

# Strategie di co-creazione per la tutela e il riuso di vasti complessi religiosi nel contesto urbano. Esperienze di ricerca e didattica per tre casi studio a Cagliari

## Co-creation strategies for protecting and reusing vast religious complexes in the urban context. Research and teaching experiences for three case studies in Cagliari

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Il contributo propone una riflessione sul ruolo strategico che i progetti di ricerca universitari possono svolgere nella costruzione di scenari sostenibili di riutilizzo di grandi complessi architettonici religiosi urbani, a partire dalle tematiche di ricerca sviluppate da Carla Bartolozzi sulle potenzialità derivanti da un uso sociale di questo specifico patrimonio. L'esperienza condotta dal 2012 su tre siti religiosi dismessi a Cagliari hanno permesso di incrementare la conoscenza dei monumenti e di sviluppare strategie di riuso basate sull'accessibilità, la socialità e la formazione, stimolando il dialogo interistituzionale e la condivisione dei risultati con le comunità per evitare il rischio di disaffezione e promuovere un processo di consapevole riappropriazione fisica e culturale.

*The paper proposes a reflection on the strategic role that university research projects can play in constructing sustainable reuse scenarios for large urban religious architectural complexes, following the studies carried out by Carla Bartolozzi on the reuse of urban religious convents and the relationships between conservation goals and possible social use of this specific heritage. The experience carried out since 2012 on three decommissioned religious sites in Cagliari has made it possible to improve the knowledge of the monuments and develop rehabilitation strategies based on permeability, sociality and training, stimulating inter-institutional dialogues and sharing results with the community to avoid the risk of disaffection and promote a progressive and conscious physical and cultural re-appropriation.*

**1** The following should be considered as main references for this contribution: Carla Bartolozzi (ed), *Patrimonio architettonico religioso. Nuove funzioni e processi di trasformazione*, Gangemi, Roma 2016; Carla Bartolozzi, Daniele Dabbene, Francesco Novelli, *Adaptive reuse of religious architectural heritage. Restoration and social inclusion in some case studies in Turin*, in «BDC Bollettino Del Centro Calza Bini», vol. 19, Federico II Open Access Press, Napoli 2019; Carla Bartolozzi, Francesco Novelli, *Research on ecclesiastical heritage: from census to design*, in Fabrizio Capanni (ed.), *Dio non abita più qui? Dismissioni di luoghi di culto e gestione integrata di beni culturali ecclesiastici / Doesn't God dwell here anymore? Decommissioning places of worship and integrated management of ecclesiastical cultural heritage*, Editoriale Artemide, Roma 2019, pages 411-420; Daniele Dabbene, Carla Bartolozzi, Cristina Coscia, *How to monitor and evaluate quality in adaptive heritage reuse projects from a well-being perspective: a proposal for a dashboard model of indicators to support promoters*, in «Sustainability», 2022, 14.

**2** Antonia Gravagnuolo, Luigi Fusco, Karima Kourtit, Peter Nijkamp, *Adaptive re-use of urban cultural resources: Contours of circular city planning*, in «City, Culture and Society», vol. 26, 2021; Luigi Fusco Girard, *CLIC Framework of Circular Human-centred Adaptive Reuse of Cultural Heritage*, Deliverable D2.7 Horizon 2020 CLIC, Napoli 2021; Luigi Fusco Girard, Antonia Gravagnuolo, *Circular economy and cultural heritage/landscape regeneration. Circular business, financing and governance models for a competitive Europe*, in «BDC Bollettino Del Centro Calza Bini», 1/2017(1), pages 35-52.

## Introduction

The reuse of abandoned or underused religious architectural heritage is a topic of great attention and debate in Italy and Europe. It has developed since the end of the 1980s in both informal and official documents promoted by the Holy See, ICCROM, and other international associations that deal with the conservation and promotion of this heritage.

Carla Bartolozzi and her academic team have deeply investigated the issue<sup>1</sup>. In more than twenty years of research and teaching experience, they have analyzed the relationships between protection and conservation goals and the possible social use of this heritage, paying particular attention to initiatives involving the components of the so-called 'third sector' as the proponents or the asset managers.

Many of the cases investigated focused on integrating conservation needs and collective well-being, aiming at both enhancement and inclusion and searching for the highest degree of compatibility of the new functions with the pre-existing historical values. Her project demonstrated that heritage protection and reuse can significantly contribute to building new development models, increasing the resources of spaces for local communities and improving the quality of life and welfare. This new approach calls with greater urgency for us to overcome the top-down approach of public policies, which are too focused on conservation, in favor of more effective tools to capture the multidimensional components of value generated by cultural heritage. In this direction, in Italy and other countries, the so-called 'third sector' plays a key role in architectural heritage revitalisation, exploiting the great potential of these monuments as a place for sociality, education, inclusion and art, and becoming a third intermediate link between the public and the private sectors. One of the most paradigmatic examples is undoubtedly the restoration of the Santa Chiara Convent in Turin (Italy), where the cooperation with the Abele Group made it possible to revitalise an underused building, reconciling the conservation and valorisation of a complex of great historical, artistic and architectural values with the social purposes of the non-profit sector and the Catholic Church. This model was successfully tested in other case studies where sacred buildings owned by religious bodies have been managed by entities entrusted to the 'third sector'.

