The transformations introduced were profound at the constructional and structural level yet deliberately restrained at the expressive level. In this sense, reconstruction can be interpreted as a form of invisible creation, in which the creative act resides in the ability to integrate technical innovation within a consolidated system of values, thereby ensuring the continuity of urban identity and the persistence of the street as a vital part of the historic centre. Such invisibility, while guaranteeing figurative continuity on the one hand, on the other hand makes a deep knowledge of post-war constructive transformations indispensable for any subsequent intervention, conditioning contemporary practices of diagnosis, maintenance, and design.

4. Conservation and Creation as Intertwined Practices: Insights from the EAAE Workshop (2024)

The experience of the EAAE Conservation / Creation workshop (Genoa, 2024) provided a privileged context for critically interrogating the processes of transformation of the historic city, by bringing into dialogue theoretical reflection, direct observation, and interdisciplinary exchange. Through walking, shared observation, and collective discussion, the historic centre was approached as a living urban system, in which visible and invisible transformations, everyday practices, and major historical events overlap, producing cumulative effects over time. In this sense, the workshop functioned as a cognitive device capable of making legible dynamics that rarely emerge through exclusively formal or documentary forms of analysis.

Within this framework, Via Garibaldi emerged as a particularly significant field of observation. Its strong figurative continuity, immediately perceptible along the route through the historic centre, highlighted by contrast the presence of profound transformations embedded within the building fabric, yet not readily recognisable at the perceptual level. Post-war reconstruction – examined in this contribution as a form of invisible creation – represents one of the layers through which such continuity has been ensured: operating primarily through technical and constructive choices, the interventions carried out by the Genio Civile introduced significant structural innovations without compromising the legibility of the monumental urban sequence, thus contributing to the persistence of the *Strada Nuova* as a vital component of the historic centre.

The workshop further demonstrated that this continuity cannot be reduced to the material or figurative dimension alone but is closely connected to the conditions of use and social presence that render the historic centre a genuinely living context. Everyday practices, often marginal or scarcely visible, observed during the traversal of the historic districts, play a substantial role in the transmission of urban values over time, raising relevant questions concerning the responsibility inherent in technical, design, and management choices. In this sense, the case of Via Garibaldi and the workshop experience confirm that the continuity of the historic city does not coincide with the absence of transformation, but rather with the fragile and continuously negotiated capacity to integrate material, technical, social, and cultural layers within a recognisable and shared urban system. To assume the historic centre as a living organism implies acknowledging that the values of the old city are not given once and for all but must be identified over time and translated into design, management, and care practices.

Notes:

1 Within the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) framework, historic urban areas are understood as dynamic living systems shaped by long-term social, cultural, economic and environmental processes. Change is therefore conceived as an inherent condition of continuity rather than a threat to heritage, to be guided through an integrated and landscape-based approach that safeguards layered tangible and intangible values while allowing adaptation over time (UNESCO 2011, paras. 8–9, 11, 15; Jokilehto 2012; Bandarin and Van Oers 2015).

2 Edgar Morin does not focus on heritage but rather expresses the concept of permanence in relation to systems: '*L'organisation est, en même temps, le principe ordonnateur qui assure la permanence. La permanence dans l'être des atomes, molécules, astres ne correspond pas à de l'inertie mais à de l'organisation active. L'organisation est morphostatique: elle maintient la permanence du système dans sa forme (*Gestalt*), son existence, son identité'* (Morin 1977, 130).

3 Permanence presupposes a form of care grounded in awareness and responsibility rather than in the mere exposure of material traces. Making the signs of the past visible does not in itself imply a recognition of their value, nor of the necessity of their conservation; only a conscious act of recognition, rooted in critical awareness of the present condition of the work, can meaningfully orient practices over time (Napoleone 2007, 402).

4 Hague Convention (IV) (1907), Convention respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Regulations annexed to the Convention, Art. 27: 'In sieges and bombardments all necessary steps must be taken to spare, as far as possible, buildings dedicated to religion, art, science, or charitable purposes, historic monuments, hospitals, and places where the sick and wounded are collected, provided they are not being used at the same time for military purposes. It is the duty of the besieged to indicate such buildings or places by distinctive and visible signs, which must be notified to the enemy beforehand'.

5 The damage to these three buildings has already been described by Ceschi (1949).

6 Collapse of the roof structures, of some floor slabs, and of parts of the load-bearing masonry, followed by the deterioration of the frescoes on the underlying floors due to the lack of protection from weather exposure (*Relazione, Danni Bellici. Lavori di completamento del restauro del Palazzo Rosso di proprietà comunale*, 15/04/1950, A. Mattei, Ingegnere Capo, Archivio Storico della Regione Liguria – ASRLi, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Serie 4, Faldoni 47; and *Lettera del Vice Sindaco di Genova all'Ing. Capo del Genio Civile*, 28/08/1948, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Serie 4, Faldoni 47–48).

7 The building was hit during the bombing of 22 October 1942 and sustained damage to the 16th-century hall known as the 'Sala degli Zecchini', to the adjacent room, as well as severe damage to the main façade on Via Garibaldi (*Perizia per riparazioni e ricostruzioni da eseguirsi nel Palazzo Serra ora Campanella in Genova, via Garibaldi, 12*, 19/09/1946, ASRLi, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Edifici privati, Serie 14, Faldone 168).

8 Funds for the initial reconstruction works were in fact allocated to the Genio Civile rather than to the *Soprintendenze*; Article 27 of Law no. 1545 of 26 October 1940, concerning compensation for war

damage, assigned all works of repair, restoration, and reconstruction of buildings damaged by the war exclusively to the Ministry of Public Works (Ministero dei Lavori Pubblici) (Ragghianti 1946, pp. 4–5).

9 *Perizia per riparazioni e ricostruzione da eseguirsi in Palazzo Serra ora Campanella in Genova*, 19/08/1946, Il Soprintendente Carlo Ceschi, ASRLi, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Edifici privati, Serie 14, Faldone 168.

10 ASRLi, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Serie 4, Faldoni 35–36.

11 In the case of Palazzo Bianco, the masonry was rebuilt using rubble stone and hydraulic lime, with two courses of solid bricks running through the full wall thickness at intervals not exceeding 0.9 m centre to centre (ASRLi, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Serie 4, Faldone 35).

12 For the Loggia di Banchi, the completely destroyed roof was reconstructed using steel trusses (ASRLi, Fondo dell'Ufficio del Genio Civile di Genova, Titolo III – Classe H, Opere dipendenti da danni bellici, Serie 4, Faldone 27).

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THE TWO SIDES OF THE WALL. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STREET ART'S IMPACT ON HERITAGE CONSERVATION IN GENOA AND BUCHAREST

Monica Mureşanu, Florin Mureşanu
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
monicamuresanu@gmail.com; gomarchgo@yahoo.com

There is Something on the Wall, but Should it Be There?

There is always something on the 'wall'. Building façades, as a form of communication within the urban milieu, are recognised per se as carrying information regarding current aesthetics, features of ownership, community structure and social well-being. Broadly speaking, one could understand from just a glance at the façades that, if they are maintained in good order, they are part of a healthy and prosperous urban environment, whereas, conversely, an urban image in disrepair would be a sign of negligence, tension and disparities within the inhabiting community.

There is, in a calculated sense, the projection that the materials used for the outer shell of buildings would suffer predictable degradation due to environmental conditions and this is unavoidable, thus foreseeable in future maintenance interventions which would be carried out in order to restore as closely as possible the original image. Along the timeline between the 'new' and the 'decayed' there are different stages of the altered state in comparison to the original condition. The lighter ones fall in the category of 'patina', totally acceptable in the spirit of conservation, until their evolution brings them into the 'degradation' sphere, where preservation plans intended to reverse the process are developed. Proper conservation techniques, some tested for generations, that clean, repair, and replace what is compromised are applied, according to the present knowledge base of mechanical, biological and chemical consequences of the environment on buildings' façades. The professionals of the field of conservation are, also, well aware of the increasing percent of the anthropic causes for degradation (Musso, 2004, p. 399) – UV exposure, caustic deposits and pollution gases – also accepted as inherent, therefore conventionally considered as an issue falling within the norms of building conservation.

To summarise, there is data already on the wall, regardless of its quality, and there is knowledge on how to retrieve the information to be dealt with in order to safeguard the integrity of the built heritage. However, at times, contextually divergent information, not inherent but somehow acquired, corrupts the ensemble, altering its coherence. Graffiti has been noted throughout history as a companion to the public-facing side of buildings. Its significance swings from good to bad as it is variously considered street art, vandalism and everything in between. Its style, quality and message taxonomy will not be the subject of this paper. Instead, we focus on debating the ethics of graffiti in the spirit of heritage conservation and, perhaps, it's worth considering among the other formally estimated degrading factors on building façades.

If Walls Could Talk, they Would 'Dialogue'

There is a wide range of graffiti out there – some abstract, some elaborate, explicit or ciphered, in various painting techniques, on older buildings, on newer buildings, fences, under bridges, on train cars. Offering insight into the social and economic context of their occurrence, they speak of critical subjects concerning the local communities, marginal or globalized subcultures, territoriality, in explicit or metaphorical terms. Their authorship is mostly personal, but often their appropriation is collective and, at times, even overlooked by the authorities as a persisting phenomenon. Graffiti is generally considered to go beyond community living norms and regulations (Yibin, 2024, p. 87) not only in addressing arising or taboo topics, but also in the way it is conveyed. It is this loud expression of less visible voices making their way into the most significant places, as a challenger to the public spaces' highlights. The reason why this happens has to do with the need to give form to disregarded individuals, groups, ideas and movements that stand apart from conventional community life in various senses.

While, in general, the community as a whole uses education to foster a system of social conformity that eases human interaction, and individuals' interaction with their environment, this is, now and then, regarded by some as too compliant with the authority system, whether formal or informal. Age-, politically, ethnically or culturally bound minorities feel the need 'to have a voice' but consider that official channels are not a fruitful medium of expression, whether because they are not transparent or sufficiently public, or because the bureaucratic maze is suspected of being too rigid and compartmentalised to propagate messages in their intended form. The act of making use of local resources, such as walls, and inexpensive means, such as paint, becomes a weapon in the asymmetric contestation of authority. In most cases, it is acknowledged and characterised as vandalism, but this is an oversimplified reaction to what is often the voice of tensions within the community stakeholders as a whole, and a failure to create a ground for unified communication.

We admit that the lack of proactive communication offers the circumstances for only a percentage of graffiti pieces, but there's also the power of example that might snowball into an excessive presence of wall-augmentation events. Lesser motivated individuals, adrenaline and attention seekers, could be inspired by previous occurrences, in actions that are not politically motivated, contest no authority, and are probably unjustified and needless, although this might further, counter-productively, shift the optics towards diminishing the relevance of 'motivated' acts and the claims of graffiti being defacing of the urban public space.

There are many literature sources that position graffiti in history as markings with purpose. However, the extent of contemporary graffiti has no counterpart in previous periods. It is a 'new territory' to be examined in the urban context of its manifestation, beyond the analysis in the context of arts, which is probably the main focus of contemporary studies. Graffiti is grounded in conflicting experiences and creates grounds for further conflicting experiences. We intend to focus in this paper on the conflicting experience of spatial perception in the context of built heritage conservation and historic areas requiring preservation.

Paleofication as Counterfactual Experience

We hypothesise that the upkeep of built heritage and the extent of the graffiti phenomenon are interlinked. Paradoxically, in the age of fast and accessible communication, where

everyone could find means of free, subjective and unrepressed expression, the choice of an archaic form of communication, artistic or not, is still preferred by some. Therefore, we theorise that it is not the message contained by graffiti that is the leading prerequisite, but its more ancient attribute – that of marking intended to persist at least for a period, in a visible or secluded space, in accordance to its intent. Why this is so could be explained by the inconsistency of spatial appropriation. In general, when speaking of community, we understand the social construct that encompasses social, economic and spatial human relations. While these relations evolve, they reflect both the past and the present culture of the community.

We do not assume that the alteration of the development of one component would disrupt the construct of community. There are recent, already studied, social and economic trends that jeopardise the communal equilibrium, such as gentrification, immigration, global economic crises, or the loss of employment due to industry demand and markets, to robotisation and, more recently, to AI. There are even more or less successful solutions to these changes, meant to counteract the negative effects of change. But what if there are changes in the spatial structure of the community? We have examples of past migration, conflict or pandemic that impacted the use of urban space or even the space itself. However, we often consider the above-mentioned events as inexorable in a factual development of the community, with certain causes and recognised outcomes.

The conservation of the urban environment comes with clear reasoning, purposes and methods. It safeguards what is considered valuable, irreplaceable and representative heritage of unique urban cultures. Still, it distances itself from what, in extreme cases, would be considered 'museumification', for it does not challenge the social and economic development of communities, thus creating an evolutionary disequilibrium by hindering the progress of one component. This more or less arrested development of the urban environment was not present before in urban evolution, since every urban generation added new layers to the built image, laid on top of previous ones or completely replacing them. The practice of conservation, as we distance ourselves from previous times and customs, and the knowledge of the fragile resilience of unprotected heritage, especially in globalised times that come with a faster pace of change, make conservation a counteractive tool for the preservation of cultural markers. Buildings, among these markers, cannot be transferred into regularly protected environments such as collections and museums, for they continue to serve the need for interior spaces. There are accepted adaptations for rehabilitation purposes that keep the use of volume in accordance with current needs for function and comfort, but we tend to have stricter rules with regard to the authenticity of the image, materials and techniques that were originally employed, because they do not alter the intended functionality of the rehabilitation process. Although the literature often refers to this as being also an act of 'musealisation' (Nelle, 2009; Aykaç, 2019), 'museification' (Galla, Paulo, 2016) or 'museumification' (Aykaç, 2018), built environments experience the blurring of boundaries between the conservation outcome and use as part of public space, becoming open-air museums (Ruy, Almeida, 2020) or exhibitions without exhibits (Lin, 2017).

On the other hand, some sort of 'gentrification' takes place, as we often see external sponsorship being employed to compensate for the lack of local resources that could finance the expensive act of conservation and, as a result, the diminishing power of local communities to negotiate, together with the diversification of the stakeholders that

would benefit from the act of conservation (Mureşanu, Mureşanu, 2024). Nevertheless, even when exhibiting or stimulating 'gentrification-like' outcomes, progression is kept under control by regulations that accompany the process of urban conservation. Since a form of 'fication' emerges, even within an often strictly regulated framework of intentional actions, we consider the particularisation of the term that would best describe the phenomenon. The arrested development of the built environment, which permanently showcases one former stage in urban development compared with any future present, would underline the persistence of the 'antiquated' subtext; equally, the limited and even unwelcome aim of halting the development of inhabiting communities creates grounds for discrepancies between different stages of societal and environmental development. Therefore, we understand the procedure of gluing a frozen-in-time setting to a more dynamically developing community as a process of 'paleofication' (gr. *paliós* – older or ancient). Morally, this requires the education and adaptation of inhabiting communities to the post-conservation prerequisites, but reality shows a rather partial and growing replacement of former inhabitants and resident businesses with new actors that understand and even contribute to this 'paleofication'.

Superimposing States – Superimposing Layers

We see the urban environment as a collective contribution of past generations of inhabitants, with the latest layers being more prominent as they are still changed by the actions of the latest generation. This environment expresses the community's authorship or affiliation to aesthetic currents, its social cohesiveness and economic worth. It contains markings of political prominence, social unrest or peace, capital distribution and territoriality that describe the contemporary community. But if the environment does not mirror present-day inhabitants and instead displays a former state of a preceding society, what then? It is understandable that we cannot cancel the drive that every generation has to create markers that reflect its presence, ideas and aspirations and, since the urban environment has a living nature, we can expect its conservation to be taken with a grain of salt. New markers of status, territory and artistic intent are bound to appear as layers superimposed on what has previously been created, whether we regulate it or not. Some reflect present society and interact tangentially with the built environment, such as appliances, fashion or automobiles, or minimally, as in the case of modern amenities. But it appears that they are not enough to leave the marks of a community's passage when that community is unable to adapt the environment to itself.

We theorise that the presence of graffiti in protected urban environments is not explained only by the inexpensiveness of the means employed and the contestation of authority, but is, in fact, the addition of layers to the urban environment: layers that would compensate for its arrested development as proof of the existence of the 'in-between' inhabitants. In support of this, we notice a similar development of the phenomenon in declining and gentrified neighbourhoods, where two different causes of environmental freezing lead to similar outcomes. It is often speculated that the presence of graffiti is a sign of limited surveillance, and that greater control would limit its extent; however, we are reluctant to confirm this result through valid examples where forms of control do not impinge on privacy or, equally, on the comfortable use of public spaces.

As a scientific community, we are, for the moment, able to conduct an objective analysis of the relevance and value of these graffiti layers by appealing to their motivation,

content, aesthetic values or degree of invasiveness, as well as their impact on the building's integrity, aesthetic or potential financial loss, and even their impact on the urban image. As it appears, this phenomenon is most often oversimplified by shifting opinions from art to vandalism, but in reality has complex social implications. It is also, by choice, decontextualised by focusing more on the act and a lot less on the particular setting of the occurrences. As a matter of fact, there are certain similarities in settings that might distort perception towards the generalisation of the phenomenon. First, the age group of the authors tends to be in the teens to young adults' segment, individuals who are out of the constraints of childhood, more prone to taking risks and in search of recognition within their circle. Secondly, also related to the same age group, it seems that they are the most responsive to visual inputs by having the most exposure time to media, new ideas and concern in defining themselves in relation to their social and environmental surroundings. As a group, they are the most expressive, especially in terms of social construct, where one's image weighs more than for 'more settled' age groups. Thirdly, we could not neglect the interconnected present world that obscures cultural differences, as we see the fast propagation and adoption of ideas, content or style of global semiotics before they are refined into the less represented category of graffiti that is more locally bound and evolves into purposeful street art. Lastly, the exposure of the environment, especially for urban historic centres, protected or not, has changed. They and, consequently, their graf-



FIG. 1. Graffiti on Arthur Verona Street at number 12 (changed annually by artists during the Street Delivery festival), Bucharest, June 2025. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.



FIG. 2. Graffiti on Arthur Verona Street at number 12A, Bucharest, June 2025. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

fiti content are not displayed anymore just for the members of the local communities or accidental passers-by, but for the entire world through tourism, which for many of them has become the leading industry. Whether, in this context, graffiti represents a stimulus or a deterrent for tourism is contextual, since they are equally subjects of organised tours and warnings about neighbourhoods with illicit activities.

Understanding all these layers and their interconnectivity would probably require an interdisciplinary approach, since no single field of knowledge has the expertise to encompass the phenomenon from its particular motivation to its complex implications, let alone to find solutions to regulate or delimit it. Perhaps a less policed and more proactive approach is necessary, but for the moment few such initiatives have had limited results.

Bucharest and Genoa Proactive Case Studies

Street Delivery is a festival organised by the Romanian Chamber of Architects and the Cărturești Foundation since 2006, consistently every summer (or autumn), with the purpose of allowing the community to appropriate the streets and urban cultural heritage in an artistic manner, promoting culture, socialisation and interaction through a temporary, all-pedestrian alternative use. The festival's epicentre is a narrow street in the historic centre of Bucharest, heterogeneous in terms of built heritage and contemporary interventions, and quite representative of Bucharest in many aspects. The event creates a stage for local artists to convey messages or raise awareness on different topics, all in a curated manner (Figs. 1 and 2).

A particular building, collectively called 'the graffiti house' (Fig. 3), stood for most of the festival's existence as a background for graffiti, since it had a large blind wall facing the street and therefore a sizable canvas for murals. Its demolition, in 2021, for an invasive project that was cancelled due to protective regulations in the area and public opposition, left a noticeable gap in what was considered tradition, since the mural was renewed each year. It was also one of the first officially sanctioned street art interventions at such a



FIG. 3. Graffiti on mesh on Arthur Verona Street at number 19, Bucharest, June 2025. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

scale. To cite some of the artists that exhibited their work on it, 'if you were not on that wall, you don't exist as a graffiti artist in Romania'.[1] Its disappearance left a spatial void, but also a gap in the collective memory of the place. However, close to this site, another derelict building that now stands covered in a protective mesh, replaced the original setting of the artistic act. Consequently, this mesh entered the spotlight as it invited new actions through illustrative graphics.

The growing popularity of the festival somehow created a paradoxical situation in which the artistic movement meant to draw attention to cultural heritage and the values of the historic part of the city also raised interest in gentrification. The festival's 'curated graffiti' also led to further spontaneous acts, even on historic buildings with substantial cultural value, degrading the historic fabric and the urban image overall. But, despite all the side effects, the Arthur Verona Street festival remains a proxy in spreading a cultural message intended to safeguard cultural values through mediated experiences.

Sweet Damage Crew created another mural not far from the above-mentioned site in 2024, replacing the one they had made on the same wall in 2015. It is a homage dedicated to the highly regarded Romanian sculptor Constantin Brâncuşi, created in collaboration with Felicia Simion, who created the original image in 2022. It is painted on a blank wall of a historic building that is a cultural hub and a restaurant on Eremia Grigorescu Street (Fig. 4). In this case, the mural acts as a large poster promoting the activities conducted inside and links the cultural past with future cultural events, and the work was commissioned by the owners of The Point Hub. Since the entire building was renovated in 2014, only the main façade was retained, possibly due to the fact that there were substantial structural problems. The idea of a 'new' wall from time to time could represent, in fact, a connection between the old and the new.

The 'Classic' cinema was opened in Bucharest in 1912 on one of the main boulevards and a few years later the Alhambra summer garden was added to this cultural establishment of the early 20th century. In the late 1930s, Henriette Delavrancea-Gibory fashioned the cinema into a modernist building that was later nationalised under the communist regime until 1990, when it closed. It was abandoned and left in decay until 2008, when a group of people tried to raise awareness over its cultural value and urban potential for almost a decade with several projects, happenings, fundraising campaigns etc., under the 'Save or Cancel' umbrella programme. Later, in 2009 and 2016, famous



FIG. 4. Mural commissioned by The Point and created by Sweet Damage Crew in collaboration with Felicia Simion, on Eremia Grigorescu Street at number 5, Bucharest, May 2025. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.



FIG. 5. Street art installation by Pisică Pătrată on Constantin Mille Street at number 13, Bucharest, May 2025. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

graphic artist Pisică Pătrată[2] was invited to design an image on the main entrance of the garden to draw attention to and sustain the concept of a potential cultural hub (Fig. 5).

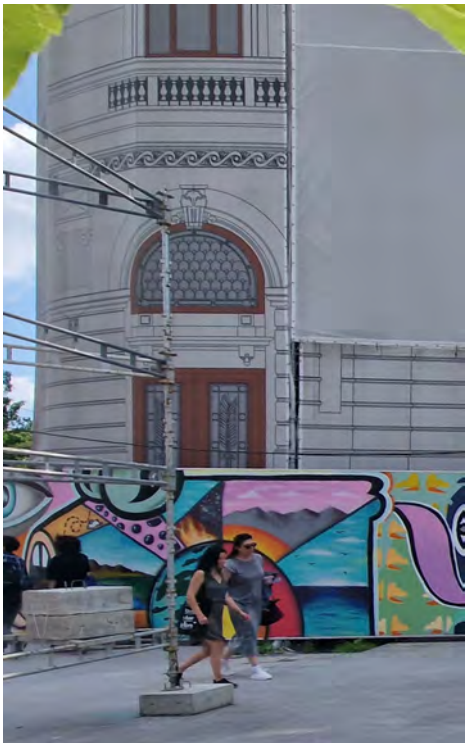
There is a clear connection between street art, curated graffiti and the intention to raise awareness and bring people together to save historic buildings (Cercleux, 2022, p. 18), when traditional methods fail. In most cases, the art changes or evolves over the years. In 2021, the summer garden was partially reopened by a private tenant, but with minimal cosmetic interventions to restore the deteriorated parts of the building and, as the Chamber of Architects reported in the local press, without the proper legal and technical steps required. Unfortunately, in this case, the constant effort and resources involved did not manage to bring about change; the building remains a ruin, further degrading and threatened by physical collapse.

A very different approach to using street art can be seen on the temporary walls surrounding the historic building of Bucharest University, which is currently in the process of restoration and conservation of the façades. The famous local graphic artist Aeul was commissioned to create graffiti artwork on the scaffolds that surround the construction site, in order to keep the covered building still connected to the public and the adjacent square. Ironically, since, prior to the ongoing works, the base of the University building was already covered with several layers of graffiti, the solution employed is only a temporary renewal, in a more structured manner, meant to ease the aesthetic transformation of the façade (Figs. 6 and 7).

The graffiti scene of Bucharest is growing and diverse in expression, and it is also surveyed.[3] There are organised tours on the topic and the local community seems to be open to this art form, especially when it conveys a message and is done with proper consideration towards the context and the cultural values of the built heritage.

The dome of Florence underwent restoration and conservation works a few years ago and the caretakers of this significant historical monument decided to combine the inter-





FIGS. 6 and 7. Scaffolding installation by Aeul on the façade of the University of Bucharest, Edgar Quinet Street, Bucharest, May 2025. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

vention with measures to discourage graffiti. They introduced Autography, a digital online tool that would allow the would-be scribblers to virtually imprint their mark on the monument for 'forever', without actually damaging the visible layer of the walls. It appears that it worked for approximately a year, between 2016 and 2017, and it collected around 30000 entries.[4] Unexpectedly, it didn't seem to work out on a long term and the reasons may have been related to maintenance and resource challenges or, perhaps, the initial momentum gradually deflated until the loss of interest.

Contemporary digital forms of expression in urban space seem to be developing every year, from digital graffiti and augmented reality to digital street art using projections. New technologies transform public space in non-invasive ways, while equally satisfying the need for expression, and create interactivity in ways that were not previously available. Digital graffiti is able to generate digital evidence to be kept by the author as a reminder of the real experience of 'being there'. It can convey messages such as the projection in Piazzetta Cambiaso in Genoa, which after dark covers the walls and the pavement of the square with philosophical questions about freedom, perspectives, beauty and ethics.

Piazzetta Cambiaso is a small square in the heart of the historic city of Genoa that is a sample of the historic centre's need 'for a new strategy that considers modern factors such as a broader concept of heritage, landscape dimension, and increased citizen involvement' (Bobbio, Musso, 2020, p. 19). Digital graffiti leaves room for community expression, but without interacting with the historic fabric (Fig. 8). It has this dual quality

of being present without being there. Moreover, the existence of a votive shrine in the square makes it even more relevant, in terms of respecting a part of 'fragile heritage' and the city's history (Vecchiattini, Moggia, 2023, p. 21).

Digital street art expression may connect better with young people's understanding of their surrounding environment and communication practices, especially since graffiti is predominantly in this age group's toolset; as Campos observes, 'Graffiti propagation over these last few decades has to do with the privileged position that image and visual communication have come to occupy in young people's expression in the public sphere. Image and visual languages are regarded as capillary channels for the production and dissemination of meaning in an increasingly mediatized and globalized society' (Campos, 2015, p. 4).

Negotiation of the Urban Image of the Historic City Centre

The historic centre of Genoa is a vibrant place with a diverse community and plenty of businesses, pubs and restaurants. Often small or family-owned, they find themselves in an identity marketing competition among the maze of narrow paths, existing historic buildings, local regulations and limitations. The least invasive way in which they negotiated with the historic centre was by personalising their doors, gates and rolling shutter doors with street art, messages and iconic portraits of cultural personalities. Often, this was acknowledged as an invitation for others to contribute as well, in less meaningful ways, or to add to the construction of spontaneous votive shrines. Additional layers of urban expression came on top of paint, patina, degradation and graffiti as posters and stickers, so it is fair to say that the historic walls in the centre of Genoa are a canvas of negotiation and communication within the local community.



FIG. 8. Piazzetta Cambiaso in the evening, Genoa, September 2024. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

Perhaps the street art on the businesses' doors and shutters are only a normalization of the graffiti actions, since they seem to discontinue the spontaneous occurrences in their immediate vicinity, perhaps as a form of respect for the artist's gesture (Figs. 9, 10 and 11).

The negotiation is ongoing and visible on the façades, yet over-curating the space and limiting interactions doesn't seem to be a way to protect the historical walls.

Street art gained more and more power from its early years in the 1960s through the 1980s and is now considered almost unanimously a conventional form of art (Cercleux, 2022, p. 3), but it is difficult to determine whether it is appropriate for a historic setting and brings benefits for cultural heritage conservation. A solid argument in this direction would be the par-



FIG. 9. Graffiti on a shop shutter on San Bernardo Street at number 90, Genoa, September 2024. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.



FIG. 10. Street art on a shop shutter on San Donato Street at number 26, Genoa, September 2024. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

ticular connection it has with the current young cohort, which is unlike previous generations: more technologically minded and visually stimulated. Could they inherit and pass on with minimal 'personal touch', or are we forced to amend the agenda of urban environment conservation in order to increase its resilience to future variations, for there is a visible demand for change?

Subjective Interpretation of the Impact of Graffiti on Historic Fabric

At first glance, and also based on personal in situ observation of the phenomenon, it appears that in many ways it falls in the grey area of urban interests and presents itself as related to the conservation of the built environment as an inverted bell curve, where on the X axis we assume the interest towards the current model of conservation (in both knowledge and morals) and, on the Y axis, the direct interaction with the environment (action driven and purposeful). We have shown interest throughout this paper towards the extremes of the graph, precisely community radicals and regulators. The first group, though focused on the health of the community, lack scientific expertise while in conflict with arbitrary regulations; while the second group, even if driven by professional concerns or scientific pursuits, neglect the holistic approach of what an urban communi-



FIG. 11. Famous street artists have visited and left their mark on the streets of the historic centre, including the so-called "Banksy" of Italy, the Rome-based artist Geco, Genoa, September 2024. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

ty entails. However, the curve mentioned also contains the rest of the stakeholders, more or less knowledgeable and invested. How they perceive both the regulatory framework and the subtexts of the graffiti phenomenon is subjectively encompassed by common sense. Also, they are the subject of persuasion from both extremes of the spectrum about the soundness of actions and claims, and they constitute the passive target of these actions and claims, since most of the time they are not actively involved, but mere recipients of the outcome of 'visual activism' and its policing. We can assume that this group contains a lot of unexploited knowledge, practical or statistical and, even if it is the largest group of stakeholders, it has the most atrophied contribution.

The lack of a current scientific knowledge base on the urban graffiti phenomenon, one that would cover more than aesthetic value, visual impact, chemical consequences and economic costs for local budgets, leaves only subjectivity to cover the missing data. We are able to acquire it through formal means, conducting social investigations and statistics in order to support compelling regulatory measures. Also, we are able to assess its foundations, informally, by measuring the amount of positive and negative reactions on-site and off-site on social media platforms, forums and media. We can learn that some displays of graffiti are considered more valuable than others, however this does not necessarily indicate their worth in relation to their physical setting, which may be of value or not in the specific sense of historic, artistic or environmental substance. We have to bear in mind that these heritage values are attributed not as a result of some collective negotiation, but are contextualised in temporally based knowledge and forecast by a group of individuals that respond to scientific requirements derived from generations of knowledge, almost never a prerequisite for other groups of individuals who share the same environment. Their less complex perception can target facets of the urban fabric appropriation with more or less entitlement. Not everybody having a systematic approach to the subject probably explains both the spontaneity of the manifestations and their quixotic management.

We can also consider that, as trained professionals in the field of built heritage, we have particular concerns over both the environment and the object, with the ability to contextualise the anthropic revisions of both, which may not be the case for the rest of the stakeholders. They have the luxury of being particularly interested in some aspects while completely unaware of others, solely motivated by their knowledge and personal



FIG. 12. Street art on the shop shutter of Don Andrea Gallo on Vico di Untoria at number 5, Genoa, September 2024. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.



FIG. 13. Contemporary votive shrine on Vico San Biagio at number 12, Genoa, September 2024. Photo: Monica Mureşanu.

concerns. Community members can stand in solidarity or opposition with messages, teenagers can value artworks for their impact as background on social media, while tourists may appreciate the landmark value of particular graffiti pieces in maze-like, unfamiliar environments, such as the narrow alleyways of Genoa's historic city centre, for example. Whether these should be considered of interest in the field of heritage conservation in a larger sense than just impediments to its nevertheless honourable objectives is, for now, a matter for the future of stakeholder relations to decide.

Instead of Conclusions

We, at this moment, intend to avoid concluding the subject of street art and, in particular, graffiti as extensive contemporary phenomena present in historic settings, due to the divergent rather than convergent perspectives of different fields of interest, mainly the conservation of the built environment and contemporary arts. Also, the explicit value it has for anthropological and social studies is relevant to a more in-depth future interdisciplinary analysis, able to encompass the magnitude and also the legitimacy of current practices. There are regulatory conservation-oriented public initiatives and, nonetheless, public criticism actions. Likewise, diametrically opposed, there are fostering programmes and projects, progressive in their nature, that intend to mediate and even to transform the trend of street art from within by introducing it to contemporary visual arts' reciprocal

benefits: less invasiveness with regard to the built environment, new visual tools that are more dynamic and attractive, and the shift towards the digital.

As graffiti does not deliberately challenge the act of conservation, but rather finds in its object a means of achieving broad and permanent exposure, maybe it should not be a direct concern for professional conservation bodies in terms of intent, but should be limited to its physical effects on what is built. Of course, we do also consider it demeaning for a monument to be considered a bulletin board to be written on and wiped off, infinitely, in a futile attempt to safeguard not only its cultural value, but also its dignity, though too much solemnity might distance it from the resident community. Perhaps, over the last few generations, since the Industrial Revolution, we have acquired this partial interpretation of 'newness' as having to be perfect and unchipped. Maybe, in our current paradigm, where most of our surrounding items come from a production line and we replace them with newer matches when we consider them outdated, we disregard too quickly what generations before industrialisation saw as natural: the imperfections of what was handcrafted and used.

In effect, graffiti is a superficial alteration less damaging than neglect, for example, which, paradoxically, is perfectly acceptable when justified by social failure or economic shortages. We accept pollution as inexorable, although it is equally damaging. Why not consider, then, graffiti to be another kind of anthropic patina? Yes, it is visually challenging in many aspects and does add information that is not required by its support. But, in a significantly protected environment, where should this information that is created by the community for community consumption be placed? Sometimes it comes from marginalised sources that distrust the 'system' or the conventional media, from individuals who speak jargon to the general population and find better representation in visual symbolism, from sidelined urban stakeholders lacking resources and negotiation power in an attempt to express their own understanding of conservation, that of a lifestyle where progress is not measured with the same unit.

Perhaps we should elevate street art to become a legitimate building block in the conservation strategies of cities. Instead of policing vandalism and terminating graffiti overlaying historic fabric, as municipalities usually do (Brazioli, Brighenti, 2025), maybe elected authorities could reconsider the efficacy of communication with local communities and better negotiate a regulatory framework. The fine line between vandalism and art is difficult to manage (Cegna, 2018, p. 23) and the way things will evolve is directly related to the organic development of historic neighbourhoods. The reality is that street art conveys the contemporary political and social message (Wanjiku, 2024, p. 18), in parallel with the historical narrative of the urban fabric, and it may very well be a viable channel towards the preservation of the local community.

Notes

1 Sweet Damage Crew is a street art team formed by Cage, Biex, Recis, Lost.Optics, Shatran, Boeme, Lux and Pandele (since 2010). They started with graffiti tags as teenagers and developed into art mural artists over time.

2 Pisică Pătrată translated as Square Cat is a street artist, his real name is Alexandru Ciubotariu, he is one of the first graffiti artists in Bucharest (after 1990).

3 Online graffiti map available at: Un-hidden Romania street art map – Google My Maps (Accessed on May 5th 2025)

4 According to an article published online on the website of Opera magazine, available at https://duomo.firenze.it/en/opera-magazine/post/4470/shareyour-memory-of-florence-send-a-postcard-to-afriend-with-autography (Accessed on 21 May 2025).

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CONSERVATION/CREATION IN CONFRONTATION WITH THE ENIGMA OF QUALITY: THE QUESTION OF PLACE

Lucina Napoleone
University of Genoa, Italy
lucina.napoleone@unige.it

Introduction

Every city possesses a distinctive character 'that distinguishes it from others and enables both inhabitants and visitors to articulate how they feel when present within it. This character is rooted in the material constitution and spatial configuration of the urban environment, yet it ultimately transcends them, encompassing a multiplicity of immaterial and ephemeral elements which, although not stably or permanently manifest, are nonetheless capable of profoundly shaping the subjective experience of urban space'. (De Matteis, 2020, pp. 86–87).

These are affective intensities that can be perceived even by those encountering the city for the first time, and for only a brief duration (Anderson, 2009, p. 78). The character of a city thus emerges from a complex constellation of material and immaterial, environmental and natural factors – some of which endure over time, ensuring a continuity that progressively crystallises into identity (Schmitz, 2024; Tuan, Y.-F., 1977). Let us take Genoa as an example: from 19th-century travellers' accounts to the images of its narrow alleys in René Clément's film Au-delà des grilles, and the songs of Fabrizio De André. Across all these representations, spanning more than a century, one can discern a certain 'family resemblance' – an underlying continuity that still makes them recognisable today (Figs. 1 and 2).

A (Senti)Mental Map of Genoa

During the September 2024 workshop, the group's first collective experience involved a walk through the city centre. This was later summarised in what was initially referred to as 'The Mental Map of Genoa' (Fig. 3), though it might more accurately be described as 'The Sentimental Map of Genoa'. In attempting to organise the participants' responses, unexpected results emerged. Despite the limited size of the sample (around ten individuals), its heterogeneity – in terms of gender, origin, and cultural background – as well as the influence of personal experiences and the inherent difficulties in translating emotional experience into verbal expression, I developed a table based on the analysis of the responses collected. The table was constructed by grouping the words according to what had been communicated: sensations, spatial descriptions, emotional tones, concepts, and objects. Naturally, some words exhibit semantic ambiguity and could fall into multiple categories – as in the case of threshold, which can be interpreted both in a concrete and abstract sense. What stands out, however, is the marked – and to some extent surprising – disproportion between the limited presence of objects and conceptual terms, and the predominance of words related to sensations, perceptual qualities, and emotions. Most of the participants were visiting Genoa for the first time, and the content recorded in the table thus reflects

an initial impression, arising mainly from sensory perception and subsequently processed on an emotional level (qualities of spaces, affective tones) as well as a rational one (conceptualisations).

Sensations	Qualities of places	Emotive tonality	Concepts	Objects/ things
Colourful	Alive	Connected	Accessibility	'Cavea'
Dark-light	Asleep	Continuity	Archaeological textures	Gates closed
Flavour – spices	Casbah	Contrasts	Coexistence	Overview
Horizontal	Climbing	Disorienting	Complexity	Ramps
High-low	Compression	Discovery	Gentrification	Staircase
Silence-noise	Crowded	Dynamic	Hybridity	Threshold
Smells	Density	Fast switch	Imaginary dimension	
Vertical	Expansion	Inaccessible	Landscape	
	Fragments	Melting pot	Multi-ethnic	
	Heavy	Oppressive	Public spaces	
	Hidden layers	Overwhelming	Historic layers	
	Intimate	Proud	Stratification	
	Labyrinthic	Segregating	Topography	
	Liminal	Surprising	Undervalued	
	Linearity	Threshold		
	Narrow-smashed	Unexpected		
	Occupation	Via's over		
	Slopes			

TAB. 1 – Table obtained from the analysis of the answers provided by the workshop participants and contained in the (senti)mental map.

The words chosen by the participants articulate lived experiences. What is described is not merely the objectively visible world – composed of buildings, streets, squares, monuments, staircases, portals, windows, shrines, columns – but rather the world into which they suddenly found themselves immersed. This world undoubtedly includes the physical environment, yet it cannot be reduced to it; it emerges from the interplay between material structures, the surrounding atmosphere, and our embodied presence. It is a world of situated spatial experiences, invariably charged with emotional significance. In essence, these are worlds made of lived space – places – in which we dwell. (Gregory, 2023, p. 43).

In 2019, philosopher Tonino Griffero gave a Humboldt Lecture entitled 'Genoa for Us: Urban Atmospheres and Felt-Bodily Resonances'. To introduce the concept of urban atmosphere – intended as a widespread affective quality, perceived through the lived body (Leib) – he drew upon the lyrics of Paolo Conte's renowned song, Genova per noi (Genoa for us). Conte evokes the 'maccaja' (an atmospheric condition typical of the city, characterised by heat, humidity, low skies and absence of wind) as a perceptive and affective key to the city:

FIGS. 1 and 2. Genoa. Two frames from René Clément's film, Au-delà des grilles, 1949, set in Genoa in the years immediately following World War II. On the left the truogoli (washhouses) of Santa Brigida, on the right via San Bernardo, the popular heart of the city.





'maccaja, a monkey of light and folly, a haze, fish, Africa, sleep, disgust, fantasy'. Conte's words do not simply describe a landscape, but activate a real embodied experience, made of smells, sounds, tactile sensations and moods: elements that constitute the atmospheric texture of the city. Although Conte describes an atmosphere that dates back to the Genoa of the Seventies, which today appears partly attenuated and altered by the noisy frenzy of mass tourism, it subsists, with surprising coherence, in the less frequented alleys and on the days of maccaja. In these moments, Genoa gives back to the sensitive visitor that same atmospheric quality that Griffero defines as 'felt-bodily resonances that inhabit and permeate spaces'. (Griffero, 2014, p. 45), a pre-reflexive and intensely localised mode of experiencing the place. We can define it as intersubjective, insofar as it is mutually communicable and understandable, constituting components of the concept of world-environment or lifeworld as developed by neo-phenomenological philosophy and neuroscience: a horizon of meanings and perceptions that arises from the collective experiences of organisms endowed with similar, though never entirely identical, functional characteristics.

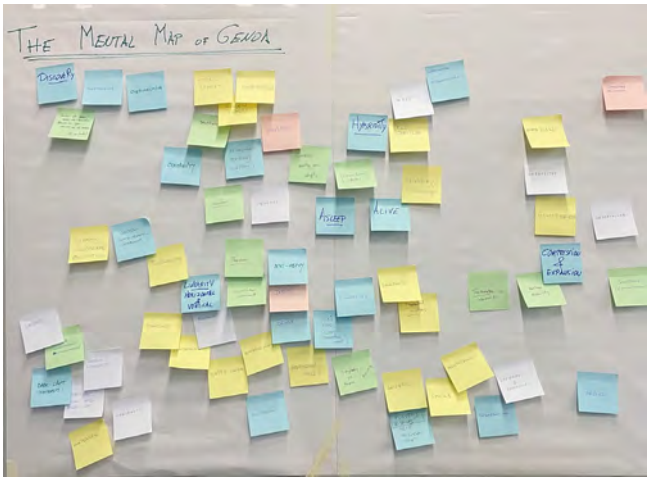


FIG. 3. The (senti)mental map of Genoa produced during the Genoa workshop.

Although limited and non-systematic, a preliminary observation arising from this collection concerns the non-exclusively subjective nature of the sensations, spatial qualities, and emotional tones expressed by the participants. Notably, no significantly discordant voices emerged, and these perceptions ultimately appear consistent with the experience of those who, like the author, were born and raised in this city (Figs. 4 and 5). These dimensions can therefore be understood as intersubjective, insofar as they are communicable and mutually comprehensible: not mere individual projections, but shared expressions of an embodied relationship with the environment. They constitute fundamental components of what phenomenology has conceptualised as the Umwelt or lived world (Lebenswelt) (Husserl, 2015; Merleau-Ponty, 2003), later reinterpreted by contemporary neo-phenomenological philosophy through a relational and embodied lens. This perspective also finds resonance in embodied cognitive science, which holds that spatial perception and experience are not reducible to internal representations, but rather emerge from the dynamic interaction between body, environment, and social context (Varela, Thompson, Rosch, 1991; Gallagher, 2005).

The resulting perceptual and affective horizon takes shape as a field of shared meanings, made possible by the common functional and sensorimotor structure of human organisms – while each lived experience remains radically situated and never fully reducible to that of another. The world as experienced is inseparable from the range of practices made possible within a subject–environment system: as the subject moves through the world, they 'do not merely alter the relationship between kinaesthetic and perceptual sensations but enact a genuine transformation of the perceived environment' (Palmiero, Borsellino, 2014, p. 50).

We always and only perceive by acting and interacting with an environment. This 'world-environment is always a function of the characteristics of an organism, of its intentions and of its effective possibilities of action, or of the practices that a certain space can offer it; it does not pre-exist outside the living organism; rather, it is the open field of phenomena that touch life, the horizon of meaning that the organism carries with it'. (Gregory, 2023, p. 44)

FIG. 4. Genoa, via Garibaldi: exterior and interior, continuity, discontinuity, rough, smooth...



In this sense, we should read the attention to light and shadow, to sounds, to smells, to colours, to all those perceptions that strike us as we are always immersed in an environment (Griffero, 2014, pp. 40–59; Schmitz, 2024, pp. 9–22; Böhme, 2024, pp. 79–91).

A second reflection concerns the words used to describe the spaces that do not refer to objective characteristics grasped rationally, but rather to their expressiveness and the 'mood' perceived by the participants. For example, terms such as 'density' and 'heaviness' are used in a metaphorical rather than in a quantitative sense and recall emotional tones such as oppression and segregation. Similarly, the narrow streets, perceived as real chaotic labyrinths, arouse feelings of wonder, movement, sudden change and disorientation. Some, passing from a dark narrow alley to a small square flooded with light, feel overwhelmed, surprised by something unexpected. (Fig. 5) One almost loses one's balance, with respect to a ground that is continually rising and falling. The continuous perceptual change corresponds to a change in emotional tone from the sense of oppression to the sense of liberation. Otto F. Bollnow, in 1956, identifies the emotional tones: joy, sadness, gaiety, exuberance, anguish... and notes how, due to their indeterminacy, they are often expressed through metaphors derived from physical sensations: feeling 'up' or 'down'. (Bollnow, 2009, p. 26)

The interesting thing is that, as Heidegger already indicated (Heidegger, 1976) when we study a situation without an analytical intention, we do not separate:

'What we 'know', what we 'want', what we 'feel', what we 'do', what we 'say' – in everyday existence, we never actually distinguish between these moments. At every instant (even if unconsciously), we are immersed in an emotional tonality, a cognitive stance, and a particular linguistic disposition. It is only by forcibly disrupting the natural flow of experience – through an effort of abstraction – that we can dissect what is a unified whole, inevitably interwoven' (Caputo 2005, p. 25)

Emotional tonalities manifest themselves in the pre-reflective and undivided unity between subject and world – an affectively qualified unity that can be shared and intersubjectively recognised. This should, however, be distinguished from the psychologism of the late 19th century, which interpreted such a relation as a unilateral projection of subjective emotional states onto an external environment passively 'coloured' by subjectivity.



FIG. 5. Genoa, a vicolo: high-low, narrow, dark, light, looming...

By contrast, already in Heidegger we find the assertion that *Stimmungen* (moods) do not belong solely to the subject but rather constitute fundamental modes of our 'being-in-the-world', disclosing our original openness to the world itself. The *Stimmung* shapes our mode of being-in-the-world and determines our openness or closure towards it – 'independently' of any internal emotional state (Ingold, 2000; Heidegger, 1976, pp. 172–178).

'Man and world are both enveloped in and permeated by a certain shared emotional tonality. This emotional tonality does not arise from an isolated 'inner life' of the human being; rather, the human being is immersed in the emotional tonality of the landscape – which, for its part, should not be understood as something separate, but as something that, in a very particular way, refers back to the human being' (Bollnow, 2009, p. 33).

In this same vein lie the investigations of Hermann Schmitz (Schmitz, 2011, pp. 91–122), who developed the concept of *Leiblichkeit* (lived corporeality) and of atmosphere as a diffuse affective spatiality, as well as those of Gernot Böhme, for whom atmospheres are neither purely subjective nor purely objective, but rather 'quasi-things' that hover between bodies and their surroundings. This is corroborated by everyday experience, which shows that our internal emotional state can sometimes be at odds with the prevailing atmosphere: one can feel sadness in a joyful place, or unease in a serene environment. Affective tonalities are not merely internal states, but emerge within a relational, situated, and shared space, in which body, environment, and affectivity are inextricably intertwined.

The fourth column of the table reflects the group members' rational point of view. The register changes markedly, and the observations are primarily shaped by the participants' shared cultural background – as architects – who focus on spatial characteristics (such as *stratification, archaeological and historical layers, landscape, topographic complexity*) and urban phenomena (*gentrification, coexistence, hybridity*, etc.), interpreting them through the lens of disciplinary frameworks. What proves most surprising, however, is the limited attention paid to the architectural objects encountered along the walk. The few terms that appear in the fifth column of the table refer only in general terms to staircases, ramps or closed gates – undoubtedly concrete artefacts, but which again seem to function merely as physical correlates of spatial sensations and qualities.

In summary, this brief and informal first encounter with the urban space suggests that what the group retained most vividly in memory were what might be described as first impressions – closely tied to the atmosphere or spiritus loci. The cognitive-rational dimension of the experience appeared to play a secondary role, while the explicit naming or identification of material objects encountered along the route was mentioned only rarely.