This cooperative approach contributes to a virtuous model of circular adaptive reuse<sup>2</sup> that Carla Bartolozzi has tested on some significant Italian religious monuments. This term refers to a complex process of participatory co-design, supported by multi-criteria and multidimensional assessment tools, aimed at identifying new functions capable of restoring social vitality and giving centrality of meaning to religious places often abandoned, underused and marginal in conditions of progressive decay. Implementing the circular model to urban regeneration strategies requires a paradigm shift in which all economic values co-exist and co-evolve with social/human values, allowing the implementation of a human-centred approach. Consequently, the new human-centred circular regeneration strategies must consider their impacts on the physical transformation of space and the social level. Taking inspiration from the ethic and multipurpose perspective of the restoration process introduced above, the paper proposes a critical review of some projects developed by the School of Architecture of the University of Cagliari on three vast religious architectural complexes located in the historic centre of Cagliari, comparing the research methodologies adopted and the results obtained.

Like many other Italian urban realities, the capital of Sardinia has inherited many extensive religious complexes. Several of these were built on the borders of the medieval settlement and progressively included in the densely stratified modern town until they became – sometimes only potentially – strategic areas for the contemporary city.

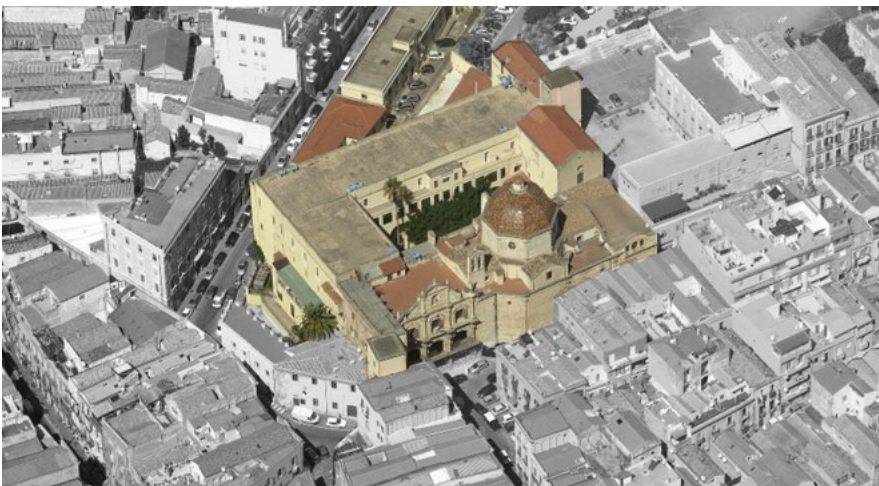
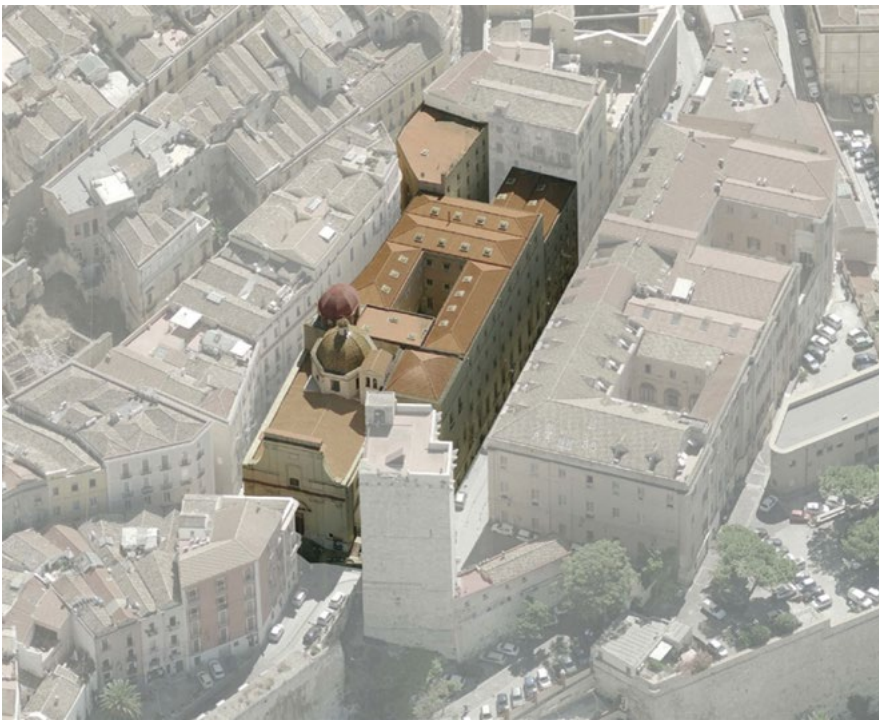


Fig. 1 – a. Cagliari, aerial view of the Santa Chiara Clarisse monastery; b. Cagliari, aerial view of the San Giuseppe Piarist College; c. Cagliari, aerial view of the St. Michael Jesuits Novitiate.

**3** Details on the history of the convent could be found in the following: Alfredo Ingegno, *Santa Chiara: restauri e scoperte*, Grafiche Pisano, Cagliari 1993; Tatiana Kirova, Franco Masala, Michele Pintus, *Cagliari. Quartieri storici. Stampace*, Silvana Editoriale, Cagliari 1994; Maria Grazia Meloni, *Note sulla presenza delle Clarisse in Sardegna nel Medioevo*, in «Bollettino Bibliografico e Rassegna Archivistica e di Studi Storici della Sardegna», XI, fasc.18, 1994, pages43-52; Maria Francesca Vardeu, Gianfranco Luzzu, *La chiesa e il monastero di Santa Chiara a Stampace, percorso storico*, Cagliari 2008.