At this point, a shift in scale occurred, moving from an experience akin to the *flâneur* of Baudelaire or the psycho-geographic drift described by Debord (1955), to a visit requiring a more conscious and intentional gaze.

Changing Gaze: from Place to Site

The transition from walking through the urban centre to visiting a historic building that has undergone a process of adaptive reuse and conservation, marks the entry into a different perceptual and interpretative condition. One finds oneself immersed in a space that is the recent result of a series of intentional acts, the outcomes of which are deciphered through an 'expert' gaze – one that adopts a conscious and evaluative posture, guided by criteria drawn from architectural criticism, design, and conservation theory. Language, perspective, and points of reference shift: a more analytical mode of experience is activated, which distances itself from immediate perception and is structured according to rational and disciplinary criteria. This shift may be exemplified by recalling the distinction between place and site, as well as the phenomenological distinction between thing and object (Heidegger, 1976, pp. 95–96; Bodei, 2009, p. 12). Place corresponds to what has been described thus far: a lived space, in which the body is constantly engaged in a dynamic interaction with the environment and with other bodies, responding to external stimuli in a circular process of perception and affect. It is within this dimension that the act of dwelling takes shape, culminating in what David Seamon describes as place realisation: 'the process whereby a physical environment gains a lived quality of ambience and character' (in Wood, 2016, p. 14).

By contrast, site 'is a location viewed through the lens of space as geometric extension' (Massiroli, 2024, p. 40). It is a reduced and objectified place, disembodied from context, which fails to consider people, and their engagement with the world: touched, invested, illuminated by the world as bodies (Bianchetti, 2020, p. 65). It entails, at the cognitive stage, the elimination of perspectives that coincide with the plurality of bodies, and, at the design stage, the negation of space as 'a fabric of forces, tensions, desires that express the action of the body and recompose it' (Bianchetti, 2023, pp. 53–59). To reduce place to site is to simplify it and, ultimately, 'to render it an infinitely reproducible function' (Massiroli, 2024, p. 40).

Architects frequently make use of the term site when conducting surveys, inspections, or design analyses. They reflect on the site, repurpose a site, conserve a site. This is not, however, a mere terminological preference. To think in terms of site implies adopting a spatial perspective grounded in geometric coordinates, in measurable primary qualities, in characteristics that can be defined and quantified according to rational and objective criteria. It is an operational and efficient approach, yet one that inevitably entails a loss – what some have referred to as tertiary or expressive qualities (Forlé, 2018; James, 1905; Parovel, 2012).

'The architectural monument has a grandeur or a loftiness incommensurable with its surface or its height. The symphony or the novel has a rhythm, a force, or a restraint of which an objective measure like the metronome gives only an impoverished image. We should realize that, in seeking to grasp expression, we disclose an unpopulated world, one which is only the promise of a world. The space and time which we find there are not structures of an organized world but qualities of an expressed world which is a prelude to knowledge' (Dufrenne, 1973, p. 183)





FIGS. 6 and 7. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: the long corridors still show signs of ageing, decay and traces of its previous uses.

Tertiary qualities, according to a distinction rooted in the philosophy of perception and recently reworked within the field of neurophenomenology, refer to those aspects of experience that are reducible neither to the objective data of physics (primary qualities), nor to mere subjective reactions (secondary qualities). Rather, they emerge from the embodied interaction between organism and environment, producing presence effects (Gumbrecht, 2004, p. 51). Concepts that we already find in the reflection of Susanne Langer, when she wrote about 'a perceptible form that bears a close logical resemblance to the structure of feeling' (Langer 1953, p. 60): spatial forms that convey affective, symbolic, or atmospheric qualities, even though they are not tied to explicit conceptual content.

The difficulty of speaking about and describing place and tertiary qualities stems from the rupture of a tradition in which they had occupied a stable position within Western culture since antiquity. Gradually displaced by the dominance of geometric space, they eventually disappeared by the end of the 18th century, when a dualistic and objectivist approach to reality gained ascendancy (Casey, 1992, pp. 200–201). Considered subjective, irrational, and ultimately expendable, they were sacrificed on the altar of the scientistic stereotype of epistemic 'purity,' founded on the systematic elimination of lived experience and the first-person dimension of perception. From this perspective, attempts to analyse places and qualities – which, despite their epistemological erasure, remain real and experientially accessible – employing reductive methods, inevitably fragment experience, reducing its expressive power and affective resonance. Even when certain aspects can be grasped, the knowledge we derive remains on a different plane from emotional and embodied understanding. In comparison with the latter, our available tools are limited and still underdeveloped, a consequence of the long-standing marginalisation of research

and critical reflection on these dimensions of experience (phenomenological language, participant observation, dense description, etc.).

Let us now come to our place/site: the Albergo dei Poveri, of which the parts repurposed for use as a library, assembly hall and study rooms were visited. The peculiarity of that experience lay in the fact that a part of the building was still awaiting intervention, making possible a direct comparison between the 'before' and the 'after' of the transformation. A comparison not mediated by photographs or documents, but experienced firsthand, walking through long corridors and courtyards that still retained tangible traces of the past. This made the difference in temporal and memorial depth inscribed in the places immediately and concretely perceptible. (Figs. 6 and 7)

Conservation

For many centuries, the Albergo dei Poveri was a shelter, a refuge-prison for the poor who were welcomed but segregated, a place of work, of production, of daily life, where women, men and children lived, a place of faith and, for much of the 20th century, a place of suffering and illness. Today it is a place of study, of welcome for the community of teachers and students who have replaced the multitude of people who frequented it in the past.

The intervention is aimed at recovering the architectural legibility of the building and resolving the critical issues related to its safety and accessibility. The technological and formal solutions are often standardised – as in the case of the emergency stairs – and when designed from scratch, they do not develop a successful relationship with the architectural and spatial context. The layout of the great hall is emblematic, with its ship's hull structure: a didactic reference to the city's maritime vocation, probably, but without a real relationship with the place, nor with its current or historical functions. (Fig. 8)

We are not faced with a successful example of conservation because the project was conceived and implemented starting from the site, not from the Albergo dei Poveri as a place. We do not believe it is possible to separate the two things and improve the structural and environmental conditions to allow the establishment of university spaces without at the same time preserving the memory, the historical depth of a place inhabited for four



FIG. 8. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: the assembly hall, the former women's oratory, with its current layout which bears no relation to what that place once was.





FIGS. 9 and 10. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri: the fragmentation of space, the treatment of surfaces brought to an ahistorical integrity, all contribute to creating an anonymous space, devoid of any reference to the memory of the place which, on the contrary, is still perceptible where no intervention has yet taken place.

centuries. The sensitivity of the designer in this case was entirely focused on the solution of a problem of refunctionalisation of a space through its 're-semanticisation', acting on the meaning of the spaces and on the message to be communicated that had to replace the previous one. The pre-existence was used as a mere physical and formal shell in which architecturally self-contained objects were inserted (paradoxically coherent, in this sense, with the criterion of distinguishability between the old and the new) (Figs. 9 and 10).

Furthermore, its temporal and memorial thickness has been reduced and, in some cases, eliminated. The result is an aseptic, cold and mute environment, in which nothing emerges but the geometric and volumetric space interrupted by new artefacts. The project has not succeeded in bringing together the new function, the legibility of the architecture, the material conservation with the conservation of the expressive density of the place constituted by architectural form, expressiveness of aged materials, atmosphere, sound and olfactory landscapes. The memory of the Albergo dei Poveri that was embodied in the old building has been replaced by history based on documents (which include the building itself when it is reduced to a historical source). A history that can be told in a book but that can no longer be lived.

In this passage, we are helped by the distinction that Giorgio Agamben makes between two types of memory that are activated in the two buildings of the Berlin Shoah Memorial designed by Peter Eisenman and the Information Centre associated with it: the *Memorable* and the *Unforgettable*:

'whoever walks between the differently inclined steles, following the alternating rise and fall of the ground, feels he is accessing another dimension of memory, that he is leafing through the pages of another book. While his foot hesitates on the tiny, flattened steles of the floor, while his gaze is lost along the brown interrupted walls of the vertical steles, he gradually leaves the memory that can be written and archived to enter the Unforgettable' (Agamben, 2017, p. 61).

According to Agamben, Eisenman's work engages with an archaic form of memory that operates through the movement of the lived body in space. Perceptions, emotions and affective tonalities are alerted. The *Memorable*, by contrast, acts on the cognitive-rational level, allowing us to absorb information about past events (Gregory, 2023, pp. 161–162). These are two registers that problematise our interaction with built space: in the former,

one navigates the world through emotionally charged situational responses (*agens*); in the latter, through rationalisation – identifying meanings, interpreting messages, and formulating value judgements (*cogitans*). But, as Agamben concludes, only a society in which the tension between the *Memorable* and the *Unforgettable* remains alive can be considered a healthy society (Agamben, 2006, p. 62).

Too often, conservation projects rely solely on the *Memorable* dimension of historical narratives preserved in books, reports, and museum displays, neglecting the *Unforgettable* which should, in fact, represent one of the central aims of the project. The quality of a conservation intervention is not exhausted by the correctness of the procedure, the choice of materials, the efficiency of structural solutions or their economic sustainability. It also depends – and perhaps primarily – on the ability to cultivate a conscious attentiveness to what is immaterial yet decisive: the invisible stratification of meanings, traces, and atmospheres that constitutes the horizon of the *Unforgettable*. Without such an attitude – one that should be cultivated from the very first encounter with the place, as exemplified by the walk through the centre of Genoa – there is a risk of reducing the *place* to a mute *site*, incapable of evoking resonance. It is therefore essential to dwell in the place as long as possible, understood as a lived and situated space, deliberately postponing the shift into the analytical and objectifying mode associated with the *site*. This allows access to the expressive and affective qualities of the place, enabling their meaningful reintegration into the design process.

Creation

At this point, the question focuses on what, within a place, makes possible the activation of an experience attributable to the *unforgettable* – that is, a form of deep, sensitive, and pathic understanding. The elements capable of triggering such an experience are not those that can be rationally described, but rather the perceptual and material qualities that stimulate the body and imagination: the textures of materials, sounds, echoes and reverberations, modulation of light, smells, and the marks left by time. All these aspects gain significance only when embraced by an affective and embodied mode of knowing, one capable of resonating with the sensitive density of the place.

From this perspective, the conservation/creation dichotomy is crucial. First, it is necessary to clarify that by *creation*, at least in the specific context we are considering, we do not mean any action that introduces a new element into the pre-existing fabric – be it an extension, a completion, a spatial or formal reorganisation, or a perceptual redefinition. Rather, we mean a conscious transformation that produces an enhancement of quality – not understood merely as adherence to normative parameters or technical standards, but as an effort to valorise or enrich the expressive density of a place.

Returning to the distinction between *site* and *place*, in our view, any act of creation can truly take place only starting from the recognition of the pre-existence as *place* – a lived, situated space, densely charged with meaning – and not simply as *site*, that is, an abstract and objectifiable portion of territory. This is because analyses conducted on the *site*, however accurate and methodologically sound, are incapable of grasping those immaterial, subtle, and sometimes ineffable qualities we have defined as tertiary or expressive – qualities that emerge only from the embodied experience of the place. The place preserves a temporal thickness, made up of sedimented memories, lived relationships,

and atmospheres that renew themselves over time without ever fully dissolving, leaving material traces that Casey calls *mnestic traces*: signs of life trapped within matter, which emerge through our bodily experience of space (affordance). Such traces are true memorial activators (Casey, 2000), imprints of existences sedimented in matter, and emotional affordances (Parovel, 2012, pp. 172–175).

Should conservation not also take all this into account? To do so, it is necessary to develop design practices capable not only of preserving and enhancing historical and symbolic value, but also of embracing the gaze of the present. It is therefore essential, beyond developing the designer's analytical skills, to seek adequate tools to describe and interpret the sensations, emotions, and affective resonances linked to lived spaces. Only in this way will it be possible to recognise and value the tertiary qualities, avoiding the risk of erasing them through interventions that are technically correct but emotionally blind. When this fails – when degradation is too advanced and, above all, when restoration is conceived solely through an analytical lens – only ruins remain: the annihilation of the possibility to perceive the subtle gap between the lost perception (the past and irretrievable) and the current one, 'between a past, vanished sense and an incomplete current perception' (Augé, 2004, p. 26). To conserve can therefore mean two things: to safeguard that gap when it exists, and to recover it through creativity when it has been lost. To restore 'the very perception of time, of the sudden and fragile reality of time, erased in the blink of an eye by scholarship and restoration (the illusory evidence of the past) as well as by spectacle and updating (the illusory evidence of the present)'. (Augé, 2004, p. 26)

Among these traces – whether sonic, visual, olfactory, or kinaesthetic – there are also signs of ageing, decay, and archaeological stratifications that do not exhaust themselves in their objective and documentary dimension but can also be perceived as presences capable of resonating on an affective and pathic level, thus enabling an embodied understanding of the place. We can therefore hope for the emergence of a dual epistemological approach, in which interpretative reason and perceptual sensitivity intertwine, opening the possibility for a knowledge that is first and foremost lived, and subsequently analytical, phenomenological, and historical.

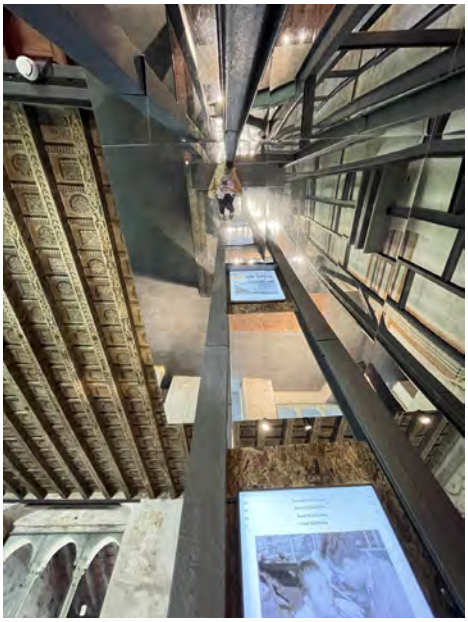
In this dual dimension – perceptual-experiential and technical-analytical – lies the responsibility of the designer, who is primarily called upon to feel the places and their expressive qualities, activating *memory* anchored to the places and the practices that inhabit them, woven from lived practices (Casey, 2000, pp. 181–215, Ingold, 2015), and thereafter interpreting the traces as data derived from historical, archaeological, technological, and structural readings, among others.

In this sense, designing is characterised by a contradictory oscillation between two poles: 'between presence effects and meaning effects... Presence and meaning always appear together … and are always in tension' (Gumbrecht 2004, p. XV). Designing does not simply mean adding or protecting but establishing a dialogue with what is already present, even where this appears as a fragment or even a lack. Traces become active instruments of design: points of engagement for generating new connections and new forms. Creation, then, is not opposed to conservation but represents its conscious extension, capable of transforming without erasing, innovating while remaining attentive.

Reflecting on the Albergo dei Poveri, we can assess the creative aspect of the project in two ways: on the one hand, the adaptation of the site to its new function through a more or less successful dialogue with the material pre-existence; on the other, the understand-



FIG. 11. Genoa, Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè. Part of the National Museum of Italian Emigration (MEI) installation called Maze, which aims to allude to the Babel of languages, intertwined paths, changes of direction, returns, the clash with an elsewhere that tends to reject. At the same time, it introduces into the space of the Commenda an autonomous element that has no relation to it.



FIG, 12. Genoa, Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè. Disorientation arises from mirror effects that duplicate and fragment the architecture, fostering the sense of spatial estrangement necessary to grasp the experience of migration. While the material consistency of the Commenda is preserved, its lived space has been lost.

ing of the place as a fabric of lived spaces, and the development of design strategies capable of enhancing it. The Albergo dei Poveri has largely been preserved as a physical site, yet it has been radically transformed as a lived place, erasing the accumulated experience embedded in traces produced over more than three centuries of daily life, replaced by a hybrid that neither constitutes a new identity nor restores the memory of its unfolding history.

The historical narrative – conveyed through explanatory panels, multimedia tools, or publications – fails to bridge this ontological and perceptual loss: it provides information but does not restore the lived density of the place. It is a conservation of the memorable, not of the indelible. The creative practice should have preserved or generated a new memorial trace, a perceptual intensity not reduced to meaning because it is neither narratable nor representable (and thus not amenable to rational comprehension). A trace that activates an experience 'outside' representation.

Another Genoese project exemplifying the betrayal of the memory of place is the exhibition design of the National Museum of Italian Emigration (MEI) at the Commenda di San Giovanni di Prè (Figs. 11 and 12).

This building, historically known as the 'hospice of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre', was a reception point for pilgrims heading to the Holy Land since the 12th century (Rossini, 2001, p. 19). During the 20th century, the Commenda came to be located at the centre of



FIG. 13. Genoa, piazza Don Gallo. Unlike a generic space (site), the place has an experiential density: it is inhabited, lived, stratified. Memory is not only temporal but also spatial, places; buildings retain mnemonic traces: paths taken, routes experienced, seasons passed, transformations, 'We remember in and through places' (Casey, 1992).

the port area of Genoa, becoming a place of transit and rest for thousands of emigrants leaving for the Americas.

Historically layered, the Commenda has undergone numerous functional transformations over the centuries, to which several restoration interventions were added from the late 19th century onwards. The traces of these transformations remain legible both in the rooms of the ancient medieval hospital and in the remains of the 17th-century oratories and the adjacent frescoed residences. Within this space, dense with memory and temporal complexity – one of the most historically and symbolically significant contexts in the Genoese urban landscape – the National Museum of Italian Emigration was inaugurated in 2022. This occasion could have offered an opportunity to intertwine themes of journey, hospitality, and distance with the specific identity of the place, activating a sensitive dialogue between the museum content and the architectural context.

Instead, the Commenda has been treated as a site: a neutral, depersonalised container where the exhibition – deliberately immersive, unsettling, and disorienting – completely absorbs the visitor's attention, disconnecting them from the material, historical, and affective qualities of the space that hosts it.

Nothing of the Commenda's essence is preserved, or more precisely, only the physical building, the original materials, the architectural fragments, and the painted ceilings are conserved. However, these elements, although present, are neutralised, reduced to a decorative backdrop, barely legible and almost entirely deactivated in the visitor's perception. The project does not even rely on a narrated history: there is no discernible articulation of the 'memorable'. The entire informational apparatus is reduced to a brief panel, accompanied by a scale model of the complex and three marble fragments lacking even captions.

Inside the rooms arranged according to the criteria of immersive museology, the visitor is indeed emotionally and cognitively engaged in the multimedia narrative, but at the expense of the place's identity. What has become of the Commenda di Prè? Where is its lived, affective, temporally sedimented dimension? This is a paradigmatic case of a project that has failed to activate an emotional – and subsequently cultural – shared memory, nor does it engage in dialogue with it: rather, it has annihilated it, replacing it with a spectacular but entirely unanchored experience (Fig. 13).

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CONSERVATION AND CREATIVITY IN URBAN REGENERATION PROJECTS IN HISTORIC CENTRES. THE TRAJECTORIES OF SOME RECENT PUBLIC INVESTMENTS IN ITALY

Annunziata Maria Oteri, Caterina Valiante

Politecnico di Milano, Italy
annunziatamaria.oteri@polimi.it; caterina.valiante@polimi.it

Conservation, Creativity, Urban Regeneration: Lights and Shadows of a Still Unclear Relationship[1]

The recent workshop in Genoa provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the intricate relationship among conservation, creativity and urban regeneration. The workshop dealt with the historic city centre and the many initiatives connected to the ambitious 'Caruggi Integrated Plan'[2] together with the various initiatives funded in Italy by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP), which will be mentioned in the second part of the contribution. In this paper, creativity is mostly linked to innovative reuse solutions for conserving historical heritage, all within a broader dimension that considers the protection of the asset itself and the potential (cultural) regeneration that these actions can trigger within a specific urban context. For this reason, urban regeneration is here the third pillar of a reflection on a three-way relationship full of lights and shadows. Depending on the meaning attributed to the three terms, tensions may arise when moving from the theoretical dimension to the application with specific reference to the historic city. If one understands creativity as a rule-free action governed only by originality and freedom of expression, architectural preservation can be perceived as a limitation to creativity because it imposes specific rules in listed areas protected by laws. However, if one considers creativity as 'the ability to define and structure one's knowledge in a new way'[3] (eg adding new meanings and values to what exists) and interprets the idea of architectural conservation as the careful management of transformation, the two expressions are perfectly compatible. The dialogue between conservation and creativity is possible only if one overcomes both a rigid idea of conservation, which opposes any change, and the opposite view of creativity as an attitude that disregards the value of what already exists.

Indeed, the limits and constraints that the historic cities present should foster imaginative and innovative solutions that balance the needs for preservation with the desire for evolution that comes from communities in contemporary society.

The attempt to find a balance between conservation and creativity is more challenging when the field of application is not a single building but rather involves regeneration at an urban scale (Franco, 2015).

This is not the place to explore definitions and the use that has been made of the idea of urban regeneration in recent years (Lupatelli, De Rossi, 2022). What is certain is that, unlike urban conservation, which is a culture-based process, the concept of urban regeneration is rooted in an idea of change (thus, not continuity) mainly aimed at fostering economic and social development.

Conservation has long remained outside discussions on urban regeneration.[4] The latter has been an exclusive domain of urban planners, sociologists, and economists, and

has mostly been understood as a highly transformative action in the contexts in which it takes place, often at the cost of sacrificing heritage, including industrial heritage and historical fabrics, in line with a misunderstood idea of ecology (limited to low land consumption and the construction of energy-efficient buildings). Only recently have some significant discontinuities been seen as an opportunity to enter the debate as well as the processes of regenerating our historic centres. According to urban planners themselves[5], the contraction of cities and territories, resulting in the obsolescence of both historic and non-historic buildings, and the increasing interest in ecological and sustainability issues, which promote the reuse and recycling of existing resources, necessitate a shift in how urban regeneration is understood. Increasingly, it should be intertwined with processes of caring for the existing built environment (Prescia, Trapani, 2016). Notwithstanding the definition, urban regeneration is nowadays a phenomenon to which a polysemic nature has been attributed. As highlighted in the legal field, the processes it entails are primarily conceived as tools to combat land consumption.[6] However, these processes can also serve as strategic actions to help implement other important policies for local authorities: promoting civic participation and new scenarios for the good of the city, fostering resilience, limiting the adverse effects of climate change, and spreading best practices in energy saving. From this perspective, they also include the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage.

Some further reflections can be made about reducing the distance between conservation and regeneration, at least in the 'battlefield' of historic centres, considering that regeneration still lacks a shared legal definition today, unlike, for example, building renovation[7] (Piperata, 2024, p. 7). As demonstrated by the integrated plan for Genoa itself, where much of the intervention takes place in the historic city, regeneration is understood primarily as the enhancement of existing spaces and buildings (Figs. 1 and 2). Therefore, this would seem to soften the contradiction between the terms *conservation* and *regeneration.* At least on paper, the plan makes the *Carruggi*, Genoa's traditional historic alleyways – 'crossroads of lives' – the focal point of regeneration strategies (the improvement of housing, green spaces, historic buildings, and so on), starting from 'listening to and taking care of places and people'.[8] In an optimistic vision, this approach could open an alternative path: on the one hand, to urban regeneration primarily based on competitiveness and economic growth, (overlooking the current state of the city), and on the other, to processes that focus solely on the architectural and spatial qualities of the city while neglecting the socio-economic and cultural implications that are, instead, central to revitalisation policies. In such an approach, the creative component operates on two levels: one related to community engagement and, therefore, to the ability to interpret desires and suggestions accurately; the other pertains to the 'categories' of existing buildings and spaces, mainly abandoned or partially used, preferably historical but not listed, which are often subjects or means for the regenerative interventions. As described in the second part of the paper, interstitial and often neglected spaces, such as minor historic fabric as well as residual and abandoned areas in the heart of historic cities, brownfields and other remnants of a now obsolete past, such as silos, aqueduct tanks, bastions of ancient fortifications, military outposts, and more, are the subject of the most unconventional and community-based transformations (eg social housing, student residences, spaces for the community, for health, and for entertainment).

This approach, which seems to mark a change in the relationship between conservation and urban regeneration, could be reinforced through a proper interpretation of the



FIG. 1. Salita Pollaiuoli in the historic centre of Genoa (photo C. Valiante, 2024).



FIG. 2. Cloister of Santa Maria delle Vigne, Genoa (photo C. Valiante, 2024).

objectives set by the NRRP. Mission 5 of the NRRP partly aimed at urban regeneration. Indeed, in the document, the suggested actions related to Mission 5 objectives are intended not so much, or not only, as mere urban-planning measures, but as part of a more ambitious programme aimed at addressing social and economic decline and improving the city's urban quality and social fabric.[9] In this context, interventions in historical heritage and settings, as the case of Genoa also demonstrates, are widespread. As emerged during the workshop, step-by-step interventions that connect the urban scale with the building scale can bring together aspects of creativity and regeneration to reuse spaces in a creative and socially beneficial way, enhancing rather than diminishing meanings and values. This is the case, for example, with the project for the adaptive reuse of a 'large object at the urban scale', such as the Albergo dei Poveri.

Indeed, the actions outlined in the NRRP are aligned with a trend that has been underway for some time to revise the concept of urban regeneration, looking at the role of culture and creativity in the socio-economic development of our cities, particularly in degraded historic areas.

The rising awareness of the value of historical heritage, not only cultural but also social (Rossitti, Oteri, Torrieri, 2025), along with the increasing need to find alternatives to investments in the tourism sector, particularly in the so-called 'art cities', seems to underpin these new trends. It is still too early to assess their outcomes, which sometimes appear to move in the opposite direction (attracting tourism). Nevertheless, a shift seems to be emerging that, at least for the historical parts of our cities, may signal a transition from urban regeneration to cultural regeneration, with all the ambiguities it entails.

Among the initiatives that seem to embrace such a vision at an international level is the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, established with the purpose of 'making culture and creativity a driving force for sustainable development and urban regeneration'[10], basing

its initiatives and experiences on the idea that 'Through innovation and the promotion of social cohesion, as well as citizen well-being and inter-cultural dialogue, cities respond to global contemporary challenges, such as economic growth, health crises, environmental impacts, and social tensions'. Although these intentions often result in negative effects for cities (gentrification, overtourism, and so on), there is no doubt that in other ways they also encourage the development of innovative strategies for revitalising abandoned or marginalised spaces and contexts, fostering the enhancement of material and intangible heritage in many cases.[11] Among the initiatives of the UNESCO Creative Cities, for example, one can mention the case of Biella Cittadellarte, with the interesting reuse of the former Trombetta wool mill in the historic textile centre of Biella. It is an interesting example of the creative reuse of a historic complex that activates culture and social regeneration.[12]

In Italy, the experience of Culturability – a programme launched in 2009 by the Fondazione Unipolis and then joined by the current Ministry of Culture (MiC) – aims at fostering and supporting cultural and creative initiatives to generate sustainable innovation activating communities and territorial cohesion.[13] Bottom-up experiences and the involvement of the so-called third sector form the basis of such an approach, which frequently addresses the reuse of abandoned buildings and spaces in the core of historic cities.

Whether successful or not, these kinds of initiatives attempt to activate bottom-up processes 'where top-down regeneration and transformation programmes have failed', seeking to operate 'in the cracks left by the failures of the State and the market and in interstitial spaces'[14] (Franceschinelli, Paluan, 2021, pp. 27–28). Once again, these initiatives do not originate within architectural heritage conservation. However, they almost always involve historic buildings, whether abandoned or not, perhaps not protected but rich in values and meaning, often treating them as mere containers. While the goal of many of these initiatives is not the conservation of the specific asset, the proposals almost always involve the reuse of historic buildings, often with innovative and creative functions, though typically vague, resulting in 'hybrid and multifaceted' contexts. It is also quite significant to note that in the *Culturability* calls for proposals, the impact of the new use on the building is never among the evaluation criteria.

Experts in the field of conservation, including those in academia, look at these experiences with scepticism, while, on the contrary, these experiences are strongly supported by cultural economists and those involved in urban policy. Certainly, there are many risks, starting with the fact that, in most cases, architectural heritage and its protection are not the focus of the interventions but, rather, the focus is often the very means through which they are carried out. The issue, therefore, is not the preservation of the asset itself but rather the enhancement of a specific urban and social context through its creative reuse. The technical dimension of the interventions, particularly when it comes to non-listed heritage, which constitutes most of the buildings reused in urban regeneration projects, often escapes any form of oversight, making it impossible to ensure the quality of outcomes in terms of the (physical) conservation of the asset. Therefore, compatibility between the new function – creative, innovative, social, community-based, and so on – and the characteristics of the building to which it is applied is rarely considered.

On the other hand, however, as has been highlighted in the legal sphere, where the interplay between regenerative practices and cultural policies encourages the development of new regulatory tools, it is important to note 'the interesting bidirectional nature of this relationship: while culture can act as a driver of urban regeneration processes, these very

processes often involve assets, spaces, and places of cultural value, thereby contributing to their protection and promoting their enhancement'[15] (Piperata, 2024, p. 9). This dynamic also fosters meaningful collaborations – partnerships and others – between public institutions and between the public and private sectors, leading, in turn, to the development of innovative legal models.

At a theoretical level, culture-based regeneration should not be condemned *tout-court*.

From the perspective of the heritage being addressed, culture-based regeneration can be effective if the cultural factor (ie, the protection of the asset) guides the regeneration process, even when the goals go beyond mere conservation. This implies envisioning innovative reuse of the heritage asset as a way to ensure its preservation and, within a broader, albeit more complex, framework, a positive and catalytic impact on the surrounding socio-economic context. In this sense, heritage is understood as a bearer of values (and thus a generator of culture) that can act positively in the context targeted for regeneration, which could become 'cultural' regeneration. However, the choice of the asset's new function is no longer determined solely by what is compatible with the building itself but also, through a dialogue with urban policymakers, by the urban, or even territorial, context in which it is situated.

Otherwise, the risk of the asset's instrumentalisation (and exploitation), shifting from being a subject to merely an object, with potentially irreversible damage, becomes significant. Certain risks should not be overlooked: the ambiguities inherent in the concept of 'valorisation', increasingly regarded as a discipline distinct from conservation (Vitale, 2024, p. 7), and the ever-present risk of a 'rhetoric of regeneration' that conceals the less noble framework of speculative processes, behind the appealing façade of cultural revival.

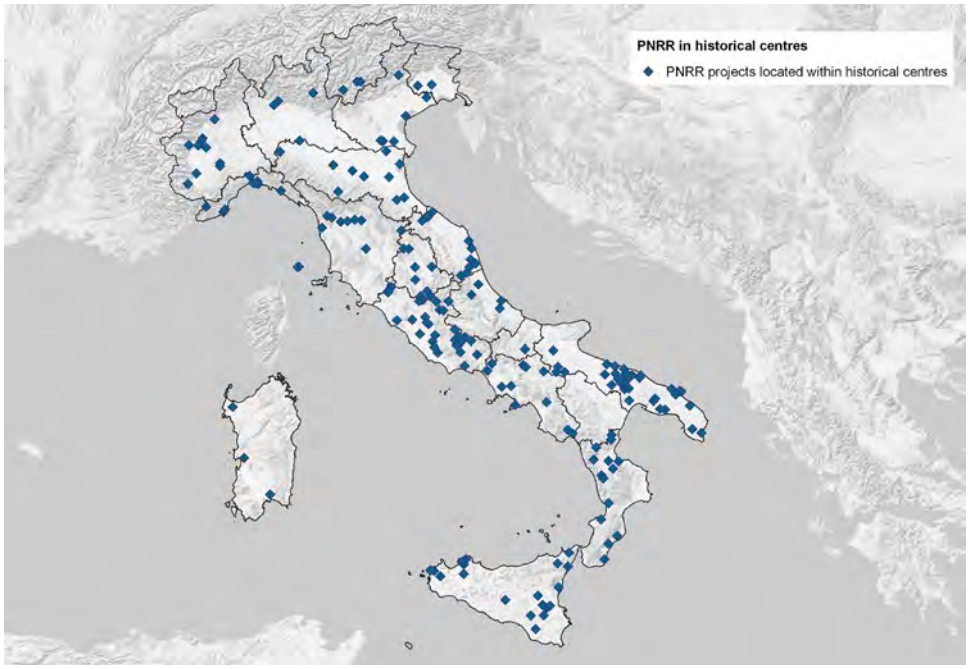


FIG. 3. Geographical distribution of the NRRP projects activated within historic centres. Authors' elaboration based on NRRP monitoring data (Italia Domani, 2024).

Trajectories of the NRRP Investments in Italian Historic Centres

The NRRP is a strategic document that outlines the investments and reforms that Italy intends to implement from 2021 to 2026. The document was prepared by the Italian government to access European funds made available through the Next Generation EU initiative (Pnrr, 2021). To address the challenges associated with the pandemic crisis and the resulting slowdown of European economies, the European Union established the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) within the framework of the Next Generation EU programme.[16] As mentioned in the first part of this contribution, and as also highlighted by recent studies (Pracchi, Oteri, 2023; Valiante, Oteri, 2024; Valiante, 2025), the number of NRRP-funded interventions that have a direct or indirect impact on the built heritage is significant. This section aims to provide a preliminary quantitative overview and, albeit in an exploratory manner, given that most proposals are still in their early stages, attempts to identify emerging trends among those initiatives concerning historic centres, particularly regarding the interplay between conservation, creativity, and regeneration discussed earlier.

Through an investigation of the monitoring data provided by the NRRP public website, which contains all funded interventions up to December 2024, a selection of the projects implemented in the historic centres was made (Italia Domani, 2024). The identified sample, which comprises over 700 interventions, was analysed through data regarding the nature of the projects, their objectives, funding lines and position within the broader plan, their promoters and geographical distribution. This contribution aims to analyse a first set of essential and preliminary data and provide quantitative elaborations that are contemporaneous with NRRP implementation, trying to assess if and how forms of 'creativity' enter these interventions and what impact they have on architectural heritage and its surrounding context. However, since the currently available monitoring data does not provide detailed information on the funded projects, the analysis focused not so much on the technical characteristics and outcomes of the interventions on the built heritage but rather on the overall approach and the predefined objectives. The results presented in this paper capture an intermediate stage in the plan's implementation and are therefore partial, although helpful in introducing some reflections regarding the direction this programme is taking. The observed tendencies will necessarily have to be verified and monitored over the long term.

To provide a general framework of the phenomenon, the 722 interventions identified in the historic centres appear to be relatively evenly distributed across the Italian territory, with a minor concentration in the central regions (Fig. 3), and essentially affect the built environment. In fact, 67% of the funded projects include some interventions on existing buildings. Looking at the promoters of these initiatives, nearly all these projects were proposed and implemented by local actors, specifically local administrations (90%) (Italia Domani, 2024). Two key issues emerge. First, the geographical distribution of the interventions aligns with the NRRP's objectives, which aim to address territorial inequalities. The second issue concerns the central role of local actors, as it is well established that those closest to the local context are better positioned to intervene in the regeneration of the built environment. Moreover, this trend could trigger further bottom-up initiatives in the future. However, it remains to be seen whether this engagement will extend across multiple levels of local society or remain limited to the municipal administration. In addition, the involvement of local actors represents a crucial point in NRRP implementation,

TAB. 1. Principal objectives of NRRP interventions in historic centres. Authors' elaboration based on NRRP monitoring data (Italia Domani, 2024).

Interventions' themes	n. projects
Tourism and culture 4.0	434
Social infrastructures, families, communities and third sector	215
Education facilities enhancement: from nursery to university	42
Territory and water protection	16
Employment policies	6
Sustainable agriculture and circular economy	6
Renewable energy and sustainable mobility	3
Total	722

considering Italy's lack of adherence to the EU requirements in terms of collective participation in the project and realisation phases, as reported by other studies (Carrosio *et al.*, 2022; Scialdone, Parisi, 2022).

The analysis of the funded interventions in the historic centres highlighted a significant number of cases (60%) that involve the sector dedicated to the improvement of digitalisation and innovation in culture and tourism. A smaller but still significant number of projects (31%) are aimed at enhancing social cohesion and inclusion. Compared to these cases, the interventions in the education and research and green transition sectors are marginal (3 and 6%) (Italia Domani, 2024). It is interesting to note that the interventions included in Mission 1 for cultural and tourism enhancement are mainly located in the historic centres of small towns. In contrast, those included in Mission 5 for cohesion and inclusion have mainly been activated in medium- or large-sized towns and cities. This significant number of interventions aimed at fostering inclusion and cohesion represents an interesting point of reflection, highlighting that some attempts have been made to combine social issues with operational interventions within historic centres.

Looking at the more specific objectives of the analysed interventions (Table 1), it is clear that the majority of projects concerned the revitalisation of tourism and culture with a digital and sustainable approach ('Tourism and culture 4.0'). This included the enhancement of historical and cultural sites by improving safety and accessibility, and the promotion of the Tourism 4.0 plan, renewing the offerings of tourism and hospitality facilities (Faccioli, 2022; Seddio, 2021). Examining their geographic distribution, these interventions are predominantly concentrated in smaller municipalities. Conversely, the second largest group of interventions, aimed at strengthening social infrastructure and oriented explicitly towards improving community and third-sector conditions ('Social infrastructures, families, communities and third sector'), appears mainly in larger urban contexts. This NRRP component aims to enhance social services, acting on health, housing, and welfare policies to support fragile and marginalised categories of the population through education, training, urban regeneration actions, and participation processes. The extensive number of projects in this section could indicate a shift in the approach to the reuse and

Funding lines	n. projects
Attrattività dei borghi (Small historical centres' attractiveness)	427
Investimenti in progetti di rigenerazione urbana, volti a ridurre situazioni di emarginazione e degrado sociale (Investments in urban regeneration projects aimed at reducing social exclusion and conditions of social degradation)	120
Programma innovativo della qualità dell'abitare (PINQuA) (National Innovative Program for the Quality of Living)	66
Piani urbani integrati (Integrated urban plans)	27
Scuola 4.0 - scuole innovative, nuove aule didattiche e laboratori (4.0 School – innovative schools, classrooms, and laboratories)	27
Misure per la gestione del rischio di alluvione e per la riduzione del rischio idrogeologico (Interventions aimed at managing flood risk and mitigating hydrogeological hazards)	16
Other	39
Total	722

TAB. 2. NRRP funding lines. Authors' elaboration based on NRRP monitoring data (Italia Domani, 2024).

valorisation of historic centres, which is usually interpreted only as an occasion to foster the tourism sector. If we exclude the exemplary plan for the historic centre of Bologna between the 1960s and 1970s (Cervellati, 1973; Giambruno, 2007) and some other sporadic cases (Bonfantini, 2016; Consiglio, Riitano, 2015; Mioni, Pedrazzini, 2005; Prescia, Trapani, 2016), the social issues often remain separate from built heritage conservation concerns (Giambruno 2007; Storchi, Toppetti, 2020).

Looking more specifically at the NRRP funding lines (Table 2), the highest number of projects is devoted to the '*Attrattività dei Borghi*' (Small historic centres' attractiveness) since this fund explicitly required that work be carried out on historical settlements (Pracchi, Oteri, 2023). However, many projects are still oriented to improving social services (education, housing, environment maintenance) through urban regeneration processes. As will be presented in the following paragraph, this kind of intervention is found mainly in medium-sized and large cities, such as the interesting case of social housing enhancement in the historic centres of Genova, Sassari, Brindisi, Firenze, Rieti, and Bologna. Similarly, the projects for improving social and cultural services can be mentioned, for instance, in Oristano and Reggio Emilia. Finally, the funding line dedicated to school innovation included other interesting projects in the historic centres of Catania, Piacenza and Venice to provide education services, especially university residences (Italia Domani, 2024).

Conservation and Creativity through Social and Cultural Initiatives: Some Examples in Italian Historic Centres

Based on the preliminary quantitative analysis outlined in the previous paragraph, some noteworthy patterns appear to emerge regarding the initiatives funded in the historic centres of medium and large-sized cities – namely, those excluded from the Ministry of Culture's call for proposals '*Attrattività dei Borghi*' (Small historic centres' attractiveness). As previously noted, the NRRP component most frequently referenced is Mission 5, which focuses on urban regeneration. Thus, the emphasis seems to lie not on tourism but on social inclusion and community-based cultural initiatives. This shift reflects the concept of

creativity in urban regeneration processes that this contribution seeks to examine. While still a preliminary sign of change, one that will need to be monitored over time, several initiatives promoted under this framework reveal an interesting convergence of regeneration, conservation, and creativity. Among these, for instance, some interesting initiatives have been promoted in the historic centre of Genoa to enhance social housing and public spaces. This project is included in the '*Programma innovativo nazionale per la qualità dell'abitare* (PINQuA)' (National Innovative Programme for the Quality of Living), a policy initiative aimed at enhancing the quality, accessibility, and sustainability of urban housing, with particular attention to social housing (Brisku *et al.*, 2022). It seeks to address territorial disparities and promote social inclusion by financing interventions focused on regenerating the built environment, improving public spaces, and integrating services within residential areas. In addition to improving housing conditions in historic centres without exacerbating gentrification or speculative dynamics, this programme seeks to strengthen the link between urban regeneration and social actors and to foster integrated networks of social services, as emphasised by the Third Sector Forum itself.[17] In the case of Genoa, the 'C^3 Co-living, Culture, Commons' project aims to increase the supply of social housing and promote residential diversity; to expand spaces dedicated to neighbourhood services; to foster social cohesion and strengthen local ties; and to develop services for students, who represent a significant portion of the local population, as well as for young people. It also seeks to support inclusive and innovative cultural initiatives and to enhance both the availability and quality of public spaces, transforming them to improve the living environment, foster social interaction, and strengthen the sense of safety (Brisku *et al.*, 2022, p. 126). However, this challenge must be addressed during any future implementation of the activities (ie, after completion of the construction works) since various social organisations work in areas where the PINQuA project is located. This programme aims to integrate with other ongoing public initiatives in the historic city centre, such as the above-mentioned *Caruggi* Integrated Plan. However, it would also be valuable to establish connections with existing bottom-up projects in the area, such as the 'social concierge' (Bernardi, 2019; Bragaglia, 2021; Bifulco, Mozzana, 2022) in Piazza Don Gallo, the *Casa delle Donne 'Brigata Alice'* in the Pellicceria district, and the organisation *Sestiere del Molo*, which has been particularly active in promoting community initiatives, including those related to urban furniture and the enhancement of public spaces (Figs. 4 and 5). According to the programme's intentions, this project could represent an interesting case of creativity in planning various actions that tackle some of the current social issues that affect the historic centre of the city (Bobbio, Musso, 2020). In this case, the project can be interpreted as 'creative' because, through the conservation and reuse of architectural heritage, it aims to provide better housing conditions and improve social services. However, as many cases have already shown, the project's effects must be assessed over the long term, since the durability of the initiative may be adversely affected if a supporting network is not activated immediately after completion of the restoration.

The PINQuA programme has also been promoted in various other Italian cities, such as Ascoli Piceno, Bari, Bologna, Brindisi, Firenze, Lamezia Terme, Pesaro, etc., experimenting with different ways to combine the improvement of housing and social services in historic centres, activating mobility, social, care and education facilities (Brisku *et al.*, 2022). In the case of architectural conservation and reuse, 'creativity' relies not only on the design aspects but also on the strategies to keep the building 'alive' over time.



FIG. 4. Don Andrea Gallo square, Genoa (photo C. Valiante, 2024).

Another interesting example of experimentation with the relationship between the creativity of solutions, care for heritage, and potential impact on the surrounding context is the case of the restoration of the former aqueduct reservoir and *Bastione del Barbagianni* in the historic centre of Pisa.[18] Funded by the NRRP line '*Investimenti in progetti di rigenerazione urbana, volti a ridurre situazioni di emarginazione e degrado sociale*', this initiative is connected to other public actions intended to recover a little-known and underdeveloped part within the walled city centre. It aims to provide the community with new educational spaces, a study centre, and new accessible pathways. In this case, the project expresses creativity by presenting a reuse strategy that combines cultural and social facilities, integrating widespread restoration actions in different points of the historic centre. However, some concerns have been raised regarding the assignment of space management to private entities without public consultation (Loi, 2024). This multi-level approach may represent an interesting method to avoid isolated interventions and take advantage of considerable public funding involving a broader context; however, the post-intervention phase is still crucial in the long term and should have included wider participation. Also, in this case, the project is still in the realisation phase, and the actual impact of such interventions must be monitored and verified, especially if we consider the effects on the built heritage and the surrounding context.

Among the NRRP urban regeneration interventions that primarily have social and cultural purposes, some other cases demonstrate interesting ways of addressing creativity within the regeneration processes of historic centres. Within the framework of the 'Inclusion and Social Cohesion' funding line, a particularly noteworthy initiative concerns the reuse of the former military barracks located in the historic centre of Pordenone.[19] The project aims to create new community spaces and to provide a new headquarters for local associations. It includes the conservative restoration of the entire complex, the functional reorganisation of its spaces, and accessibility enhancement. This intervention is part of a broader strategy for the regeneration of the Via Molinari neighbourhood, which also involves the reuse of three other buildings (the former Education Office, a former brewery, and the former hydropower plant) to expand social services in the area, particularly for younger and older segments of the population. Overall, the project represents an attempt to regenerate a substantial portion of the city by delivering services and responses tailored to the local community's needs. Even though the project is still ongoing and it is not possible to verify its physical effects on the built environment, it is interesting to note how, in this case, creativity relies on tools to foster urban and social regeneration

while preserving and valorising the architectural heritage.

Most of the interventions in historic centres under this category (Mission 5) also focus on open urban spaces in major Italian cities, such as Belluno, Lecce, Reggio Emilia, and Siena (Italia Domani, 2024). These include the redevelopment of streets and squares, improvements to street furniture and public lighting, creating pedestrian and cycling paths, and removing architectural barriers. In these cases, the approach focuses on reclaiming deprived areas within historic centres, with the aim of providing higher-quality spaces for social interaction and collective activities.



FIG. 5. Urban furniture realised by the organisation Sestiere del Molo in the historic centre of Genoa (photo C. Valiante, 2024).

Conclusions

The above-mentioned cases highlight how the issue of creativity can be addressed in conservation and reuse projects in many different ways, not only from a technical point of view. Looking at these examples, the possible compatibility of architectural preservation and creativity clearly emerges. Moreover, creativity can be highly effective in defining new ways to have a positive impact on the community and the broader context. Specifically, the sectors of culture and social innovation can go hand in hand, as demonstrated by previous studies (Consiglio, Riitano, 2015; Prescia, Trapani, 2015), since culture represents an expression of civil society while being a constitutional right (Montanari, 2015). In this sense, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan may represent a valuable opportunity to allocate substantial funding toward integrating culture, preservation, and social regeneration. The risks involved in managing such significant funds for ambitious projects to be implemented and reported within relatively short timeframes have been, and continue to be, widely discussed. This is not the place to delve further into that debate. It is also true that faced with the urgency of presenting proposals, many administrations have dusted off outdated projects that are likely to have limited effectiveness or utility. However, it is equally true that even a purely quantitative survey such as the one presented here allows us to draw some interesting insights into the themes of greatest relevance to our discussion.

In attempting a synthetic assessment, three aspects appear particularly noteworthy. The first is related to the fact that large and medium-sized cities have seized the opportunity offered by the NRRP to revitalise historic urban contexts that are otherwise difficult to address. In doing so, they have often abandoned the (reassuring and consolidated) tourism path in favour of initiatives that are more directly aimed at social inclusion and, thus, at resident communities, viewing architectural and urban heritage as an opportunity to foster cultural (not urban) regeneration.

The second aspect, which is particularly relevant here, is the (albeit indirect) involvement of architectural, urban, and intangible heritage in these policies. The fact that attention is predominantly directed toward non-listed heritage may, on the one hand, reflect a desire to 'avoid complications', thereby sidestepping the restrictions imposed by heritage protection laws. However, on the other hand, it may also suggest a bottom-up dynamic in recognising values in what is generally considered a 'minor' heritage.

Lastly, there appears to be, or so we would like to believe, a close relationship between the revitalisation of historic fabric and built environments and unconventional (creative) modes of reuse and recovery of abandoned spaces. These are experiences rarely developed within the traditional heritage protection framework but which the world of conservation can no longer afford to overlook because they sometimes outline unexpected yet credible recovery pathways; because they valorise 'categories' of heritage that are largely disregarded by conventional protection approaches, yet may be highly meaningful for the communities who inhabit them; and lastly, but no less importantly, because they propose new regulatory and management tools which, in light of the significant broadening of interest in non-listed heritage (and the corresponding threats it faces), are undoubtedly worthy of further exploration.

Notes

1 This article is the result of the joint work of both authors; however, from an editorial point of view, the section *Conservation, Creativity, Urban Regeneration: lights and shadows of a still unclear relationship* is attributed to A.M. Oteri, whereas the sections *Trajectories of the NRRP investments in the Italian historical centres and Conservation and creativity through social and cultural initiatives: some examples in the Italian historical centres* are attributed to C. Valiante. The conclusions are the result of a joint reflection.

2 Integrated plans are a tool funded by the NRRP (National Recovery and Resilience Plan) for metropolitan cities, essentially translating into urban regeneration projects aimed at greater social inclusion. These plans include among other things, maintenance for the reuse of existing public spaces and buildings, with investments from the third sector and private investors up to a maximum of 25%. Many cases, such as Genoa, involve historic contexts and buildings (https://www.interno.gov.it/it/m5c2-investimento-22-piani-urbani-integrati. Accessed: 1 April 2025).

3 The definition is from the online Vocabolario Treccani ad vocem (https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/creativita/) (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

4 The topic is explored in Crișan, Franco, Kealy, and Musso, 2013, which brings together several contributions from different disciplinary fields, including architectural conservation.

5 Recently, Arturo Lanzani has referred to three discontinuities that currently shape – or should redirect – urban regeneration processes: the proliferation of shrinking territories and the obsolescence of the built environment, the growing urgency of ecological and environmental concerns in the governance of cities and territories, which prioritises reuse and recycling, and a new neoliberal socio-economic era that influences urban regeneration practices by acting on socio-spatial inequalities (Lanzani, 2024, pp. 13–15).

6 European policies on limiting land consumption – which aim to reduce it to zero by 2050 – have also had an impact on this approach (Piperata, 2024, p. 9).

7 In Italy, national Law No 457 of 1978 defined the category of 'building renovation' for the first time.

8 https://smart.comune.genova.it/node/19457 (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

9 https://www.governo.it/it/approfondimento/inclusione-sociale/16706.

10 https://www.unesco.org/en/creative-cities/creativity-and-cities?hub=80094 (Accessed: 6 April 2025).

11 https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000390387 (Accessed: 1 April 2025)

12 See https://cittacreativa.visit.biella.it/ and https://cittadellarte.it/it/la-fondazione (Accessed: 23 December 2025).

13 See https://www.fondazioneunipolis.org/progetti/culturability/ (Accessed: 1 April 2025).

14 Translation by the authors.

15 Translation by the authors.

16 This temporary instrument allocated Italy – the largest recipient of funding in the EU – a sum of €191.5 billion. Regulation (EU) 2021/241, 12 February 2021.

17 Forum Terzo Settore, https://pnrr.forumterzosettore.it/misure-ts/programma-innovativo-della-qualita-dellabitare-pinqua/ (Accessed: 3 April 2025).

18 Comune di Pisa, https://www.comune.pisa.it/Novita/Comunicati/PNRR-restauro-del-Bastione-del-Barbagianni-e-dell-ex-serbatoio-dell-acquedotto (Accessed: 3 April 2025).

19 Comune di Pordenone, https://www.comune.pordenone.it/it/comune/comunicazione/comune-informa/stampa/area-stampa/procedono-ilavori-alle-ex-casermette-di-via-molinari (Accessed: 3 April 2025).

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HERITAGE CONSTELLATIONS. VALUE CREATION THROUGH ARCHITECTURAL CONSERVATION FOR THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF GENOA

Valentina Pintus, Nino Sulfaro, Oana Țiganea

University of Cagliari, Italy
valentinapintus@unica.it

Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria, Italy
nino.sulfaro@unirc.it

Politecnico di Milano, Italy
oanacristina.tiganea@polimi.it

The paper explores the concept of *constellation* as an interpretative framework for generating new cultural and social values in built heritage conservation. This approach connects tangible and intangible elements across multiple scales – ranging from individual buildings and sites to urban areas, territories, and communities – highlighting the significance of assets that are often overlooked or undervalued. By foregrounding the interwoven historical, economic, political, and expressive dimensions of these various assets, the *constellation* framework reveals latent meanings and supports the creation of alternative narratives.

In the specific case of Genoa, the historic city centre still stands as a contested space whose activation and conservation remain unresolved, despite its universally acknowledged patrimonial value. Historically characterised by social and functional *mixité* (Bobbio, Musso, 2020), the area attracts tourism through its social and cultural vibrancy and dynamism, while also triggering less desirable effects, including speculative real estate investment and privatisation of public space (Petrillo, Benasso, 2020, p. 151). Within this context, the creation of a *heritage constellation* may function as a strategic counterpoint, fostering inclusive narratives and alternative conservation practices grounded in the recognition of layered local histories and everyday social uses, especially as these intersect with the new communities and, therefore, the new identities that currently inhabit the historic city centre.

The concept of *constellation* typically emerges in 20th-century contexts marked by large-scale transformations – such as industrialisation, infrastructural expansion, and the rise of mass tourism – that transcend individual buildings and reflect broader territorial processes. Identifying a *constellation* entails recognising a network of interconnected components whose collective significance opens possibilities for reinterpretation. Building on previous research and on-site observations during the workshop, the paper addresses the concept of *constellation* as an interpretative framework closely tied to the complex nature of industrial heritage and to the challenges identified in Genoa's historic city centre. It further explores the applicability of this framework beyond its conventional thematic boundaries, considering its relevance to heritage preservation within Genoa's historic centre. Through a combination of literature review and empirical analysis, the study assesses how the *constellation* framework can inform conservation strategies and practices, ultimately contributing to the production of new cultural and social values.

Constellation and Gentrification: The Case of Genoa's Historic City Centre

The historic centre of Genoa has long been characterised by a high degree of social diversity, embedded within its dense and stratified urban fabric. It is not uncommon to find different social groups coexisting within the same building: a manager occupying the upper floors with a small terrace overlooking the historic rooftops; an intellectual living on the floor below; a young family further down; and an immigrant family inhabiting the mezzanine, all sharing the same architectural structure in a condition of apparent coexistence (Foglino, 2018, p. 79). This social heterogeneity is mirrored in the urban public space and built heritage, where multiple social spheres, enclaves, classes, and activities overlap and intersect. Such a condition is not accidental, but spatially structured, taking form through specific urban constellations in which architectural typologies, everyday practices, and social relations are tightly interwoven.

One of the factors that made the historic centre of Genoa distinctive and attractive – particularly during the initial phase of gentrification in the 1990s – was precisely this *mixité* embedded within its dense network of alleyways: 'a plurality of social and cultural contexts, as well as the quality of living but, in some way, distant universes despite the proximity of space' (Borzani, 2025). Several scholars, including Gastaldi (2003), suggest that this early phase of gentrification contributed to reversing the trends of the previous decades, when parts of the historic centre had been marginalised or even demolished. During this period, the area began to attract a new population of young people, students, intellectuals, and young couples who valued the historic centre precisely for its heterogeneity and cultural diversity. However, other scholars point out that Genoa's gentrification process has remained incomplete, largely due to the absence of a stable and supported creative population. This group has struggled to take root locally, in part because public administrations have failed to implement coherent economic strategies and long-term incentives capable of sustaining it. At the same time, the organisation of major events in the historic centre during the 1990s and early 2000s has further contributed to processes of social segregation, through the temporary and permanent appropriation and privatisation of public space. These dynamics have disrupted everyday practices and weakened the fragile social constellations that had previously characterised the area (Petrillo, Benasso, 2020, pp. 151–158).

From a broader theoretical perspective, *gentrification* is a sociological concept describing the progressive sociocultural transformation of an urban area triggered by imposed increases in property values. While some scholars trace its historical roots to 19th-century Paris, where Haussmann's urban interventions displaced marginalised populations (Harvey, 2005), others identify its emergence in the post-war transformations of neighbourhoods such as Islington in London (Glass, 1964). Although at the beginning of the new millennium gentrification was often framed in positive terms – focusing on the conditions that hindered its full realisation – it is today increasingly regarded as a problematic phenomenon, particularly due to the financial pressures and resulting social segregation it induces within an increasingly homogenised urban environment: 'those who speak of gentrification are essentially referring to a form of imposition – a process that appears alienating in relation to the historical forms through which cities were previously structured. It thus represents a kind of 'bad novelty'' (Petrillo, 2017, pp. 149–154).

In contemporary Italian cities, and especially in historic centres with strong tourist appeal, these dynamics are increasingly driven by mass tourism. The growth of the tour-

ism industry, combined with the reorientation of traditional land uses towards short-term tourist accommodation, has pushed property owners to prioritise temporary rentals, a process facilitated by digital platforms. As a result, historic alleyways are progressively transformed into commercial corridors catering to a transient population, contributing to what has been described as a 'Disneyland effect' (Semi, 2015), with severe consequences for local communities and the built environment. This phenomenon has made the historic centres of renowned destinations like Venice and Florence progressively uninhabitable.

Within this context, Genoa's historic centre – marked by exceptional social diversity, stratified built forms, and a longstanding tradition of informal coexistence – faces the risk of cultural homogenisation and functional monoculture. If new, integrated urban functions are not introduced, particularly in the fields of social, educational, and health services grounded in proximity-based logics, the historic core risks being reduced to a consumable backdrop rather than remaining a living part of the city. A meaningful response to these challenges lies in reconfiguring how historic city centres are understood and managed – not as isolated enclaves of cultural capital or commodified tourist destinations, but as integral, functional parts of the broader urban fabric. In this sense, the concept of *heritage constellation* offers a compelling interpretative and strategic framework. Rather than focusing on conserving and enhancing individual monuments or buildings, a *heritage constellation* acknowledges the interconnected network of tangible and intangible assets, historical layers, and diverse social practices that define urban complexity.

In Genoa, where informal uses of space have long contributed to the city's identity and resilience, this perspective is particularly pertinent. By fostering 'new social constellations' that bring together long-standing residents, migrants, students, and marginalised communities, the approach supports community-driven conservation strategies rooted in shared knowledge and participatory memory. Drawing from Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, this view positions the subject as an agent of spatial transformation: space is not merely inherited or protected, but continuously produced through bodily presence, social interaction, and cultural interpretation (Lefebvre, 1974).

Recognising and reinforcing *constellations* of initiatives rooted in Genoa's multi-layered urban setting allows heritage professionals and planners to move beyond conservation of form towards the activation and creation of meaning. This may include adapting historic spaces to host community workshops, intercultural centres, cooperative housing, and educational hubs – each reinforcing the other within a spatial and symbolic network of value. Ultimately, this approach enhances the sense of belonging, attachment, and reappropriation among residents. Rather than displacing communities, the *heritage constellation* model facilitates inclusive urban regeneration by grounding it in shared knowledge, participatory memory, and socio-spatial justice. In doing so, it becomes a tool for safeguarding urban diversity and ensuring that Genoa's historic centre remains not just a site to visit, but a place to live, create, and thrive.

Constellation and Creation

The term *constellation* is used to describe a cognitive and interpretative strategy whose meaning can be traced back to its astronomical origin. In this context, a constellation refers to a grouping of stars in the celestial sphere – historically known as an asterism. Since the earliest recorded times, humans have identified recognisable figures – animals,

heroes, or objects – within these groupings, a process through which constellations acquired their names[1]. Crucially, the spatial distribution of visible stars from Earth is largely random and does not reflect any inherent hierarchy or physical order. A constellation is therefore not a natural phenomenon, but a construct of human interpretation, emerging from cultural, symbolic and imaginative capacities.

This interpretative ability is closely related to *pareidolia*, the cognitive process through which the human mind recognises familiar patterns within seemingly chaotic or indeterminate visual fields (Adamo, 2017). Such a capacity to detect structures and latent signals within noise constitutes a fundamental mechanism for understanding complexity and solving problems in uncertain contexts (Bellemare-Pepin *et al.*, 2022, pp. 103–105). From the 19th century onwards, the notion of *constellation* was progressively adopted across several disciplines, particularly within the humanities. In these contexts, the term was used to describe configurations of heterogeneous factors that generate meaning through their interrelations rather than through isolated attributes (political, economic, social and cultural). These configurations can only be fully understood when the network of relationships that sustains them is considered, making the constellation a powerful metaphor for alternative modes of knowledge production[2].

From this perspective, a *constellation* may be understood as a visual and conceptual phenomenon whose form and meaning change according to the observer's position and standpoint. As a metaphor, it encourages a departure from rigid models of knowledge based on singular, authoritative frameworks that claim objectivity and universality. Instead, it embraces a plurality of viewpoints and interpretative positions, free from the dominance of a single authority. In doing so, the image of the constellation signals a shift away from static, centralised, and systemic modes of thinking towards dynamic, decentralised, and anti-systemic configurations. Unlike the idea of a *system* – rooted in ideas of cohesion, hierarchy, and functional integration – the notion of *constellation* foregrounds irreducible multidimensionality and the contingent nature of historical moments, cultural contexts, or social formations[3].

Within this theoretical framework, the paper addresses the process of industrialisation, which shaped territories and communities through coherent systems structured around production flows, infrastructures, and resource exploitation. Over time, uneven processes of deindustrialisation, unfolding within diverse political, economic, social, and cultural contexts, have disrupted these systems, fragmenting their material and immaterial components. This transition from *system* to *constellation* enables a reinterpretation of such dispersed resources, opening possibilities for their recognition and valorisation from a patrimonial perspective, where meaning emerges not from isolated remnants but from their relational and contextual interdependencies.

Constellation and Industrialisation

Focusing on European industrialisation from the late 18th century to the early 20th century, it is evident that extensive territorial systems emerged, largely driven by the development of heavy industries (Berger, 2018). These systems interconnected natural resources with production sites and markets, integrating coalfields, mining, iron and steel works, shipyards, and machinery plants with ecological and agricultural landscapes supplying raw materials, water, and wood. Such production networks were supported by dense infra-

structural frameworks – railways, roads, canals, power grids, and cable cars – that enabled both upstream and downstream material flows, as well as labour migration and the formation of new communities and collective memories (Wicke, Berger and Golombek, 2018; Țiganea, 2023). As a result, entire regions were rapidly transformed into territorial production systems extending beyond administrative boundaries and sustained by shared industrial identities, as exemplified by the Ruhr Basin and the Norbotten 'technological mega-system' (Berger and Wicke, 2017, pp. 10–20; Hansson, 1998)[4]. These territorially embedded production systems, particularly in Western Europe, relied on the integration of extraction, manufacturing, labour, and infrastructure, often under strong national planning frameworks. Similar dynamics emerged in Eastern Europe through centrally planned socialist economies, where state coordination strategically distributed industrial sectors to exploit regional resources and reinforce national autonomy, as seen in Romania's steel industry (Țiganea, 2023). From the mid-20th century onwards, however, such regionally anchored systems increasingly gave way to processes of 'planetary urbanisation' (Brenner and Schmid, 2012), characterised by globally dispersed networks of extraction, production, logistics, and energy landscapes. Concepts such as operational landscapes and *petroleumscapes* capture this global spatialisation of production, highlighting their socio-ecological complexity and the challenge they pose to conventional understandings of territory, urbanity, and sustainability (Brenner, 2014; Brenner and Katsikis, 2020; Hein, 2022).

The transformative impact of these systems becomes particularly evident through deindustrialisation. In many heavy-industry regions, deindustrialisation began shortly after World War II, producing cascading economic, social, and cultural decline as industrial cores collapsed, though its pace and intensity varied according to geopolitical and national contexts (Wicke, Berger and Golombek, 2018, p. 1). Industrialisation and deindustrialisation often overlapped spatially and temporally, making their effects on local memory and identity deeply intertwined and insufficiently understood (High, 2003; Berger and Wicke, 2017, pp. 10–20).

Deindustrialisation disrupted formerly coherent and hierarchical production systems, leaving behind fragmented landscapes marked by brownfields, abandoned infrastructures, and shrinking communities. When interpreted through a heritage lens, however, these industrial and post-industrial macro-regions can be reframed as *constellations* of interconnected tangible and intangible elements, or 'groupings of assets' whose collective value exceeds that of individual components. This sphere can be understood as an 'inseparable sum of varied and multiple elements' (Serafini and Varagnoli, 2021, p. 78). This perspective encompasses not only sites, machinery, and architectural forms, but also labour, social practices, skills, and industrial cultures as fundamental cultural expressions. Yet such legacies are increasingly threatened by redevelopment pressures, demolition, and the loss of technical equipment, particularly where legal protection is absent, as in the Italian context under Legislative Decree 42/2004. The incremental erasure of these elements weakens broader territorial identities forged through industrial activity.

In this context, the *constellation* framework offers a valuable interpretative and operative tool, enabling the reconstruction of relationships among infrastructures, sites, knowledge, and lived experiences. By fostering value creation across architectural, urban, and territorial scales, it supports conservation and heritage enhancement beyond individual sites, raising critical questions about how such processes can be achieved in the absence of legislative support and how preserving constellations can generate new cultural values.

Constellation is not Landscape

The recognition of industrial heritage as a legitimate category of cultural heritage has generated extensive international debate. Over the past three decades, UNESCO nominations of industrial sites have progressively reshaped both theoretical frameworks and heritage practices[5]. Notably, the inscription of the Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin (France) introduced the concept of an 'evolutionary cultural landscape' (Preite, 2017), marking a significant shift in scale from the individual production site to an entire region structured by industrial logics. This approach emphasised the landscape as a 'living and evolving' entity[6], shaped over time by interconnected production systems. Similarly, the nomination of the Roșia Montană Mining Landscape (Romania) reflects the paradigm of a 'continuing cultural landscape,' where ongoing industrial and socio-economic processes highlight the dynamic nature of heritage rather than its fixation in the past[7].

This evolving conceptualisation of industrial heritage as dynamic and living landscapes finds a theoretical foundation in broader landscape theory, which deepens the understanding of landscapes as complex, autopoietic systems. Landscape can be identified as a living system because it is characterised by the three features of pattern, structure, and process. The pattern expresses the general order of relationships among a system's elements, and it is common to all landscapes. Structure, by contrast, refers to a specific landscape in which this general pattern is concretely realised through an autopoietic process. The relationship between these two fields – and this is the decisive characteristic for living systems – is in constant renewal. This process points to a new definition of the term 'life' as a descriptor of everything that can initiate an autopoietic process. Landscape remains a stable structure but can be recreated at any moment by the continual exchange of energy, matter, and information; therefore, landscapes are autopoietic.

The 'transdisciplinary landscape' concept builds upon earlier historical landscape concepts and can be understood as their logical culmination (Tress and Tress, 2001). It is built on five dimensions: spatial entity; mental entity; temporal dimension; nexus of nature and culture; complex system. While these dimensions are often described separately for methodological clarity, they coexist simultaneously within real landscapes. Although one might assume that full understanding requires the dissection of each relationship[8], Capra argues that a systems-oriented, transdisciplinary approach nonetheless brings us closer to holistic knowledge (Capra, 1996, p. 56). In line with Bohm and Peat (1987, p. 569), knowledge is not a process of linear accumulation but one of continuous transformation. Accordingly, the *landscape* concept combines physical, material and cognitive systems. However, it is neither a solely objective nor a purely subjective reality; it is both simultaneously. It can therefore be said that we are not only part of the landscape, but that the landscape is also part of us, conditioning our identity and subjective perception. In this context, the notion of a *heritage constellation* can be understood as an interpretative framework that enables the construction of relational heritage configurations composed of elements that may lack intrinsic value when considered in isolation. By applying a history-based criterion to processes of survey and analysis, significance emerges through relational interpretation. This approach is particularly relevant to industrial heritage, which encompasses both tangible and intangible remnants of production systems oriented towards maximum profit. What persists is not simply a collection of obsolete artefacts, but a structured *constellation* formed through historical, economic, social, and environmental interdependencies.

Such a framework supports the development of new heritage narratives grounded in interconnectedness rather than in the isolated value of individual objects.

The distinction is therefore not primarily ontological but epistemological: while landscape denotes a complex spatial and cultural reality produced through continuous interactions between human and natural processes, the notion of constellation describes an interpretative operation through which selected relationships among heterogeneous elements are made visible and meaningful.

Conclusions

In the historic centre of Genoa, the *constellation* perspective foregrounds a series of unresolved yet crucial questions for contemporary conservation practice: How can preservation strategies foster new forms of collective life without displacing existing communities? Does the creation of new social *constellations* imply the construction of new identities? Can creativity operate as a mediating force capable of translating local needs into spatial and cultural practices of care, rather than into mechanisms of exclusion or homogenisation?

Building on the concept of *heritage constellation* developed in the previous sections, the relationship between conservation and creativity emerges as a critical field of tension, in which constraints and opportunities coexist. When interpreted through a constellational lens, conservation practices no longer operate on isolated objects, but instead engage with networks of places, uses, and social relations, whose meaning arises from their interconnections rather than from singular architectural entities. A key implication concerns the rescaling discussed above: applying the constellation approach means reading the historic centre through relational configurations of heterogeneous elements rather than through isolated entities.

Consequently, the analytical task is to trace the connections between concepts, arguments, actors, and practices, as well as the historical questions that motivate them. Within a constellational framework, major historical, social, and political processes are reconstructed through the study of the relations between the actors involved, including those occupying secondary or marginal positions. It is precisely through these relational configurations that broader historical dynamics become intelligible (Tedeschini, 2020). In this perspective, a *heritage constellation* may be understood as a relational construct characterised by the creation of significance through relationships between elements; the capacity to articulate multi-layered values; the inclusivity of everyday uses and communities; and the ability to activate creative forms of stewardship.

In conclusion, this framework can catalyse creative and community-driven approaches to conservation, where the act of preserving is reimagined as a creative process, a 'chain of creative acts' that includes construction, transformation, adaptation, and continuous use. In contexts exposed to gentrification pressures, such as Genoa's historic centre, this approach can activate new creative forms of civic engagement, fostering community-making through shared memory and spatial appropriation. In this sense, the circularity between conservation and creativity becomes a tool for sustaining identity while also translating the evolving needs of local populations into spatial and cultural forms. Ultimately, the paper argues that heritage constellations can serve as generative infrastructures that

resist homogenisation and support the emergence of new communities and identities grounded in knowledge, participation, and care for the built environment.

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Notes

1 See both the Italian and English definitions of the word 'constellation'. Treccani Online Dictionary https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/costellazione/ (Accessed: 15.04.2025), and Britannica https://www.britannica.com/science/constellation (Accessed: 28.05.2025)

2 In 1804, Adam Müller described the astronomical 'system' as a 'foundational parable' for the connection between seemingly divergent cultural spheres; in 1861, Joseph von Held spoke of 'political constellations'; Georg Simmel referred to 'sociological,' 'teleological,' and 'historic-psychological constellations' at the end of the 19th century; and in 1902, Werner Sombart characterised the 'constellation of economic conditions' (Albrecht, 2010, pp. 104–149).

3 The interdisciplinary history of the conceptual transfer of the constellation image spans several important fields and influential figures. Notable examples include the psychological adaptations of Carl Gustav Jung; the metaphysical and artistic-philosophical interpretations of Walter Benjamin; the cultural-sociological approaches of Alfred Weber; the sociology of knowledge developed by Karl Mannheim; the linguistic-philosophical contributions of Ludwig Wittgenstein; the aesthetic theories of Theodor W. Adorno; the phenomenological perspectives of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; the post-structuralist readings of Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Italo Calvino; as well as political applications – from Munich School neorealism to the thought of Jürgen Habermas and Richard J. Bernstein – up to more recent adaptations in philosophy and intellectual history by Dieter Henrich, Martin Mulsow, and Marcelo Stamm (Albrecht, 2010, pp. 104–149).

4 The Norbotten technological megasystem (NTM) represents a transnational infrastructure corridor stretching for 400 km from the North Sea to the Baltic coast. The corridor has been developed since the late 19th century to exploit the rich mineral resources of the region (initially iron ore). The megasystem schematically comprises the iron ore mines and the mining towns of Kiruna (Kiruna Municipality) and Malmberget (Gällivare Municipality), the railway connecting the mines with the shipping harbours of Luleå (Luleå Municipality), Sweden, and Narvik, Norway, as well as the hydroelectric power plant in Porjus, which was built to electrify the railway, and the fortress system in Boden – the latter built to protect this industrial complex from foreign threats, mainly Russia (Hansson, 1998; Agatino, Sjöholm and Luciani, 2024).

5 *Guidelines on the Inscription of Specific Types of Properties on the World Heritage List,* Annex 3, UNESCO, 2008 http://whc.unesco.org/fr/PaysagesCulturels/#2 (Accessed: 01.04.2020). *The Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of World Heritage Convention*, UNESCO WHC.24/01 (https://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/, Accessed: 22.05.2025);

6 UNESCO, Nord-Pas de Calais Mining Basin, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1360/ (Accessed: 15.04.2025)

7 UNESCO, Rosia Montana Mining Landscape, https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1552 (Accessed: 15.04.2025)

8 Tress and Tress stated that the examination of geological, biological, aesthetic, historical, psychological, social, or economic dimensions in isolation is not appropriate to the landscape's complex reality. Landscape research is a future-oriented, proactive science, and therefore it is necessary to take on the challenge of looking beyond the boundaries of all disciplines involved and their own familiar ways of thinking to discover common ground between them (Tress and Tress, 2001).

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CONSERVATION AND CREATION: WHAT KIND OF PHYSICAL CONSERVATION FOR SOCIAL AND CULTURAL VITALITY?

Daniela Pittaluga
University of Genoa, Italy
daniela.pittaluga@unige.it

1. Conserving through Transformation

Material conservation is an essential condition for transmitting cultural heritage to future generations. Without the persistence of the built fabric, many of the values, memories, and testimonies associated with places would risk losing their tangible support. However, heritage conservation cannot be understood exclusively as a process of keeping material fabric unchanged. Historic buildings and urban fabrics that have survived to the present day are complex systems characterised by layers, changes of use, technological modifications, maintenance, repairs, and successive attributions of meaning. Their very persistence is often the result of continuous processes of adaptation. Contemporary design therefore intervenes in a material fabric that is already the product of a long sequence of transformations. This observation raises a fundamental question: what does conservation mean in practice? Integral and absolute conservation is difficult to achieve. Some elements may no longer be possible to conserve for technical or structural reasons; in other cases, assigning new functions inevitably requires modifications to the existing fabric. Moreover, each generation interprets heritage through its own knowledge, values, and needs and consequently redefines the ways in which it is transmitted. The issue is therefore not simply one of choosing between conservation and transformation, but of understanding how to transform without interrupting the continuity of meanings. It is within this space of negotiation that the theme of creativity emerges. If creating means producing something new, conservation may appear, at least at first sight, to be its opposite. In reality, every conservation project requires interpretation, selection, adaptation, and decision-making. It therefore necessarily contains a creative dimension. From this perspective, creativity does not coincide with the pursuit of formal originality. Rather, it is the ability to identify appropriate responses to specific conditions, establishing relationships between what already exists and contemporary needs, uses, and meanings.

Creativity is therefore not an added value of the conservation project, but one of its operational components. It broadens the range of possible interventions, while knowledge of heritage and conservation responsibility guide their evaluation.

To conserve, therefore, also means to interpret what exists, determine what should be transmitted, identify what may be transformed, and define the ways in which the new can enter into a relationship with the old.

2. Conservation, Creativity, and Use

The conservation project is first and foremost a knowledge-based process. Knowing a place involves recognising its material fabric, layers, transformations, construction tech-

niques and traces of use, as well as understanding the social and cultural relationships that have contributed to constructing the meaning of a place. There is therefore no fully automatic procedure through which it is possible to determine what should be conserved and how. Building and urban fabrics present different material, historical, functional, and social conditions. Conservation consequently requires interpretative capacity and a willingness to consider alternatives. In this sense, creativity is already embedded in the act of conservation. Knowing, interpreting, selecting, establishing relationships, integrating, and adapting are all operations that involve choices. The introduction of new elements can also form part of this process, provided that it derives from an understanding of the existing fabric rather than from its simple replacement. A useful interpretative framework is provided by the concept of lateral thinking developed by Edward De Bono (2000; 2001), understood not so much as a general theory of creativity, but as a methodological tool for broadening the range of design alternatives in conservation. From this perspective, lateral thinking makes it possible to question apparently inevitable solutions, change the way a problem is viewed, and explore possibilities that might otherwise remain excluded by an exclusively linear or prescriptive approach. Applied to conservation, it makes it possible to move beyond the binary opposition between preservation and transformation and to broaden the range of questions. The questions extend beyond "What should be conserved?" to include "What meanings need to be made understandable again? What uses can ensure the continued existence of a building? Which communities take ownership of the space? Which apparently marginal elements contribute to the identity of the place? What minimal interventions can produce significant effects?". Lateral thinking does not, however, provide criteria for determining which alternative is most appropriate from a conservation perspective. Its function is preliminary: to broaden the field of possibilities, making visible options that can subsequently be compared in light of recognised values, material constraints, use requirements, and responsibilities towards heritage. Creativity thus becomes an intentional search for alternatives within the limits established by knowledge of the heritage.

The design process can therefore be understood as a sequence of stages: understanding the existing fabric, formulating different possibilities, critically evaluating them, and finally selecting the modes of intervention that are most consistent with recognised values and contemporary conditions. Within this process, creativity and conservation are not opposed: the former broadens the field of possibilities, while the latter responsibly guides and limits their application. This perspective also leads to a reconsideration of the relationship between conservation and use. Conserving does not necessarily mean maintaining the original function. Uses can change, and the possibility of adapting a building or space to new needs is often precisely what enables its continued existence. What should be safeguarded is not necessarily the original function, but the legibility of the relationship between space, material, and use over time. Even apparently minor traces—signs, inscriptions, spatial layouts, and evidence of previous transformations—can become documents of the history of use. New uses can therefore become part of the continuity of a place without turning heritage into a neutral container.

3. Genoa: Conserving through Use and Memory

The historic centre of Genoa is the main case study for this reflection. Its complexity derives not only from the density of its architectural layers, but also from the coexistence of

different populations, practices of use, and forms of appropriation of space (Aime, 2004). Alongside the need to conserve the historic fabric, issues arise concerning residential life, the quality of public space, cultural diversity, tourist pressure, social vulnerability, and the continuity of local communities. The question is therefore not simply how to conserve individual buildings, but how to maintain the vitality of the urban system of which they are part.

The analysis of the two selected case studies is based on a review of the existing literature, project documentation, and, in part, field research.

The Giardini Luzzati (Fig. 1) provide a significant example of the relationship between heritage, use, and social reappropriation (Pittaluga and Montoli, 2026). For a long time perceived as a residual and problematic space within the historic centre, the area has gradually been reactivated through cultural, recreational, and social initiatives promoted by the association "Il Ce.Sto" and other associative and institutional actors. This process has encompassed both the gardens and the archaeological area within them, which had previously been closed off and difficult to access but has gradually been opened to the public and transformed into a venue for cultural activities, including talks, exhibitions, and concerts.

The transformation has therefore concerned not only the physical configuration of the space, but also its accessibility and uses: an area perceived as marginal has become a place of collective activity, accommodating different functions and communities. The area dedicated to Mauro Rostagno further illustrates how public space can incorporate new layers of civic memory, linking contemporary uses to the remembrance of the struggle against organised crime (Manna, 2019).

A similar process of reappropriation can be observed in nearby Piazza Don Gallo, where physical interventions have been accompanied by social initiatives promoted through collaboration between Third Sector organisations, associations, and local institutions. Between 2020 and 2022, the "Voce del verbo custodire" project supported a range of activities aimed at local residents, including language courses, assistance with administrative procedures and job searches, book-crossing, workshops for children, cultural



FIG. 1. Giardini Luzzati, Genoa. The archaeological area and public gardens as a space of social reappropriation, cultural activities, and the integration of heritage into contemporary urban life (Source: Il Ce.sto, 2025).

events, and initiatives to activate public space. These activities were accompanied by the permanent installation Lighting #1, designed around the tree planted in 2014 in memory of Don Andrea Gallo (Fig. 2). Combining seating and lighting, the installation provides opportunities for social interaction and gives the square a recognisable focal point[1]. The case thus illustrates how a small-scale intervention can connect the material configuration of a public space with collective memory and everyday social practices.

The two cases are not considered examples of architectural conservation in the narrow sense, nor are they intended to demonstrate a direct causal relationship between social activation and improvements in the physical condition of heritage. Rather, they provide an opportunity to examine how physical interventions, sustained uses, and processes of appropriation can contribute to the recognition and reinterpretation of historic places. In the Giardini Luzzati, the reactivation of an archaeological area and its integration into contemporary urban life illustrate the potential relationship between accessibility, use, and the renewed significance of heritage. In Piazza Don Gallo, the combination of a permanent physical intervention, civic memory, and social initiatives highlights how the identity of a place can be reinforced through everyday practices.

These experiences suggest that the conservation of historic places cannot be considered independently of the social relationships through which they are experienced and recognised. Material fabric provides the physical support for memory and interpretation, while contemporary uses can help maintain the relevance of heritage within collective life. Social activation, however, does not automatically ensure material conservation. Its contribution depends on whether new uses remain compatible with heritage values and whether this sense of responsibility leads to appropriate management, maintenance, and care. The cases therefore support an understanding of conservation as a process connecting material permanence, spatial transformation, and the continuity of cultural meanings, while also highlighting the need to distinguish social vitality from the demonstrable physical conservation of the built fabric.

4. Conserving for a Living Community

The relationship between conservation and social vitality inevitably leads to the question of participation. Contemporary reflection on heritage has progressively expanded the role attributed to local communities, recognising that cultural value does not belong exclusively to the material object, but is also constructed through the relationships that people establish with it. Participation should not, however, be reduced to consultation at the end of the design process. Community involvement can be more effective when it begins during the stages of knowledge-building and problem definition, contributing to the identification of priorities and, where possible, to the development of intervention strategies.

Research conducted by the author in several contexts in the Province of Genoa suggest the value of this approach (Pittaluga and Nanni, 2016; Molinari and Pittaluga, 2016).

Participation makes it possible to recognise values that may remain invisible to an exclusively technical or disciplinary reading and to understand how inhabitants attribute meaning to apparently marginal places.

Understanding the relationship between conservation and social vitality requires a dialogue between conservation theory and critical heritage studies. While conservation theory has traditionally focused on the material fabric and the transmission of histor-

ical, aesthetic and documentary values, critical heritage studies have highlighted the role of social practices, collective memories and cultural interpretations in the construction of heritage significance (Muñoz Viñas, 2005; Smith, 2006). These perspectives should not be understood as opposing approaches, but as interdependent dimensions of the same process. This integrated perspective is particularly relevant when tangible and intangible heritage are considered in their mutual relationships; the conservation of these complex relationships must be addressed in close collaboration with local communities (Pittaluga, 2019). The challenge is therefore not simply to preserve material fabric or sustain social practices independently, but to understand how physical interventions, cultural meanings, and community relationships can be addressed together within the conservation process.



FIG. 2. Piazza Don Gallo, Genoa. The integration of physical interventions, collective memory, and community initiatives in support of public space vitality and social interaction (Source: https://smart.comune.genova.it, 2021).

The material fabric provides continuity through which heritage can be experienced and interpreted, while social practices and collective meanings contribute to determining why that fabric matters and how it continues to be recognised. The challenge for conservation is therefore to translate this plurality of values into responsible design decisions. This requires not only recognising the different values associated with heritage, but also critically assessing them and understanding how they inform conservation priorities and intervention choices (Mason, 2002). The aim is to balance the preservation of material evidence with the continuity of uses, relationships, and meanings (Avrami *et al.*, 2000; Australia ICOMOS, 2013).

At the same time, participation should not be idealised. The social value of heritage is neither fixed nor necessarily shared by all stakeholders; its identification and interpretation may involve tensions, competing interests, and dilemmas (Jones, 2017). Not all stakeholders have the same degree of influence, representative capacity, or resources. The most vulnerable communities may in fact be those that face the greatest difficulties in being heard. For this reason, participation must be accompanied by professional expertise, mediation skills, and institutional responsibility.

A genuinely people-centred approach to conservation should therefore consider heritage as part of an inhabited urban system. Vitality depends on whether different groups can continue to use historic spaces and recognise them as their own. This aspect is particularly relevant in Genoa's historic centre, where permanent residents coexist with temporary residents, students, commercial activities, tourism, and new urban economies. The plurality of uses can constitute a resource, but if excessively concentrated they may weaken the social continuity of the neighbourhood. Physical conservation and social vitality

are therefore mutually dependent: material fabric needs to be cared for but care itself requires a community that recognises that material as meaningful.

Social participation can also contribute more directly to the physical conservation of heritage. By fostering shared responsibility, facilitating the identification of maintenance needs, and mobilising local resources, community involvement can help create the proper conditions for the continued care of historic places. Research on community-based maintenance in Cuenca, Ecuador, documents improvements in the physical conditions of historic buildings associated with collective conservation activities (Achig-Balarezo and Tenze, 2019). However, this relationship is not automatic: social engagement contributes to material conservation when it is translated into sustained practices of care, appropriate management arrangements, and technically sound interventions.

5. Small-Scale Transformations and New Meanings

Finally, the cases analysed suggest the importance of small-scale actions. In a complex historic fabric, transformation does not always need to take the form of a single large-scale project. Small interventions can improve the usability of spaces, introduce new uses, create opportunities for interaction, and activate gradual processes of appropriation. Their value does not necessarily depend on their individual architectural significance. A garden, square, courtyard, facility, or temporary device can acquire greater importance when integrated into a broader strategy of urban care. Creativity therefore also consists in recognising the potential of apparently marginal elements and in establishing connections between small-scale interventions. This approach makes it possible to understand design not as a completed act, but as the beginning of an open-ended process in which uses and meanings can continue to evolve.

There remains, however, a risk that reinterpretation may produce simplifications or erasures. A new intervention may read the history of a place superficially, impose values that are extraneous to the context, or turn heritage into a scenography backdrop for contemporary functions. Similarly, although digital technologies offer important opportunities for knowledge and transmission, they cannot replace a critical understanding of the material fabric and its context. Creativity must therefore be accompanied by interpretative responsibility. The new can be meaningful only if it keeps open the possibility of understanding what precedes it. In this sense, broadening the range of design alternatives does not mean weakening the constraints of conservation, but making more deliberate the process by which those constraints are interpreted and translated into conscious design decisions.

6. Conclusions: Conservation as Responsible Creation

The initial question—what kind of physical conservation is necessary to ensure social and cultural vitality?—leads to an answer that moves beyond the opposition between conservation and transformation. Conservation is necessary because without the persistence of material fabric, the tangible support of memories and meanings is lost. However, material fabric alone does not guarantee the vitality of heritage. A building or urban space may survive physically while simultaneously losing its capacity to be recognised, used, and interpreted. The question therefore becomes: what values need to be conserved so

that material fabric can continue to support social and cultural life? Conservation should consequently be understood as a dynamic process in which care for material fabric is accompanied by care for uses, relationships, and meanings. The Giardini Luzzati and Piazza Don Gallo demonstrate, in different ways, how this relationship can produce forms of continuity between heritage and contemporary life. They do not demonstrate that social activation is itself conservation, but rather show how physical permanence acquires greater cultural effectiveness when supported by practices of use, memory, and processes of reappropriation. From this perspective, creativity is not the opposite of conservation. Rather, it is one of the conditions through which conservation can address the complexity of the present. To conserve means to decide what should be transmitted, interpret traces, establish relationships between different times, introduce compatible uses, and create the conditions for future generations to recognise heritage as part of their own experience. Conservation can therefore be understood as a creative act, not because it must necessarily produce new forms, but because it constructs a new and conscious relationship between past, present, and future. At the same time, creation can acquire a conservation value when it does not merely impose a new layer on heritage, but contributes to its care, the continuity of its meanings, and its capacity to generate new forms of belonging. The issue is therefore not to choose between old and new, between conservation and creation, but to establish the conditions for a conscious integration of conservation and creation.

Conservation does not consist in maintaining an original meaning unchanged, but in enabling the persistence and legibility of a plurality of meanings. From this perspective, heritage is neither an immobile object nor a material fabric available for unrestricted transformation: it is a living system of materiality, memory, use, and social relationships.

Creativity thus becomes meaningful to conservation when it brings together the persistence of material fabric, the plurality of meanings, social practices, and responsibility towards the future.

Physical conservation thus becomes truly meaningful when it enables heritage to continue to be inhabited, interpreted, and transformed without losing its recognisability. It is in the capacity to maintain this continuity while simultaneously accepting change that conservation and creation can meet.

Notes

1 See also: 'Disegni di luce nel centro storico di Genova, si accende piazza Don Gallo' (2021); URP-Ufficio Relazioni col Pubblico WEB NEWS. (2013; 2014).

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BEYOND THE THRESHOLD: CREATIVE CONSERVATION AND REUSE OF HETEROTOPIC SPACES. JESUIT COLLEGES AS DEVICES FOR URBAN REGENERATION

Martina Porcu
University of Cagliari, Italy
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
martina.porcu@uniroma1.it

Introduction. Conservation/Creation as a Critical Project Framework

In the contemporary discourse on cultural heritage, the binary opposition between preservation and creation has evolved into a dynamic tension, thereby challenging conventional categories within the discipline of restoration. Recent experiences in the field of architectural and urban design demonstrate that conservation can no longer be regarded exclusively as an operation of material protection or as a process aimed at neutralising the effects of time. Instead, it must evolve into a critical, interpretative, and transformative practice, capable of reintroducing the values, functions, and potential of historical spaces into circulation.

The international workshop, the theme of which was *Conservation/Creation: The Contribution of Conservation to Urban Futures*, held in Genoa from 10 to 13 September 2024, represented a significant opportunity for collective reflection on these issues, starting from concrete case studies addressed at various scales and employing transdisciplinary approaches. The comparison of design practices, theories, and ways of using spaces made it possible to outline multiple perspectives on the notion of conservation. This enabled the work to move beyond monolithic views and embrace a processual, multifaceted and systemic dimension. Heritage, therefore, must be considered a dynamic and living cultural infrastructure, an open system in which memory and transformation, preservation and invention, permanence and use are constantly intertwined.

In this perspective, conservation assumes an active role in the construction of the contemporary project, no longer being regarded as a premise or an obstacle. It becomes part of the chain of creative acts that accompanies the entire life cycle of architecture: from construction to abandonment, from oblivion to reuse. The project concerning the historic building can no longer be viewed as a technical exercise of restoration or a simple re-presentation of past forms; rather, it must consciously assume its temporal, dialogic and interrelated dimension.

This contribution is situated within this theoretical and operative framework, with a specific category of complex historical architecture – the Jesuit colleges – serving as the field of investigation. These edifices emerged in the modern era as a component of meticulous urban, pedagogical, and religious strategies, which profoundly shaped the urban fabric of European cities, leaving an architectural and symbolic legacy that endures to the present day. These locations functioned as both training and control centres, educational institutions and evangelisation sites, as well as venues of cultural production and pedagogical experimentation. They are configured as ante litteram heterotopic devices: other spaces, separate and yet profoundly interconnected with the city, capable of reflecting, altering, and occasionally transforming the spatial, social, and symbolic logic of their context.

Across Europe, the reuse of large historical complexes – former religious institutions, charitable buildings, and educational architectures – has increasingly been framed as an opportunity for urban regeneration. While certain interventions have succeeded in reactivating these structures as cultural and civic infrastructures, others reveal persistent ambiguities, particularly in the relationship between conservation, functional adaptation, and the interpretation of historical stratifications. Rather than offering an exhaustive overview of such experiences, this paper focuses on selected paradigmatic situations in which reuse exposes unresolved tensions between preservation, transformation, and contemporary urban demands.

These examples suggest that the functional reactivation of these architectures should not be conceptualised as simple functional adaptation, but rather as an opportunity for a critical and generative reinterpretation of heritage, in which the cultural, educational and social dimensions intertwine with the design dimension.

This essay is informed by ongoing research on Jesuit architecture in Europe, with a particular focus on Italy and France. The objective is to explore the potential of Jesuit colleges as a site for rethinking the concept of conservation. The question posed is: what design strategies are currently available that can restore meaning to these spaces without reducing them to functional containers or museumified simulacra? How can design interpret and revive the historical, typological, and symbolic stratifications of such architectures? The paper explores how contemporary communities can be involved in the collective re-signification of these places.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate how the reuse of Jesuit colleges can serve as a unique experimental setting for implementing a conception of conservation as a creative act. In this perspective, creation should not be understood as an act of formal invention opposed to conservation, but as an interpretative and ethical decision embedded within the conservation process itself. Creation occurs in the selection of what is preserved, transformed, or left unfinished; in the construction of narratives that give meaning to stratified spaces; and in the opening of historical architectures to new forms of use and collective appropriation. Rather than producing new forms, creative conservation operates through acts of critical reading, mediation, and re-signification, positioning the project as a responsible intervention within a temporal continuum.

This is achieved by undertaking a critical analysis of the case studies addressed during the workshop and by comparing them with other international experiences. The crux of the issue is not an opposition between creation and conservation, but rather an acknowledgement of their symbiotic relationship, with the understanding that every intervention on heritage constitutes a design gesture and a cultural, political, and ethical stance in itself.

The Genoa workshop did not merely provide a contextual background for this research but acted as a critical testing ground for its theoretical framework. The direct engagement with complex and unresolved architectural situations – such as the Albergo dei Poveri and the Loggia dei Banchi – exposed the tensions between conservation and creation as concrete, situated practices rather than abstract disciplinary categories. In this sense, the workshop functioned as an operative lens through which the concept of creative conservation was questioned, refined, and confronted with real conditions of incompleteness, institutional fragmentation, and temporal layering.

Creative Conservation and Heterotopic Spaces: From Theory to Design Responsibility

The concept of conservation as a creative act necessitates a re-evaluation of the theoretical and operational assumptions that have historically guided interventions on the historic built environment. The project under discussion is not concerned with the logic of stylistic restoration, which aims to recreate an ideal formal unity, nor with that of pure conservation, which focuses exclusively on the physical preservation of the building. Rather, it is a vision that assumes the project as a tool for critical interrogation of the past and opening towards the future, capable of generating new forms of meaning, use, and belonging starting from the inherited material.

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the concept of heritage as a *common good and a space of collective identity* (Magnaghi, 2010) came to the fore. This development precipitated a profound transformation in conservation practice. The process has progressively been rethought and is now regarded as dynamic and creative. This rethinking acknowledges the value of historical and cultural stratifications, the complexity of meanings that are inherent in places, and the active role that heritage can play in the contemporary urban and social fabric (Jokilehto, 1999; Feilden, 2003).

This perspective is informed by critical theories that extend the concept of the monument beyond its traditional static and unchanging nature, emphasising its dialogical and relational dimensions. Alois Riegl's theory of values is particularly relevant in this context, as it introduces the concept of *antiquity* by emphasising the significance of the history of the building, with all its transformations, as a heritage to be valorised and not erased.

Concomitantly, the contemporary approach to heritage, drawing further inspiration from the reflections of Bernard Rudofsky and Peter Zumthor, values architecture as a cultural and social text to be interpreted through design practices capable of mediating between memory and contemporaneity. In the spirit of Rudofsky's reflections, Zumthor proposes a methodological approach to the interpretation of space, centred on bodily experience and the atmosphere (Zumthor, 1998; Rudofsky, 1964).

The conservation project is configured as a cultural and creative act, capable of regenerating meaning and functions through a fruitful dialogue between past and future. In this context, the project does not entail the slavish reproduction of original forms or uses; rather, it is concerned with the activation of processes of re-signification that relate the history and materiality of the building to contemporary needs. The project thus valorises the heritage as a living resource integrated into the present.

In this new paradigm, creativity is not reduced to a mere formal exercise or a simple aesthetic innovation but is configured as an act of responsibility. Interventions on historic assets require critical, conscious and reflective choices regarding which elements to preserve, which to transform, and how to introduce innovation without compromising historical and cultural identities.

As posited by Alberto Magnaghi, this phenomenon is to be considered a *transformation ethic* (Magnaghi, 2005), a process that acknowledges the social and cultural value of buildings, thereby promoting their capacity to persist as meaningful and vital elements within communities. In this sense, design creativity can be understood as a continuous negotiation between memory and innovation, between conservation and renewal.

The category of heterotopia, as expounded by Michel Foucault (1967), serves as a pertinent theoretical instrument for the interpretation of the dialectic between conservation and transformation in the design of historical spaces. Heterotopias are defined as real



FIG. 1. Cagliari, Castello district. Aerial view of the Jesuit complex of Santa Croce, now the Faculty of Architecture.

places that, while forming part of the urban fabric, are configured as other, in that they are characterised by rules, functions and spatial relations in tension with dominant normative structures.

Such spaces, it can be argued, condense complex cultural and social dynamics, assuming an ambivalent nature: they are simultaneously devices of exclusion and inclusion, separation and exchange, preservation and innovation. Institutions such as asylums, prisons, cemeteries, gardens, libraries and theatres exemplify this liminal condition, as architectures designed to contain surplus or marginal practices and knowledge, while maintaining a structural link with the city.

From this standpoint, the implementation of a heterotopic approach to architectural conservation is indicative of an acknowledgement of the material, symbolic and functional stratification of historical spaces. The project is configured as an interpretative and critical act, capable of interpreting and reformulating spatial devices in the light of their inherent tensions.

Jesuit colleges, as complex and highly characterised architectural typologies, serve as paradigmatic cases. The complexes were distinguished by an articulated internal structure (classrooms, chapels, residences, courtyards, refectories, gardens) and by a strategic location in the urban context. These complexes pursued a dual function: on the one hand, disciplinary and educational; on the other, symbolic and representative.