The case studies selected are the ruins of the ancient monastery of Santa Chiara (Fig. 1a), the former college of San Giuseppe of the Piarist Fathers (Fig. 1b) and the former Jesuit novitiate of St. Michael, now De Murtas Barrack (Fig. 1c), located along a linear path that ideally connects two of the four old urban districts: Stampace and Castello. The three sites have historical similarities, even if they had different destinies. Like many other Italian religious assets, the three of them suffered the consequences of the Italian subversive laws resulting from the suppression of religious Orders that led to the fragmentation of the properties: churches have maintained their religious use, separated from the residential buildings re-designated for new public, civil and military uses. This 'second life' was impactful for all the assets, but, at the same time, it added relevant social values for the communities, whose conservation is currently at risk due to the long-term closure of the sites to the public. Excluding the ongoing military use of the complex of St. Michael, the other two sites have been neglected for years, depriving the city of important cultural public spaces and strategic 'containers' suitable for hosting services for the community.

Starting from the risk of a progressive loss of material testimonies and the fear of disaffection of the citizens, the research and teaching explorations – academic laboratories, workshops, master's degree and PhD thesis, developed by the conservation team in cooperation with a panel of educational experts in survey and drawing, history of architecture, urbanism, geomaterials, physics, structures and diagnostics – were aimed at improving knowledge of the monuments and stimulating the re-appropriation of the assets by their public owners and the local communities, through projects based on permeability, sociality and inclusion.

## **1. History, destinies and potentials of three vast urban religious complexes in Cagliari**

### **1.1 Santa Chiara Monastery**

The ruins of the convent are located in Stampace on the western side of the Castello hill in a flat area between the Bastione Santa Croce, via Santa Margherita and piazza Yenne (Fig. 2). This nodal urban space connects the three historic quarters of Stampace, Castello, and Marina. The convent ruins are part of a more extensive monumental complex, including the baroque Santa Chiara church and the local Santa Chiara market, built in the modern era<sup>3</sup>.

The monument, assigned to and occupied by the religious Order of Clarisse nuns, was built in the XIV century on an existing church dedicated to St. Margaret outside the city's medieval defence walls and isolated from the urban context. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the baroque church was built in its current form, and the convent was probably expanded. Relationships with its surroundings changed as it began to play a significant role in the city's urbanisation and economy. At the end of the following century, the convent was described as unhealthy, especially the dormitory, due to its location near the humid embankment.

Due to structural obsolescence and difficult living conditions, the convent's community sharply declined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1864, a heated anticlerical climate, fomented by controversial discussions on the temporal power of the church, affected the whole





Kingdom and led to the enactment of laws for the suppression of religious Orders. In the same year, the "Agents of the Government" entered the convent and transferred the nuns to the Purissima convent in the district of Castello. In 1865, the building was returned to the nuns after a strong popular protest. In the same period, the engineer Gaetano Cima designed a new urban plan (1858) for the city in which the Santa Chiara complex became a nodal point of connection between neighbourhoods through the design of a monumental staircase on the rocky and wild uphill path to Castello from piazza Yenne. In 1897, the property of the convent and the church was confiscated and handed over to the Municipality of Cagliari. The convent's closure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and its consequent desertion caused the area to lose its central role and become a neglected place.

In 1943, WWII bombing destroyed part of the structures, and the consequent cleanup returned a ruined shell of masonry with no roofs and floors. Then, in 1957, following the demolition of the central market, a temporary local marketplace was installed inside the convent, transforming the space with new roofs, floors, and partitions. Although it was a temporary solution, the Santa Chiara market took up permanent residence there.

The Superintendence for Cultural Heritage carried out vast archaeological excavations, structural renovations, and repairs between 1954 and 1997. In the 1990s, the decision to install a lift in the space between the church and the convent, the original location of the confessionals and oratories, raised additional issues regarding the legibility of the parts of the monument – the church and the convent – which were perceived as two different buildings (Fig. 3).

Due to this significant role and the convent's importance, between 2006 and 2009, the Council moved the market to an adjacent area close to the church access stairs. Nowadays, despite recent restoration and integration work (2016) carried out by the Superintendence (designed by architect Paolo Margaritella), the convent is still in a state of ruin, and nobody can access the structures.

Fig. 2 – Cagliari, Santa Chiara monastery, internal view of the ruins.



4 The convent was the main case study of a PhD research carried out by Elisa Pilia at the University of Cagliari in cooperation with the Scottish Centre for Conservation Studies, University of Edinburgh. The results are edited in Elisa Pilia, *Urban Ruins. Memorial Value and Contemporary Role*, DOM Publishers, Series Basics, n. 88, Berlino 2019. See also Donatella Rita Fiorino, Silvana Maria Grillo, Elisa Pilia, Giuseppina Vacca, *Geomatics and archaeometric investigations for the sustainable reuse of ruins. The Santa Chiara convent ruin in Cagliari (Sardinia)*, in «The International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences», vol. XLII-2 W11, 2019, pages 525-532.

Given its strategic central position and good accessibility, the site has extraordinary potential for new functions as a public space and services for the neighbourhood.

The studies on the convent started in 2013 with metric and stratigraphic surveys, sampling and mapping of the materials and decays, which allowed the understanding of the monastery's construction phases and the identification of both values and criticalities<sup>4</sup>.

As in the case of the church and convent of the Clarisse nuns in Turin, studied by Carla Bartolozzi, it immediately seemed clear that the ancient 'place of exclusion' needed to be restored to being a centre for 'social inclusion' in the form of a liveable public space that should be given back to the community.



Fig. 3 - Cagliari, Santa Chiara monastery, the urban lift in the old religious spaces.

## 1.2 San Giuseppe Piarist College and Convent

The Piarist College of San Giuseppe (Fig. 4) is located in a large urban block between via San Giuseppe and via Università, with an average height of about 14 m. Therefore, the building has a ground floor and two upper storeys for those accessing via San Giuseppe (15 m) and five levels for those accessing via Università (24 m). Besides the church (Fig. 4), the old religious school was organised around two courtyards: the cloister proper and a second inner courtyard, determined by the urban growth of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Both open areas are located on the line of the former medieval walls at the edge of the Pisan boundary of the Castello district<sup>5</sup>.

The Piarist Fathers arrived in Cagliari in the fourth decade of the 17<sup>th</sup> century as one of the last Orders to settle in the capital of Sardinia. Like all ecclesiastical settlements, the newly born college benefited from the City Hall and government authorities' direct engagement and generous legacies from the wealthy bourgeoisie that supported the challenging architectural and urban programme. They donated some buildings – mostly private residences along the carrer of Oriphany, now via San Giuseppe, near the Torre dell'Elefante, to the Piarist. This was an urban area where many functions coexisted, characterised by the Pisan medieval defence system which was gradually losing its vocation. The Bastione del Balice, built in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, extended the boundaries of Castello, and the ancient medieval fortifications were progressively incorporated into the new religious property. The design and construction of the spaces were realised through the progressive acquisition of preexisting private buildings. The shape of the urban block was defined in 1678, when state officials obliged the Piarist Fathers to build the new college beyond a line running between the Torre dell'Elefante and the Brondo properties, which is still recognisable in the current urban framework.

Construction continued until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the last works in the church and schools were finished. However, the subversion laws (1855, 1866) inaugurated a new era for the former college: intended for use as a Civil Court and primary school, the building was restored

<sup>5</sup> Details on the history of the convent could be found in the following: Francesco Colli Vignarelli, *Gli Scolopi in Sardegna*, Istituto Calsanzio, Sanluri Cagliari 1982; Michele Pintus, *Il rilievo della chiesa di San Giuseppe a Cagliari*, in Tatiana Kirilova Kirova (ed), *Arte e cultura del 600 e 700 in Sardegna*, ESI, Napoli 1984, p. 138; Gianfranco Spagnesi, *L'architettura religiosa degli Scolopi e la Chiesa di San Giuseppe a Cagliari*, in Kirilova Kirova (ed), *Arte e cultura cit.*, pages 128–129; Donatella Rita Fiorino, Vincenzo Bagnolo, Silvana Maria Grillo, Stefania Nonne, Marcello Schirru, *Integrated sciences for heritage reuse: interdisciplinary studies on the piarist college of San Giuseppe in Cagliari (Italy)*, in «International Journal of Heritage Architecture», vol. 1/4, 2017, pages 517-537.

Fig. 4 – Cagliari, San Giuseppe Piarist Church in the current condition, deprived of the plasters.

Fig. 5 – Cagliari, San Giuseppe Piarist College, internal view of the cloister north wing.



6 E. Sitzia, *Le istituzioni dei Gesuiti a Cagliari*, in *I padri Gesuiti in Sardegna*, special issue of *Eco di Sardegna*, Organo del Pontificio Seminario Regionale Sardo, Cuglieri, Sassari 1956; AA.VV., *La chiesa di San Michele a Cagliari*, «Quaderno didattico», V/1991, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, Soprintendenza ai beni ambientali, architettonici, artistici e storici per le province di Cagliari e Oristano, Cagliari 1991; Alfredo Ingegno, *Il restauro della Chiesa di San Michele*, Stef, Cagliari 1995; Tatiana K. Kirova, Donatella Rita Fiorino, *Le Architetture religiose del barocco in Sardegna. Modelli colti e creatività popolare dal XVI al XVIII secolo*, Aipsa, Cagliari 2002.

7 These activities have involved all levels of academic training: laboratories, master's degree thesis, PhD thesis. Results are edited in Donatella Rita Fiorino, *Sinergie. Percorsi interistituzionali per la riqualificazione delle aree militari/ Synergies. Interinstitutional experiences for the rehabilitation of military areas*, Unicapress, Cagliari 2021; Donatella Rita Fiorino, Elisa Pilia, *Ospedali Militari in Italia. Permanenze e processi di rifunionalizzazione*, in Federico Camerin Francesco Gastaldi (eds), *Rigenerare le aree militari dismesse. Prospettive, dibattiti e riconversioni in Italia, Spagna e in contesti internazionali*, Maggioli Editore, Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna 2021, pages 461-474.

because of its new functions under the direction of engineers Enrico Melis and Enrico Besson. The XX century was no less eventful for the Piarist Fathers' residence. During the late '60s, engineer Romano Antico converted the spaces inside the four wings of the main cloister into school rooms with hipped and flat roofs in brick-reinforced concrete slabs.