Despite their inward-looking layout, they present elements of openness towards the city, through spatial and institutional devices (churches open for worship, libraries, theatres, public activities) that act as intermediaries between private and public spheres. The specific heterotopic quality of these complexes is constituted precisely by this functional and symbolic ambiguity.

Consequently, contemporary intervention in these architectural complexes requires a critical rethinking of the methodologies applied to their conservation. This rethinking must go beyond material recovery; it must also address the plurality of meanings and potentialities inherent in these places. In this sense, their regeneration must take account of their historical role, as well as their capacity to activate new imaginaries and practices in the contemporary urban space.

The Collegio di Santa Croce in Cagliari is an exemplary case of heterotopic space, in which historical stratification and spatial articulation reflect the tensions between control and openness, between sacred and profane (Fig. 1).

In a different but complementary urban and institutional context, similar tensions between conservation, governance, and reuse emerge in Genoa.

The complex was founded in 1564 at the behest of Archbishop Antonio Parragues de Castillejo and is located in the Castello district. The complex comprises the church

of Santa Croce, formerly a Jewish synagogue, and several adjacent dwellings. The architect Giandomenico da Verdiana initiated the construction project in the years between 1565 and 1569, whereas the 18th-century extension was entrusted to the architect Antonio Felice De Vincenti, who designed the east wing and the portico joining the two buildings, with the project partially completed in 1773.



FIG. 2. Cagliari, Santa Croce Jesuit complex. Entrance hall from Via Corte d'Appello (photo Cédric Dasesson).

The complex is divided into distinct yet interconnected functional spaces, including the church of Santa Croce, the college proper, the cloisters, and the portico connecting the two wings. This spatial organisation reflects the desire to create an educational and spiritual environment that is both separate and integrated into the urban fabric. The baroque façade of the church, with its portal surmounted by the IHS christogram (the emblem of the Society of Jesus) and the porticoed atrium with Doric columns, serves to affirm the symbolic and visible authority of the institution (Fig. 2). Following the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, the complex was transferred to the state and underwent several transformations, becoming the seat of the Royal Printing House, the Royal Archives, the Royal Audience and the Court of Appeal. In 1941, the University of Cagliari acquired the building, which today houses the Faculty of Architecture (Fig.3).

Jesuit Colleges as Urban Devices: Permanence, Transformation and Thresholds

The architectural design of Jesuit colleges is characterised by a coherent and distinctive typological model, originating in the Counter-Reformation era as a strategic instrument for the dissemination of knowledge, the regulation of bodies, and the organisation of urban space. This design integrates functionality and symbolism, contributing to the establishment of a distinct architectural style. The architectural typology of Jesuit buildings is typically characterised by a functional tripartition, comprising the church, the spiritual and often urban nucleus; the *scholarum area*, dedicated to scholastic and didactic activities; and the *collegii area*, reserved for the life of the Jesuit community. Both of these latter areas developed around porticoed courtyards, where the open space assumes a cardinal role as a place of distribution, relationship and representation, and as an identity device for the entire complex (AA. VV., 1990).

Despite being conceptualised as a model capable of adaptation to diverse geographical and cultural contexts, the Jesuit college has, over time, developed a distinctive architectural character, characterised by a harmonious balance between compositional rationality and spiritual tension, between functional requirements and universal aspirations. The clarity of distribution, the internal hierarchy of routes and the centrality of spaces such as classrooms, corridors and courtyards are interwoven with symbolic devices, transforming the complex into an ordered, pedagogical and representative microcosm.



FIG. 3. Cagliari, Santa Croce Jesuit complex. Chronology of structures.

In contrast to earlier convent structures, which were organised around the cloister and devoted to seclusion, the Jesuit college is configured as an educational apparatus open to the city. It was conceived to welcome, instruct and orientate its users. The strength of the proposal lies in its ability to coherently articulate different functions, actively interacting with the urban fabric and contributing to the construction of collective identity (Fig. 4).

This paper contributes to the ongoing debate on architectural conservation by framing creative conservation as a situated, critical and project-oriented practice, capable of activating historical heterotopic spaces beyond the opposition between preservation and transformation.

An emblematic case is represented by Genoa, the site of the international workshop on the theme of Conservation/Creation. In recent decades, Genoa has undergone a profound process of urban and social transformation, centred on the symbolic and physical reconnection between the port and the historic centre, and on the reactivation of its architectural heritage.

The renewal of the city was initiated through an articulated programme of redevelopment of the historic port, accompanied by the restoration of valuable buildings and the recovery of strategic public spaces, capable of re-establishing continuity between the port area and the consolidated fabric. This process has had a profound impact on the relationship between the community and its heritage, leading to a revitalisation of urban life and a resurgence in tourism. This resurgence has underscored Genoa's historical significance within the broader context of the European Grand Tour. However, the process of regeneration has not been without its critics. The interventions of the 1970s, although occurring in a context of early recognition of the value of the historical centre (since the 1950s), resulted in demolitions and replacements perceived as extraneous, thus marking the fragility of a still unstable balance between conservation and transformation.

The case of the Albergo dei Poveri, a large 17th-century complex that represents a paradigmatic example of the management and design complexity associated with the conservation and reuse of historic architecture (Fig. 5), is set in this context. The edifice, characterised by its multi-layered nature and a history of successive interventions,

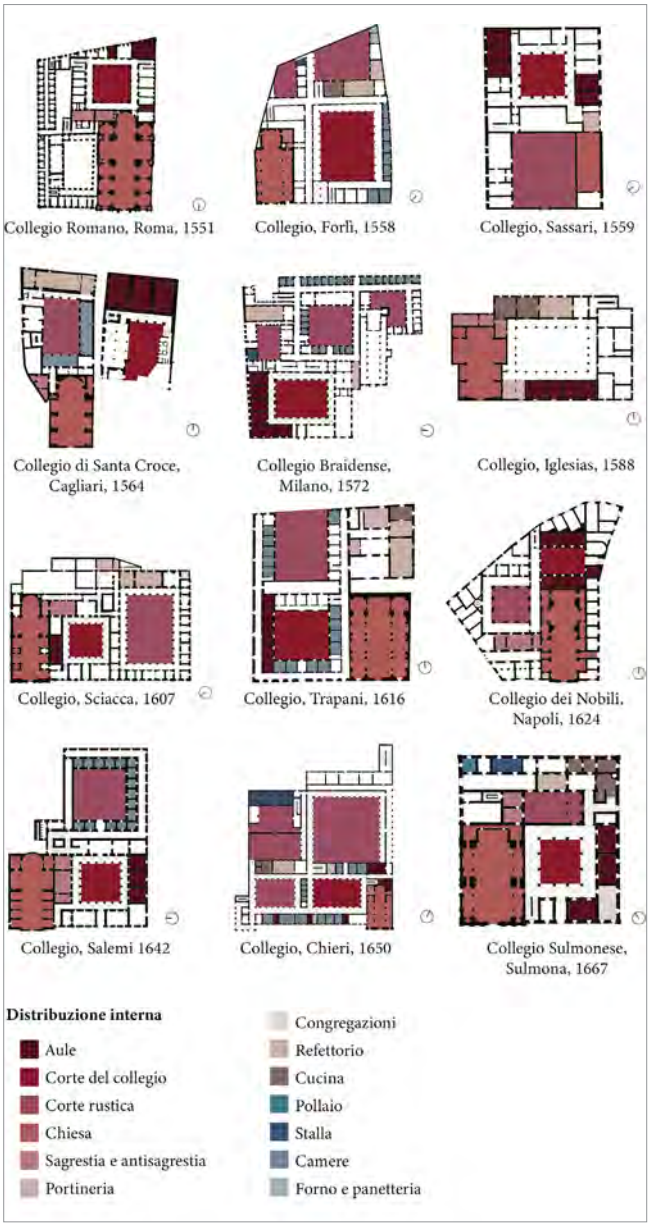


FIG. 4. Cagliari, Santa Croce Jesuit complex. Synoptic overview of the spatial distribution of the main rooms characterising the ground floor of a Jesuit college (graphic elaboration by C. Lombardo, E. Marini, R. Saba).

sustained damage during the Second World War. It underwent a period of fragmented administration, being divided between the original institute, the University of Genoa, and the Archbishop's Curia. Despite the university's efforts to address specific areas of the complex with targeted interventions (Fig. 6), significant portions of the site remain in a state of neglect (Fig. 7). This condition emphasises the need for a coordinated and forward-looking strategy capable of integrating protection, accessibility and new functionality.

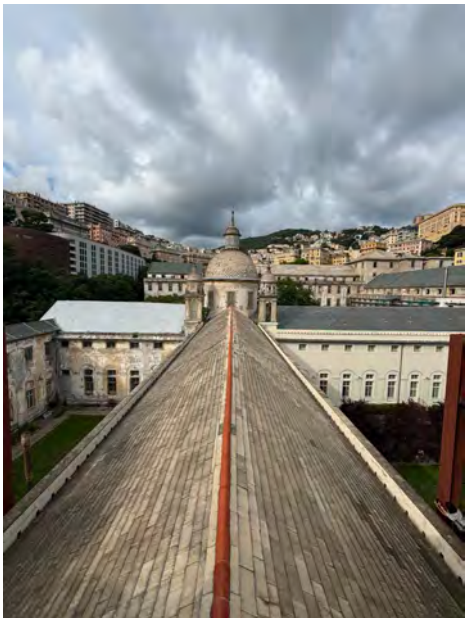


FIG. 5. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri. Axial view of the roof: in the foreground, the dome of the central church; in the background, the contrast between the restored wing (right) and the wing still in a state of decay (left).

Within this framework, the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa can be interpreted not as a conventional case study, but as an analogical device through which the tensions inherent in creative conservation become visible.

In this framework, the architectural project is not understood as a definitive formal outcome, but as an interpretative and exploratory device, capable of testing hypotheses on time, use and meaning within stratified urban contexts.

The vast 17th-century complex embodies a condition of permanent incompleteness: a monumental architecture conceived as a total institution, later damaged, fragmented and subjected to overlapping and often conflicting forms of governance. Its current state – suspended between abandonment, partial reuse and institutional uncertainty – reveals a critical threshold where conservation can no longer rely solely on material repair or functional assignment.

The Albergo dei Poveri thus operates as a contemporary heterotopic space, where multiple temporalities, meanings, and expectations coexist without full reconciliation. In this sense, creation does not coincide with the introduction of a new form, but with the capacity to interpret this unresolved condition as a design resource, acknowledging incompleteness, conflict, and latency as active components of the project.

In the same urban scenario, the Loggia dei Banchi is notable for the recent excavations conducted by the Soprintendenza, which have revealed a segment of the city's medieval and Roman fabric believed to have been lost (Fig. 8). The Loggia is located in the heart of the historic centre, behind the ancient Ripa Maris, and thus occupies a pivotal position as a nerve centre of merchant and republican Genoa.

These findings, anticipated by historical and urban-planning studies, offer an extraordinary opportunity to rethink the relationship between material memory and design, going beyond the logic of a simple exhibition space. The Loggia has the potential to be transformed into an urban portal, a site of interpretation and narration, capable of establishing a connection between the historic city and the collective imagination. From this standpoint, the site is proposed to function as a cultural hub and generative space, where memory becomes a living and shared praxis (Musso, 2023).

The contemporary challenge is to ensure that the *rediscovered Middle Ages* are not consigned to the status of a museum object or a specialised find; rather, it is imperative to recognise this period as living material for contemporary design, representing an opportunity to cultivate new relationships between stratification, creativity and citizenship. The case of the Loggia powerfully exemplifies the generative potential of conservation un-

derstood as cultural rewriting, capable of giving meaning to the past in the present.

Rather than offering models to be replicated, the cases discussed underline how conservation becomes a critical practice when it confronts unresolved conditions, institutional fragmentation and temporal discontinuity. In this sense, both the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa and the Collegio di Santa Croce in Cagliari reveal conservation as a project of thresholds, where memory, use and meaning are continuously negotiated rather than stabilised. These architectures do not call for definitive solutions, but for responsible design actions capable of working within complexity and incompleteness.



FIG. 6. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri. The new main hall, formerly a women's refectory, features an installation recalling the shape of a ship's deck, in homage to the city's seafaring vocation.

Conclusions. Creative Conservation as a Situated Practice: Reflections from the Genoese Workshop

The concept of conservation is not merely a technical or normative operation; rather, it is now configured as a cultural, critical and generative act. The fundamental notion of conservation, as a project of meaning, necessitates a re-evaluation. This re-evaluation should be grounded in the recognition of the stratified value of historical spaces. It should not be limited to preserving their image but rather should be characterised by the activation of their potential through transformative practices.

Within this theoretical framework, Jesuit colleges, with their symbolic density and current marginality, are considered a conceptual testbed. Their long-term processes of transformation, reuse, and functional discontinuity offer a laboratory through which to observe how conservation can operate as a creative and interpretative practice. This perspective does not propose Jesuit colleges as models, but as analytical devices that inform the reading of other large disused historical complexes.

The analytical framework also informed the approach adopted during the Genoese workshop, where the Albergo dei Poveri was explored as a comparable heterotopic structure, characterised by stratification, institutional memory, and unresolved potential. The concept of architectural heterotopia, exemplified by Jesuit colleges, has emerged as a significant site for empirical testing of this theoretical framework. These places, characterised by rich history and functional discontinuity, raise pressing questions regarding the project's responsibility towards time, matter, and communities.

The reuse of Jesuit colleges, as evidenced by the case of Cagliari, has demonstrated the potential of the project to serve as a catalyst for cultural and civic revitalisation. This process restores centrality to previously marginalised places, circumventing the perils of musealisation or functional obsolescence.



FIG. 7. Genoa, Albergo dei Poveri. A vaulted corridor documents the degraded condition and the incompleteness of the recovery process, highlighting the material stratification and the urgency of an integrated design strategy.

A fundamental objective of the Genoese workshop, and of this essay, was to overcome the dichotomy between conservation and creation. These are not oppositional forces but components of a unified design process. Creative conservation does not entail the annulment of the past; rather, it signifies the active listening and conscious rewriting of the past in dialogue with the present.

Interventions combined respect for pre-existing buildings with advanced technological solutions for conserving artworks, using materials such as wenge to mediate the dialogue between old and new. The incorporation of works by local artists reinforced the connection between heritage and community. Success was facilitated by the active involvement of the public through educational initiatives and scheduled openings, transforming the museum into a living, participatory space.

These cases demonstrate how the valorisation of significant architectural heritage can generate new urban and cultural centralities, where conservation and creation intertwine in a continuous process of regeneration. This perspective is central to the cases of Santa Croce in Cagliari and the Albergo dei Poveri in Genoa, where reuse is inseparable from memory and the production of meaning in the present.

In this sense, any alteration to a historic building must be regarded as a design intervention, constituting an intentional gesture that requires critical awareness, methodological openness, and advanced skills of reading and mediation. The possibility of combining memory and innovation without falling into either conservative crystallisation or total replacement emerges as a central issue in contemporary conservation practice. Rather than opposing past and present, such an approach promotes a critical continuity capable of generating new meanings from historical stratifications.

This perspective underscores the importance of a situated approach to conservation, highlighting that there are no universally applicable models, but rather processes that must be continually adapted, starting from the material, social, and symbolic specificities of each context. In this framework, the engagement of local communities proves to be decisive: not merely as users of transformed spaces, but as active co-producers of meaning, involved in the construction of the identity and future of places.

From this standpoint, the concept of reuse cannot be confined to a purely functional inquiry. Instead, it calls for a broader examination of the cultural, ethical, and political dimensions inherent in the project. The reuse of historical architecture implies more than the attribution of a new function; it requires a reinterpretation of its history and an un-

derstanding of its settlement, educational, and urban logics, with the aim of reintegrating it into the contemporary fabric.

The discussions developed during the Genoese workshop highlighted how the reuse of disused heterotopic spaces cannot rely on abstract or universally transferable solutions. Conservation emerged instead as a situated and experimental practice, grounded in the material, social, and symbolic conditions of each specific context. Stratification was not understood as an obstacle, but as a generative condition, capable of orienting design choices without predetermining their outcomes. In this sense, creative conservation operates through reversible, open-ended, and incremental interventions, allowing historical spaces to remain receptive to future transformations while maintaining memory as an active component of the project.



FIG. 8. Genoa. Loggia dei Banchi. View of the archaeological excavations.

A further significant aspect concerns the educational value of conservation practices. Intervening in a historic building entails the construction of narratives, the formulation of questions, and the development of critical perspectives on the past. In this respect, former educational architectures – such as Jesuit colleges – retain the potential to evolve into laboratories for a renewed heritage pedagogy, capable of fostering historical awareness and design consciousness.

The reuse of these spaces may also contribute to the emergence of new forms of citizenship, in which care for heritage becomes part of a shared public ethic. The project thus exceeds the scale of the architectural gesture, assuming the character of a collective responsibility, capable of generating meaning, cohesion, and a sense of belonging.

In light of these considerations, conservation may be redefined as a critical practice, able to act on the consolidated city not only through protection, but also of conscious transformation. This implies abandoning disciplinary dogmatism in favour of dialogic and interactive processes, valorising the latent potential of historical spaces, and introducing design devices capable of mediating between history and contemporaneity, permanence and change.

This reflection ultimately contributes to a broader perspective that may be defined as post-patrimonial: a project culture not solely focused on preserving what exists, but on generating the future through memory. This approach rejects the sacralisation of the past while recognising the value of remembrance, and draws on the complexity of historical spaces as a resource for addressing contemporary ecological, social, and cultural challenges.

From this perspective, the Genoese experience confirms that conservation is not a neutral act, but a conscious and creative positioning within a complex cultural and urban ecosystem. Rather than relying on iconic or spectacular gestures, regeneration processes

are grounded in careful mediation between permanence and change, memory and contemporary use. Conservation thus emerges as an ethical and creative practice, capable of producing new meanings and forms of urban centrality while remaining accountable to history, communities, and future generations.

In essence, conservation can be understood as an act of taking a position. This does not entail the imposition of a single truth, but the assumption of responsibility towards history, communities, and future generations – a responsibility that reveals the deeply political and creative dimensions of the conservation project.

The intervention on a historic building can no longer be conceived as an isolated gesture, but rather as part of a complex cultural and urban ecosystem, within which the sense of the past is continuously regenerated through dialogue with the present and in tension with the future.

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WRITTEN IN STONE. GENOVA'S HISTORIC CENTRE AND AUCKLAND VOLCANIC FIELD: A DIALOGUE ON CONSERVATION BETWEEN OUTSTANDING HISTORIC URBAN LANDSCAPES

Candida Rolla
University of Auckland, New Zealand
candida.rolla@gmail.com

International Approaches: World Heritage, Sustainable Development and Cultural Interweaving

This paper analyses the themes explored at the IX EAAE Conservation Network Workshop 2024, in Genova, *'Conservation/Creation: The Contribution of Conservation to Urban Futures'* by interweaving international heritage discourses about two widely separated historic urban landscapes: *'Genoa: Le Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli'* World Heritage-listed property (UNESCO, 2006), and *'Auckland Volcanic Fields'* proposed cultural landscape on the New Zealand UNESCO World Heritage Tentative List (DoC, 2006).

Although they stand apart in culture, geography and epistemology, the challenges these sites face in identifying, restoring and managing their most valuable historic urban landscapes reveal shared international heritage discourses and practices. Both contexts demonstrate how the overarching discipline of conservation has evolved over time towards a holistic, values-based, and community-centred approach, increasingly endorsed by global frameworks such as the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and Centre (WHC).

The workshop brought together diverse international expertise in dialogue, highlighting how distant sites can illuminate common everyday pressures, aspirations, and responsibilities within contemporary cultural heritage management as part of a broader, resonant movement to rethink conservation as an active, generative force shaping the urban future. The physical setting, Genova's historic centre, key attribute of the World Heritage nomination, contributed narratives to the debate and ignited a dynamic conversation among participants advocating for community building, inclusivity, and participatory approaches as central tools for managing both visible and invisible cultural layers. Correlating the specific challenges identified *in situ* led to a shared conclusion: conservation *must* be reimagined as a catalyst for creation.

The tours (here, mostly discussed the *Vicoli* and the *Loggia*) validated this position, which was further enhanced in the final presentations under the banners of 'bottom-up inclusive conservation approaches' and 'methodologies for resurfacing hidden narratives' as possible ways forward for the city.

The contemporary conservation sector in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) closely echoes this stance, for example in the motto used by the local institution Te Toi o Tāmaki (Auckland Art Gallery) to promote restoration works on its iconic building in the city centre: 'Kia whakahou, kia whakaora' (to 'restore', 'heal' and 'inject a breath of new life') (Te Toi o Tāmaki, 2025) (Fig. 1).

A further connection between these distant realities is the dilemma between, on the one hand, development, privatisation, commercialisation, and local economies, and, on

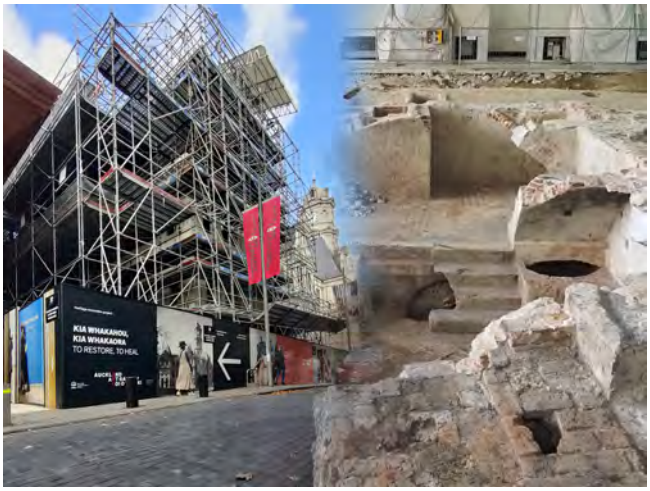


FIG. 1. Interpretive graphic comparing parallel key points between two conservation approaches. Right: Loggia di Banchi excavation project, September 2024; left: Te Toi o Tāmaki Auckland Art Gallery, June 2025. Graphic and photographs by C. Rolla.

the other, public interest and collective well-being, especially given their shared vulnerabilities to the social repercussions of climate change and unsustainable practices.

Historical analogies between Genova and Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland (Tāmaki), cities shaped by trade and maritime economies, can be found in their strategic positions: the first, a powerful hub of Mediterranean connections; the second, an enduring, pivotal centre for navigation and commerce in the Pacific Ocean. Two landscapes of harbours framed by rocky terrain that have never stopped being central to urban identity and economy, having witnessed continuous immigration, settlement, and the establishment of distinct cultures over centuries. In these settings, the domains of cultural heritage are essential research tools for identifying, preserving, and sharing the values embedded in the urban environments, (Sacchini *et al.*, 2018, p. 528) in alignment with UNESCO's framework for Outstanding Universal Value (OUV) which relies on the identification of 'social and cultural practices, economic processes and other intangible dimensions of heritage such as perceptions and associations' (UNESCO, 2025a).

This perspective advances a multidisciplinary approach to OUV conservation by integrating architectural and material sciences with history, geology, anthropology, and indigenous epistemologies into an innovative, holistic framework (Stubbs *et al.*, 2024, p. 48). However, the idea of international and interdisciplinary collaboration, or cultural 'cross-fertilisation', has long been a hallmark of European cultural property conservation, from which the World Heritage system itself evolved. The emergence of restoration as a scientific discipline from antiquity, with practices of repair in ancient Rome and the medieval period gradually evolving into a codified field and later consolidating international frameworks such as ICOMOS and ICCROM provided Europe with centuries of accumulated reflection on authenticity, integrity, and the ethical responsibilities of intervention (Jokilehto, 1986).

The centrality of Italian scholarship and practice in the history of conservation is widely acknowledged, most famously embodied in the globally utilised International Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites (The ICOMOS Venice Charter 1964). Less renowned, yet significant, is New Zealand's contribution to the development of associative landscape values within the UNESCO World Heritage Convention frame-

work. This contribution first emerged in 1993, when Tongariro National Park was inscribed as the world's first cultural landscape, advocated and consolidated by the late Sir Tumu Te Heuheu Tūkino VIII, an influential Māori intertribal leader and paramount chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa, ancestral descendants of the Tongariro landscape (Stubbs *et al.*, 2024, pp. 47–52).

In New Zealand, material heritage conservation as a formalised academic discipline developed much later, and its delayed institutionalisation contributed to the irreversible losses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; losses that occurred without systematic recording, archaeological analysis, or recognition of the cultural and geological significance of the sites. In Tāmaki, entire volcanic cones and all the information they contained were quarried away before the intellectual and legislative tools existed to protect them, and before Indigenous values, relationships to place, and intangible attributes were acknowledged as OUV. What survives today is therefore a deeply uneven palimpsest: colonial military structures, reserves, and suburban forms are mostly preserved and interpreted, while much of the pre-colonial landscape, its geology, archaeology, and cultural meaning, has been diminished or erased.

The formalisation of WHC priorities during the Christchurch 2007 assembly, the first and, so far, only gathering in this country, is evidence of the international recognition of foundational concepts rooted in Te Ao Māori. There, under the leadership of Te Heuheu, who had by then become chair of the Committee, the framework of the Strategic Objectives of Credibility, Conservation, Capacity-building, and Communication was expanded to include a fifth 'C': Community, affirming it as a core pillar of global heritage governance (Stubbs *et al.*, 2024, p. 50).

Local communities, as key stakeholders, offer historically and organically developed information about the use and care of heritage resources, ensuring the continuous, long-term care of places and helping to reconcile socio-economic goals with best-practice conservation principles. This is also recognised in Europe by the Faro Convention as essential for practical preservation and resilience (Council of Europe, 2005, Article 12).

Furthermore, examples of aligned initiatives formed part of the 2015 ICCROM 'Living Heritage Approach' programme and 'People-centred Approach' theme, developed during the 2011 World Heritage Capacity Building Strategy in cooperation with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and ICOMOS, with topical presentations on participatory approaches and successful practical examples of 'Public Archaeology' in Italy (Court and Thomson, 2019, pp. 29–30).

Against this backdrop, while the main takeaway from Tāmaki is the value of rigorous material research and conservation, Genova offers a promising setting for extending the identification of community, landscape and invisible heritage values towards adaptive reuse, particularly given the rich insights gained from the workshop's exploration of the historic centre.

Genova: Archaeology, Economic Dominance and Rediscovery of Community Values

Le Strade Nuove and the system of the Palazzi dei Rolli exemplify the architectural and urban development that defined *El siglo de los Genoveses*, a time of Genova's financial prominence in the Mediterranean. The site's OUV derives not only from its built heritage but also from a socio-economic palimpsest reflecting centuries of evolution and govern-

ance. Nestled between the natural amphitheatre of the *Apennino Ligure* and the commercial harbour, the entire 113 ha of buffer zone is distinguished by the interaction of topography and urban layout, as well as the public-private cooperation between Genova's élite and the Republic, which the *Palazzi dei Rolli* represent (MiBAC, Comune di Genova, 2016, pp. 13, 22).

Despite '*el siglo'* referring to a specific period of well-preserved Renaissance legacy, Genova's heritage is far from frozen in a single century; rather, it reflects millennia of dynamic, continuous historical evolution.

Historian Paola Pettinotti reports with sagacity: 'If you mention the subway to a Genoese, prepare to hear a string of grumbles' (Pettinotti, 2017, pp. 3–4). After more than a century of projects and thirty years of work, the outcome is a mere 7.1 km. However, this 'Odyssey' produced an unexpected result: the excavations near *Stazione Brignole* uncovered archaeological remains that revolutionised the theories on the birth of Genoa. A 9-meter dry stone wall, along with traces of fires, meals, and tools, marked the origins of prehistoric Genoa around 4800 to 4500 BCE, near the Bisagno River, where the wide estuary provided a safe harbour for early boats. Coastal landing sites, inland routes, and artefacts reflecting intertribal exchange suggest cultural thriving around these harbours for as long as the archaeological record allows (Melli, 2021).

Excavations of the *oppidum* construction suggest that by the 5th century BCE, the settlement had shifted to Castello Hill, where huts and palisades evolved into a fortified village strategically located along a key route connecting Genoa to the northern Italian plains. French, Etruscan, Greek and Punic finds suggest a period of flourishing trade during the pre-Roman centuries (Milanese, 2004). Although the Romans seem to have described the Ligurians as fierce and somewhat uncivilised fighters, the early Genuati, a group of Ligurian natives who likely assimilated Etruscan and Roman culture, are remembered by early authors as culturally sophisticated, with a deep wealth of traditional knowledge and ancestral environmental-interpretation abilities (Pettinotti, 2017). (Figs. 2 and 3)

The urban development of Genova's historic centre is closely tied to the influence of powerful kin groups over the centuries. While traces of the Roman period remain, the most defining feature of the old city is the medieval layout (MiBAC, Comune di Genova, pp. 47–48). This urban fabric is strongly linked to the broader territorial infrastructure and natural resources through the Genoa Walls Urban Park, a system of historic fortifications (Sacchini *et al*., 2018, p. 528).

The importance of integrating pre-*Palazzi* heritage was reinforced during the EAAE workshop following a visit to the recent excavations at the 1588 *Loggia dei Mercanti*, which uncovered some previously unseen remnants of Genoa's Medieval and Roman history. The 1588 headquarters of Genova's financially dominant class of merchants and bankers, erected through the expropriation of residents' homes and workshops, was physically superimposed on the pre-existing urban fabric. This monument to the 'golden city' narrates a history of cultural displacement that has re-emerged, uncovering a tangible record of socio-economic shifts and cultural stratification recognised within the OUV.

'Uncovering', but not 'discovery' in the strictest sense, this history had long been central to local historical research: pioneering work, such as Ennio Poleggi's mapping through archival documentation, had already established the foundations of these narratives (Musso, 2023, p. 11).





FIGS. 2 and 3. Stazione Brignole revealed a 9-metre-long drystone wall thoughtfully incorporated into the public space. Photographs courtesy of C. Bucarelli, 2024.

The School of Specialisation in Architectural and Landscape Heritage, along with local educational institutions and museums, brings decades of expertise in advocating for and communicating the city's ancient past. The guided tour of the *Loggia* excavation during the workshop clarified their vital role in advancing the chronological, typological and socio-cultural approach to this project. The initial design of the *Museo della Città*, intended within the premises as a strategically located museum for incoming visitors, was not fully equipped to accommodate the ancient city's underlying stratification. Once 'opened up', the physical remains tangibly surfaced, along with the complexities of reduced floor space and the need for lengthy, costly, but necessary further excavation, consultations, and studies. What also surfaced was, ultimately, a narrative of financial oppression of the population of the ancient historic centre, even as it was memorialised by one of its most beloved public architectures.

With this in mind, the task ahead tends to shift from mere exposure of the past to something more restorative of the intangible layers. In Aotearoa New Zealand, such an ap-

proach is described as *whakaora* (to restore, revive, and bring back to light). This framing captures the renewed emphasis on the historic centre's resident communities, recognising that any intervention must serve not only the material remains' touristic and financial potential but also the people who live among them.

Many initiatives around the *Loggia* and surrounding *vicoli* include community-driven activities such as outdoor social gatherings, grassroots projects inspired by socially and politically active figures, and the creative, temporary, and reversible use of historic urban spaces. As highly valued events, they foster a sense of collective ownership and continuity, underscoring that conservation is not just a technical exercise but a process of cultural sustainability. The *OpenVicoli*, a collaborative project run by a network of museums, social organisations, businesses, and cultural associations between 2019 and 2020, for example, intended to connect the cultural and social sectors to encourage citizen participation and engagement with local heritage (Il Laboratorio Società Cooperativa Sociale, BAM! Strategie Culturali, 2019a). As explained by Margherita Priarone, professor, researcher and museum conservator, as well as guide of the *Loggia* excavation site during the workshop, the key words within the project were 'Network' (of social workers, cultural operators, and museums), 'Interaction', 'Integration', and 'Community Design' to make museums more accessible and reflective of the cultural landscape they inhabit (Il Laboratorio Società Cooperativa Sociale, BAM! Startegie Culturali, 2019b).

These conservation efforts highlight how effective maintenance of the past must encompass not only the physical preservation of historical structures but also the narratives and practices of the communities that exist now and have existed historically within them, with academia being one of them, unified in recognising the opportunity to study, conserve, and share the artefacts with the public through accessibility and connection with other landmarks in the ancient historic centre.

Within this framework, conservation is understood not as freezing materials and spaces in time in a museum-like action, but as an intellectual and interpretive act, grounded in rigorous academic analysis, that can foster collective networks and strengthen the territory's living identity.

Tāmaki: Basalts, Māori Heritage and the statutory tools of Kaitiakitanga

'If you need a monument, look around you'
Mackintosh, 2021, p.189

The philosophy of *kaitiakitanga* (ancestrally bestowed guardianship duty) of heritage, including intangible values in connection with the natural environment, is characteristic of many World Heritage sites worldwide, often stemming from the interaction with the Indigenous traditions these sites preserve. In Aotearoa New Zealand, *Te Ao Māori* (the Māori worldview) formalises the concept of *whakapapa* (genealogy) as the keystone of the heritage palimpsest, encompassing ancestral narratives from cosmogenesis to the present.

Tāmaki Makaurau sits between two harbours, Waitematā and Manukau, within a 360-square-kilometre monogenetic volcanic field that features at least 54 cones and craters (Nemeth *et al*., 2021), several scoria cones and lava flows, volcanic vents and caves, and burned and buried fossils dating within and around the past 250,000 years (Hayward, Murdoch and Maitland, 2011, p. 25). These rise above marine Miocene sediments offering

outstanding opportunities for geological and archaeological study (Kermode, 1992, p. 7), as well as unique biodiversity, within a 20 km radius of the highly developed central business district, which features a network of urban parks, reserves, and coastal landscapes.

Among the landmark summits, the most recent eruption, Rangitoto, approximately 600 years ago, is reputedly the only event within the Auckland Volcanic Field (AVF) known to have been witnessed by people. Linked to this ancestral knowledge, remains of a small fishing village buried beneath a metre of ash have been discovered on neighbouring Motutapu Island, along with human and dog tracks preserved as *tapuwae* (sacred footprints) within petrified ash and burial caves. (Hayward, Murdoch and Maitland, 2011, p. 101)

Current anthropological studies report that offshore sailing in Te Moana-nui-ā-Kiwa (the Pacific Ocean) began in Southeast Asia around 3000 years ago, with navigation and settlement of the Pacific took place between 1100 and 800 BCE (Manatū Taonga, 2023). Māori traditional studies contain information about ancestral *waka* (canoe) voyages by East Polynesian navigators who settled in various places, including Tāmaki, sometime in the 1200s (Taonui, 2005). *Tangata whenua* (the people of the land) settled by communal gardening, harvesting, and fishing, designing the new landscape through cultivation areas, ridges, boundary walls, terraces, windbreaks, drainage systems, housing plots, cooking areas, and more. Today, only the most resilient material traces remain, including postholes, ground formations, shell middens, and artefacts of hardwood, bone, and stone, alongside *pā* (fortified villages), horticultural features, and areas associated with tool production.

The local strength of the AVF management system lies in the articulation of intangible values and cultural significance, upheld through the use of toponyms and names in *te reo* (Māori language), which encode relationships between volcanic landforms, resources, and ancestral narratives. The name Tāmaki Makaurau ('desired by many') itself conveys the region's overall value, rooted in the volcanic landscape, where fertile basaltic soils supported intensive horticulture and the *maunga* provided commanding views and defensible positions. Within this palimpsest, the stone is not only a geological substrate and an infrastructural resource, but also a culturally resonant material: the name *Onewa* (local type of basalt) carries ancestral, historical and practical significance understood through *whakapapa* as part of the living genealogy linking people, land, voyaging and volcanic origins.

British colonisation (physical and cultural) unfolded from the early 19th century, was driven by an instrumentalised Enlightenment ideology and the 15th-century moral framework of the 'doctrine of discovery,' which justified the acquisition and exploitation of Indigenous land and resources alongside the overriding of names and customs (Smith, 2021). This legacy marked a resistance to fully comprehending how Māori thrived socially, economically and politically before the rapid increase in the scale and pace of imperialism (Pool, Kukutai, 2018), even though tribal leaders of the period established sophisticated statutory bodies for asserting their sovereignty with devices as the 1835 *He Whakaputanga – Declaration of Independence and the Confederation Flag*, symbols and foundation for today's bicultural framework in Aotearoa New Zealand (Manatū Taonga, 2024).

The Constitution of Aotearoa New Zealand is the 1840 *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* (Treaty of Waitangi), a written agreement between the British Crown and more than 500 *rangatira* (tribal chiefs) that sets out the rights and responsibilities of all communities in their approach to land and resources (Orange, 2023).

The concept of *Rangatiratanga* (sovereignty) (Article 2) literally means the weaving together of a group of people (*ranga* = weaving, *tira* = group), emphasising collective leadership and unity rather than individual power.

A century and a half of skewed interpretation and government acts accelerated breaches of this foundational contract, exploiting and destroying many treasured sites and suppressing traditional communal practices (Hill, 2021, pp. 110–113). *Tangata whenua* were victims of systemic westernisation through alienation and assimilation, as the communal nature of land ownership was not recognised under British law, which was striving for privatisation (Manatū Taonga, 2025).

Intense protests never stopped, but only in 1975 *Te Tiriti* (the Treaty) regained its *mana* (authority) at the statutory level with the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal, a commission of enquiry aimed at addressing the shortcomings arising from the Crown's past tangible and intangible damage to Māori cultural self-determination, including customary use of resources (Waitangi Tribunal, 2025). The Tribunal's work ultimately influenced the national conservation ethos and policy, leading to internationally unique environmental endeavours such as the Resource Management Act 1991 (RMA), the national planning code, which protects historic and natural heritage from inappropriate development (Ministry for the Environment, 1991).

Following this lead, Māori philosophy was implemented in statutory legislation and policy outreach on national and local administration levels, also through the Heritage New Zealand Pouhere Taonga Act 2014 (Andersen, Hanna, Rouse, 2024, pp. 274, 269, 242–243), which restructured the mid-century Crown-funded New Zealand Historic Places Trust, strengthening the control of ground disturbance through the Archaeological Authority process (HNZPT, 2025), reinforcing the dedicated teams for Māori heritage preservation, maintaining advice and advocacy around identification and conservation of the *Rārangi Kōrero* (New Zealand Heritage List) sites, and aiding the processes endorsed by territorial authorities under the RMA.

Another internationally distinctive achievement rooted in Māori *kaupapa* (agenda) is the recognition of legal personhood for natural features. Notable examples include Te Urewera forest (2014), the Whanganui River (Te Awa Tupua, 2017), and Taranaki Maunga (2024), each of which has been recognised in law as a living entity with its own rights, interests, and guardianship arrangements. Legally, this framework departs from conventional environmental regulation by moving beyond resource ownership or protection toward a model in which natural features are represented as living beings by related *kaitiaki* (guardians) who act on their behalf within governance and planning processes. By embedding these values into national legislation, legal personhood operationalises *kaitiakitanga* within the statutory system, reshaping environmental stewardship as a shared ethical responsibility and influencing broader approaches to sustainable development and resource management in Aotearoa New Zealand (Community Law, 2025). For Māori, the obligations to protect and sustain the ancestral spiritual values are sacred, communal, and extend to the realm of built heritage, in the preservation of the spiritual essence of place and the maintenance of its *mana* (also strength, integrity) (Stanley-Price *et al*., 2005, pp. 12–18).

For the AVF specifically, one of the latest significant policy developments is the establishment of the Tūpuna Maunga Authority (TMA, n.d.-a) in 2014. This committee oversees the protection of AVF *Tūpuna Maunga* (ancestral volcanic cones) through plans that in-

tegrate *iwi* (tribal groups), local government, and the Crown agency. Established as part of the *Ngā Mana Whenua o Tāmaki Makaurau Collective Redress Deed*, it focuses on the cultural, environmental, and ecological values of the cones and volcanic stone features, balancing bicultural narratives and historical perspectives (TMA, n.d.-b).

The losses from a past when these protection tools did not exist encompass originally prominent geological features that hosted *pā* (fortified villages) strategically positioned in relation to one another. (Hayward, Murdoch and Maitland, 2011, pp.115–121)

The TMA position in relation to these 'disappeared' *maunga* is revealing: from a Te Ao Māori perspective, they are simply still standing; their intangible presence has not been destroyed[1] (Fig. 4).

A story of almost completely destroyed *taonga tuku iho* (ancestral treasure) of the AVF, is *Te Pou Hawaiki (Northern Districts Combined Headquarters Bunker)* in the suburb of Epsom. Recognised as a sacred site and a centre for ritual practice by early Tāmaki settlers, who brought soil from their ancestral homeland of Hawaiki and placed it on the maunga, it held a ceremonial value widely recognised through iwi narratives. Yet, by the late 1800s and early 1900s, extensive quarrying had almost destroyed the maunga, and the area became first a military structure and later a semi-underground car park for the Auckland Teachers' Training College (HNZPT, n.d.). Listed on HNZPT *Rārangi Kōrero* (the national list of identified heritage sites) for its military and colonial historical value, this story underscores the urgent need for conservation strategies that openly address, through bespoke, high-quality design, geological, cultural, pre-colonial and archaeological layers embedded in the urban fabric. While many stone buildings are protected under heritage listings and scheduling, less prominent boulders, natural and retaining walls, fences, walkways, and kerbs can fall into gaps and be lost to development without proper recording.

Local scholarship maintains: 'A study of the use of basalt in Auckland is interesting for two reasons. Firstly, from the point of view of adaptation of building practices to the material readily available locally, secondly, from the point of view of continuity between the natural landscape and the building' (Barnes, 1992, p.3).

From a technical perspective, despite the basalt's durability, making it an extensively used material in Auckland's buildings and infrastructure, its impermeability creates weak



FIG. 4. View from Takarunga (Mt Victoria) towards Rangitoto and the remnant of a 20th-century military defensive battery. Photograph by C. Rolla, 2025.



FIG. 5. 1861 Bluestone Store, in Auckland's CBD, standing relatively intact amid surrounding contemporary developments. Photograph by C. Rolla, 2025.

points at junctions with other materials, such as softer stones, bedding and joint mortar, or incompatible technologies. These vulnerabilities require careful conservation analysis and planned maintenance to ensure longevity. (Barnes, 1993, pp. 7–8)

Poor construction detailing and limited studies in materials conservation are key factors contributing to the deterioration of many stone structures in Aotearoa New Zealand. Notably, the first and only full master's programme in architectural heritage conservation, initiated in 2015 by the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of Auckland, was discontinued after ten years, despite its successful training of many professionals (Architecture Now, 2015). This context reveals how academic European examples continue to offer useful models, although methodologies must be adapted to local specificities.

The work of TMA, HNZPT and like-minded organisations, deeply rooted in local community values and international approaches, represents a necessary rebalancing. It demonstrates how conservation can be re-grounded through traditional knowledge systems and a recognition of past omissions. In this sense, the future of Tāmaki depends on cross-cultural fertilisation, a practical dialogue in which scientific principles and Indigenous worldviews inform one another, producing an approach capable of addressing the multilayered, colonial and pre-colonial heritage that defines the city. (Fig.5)

Conclusions

Globally, preserving the material *attributes* ('aspects of a property which are associated with or express the OUV') (UNESCO et al, 2011) of historic environments and artefacts maintains the connection between people and the knowledge of origin, craftsmanship, and cultural context. In the comparison reported, both cities have developed sophisticated methodologies, policies, and processes for identifying and preserving locally specific heritage. Nonetheless, this comparison prompts further reflection.

Genova's *Strade Nuove*'s successful 2006 inscription relied on the vision of an integrated system of *Palazzi* and a buffer zone that covers the entire historic centre with its multiple values and layers (UNESCO, 2006); however, prehistoric or indigenous cultural layers remain largely unaddressed. The policies offer robust protection, especially for built



FIG. 6. Interpretive graphic highlighting the maritime heritage of Genoa and Auckland, with a focus on the urban density along each city's harbour front. Above, photograph courtesy of C. Bucarelli, 2024. Used with permission. Below, photograph by C. Rolla, 2025.

heritage, although the regulatory frameworks often initially privilege the monumental, commercially valuable structures of the urban fabric over vernacular, pre-existing archaeological, prehistoric, and indigenous sites, reflecting long-standing cultural, economic, and institutional hierarchies (top-down initiatives).

In Genova, the pre-medieval narratives and living ancestral knowledge are buried so deeply within the palimpsest that their currency is only identifiable in localised 'uncoveries', and when they resurface, the task ahead is to identify and integrate the interests of the inhabiting communities.

The AVF holds substantial resources to support a community-participatory approach and *kaitiakitanga* towards cultural and natural *taonga* (treasures), by building on relationships and integrating archaeology, geology, and *Mātauranga Māori* (traditional knowledge) protection systems. It does, however, struggle to balance advocacy and education of architectural and material heritage conservation with the forces of development and private interests. Finally, the Word Heritage Tentative List entry is now outdated and would require revision to reflect recent developments in statutory protection and cultural recognition.

Recognising these patterns and the opportunities in the heritage disciplines fosters collaboration, resilience and the move towards equitable, more sustainable development.

In this 'culturally cross-fertilised' metaphorical space, the term 'conservation' becomes a contact space between sciences, disciplines and traditions, and it defines the realms of value to which the objects of 'conserving' action belong: natural, cultural, tangible and intangible heritage.

There is growing international momentum for participatory heritage management. Local identities are increasingly involved in decision-making processes regarding the use of cultural resources and are widely recognised as crucial for reducing environmental degradation. Current scholarship across disciplines is progressively acknowledging that such positive outcomes are achievable only when communities are aware of the significance, value, and economic potential of their cultural landscapes, including their intergenerational connections.

UNESCO's advisory bodies continue to emphasise that the concept of OUV is structurally reliant on effective protection and management. Specifically, this discussion has highlighted the importance of managing the 'unseen' or 'untold' archaeological layers through engagement with stakeholders and local expert communities. Their role is ultimately to improve the urban environment adaptively and creatively by preserving the materials of the historic landscape and the narratives they portray (Fig. 6).

Notes

1 Conversation with TMA experts, October 2025.

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TRACES FOR ORIENTATION
PRESERVING IDENTITY THROUGH PROCESSES OF TRANSFORMATION

Barbara Scala
Università degli Studi di Brescia, Italy
barbara.scala@unibs.it

It was a story of origins – a creation story, in fact – a tale about the modern rage for perpetually new beginnings, fresh starts and makeovers; in short, a story about the genesis of genesis.
Herbert Muschamp, New York Times, 28 February 2007

Introduction

Traces for Orientation: Conservation as a Form of Spatial Guidance
This essay starts from an axiom: 'to conserve is to choose' (Brandi, 1963). Any choice, in turn, implies interpretation – and therefore creation. In historic urban contexts – where tangible stratifications of the built fabric intersect with intangible dimensions such as memory, meaning, and lived practices – conservation cannot be reduced to technical repair, but operates as a cultural, social, and political practice (Cercleux *et al.*, 2022). Historically, the concept of conservation has shifted from a monumental and static vision, primarily concerned with safeguarding prestigious ruins or officially recognised masterpieces. This perspective has gradually given way to a more holistic and dynamic approach, one that encompasses the urban fabric in its entirety and acknowledges its multiple material and immaterial stratifications (Riegl, 1903; Choay, 1992).

This evolution has been essential in recognising the value not only of individual architectural monuments, but of the city as a whole – as a repository of collective memory and a space shaped by lived experience.

The essay examines how conservation can safeguard identity amid change by treating urban traces as orienting devices. These are sites where memory is continually renewed through use, participation, and narrative (Augé, 1992).

In this regard, the city is understood as a living organism in constant transformation, where every architectural or urban intervention carries the significance of an interpretive act (Jacobs, 1961; Lynch, 1960[1]). The trace – conceived not solely as a material imprint but as a stratification of meanings and experiences – serves as a heuristic tool for reading the urban palimpsest, enabling a conscious projection into the future through the interpretive lens of the past.

In contemporary cities, marked by accelerating transformations, demographic mobility, and increasing socio-spatial fragmentation, the question of orientation acquires renewed relevance. Orientation is not merely a matter of physical navigation, but also of cognitive and cultural positioning within environments subject to constant change. In this sense, urban traces perform a crucial function: they provide points of reference through

which individuals and communities can negotiate continuity in conditions of uncertainty. Rather than offering stable certainties, traces allow for processes of re-anchoring, enabling the construction of meaning across temporal discontinuities. Conservation, understood through this lens, does not aim to freeze the past, but to maintain the legibility of those elements that support orientation – socially, symbolically, and spatially – within evolving urban landscapes. Traces thus become operative devices for inhabiting change, helping to counteract experiences of dislocation and loss of meaning without denying transformation itself.

Conservation, therefore, is not the opposite of transformation, but rather a specific mode of constructing the future. It is a deliberate process, capable of interpreting the sedimented signs of the past in order to reintegrate them into the present with renewed meanings (Lowenthal, 1985). The safeguarding of identity is not based on a static notion of authenticity, but on the capacity to recognize and value continuity within discontinuity, persistence within change (Mumford, 1961; Smith, 2006). From this perspective, conservation planning can be understood as a form of stewardship over the territory and its communities, one that does not exclude the new but rather integrates it into the process of recognising and narrating urban identities (Leoni, 2009).