Despite the many transformations (Fig. 5), the monument currently preserves meaningful testimonies of the oldest phases, including relevant sections of the medieval walls on the lower floors of the east side. The ground level on the west side, overlooking via Università, now hosts some art studios and the offices of some cultural associations, and the university archives are on the first floor above.

Because the School of Art relocated to another location in 2012, the architectural complex, which has been in disuse since then, now suffers from multiple problems.

### 1.3 St. Michael Jesuit's Novitiate

The monumental complex, which currently houses the Military Hospital (Fig. 6), was initially designed for the Novitiate of the Society of Jesus, which moved to Cagliari from Busachi in 1585. The chosen area was in the district of Stampace, next to the medieval urban walls and the Sperone Tower, built in 1293. The ancient urban gate guaranteed the Jesuits a steady flow of people, wagons and goods.

Multiple stages mark the history of the Novitiate's construction, all connected with significant testamentary legacies that ensured the Fathers the necessary resources<sup>6</sup>. The primary residence was probably a dowry-owned house that was then extended by purchasing additional private buildings. In 1592, a substantial legacy came from the bishop of Ampurias and Civita, Monsignor Giovanni Sanna, allowing the first significant expansion of the complex. In 1674, the works went on thanks to the testamentary bequest of Don Francesco Angelo Dessì from Bortigali, with the construction of twenty-four rooms and, between 1677 and 1680, the construction of the inner chapel. The construction of the Church began during the same period. The baroque façade was completed in 1705, but it wasn't until 30 November 1738 that the liturgical space was finally consecrated. The history of the Novitiate ends with the suppression of the Order, which took place by Royal Decree on 12 October 1773, with the consequent sale of all the Jesuit's assets. The Fathers used the complex, albeit with some periods of exile, until 1848, when they were expelled from Cagliari. Immediately after, the religious complex was destined for use as a Military Hospital, which is still in operation. The building has, of course, undergone adaptations, some of which quite consistent, in relation to the new function but it retains the legible structures of the original convent (Fig. 7). In addition to the old Novitiate building, the architectural complex currently consists of six additional buildings related to different construction stages. The studies on the convent started in 2018, with a series of educational and research activities carried out under the umbrella of a special agreement signed by the University of Cagliari and the Ministry of Defence to develop scientific studies in engineering and architecture<sup>7</sup>.

The research group had the opportunity to investigate old documents, including historical and recent military inventories. These precious documents contain, room by room, the detailed description of each architectural element and service: floors, windows, plasters, ceilings, roofs, heaters, etc.





The information gathered through archival sources, compared with those supplied by metric and stratigraphic surveys, sampling and mapping of the materials, made it possible to understand the monument's chronological stages and identify vulnerabilities and potentials in terms of conservation and social issues.

## 2. A shared protocol of investigation for different inter-institutional co-creative strategies and design projects

The research on the three case studies started by applying a rigorous investigation protocol that was conducted according to well-known methods and operational practices in conservation. The knowledge plan was conceived as a multilayered stratified knowledge, and indirect and on-site analysis required a multidisciplinary team. The most peculiar aspect was the tool of the 'Raumbuch', adapted to each site's specificity, which allowed for the gathering of a considerable amount of high-level data and documentation produced and cross-checking the flow of information. Based on this, research and educational investigations have been focused on defining a sustainable strategy of preservation and reuse capable of protecting and revitalising the three historic sites.

All the projects shared the goal of making monumental complexes accessible and open to the public. The main idea was to ensure that residents and tourists could access the common areas and courtyards.

Fig. 6 – Cagliari, St. Michael Novitiate now De Murtas Barrack, former cloister current as modified by the military use (R. Salgo, 2021).

Fig. 7 – Cagliari, St. Michael Novitiate, now De Murtas Barrack, an internal view of the corridor of the north wing after maintenance work carried out by the military (R. Salgo, 2021).

At the same time, the historical and artistic significance of the old religious buildings required practical solutions to preserve their tangible and intangible aspects. These solutions needed to be compatible with the buildings' dimensions, location and values, while ensuring that the complexes could be managed and maintained effectively.

The first issue to address was conservation, with the most critical situation being the convent of Santa Chiara, which is currently in a state of ruin. The research began by recognising that Santa Chiara's 'ruin' represents a physical legacy and reflects ancient and recent history. As a result, this site serves as an extraordinary testament to the interconnectedness of place and history – a 'narrative' and an educational resource for those involved in historical settings and anyone confronting the passage of time and the fragility of existence. For this reason, the conservation project stemmed from the desire to maintain all the signs of the past, differentiate new interventions from older ones and ensure the legibility of the different historical layers. Early knowledge was crucial in anticipating and supporting the design.

Along with traditional analysis, the knowledge process involved urban investigations supported by innovative design technologies and techniques. These studies have enabled the exploration of accessibility in and around urban ruins, emphasising collective interaction through interconnected pathways and revealing latent spatial connections among all the ruins within the local historical context.

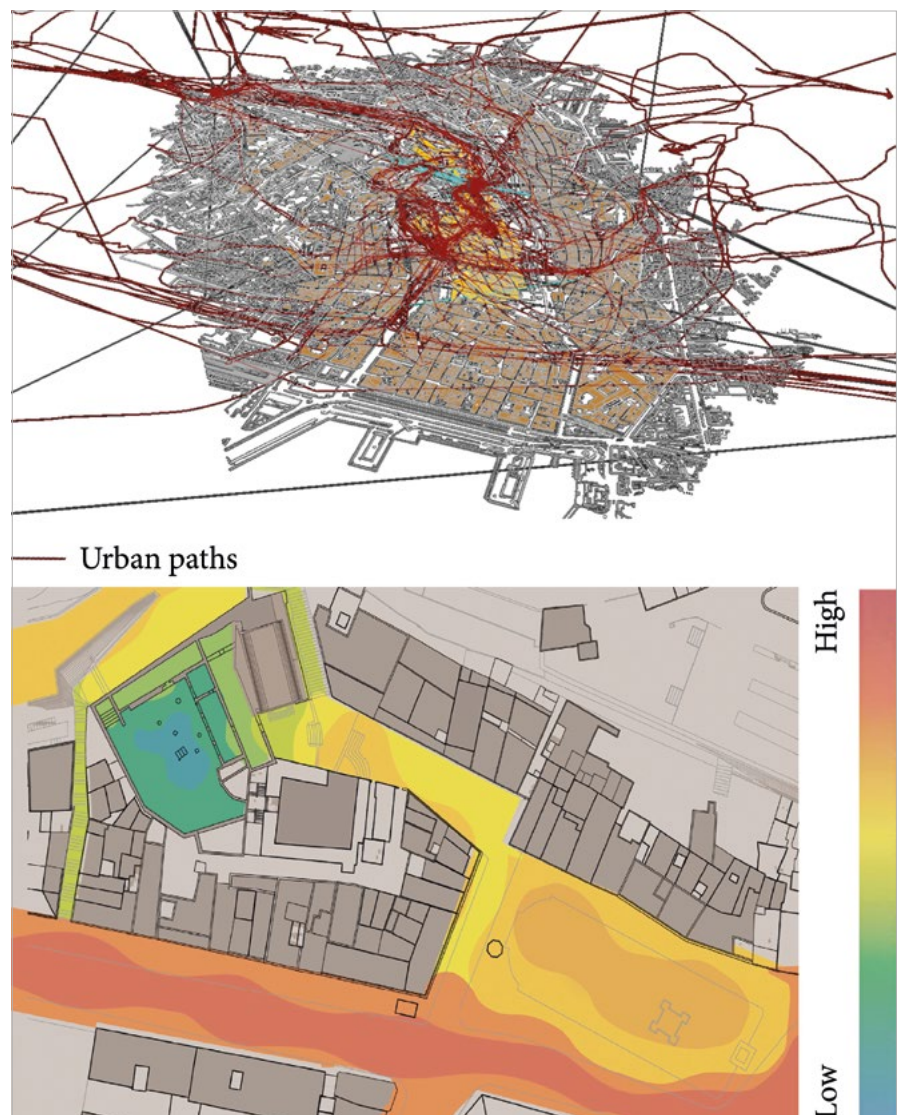
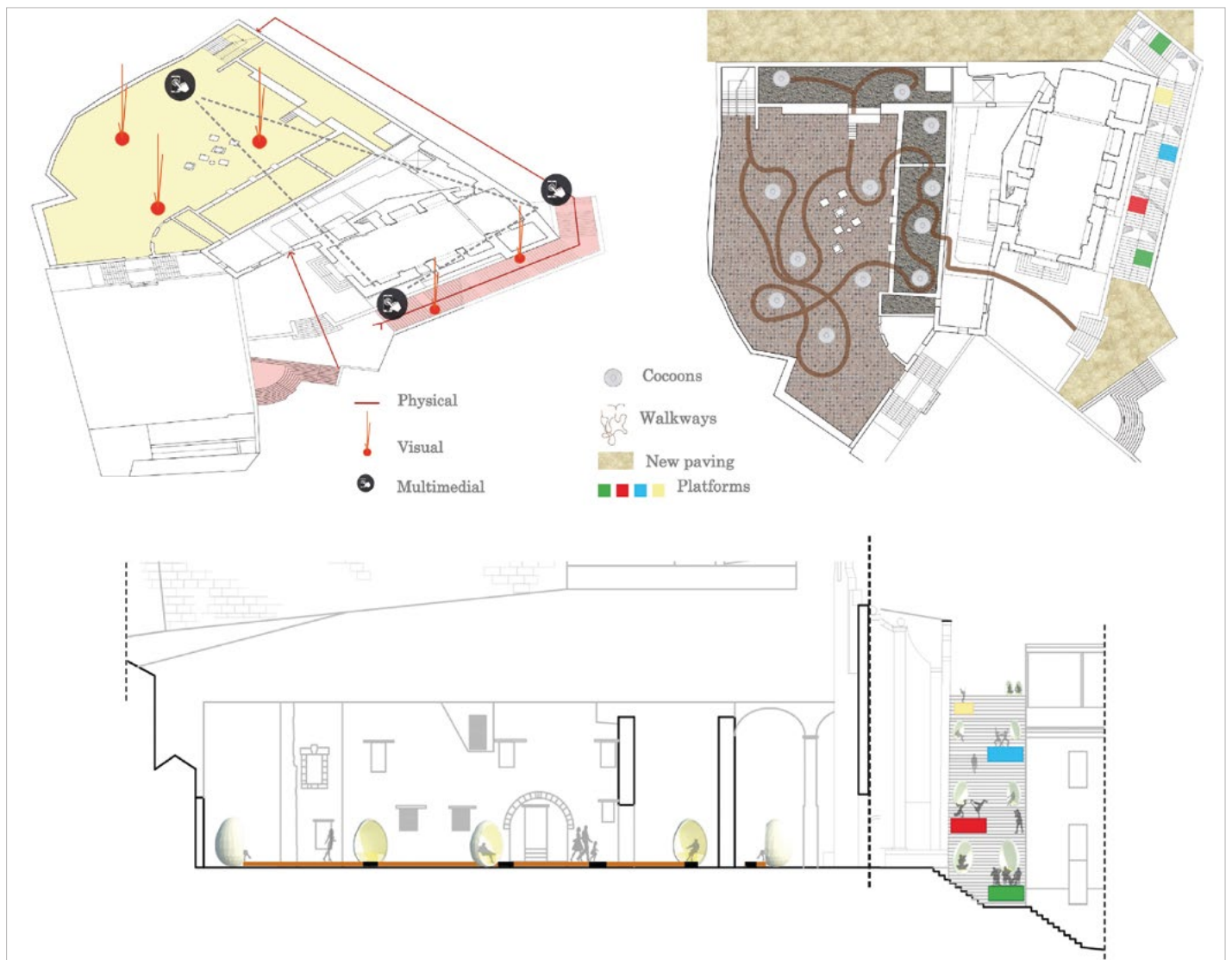