Genoa: The Tension Between Conservation and Creation

The city of Genoa offers a series of emblematic cases through which to explore these tensions. This is evident, for instance, in its topographical configuration, the direct relationship between the historic core and its surrounding peripheries, as well as between the port and the city itself. All these aspects have made Genoa a complex laboratory for practices of conservation and transformation. Over the past decades, the city has been the site of often controversial interventions, in which the confrontation between conservation demands and creative impulses has alternated between conflict and hybridisation (Gastaldi, 2009). A notable example – though not explored in depth here – is the redevelopment of certain port areas which, while generating new functions and attractions, have at times sacrificed distinctive elements of their industrial or social past, sparking debates about the loss of identity and subtle forms of gentrification (Annunziata, 2022).

This longstanding tension between conservation and creation is deeply embedded in Genoa's historical development. Genoa's historic centre – one of the largest in Europe – constitutes a cultural heritage of immense value, recognised internationally. At the same time, pressures from tourism, the need to regenerate degraded areas, speculative dynamics, and urban branding policies have frequently promoted transformative interventions oriented more towards innovation than towards meaningful dialogue with the existing fabric.

In this context, the tension between preservation and innovation has sometimes resulted in aesthetic simplifications, the erasure of significant traces, and partial narratives of the past (Vecchiattini, 2022). The causes of this tension are manifold: the fragmentation of institutional responsibilities, limited resources, weak participatory processes, and a prevailing conservation culture still too closely tied to regulatory protection rather than to a shared cultural vision. Urban identity thus risks becoming an abstract formula, emptied of meaning, or worse, a marketing tool disconnected from lived reality (Zukin, 2009). This tendency is often fuelled by a short-term vision that privileges spectacle over the understanding and appreciation of the layered complexity of the existing urban fabric.

Yet, alongside these challenges, exemplary cases have emerged in which conservation has effectively engaged in dialogue with creative processes, restoring complexity, attentiveness, and a sense of place (Chitty, 2016).

Quality and Meaning in the 'Creative' Conservation of Historical Traces

If conservation entails navigating the sedimented layers of the past to construct new forms of belonging, it must therefore embrace a creative dimension (Choay, 1999). This is not about juxtaposing old and new, nor about preserving lifeless forms, but about recognising the quality of interpretation as the decisive threshold between preservation and loss (De Marco, 2005). The Genoese case studies examined here demonstrate how conservation may become a tool for critical renewal, dissolving the traditional dichotomy between conservation and transformation -– a conceptual oversimplification in this context.

Any intervention in the built environment necessarily involves selection and interpretation. Conservation is, therefore, by nature, a creative act. Historical traces – both material and immaterial – are never inert residues but dynamic matrices of meaning through which communities orient themselves and articulate identity. As such, conservation cannot be reduced to formal stasis; it must instead be conceived as a critical practice of cultural regeneration (Franco, 2024).

The Loggia dei Banchi in Genoa exemplifies this approach. Constructed between 1589 and 1595 to a design attributed to Andrea Ceresola, known as il Vannone, the Loggia is embedded in a densely stratified urban fabric brought to light by recent archaeological investigations (Gazzano, 2015). These have revealed medieval foundations, domestic structures, and drainage systems, confirming the site's long-standing role as a mercantile and civic hub – its name itself derived from the banking benches (banchi) once present (Fig. 1).

These findings have not been preserved as isolated relics but have been integrated into a broader interpretive and museological project (SABAP GE-SP, 2023; Stefani, 2020). The enhancement strategy, promoted by the Municipality of Genoa with support from the Ministry of Culture and the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation, moved beyond material conservation to construct a polyphonic narrative. Immersive projections, interactive media, and soundscapes that evoke scenes of Renaissance commerce have reintroduced the Loggia as a space of collective memory and civic interaction. These interpretive tools do not aim at spectacle or simplification, but at making the site's stratified history legible, enabling visitors to engage critically with its temporal depth rather than consuming it as a themed experience. In this context, conservation operates as an active process that brings the site's historical layers into public view. The Loggia is no longer treated as a



FIG. 1. Loggia dei Banchi, engraving, 1885 - Massa P. 2004, Attori e strumenti del credito in Liguria, Fondazione Carige e Edizioni Microart's.



FIG. 2. Inside the Loggia dei Banchi, there is an old room where metalworking crucibles can be found.

static monument; it becomes a place where these layers are made accessible and understandable to visitors (Fig. 2).

A similarly interpretive strategy informs the restoration of the Church of Santa Fede in the Prè district. Founded in the early medieval period atop a Paleochristian burial site, the building was reconstructed in the Baroque era under Giovanni Battista Grigo and later repurposed as a wine warehouse. A major restoration project launched in 1993 revealed significant Romanesque elements – two apses and parts of the perimeter wall – and prompted the removal of later accretions, creating the new public space of Piazza Santa Fede (Cileone, 2016).

The intervention restored the spatial unity of the nave and made the building's historical layers visible. It also redefined the church's function: inaugurated in 2005 as the seat of Municipality I Centro Est, the site underwent a symbolic shift from sacred to civic space. This reactivation, far from a mere functional change, marked a profound redefinition of meaning, positioning Santa Fede as a locus of democratic engagement.

The project exemplifies interpretive reuse, in which conservation extends beyond safeguarding architectural fabric to include processes of meaning-making and identity redefinition. By retaining the legibility of historical stratifications, the intervention avoided stylistic synthesis and musealisation, fostering instead a critical dialogue between eras – an approach consistent with the ideas of Gustavo Giovannoni (Giovannoni, 1931) and later developed by Musso in the field of architectural reuse (Musso, 2017).

Such a perspective views heritage as an evolving cultural process rather than a fixed object. Conservation acquires relevance through its ability to recontextualise the past within contemporary uses and forms of collective identification. In this light, the civic reuse of Santa Fede has fostered renewed community engagement, reclaiming a marginalised site as an active space of participation.

Another paradigmatic case is the temporary reuse of the Church of San Pietro in Banchi. This 16th-century structure – an unprecedented typological model combining a centrally planned elevated church with commercial premises – is strategically located between Piazza Banchi and the Old Port. Its periodic reopening as a cultural venue during events such as the Genoa International Boat Show has reactivated its urban centrality and restored public access (Giannini, Baratta, 2014).

Although temporary, these initiatives have generated participatory and symbolic re-engagement, maintaining a balance between historical continuity and contemporary interpretation. They challenge the traditional opposition between conservation and transformation, showing that time-bound interventions, when grounded in a critical reading of place, can contribute meaningfully to heritage revitalisation.

Taken together, these examples demonstrate that conservation, when understood as a creative and interpretive process, can serve as a driver of cultural regeneration and social inclusion. Its efficacy lies not in the fixation of form, but in its ability to generate meaning – preserving traces not as nostalgic residues, but as resources for new forms of citizenship and spatial justice (Settis, 2022).

Conservation as a Condition for Cultural and Social Vitality

Material conservation cannot be separated from cultural and social preservation. The vitality of a building, street, or square depends not only on its physical integrity but also on its capacity to be experienced and embraced by the community. This entails a dual process: adapting spaces to contemporary needs – such as accessibility, safety, and climatic comfort – and involving people directly in decision-making. The quality of a conservation intervention must therefore be assessed not only in technical or stylistic terms but also according to its ability to foster relationships, knowledge, and collective appropriation. Conservation is no longer about preserving on behalf of the community but preserving *with* it, recognising citizens as co-authors of the heritage they inhabit. Maintaining urban vitality thus requires a collaborative approach capable of accommodating diverse needs and building a shared, evolving memory.

A notable example of this policy approach is the restoration of Palazzo Bocca Trezza in Verona. Initiated without a predetermined function and open to participatory interpretation, the project demonstrates how activating spaces can generate new forms of collective responsibility. Similar strategies can be seen in the Macello di Porta Vittoria in Milan (D'Amia, 2015) and the former Filangeri nursery in Naples (Micciarelli, 2017). Likewise, the Pact for the Historic Centre of Genoa brings together institutions, associations, and residents to support the shared regeneration of selected historic areas. These models show how the co-production of heritage – through co-design workshops, community-managed space tenders, and negotiated planning tools – can transform conservation into a driver of social inclusion and civic innovation.



FIG. 3. A new clothing shop is located above the milk shop sign. It is probably not the awareness of history that has guaranteed the preservation of a useful memory. It is important that this action should not be accidental but carried out with awareness and determination.

Via di Prè: Urban Traces, Spatial Practices, and the Political Dimension of Conservation

Via di Prè in Genoa offers a compelling example of the interrelation between urban transformation, heritage preservation, and the ongoing redefinition of cultural identities. Located in the historic centre along the



FIG. 4. The Adoration of the Magi, attributed to Giovanni Gagini (c. 1460), is a sculptural relief embedded in the façade of a building in Genoa's historic centre. Similar to the old commercial signs in Via di Prè, it is a silent yet eloquent trace of the city's stratified memory. These material remnants – whether religious or vernacular – contribute to the construction of a shared urban identity, where conservation and reinterpretation coexist in a continuous dialogue between past and present.

axis connecting Porta dei Vacca to Piazza della Nunziata, the street has long been shaped by successive social, economic, and cultural shifts. The presence of a substantial immigrant population, the emergence of new commercial typologies, and the everyday encounters between long-standing residents, migrants, and students have progressively reconfigured the area, positioning Via di Prè as a space where different forms of urban life intersect and are continuously renegotiated.

The superimposition of uses (Fig. 3) – exemplified by the conversion of a milk shop into a clothing shop – together with ongoing demographic change raises questions concerning belonging, identity, and adaptive reuse. Historic commercial signage linked to Genoa's artisanal past coexists with contemporary elements such as multilingual shopfronts, ethnic markets, and spaces of worship and sociability. Rather than producing a merely representational stratification, these overlapping elements give rise to an urban condition in which earlier traces and current practices are held together within a shared, though often contested, spatial framework. Such interactions do not unfold without friction: everyday coexistence is accompanied by social tensions, informal practices, and divergent readings of the street.

Disused shop signs, frequently preserved above businesses now managed by migrant entrepreneurs, constitute a fragile yet significant form of urban heritage. They register economic transition and processes of spatial reconfiguration in which new uses reinterpret existing traces instead of erasing them (Sabatini, 2020). Comparable to ancient bas-reliefs (Fig. 4) embedded in façades or to votive shrines, this commercial signage bears witness to ordinary histories of labour, exchange, and local economies. Its recognition depends less on material conservation alone than on forms of cultural acknowledgement and collective engagement that activate its relevance in the present. Value, in this sense, emerges through relationships established between inherited traces and contemporary appropriations. This process finds a methodological parallel in the Werkspoorkwartier in Utrecht,

where industrial 'residues' were not erased but utilised as 'orienting devices' (Lynch, 1960) to legitimise new creative uses through the memory of previous labour, transforming the aesthetic of decay into a resource for urban branding rooted in authenticity.

Preserving such elements is therefore not simply an aesthetic or documentary operation, but a way of maintaining temporal depth within the urban landscape. Concurrently, new commercial activities introduce practices, memories, and references drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds, contributing to plural processes of meaning-making that transform the street without dissolving its historical specificity. The acknowledgement of these traces, however, opens up questions that extend beyond interpretative frameworks and enter the domain of urban governance. Decisions regarding what is conserved, overlooked, or transformed are never neutral; they reflect implicit hierarchies of legitimacy and value.

In contexts such as Via di Prè, where social heterogeneity intersects with economic vulnerability, conservation practices become entangled with issues of regulation, representation, and control. Urban traces may be mobilised as cultural resources, tolerated as residual presences, or perceived as impediments to processes of normalisation and city branding. The treatment of minor and everyday forms of heritage thus functions as a revealing indicator of how cities manage difference, visibility, and belonging within contested urban environments.

Via di Prè is also characterised by pronounced tensions. Marginalised phenomena – such as street prostitution and drug dealing – raise concerns related to perceived safety, social cohesion, and the effectiveness of public policies. Urban furnishing interventions aimed at improving decorum, including ornamental planting and standardised seating, often appear decontextualised or inadequate (Fig. 5). Although introduced with corrective intentions, such top-down measures risk simplifying the complexity of the street, masking its layered historical and social dimensions and failing to address the lived realities of both long-standing and newly arrived inhabitants (Guala, 2021). In privileging visual order over situated understanding, these strategies tend to reproduce normative representations of the city while leaving structural inequalities intact. To counter this, the experience of Grand Parc in Bordeaux (Vassal, 2007) suggests an alternative path: conservation not as aesthetic 'maquillage', but as spatial empowerment. By adding winter gardens to existing social housing instead of imposing 'ornamental' fixes, the project demonstrates that true conservation lies in the generosity of the space provided to its inhabitants, rather than in the imposition of a standardised visual decorum.



FIG. 5. Example of urban furniture consisting of small potted plants: the solution does not seem suitable to improve the neighbourhood.

By contrast, local cultural associations and grassroots initiatives have made im-

portant, albeit uneven, contributions. Projects such as the cooperative Il Ce.Sto and the University of Genoa's PreVisioni have supported the conservation of historic signage and the collection of oral histories, promoting forms of intercultural exchange and dialogue (Ferrando, 2023). In the absence of stable public leadership and a coherent long-term framework, however, these initiatives remain fragmented and fragile.

Today, Via di Prè can be understood as a site of dynamic accumulation, where the persistence of urban traces enables the continuous production of new meanings. Migrant-run businesses do not negate existing inheritances but reposition them within broader cultural horizons. This ongoing process underscores a central challenge for contemporary conservation: not the selection between past and present, but the careful design of their coexistence. To counter the risks associated with heritage-led gentrification, conservation strategies must therefore be integrated with social protections and participatory mechanisms capable of sustaining the diversity that defines Via di Prè. In this perspective, the street operates as a paradigm of conservation conceived as a cultural and social practice, in which inherited traces function as generative resources for inclusive forms of urban citizenship (Settis, 2022). However, for this diversity to persist, conservation must be supported by innovative governance models such as the Community Land Trust (CLT) in Brussels. By decoupling land ownership from property value, such models offer a concrete tool to shield the 'fragile traces' of Via di Prè from heritage-led gentrification, ensuring that the right to the city remains accessible to the very migrant communities that currently redefine its meaning.

Within this broader framework, conservation cannot be understood solely as a matter of material legacies and spatial practices, but also as a process sustained by social actors and forms of everyday engagement that operate beyond formal heritage interventions.

Community, Care, and New Urban Equilibria: Social and Ethical Dimensions of Conservation

Don Andrea Gallo stands as an emblematic figure in the recent history of Genoa's historic centre and, more broadly, in the social life of neighbourhoods marked by marginalisation and inequality, including Via di Prè. As a priest and public intellectual, he devoted his life to working alongside the most vulnerable, promoting practices of inclusion, solidarity, and social justice rather than engaging directly in the conservation of material heritage.

Through his long-standing presence in the area and his work with the *Comunità di San Benedetto al Porto*, Gallo contributed to shaping a dense network of social relations that profoundly influenced the everyday life of the neighbourhood. His action was not aimed at preserving physical traces or historic artefacts, but at sustaining the social fabric that gives meaning to urban space. In this sense, his contribution can be read as complementary to heritage practices: while not operating on buildings or material signs, he worked on the conditions that allow memory, belonging, and collective identity to remain alive.

Central to Gallo's approach was the recognition of marginalised subjects – migrants, people experiencing poverty, individuals struggling with addiction – as legitimate urban actors. By affirming their right to visibility and participation, he challenged exclusionary narratives of urban decorum and order, proposing instead an ethic of care grounded in proximity and everyday engagement. In this sense, his practice resonates with Lefebvre's conception of the 'right to the city' as a collective claim to urban space and meaning (Lefebvre, 1996). This perspective finds clear parallels in contemporary reflections on ur-

ban conservation that emphasise social sustainability and the right to the city as integral components of long-term regeneration processes.

Rather than opposing urban change, Gallo acknowledged transformation as an intrinsic condition of the city. He interpreted the presence of new cultural communities not as a rupture with the past, but as part of a continuous process of stratification that has historically characterised areas such as Via di Prè. His work thus contributed to fostering a culture of coexistence, in which diversity was understood as a resource rather than a threat.

Don Andrea Gallo's legacy lies above all in the practices of participation and responsibility he helped to cultivate. His action demonstrates that urban regeneration cannot rely solely on technical or aesthetic interventions but must be supported by social infrastructures capable of sustaining inclusion, dialogue, and collective care. In this light, his figure offers a crucial ethical and political framework for contemporary debates on conservation, highlighting how social vitality and urban memory are deeply intertwined. His commitment stands as an example of how individual action, grounded in a strong community vision, can contribute to more equitable and resilient urban environments.

Design, Decision-Making, and Participatory Conservation

At the level of conservation theory and architectural practice, the analyses developed thus far point to the need to reconsider conservation as a process structured through concrete decisions and design operations. This reorientation does not merely involve revising interpretative models but calls attention to how specific choices – such as what to preserve, transform, or replace – are made within given regulatory, cultural, and institutional frameworks. Conservation thus emerges as an operative field in which technical actions are inseparable from value judgments and strategic positions. It is precisely within this domain of practice that the tensions and the generative possibilities of a critical and creative approach to conservation become visible.

At the architectural scale, this perspective reconfigures the role of the project itself. Conservation interventions no longer aim at stabilising an assumed state of completion, but operate through calibrated adjustments, selective integrations, and controlled degrees of transformation. The treatment of structural systems, surfaces, and spatial additions becomes a means of negotiating continuity and change, rather than of restoring an idealised condition. Within this framework, incompletion, patina, and traces of use are not residual conditions to be corrected, but operative elements through which architectural meaning is articulated and transmitted over time. Conservation thus assumes a projectual character, engaging the artefact as a stratified construct whose significance emerges through the relationship between intervention, use, and temporal duration.

When approached from a conservation perspective, Via di Prè can be read not simply as an urban context, but as a testing ground for project-based approaches that confront conditions of heterogeneity, transformation, and social complexity. Interventions on buildings and public space are required to operate within environments characterised by layered uses, ongoing change, and contested meanings. In such contexts, conservation cannot be oriented toward the stabilisation of an assumed normative state, but must instead develop criteria capable of engaging coexistence, temporal overlap, and functional adaptation. Informal transformations and evolving patterns of use thus become parameters to be critically assessed within the design process, rather than anomalies to be corrected, provided that the material consistency and cultural significance of the built fabric are not compromised (Carletti, 2024).

Under these conditions, conservation cannot be conceived as an expert-driven process alone. The definition of values, priorities, and acceptable degrees of transformation increasingly depends on forms of situated knowledge produced through everyday use, informal practices, and collective experience. Conservation thus becomes a participatory process, in which local actors, users, and communities contribute – directly or indirectly – to shaping the criteria through which heritage is interpreted and transformed. Participation, in this sense, does not replace technical expertise, but reconfigures it, expanding the field of decision-making to include multiple forms of agency and knowledge embedded in place.

A paradigmatic illustration of this project-oriented approach to conservation is provided by the Albergo dei Poveri. Originally conceived in the late 17th century as a monumental charitable institution (Napoleone, 2017), the building has undergone successive phases of abandonment, alteration, and partial reappropriation, culminating in its recent integration into the university system. Rather than pursuing a fictive return to an assumed original condition, the restoration process has negotiated between historical stratifications and contemporary functional requirements, foregrounding the building's civic and collective dimension (Musso, 2024).

The deliberate preservation of selected areas in a controlled state of incompletion, the coexistence of restored and unfinished spaces, and the introduction of explicitly contemporary architectural insertions exemplify a conservation strategy that does not aim to resolve historical complexity, but to work productively within it. Through these calibrated design choices, the project acknowledges stratification, discontinuity, and transformation as operative conditions rather than anomalies to be eliminated. In this sense, the Albergo dei Poveri demonstrates how conservation can retain projective agency while engaging critically with material sedimentations, temporal depth, and evolving patterns of use.

Within this theoretical framework, the central challenge of conservation is no longer confined to technical resolution but concerns the capacity of design to engage complexity without neutralising it. Project interventions are required to operate within contexts marked by heterogeneity, discontinuity, and conflicting temporalities, developing strategies that do not simplify or sanitise the built fabric, but instead articulate its layered and contested character. From this perspective, conservation design becomes a critical practice that negotiates between persistence and change, rather than a tool for stabilising predefined meanings.

This approach entails recognising conservation as an ethical and cognitive responsibility grounded in informed, situated choices and open to deliberative pluralism, in which participatory processes play a constitutive role. In this perspective, participation is not understood as a consultative supplement, but as an integral component of conservation practice, shaping how values are identified, conflicts negotiated, and future transformations envisioned. It requires acknowledging practices of use, dissonant readings, and informal forms of spatial agency as integral components of architectural reality. Architecture, in this sense, cannot be reduced to its material constituents alone – stone, mortar, or plaster – but must be understood as a relational construct shaped by social interactions, narrative frameworks, and collective imaginaries. It is within this expanded and projective understanding that the vitality of heritage becomes legible, a vitality that contemporary digital and immersive technologies may further explore by offering new modes of interpretation, representation, and engagement.

Operational Perspectives for Participatory and Shared Urban Conservation

Building on the theoretical framework outlined in the previous chapter, it becomes essential to translate a relational understanding of conservation into operational structures and practices.

The case studies discussed demonstrate how conservation can evolve into an inclusive, multi-scalar process, open to a plurality of actors and perspectives. Drawing on European experiences such as the Community Land Trusts in Brussels (Lenna, 2019) and the participatory formats promoted by the German Bundesstiftung Baukultur – such as the Baukulturwerkstätten[2] – a viable strategy emerges: the creation of permanent design laboratories within historic urban centres, conceived as platforms for gathering memories, visions, and proposals.

These laboratories are not conceived as temporary participatory tools, but as long-term civic infrastructures capable of sustaining continuity, negotiation, and shared responsibility over time.

Within such frameworks, the architect no longer operates as an isolated designer, but as a mediator and facilitator of processes. Restoration is reframed as a practice that weaves together care and innovation, attentive listening and experimental engagement.

In this perspective, the municipality of Genoa could initiate a pilot project through the establishment of an Urban Heritage Observatory: a platform dedicated to documentation, capacity building, collaborative design, and public dissemination. Anchored in areas of intense historical and social stratification – such as Via di Prè – this Observatory could function as a laboratory for testing participatory instruments, including thematic conservation budgeting, community-based mapping of urban palimpsests, and publicly accessible, educational restoration sites. In this sense, the Observatory operates not merely as a consultative body, but as a space where conservation decisions are collectively informed, discussed, and iteratively refined.

Such initiatives require institutional courage and the construction of renewed alliances among universities, local administrations, and civil society. For conservation to become genuinely transformative, it must move beyond academic discourse and regulatory frameworks, re-entering the urban realm as a shared practice of collective meaning-making.

Ultimately, conservation should be understood not as the preservation of the past, but as the cultivation of futures embedded within its traces.

Notes

1 'Cities are an immense laboratory of trial and error, failure and success, in city building and city design' (Jacobs, 1961, p. 6). 'The city is a construction in space, but one of vast scale, a thing perceived only in the course of long spans of time. Like any environmental image, the city is the product both of immediate sensation and of the memory of past experience. (…) It is thus a temporal art' (Lynch, 1960, p. 1).

2 https://www.bundesstiftung-baukultur.de/ (Accessed: 10 May 2025)

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CONSERVATION AND CREATION IN DIALOGUE: ADAPTIVE REUSE OF THE SÜMERBANK KAYSERI TEXTILE FACTORY AS A UNIVERSITY CAMPUS

Nisa Semiz
Abdullah Gül University, Kayseri, Türkiye
nisasemiz@gmail.com

The adaptive reuse of industrial heritage has increasingly positioned conservation as a design-driven and critically contested practice. Rooted in functional specificity, industrial architecture often resists straightforward reuse, posing both technical constraints and conceptual challenges. At the same time, such sites offer fertile ground for creative reinterpretation, where past and present can meaningfully coexist. This paper examines the transformation of the Sümerbank Textile Factory in Kayseri, an emblematic industrial complex from Türkiye's early Republican period, into the Abdullah Gül University (AGU) campus. Framed as an act of *creative conservation*, the project moves beyond conventional preservation models, engaging a spectrum of interventions: from sensitive material retention to bold spatial reconfigurations and newly inserted architectural elements. Originally constructed in 1935 through international collaboration, the factory served not only as a production site but as a socio-urban hub for the city of Kayseri. The campus conversion, shaped by a holistic master plan, reflects a deliberate negotiation between conservation and creation. However, this process also reveals tensions: between heritage integrity and contemporary function, between symbolic memory and material transformation. Through critical analysis of selected design interventions, including hybrid structures, adaptive spatial reuse, and layered restoration strategies, this study interrogates how architecture can navigate the fine line between memory and innovation. The AGU Sümer Campus offers both an instructive precedent and a provocation, illustrating the creative potential and critical contradictions of reusing industrial heritage within the evolving fabric of urban life.

Introduction

The adaptive reuse of industrial heritage sits at the intersection of conservation and design, where the material legacies of the past encounter the demands and requirements of the present. While such sites offer considerable potential for architectural innovation, they also pose distinct challenges: their typologies are functionally rigid, their spatial logic often incompatible with new uses, and their meanings contested. In this context, the reuse of industrial heritage is not merely a technical or restorative exercise but a design problem, one that demands critical interpretation, negotiation, and invention.

The transformation of the Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory into Abdullah Gül University's Sümer Campus presents a compelling and complex case of what might be termed *creative conservation*. Constructed in 1935 as part of Türkiye's early industrialisation strategy and designed by Russian architect Ivan Nikolaev, the factory complex functioned as more than an industrial site; it embodied a comprehensive modernist vision,

combining production with housing, education, recreation, and healthcare. As one of the most significant industrial heritage sites in the country, its architectural, urban, and social dimensions make it both a valuable historical asset and a demanding subject of transformation.

Following its closure in 1999 and eventual transfer to AGU in 2012, the site underwent a series of interventions guided by a master plan ratified in 2014. While the project succeeded in reactivating the site for educational use, its transformation raises critical questions: To what extent can creative interventions be reconciled with heritage integrity? How do new spatial and functional demands reshape the reading of industrial heritage? And where is the line between respectful adaptation and conceptual rupture?

This paper examines the Sümer Campus as a site of active tension between conservation and creation. Through selected design interventions, it explores how architecture operates as both a preserving and an inventive force, forming new interpretations while engaging with historical legacies. The project offers not only a precedent for industrial reuse but also a framework for critically rethinking the role of design in heritage transformation.

Historical and Urban Context of the Factory Complex

During the early Republican period in Türkiye, a series of initiatives aimed at promoting the country's social and economic development led to the establishment of new industrial enterprises in the textile sector. These initiatives were based on assessments of the country's raw material and labour potential (Kaya and Şenyiğit, 2022). In support of this vision, the banking sector implemented a range of policies and financial mechanisms, culminating in the foundation of Sümerbank in 1933. The Kayseri Textile Factory, recognised as one of the most significant and earliest textile production centres of period, represented Sümerbank's first major project after the bank was established to manage state-funded industrial facilities[1].

The factory was built through international collaboration between Turkish and Russian experts[2] and was designed by Russian architect Ivan Nikolaev. It officially opened in September 1935 ('Kayseri fabrikası dün büyük törenle açıldı', 1935) (Fig. 1). The site selection was strategic, taking into account proximity to energy sources, transportation infrastructure, raw material supply regions, availability of skilled labour, and construction material logistics[3]. Located north of Kayseri's city centre, the factory subsequently became a catalyst for urban expansion in that direction.

The factory complex was designed as a self-contained unit, integrating production, administrative, service, and social functions. Its establishment generated significant em-



FIG. 1. General views from the period when the Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory first opened (Anonymous, 1935).

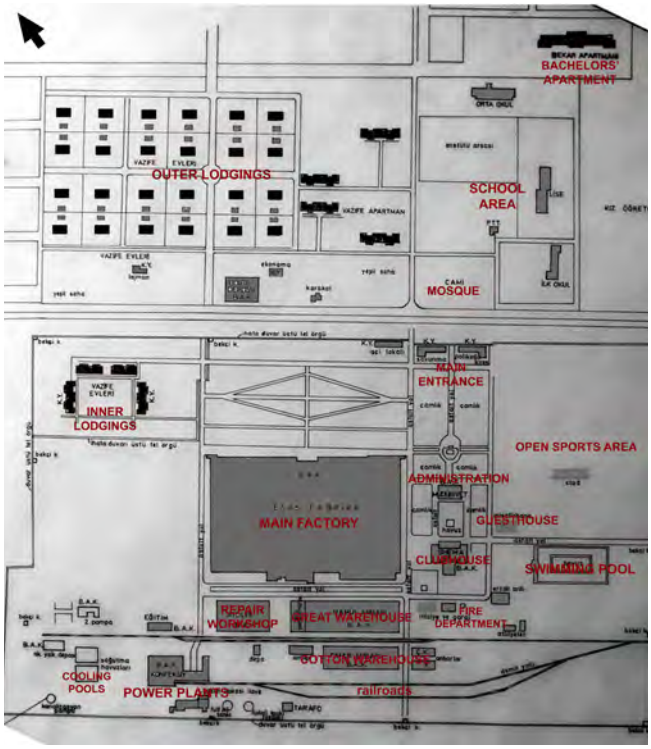


FIG. 2. Site plan of the factory complex (obtained by Asiliskender (2002) from the Sümerbank Archives).

ployment not only within Kayseri but throughout the wider region[4]. In response to the growing workforce and housing demands, a new residential district, Yeni Mahalle (New Quarter), was developed to the east of the campus in the 1950s (Özsoy, 2014).

Covering 922,500 m² (Asiliskender, 2002), the industrial complex is situated just 435 metres north of the Kayseri Train Station, in close proximity to the main railway line. The plan area, approximately 770 x 835 metres, included facilities for production, administration, education, housing, and social services (Fig. 2). To mitigate environmental pollution from production activities concentrated in the southwest part of the site, a 200-meter-wide green buffer zone was established along the southwest and northwest edges (Fig. 3).

The campus was bisected by a main road extending from the city centre in a northwest–southeast direction, today known as Erkilet Boulevard. The facilities on both sides of this road were arranged on a grid plan that followed functional requirements. A network of perpendicular roads connected internal campus functions to each other and to the main thoroughfare.

The main entrance on the southwest side provided access to the central campus area. This entryway led directly to the administration building, followed by the employees' clubhouse, a social centre that included a cinema. The main production building was located northwest of these, at the centre of the site. Further to the southwest were the warehouses, maintenance and repair workshops, and, at the far north, the energy and steam power plants. A branch railway line connected the warehouses and power plant to the main railway line to facilitate raw material delivery and product distribution.

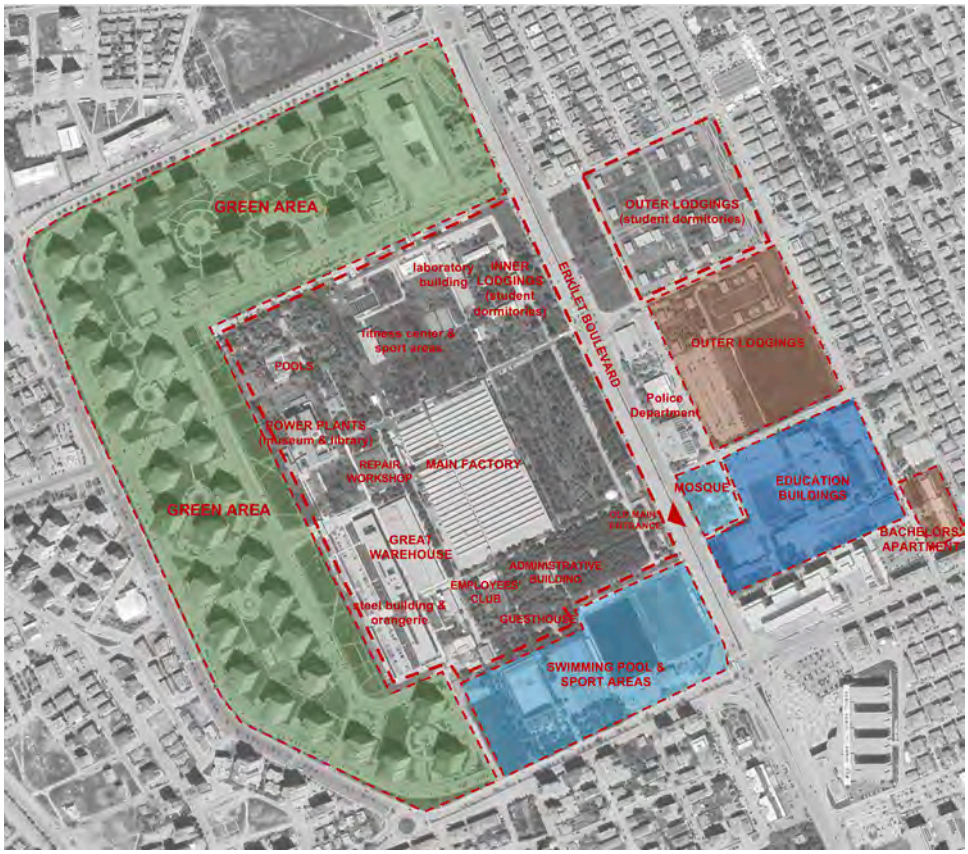


FIG. 3. The factory complex and its surroundings shown in a recent aerial photograph from Google Earth.

To the southeast of the administrative area was a guesthouse, and along the campus's southeastern edge, a large sports complex including a stadium, tennis courts, volleyball courts, and a swimming pool[5]. North of the factory building resided the inner lodgings for civil servants, while the outer lodgings for workers, consisting of two-storey stone masonry houses, were located across the main road to the north. A bachelor's apartment was built for single workers on the eastern side, with educational buildings situated to its west[6]. Additional facilities included healthcare services, a nursery for workers' children[7], and a mosque, which is still in use today.

Due to outdated production technologies and environmental concerns, the factory was shut down and expropriated in 1999. It was transferred to Erciyes University in an effort to preserve its cultural and historical significance. However, the sports fields were excluded from the transfer due to unresolved debt obligations. Erciyes University undertook limited, uncoordinated interventions to convert parts of the campus into educational spaces, without a comprehensive restoration plan – an approach that attracted criticism (Habertürk, 2014).

Following advocacy by the DO.CO.MO.MO Türkiye Working Group, the site and all its buildings were listed by the Kayseri Cultural and Natural Heritage Conservation Board in 2003. Meanwhile, the area containing the bachelor's apartment and educational build-

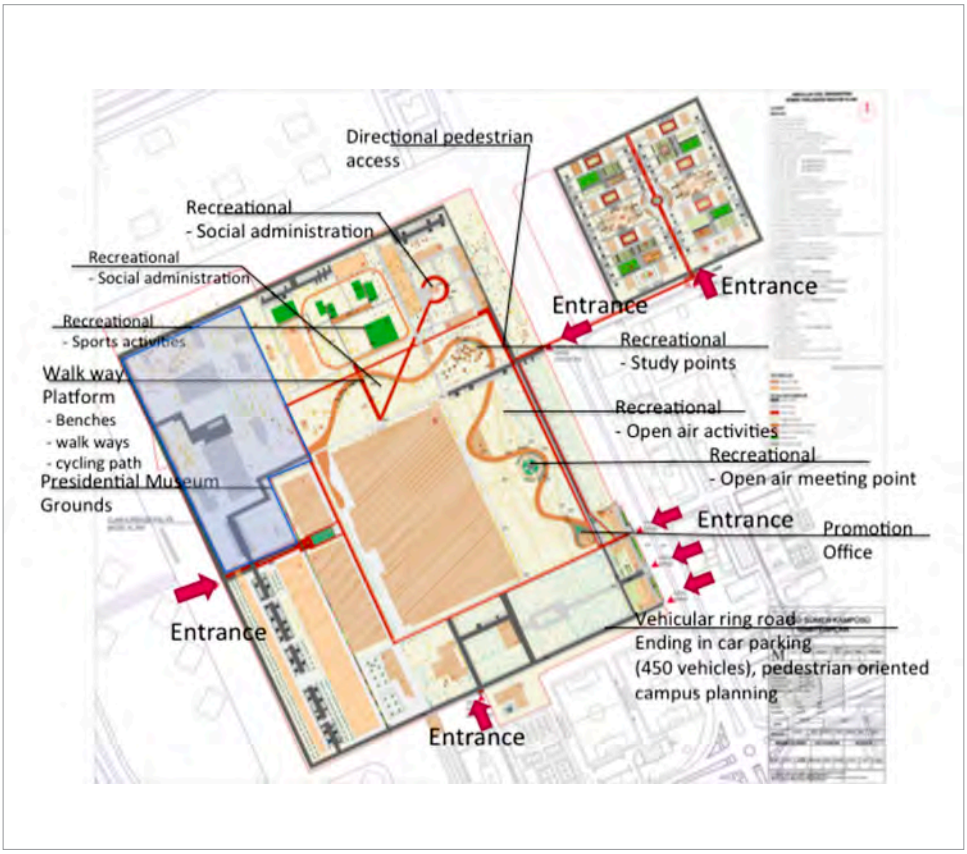


FIG. 4. Master plan of the AGU Sümer Campus dated 2014 (Asiliskender and Yöney, 2016).

ings was repurposed as a Youth Centre through a collaborative initiative by the Kayseri Provincial Directorate of National Education and the Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality. However, some of the alterations, particularly to the bachelor's apartment, were criticised for compromising the site's architectural integrity (Habertürk, 2014).

In 2005, part of the outer lodgings area was transferred to the Kayseri Police Department, which subsequently demolished the historic laundries for security reasons and built new facilities on the edge of Erkilet Boulevard. In 2006, Erciyes University and the municipality signed a protocol for the site's transfer to local government and the construction of a 600-bed hospital. During this period, both the municipality and police department filed lawsuits attempting to cancel the heritage registration, though these were unsuccessful. Nonetheless, zoning changes allowed residential development in areas once designated as green buffer zones. These interventions reflect broader neoliberal development pressures that have increasingly challenged heritage conservation efforts in Türkiye. A turning point in the site's transformation came with its transfer to Abdullah Gül University (AGU) in 2012, a year after the university's founding. A comprehensive campus master plan was developed by Burak Asiliskender and Nilüfer Yöney in 2014 (Fig. 4). This plan laid the groundwork for a new vision: a university campus that would intertwine preservation and re-creation. Since then, various architects have undertaken design and

implementation projects on the site, resulting in a unique spatial narrative where architectural memory and creative reinterpretation coexist.

Design-Driven Conservation from Factory to Campus

Following the transfer of the Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory to Abdullah Gül University (AGU) for educational purposes, an initial master plan was prepared to guide the site's transformation. However, recognising its limitations in addressing the complexity and potential of the heritage site, a revised and more holistic master plan was approved by the Conservation Board in 2014 (Asiliskender and Yöney, 2016). This new vision proposed an open-campus model that would not only preserve the architectural heritage but also allow creative reinterpretation, repositioning the former industrial compound as an urban interface for academics, students, and the citizens of Kayseri.

At the heart of the plan lies the understanding that conservation should not be limited to physical safeguarding. Instead, it must act as a platform for creative interventions that extend and reinterpret the site's historical narrative. The revised layout reorganised circulation, restructured the campus to accommodate both pedestrian and vehicular movement, and designated public outdoor areas for sports, recreation, and social interaction. The transformation of the site from a closed production facility into an open academic institution marked a paradigmatic shift, not just in function, but in meaning. This shift established the foundation for design-led conservation as an active, future-oriented practice.

The master plan defined the spatial distribution of administrative, educational, and socio-cultural functions, particularly considering the interconnectivity between the main campus (southwest of Erkilet Boulevard) and the 'student village', a redevelopment of the former worker lodgings on the opposite side. Entrances were newly arranged in three directions (excluding the historic northern factory gate), and the emphasis on pedestrian mobility reinforced a sense of openness. Publicly accessible spaces were reimagined as shared domains, aligning with contemporary academic life while respecting the site's layered past.

Although many buildings were partially deteriorated or damaged, they were approached as architectural documents that embodied the evolution of 20th-century construction techniques and materials. Although built under constraints imposed by the need to import most construction materials into Türkiye, these structures impressively demonstrate ambitious and forward-thinking design strategies. In conservation terms, the adaptive reuse of these buildings became an opportunity to preserve not only their physical fabric but also the economic, social, and cultural narratives they carried (Asiliskender and Yöney, 2016).

Importantly, these buildings were not treated as frozen artefacts. Rather, they were understood as adaptive frameworks that opened up a perspective on the creative act of conservation. For example, the reactivation of the inner and outer lodgings as student dormitories (Fig. 5), and the conversion of the old administrative building for university use, exemplify minimal intervention. Through basic, non-intrusive repairs, spatial memory was preserved while contemporary needs were accommodated (Yöney and Asiliskender, 2014). These quiet interventions reflect a conservation strategy rooted in continuity and sustainability rather than spectacle.



FIG. 5. Outer (left) and inner (right) lodgings used as student dormitories today (2025).



FIG. 6. Steel Building (left) and Great Warehouse Building (right) (2025).

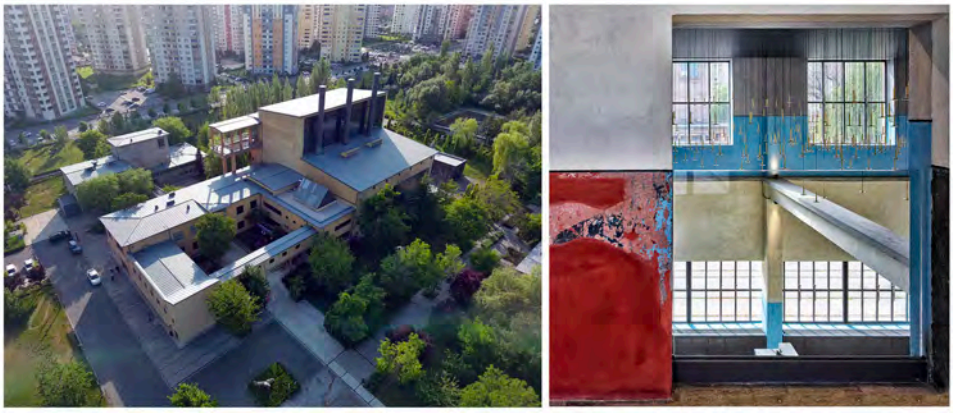


FIG. 7. Presidential Museum and Library: aerial photograph (2025) and interior view (URL-3).

By contrast, the Steel Building (Fig. 6), designed by Emre Arolat Architects (EAA), embodies a more assertive and expressive design stance. Conceived before the master plan, the structure overlays a new linear steel volume onto the footprint of the former cotton warehouse. Adjacent to this, the orangerie continues the same linear logic, reinforcing the transformation axis. Rather than isolating or reconstructing the existing form, the design of the Steel Building partially dissolves it and introduces new academic, administrative, and social functions while reshaping the logic of the industrial hangar (Emre Arolat Architecture, 2012–2014). Voids left at ground level promote permeability, while the dark

steel aesthetic introduces a bold visual language. Yet this same aesthetic also invites critique, particularly regarding light conditions and user experience, raising important questions about the limits of expressive intervention in heritage contexts.

Another powerful expression of creative conservation is found in the Presidential Museum and Library, created within the former energy and steam power plants and completed by EAA in 2016. Here, the design approach celebrates the building's material ageing and industrial patina. Rather than restoring the site to a former 'ideal' state, the project foregrounds its layered time through preserved coal chimneys, ash chambers, and other infrastructural remnants, now woven into the visitor experience (Fig. 7). This is interpretive conservation, where memory is constructed through spatial storytelling rather than historical replication. The adjacent pools and landscape were designed by DS Architecture, creating continuity between built form and open space (Arkiv, 2013–2016).

In the Great Warehouse Building (Fig. 6), restored by Asiliskender and Yöney, yet another conservation strategy unfolds, this time through reversible modularity. Educational spaces and a refectory were inserted as freestanding, steel-framed boxes within the preserved outer shell (Asiliskender, Yöney, and Özer, 2015). New construction was deliberately differentiated from the old, with contrasting materials and techniques to maintain legibility. The result is a clear visual and structural dialogue between past and present. Despite the insertion of two-storey programmatic volumes, the warehouse retains its spatial generosity and identity. The adjacent fire station was similarly reimagined as a café and recreation space in 2017, supporting the idea that conservation also entails the activation of social life within heritage environments (Arkiv, 2014–2017).

The Laboratory Building (Fig. 8), designed by Han Tümertekin and completed in 2018, contributes to the contemporary architectural layer of the campus (Mimarlar & Han Tümertekin, 2018). Referencing the shed roof typology of the original factory while using modern materials such as titanium-zinc cladding and steel, the structure strikes a balance between formal abstraction and industrial memory. An expressive spiral staircase animates the interior (Veritas Engineering, 2017), reinforcing the idea that new design elements can become part of the evolving identity of heritage sites. Similarly, the Fitness Centre (Fig. 9) adopts a modest architectural language, nodding to surrounding structures, though its integration with the landscape and pedestrian circulation could be more fully resolved.

Tümertekin also developed the preliminary reuse concept for the Main Factory Building (Fig. 10). Due to the vast scale of the structure (235 x 155 metres), implementation is ongoing in stages. A new interior layout introduces two- to three-storey steel modules within the vast, open-plan factory hall, creating diverse classroom and meeting spaces (Fig. 11). While this subdivided layout contrasts with the original singular production hall, it responds to contemporary academic requirements. This shift between the spatial logic of industrial production and academic learning underscores a central tension in conservation design: balancing memory with transformation.

Throughout the campus, projects vary in tone and intensity, from subtle maintenance to bold architectural reinterpretation. Even unimplemented projects, like those for the maintenance workshop and employees' clubhouse studied in academic theses (Elagöz Timur, 2015; Baz, 2023), highlight the campus's potential as a laboratory for heritage-led innovation.



FIG. 8. Laboratory Building (2025).



FIG. 9. Fitness Centre (2025).



FIG. 10. Main Factory Building (2025).

The transformation of the Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory into the AGU Sümer Campus illustrates how conservation, when understood as an act of design, can catalyse the reimagining of industrial heritage. It is not simply a matter of reuse or restoration, but of re-creation, where form, meaning, and function are negotiated through creative and context-sensitive design strategies. The campus today stands as a compelling example of

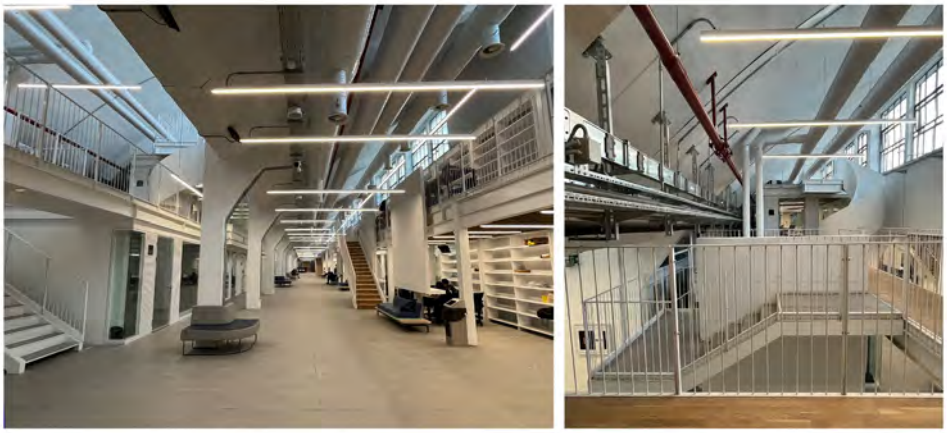


FIG. 11. Interior spaces of the Main Factory Building (2025).

how post-industrial spaces can evolve, not as relics, but as dynamic civic and educational environments embedded in the contemporary urban life of Kayseri[8].

Final Review

The first modern industrial facilities of the early Republican period in Türkiye began to lose their function by the early 2000s, due to a combination of technological developments, urban growth, and evolving social structures. As a result, many of these complexes were abandoned after their original equipment was removed or deteriorated. This process not only rendered the structures ineffective but also eroded their connection to contemporary urban life. The Sümerbank Kayseri Textile Factory is one such example. Following its closure in 1999, most of its machinery was dismantled, leaving the buildings as largely empty shells.

When transferred to Erciyes University, the complex suffered further from a lack of comprehensive planning, leading to additional deterioration. However, after its handover to the newly established Abdullah Gül University (AGU) in 2012, the transformation gained momentum and was pursued with a more systematic and design-led approach. This transition marked the beginning of a dialogue between conservation and creation, where the historic factory was not merely preserved but reinterpreted as an academic and civic space.

The development of a master plan was pivotal in shaping this dialogue. An initial plan proved inadequate, prompting the creation of a new version ratified in 2014. As Asiliskender and Yöney (2016) explain, the revised master plan was grounded in international conservation guidelines, such as the Madrid Document (2011), Dublin Principles (2011), and Valletta Principles (2011). It emphasised the need to mediate between old and new – accepting interventions in circulation, access, and even structural modifications where appropriate. The plan acknowledged that conservation in this context required creative reinterpretation, not static preservation.