Fig. 8 – Cagliari, city map showing the paths people prefer to take during the day and the variations in the intensity of noise in the former Santa Chiara monastery as one approaches the cloister, from high to low (in cooperation with the University of Edinburgh).

This was also an experimental way to reorganise, reframe and enhance the collective experience of urban spaces. The analysis provided a city map showing the paths people prefer to take during the day and the variations of intensity of noise approaching the cloister, from high to low (Fig. 8). It helped us understand how fast people move and where they cross the city centre. Additionally, it emphasised the significance of the Santa Chiara monastery in the city. The area can be seen as the central point of a route that starts from the lower part of piazza Yenne and leads to the entrance of the Castle through the Torre dell’Elefante urban gate. This route is now the primary path for tourists who arrive at the port or come to the city by shuttle and train, arriving in piazza Matteotti. They then proceed to the historic districts along largo Carlo Felice and pass through piazza Yenne.

Turning to the analysis of past uses, despite the negative impact caused by the physical presence of market boxes, the site has consolidated its social function as a meeting place in the twentieth century, particularly among the neighbourhood’s inhabitants. The strategy’s primary goal is to revitalise and integrate the former monastery area into the city’s life beyond its archaeological significance. This involves transforming it into a key point along an important urban route in the historic centre, incorporating functions that can activate the courtyard and garden spaces, such as bars and restaurants, while reinforcing its market function, which was the “second life” of the church place (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 – Cagliari, Santa Chiara monastery, a design studio for the revitalization of the cloister based on inclusivity and social contamination (in cooperation with the University of Edinburgh).





The idea is to reassemble the spatial figure of the cloister with a new volume inside the old building, integrating the permanence in the latest functional context without causing detriment to the preservation of the material authenticity of the artefacts. Many ruined rooms can be left uncovered or protected by a new flat roof, keeping the quality of views from and to the upper city and preserving the area's panoramic vocation. In this case, the reunification of the church with the convent seems unnecessary but also not practicable. However, the projects developed in the laboratories have elaborated alternative scenarios for positioning the lift to the castle – incorporated inside the old ruins – to redevelop the former monastic spaces used as urban corridors and reconnect them to the church.

Thanks to solid inter-institutional cooperation with the Municipality, the studies' results guided the new urban plan for the historic centre of Cagliari, with a specific document dedicated to protecting and reusing the area of Santa Chiara.

In the case of the complex of San Giuseppe, the state of conservation was much better, given the use of the structure, until 2012 as the seat of the 'Foiso Fois' School of Art. The identification of the function was again determined by the reflections initiated with the Municipality of Cagliari within the drawing up of the Historic Centre Development Plan, as happened for the Santa Chiara site. The project – developed within the framework of teaching laboratories and some master's degree theses – is based on the desire to return to the city, a relevant piece of the urban fabric of Cagliari, which preserves traces of all urban stratification from the medieval town to the twentieth century. The great potential of the architectural complex is that it can be accessible from three different streets located at three different levels of Castello Hill. The first problem was the site's fragmentation due to the separation between the convent and the church. Furthermore, it should be considered that, for years, the site was used for three different non-conversant purposes: the School of Arts, the University Archives and the Church, close to the public.

It's important to remember that Castello has recently been transformed into a museum, with most houses now used as 'bed and breakfasts', without adequate services for the resident community. Within the studies for the drawing up of the previously mentioned urban plan for the historic centre, the strong vocation of the property to host the new Office of the Historic Centre Development Plan emerged due to its location in the heart of the neighbourhood and the typology of the building, with two cloisters and numerous vast, silent and bright rooms, distributed according to a well-organized scheme.

The office has been designed as a meeting place between technicians and communities to collect information, suggestions and critical reports. Residents can meet to discuss the common problems of life in the neighbourhood and transfer them to the municipality to find strategies and possible solutions.

The new function required the identification of co-working areas, rooms for individual work and spaces for the public to interact. The latter has been designed according to the criterion of maximum permeability as spaces at the service of the public, where the institution can talk about its work and put participatory design activities into practice (Fig. 10).