This approach was especially evident in the challenge of integrating the Presidential Museum and Library, a separately administered programme within the university campus.

Its inclusion required spatial and symbolic coherence despite its distinct function, demonstrating how design became the language through which conservation and creation were reconciled.

The master plan also embraced re-functioning, adaptive reuse, as a primary conservation strategy. Preserving cultural heritage was no longer seen as simply retaining material authenticity, but as enabling continued relevance through new uses. However, this also introduced complexities: the deteriorated condition of the buildings and the university's functional needs posed serious challenges. Design decisions, therefore, had to creatively balance the preservation of architectural character with the requirements of a contemporary academic campus.

As Wong (2016) argues, reuse is not merely technical transformation; it is a creative act involving reinterpretation of material, memory, space, and time. Similarly, Özçakır (2024) states that ICOMOS recognizes reuse as a tool for safeguarding heritage, as long as it protects historic values, respects structural capacities, responds to context, and incorporates participatory design. These principles underpin the conservation–creation interplay at AGU Sümer Campus.

The transformation of the Sümerbank Factory, one of the most emblematic early Republican industrial sites, reflects these principles (Fig. 12). Particularly in the areas adapted into the university campus, the project demonstrates how conservation becomes a platform for design innovation. Yet, the process was not without losses. For example, the conversion of the green belt into residential areas could be seen as a missed opportunity for enhancing public heritage space. Similarly, retaining all outer lodgings within the university campus might have offered a more cohesive preservation strategy.

Nevertheless, certain public uses have been sustained. The continued operation of the 1930s sports facilities by the Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality illustrates how functional continuity supports heritage preservation. More broadly, the transformation of the factory into a university campus redefined internal and external relationships, fostering new urban connections and generating economic, cultural, and social value for Kayseri. Despite the fragmented early years, the 2014 master plan provided a coherent vision that integrated conservation ethics with creative urban design. Active stakeholder engagement further supported the effective and continuous use of the campus.

As Özçakır (2023) notes, the success of re-functioning projects depends on design and implementation strategies that sustain both heritage values and contemporary use. These dynamics are clearly visible in the AGU Sümer Campus, where a wide range of structures have been approached through differentiated conservation–creation strategies.

For example, the Steel Building was among the first creative interventions. Constructed linearly over the footprint of the former



FIG. 12. Aerial photo of AGU Sumer Campus (2025).

cotton warehouse, it merged preserved fragments with new architectural language. While parts of the original shell were retained, the new steel structure reshaped the space entirely, prioritizing openness and adaptability. However, the legibility of the historic warehouse has diminished, raising questions about how far creation can go within a conservation context. Moreover, the constant reliance on artificial lighting, which is further accentuated by the dark materials chosen for both interior and exterior finishes, along with the demands of the installed ventilation and heating systems, raises concerns about the building's long-term energy sustainability.

By contrast, the Presidential Museum and Library exemplifies a conservation-driven creation. Housed in the former energy and steam power plants, the design preserves the material patina, structural elements, and industrial identity of the buildings. Public functions, including exhibitions, educational spaces and cafés, were inserted with minimal intervention, allowing new life to emerge from historic fabric. Further cultural programming could reinforce this space's civic potential.

A different approach was used in the Great Warehouse Building, where modular volumes were inserted to accommodate classrooms and a refectory. These new internal 'boxes' are clearly differentiated from the original shell, embodying a reversible design strategy that respects the existing structure. Sustainability challenges, such as ventilation and energy use, remain areas for improvement, especially relevant under current global climate pressures.

Some interventions represent low-intensity creation, such as the inner and outer lodgings reused as student dormitories, and the guesthouse, all adapted through simple repairs. The administration building continues in use with minimal changes, demonstrating that creation can also reside in continuity, not just contrast.

Meanwhile, new additions like the Laboratory Building and Fitness Centre embody a typological dialogue with the historic site. The Laboratory Building, designed by Han Tümertekin, draws inspiration from the factory's shed roof forms and structural logic, using contemporary materials to express architectural continuity. The Fitness Centre, while more modest, blends in massing and materiality, though its spatial integration with the wider campus could be improved.

The Main Factory Building, once a vast production space, is gradually being transformed into academic facilities. Modular classroom 'boxes' have been inserted within the industrial shell, enabling functional partitioning while maintaining the legibility of the original structure. The juxtaposition of the original openness with the increased programmatic density reflects a deliberate design tension that seeks to balance spatial memory with contemporary educational needs. However, the usability and accessibility of the upper levels, reached via spiral staircases, remain open to debate (Fig. 11). The phased nature of the interventions in the Main Factory Building reflects a dynamic and adaptive conservation strategy, allowing for incremental revisions. Incorporating user feedback during implementation not only enhances the design process but also supports a more participatory and responsive approach to heritage transformation.

Though much of the transformation is complete, several buildings still await adaptive reuse. Timely intervention is crucial to prevent further deterioration. The range of design approaches applied thus far, ranging from minimal repair to expressive reinterpretation, illustrates the breadth of the conservation-creation dialogue at the Sümer Campus. This

diversity affirms that conservation is not a fixed methodology but a flexible framework that allows for site-specific creativity.

To sum up, the AGU Sümer Campus illustrates how a disused industrial site can be reactivated as a space for education, research, and cultural production. Through the lens of creative conservation, it demonstrates how architecture can honour the past while generating new social and spatial futures. This dialogue between conservation and creation offers a replicable model for similar heritage transformation projects, ensuring that historical environments remain relevant, resilient, and meaningful in contemporary urban life.

Notes

1 Sümerbank played a significant role in the development and expansion of the textile sector in Türkiye. Its responsibilities included initiating new industrial ventures, organising training for the masters and workers needed in the factories it operated, providing loans to industrial enterprises, and carrying out banking activities (Dölen, 1992). As a result, the factories were commonly referred to by the name 'Sümerbank'.

2 A Turkish delegation was sent to the Soviet Union to study the economic model implemented there at the time. Subsequently, a delegation from the Soviet Union visited Türkiye to conduct feasibility studies for the establishment of industrial facilities, primarily in the textile sector. As a result of these investigations, it was decided to establish textile factories first in Kayseri and Nazilli (Aytemur, 2010; Yücel, 2015).

3 During this period, cotton was produced in Kayseri, and by 1927, railway transport had been established to Adana – an important cotton production centre in the south. It was planned that the factory's energy needs would be met by the power plant in Kayseri and the stream in the nearby district of Bünyan. Kayseri's status as a traditional weaving centre, along with the availability of skilled labour, were key factors in selecting the site. Although the factory buildings were primarily constructed using modern techniques, the use of the region's abundant tuff stone resources was also planned as a complementary construction material (Kesgin, 2013).

4 By 1936, just one year after its establishment, the factory employed over 2,000 workers. It also became one of the leading factories in Türkiye in terms of employing women (Tuna, 2002).

5 The Kayseri Sümerbank Sports Club was established within the factory and offered a wide range of sports activities, including cycling, athletics, football, swimming, tennis, volleyball, and basketball (Akpınar, 2013).

6 To meet the factory's need for qualified personnel, a *Weaving Specialisation School* was established within Sümerbank in Kayseri to train workers ('Kayseri'de dokumacılık ihtisas mektebi', 1935).

7 Female workers left their children at the primary school and nursery located within the factory campus. The campus also included a 20-bed hospital, which featured multiple departments and was used both to treat epidemic diseases and to prevent their spread (Akpınar, 2013).

8 Özçakır's (2023) framework for evaluating the adaptive reuse of industrial heritage in Türkiye – based on the criteria of design approaches (project planning and implementation), participation (in planning, implementation, and use), and continuity of use (long-term occupation and adaptation) – is used as a reference point to assess the transformation of this 20th-century industrial site into the AGU Sümer Campus.

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‘LIVING ORGANISMS’ TO PRESERVE: PREVENTIVE ARCHAEOLOGY AND PRESERVATION PROJECT IN THE CHANGING CITY

Andrea Ugolini
University of Bologna, Italy
a.ugolini@unibo.it

Like the Lines of a Hand

The contemporary city, much like the ancient one, does not seem eager to reveal its past – although it undoubtedly ‘lo contiene come le linee d’una mano’ (Calvino, 1993, p. 10). Street layouts, squares, gardens, as well as open spaces and buildings – both new and stratified – are themselves the outcome of the continuous transformation of a place and a city, shaped by multiple histories and ways of inhabiting and using space, not always immediately legible or accessible. This multiplicity of traces and narratives becomes increasingly difficult to grasp in a world that is growing ever more superficial, where the dominance of the image tends to reduce the complexity of reality to simplified messages, discouraging deep focus and the capacity to look beyond appearances. Cities like Genoa, for instance – with one of the largest historic centres in Europe – clearly embody the coexistence of multiple temporalities. Here, historical distance and narrative-emotional simultaneity intertwine, forming a *continuum* between past and present (Settis, 2012, p. 3).

When these traces – these marked artefacts – are included in the category of ‘cultural heritage’, particularly archaeological heritage, they often evoke a variety of responses, sometimes conflicting, among those who interact with the remains of our past: scholars, heritage professionals entrusted with their safeguarding, public administrators, businesses involved in urban transformations, cultural associations, and ordinary citizens (Ricci, 2006, p. 9). These sentiments, which may give rise to divergent interests and conflicts, emerge in Genoa as elsewhere, also due to an increasing cultural heterogeneity linked to the presence of new residents from various parts of the world, as well as a complex social and economic context. All of this can hinder the development of a strong connection between people and the places they inhabit – a connection that underlies the sense of attachment to, and care for, those places.

Over the past century and the preceding one, we have repeatedly witnessed an ambiguous relationship with the vestiges of the past. At times, this relationship has taken the form of glorification, and at others of rejection, leading to the ‘isolation’ of monuments or the demolition of historic urban fabric, often driven by explicit political-pedagogical agendas (Gallerano, 1995, p. 18). Such actions were particularly prominent in the aftermath of Italian unification and during the Fascist period, linked to well-documented processes of nationalisation and the construction of a collective identity. In the post-war period, this dynamic shifted toward a kind of paralysis, the result of a changed – and increasingly expansive, even ‘boundless’ – conception of historical and artistic heritage. This broader perspective frequently engendered a fear of betraying the meaning of heritage or losing its memory. As a result, many contexts moved from selective approaches to a veritable ‘freezing’ of the historic city, losing sight of conservation as a complex and dynamic process – one that should integrate attention to material and historical data with an un-



FIG. 1. Genoa, Porta Soprana, or Porta di Sant'Andrea (photo: Ugolini, 2024).



FIG. 2. Genoa, the so-called House of Christopher Columbus (photo: Piergiulio90, own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Casa_di_Cristoforo_Colombo_(Genova)#/media/File:Casa_Cristoforo_Colombo_2.JPG).

derstanding of the relationships between visible pre-existing structures and evolving urban contexts. Such an approach is necessary to embrace change, innovation, and the inevitable evolution of the city.

The heritage, *lato sensu*, that characterises our cities appears to be composed, on the one hand, of iconic or monumental artefacts with a strong didactic function – as is the case in Genoa when observing Porta Soprana, the flank of Palazzo San Giorgio facing the Ripa, or the so-called 'House of Columbus'. In such instances, restoration interventions have often selectively erased the traces of time, stripping these sites of evidence of their historical development and transforming them into a kind of 'negation of memory' (Figs. 1 and 2). On the other hand, there exist what may be called 'memory enclosures' or 'temporal windows', in which ancient remains – though materially preserved, and perhaps too often merely 'frozen' – end up appearing disconnected from the living, ever-evolving fabric of the city to which they belong. In these cases, paradoxically, history seems to have vanished.

Walking through the *caruggi* of Genoa, one encounters fragments of arches, walled-up openings, and chipped plaster – forming a veritable urban catalogue of historical stratifications. Yet within this context, the rhetoric of the 'palimpsest' sometimes risks turning into an uncritical celebration of permanence and accumulation, ultimately obscuring the tensions, fractures, and discontinuities that mark urban forms and spaces (Figs. 3 and 4).

A Different Perspective: from Risk to Archaeological Potential

Given these premises, it becomes clear how complex it is to establish shared relationships between ever-evolving urban environments and a heritage whose vastness seems to expand with each passing

day. When we focus specifically on archaeological heritage, the situation becomes even more intricate. It is important to recall – as emphasised by the archaeologist Luigi Malnati – that archaeological heritage is not limited to what is visible, such as monuments, sites, or artefacts displayed in museums. It also significantly encompasses what remains hidden underground and is yet unknown: ancient settlements scattered across the landscape or stratified deposits lying beneath our cities (Malnati, 2014, p. 6). This is a form of heritage whose scale appears to be growing continuously.

Until a few years ago, this growth was often the result of salvage excavations and emergency recoveries, driven by a widespread indifference to the historical identity of places – places where it was assumed that time or human activity had erased all traces of the past. Although history is frequently recounted solely through written or documentary sources, it manifests itself in a far more tangible and complex manner through material evidence, stratifications, and physical traces – preserved both above ground and beneath the surface – as exemplified by the *Loggia dei Mercanti* in Genoa, which will be discussed later (Fig. 5).

Since the mid-19th century, archaeological excavation has been recognised as a scientific practice aimed at the study and documentation of the remains of antiquity. This practice is formally endorsed by both legislation and international charters, not only as a preliminary phase in the restoration of monuments, but also as an emergency measure within the framework of infrastructure works, with the aim of recovering and safeguarding archaeological heritage[1].

However, it is only when a decision is made to preserve *in situ* the remains brought to light – due to the quality and significance of the finds – that this assemblage of remnants takes on the form of a genuine 'site'. The excavation process, with



FIG. 3. Genoa, houses on Via Ponte Reale (photo: Mariotti, 2024).



FIG. 4. Genoa, the corner of the Loggia della Mercanzia, also known as the Loggia di Banchi (photo: BasilicoIrish, own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=35463000).

its inevitable destructions and selections, can be understood as an authentic act of 'creation' – understood as the 'act or process of making or building something' (Cambridge Dictionary) – which consciously or unconsciously transforms that fragment of city or territory into new urban and extra-urban 'landscapes'.

In these places, what remains should be recognised not as isolated artefacts but as dynamic products of cultural, settlement, construction, and transformative processes that have shaped the urban space over time. These are complex palimpsests in which the material traces of the past – structures, infrastructures, pathways, surfaces, and relics – coexist and intertwine with contemporary transformations, rendering a layered and vibrant image of the city[2].

A clarification may be useful. The safeguarding of archaeological heritage – an essential testimony to a community's identity and a fundamental component of cultural heritage – has, at least since the end of the last century, necessitated a shift away from the 'randomness' of urban discoveries and the management of so-called 'archaeological risk'.

In the aftermath of the building boom and rapid territorial transformations of the 1960s and 1970s – and the often-irreversible damage suffered by archaeological heritage – the need to move beyond merely reactive protection emerged strongly, advocating instead for precautionary interventions during the design phase[3]. Consequently, policies focused on emergency salvage operations were abandoned (Cabona, Gardini, 1989, pp. 295–297) in favour of strategies aimed at prevention and the management of archaeological risk, as established by the Malta Convention (1992), which promoted the integration of preventive archaeology into urban planning and infrastructure projects[4]. This approach might have offered the undeniable macroeconomic advantage of containing the costs of major public works, particularly with regard to execution timelines.

During the years of Italy's ratification of the Malta Convention, alongside numerous emergency investigations in historic centres, a profound shift occurred in the management of urban archaeological heritage. Pioneering experiences in cities such as Rome, Verona, Bologna, and Naples helped to define new approaches. In this context, Genoa also played an important role, marking what is recognised as the true 'birth of urban archaeology' in Liguria (Gardini, 2015). This period represented the transition from emergency protection to a more conscious and integrated planning of archaeological heritage within the urban environment.



FIG. 5. Genoa, Loggia dei Banchi, interior excavations (photo: Ugolini, 2024).

In planning new interventions in the territory or the city, traditional archaeological maps were initially used; however, these only recorded known findings. Subsequently, a predictive risk assessment was adopted, based on known archaeological data and historical removals, estimating the extent of deposits still preserved. These tools, initially referred to as 'risk maps' and later as 'archaeological potential maps' to emphasise their proactive function, enabled large-scale territorial in-

vestigations by integrating archaeological data with geological, geomorphological, pedological, and toponymic information.

Preventive archaeology in Genoa has accompanied significant urban and infrastructural interventions, ensuring the protection of heritage. Key examples include the excavations at Piazza De Ferrari (2015–2017), preventive investigations in the Maddalena district (2010–2013), excavations related to the construction of the metro (ongoing since 2009), those at Piazza della Vittoria connected to the Bisagno stream (late 1970s to early 1980s), and investigations prior to the consolidation works on the ancient walls (2012–2016)[5].

However, the main issue identified is the lack of recognition – particularly among non-archaeological professionals such as architects, engineers, urban planners, and policymakers – of the fundamental objectives of archaeological protection and its extraordinary cultural potential. This is often confined to a technical-specialist domain, overlooking its nature as a public and collective good. Preventive archaeology is frequently perceived merely as a regulatory requirement, intended to 'clear' areas to allow construction works to proceed. Consequently, the discourse has shifted from the concept of risk *to* archaeology to that of risk *from* archaeology, transforming what is essentially a scientific matter into an operational problem, thereby failing to appreciate its evident macroeconomic benefits (Gelichi, 1999, p. 8).

One of the most problematic aspects, long highlighted by numerous scholars, concerns the apparent estrangement and anonymity of new assets and landscapes – both urban and non-urban – recently brought to light through excavation activities. These frequently present themselves as isolated entities, almost disconnected from their surrounding context. For the inhabitants or users of these places, it is therefore challenging to recognise in the few preserved material remains – such as wall fragments, traces and fragments of pavements, or utilitarian and productive artefacts – a coherent component of a broader narrative, a legible fabric that synthesises the multiple histories that have shaped them over time.

Ruins and architectural fragments, even when recontextualised in their original setting or revealed through restoration interventions, too often appear as isolated elements, detached from the historical context to which they originally belonged. Under these conditions, it is difficult to imagine the original appearance of a building or an urban fabric, as well as to understand the daily lives of its inhabitants through what remains (Fig. 6). Even when subject to restoration, such remains often seem distant from current reality and, despite their undeniable historical value, struggle to be recognised as authentic cultural assets – that is, as living and meaningful testimonies of a civilisation (Ricci, 2006, pp. 80–81).

"'Comprendre, c'est traduire': The Loggia dei Mercanti in Genoa"

It is important to remember that every archaeological discovery has always been met with enthusiasm by both specialists and the general public. This sentiment today is further fuelled by certain cultural heritage policies which, while aiming to share specialised knowledge with an increasingly broad audience, risk simultaneously reducing everything to superficial consumption, much like many other aspects of our society. One only needs to observe the emphatic tones with which the media have traditionally greeted the discovery of a fragment of the history of our cities, followed by a rapid disinterest in its fate. Such neglect has sometimes condemned these finds to oblivion for years, as was the case with the large stone blocks of the so-called *Moli di Colombo*, unearthed during the rede-



FIG. 6. Genoa, Loggia dei Banchi, remains of ancient city shops (photo: Ugolini, 2024).

velopment works of Genoa's Old Port for the Colombiadi of 1992, and subsequently abandoned for years near the Scarpino landfill (Lombardi, 2022). This fate has befallen many other decontextualised ruins, preserved ostensibly for protection, and often subsequently forgotten.

The issue, however, goes beyond the mere conservation and study of archaeological data; it concerns, even more significantly, the strengthening of its relationship with the historical and urban context to which it belongs. In the specific case of the *Moli*, as reported by local news sources[6], these stone fragments – which could not be reintegrated into their original context due to the area's planned use as a car park in Renzo Piano's redevelopment project – now risk being relocated to alternative sites, albeit within a renewed urban museum itinerary. In this perspective, however, there is a real danger that such elements, as 'scattered and surviving remnants from demolitions and excavations, lost in storage' (Giovannoni, 1931, p. 258) may be relegated to the status of mere decorative objects for squares and public spaces, stripped of their original historical and testimonial significance.

It is crucial to recall that the role of objects as historical sources is neither self-evident nor automatic. Rather, it requires a continuous process of cultural mediation, in which the preservation of archaeological data must be understood as a creative act – one that enables the construction of new layers of meaning, especially when the passage of time or human intervention has severed the original connections. In such cases, a continual transmission and reinterpretation of past values and histories within contemporary communities becomes essential.

An opportunity to reflect on the issues discussed thus far – not only regarding how a site is uncovered but also its future – is offered by the case of the *Loggia dei Mercanti* in the Maddalena district, located in Piazza Banchi in Genoa, one of the oldest and most characteristic areas of the city's historic centre (Fig. 4).

First and foremost, it should be noted that – despite the availability of a substantial body of documentation, including archival sources and well-established studies on the medieval urban fabric of the city – it appears that in this case, too, work commenced without a prior and systematic archaeological assessment. Such an investigation could have revealed, near the construction site, the presence of Roman and medieval structures.

The *Loggia*, built at the end of the 16th century through the demolition of pre-existing buildings, is located in a strategic area of Genoa's urban fabric, close to the harbour. Archaeological investigations have uncovered a highly stratified area of approximately 300 m², which testifies to a continuous occupation from the Roman period through to the High Renaissance. Evidence emerged of structures belonging to two noble *Alberghi* (the de Nigro and Usodimare families), set within a complex urban layout composed of both public and private spaces – such as courtyards, *caruggi* (narrow alleyways), small squares, and workshops (Gardini, 2023, pp. 4–5; MiC, 2020).

The various building phases, taken as a whole, document a significant evolution in both architectural and functional terms, including structural modifications, hydraulic and sewerage systems, and traces of artisanal activities – particularly in metallurgy and, quite likely, textiles. The site thus represents a privileged observatory for analysing the historical, urban, and economic dynamics that have shaped one of the key nodes of Genoa's historical city (Fig. 5).

The management and interpretation of a context of such significance therefore present considerable challenges – both methodological, in terms of the protection and preservation of the site, and communicative, in terms of cultural translation directed towards increasingly diverse communities, both culturally and ethnically. First and foremost, the site of the *Loggia dei Banchi* compels us to engage with the complexity of an 'internal' temporality: a multiplicity of time layers evoked and borne witness to by the interwoven material remains.

It is therefore essential to learn to read these interwoven layers as plural, open-ended, and never definitive narratives. As Paul Ricoeur reminds us: 'To understand is to translate' (Ricoeur, 2004, pp. 44, 145). In the face of the stratigraphic and semantic complexity of an archaeological context, the notion of a univocal and definitive reconstruction of the past should be consciously abandoned. Every interpretation must remain open to being reformulated, challenged, or superseded by new 'translations'. This constitutes a continuous exercise in mediation, in which the partial and provisional nature of any reconstruction should not be regarded as a shortcoming, but rather recognised as a defining condition of our knowledge of the past.

In this light, even the interpretation of excavation data – while remaining essential for historical and archaeological analysis and documentation – should evolve beyond the standard reliance on lengthy descriptive panels and technical plans, often accessible only to specialist audiences (Fig. 7)[7]. These tools, though widely used in exhibition contexts and frequently regarded as the primary form of public engagement, have often proved ineffective in reaching broader, more culturally diverse publics.

It would thus be advisable to develop communication strategies that favour narrative forms more deeply integrated with the surrounding urban – and indeed, social and cultural – context. Such approaches would allow for the generation of new, situated narratives capable of re-establishing meaning and continuity within place. In this perspective, it becomes essential to foster a sustained and nuanced dialogue between the past and the contemporary city – one that transcends rigid temporal divisions and reweaves the links between the ancient and the present-day environment.

In other words, we should seek to 'step outside' the physical boundaries of the structures beneath which the remains of the ancient city lie, and instead restore to them an active and meaningful role within today's urban landscape. But we shall return to these questions in due course.

A recent visit by the present author to the now somewhat dated museographic and multimedia displays at the *Domus* of Palazzo Valentini in Rome[8], as well as to the more recent installations at the *Mausoleum* of Cecilia Metella and the *Castrum Caetani*[9] – located just before the third mile of the *Via Appia Antica* – offers a compelling demonstration of how it is today possible to narrate a complex ensemble of interlocking structures through a carefully calibrated use of lighting, soundscapes, visual reconstructions, and evocative stimuli that recall everyday life in the past, in many ways not so distant from our own.



FIG. 7. Genoa, Brignole metro station (photo: Pittaluga, 2025).



FIG. 8. Rome, Domus of Palazzo Valentini, detail of multimedia reconstructions of flooring (photo: Ugolini, 2024).



FIG. 9. Rome, Mausoleum of Cecilia Metella, multimedia storytelling. Left: Livioandronico2013, own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=34471749; right: photo by Ugolini, 2025.

These are narratives that are at times fragmentary, marked by temporal leaps and juxtapositions of elements belonging to different periods. Yet, when well-orchestrated – as in the cases cited – they function like frames in a documentary, assembled according to a cinematic logic capable of generating both meaning and engagement (Figs. 8 and 9).

The strength of such displays lies precisely in their ability to render the past more accessible, as recommended by Article 6 of the Italian *Codice dei Beni Culturali* (Legislative Decree no. 42/2004), by combining emotional resonance with interpretative depth, all without sacrificing the plurality of meanings inherent in the material record. As Smith and Iversen (2012) already observed, 'interactive and social media can indeed contribute to enriching the qualitative relationships and dynamics between the public and cultural heritage objects' (Ceraudo, 2018, p. 7), as they can engage visitors in targeted, participatory activities that stimulate dialogue and shared reflection.

The author is, however, fully aware of the risks associated with multimedia narratives. On the one hand, such tools play a valuable mediating role between the scientific community and the wider public; on the other, one cannot ignore their tendency to simplify content and to spectacularise – or even distort – the multiple histories of places. This risk is particularly evident when ancient remains are isolated within enclosed spaces, such as museums or structured archaeological areas, thereby losing their original connection with the urban or landscape context to which they belong (Ugolini, 2017, p. 226)[10].

Such risks, however, do not appear to apply to the two Roman case studies discussed here, largely due to their spatial location: the *Domus* of Palazzo Valentini, situated in close proximity to the Imperial Fora, and the Mausoleum and *Castrum Caetani* complex at the third mile of the *Via Appia Antica*, within the perimeter of the corresponding Archaeological Park. In both instances, the strong integration with the historical and environmental fabric facilitates a more coherent and contextually grounded form of narration, helping to preserve a meaningful relationship between the material remains and the memory of place.



FIG. 10. Valencia, Archaeological Museum of l'Almoina (photo: Joanbanjo, own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12515096).



FIG. 11. Valencia, Archaeological Museum of l'Almoina, multimedia reconstructions (photo: Ugolini, 2024).

Certainly, the experience of the *Centre Archéologique de l'Almoina*[11] in Valencia offers a case far more comparable to that of Genoa. This site stands as a significant example of the interaction between ancient ruins and the contemporary city, tracing a red thread between past stratifications and the present-day urban fabric. Located in the heart of the city, l'Almoina allows for a 'transparent' reading of Valencia's history, offering genuine 'temporal windows' from the square above that make historical continuity tangible within the urban landscape.

Carefully designed strategies for the conservation of ancient remains are complemented by subtle multimedia reconstructions of the Roman city, all housed within an architecture that is sober and understated. Through the calibrated interplay of light and shadow, the site communicates the layered stories of the place, unfolding the traces of an ongoing historical process (Figs. 10 and 11).

Similarly, the *Jardin des Vestiges* in Marseille provides an integrated pathway through which the remains of the ancient port – rediscovered below street level – are physically and culturally linked to the city's Museum of History. In this instance, the preservation of antiquity goes beyond mere material safeguarding of the past. It also enables the creation and re-weaving of new relationships with the contemporary urban landscape[12]. This, in turn, fosters a deeper understanding of both the historical context and the ancient maritime setting, with the site conceived as part of a connected system involving other historical monuments and archaeological complexes within the city centre (Figs. 12 and 13)[13].



FIG. 12. Marseille, Jardin des Vestiges. Discovery of the ancient port of Marseille (c. 1967), educational panels at the Marseille History Museum (photo: Ugolini, 2019).



FIG. 13. Marseille, Jardin des Vestiges and the Marseille History Museum at the Centre Bourse (photo: Ugolini, 2019).



FIG. 14. Genoa, Palazzo Ducale, Grimaldina Tower (photo: Postcrosser, own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Palazzo_Ducale_Torre_Grimaldina.JPG).

… Starting Over from the Present

Starting over from the present represents the most effective way to enhance the Loggia dei Banchi, provided that the project, as mentioned, goes beyond the physical boundaries of the ancient building beneath which the archaeological remains are preserved. These remains – medieval shops, commercial spaces, hydraulic structures such as the cloaca connected to the Sant'Anna stream, and fragments dating back to the Roman era – possess extraordinary value, which, however, risks fading if isolated from the broader urban context.

The challenge, therefore, lies in building a vital and dialogic relationship with the city, with its alleyways and its stones, which, so to speak, 'speak' because they are continuously marked by human action and time.

From this perspective, the Loggia dei Banchi could transform from a simple exhibition space – as has sometimes been proposed – into a point of activation for a broader and more layered urban narrative, capable of restoring depth and continuity to the city's memory.

Located in a highly symbolic area of the historic centre – just a short distance from Palazzo San Giorgio, the ancient municipal seat and later the eponymous Banco, and not far from Palazzo Ducale with the Grimaldina Tower (Fig. 14) – the Loggia should not be regarded as an isolated monument, but as an integral part of a complex system of places that, taken together, narrate the historical

complexity of Genoa: from the medieval street network and squares (Piazza Banchi, Via del Campo, Via San Lorenzo, Piazza San Matteo) to the historic churches (San Pietro in Banchi, San Lorenzo, San Donato), from the museum institutions (Museum of the Treasury, Diocesan Museum, Strada Nuova Museums) to even the protected historic shops (Fig. 15).

The true meaning of the city, in fact, is not hidden in a single place to be discovered or jealously preserved, but is revealed through a temporal journey, a narrative project constructed by organising a web of choices: of places to visit, routes to follow, ways of telling and interpreting each stage. Essentially, it is a form of writing and interpretation that brings the city itself to life.

In this context, a solid and well-considered network of relationships would enable a more contextualised and participatory visitor experience, enhancing the historical and urban continuity of Genoa through the dialogue between memory, public space, and traditional economic practices.



FIG. 15. Genoa, Marescotti di Cavo, historic pastry shop and liqueur store (photo: Ugolini, 2024).

This approach is, moreover, perfectly aligned with the objectives of the Integrated Urban Regeneration Plan for the historic centre, known as the *Piano dei Caruggi*[14], as it helps to strengthen the bond between heritage and community, promoting a more inclusive and lively use of urban spaces.

The Loggia could thus become a place where the remains of medieval Genoa connect with contemporary cultural practices, activating a permanent laboratory for interpreting the past that is integrated into the daily life of the city.

Only by acknowledging and embracing this complexity, and by overcoming the customary prejudices that constrain new interpretations of heritage, can one hope to reconcile, in a balanced manner, the imperative to preserve the physical and cultural legacy of historic structures with the introduction of diverse modes of enhancement and utilisation. Such approaches have the potential to bring wider audiences closer to realities often perceived as the exclusive domain of specialists, thereby ensuring a vital continuity with the present, even when necessitating appropriate modifications.

Indeed, the intricate relationship between heritage and collective memory entails, as Halbwachs reminds us, a perpetual 'reconstruction in light of the present' (Halbwachs, 1987, p. 28). Collective memory does not merely safeguard the past; rather, it continuously reinterprets it in response to contemporary needs, sensibilities, and inquiries. As the French philosopher demonstrates, it is never identical to itself; likewise, strategies for the management and preservation of ancient remains inevitably constitute a creative endeavour, which finds expression through practices of material conservation.

Furthermore, these practices are far from neutral interventions: they involve transformations, contextual adaptations, and an ongoing redefinition of meanings over time. It is within this dynamic process that the surviving vestiges assume new functions, renewed significance, and a continuity of meaning that enables an active dialogue with the present.

This reflection takes on particular significance in light of the increasingly multi-ethnic nature of the populations residing in many historic city centres, such as Genoa, where cultural heritage must engage with an ever more diverse society. Within this context, the objective becomes the construction of new interpretative alliances capable of enabling – even symbolically – contemporary urban landscapes to reclaim their historical depth, and the vestiges of the past to acquire a living significance within a dynamic present oriented towards the future.

For this significance to remain active and widely shared, it is essential that every process of valorisation be founded upon a shared cultural project, one that transcends individual expertise and mere material testimony, recognising in the signs of change essential elements of a common narrative. Only in this way will it be possible to integrate the transformations of territories and cities – understood, as Bianchi Bandinelli observed as early as 1953, as veritable 'living organisms' – within a vision that unites conservation, inclusion, and a sense of time.

Notes

1 The first emergency excavations date back to the construction of the London Underground in the mid-19th century, and in Italy to the mid-20th century during the development of the Rome metro (Zanini, 2000, pp. 255–261).

2 See the definition of Historic Urban Landscape outlined in the Recommendation adopted by UNESCO (2011).

3 The first initiatives of this kind were undertaken by the British immediately after the Second World War, during the expansion of the London Underground. In Italy, however, it was not until the 1980s that the first experimental approaches in this field were observed (Ugolini, 2020, p. 821).

4 Although the European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (Council of Europe, 1992) was signed in Valletta in 1992, the Italian government only ratified it in 2015. For further details, see *Archaeologia Preventiva*, published by the ANA in May 2015 (Available at: http://www.archeologi.org/professione/archeologia-preventiva.html, Accessed: 29 May 2025). It should be noted, however, that Article 28 of Legislative Decree 42/2004 already permitted the Superintendencies to require preventive archaeological surveys for the protection of archaeological heritage. Furthermore, the new Public Procurement Code (Legislative Decree 36/2023) has finally established procedures for the preventive verification of archaeological interest (VPIA) in Annex I-8.

5 For further reference, see the volumes of *Archeologia in Liguria*, new series, vol. III (2008-2009), vol. IV (2010–2011), and vol. V (2012–2013), available on the official website of the Soprintendenza Archeologia, Belle Arti e Paesaggio per la Città Metropolitana di Genova e la Provincia di La Spezia.

6 As reported by *GenovaToday* on 8 October 2016, a project was announced to relocate the so-called *Moli di Colombo* – eighteen large stone blocks that had been stored for years near the Scarpino landfill – back into the heart of the historic city centre. (Available at: https://www.genovatoday.it/cronaca/moli-colombo-progetto-riqualificazione.html, Accessed: 29 May 2025).

7 In Genoa, at the Brignole metro station (2012), remains of Bronze Age masonry are visible, though their enhancement is largely limited to basic explanations via information panels. Similarly, the Darsena stop (2005) still hosts the permanent exhibition *ArcheoMetro*, which uses models and explanatory panels to illustrate the historical development of the port of Genoa.

8 The Domus of Palazzo Valentini, located in the heart of Rome near Piazza Venezia, forms part of an underground archaeological site preserving the remains of affluent Roman residences from the Imperial period. The exhibition, inaugurated in 2010 and curated by Piero Angela alongside a team of archaeologists, historians, and technicians, employs lighting, projections, and virtual reconstructions to recreate rooms, mosaics, and furnishings. (Angela 2011; Baldassarri, 2010).

9 The Mausoleum of Cecilia Metella stands as a prominent monument along the Appian Way. Adjacent to it is the Castrum Caetani, a medieval fortress built in the 14th century by the noble Roman Caetani family. In 2022, the Appian Way Archaeological Park launched a multimedia project curated by archaeologists Stefano Roascio and Francesca Romana Paolillo. This immersive experience retraces the history of these sites, focusing on the construction of the Via Appia and its crucial role in Rome's expansion. Enriched with virtual reconstructions and multimedia content, the exhibition offers an engaging and accessible narrative of the transformations that have shaped the site over the centuries (Paris, 2009; Lucchetti, 2022).

10 It should also be noted how risky multimedia storytelling can be in terms of communication, especially when it encourages superficial interaction focused more on visual effects than on content, or when technological obsolescence demands costly updates that are unsustainable over time (D'Alessandro *et al.*, 2020).

11 The Almoina Archaeological Centre, designed by Elías Torres and José Antonio Martínez Lapeña and opened in 2007, preserves remains from the Roman, Visigothic, and Islamic periods. The elevated walkway and display technologies allow visitors to understand the city's transformations over time in relation to the urban context.

12 The Jardin des Vestiges, inaugurated in October 2009, is located in the 1st arrondissement of Marseille, behind the Centre Bourse. Discovered in 1967 during construction works, it houses the remains of the ancient Greco-Roman port of the city. The garden was designed by landscape architect Joël-Louis Martin and is now an integral part of the visitor route of the Marseille History Museum.

13 In Italy, there are equally significant examples of integration between ancient remains and museum systems. In Turin, the Archaeological Garden of the Palatine Gate and the Museum of Antiquities are part of a large urban redevelopment project launched in the 1980s. This project connects various sites in the Roman area, including the Palatine Gate, the Roman theatre, the Egyptian Museum, and other museums within the Royal Complex, creating a coherent and accessible cultural route. Similarly, in Milan, between the 1990s and 2000s, a comparable itinerary was developed which, starting from Via De Amicis and passing through the Antiquarium and Via Arena, links the Columns of San Lorenzo, the mosaics of the Chapel of Sant'Aquilino, the Park of the Basilicas, and the Imperial Amphitheatre.

14 Launched in November 2020, the 'Piano Caruggi' is an integrated programme of measures aimed at the regeneration of Genoa's historic city centre, with the goal of making it a more liveable, safe, and attractive place for residents, workers, and tourists. The programme is structured around several operational pillars, including maintenance and technological innovation, socio-educational initiatives, commercial development, enhanced security measures, and the promotion of tourism and leisure activities. (Available at: https://smart.comune.genova.it/caruggi, Accessed: 29 May 2025).

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PRESERVING THE ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF GENOA. REFLECTIONS ON AN ONGOING EXPERIENCE

Rita Vecchiattini
University of Genoa, Italy
rita.vecchiattini@unige.it

The University of Genoa owns or manages a rich heritage of historic buildings, representing some important phases of expansion and wealth for the city[1]. The heritage includes many protected buildings such as deconsecrated churches, monasteries, 16th century villas, 17th and 18th century palaces and complexes, bourgeois palaces and early 20th century buildings, such as those of the San Martino university campus, built in reinforced concrete using the Hennebique system[2]. These are not structures emptied of their contents and reused solely for educational purposes, but buildings that often house another form of heritage within them, in some cases frequently enjoyed by the public both inside and outside the University. Daily tourist visits mainly involve the buildings that, since 2006, have been recognised by UNESCO[3] and are included in all the main itineraries of the city. The movable assets housed within the buildings are partly linked to their previous uses but also to the now historic university settlement that derives from the activity of the Jesuit College, active in the city since 1554[4]. In addition to sculptures, paintings and furnishings, there are archives and collections of various kinds and sizes, from the geo-cartographic collection, which includes two rare 17th century globes, to the botanical collection with unique 19th century specimens (dried in the herbarium and living in the greenhouse). The University also owns several buildings designed by renowned 20th century architects, which are now considered important examples of post-war architecture: the Faculty of Architecture designed in 1975 by Ignazio Gardella, the Valletta Puggia complex designed in 1977 by Tomaso Badano and Lionello Calza, and the Faculty of Economics designed in 1990 by Aldo Luigi Rizzo and Aldo Pino[5]. Of these, only the Valletta Puggia complex is a completely new building that certainly relates to the landscape but not directly to existing structures. In the other two cases, however, the design creativity had to contend with previous buildings or ruins, demonstrating different levels of attention and recognition of value.

The University's oldest architectural heritage dates back mainly to the 16th and 17th centuries and has undergone functional, technical and stylistic changes throughout history. The bombings of the Second World War put a strain on the heritage, with demolitions and partial collapses that required numerous partial reconstruction work. These were mostly carried out by the Genio Civile in a pragmatic manner, often in reinforced concrete, without the sensitivity of the conservator or the creativity of the designer[6]. The case of the decorative elements, which have always been considered the greatest repository of value, is different. The necessary additions to the wall paintings were mostly carried out in continuity with the original work, simplifying the designs and colours as much as possible. There are numerous examples where the decorative elements have been restored with careful, camouflaged additions. In a complete paradigm shift, in 1958 the central panel



FIG. 1. Former Faculty of Architecture, now Department of Architecture and Design – new-build project by Ignazio Gardella (photo by M. Ridella).

of the vault in the Aula Magna of the University building, which had lost its decoration[7], was repainted by Francesco Menzio, the winner of an open public competition that did not direct participants towards specific themes or styles. In a complete departure from the rich frame of the painting, he proposed a simple decoration for the vaulted ceiling inspired by ancient Genoese portolan charts, with a blue background featuring wind roses and a few small allegorical and religious figures. It was a courageous intervention that testifies to the connection between the city and the sea and, in the painter's intention, was intended to lighten the entire composition. The result is certainly creative but perhaps contrasts too sharply with the rest of the painting, producing, according to some, a sense of alienation that the four allegorical figures relating to the frame fail to remedy. However, the Soprintendenza[8] considered the intervention to be appreciable, based on the value of difference rather than an attempt at an ahistorical revival of motifs taken from the 17th century (SBAP, 2006).

Over time, the University has adopted various management approaches, sometimes emphasising its historical and artistic heritage as a distinctive and essential feature, and sometimes considering it merely as a means to serve its educational and research missions, relegating it to the role of a silent shell. In some cases, it has even been considered a burden, a tight-fitting garment that had to be altered to meet the needs of the moment: bold choices were made that took into account neither the value nor the structural, compositional and spatial logic with which the buildings had been constructed.

Until the 1990s, interventions on the existing university heritage were sporadic but fundamental, involving local and non-local designers who placed their design skills and creativity at the service of the university, creating works that remain today as architectural landmarks. In this regard, Ignazio Gardella comes to mind, who designed and built the admirable complex of San Silvestro between 1975 and 1989: the first lot of the then Faculty of Architecture, which many consider one of his most successful projects (Franco and Musso, 2016, p.136). Gardella worked in a unique setting, the hill of Castello[9], where he inserted a building capable of connecting paths at different levels and becoming the distinctive element of the complex through its forms and the reinterpreted use of traditional Genoese materials (Fig. 1). However, it was Luciano Grossi-Bianchi, a professor at the University of Genoa, who directly engaged with the existing structures, designing and constructing the second lot of the then Faculty of Architecture between 1989 and 1992 on the ruins of the Bishop's palace and what remained of the nuns' convent (Moriconi, 2006). The preservation of some ruined parts in the garden, the uncovering of some significant sections of wall and the completion of other parts with new reinforced concrete structures that echo the fullness of the stone walls and the shape of the vaulted ceilings are combined with parts where reinforced concrete is used in a decidedly contrasting way.

In a spirit of conservation, Cesare Fera and Riccardo Baldacci undertook the restoration of a part of the Balbi-Senarega palace affected by bombing in the 1980s. They worked on the wall paintings and limited the design of the new lighting system to lighting fixtures reminiscent of ship lamps, the replacement of some windows and doors, and the addition of new marble flooring and some furnishings.



FIG. 2. Albergo dei Poveri, lecture hall and reading room – renovation and fitting-out project by Enrico Bona.

Enrico Davide Bona, also a professor at the University of Genoa, began work on the Albergo dei Poveri in 1991, creating new structures within the complex to reduce the oversized spaces and adapt them to new functions (classrooms, library, lecture hall). Here too, the reference to the sea was the basis for the decision to create a sort of light, permeable bow in metal mesh at the entrance to the lecture hall and a structure reminiscent of a suspended vessel, which now houses a reading room in the library (Fig. 2).

Finally, Aldo Luigi Rizzo, a contract lecturer in the Architecture course during the years of the project, was the author of a visionary project for the then Faculty of Economics, also completed in 1991, in the 19th-century Scio in Darsena. A superstructure of steel, reinforced concrete and glass-block conceals the old building, which remains crushed and barely legible, except for the passageways and vaulted spaces on the ground floor (Fig. 3). A large steel arch leaning against one of the warehouses houses the safety stairs, supports the overhang of the structure above and formally characterises the seafront.

In each of the above interventions, it is possible to identify the personality of the designer and his creativity, from Rizzo's large-scale intervention to Fera's more limited one. The conservative aspect can be discerned in a certain attention to the spatial qualities of the rooms, but certainly not in the respect for the materials. Coverings, doors, windows and flooring were not preserved in any case unless identified as the work of an artist, as in the case of the small room decorated with architectural and floral motifs.

The latest new construction in the historic context of Via Balbi is the work of Giorgio Mor, professor at the University of Genoa, who in 2002 built a new connecting building between the Palazzo di Gio Francesco Balbi in Via Balbi 2 and the Palazzo di Giacomo e Pantaleo Balbi in Via Balbi 4. This delicate intervention was necessary in order to accommodate a stairwell and lift serving both buildings. The connection acts as a camouflaging element between the two prestigious buildings, but inside, traces of the old façade remain visible in some of the windows and in the corbels of a balcony.

Apart from this case, since the 2000s, the University has carried out maintenance work, alternating between specific artistic heritage conservation projects, such as those relating to Valerio Castello's frescoes in Palazzo Balbi-Senarega, and maintenance work and the brutal installation of systems, which are unfortunately much more numerous than the conservation work and are not organised within a planned framework. The restoration of the frescoes, among the most striking examples of Baroque art, was an



FIG. 3. Darsena, headquarters of the Department of Economics – renovation and extension project by Aldo Luigi Rizzo (photo by M. Ridella)

important project promoted by the University in support of the conservation and enhancement of heritage[10]. The project made it possible to create several reading rooms with new furnishings where students can enjoy the beauty and art that surrounds them in a relaxing atmosphere (Fig. 4). However, the focus on the results and on conservation aspects, which were always shared and discussed with the Superintendency, did not favour the overall vision, to the extent that the upgrading of the electrical system and the shading of the south-facing French windows were postponed. These may seem trivial issues, but they are necessary for the proper functioning of the rooms, for which two creative solutions are needed. In 2025, it was necessary to install some temporary walkable cable ducts on the floor while awaiting a design solution. As for the windows, the rooms are very bright and in some months of the year the sun shines in strongly, causing discomfort for students reading or working on computers. Not only that, but the sun's rays passing through the glass tops of the desks overheat the surfaces below, posing a risk to objects and people. The simple and creative solution, which does not mask the historic windows, came from observing what had been done at the National Museum of Ravenna, which had already faced a similar problem by placing lightweight fabric panels on the window shutters.

While some parts of the heritage have finally been restored, many other works still need to be carried out. On a positive note, we can say that much has been preserved simply because no work has been done or because some spaces, which are difficult to use, have been abandoned, in line with the practice of closing off areas that pose excessive problems in terms of use and/or safety. For this reason, there are currently service staircases, individual rooms or entire parts of buildings that are closed, sometimes walled up and even forgotten.

In the case of the University of Genoa, conservation and creativity seem to have been opposing activities so far. What emerges strongly from a simple survey of the architectural heritage is that this heritage, as a whole, needs attention and planning that can no longer be postponed.

In recent years, attempts have been made to forge ever closer ties between the University's technical office, which deals with technical and maintenance aspects relating to structures and facilities, and certain University departments[11] involved in research and teaching on design issues, including restoration and structural consolidation. Again, these are occasional collaborations that are not part of a planned programme. Important contributions have also come from the School of Specialisation in Architectural and Landscape Heritage in Genoa, which for several years has worked with students on some of the University's significant heritage assets: the Albergo dei Poveri, Palazzo Cattaneo-De Ferrari (Belimbau) and the former Church of Saints Gerolamo and Francesco Saverio[12].

This is the context for the study topic proposed to students of the Master's Degree Course in Architecture (LM4) who attended the Laboratory for the Design of Restoration and Enhancement of Cultural Heritage in the academic year 2024–25[13]. The Palazzo di Giacomo e Pantaleo Balbi in Via Balbi 4 is undoubtedly one of the most evocative noble buildings in Via Balbi, but also one of the most significant Palazzi dei Rolli listed in the 2006 UNESCO recognition[14]. It consists of a main body, begun in 1618, which has the peculiarity of having two noble floors one above the other (for the two Balbi brothers), to which, in 1645, an internal garden was added, breaking through the back wall, which opens onto a large nymphaeum and two side wings. One of the two wings was originally porticoed and was later closed off with infill between the columns and a mezzanine floor added to make full use of the space, which has been transformed from long walkways into small studies, now used by lecturers in archaeology and art history. It is precisely these areas, partly home to the Department of Antiquities, Philosophy and History (DAFIST)[15] and partly closed due to non-compliance with height requirements, that have been the subject of study by the Restoration Design Laboratory[16] (Fig. 5).



FIG. 4. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, study rooms – restoration project by Monica Giovannelli and Stefano Bergamini.



FIG. 5. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, former archaeology spaces currently closed and the subject of the Laboratory's work.

Almost twenty years after the EAAE Conservation Network Workshop held in Genoa in 2007 on the theme: 'Teaching Conservation/Restoration of Architectural Heritage: Objectives, Content and Methods', the teaching model I presented at the time remains valid (Vecchiattini, 2008). The workshop format has appeared, and still appears, to be the only one capable of integrating theory and practice. This may seem obvious, but it is important to emphasise that it is also capable of stimulating the ability to analyse and synthesise knowledge. By working on a real object, students can experiment with what they have learned and 'discover' that all the knowledge acquired during their academic years is useful in a complex project such as restoration. For this reason, it is useful for the restoration design workshop to be placed in the final year of the course so that it can serve as a melting

pot of knowledge and activities. Back in 2007, I highlighted the need to develop critical thinking and saw a possible solution in the interaction between professionals with different skills. The integrated workshop, which brings together two disciplines, Restoration and Construction Technology, sometimes presenting incompatible or even opposing views and demands, helps to develop students' critical thinking skills, empowering them to make design choices. In addition, the alternation of group and individual work encourages discussion but keeps everyone's ideas and creativity distinct. In particular, the workshop is organised so that the analysis and diagnosis part is carried out in groups, in order to encourage dialogue and reasoning about structural functioning, degradation phenomena and instability mechanisms. The design proposal and choice of interventions, on the other hand, is carried out individually by students who come from very different educational and cultural backgrounds. In 2007, differences in age, level of education and aptitude were taken into account. The students came from three different educational backgrounds: Bachelor's Degree in Restoration (L17), Master's Degree in Architecture (LM4) and Master's Degree in Building Engineering-Architecture (LM4). The new experience, now in its second year, considers a more homogeneous group of students in terms of age but allows for the introduction of some considerations related to the students' or-

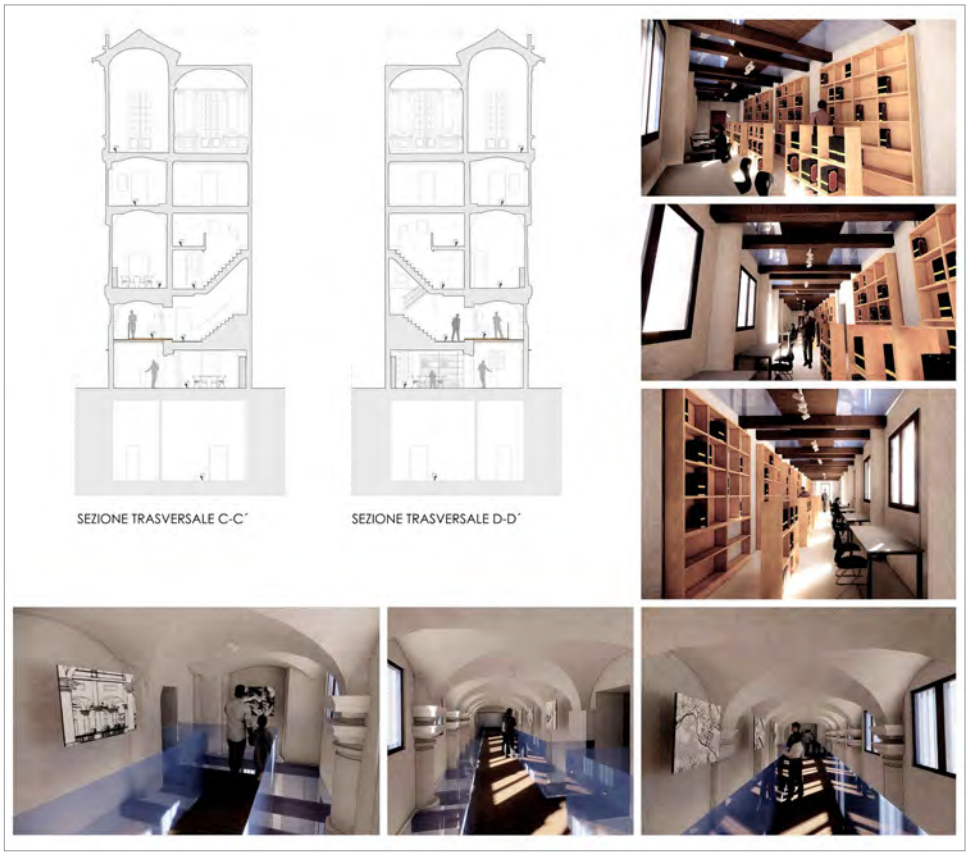


FIG. 6. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, former archaeology spaces – a project table (Alcalá Ortiz, Lavado Baquero and Vargas Rodríguez, a.y. 2024-25).

igins from different countries, both European and non-European. This course, considered distinctive of the Italian educational system, is often chosen by ERASMUS students from European countries, but also by students participating in other international exchange programmes[17].

Italian students in Genoa arrive at the Restoration Design Laboratory in their final year of their master's degree after attending Fundamentals of Restoration in the third year of their bachelor's degree and the Restoration Laboratory in the first year of their master's degree, thus after a course of study that should have equipped them with knowledge of the subject and, in some cases, a certain sensitivity to conservation. Whether due to their aptitude or what they have been taught in previous courses, they approach restoration with extreme caution, almost deferential fear, taking conservation to the extremes of its sustainability. In the Laboratory, they discover that it is not always necessary to crystallise the places to be conserved, and that it is possible to intervene creatively to enhance them, to interpret them or simply to make them usable. By contrast, international students approach restoration with enthusiasm and creativity, often ignoring the system of values still recognisable in the building as well as its construction peculiarities and, of course, local materials and techniques. The six-month workshop (which actually lasts three months,



FIG. 7. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, former archaeology spaces – a project table (Tosetti, a.y. 2024-25).

from February to May) makes it difficult to bridge the gap between students. Two schools of thought naturally form: conservatives and creatives (!). The educational task is to reduce the extremism of both sides, placing them in a position of equal debate. Students present their ideas to everyone and engage in dialogue with the group to find an effective and sustainable project solution that addresses the comments of teachers and students.

The proposed theme poses a difficult problem: two floors that are not directly connected, divided by a loft built in the 19th century with joists and rough wooden planks, positioned at a height that makes the mezzanine floor unusable due to the reduced height of the vaulted spaces[18]. In addition, tests carried out on the floor in 2021 by the University's technical office to check the condition of the floor had already revealed that some of the joist heads were badly degraded, as were parts of the planking, making preservation difficult. The solution proposed by the technical office at the time was to build a higher false ceiling with metal profiles anchored to the walls and corrugated sheet metal and to preserve the wooden joists, relieved of their load-bearing function except for their own weight and the weight of a suspended false ceiling capable of concealing the floor from the ground floor. Although this design solution would have preserved the joists, it would have deprived them of their structural significance, hidden them from view and further reduced the height of the room.



FIG. 8. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, former Archaeology spaces – a project table (Benazzi, Bologna and D'Imporzano, a.y. 2024-25).

Using materials kindly provided by the University, the students studied the building from various points of view, producing a series of thematic tables summarising its construction, structural and diagnostic aspects. They then consulted with potential future users of the spaces to understand their needs and how they would use the building. The identification of the values at stake to be preserved – and, if possible, emphasised – led to passionate discussions between teachers and students, who did not always agree. The outcome of the workshop took the form of six different projects, reflecting the different groups of thought and sensibilities, which are briefly illustrated below.

One project involved the preservation of the wooden floor with structural and material consolidation, the removal of the existing screed and the installation of new flooring. The impossibility of achieving heights that comply with building regulations led to a preference for functions for which the presence of people may be occasional or limited. The students worked mainly in the adjacent rooms and attempted to obtain an exemption from the minimum height requirements, given the undoubted value of the protected building.

A second project involved the conservation of only the main beams of the floor with structural consolidation work at the head of the degraded elements. A walkway was placed on top of these in order to limit passage to the central part, where the heights

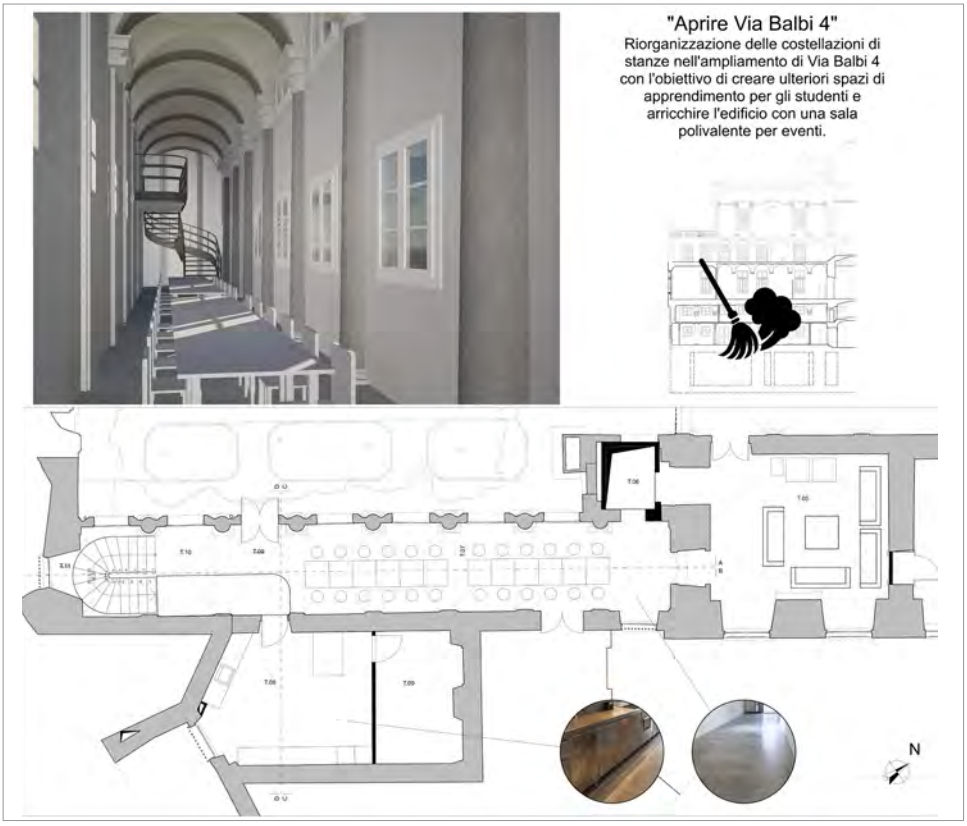


FIG. 9. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, former Archaeology spaces – a project table (Möltgen, a.y. 2024-25).

were almost uniform. The addition of a walkway made it possible to recover the spaciousness of the room that was once a portico, but once again led to the choice of a passageway rather than a work/study area (Fig. 6).

In the remaining four projects, the wooden floor was demolished to recover some or all of the lost spatiality of the ancient portico. One project involves the construction, in place of the floor, of a mezzanine capable of recalibrating the heights between the ground floor and the mezzanine floor. The double-height space is entirely dedicated to a study room (Fig. 7). A second project, with a similar objective, creates a raised walkway to connect the adjoining rooms but reserves only the ground floor for the study room (Fig. 8).

Finally, the last two projects do not involve even partial reconstruction of the floor, limiting themselves to maintaining a view from the mezzanine floor to the ground floor (Fig. 9). The last project is the most daring, as it also involves the demolition of the infill walls between the columns and the restoration of the portico as an internal space connected to the external garden. The intended use is an exhibition space for contemporary artworks owned by the University that have not yet found an exhibition location and could find a cultural connection here with the contemporary art section of the Science Library (Fig. 10).

Each project was discussed with the structural engineer for structural consolidation, the design and calculation of the new structures, and safety measures for the structures during demolition. Similarly, all cases were discussed with the building-services engineer for the heating and cooling systems in order to find the most suitable and least intrusive system for each one in relation to the existing structures[19]. I must admit that, due to time

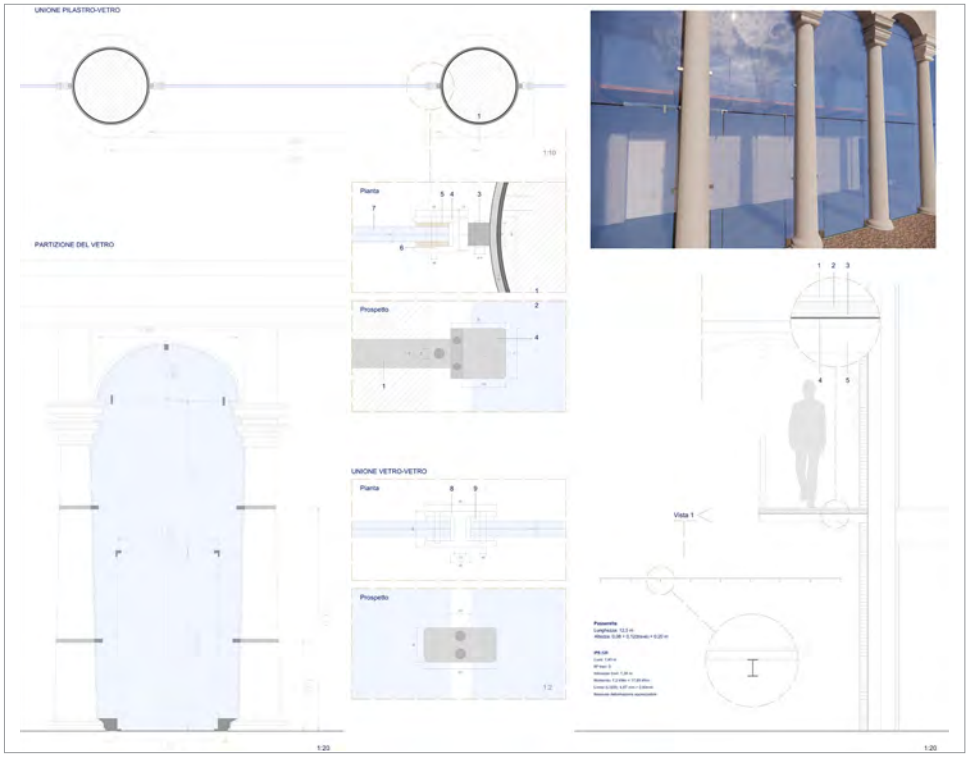


FIG. 10. Palazzo Balbi Senarega, former Archaeology spaces – a project table (Martín Diaz, a.y. 2024-25).

constraints, there was no discussion with the regulatory bodies, which would certainly have been interesting and would have stimulated further reflection.

In conclusion, the attempt was once again to combine analysis and synthesis, seeking to limit excessive analytical detail in favour of forming relationships between things, between ideas and, ultimately, between people. The site visits were organised not only to fill files with data but also, and above all, to convey a sense of curiosity and discovery, the exciting pleasure of 'creating combinations that restore unity between the so-called 'natural sciences', which are analytical, and the 'human sciences', which are necessarily synthetic' (Zagrebelsky, 2022, p. 52).

Notes

1 The real estate assets owned by the University of Genoa or managed by it, either through rental or rent-free loan, currently include more than twenty buildings and complexes of considerable value (Magnani, 2014), as well as others of lesser importance.

2 Among others, we mention, in Genoa, the deconsecrated church of San Salvatore, and that of Santa Maria delle Grazie with its monastery; Villa Giustiniani-Cambiaso, designed by Galeazzo Alessi; Villa De Franchi-Bonino; several buildings on Via Balbi, the result of land parcelling by the Balbi family, who improved the city's road network in the west in the 17th century, simultaneously creating what would become a celebration of their own legacy (Palazzo di Gio Francesco Balbi and Palazzo di Giacomo e Pantaleo Balbi), as well as the former college of the Society of Jesus (now Palazzo dell'Ateneo); the 17th-century Palazzo Cattaneo-De Ferrari (Belimbau) and the 18th-century Palazzo Rebuffo-Serra; the Albergo dei Poveri, a remarkable complex commissioned and financed by Emanuele Brignole; Palazzo Balbi-Piovera (Raggio); the former Eridania office building from 1914; the university campus, built between 1920 and 1930, a fine example of a reinforced concrete complex, as are the university clinics and the pavilions of the San Martino Hospital used by the University; the former Saiwa factory from the 1950s; and the Botanical Gardens, where architecture and nature merge.

3 Part of the University's architectural heritage is included in the UNESCO recognition that in 2006 established the site 'Genoa, the Strade Nuove and the System of the Palazzi dei Rolli'. One of the new streets is Via Balbi, and among the 42 Rolli palaces included are the following University buildings: Palazzo Cattaneo-De Ferrari (Belimbau) in Piazza dell'Annunziata; Palazzo di Gio Francesco Balbi; Palazzo di Giacomo e Pantaleo Balbi; Palazzo Balbi-Piovera (Raggio), all three on Via Balbi.

4 In Genoa, the first degrees in philosophy and theology were awarded by the Jesuit College starting from 1628 (Savelli, 1993).

5 The former Faculty of Architecture is now home to the DAD (Department of Architecture and Design); the Valletta Puggia complex is home to the DCCI (Department of Chemistry and Industrial Chemistry), the DIFI (Department of Physics), the DIMA (Department of Mathematics) and the DIBRIS (Department of Computer Science, Bioengineering, Robotics and Systems Engineering); the former Faculty of Economics is now home to the DIEC (Department of Economics).

6 The 'Genio Civile' is an Italian civil engineering body that was responsible for public works from 1861 to 1977. It was established after the unification of Italy by merging existing bodies dedicated to infrastructure (water, bridges, roads), which were initially under military jurisdiction and later under regional jurisdiction (1977)

7 The vaulted ceiling was originally adorned with a 17th-century fresco by Giovanni Andrea Carlone (1639-1697). It was then repainted in the 19th century by Giuseppe Isola (1808-1893) and finally lost this second decoration as well. A fragment of Giovanni Andrea Carlone's fresco depicting Saint Ignatius has recently been identified in a private collection (Montanari 2025).

8 The *Soprintendenza* is a decentralised body of the Italian Ministry of Culture (MIC) responsible for the protection and enhancement of cultural and landscape heritage. Over time, it has undergone several internal reorganisations, and the Superintendency for Historical, Artistic and Ethno-anthropological Heritage (SBAP) has merged into the Superintendency for Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape (SABAP).

9 The Castello hill is identified with the *castrum Januae*, which marked the beginning of the history of the urban settlement of Genoa. The area, rich in stratifications, was unfortunately bombed during the Second World War and was subsequently the focus of archaeological excavations starting in the 1960s and 1970s.

10 The restoration and refurbishment work involved four rooms in Francesco Maria Balbi's apartment on the second floor of the building. It was promoted by Prof. Lauro Magnani, the Rector's Delegate for the

enhancement of the University's heritage until 2022, and carried out between 2019 and 2022, based on a design by Monica Giovannelli and Stefano Bergamini (UniGe), in three phases by *BRC Costruzioni* (roofing); Tecnica Mista snc with Francesca Ventre, Amalia Sartori and Maria Luisa Carlini; Della Rovere (furnishings). The operational management of the restoration was carried out by the Superintendency (Dr Paola Parodi, Dr Stefano Vassallo), as was the statutory supervision (architect Carla Arcolao, Dr Massimo Bartoletti, and Dr Caterina Olcese).

11 The departments involved in architectural design are DAD and DICCA (Department of Civil, Chemical and Environmental Engineering), as well as the SSBAP in Genoa (School of Specialisation in Architectural Heritage and Landscape) for restoration, which has long supported the Technical Office with surveying, analysis, diagnosis and design guidelines.

12 Students from the 2011–12, 2012–13 and 2013–14 academic years worked on the Albergo dei Poveri; students from the 2014–15, 2015–16 and 2016–17 academic years worked on the Palazzo Cattaneo-De Ferrari (Belimbau); students from the 2018-19 academic year worked on the former Church of Saints Jerome and Francis Xavier.

13 The Laboratory takes place in the second and final year and can be chosen from four offered by the degree programme: Integrated Design Laboratory, building within the built environment; Design Laboratory for the restoration and enhancement of cultural heritage; Multi-scale Design Laboratory: city, territory, landscape; Design, Technology and Environment Laboratory. It consists of two modules, one on Restoration and one on Structural Consolidation, which, in the academic year 2024–25, were taught respectively by the author and Prof. Stefano Podestà, with the collaboration of architect Cecilia Moggia.

14 The palaces, known as Palazzi dei Rolli, were residences of the Genoese aristocracy which, between the 16th and 17th centuries, formed a system of public accommodation and were included in special lists (*rolli*). There are five lists (1576, 1588, 1599, 1614, 1664) divided into categories according to the quality and capacity of the palace. From these, the palaces, and consequently the families, that were to accommodate distinguished guests visiting the Republic were selected. In the absence of a monarchy, this honour and responsibility fell to the noble families of the city (Poleggi, 1998).

15 Palazzo Balbi Senarega is home to two of the three departments that make up the School of Humanities: the DAFIST (Department of Antiquity, Philosophy and History) and the DIRAAS (Department of Italian Studies, Romance Studies, Antiquity, Arts and Entertainment).

16 The opportunity arose following numerous inspections of various university buildings carried out in my capacity as the Rector's Delegate for the Balbi-Darsena campus. It was highly regrettable that such interesting spaces remained closed, with the real risk of their condition deteriorating year after year.

17 In the academic year 2024–25, students came not only from Italy, but also from various Spanish universities and Austria. The previous year, students also came from Colombia, Iran, Thailand and Turkey.

18 The maximum height at the keystone is 250 centimetres in some places and 230 centimetres in others, while the minimum height of the wall at the springing of the cross vaults varies between 150 and 160 centimetres. The municipal building regulations (Municipality of Genoa, 2020) stipulate a minimum height of 270 centimetres at the springing line and a minimum wall height of 150 centimetres for non-residential premises.

19 For the structural component, the lead lecturer was Prof. Stefano Podestà, while for the building services component the lead lecturer was engineer Marco Cartasegna.

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CREATE NEW ARCHITECTURE WITH THE OLD – FOCUSING ON THE CASES IN GENOA

Xia Yue
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
yue.xia@polimi.it

1. Introduction

In Genoa's historic centre, the blending of 'old' and 'new' architecture is striking, vividly presenting the history of a building or even an entire area. If excellent architectural works offer visual pleasure, then new works that incorporate historical elements provide a form of humanistic concern and philosophical reflection. For example, the School of Architecture at the University of Genoa, located in the city's oldest Castello district, combines Roman foundations and medieval walls with modern buildings, seemingly condensing the history of Italian architecture into this complex. Similarly, the Teatro Carlo Felice, along with the adjacent library and art gallery, was destroyed during the Second World War. Aldo Rossi and his collaborators redesigned the theatre space while preserving the original portico, better meeting the needs of a modern theatre and retaining the memories of old Genoa. The broken sculpture at the theatre entrance speaks to the brutality of war and the preciousness of peace. In this paper, I discuss this kind of architecture, which uses historical elements as important fragments while simultaneously incorporating contemporary structures, reconstructing spatial meanings from the past to the future. I hope this study can reveal the integration characteristics of 'new' and 'old' elements in this type of architecture, thereby providing guidance for similar design contexts.

2. Case Studies in Genoa's Historic Centre

In Genoa, the number and quality of buildings that combine 'old' and 'new' are significant. In the 2016 publication *Architettura in Liguria dopo il 1945*, outstanding modern buildings in the region are included; 13 of the 59 buildings in the central area of Genoa (A. Porto – B. Centro) have distinct 'historical layers' (Table 1).

There are 12 examples in the historic centre, excluding Brignole Metro Station. The 12 projects were realised between the 1960s and the 2010s. They are all public projects, serving as metro stations, museums, schools, theatres, social housing and commercial buildings. Considering their distribution (Fig. 1), they may be grouped into the following categories:

- Metro line: Principe, Darsena and San Giorgio Metro Stations
- Darsena area: Caffa Block, Metelino Block, School of Economics and Galata Museum
- Sarzano area: Sant'Agostino Museum and the School of Architecture
- Piazza De Ferrari: Carlo Felice Theatre
- Piazza Santa Sabina: House for the Young

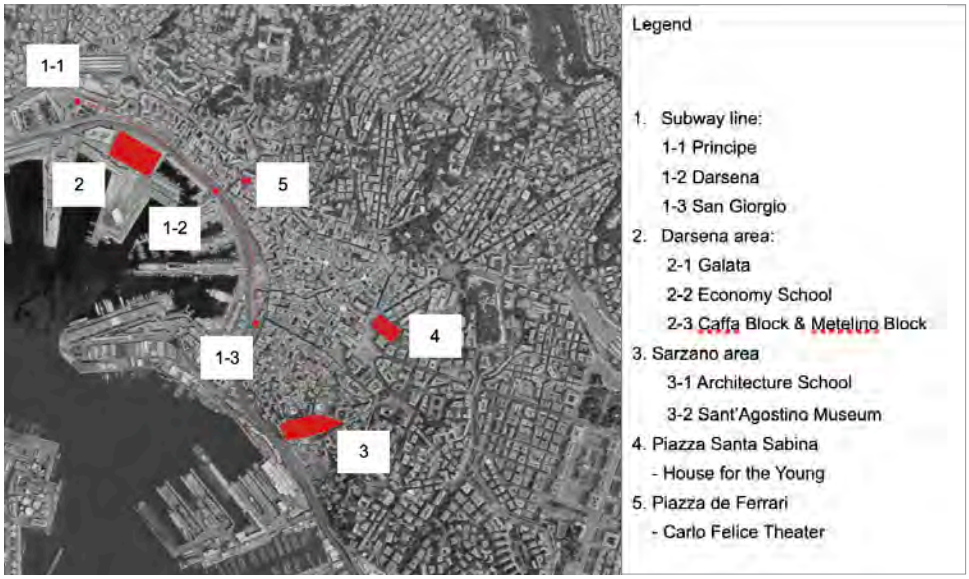


FIG. 1. Distribution of case studies in Genoa's historic centre.

	Architectural Function	Case	Construction Era	Architect
1	Subway Station	Subway Station of Principe (A–6)	1992	Renzo Piano Building Workshop
2		Subway Station of Darsena (A–14)	1998–2003	Renzo Piano Building Workshop
3		Subway Station of San Giorgio (A–20)	1998–2003	Renzo Piano Building Workshop
4		Subway Station of Brignole (B–27)	2003–2012	Atelier di Architettura
5	Museum	Museum Galata (A–8)	2002–2004	Vázquez Consuegra, Guillermo
6		Museum Sant'Agostino (B–2)	1963–1979	Albini, Franco/Helg, Franca
7	Theater	Carlo Felice Theater (B–36)	1981–1990	Rossi, Aldo
8	School	School of Economics (A–9)	1991–1992	Rizzo, Aldo Luigi (Seicom)
9		School of Architecture – P building (B–3)	1975–1989	Gardella, Ignazio
10		School of Architecture – Q building (B–4)	1989–1992	Grossi Bianchi, Luciano
11	Social Housing	House for the Young (A–13)	2005–2014	Una2 architetti associati Prati, Franz
12	Commercial Building	Caffa Block (A–10)	2000–2004	Bona Enrico D. (Studio Patrocchi)
13		Metelino Block (A–11)	2000–2004	Bona Enrico D. (Studio Patrocchi)

TAB. 1. Historical Cubist Architecture in Genoa's historic centre.

3. Case Studies

To explore 'Historical Cubist Architecture', a case-study method can be adopted. This study proposes an analytical framework for examining 'Historical Cubist Architecture'. The investigation proceeds in four structured phases. First, it identifies and differentiates between historical fragments ('old') and contemporary interventions ('new') within the architectural fabric. Second, it analyses how these fragments are arranged to achieve a perceptual quality of 'simultaneity'. Third, the representation of temporality is interpreted through close observation of material historical strata and traces, combined with an analysis of the organisation of the spatial narrative sequence. Finally, the study evaluates the building's functional adaptation and its capacity for public engagement, thereby assessing its continued socio-cultural relevance.

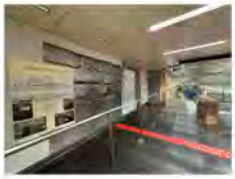
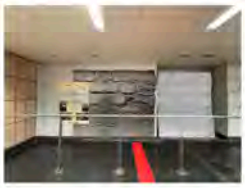
3.1 Metro Stations of Genoa

Genoa's current metro system emerged in the 1980s as a response to the city's escalating traffic crisis and inefficient public transport. Initially envisioned as a surface tram network, the project evolved into a light metro (*metropolitana leggera*) because of limited urban space and the strategic reuse of existing infrastructure. Key to its development was the adaptive repurposing of disused tunnels, such as the historic Galleria delle Grazie and Certosa Tunnel, minimising costs and preserving the city's dense urban fabric. The system's eight stations exemplify innovative urban mobility, blending modern engineering with heritage infrastructure – a testament to Genoa's resolve to transform historical challenges into a sustainable transit future.

Principe, Darsena and San Giorgio Metro Stations were designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop; the stations feature a central platform flanked by two lateral tracks. This section of the metro is located approximately 15 metres below street level, and the station sits below sea level.

1-1 Principe Metro Station			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Archaeological Presentation: Only foundations, fragments, or other archaeological relics are displayed.
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Independence: The new structure is self-sufficient, engaging with the old only spatially.
Intervention Geometry	Juxtaposition: The new volume is separate from but placed alongside the old structure, creating a dialogue.		

TAB. 1-1. Principe Metro Station.

1-2 Darsena Metro Station			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Fragmentary Preservation: Portions such as walls, frames, or roof sections are retained.
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Independence: The new structure is self-sufficient, engaging with the old only spatially.
Intervention Geometry	Encasement/Wrapping: A new skin/cornice (e.g., glass, metal) fully or partially wraps the old structure.		

TAB. 1-2. Darsena Metro Station.

1-3 San Giorgio Metro Station			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Archaeological Presentation: Only foundations, fragments, or other archaeological relics are displayed.
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Independence: The new structure is self-sufficient, engaging with the old only spatially.
Intervention Geometry	Juxtaposition: The new volume is separate from but placed alongside the old structure, creating a dialogue.		

TAB. 1-3. San Giorgio Metro Station.

Principe Metro Station has a single exit on Via Fanti d'Italia'. In front of the entrance, there is a historic wall structure, discovered during the station's construction. Archaeological research shows that it was probably constructed around the 14th century and provides evidence of the ancient San Tomasso village. This structure is highly visible to people entering and exiting the station. It gives the area a historical atmosphere and, at

the same time, contrasts with the modern-style metro entrance, making the latter appear more contemporary (Table 1-1).

Darsena Metro Station was constructed from 1998 by repurposing the old underground railway tunnel. The station is characterised by a spacious mezzanine that offers a bright, open view of the platforms. On the mezzanine, the permanent 'ArcheoMetro' exhibition uses scale models and information panels to show the historical development of the Port of Genoa over the centuries. It has three entrances. When entering from Piazza Darsena, a fragment of the old wall structure of the 17th-century' dock, with an introduction, can be observed. It serves as the beginning of the exhibition and, at the same time, describes the transformation of the dock area of the ancient port of Genoa (Table 1-2).

San Giorgio Metro Station serves the core district of the ancient port, next to the famous Palazzo San Giorgio. The main entrance is surrounded by the remains of the New Commerce Bridge (Ponte Nuove della Mercanzia), which could date back to the 15th century. The ancient structure is divided by a series of metal railings surrounding the new entrance (Table 1-3).

3.2 Darsena Area

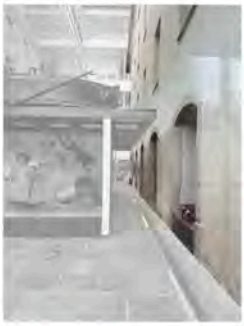
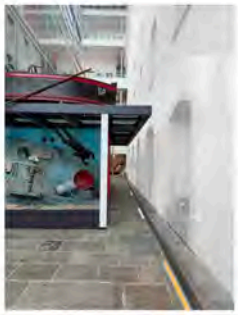
This area was historically occupied by the Darsena (dock basin) and the Arsenale (shipyard) of the Republic of Genoa. It served as a hub for coastal trade and as a shelter for merchant and war ships, while the Arsenale was used for constructing galleys and storing their weaponry. In the 17th century, with the establishment of the general Portofranco (free port), new buildings were constructed for goods storage, and the Darsena itself underwent significant transformations.

After the fall of the Genoese Republic in 1797, the Darsena was fully militarised. The most important restructuring, however, dates to the late 19th century. In 1867, the municipality signed an agreement with the government to purchase the Darsena. The general redevelopment plan, approved in 1889, included the construction of multi-storey warehouse buildings. These new 'quartieri' (warehouse blocks), each named after one of Genoa's ancient colonies – Caffa, Cembalo, Metelino and Tabarca – were completed in 1895. They joined the pre-existing Famagosta and Galata warehouses, which were part of the original Arsenale. The Scio quarter, the largest and closest to the sea, now housing the School of Economics, was completed around 1898.

Today, the area is occupied by the Galata Museum, the Caffa Block, the Metelino Block and the School of Economics. Because of its long history, rich historical fragments remain in these buildings.

3.2.1 Galata Museum

The Galata Museum is part of the broader redevelopment of the 'Porto Antico' (Ancient Port), designed by Guillermo Vazquez Consuegra for the 1992 Columbus Quincentenary celebrations and continued for Genoa's tenure as European Capital of Culture in 2004. The building was constructed in the 16th-17th centuries on medieval foundations and underwent numerous transformations over the centuries owing to political shifts and evolving shipbuilding techniques. Today, the arsenal is 'wrapped' on its front and partially along its city-facing side with new steel-framed structures and expansive glazing. In the ground-floor exhibition spaces, the remnants of the ancient facade remain present alongside new contemporary structures (Table 2-1).

2-1 Galata Museum			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Archaeological Presentation: An entire facade or structural system is preserved intact.
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Hybridity: Ola and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.
Intervention Geometry	Encasement/Wrapping: A new skin (e.g., glass, metal) fully or partially wraps the old structure. Embedding: The new volume is inserted into a "cavity" or within the interior of the old structure.		

TAB. 2-1. Galata Museum.

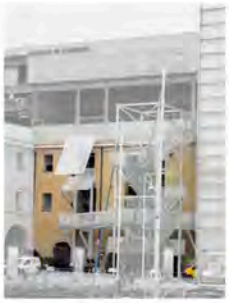
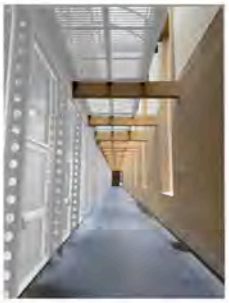
3.2.2 School of Economics of the University of Genoa

The School of Economics of the University of Genoa was transformed from the old 'Scio' quarter. The main structure remained, while the spatial function was redefined. The steel-framed 'bridges', which show a representative contemporary architectural pattern, connect the new rooms, such as classrooms, the library and study rooms. At the same time, the blue decorative tone recalls the sea, which forms the city's background (Table 2-2).

3.2.3 Caffa Block and Metelino Block

The architectural complex comprising the Caffa, Metelino and Tabarca buildings (the latter under construction), located in Genoa's historic port area, represents a significant project of urban regeneration aimed at revitalising a long-deteriorated and disused section of the old docks. Originally serving as storage and administrative facilities, these structures had fallen into a state of abandonment. The intervention, led by architect E.D. Bona, seeks to reintroduce them into the city's fabric by adapting them for contemporary mixed-use functions, including retail, ateliers, office spaces and cultural centres.

The design strategy is distinctly characterised by a layered approach that treats the existing historical structures and new additions as legible, contrasting elements. For Caffa and Metelino, the project implements a conservative restoration of the lower levels, pre-

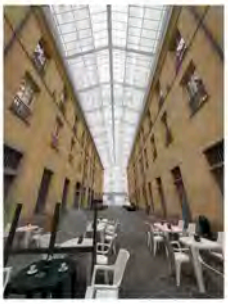
2-2 Economics School of Genoa University			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Archaeological Presentation: An entire facade or structural system is preserved intact.
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Hybridity: Ola and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.
Intervention Geometry	Layering/Stacking: Old and new elements are superimposed in vertical or horizontal layers. Embedding: The new volume is inserted into a "cavity" or within the interior of the old structure.		

TAB. 2-2. School of Economics of the University of Genoa.

serving their original architectural substance. In contrast, new upper volumes (*sopralzi*) are constructed ex novo, clad in materials such as curtain-wall glazing, wood and slate panels that deliberately differentiate them from the historic base. The three buildings are physically linked by substantial external metal walkways and staircases, further emphasising the additive nature of the intervention. Crucially, the restoration of the imposing glass gallery spanning the space between Metelino and Caffa forms the central, unifying element of the complex. This preserved historic structure acts as both a connective circulation space and a symbolic core, orchestrating a dynamic dialogue between the preserved industrial heritage and the distinctly modern architectural insertions (Tables 2-3 and 2-4).

3.3 Sarzano Area (School of Architecture and Sant'Agostino Museum)

Archaeological evidence shows that, in ancient Roman times, people lived in the area of the Castle. The 'Campo di Sarzano', a vast open area at the base of the Episcopal Castle, began taking shape as a public square around the mid-12th century. Within years, the entire area – including the Church of San Salvatore – was incorporated into the 'Barbarossa Walls'. By the late 12th century, the Church of Santa Croce (closed in the early 1800s and converted into housing), with its small hospital, stood at the western edge of the square. In 1260, the Augustinians established a large monastic complex on adjacent land to the north. As the public space within the city walls, the Campo became the heart of civic life

2-3 Caffa Block; 2-4 Metelino Block			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Archaeological Presentation: An entire facade or structural system is preserved intact.
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Hybridity: Ola and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.
Intervention Geometry	Layering/Stacking: Old and new elements are superimposed in vertical or horizontal layers.		

TABS. 2-3 and 2-4. Caffa Block and Metelino Block.

from the mid-12th century onwards. However, the Sarzano area, rich in historic structures and a typological variety of churches and convents, emerged from the war half-destroyed.

Between 1942 and 1960, the post-Second World War General Urban Plan (Piano Regolatore Generale, P.R.G.) had not yet been approved. The interim Reconstruction Plan concerning the Historic Centre revealed a systemic underestimation of both urban decay and historical heritage value through its partial and general decisions. As a result, the Historic Centre, including the Sarzano area, was labelled a 'white zone' (*zona bianca*), exempt from preservation regulations, and left to decay. In the 1970s, the Genoa municipal government integrated the proposal to develop the university in this area into its ongoing urban masterplan. Professor Ignazio Gardella, a leading Italian architect, was tasked with drafting the Detailed Plan for the entire area, which the city council formally adopted in June 1972. Subsequent revisions by regional and municipal authorities reduced Gardella's plan to public-domain interventions.

3.3.1 School of Architecture of the University of Genoa

Gardella shaped his urban design through a 'dialogue between old and new', insisting that continuity with the historical context should guide modern interventions, endowing contemporary architecture with meaning and quality beyond sterile functionalism. The scaled-down 'Gardella Plan' focused on relocating the Faculty of Architecture. The Faculty of Architecture's phased construction involved two lots: Lot 1 on the ruins of San

Silvestro church (designed by Gardella as a modern volume echoing the original chapel sequence) and Lot 2 on the Pisano Dominican convent and 'Bishop's Palace' (assigned to Grossi Bianchi for historical recomposition).

The P building of the School of Architecture '... is deemed one of Gardella's best projects. Working upon the land of San Silvestro's destroyed monastery, Gardella conceived the new building as the pivot of a complex system of routes between spaces at different levels, with its inner parts open onto the city. The Gothic forms recall the medieval past of the city, reinterpreted in non-mimetic ways. The building has a structure made of reinforced concrete pillars and beams. Arranged on the perimeter in order to leave the internal spaces free and adaptable, the pillars are embedded in a three-dimensional wall, with coloured crushed perlite and raw clay plaster, within solid structures alternating with extended full-height windows on the side fronts, with bronzed aluminium fixtures. The headers are filled, with two vertical cuts, by the distribution and service spaces, and the pitched roof has a slate mantle' (Table 3-1).

3.3.2 Sant'Agostino Museum

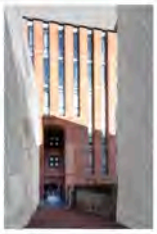
The Museum of Sant'Agostino in Genoa exemplifies a profound dialogue between medieval heritage and Rationalist intervention. Established in 1939 within a 13th-century Gothic convent complex, the site was severely damaged during World War II. Its defining transformation occurred in the 1950s under architect Franco Albini, who conceived a radical museographic scheme. He strategically repurposed the historic fabric: the convent and its unique triangular cloister now house the permanent collection, while the deconsecrated church serves as a flexible space for temporary exhibitions.

Albini's design philosophy is characterised by a clear dialectic between old and new. He inserted autonomous, lightweight structures – minimalist staircases and metal display supports – crafted from industrial iron and glass. These elements, with their clean lines and geometric forms, are intentionally juxtaposed against the weathered Gothic stonework, creating a respectful yet dynamic contrast. This approach preserves the historic shell as a legible artefact while establishing a distinct, modern layer for display. The result is a celebrated architectural palimpsest, where Albini's rigorous Rationalist principles engage in a continuous conversation with the medieval past, defining the museum's unique identity (Table 3-2).

3.4 House for the Young

Based on the guidelines of Genoa's updated urban development plan, the former Casa della Giovane underwent a targeted volumetric reduction of its frontal section along Via delle Fontane. This 'thinning' intervention was implemented primarily to enhance natural lighting and ventilation for the adjacent small square, focusing strategically on the most expendable portion of the structure: the late-1950s annex. The project thus reconciles urban regulatory requirements with the preservation of historical stratification, deliberately altering only the most recent architectural layer while maintaining the integrity of the original context.

The redesign concentrates on the street-facing volume, which accommodates emergency stairs and a new elevator, connected to the existing circulation system. A vertically articulated elevator shaft establishes a dialogue with the geometrically abstract envelope of the staircase, clad in overlapping, non-reflective lead panels. In contrast, the north and

3-1 Architecture School of University of Genoa			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Fragmentary Preservation: Portions such as walls, frames, or roof sections are retained
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Hybridity: Old and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.
Intervention Geometry	Layering/Stacking: Old and new elements are superimposed in vertical or horizontal layers. Base/Plinth: The old structure serves as a base or plinth for the new volume, or vice versa.		

TAB. 3-1. School of Architecture of the University of Genoa.

3-2 Sant'Agostino Museum			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Fragmentary Preservation: Portions such as walls, frames, or roof sections are retained
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Hybridity: Old and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.
Intervention Geometry	Layering/Stacking: Old and new elements are superimposed in vertical or horizontal layers. Base/Plinth: The old structure serves as a base or plinth for the new volume, or vice versa.		

TAB. 3-2. Sant'Agostino Museum.

south façades, representative of 1950s architectural language, remain largely unaltered, as their interior layouts did not justify modification. Consequently, the intervention renders the building's two distinct historical layers legible – the post-war expansion and the contemporary insertion – while framing them within a streetscape enriched by significant historical landmarks such as the Oratorio Orazione e Morte and Palazzo Belimbau (Table 4).

3.5 Carlo Felice Theatre

Carlo Felice Theatre is a landmark of Genoa, located in Piazza De Ferrari. It is considered the 'last grand theatre project of the 20th century'. The Carlo Felice Theatre's construction history is a century-spanning narrative of resilience. Built in 1825–28 to Carlo Barabino's neoclassical design, it was gutted by Second World War bombs (1942–44), leaving only the perimeter walls and iconic pronaos. After a stalled post-war competition and an unrealised design by Carlo Scarpa (1963–77), a second competition was won by Aldo Rossi, Ignazio Gardella and Fabio Reinhart (1981–84). Their scheme preserved the historic fragments while adding a modern auditorium, culminating in the theatre's final completion between 1987 and 1991.

4 House for the Young		
Fragment	Identification	
The old		Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Holistic Preservation: An entire facade or structural system is preserved intact.
The new		Autonomy of the New Structure Dependency: The new structure relies entirely on the old structure for support.
Intervention Geometry	Base/Plinth: The old structure serves as a base or plinth for the new volume, or vice versa.	

TAB. 4. House for the Young.

5 Carlo Felice Theater			
Fragment	Identification		
The old			Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements: Fragmentary Preservation: Portions such as walls, frames, or roof sections are retained
The new			Autonomy of the New Structure Hybridity: Ola and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.
Intervention Geometry	Layering/Stacking: Old and new elements are superimposed in vertical or horizontal layers.		

TAB. 5. Carlo Felice Theatre.

The design of the new Carlo Felice Theatre confronted a dual and inherently contrasting set of demands: the historical mandate to rebuild on the exact original site and the functional necessity to incorporate contemporary theatre technology. To reconcile these requirements, the scheme adopted a strategy of vertical expansion, culminating in the construction of a massive stage tower approximately 63 metres in height. The architectural massing is articulated as a clear geometric composition: a simple, compact, upward-extending rectangular prism (the stage tower) connected to a smaller rectangular volume housing the auditorium, foyers and public services, above which rests a triangular prism from which Barabino's original pronaos and portico protrude.

Materially, the exterior employs stone and steel, while interiors feature marble and wood – durable materials chosen to evoke an image of permanence and solidity. The design integrates historical fragments (such as the columns and inscriptions) into a new, functionally driven modern volume. A distinctive conical light-well, roughly 30 metres in height, penetrates vertically through the multiple foyer levels, channelling natural light into the interior and visually connecting the spaces to the covered square below. This intervention introduces a dynamic interplay between interior and exterior within the rigorously geometric ensemble (Table 5).

4. New Architecture with the Old

In this research, I examine a series of cases located in the historic centre of Genoa to explore new architectural projects involving historical remains. I identify and differentiate between historical fragments ('old') and contemporary interventions ('new') within the architectural fabric. The following observations can be made:

Degree of Fragmentation of Historical Elements:

- Holistic Preservation: An entire façade or structural system is preserved intact.

- Fragmentary Preservation: Portions such as walls, frames, or roof sections are retained.
- Archaeological Presentation: Only foundations, fragments, or other archaeological relics are displayed.

Autonomy of the New Structure:

- Dependency: The new structure relies entirely on the old structure for support.
- Independence: The new structure is self-sufficient, engaging with the old only spatially.
- Hybridity: Old and new structures are connected through joints, sharing loads and forming a hybrid system.

To achieve a perceptual quality of 'simultaneity', these fragments are arranged according to the following intervention geometries:

- Juxtaposition: The new volume is separate from but placed alongside the old structure, creating a dialogue.
- Embedding: The new volume is inserted into a 'cavity' or within the interior of the old structure.
- Encasement/Wrapping: A new skin (e.g. glass, metal) fully or partially wraps the old structure.
- Layering/Stacking: Old and new elements are superimposed in vertical or horizontal layers.
- Base/Plinth: The old structure serves as a base or plinth for the new volume, or vice versa.

Related literature suggests that the adaptive reuse of historical fragments in contemporary architecture is often less an autonomous architectural decision and more a product of governmental intervention. Key factors such as budgetary constraints, cultural heritage legislation and urban planning policies frequently dictate the extent and manner of preservation. This public governance framework helps explain why such projects predominantly result in public buildings. Moreover, these hybrid structures, rich in historical layers, contribute significantly to a city's unique identity by visibly nurturing its cultural roots.

In the future, the historical layering architecture represented by the Genoa model will gradually transcend the binary framework of 'preservation versus renewal', evolving towards a form of temporally intensive urbanism. These structures are not merely products of interaction among governments, architects and technology, but will also become key spatial vessels for cities addressing climate challenges, fostering social cohesion and sustaining collective memory. The core evolutionary logic shifts from 'how to preserve history' to 'how history can help us face the future'.

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URBAN MORPHOMETRIC ANALYSIS FOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION: MAPPING HYBRID IDENTITY IN GENOA'S HISTORIC URBAN FABRIC

Yaozhong Zhang, Branka Dimitrijevic, Ombretta Romice
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland
zhangyaozhong0311@gmail.com

Introduction

Urban conservation is increasingly understood not as the rigid preservation of static artefacts, but as a generative field where historical legacies and contemporary cultures negotiate space, meaning, and transformation (Battaglini, 2020). This evolving perspective reflects growing critiques of conservation models overly focused on material authenticity (Tweed and Sutherland, 2007) and supports a shift towards adaptive, socially responsive strategies that embrace complexity, hybridity, and change (Brumann, 2017; Merai, Veldpaus, Pendlebury and Kip, 2022). The increasing significance of urban heritage as a nexus of cultural identity, economic potential, and political representation necessitates a paradigm shift in conservation practices (Bandarin and Oers, 2014; Veldpaus and Pereira Roders, 2017). This reconceptualisation positions conservation not as a static preservation endeavour but as a dynamic, forward-looking discipline that harmonises the imperative of historical continuity with the drive for innovation. Within this context, the present study approaches innovation not as an act of creative design generation, but as a research-driven process grounded in analytical and methodological inquiry.

This study examines, through a methodological lens, the interaction between traditional and contemporary urban elements, conceptualised as temporal dimensions of urban morphology within Genoa's historic core, and how this interaction sustains and reinforces cultural hybridity. In this context, hybridity refers to the reinterpretation and adaptation of historical spatial configurations to accommodate emerging functions, services, and cultural expressions. The research argues that spatial organisation, particularly when analysed through the lens of urban morphology, not only reflects but actively facilitates the coexistence of diverse cultural paradigms across temporal scales. Genoa's complex and stratified urban fabric provides an optimal setting for exploring how historical and modern spatial arrangements interface with intangible socio-cultural practices, allowing legacy structures and innovative uses to mutually reinforce one another. Therefore, hybridity is conceptualised not merely as a social phenomenon but as a condition materially embedded within and shaped by the urban morphological structure.

To uncover these relationships, the study adopts an explicitly analytical methodology, combining Urban MorphoMetrics (UMM) – a Python-based computational framework for measuring and classifying spatial form – with ethnographic and photographic fieldwork. Rather than serving as a prescriptive design or creativity-driven framework, this combined methodology is intended to support evidence-based understanding of how historic urban fabrics accommodate adaptation and socio-cultural change. Drawing on recent advances in morphometric analysis and urban analytics (Oliveira, 2016; Fleischmann, Feliciotti, Romice and Porta, 2020; Chen, Wu and Biljecki, 2021), UMM is used to identify recurring

urban morphological types (urban types) across Genoa's built environment. These are then interpreted through on-site observations of how space is lived, negotiated, and adapted by different communities. By integrating quantitative spatial analysis with grounded cultural documentation, the research shows how old and new architectural configurations act as co-constitutive dimensions of urban futures – materially shaping and symbolically embodying the hybridity of Genoa's socio-cultural landscape.

The manuscript is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a comprehensive review of pertinent literature concerning the evolution of heritage practices, cultural hybridity, and urban morphology. Section 3 sets out the methodological approach, including the selection of morphometric variables and the observational framework employed. Section 4 presents the findings derived from the UMM classification alongside site-specific observations. Section 5 discusses the implications of these findings for heritage planning in Genoa, with a critical examination of the limitations inherent in the current study. Finally, Section 6 offers a reflective conclusion on the methodological contributions and outlines potential avenues for future research.

Literature Review

Heritage as Evolving Cultural Practice

Contemporary understandings of built heritage increasingly reject the notion of a static legacy to be preserved in its original form, instead framing it as a dynamic and evolving cultural practice (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). This perspective emphasises the significance of memory, adaptation, and active participation in determining what merits conservation. Consequently, conservation transcends a mere technical endeavour of safeguarding; it is an interpretative and socially mediated process that encompasses adaptation, reinvention, and the negotiation of value over time. In historically rich environments such as Genoa, Italy, where cultural strata are intricately woven into the built environment, conservation becomes inherently linked to transformation. Within this context, architectural and cultural hybridity, where old built form intersects with new industries and services, and the traditional with the contemporary, emerges not as a challenge but as a viable manifestation of continuity.

Physical planning has traditionally been regarded as a mechanism for heritage management; however, it is increasingly also recognised as a medium through which cultural narratives are articulated and reimagined (Pendlebury, 2013). The physical morphology of a city, particularly within its historic nucleus, significantly influences the types of practices, interactions and adaptations that can occur within it. Thus, conservation encompasses not only the aspects of the built environment that are preserved but also those that are facilitated.

Creativity, Hybridity, and the New in the Old

Recent conservation scholarship has increasingly addressed how historic environments accommodate contemporary cultural dynamics, prompting renewed attention to adaptation, hybridity, and the emergence of the new within the old. This perspective transcends mere adaptive reuse; it suggests a simultaneous existence of various temporalities and meanings within a single spatial context (Pendlebury, 2013; Bellini and Pasquinelli, 2017).

In urban environments such as Genoa, hybridity is evident through both spatial stratification and cultural integration: arcades influenced by Roman heritage now accommodate African-owned enterprises, while medieval passageways feature modern street art and migrant economic activities. This interaction between historical and contemporary elements necessitates analytical frameworks capable of addressing both the physical fabric and the shifting social meanings it engenders. As articulated by Amin (2008) and Massey (2005), urban space is inherently dynamic: it is constructed through interactions, negotiations, and the convergence of diverse trajectories. Grasping the concept of hybridity in this context requires a departure from binary oppositions (preserved versus transformed) towards a more relational understanding of urban evolution.

Morphology as a Medium of Cultural Interaction

Urban morphology provides a conceptual framework for interpreting how physical configurations both reflect and influence socio-cultural dynamics. Within this study, morphology is approached as an analytical medium rather than a design strategy, enabling the systematic examination of spatial–cultural interaction. Expanding upon Kropf''s (2017) notion of urban tissue, various urban typologies can be understood as spatial manifestations of historical epochs, planning philosophies, and cultural practices. The occurrence of morphological diversity, marked by the simultaneous presence of varied street configurations, population densities and architectural styles, provides a concrete basis for the synthesis of cultural distinctions.

The historic centre of Genoa, with its intricate medieval layout, arcaded Renaissance passageways, port infrastructure, and modernist interventions, exemplifies a compelling case study for examining how these spatial forms not only coexist but also accommodate distinct and overlapping social realms. Consequently, morphological analysis emerges as a vital conduit for comprehending the interplay between the built environment and cultural hybridity.

Recent scholarship has in fact underscored the need to correlate morphological categorisation with everyday lived experience (Vaughan, Griffiths, Haklay and Jones, 2009), particularly within contexts marked by cultural diversity. This rationale supports the application of mixed methodologies that combine spatial data with ethnographic and visual observations, thereby elucidating how built forms facilitate, restrict, or transform cultural practices.

Urban MorphoMetrics and Beyond: Capturing Spatial Distinctiveness, Socio-Cultural Vitality, and Hybridity

Urban MorphoMetrics (UMM) offers a quantitative framework for analysing physical urban forms at a macro scale. By leveraging data on building footprints and street networks, UMM facilitates the identification of distinctive urban typologies predicated on formal characteristics such as density, connectivity, and orientation (Fleischmann, Feliciotti, Romice and Porta, 2020).

Although UMM is adept at delineating morphological variations, it does not capture the cultural or experiential meanings inherent in these forms. Recent research has noted the potential for enhancing morphometric classifications through field observations and socio-spatial interpretations (Fleischmann, Feliciotti, Romice and Porta, 2021). In this study, UMM is employed not only to discern spatial variations within the historic centre

of Genoa but also to substantiate them through photographic documentation and on-site observation of cultural practices. Rather than functioning as a creativity-driven or design-generative tool, UMM is used here as an analytical framework to contextualise and interpret observed socio-cultural practices.

This mixed-method approach aligns with emerging methodologies in heritage and urban morphology research that combine spatial mapping with visual and observational studies to interpret socio-cultural patterns (Vaughan, Griffiths, Haklay and Jones, 2009; Schofield, 2014). Instead of directly interacting with residents, the research documents surface-level practices, such as signage, informal adaptations, and public activities, within specific morphological contexts to investigate the interplay between spatial configurations and cultural expression.

Methodology

This study is driven by the central research question: How do the temporal dimensions of the old and new converge to facilitate cultural hybridity within the historic urban fabric of Genoa? To address this question, an explicitly analytical mixed-methods methodology is employed to examine how Genoa's historical urban fabric supports and manifests cultural hybridity. The research integrates two steps: 1) Urban MorphoMetrics analysis and 2) visual–ethnographic documentation, to correlate physical form with socio-cultural dynamics across different urban sectors.

The first phase (UMM) involved the development of a morphological taxonomy using building footprint and street network data provided by OpenStreetMap and Microsoft Map. Following the original UMM rationale in Fleischmann, Feliciotti, Romice and Porta (2021) on the selection of spatial variables to measure (including both primary and contextual descriptors), 296 were selected and computed in total; subsequently, Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering (AHC) was performed to categorise the built environment into 15 types on the basis of the calculated indices (Fig.1). The selection of 15 clusters was informed by evaluating three clustering performance metrics: the Davies-Bouldin Index (where lower values indicate better clustering) (Davies and Bouldin, 1979), the Calinski-Harabasz Index (where higher values are better) (Caliński and Harabasz, 1974), and the Silhouette Score (also favouring higher values) (Rousseeuw, 1987).

As shown in Figure 1, K = 15 offers a well-balanced trade-off: it corresponds to a local minimum in the Davies-Bouldin curve, aligns with a reasonable score on the Calinski-Harabasz Index (despite its peak occurring at K = 3), and maintains a competitive Silhouette Score relative to neighbouring cluster counts. This combined assessment supports the

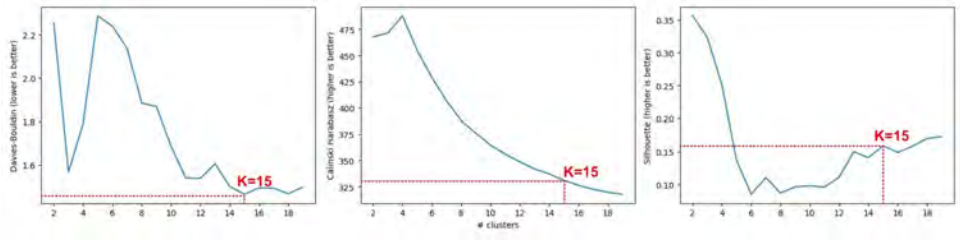


FIG. 1. Confirmation of the number of urban types: a) Davies-Bouldin Index; b) Calinski-Harabasz Index; c) Silhouette Score.

selection of K = 15 as a meaningful cut-off point that captures variation without over-fragmenting the dataset. These UTs represent diverse configurations of density, grain, layout, and connectivity, visualised through both colour-coded maps and a dendrogram of similarity amongst the 15 types (Fig. 1). Importantly, the UMM classification is used here as a descriptive and interpretative analytical framework rather than as a design-generative or creativity-driven tool.

The subsequent phase comprised analytical fieldwork conducted between 10 and 13 September 2024, concentrating on selected UTs that exemplify distinct spatial and socio-cultural characteristics. Within each UT, photographic documentation was acquired to capture physical conditions, social practices, signage, adaptive reuses, and expressions of cultural presence (e.g. food vendors, religious icons, murals, flags). Observational notes were also recorded to document rhythms of use, interactions, and atmospheres.

This qualitative component facilitated an interpretative reading of how different morphological settings relate to cultural hybridity – whether through immigrant adaptations in dense historical units, state-led cultural programming in institutional areas, or tourist-driven reuse of port spaces. The methodology thus establishes a dialogue between spatial classification and lived experience, providing a multi-scalar perspective on the coexistence of the past and present within Genoa's historic centre. However, it is important to note that the field study was conducted purely through the authors'' observations' during the EAAE workshop visit and, due to time constraints and access limitations, no participatory research methods such as interviews or questionnaires were employed. As such, the analysis is based on surface-level documentation of available services and cultural elements rather than a thorough engagement with local communities.

Results

The research findings are organised into two sections. In Section 4.1, we examine the territorial evolution of Genoa''s historic core and its surroundings to gain a comprehensive understanding of the transformations in its urban form. The selected years are informed by literature that provides insights into Genoa's historical development, including works by Faccini et al. (2021), as well as the availability of historical maps, such as those from Stockdale (1800) and Google (2025). The specific years analysed are 1850, 1943, 2003, 2013, and 2023. Subsequently, we apply the Urban MorphoMetrics framework (UMM) as an analytical tool to characterise the attributes and internal differentiation of Genoa's urban fabric. Section 4.2 employs photographic data collected from the field study to depict different modes of spatial occupation, thereby enriching our comprehension of the city's social and cultural diversity.

Urban Morphometric Study on Genoa's Historical Centre and its Periphery

Genoa's urban form is the outcome of a long and layered evolution shaped by its topography, mercantile prosperity, and shifting political and infrastructural demands. From its medieval nucleus to its modern-day peripheral developments, the city presents a remarkable palimpsest of spatial configurations that reflect successive periods of growth, adaptation, and restructuring (Faccini *et al.*, 2021). This analysis is not intended to narrate design innovation, but to establish a morphological baseline for interpreting spatial continuity and transformation.











FIG. 2. Evolution of Genoa's city core: maps from the years a) 1850; b) 1943; c) 2003; d) 2013; e) 2023 (base map from Google, 2025).

The historic urban core, characterised by a dense network of narrow alleyways (caruggi) and tightly packed building plots, stands as one of Europe's largest and well-preserved medieval centres. Its morphological evolution occurred incrementally, adapting organically to the challenging topography and prioritising pedestrian circulation over vehicular transit. This compact urban core was subsequently encircled by Renaissance expansions and Baroque restructurings, succeeded by 19th-century infrastructural improvements and, later, post-war modernist interventions. The urban expansion progressed westward and inland from the port area, propelled by industrialisation and the city's prominence as a maritime centre.

The diachronic evolution is manifest in a series of morphogenetic shifts, as evidenced across the five temporal cross-sections in Figure 2. The tightly packed, heterogeneous texture of the historic urban core, observed in 1850 and 1943 (Figs. 2a, 2b), indicative of a dense medieval and early modern configuration, progressively yields to more systematized, yet still compact, grid-based configurations by 2003 (Fig. 2c), correlating with initial industrial and residential expansion. By 2013 and 2023 (Figs. 2d, 2e), the urban matrix demonstrates increasingly expansive, discontinuous, and car-oriented layouts, characteristic of advanced suburbanisation and post-war interventions. This trajectory was modulated not only by shifting economic imperatives, such as commerce, manufacturing, and recreational tourism, but also by the dynamic interplay of planning doctrines, infrastructural capital outlays, and demographic changes, including the proliferation of exurban residential sectors.

In recent decades (in 2000s and 2010s), immigration particularly from North and Sub-Saharan Africa has further shaped Genoa's social and spatial dynamics (Rosasco, Sdino and Sdino, 2021). While the impact of these communities on the built fabric has been more adaptive than structural, their presence has reconfigured the use and perception of space, especially in areas like the Prè district. Here, historical shopfronts and ground-floor premises have been repurposed into culturally specific businesses, markets, and religious centres (Jung, 2020). These transformations have not substantially altered street layouts or building massing due to strict heritage regulations, but they have revitalised once-declining areas through new economic activities and social life.

To capture Genoa's spatial heterogeneity, the study applied Urban MorphoMetrics (UMM) and Agglomerative Hierarchical Clustering (AHC) and classified 15 urban types (UTs) based on density, spatial distribution, and connectivity. The resulting UTs visualised in the UT maps and dendrogram (Figs. 3 and 5) mirror Genoa's historical evolution: from compact medieval fabrics to transitional and peripheral morphologies. UMM thus reinforces the historical narrative through a data-driven lens, highlighting the city's morphological variety and layered urban logic.

Within the historical core, the predominant urban types include UT0, UT2 and UT5 (Fig. 3), which delineate the most compact and irregular sections of the city. These urban types correspond to the pre-modern nucleus, where parcelisation has remained largely static for centuries, thereby preserving the intricate fabric of medieval and Renaissance-era architecture. The streets in these types are highly interconnected, yet narrow and serpentine, fostering a robust pedestrian-oriented environment. The building footprints are predominantly small and fragmented, reflecting a highly adaptive historical construction process.

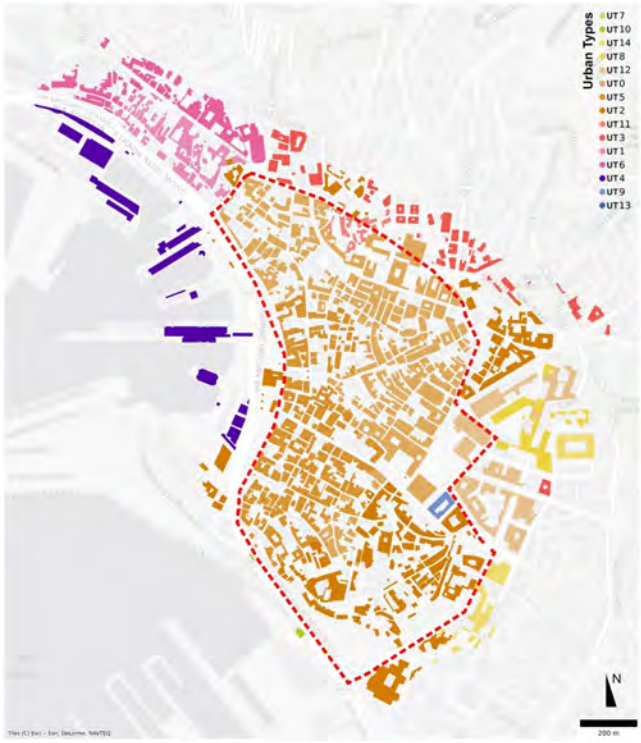


FIG. 3. Calculated urban types in Genoa (base map from OpenStreetMap).

To clarify the morphological characteristics of Genoa's historic core, we examined three street network descriptors: setback deviation (sdsSWD), street openness (sdsSPO), and street profile width (sdsSPW). These indicators, grounded in the Urban MorphoMetrics methodology (Fleischmann, Feliciotti, Romice and Porta, 2021), were used to interpret the spatial qualities of UTs 0, 2, and 5 which are predominantly located within the medieval centre.

As shown in Figure 4, these types exhibit high setback deviation, reflecting irregular building alignments shaped by centuries of incremental development. In contrast, street openness and profile width remain consistently low, confirming a narrow, enclosed spatial structure characteristic of the historic caruggi. Compared to adjacent UTs outside the historic boundary, which display broader and more open street profiles, this confirms the spatial compactness and pedestrian-scale enclosure that define Genoa's inner core.

Together, these metrics highlight the morphological coherence of the historic centre while illustrating its contrast with later expansion zones.

The morphological transition of Genoa's urban fabric beyond its historic nucleus manifests through distinct intermediary typologies (UT11, UT6, UT3, and UT1), which demarcate the city's initial planned expansion and industrial metamorphosis. These transitional morphometric zones correspond to the city's late 19th and early 20th century territorial growth, characterised by municipal amalgamation and the implementation of significant infrastructural arteries, notably Via XX Settembre (1892-1913) (Comune di Genova, 2020).

The morphometric analysis reveals a marked departure from the dense, organic urban grain characteristic of the medieval core (UT0, UT2, UT5). These intermediary zones

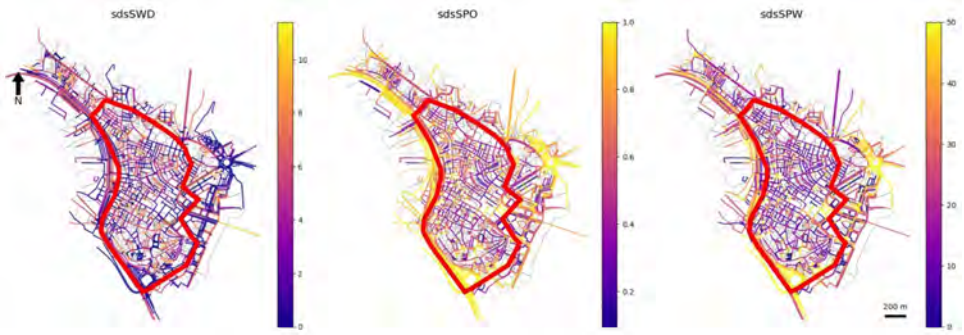


FIG. 4. Street-network analysis: a) sdsSWD; b) sdsSPO; c) sdsSPW (base-map data from OpenStreetMap).

exhibit moderate-scale built forms, expanded plot subdivisions, and orthogonal street networks, reflecting enhanced urban planning rationalization. Such spatial configurations emerged in response to evolving socioeconomic imperatives, particularly the proliferation of commercial enterprises and nascent industrial activities. While maintaining relative density compared to peripheral developments, these areas demonstrate enhanced circulation efficiency through their linear street hierarchies.

The functional composition of these zones manifests as heterogeneous urban environments, serving as spatial mediators between the historic nucleus and emergent industrial districts. The coexistence of residential, commercial, and light industrial uses generates a hybrid urban landscape that simultaneously preserves historical continuity while accommodating modernisation imperatives (Galdini, 2005). These morphological types thus function as crucial spatial intermediaries, bridging the organic medieval urban form with the rationalized industrial morphology.

The industrial and port sectors of Genoa, parallel to the location of UT4, delineate distinct, low-connectivity, specialized zones along the waterfront, characterised by extensive warehouses, shipyards, and logistics centres. Functionally segregated and exhibiting minimal walkability, these areas remain economically significant yet spatially isolated from the city's mixed-use urban fabric.

Conversely, the areas of UT7 and UT10 embody structured mid-density residential zones (Fig. 3), serving as transitional spaces between the historical core and suburban expansions. Their organised street configurations and moderate building heights facilitate both pedestrian and vehicular circulation while preserving compactness.

In contrast, UT8, UT14, and UT12 delineate low-density suburban and peri-urban typologies (Fig. 3), marked by larger plots, fragmented layouts, and diminished connectivity, signifying a transition towards

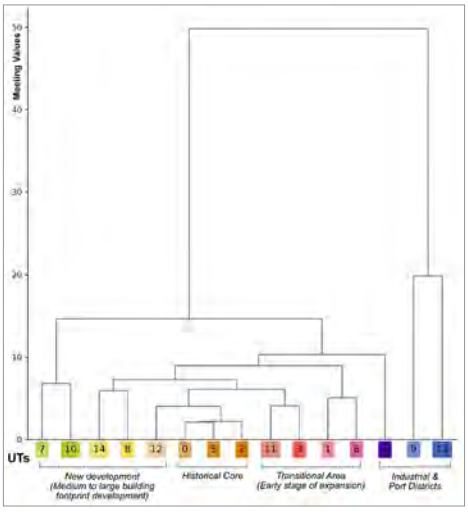


FIG. 5. Dendrogram of urban-type relationships.

decentralised residential growth influenced by topographical features and the later stages of suburbanisation.

The Urban Types (UTs) delineated through diachronic analysis (Table 1) demonstrate strong correlation with Genoa's spatiotemporal evolution, progressing from the medieval nucleus through intermediate morphological zones to the industrial-suburban periphery. This morphogenetic sequence exhibits distinct configurational patterns shaped by critical urban transformations, encompassing pre-industrial organic development, 19th-century territorial expansions and 20th-century industrial transformation. The hierarchical cluster analysis (Fig. 5), however, presents an alternative taxonomic logic: while confirming the morphological coherence of the historic core (UT0, 2, and 5), it aggregates traditionally distinct development phases (UT1, 3, 6, and 11) into a unified morphological category. This form-based classification, transcending conventional temporal demarcations, suggests that Urban MorphoMetrics (UMM) identifies comprehensive transitional morphologies beyond linear chronological progression. The clustering of temporally disparate UTs 7, 10, and 8, unified by shared morphometric variables including expanded plot dimensions and orthogonal street patterns, further substantiates UMM's capacity to reveal intricate morphological hybridization within both the urban core and peripheral zones, offering an analytical framework predicated on physical form rather than temporal stratification.

Urban Type	Paralleled Geographic Area	Period of Development
UT0	Maddalena, part of Prè	Medieval (before 1850)
UT2	Southern Molo (San Donato, Santa Maria di Castello)	Medieval core, slope-adapted (before 1850)
UT5	Molo (arcaded streets, Loggia dei Banchi)	Medieval and Renaissance (before 1850)
UT1	Western Prè (Via di Pré, Via del Campo)	Early 20th century transformation (1900 -1943)
UT6	Western Prè (Via di Pré, Via del Campo)	Early 20th century transformation (1900 -1943)
UT11	Piazza De Ferrari, Teatro Carlo Felice, Via XX Settembre	Late 19th to early 20th century (1874 - 1926)
UT4	Porto Antico (via al Porto Antico, Magazzini del Cotone)	Industrial and port era, redeveloped post-1992
UT7	Residential buffer zones near core	Mid-20th century (1943 -1970s)
UT10	Mid-density zones transitioning to periphery	Mid- to late-20th century (1943 - 1980s)
UT8	Peripheral hills, suburban edge	Post-1970s suburbanisation
UT12	Peripheral hillside developments	Post-1970s suburbanisation
UT14	Peri-urban fringe, low-density suburbs	Post-1970s suburbanisation

TAB. 1. Comparison between calculated urban types, paralleled geographic area and period of development

Building on the explanation of Genoa's historical core evolution and the morphological examination, the subsequent section explores photographic documentation of socio-cultural practices across distinct urban types, showing how spatial configurations affect service availability and cultural expressions manifested through architectural style.

The correlation between urban form and socio-cultural activities is particularly pronounced in the dense pedestrian networks of the historical centre, the functional segregation of industrial-port districts, and the evolving community dynamics of suburban areas. By capturing these socio-spatial interactions, the study integrates MorphoMetric classification with lived experiences, offering insights into how urban space is influenced by and, in turn, influences human activities.



FIG. 6. Observation locations (base map from OpenStreetMap).

Field Observation

The selected photographic sites are situated within the historical urban core of Genoa, primarily representing Urban Types 0, 2, and 5, along with portions of Urban Types 1 and 6 during the workshop field study. The author also documented additional urban typologies over the subsequent days in Genoa, specifically Urban Types 4 and 11 (Fig. 6).

UT0 corresponds to the Maddalena neighbourhood, extending into parts of Prè, forming the vibrant core of Genoa's historic centre. The photographic evidence (Table 2) reveals this area as a lively setting for everyday public life, where narrow corridors, small squares, and stairways are actively used by residents for social interaction, commerce, and leisure. The socio-cultural atmosphere is defined by spontaneous placemaking, residents introduce seating, greenery, and personal touches to the street environment. Informal economies, community-driven activities, and the coexistence of different social groups, long-standing locals, migrants, and students (the University of Genoa) – manifest a distinctive hybrid culture. This hybridity thrives in open public spaces, where street-level creativity and multicultural presence interact fluidly with the historical spatial framework.

UT5 is contiguous with the Molo district, wherein Genoa's arcaded heritage streets, reflecting Roman and subsequent medieval influences, persist in their tangible and functional form. The arcade structures (Table 2), initially purposed for commercial and civic activities, now house cafes, restaurants, retail establishments, and tourist-oriented services, thereby signifying a transition from traditional mercantile practices to a contemporary leisure economy. Cultural institutions and renovated heritage buildings contribute to a tourism-centric environment, while vestiges of quotidian life, such as residents' use of markets or passage through the arcades, coexist with curated historical narratives. This context exemplifies a layered hybridity, wherein architectural conservation and global tourism intersect with local rhythms and spatial memory.

UT2, situated in the southern part of the historic core, encompassing the vicinity of Piazza San Donato, Santa Maria di Castello, and contiguous sections of Molo, presents a sector of considerable architectural significance and historical fidelity. Despite its relative

Next pages:
TAB. 2. Selections of observation photos by urban types

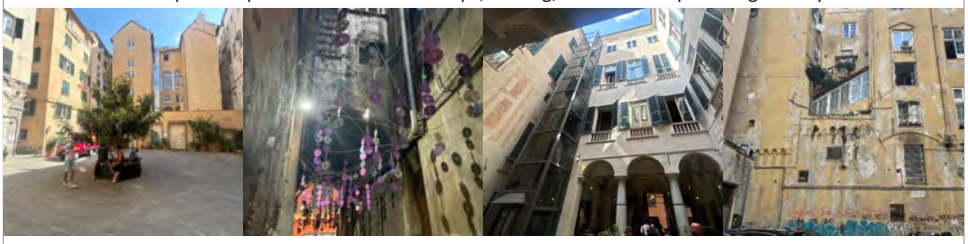
UT0 - Community Corridors and Everyday Public Life



Corridors and alleyways function as the residents' daily communication spaces.



The public square features coffee shops, seating, and resident-planted greenery.



Local inhabitants' creativity in street handicraft decoration, lift and staircase installation.

UT5 - Heritage Arcades and Tourism Nexus



Arcade spaces, influenced by Roman urbanism, now accommodate tourism-based industries such as restaurants, bars, and markets.



UT5 encompasses several tourist attractions, including museums and art galleries. Furthermore, the ongoing conservation strategy for historical sites, such as the Loggia dei Banchi, is undergoing transformation through the integration of contemporary amenities and infrastructure.

UT2 - Slope-Adapted Historical Enclaves



UT2 exhibits a slope-adapted typology, predominantly situated in the southern sector of Genoa's historic centre. While its architectural authenticity is largely preserved, it experiences diminished tourist visitation compared to UT 0 or 5.

UT 1 & 6 - Multicultural Heritage and Immigrant Adaptation



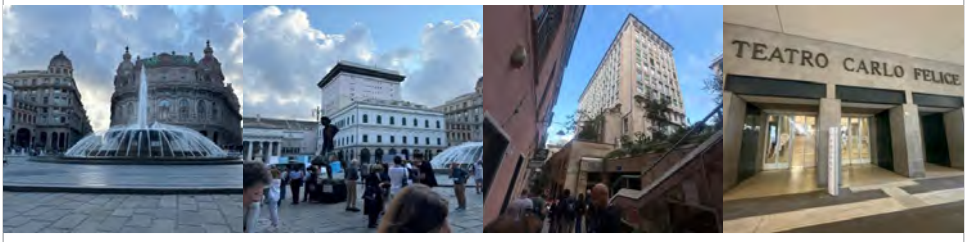
UT 1 & 6 reflect immigrant cultural hybridity akin to other historic centres, with industries now dominated by African immigration. Lat Teria illustrates this shift, transforming a dairy into a retail space for African immigrants. Observations noted the unloading of Algerian lamb, indicating dietary adaptation to immigrant food sources.

UT 4 - Port and Trade Hub of Genoa



The port district exhibits a contemporary character, encompassing not only shipping operations but also a notable presence of dining establishments. This sector of Genoa is additionally purposed for tourism and the facilitation of international trade, including both imports and exports.

UT11 - Expansive Civic Plazas and Cultural Institutions



UT11 exhibits a late-built character, characterised by substantial architectural footprints and urban plazas designed for large gatherings. Furthermore, contemporary amenities, including theatres, are also present.

obscurity to the tourist audience compared to the arcaded zones of UT5, photographic evidence underscores its tranquil character, typified by constricted alleyways, subdued street activity, and a pronounced residential ambiance. The morphology of this area, influenced by topographical gradients, engenders a distinctive spatial cadence of enclosure and aperture across the built environment and interstitial spaces. Hybridity, while present, manifests more subtly; contemporary lifestyles and migrant populations are integrated with circumspection within a framework that prioritizes continuity and restraint. This results in a nuanced coexistence wherein established spatial configurations accommodate evolving, yet contained, socio-cultural heterogeneity.

UT1 and UT6 correspond to the western sector of the Prè district, specifically the zone encompassing Via del Campo, Via di Pré, and adjacent thoroughfares extending towards Via Gramsci. This area showcases significant evidence of multicultural transition, notably through the presence of African and North African immigration culture. Photographic documentation (Table 2) illustrates dynamic ethnic markets, halal butcheries, imported commodities, and culinary signage tailored to immigrant demographics. Previously used industrial or conventional commercial premises have been reconfigured to accommodate culturally specific entrepreneurial activities. These economic and social behaviours exemplify a tangible and observable form of hybridity, wherein immigrant economic activities and lifestyles occupy and reinterpret the historical ground floor typologies of Genoa's architectural heritage.

UT4 corresponds to the Porto Antico area, extending along Via al Porto Antico, the Magazzini del Cotone, and parts of the Darsena. Historically an industrial and maritime hub, this area has undergone substantial transformation, integrating tourism, commerce, and leisure with residual port activity. The documentation (Table 2) shows cruise ship terminals, maritime museums, warehouses converted into exhibition spaces, and waterfront restaurants. The scale of buildings and infrastructure sets it apart morphologically from the rest of the city. The co-presence of industrial relics, new amenities, and public-facing commercial use makes this zone a prime example of Genoa's shift towards a multifunctional coastal economy. Cultural hybridity here is largely driven by tourism and public programming, with heritage infrastructure repurposed for global flows of people and capital.

UT11 encompasses the Teatro Carlo Felice and Piazza De Ferrari, with extensions towards Via XX Settembre and Via Roma. This sector serves as a formal civic and cultural nucleus, characterised by significant institutions. The architectural design is monumental, and public spaces are engineered for formal events. Photographic evidence reveals civic engagement, cultural activities, and public leisure within structured plazas and avenues. The observed hybridity is top-down and curated, with state, cultural and commercial entities shaping a regulated environment for cultural exchange and urban participation.

The photographic and observational data across various urban typologies illustrate that the historic centre of Genoa embodies a rich tapestry of socio-cultural hybridity, influenced by both spatial dynamics and community interactions. In denser, heritage-rich locales such as UT0 and UT5, informal adaptations and tourism-driven repurposing coexist alongside remnants of local life. By contrast, in transitional or immigrant-centric areas like UT1 and UT6, hybrid functionalities arise from necessity, resilience, and cultural reinterpretation. In contrast, institutionalised forms of hybridity prevail in UT11 and the port districts UT 4, where state and market forces orchestrate large-scale cultural expressions. These observations indicate that the interplay between the old and the new transcends

mere formalities; it is inherently social and dependent on the ways in which space is occupied, negotiated, and reimagined over time. The urban morphology, rather than serving as a passive backdrop, actively influences the facilitation or limitation of these layers of hybridity.

Discussion

This study is guided by the central research question: How do the temporal dimensions of the old and new converge to facilitate cultural hybridity within the historic urban fabric of Genoa? By employing Urban MorphoMetrics (UMM), diachronic mapping, and empirical field observation, the analysis demonstrates, through an analytical lens, that Genoa's hybrid identity is materially inscribed within its spatial configuration, rather than merely superimposed through historical events or demographic transitions.

The historical cartography delineates the correlation between Urban Types (UTs) and established phases of urban evolution, encompassing the dense medieval core (UT0, UT2, UT5), the transitional expansions of the early 20th century (UT11, UT6, UT3, UT1), port-industrial redevelopment (UT4), and suburbanisation (UT7, UT10, UT8). Conversely, the dendrogram introduces a form-based reclassification, categorising UTs based on geometric and configurational affinities, thereby diverging from a chronological framework. For instance, UTs 1, 3, 6, and 11, which developed across distinct temporal periods, are clustered due to shared characteristics such as moderate density and linear street patterns, thus revealing structural cohesion that is not immediately discernible through historical analysis (Fleischmann, Feliciotti, Romice and Porta, 2021). This form-based reclassification does not seek to reinterpret history creatively, but to analytically reorganise urban form in order to expose latent structural relationships.

This underscores the analytical capacity of UMM to uncover latent morphological hybridity, particularly in transitional areas where heritage intersects with adaptation. Such spatial entanglement reflects the principles of the Historic Urban Landscape (HUL) approach (United Nations Educational and Cultural, 2011), which advocates for integrated interpretations of urban transformation across temporal, functional, and social dimensions. In Genoa, UTs such as those in Prè (UTs 1 & 6) exemplify how historical fabrics are revitalised through cultural reuse, while UT11 and UT4 illustrate institutional or port-related restructuring that maintains morphological continuity despite programmatic alterations (Hou, 2010; Ginzarly, Claudine and Teller, 2019).

This discussion also aligns with the objectives of PINQuA (Programma Innovativo Nazionale per la Qualità dell'Abitare) (Ministero delle Infrastrutture e dei Trasporti, 2020), which aims to enhance the quality of living environments through comprehensive urban regeneration, particularly in historic or marginalised locales. While the programme addresses housing, mobility, public space, and inclusivity, it frequently encounters challenges in balancing character preservation with transformative potential. UMM presents a robust and scalable analytical methodology that can support PINQuA's objectives by identifying morphological zones of hybridity – areas that are structurally capable of accommodating change without obliterating identity. This research introduces an additional socio-cultural dimension to the unique morphological classifications derived from UMM, while also contributing to the broader discussion of how computational visualisation can illustrate the interplay between historical and contemporary aspects of urban form and

socio-cultural practices. Subsequent research could integrate UMM within evaluative frameworks such as PINQuA, thereby equipping urban planners to discern and analyse hybrid urban typologies with improved spatial precision.

Ultimately, the case of Genoa indicates that cultural hybridity is not merely a superficial phenomenon but is embedded within the built environment – across arcades, alleys, plazas, and post-industrial voids. UMM transcends its role as a classification instrument; it serves as a spatial lens through which the coexistence of past and present becomes analytically discernible, informing critical interpretation and evidence-based urban understanding rather than prescriptive design action.

Conclusion

This investigation outlines the interplay between the temporal dimensions of Genoa's historic urban fabric – characterised by its intricately layered built environment and evolving socio-cultural dynamics – and the resultant socio-spatial hybridity. Anchored in the principal research inquiry regarding the convergence of the old and the new, the paper demonstrates that Urban MorphoMetrics (UMM), in conjunction with field observations, provides a comprehensive and nuanced analytical methodological framework to elucidate not only morphological variations but also the socio-cultural logics embedded within spatial constructs.

The application of UMM to both the historic core and the periphery of Genoa has identified 15 distinct urban typologies, each corresponding to unique yet occasionally overlapping development phases. While historical analyses may suggest a linear trajectory of spatial evolution, from medieval compactness to contemporary fragmentation, the dendrogram reveals a form-based taxonomy that transcends conventional historical periodization. Transitional types such as UT1, UT3, UT6, and UT11, despite being developed across different decades, exhibit shared spatial characteristics, underscoring UMM's capacity to capture morphological hybridity that traditional analyses may overlook. This affirms that spatial form is not merely a passive outcome of historical layering but an active analytical condition through which new uses and cultural identities can be understood.

Ethnographic and photographic documentation further substantiates this assertion, illustrating how cultural hybridity is inscribed within specific morphologies. In locales such as Prè, immigrant communities adapt ground-floor typologies for new functions while preserving the historical logic of the streetscape. In institutional or port-side areas, hybridity is curated through tourism and cultural programming. Across these contexts, the research shows how varying morphologies condition distinct forms of cultural negotiation and socio-spatial interaction.

These findings bear potentially significant implications for future heritage and planning policies, particularly in the context of initiatives such as PINQuA (Programma Innovativo Nazionale per la Qualità dell'Abitare), which seeks to regenerate underused or socially vulnerable urban spaces. While PINQuA promotes integrated methodologies, it frequently operates within abstract spatial categories. This study posits that UMM could be integrated into such frameworks as an analytical support tool to identify and visualise zones of hybridity – areas where the old and new converge both symbolically and materially – thereby informing more context-sensitive and evidence-based regeneration strategies.

Ultimately, the case of Genoa exemplifies that cultural hybridity is not incidental to its urban form but rather constitutive of it. Rather than perceiving conservation and development as opposing forces, this research reconceptualises them as co-productive elements mediated through spatial form. UMM, when combined with empirical observation, bridges quantitative data and lived experiences, providing planners, urban designers, and policymakers with a methodology to interpret, honour and build upon the city's spatial complexity. In doing so, it contributes to an expanding corpus of knowledge that regards heritage not as a static legacy but as a dynamic condition that can be critically interpreted within inclusive urban futures.

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Annexes

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

IX Workshop on Conservation – Genoa, Italy – 10-13 September 2024








Simonetta ACACIA
University of Genoa, Italy
simonetta.acacia@edu.unige.it

Marta ACIERNO
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
marta.acierno@uniroma1.it

Mario BARRA
Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Republic
mario.barra@fa.cvut.cz

Carla BARTOLOMUCCI
Università degli Studi dell'Aquila, Italy
carla.bartolomucci@univaq.it

Anna BOATO
University of Genoa, Italy
anna.boato@unige.it

Analu CADORE
Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
a.cadore@stud.iuav.it

Alexandru CALCATINGE
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
alexandru.calcatinge@gmail.com

Miguel Angel CALVO-SALVE
Marywood University, Pennsylvania, USA
salve@marywood.edu

Maria Teresa CAMPISI
Università degli studi di Enna "Kore", Italy
teresa.campisi@unikore.it

Marta CASANOVA
University of Genoa, Italy
marta.casanova@unige.it

Alessandro CEPPETELLI
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
alessandro.ceppetelli@uniroma1.it

Federica CHECCACCI
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
federica.checcacci@uniroma1.it

Giulia CHERCHI
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
giulia.cherchi@uniroma1.it

Rodica CRISAN
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
rodica.crisan@uauim.ro

Giorgio DANESI
Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
gdanesi@iuav.it

Maria Antonietta DE VIVO
University of Bologna, Italy
maria.devivo@unibo.it

Carolina DI BIASE
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
carolina.dibiase@polimi.it

Elena-Codina DUSOIU
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urbanism, Bucharest, Romania
imuau_relations@yahoo.com

Tomàs EFLER
Czech Technical University in Prague, Czech Republic
tomas.efler@fa.cvut.cz

Donatella FIORANI
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
donatella.fiorani@uniroma1.it

Ersilia FIORE
University of Naples Federico II, Italy
ersilia.fiore2@unina.it

Giovanna FRANCO
University of Genoa, Italy
giovanna.franco@unige.it

Pedro Murilo GONÇALVES DE FREITAS
University of Porto, Portugal
pfreitas@arq.up.pt

Rita GAGLIARDI
University of Naples Federico II, Italy
rit.gagliardi@gmail.com

Davide GALLERI
University of Naples Federico II, Italy
davide.galleri@unina.it

Mariacristina GIAMBRUNO
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
mariacristina.giambruno@polimi.it

Caterina GIANNATTASIO
University of Cagliari, Italy
cgiannatt@unica.it

Michela Marisa GRISONI
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
michela.grisoni@polimi.it

Sara IACCARINO
University of Naples Federico II, Italy
sara.iaccarino@unina.it

Loughlin KEALY
University College Dublin, Ireland
loughlin.kealy@ucd.ie

Merlo KELLY
University College Dublin, Ireland
merlo.kelly@ucd.ie

Martina LA MELA
Università degli Studi Mediterranea di Reggio Calabria, Italy
martina.lamela@unirc.it

Ying LI
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
ying.li@polimi.it

Luca MARASSO
University of Genoa, Italy
marasso.luca@gmail.com

Chiara MARIOTTI
Università Politecnica delle Marche, Italy
chiara.mariotti@univpm.it

Pietro MATRACCHI
University of Florence, Italy
pietro.matracchi@unifi.it

Sara MAURI
University of Genoa, Italy
sara.mauri@edu.unige.it

Giulio MIRABELLA ROBERTI
Università degli studi di Bergamo, Italy
giulio.mirabella@unibg.it

Cecilia MOGGIA
University of Genoa, Italy
cecilia.moggia@edu.unige.it

Ioana MOLDOVAN
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
ioana.moldovan@campus.utcluj.ro

Silivan MOLDOVAN
Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, Romania
silivan.moldovan@arch.utcluj.ro

Florin MUREȘANU
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
gomarchgo@yahoo.com

Monica MUREȘANU
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
monicamuresanu@gmail.com

Francesca MUSANTI
University of Cagliari, Italy
francesca.musanti@unica.it

Stefano Francesco MUSSO
University of Genoa, Italy
stefano.francesco.musso@unige.it

Lucina NAPOLEONE
University of Genoa, Italy
lucina.napoleone@unige.it

Annunziata Maria OTERI
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
annunziatamaria.oteri@polimi.it

Andrea PANE
University of Naples Federico II, Italy
a.pane@unina.it I

Gianluca PINTUS
La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
gianluca.pintus@uniroma1.it

Valentina PINTUS
University of Cagliari, Italy
valentinapintus@unica.it

Sonia PISTIDDA
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
sonia.pistidda@polimi.it

Daniela PITTALUGA
University of Genoa, Italy
daniela.pittaluga@unige.it

Beniamino POLIMENI
University of Hertfordshire, United Kingdom
b.polimeni@herts.ac.uk

Federica POMPEJANO
University of Genoa, Italy
federica.pompejano@unige.it

Martina PORCU
University of Cagliari, Italy and La Sapienza Università di Roma, Italy
martina.porcu@uniroma1.it

Sara ROCCO
University of Genova, Italy
sara.rocco@edu.unige.it

Candida ROLLA
University of Auckland, New Zealand
candida.rolla@gmail.com

Barbara SCALA
Università degli Studi di Brescia, Italy
barbara.scala@unibs.it

Nisa SEMIZ
Abdullah Gül University, Kayseri, Türkiye
nisasemiz@gmail.com

Maria Iulia STANCIU
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
iulia.stanciu@starh.ro

Sally STONE
Manchester Metropolitan University, United Kingdom
s.stone@mmu.ac.uk

Nino SULFARO
Mediterranea University of Reggio Calabria, Italy
nino.sulfaro@unirc.it

Tarek TEBA
University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom
tarek.teba@port.ac.uk

Oana ȚIGANEA
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
oanacristina.tiganea@polimi.it

Raluca-Maria TRIFA
'Ion Mincu' University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest, Romania
trifa_raluca@yahoo.com

Francesco TROVÒ
Università Iuav di Venezia, Italy
trovo@iuav.it

Andrea UGOLINI
University of Bologna, Italy
a.ugolini@unibo.it

Tomás VALENTE LLOVES
CESUGA Centro de Estudios Superiores Universitarios de Galicia, A Coruña, Spain
tvalente@cesuga.com

Caterina VALIANTE
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
caterina.valiante@polimi.it

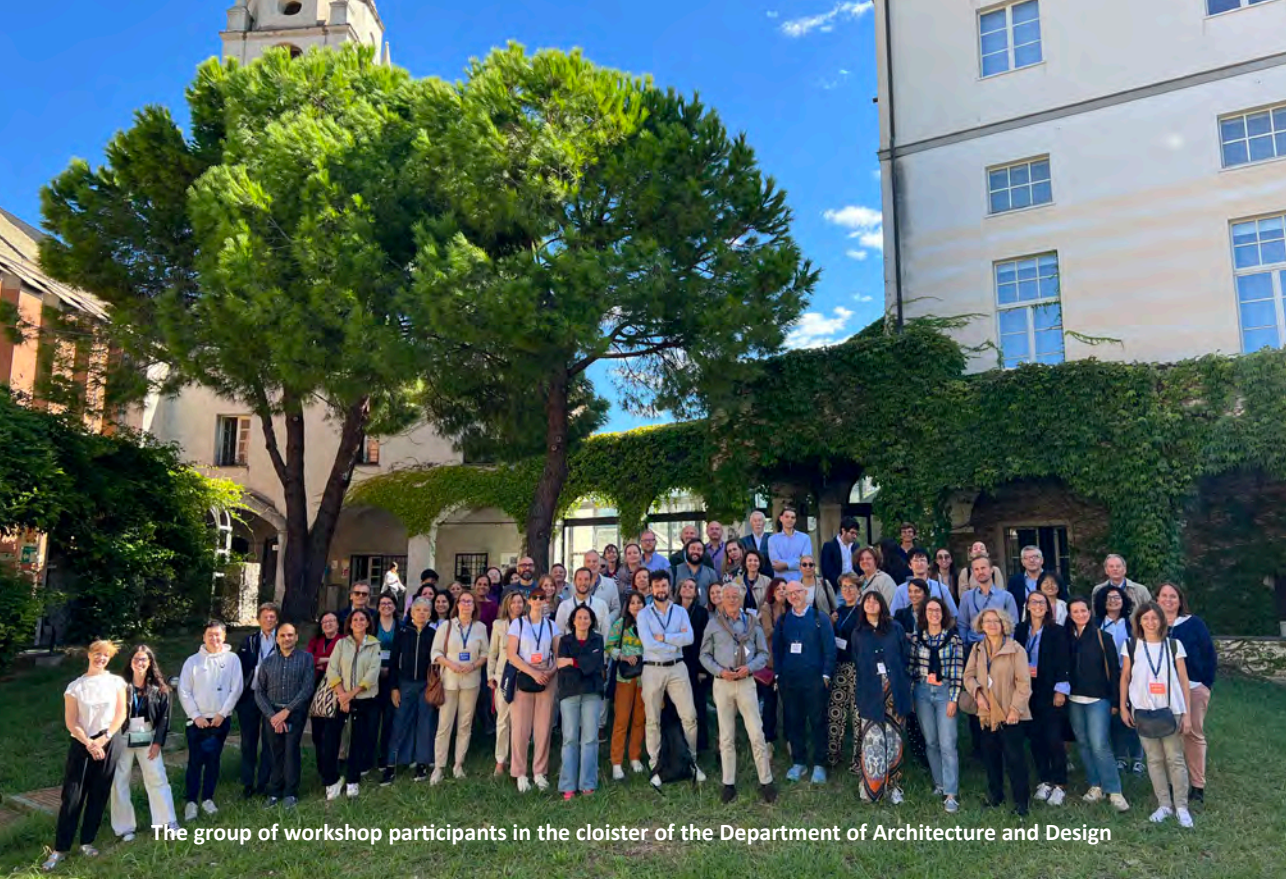
Rita Vecchiattini
University of Genoa, Italy
rita.vecchiattini@unige.it

Stefan VIETHS
Università degli studi di Bergamo, Italy
stefan.vieths@unibg.it

Francesca VIGOTTI
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
francesca.vigotti@polimi.it

Yue XIA
Politecnico di Milano, Italy
yue.xia@polimi.it

Yaozhong ZHANG
University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, Scotland
zhangyaozhong0311@gmail.com



The group of workshop participants in the cloister of the Department of Architecture and Design



A plenary session in Benvenuto hall



A plenary session in Benvenuto hall



The Organizing Committee



Study visit to the historic centre



Study visit to the historic centre



View from Castelletto



Visiting the Albergo dei Poveri



Visiting the Albergo dei Poveri: the hall



A courtyard of the Albergo dei Poveri



Welcome cocktail in the cloister