Another wing of the former convent has been designed as a new location for the design workshops of the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Cagliari, previously located in the nearby former Jesuit monastery of the Holy Cross. Establishing design classrooms and

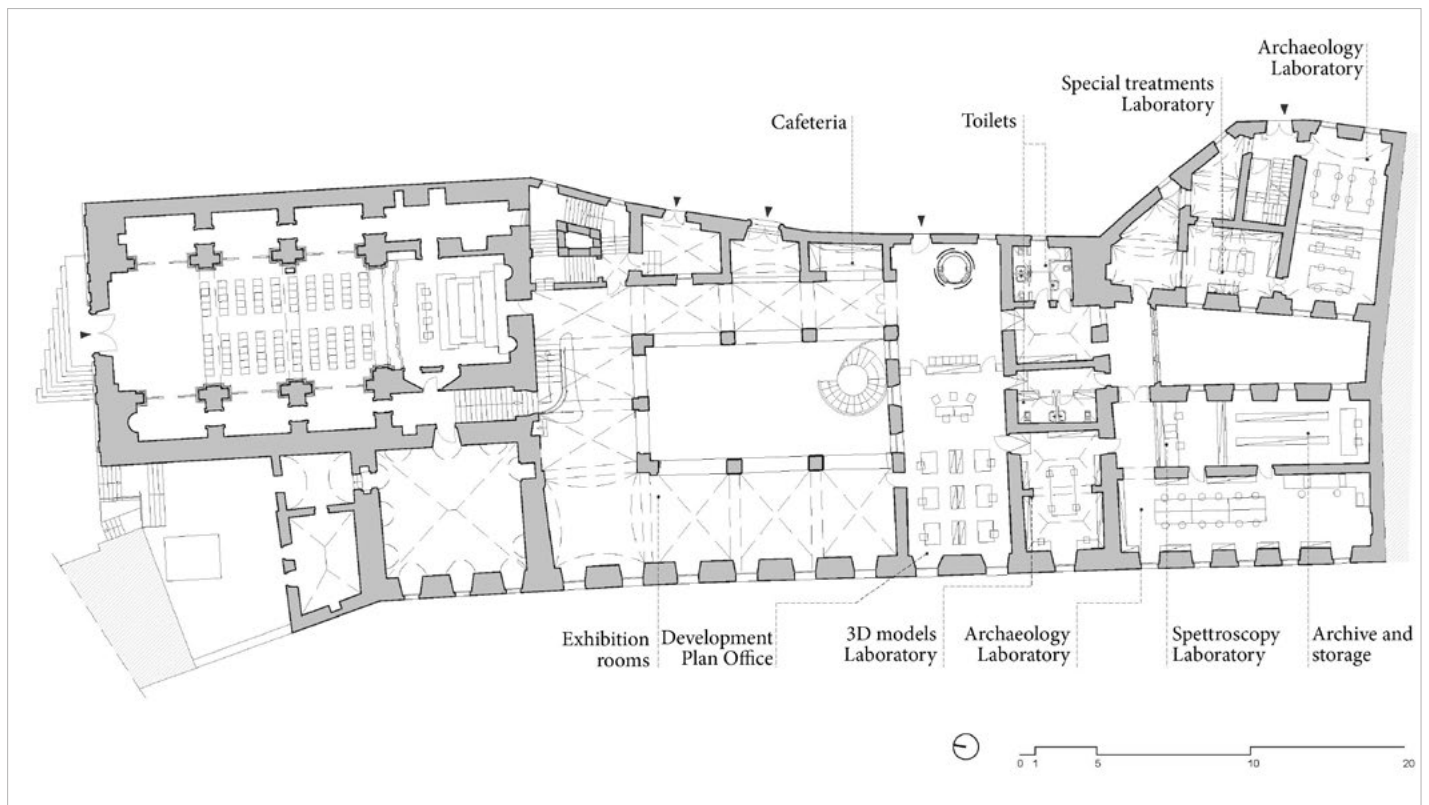


Fig. 10 – Cagliari, San Giuseppe Piarist College, plan of the ground floor at the level of St. Joseph Street, with new functions.

laboratories beside the offices of the City’s Technical Department would promote a mutual exchange of expertise and the start-up of a veritable “factory of ideas” shared by the planning institution, scholars and residents.

The aim is to develop Castello as a place of reference for students and residents, where architecture and people must interact by integrating new spaces.

Within the complex, there will be at least four areas of relationship among the University, Municipality and citizens: the cloister, the laboratories, the church used as a conference room, and the library, converted into a Library dedicated to the conservation and reuse of historic architecture and historic centres, open to the public. In the project, another side of the complex has been allocated to the Superintendence for Archaeological Heritage restoration laboratories, dedicated explicitly to urban archaeology. The idea is to provide the Conservation Office with a laboratory for cataloguing and restoring findings from the numerous cavities and underground spaces of which Castello is rich.

The last function – located in the vaulted rooms open on the ground floor accessible from via Università – is the FabLab Building, a series of parallel galleries dedicated to the artistic and craft sector, historically present both in Castello and in the suburbs of Villanova and Stampace. The project focused on solving problems related to accessibility and internal practicability to facilitate the interconnectedness of different work areas (Fig. 11).

To create connections and incorporate key technological elements such as lifts, technical rooms and toilets, it was beneficial to use the mapping of the latest stratifications, including the elements added during the heavy restoration works designed by Eng. Romano Antico in the second half of the twentieth century. Although they could be considered inappropriate and disrespectful compared with the contemporary aesthetic standards and the sensitivity of the modern restoration approach, the general intention of the conservation project

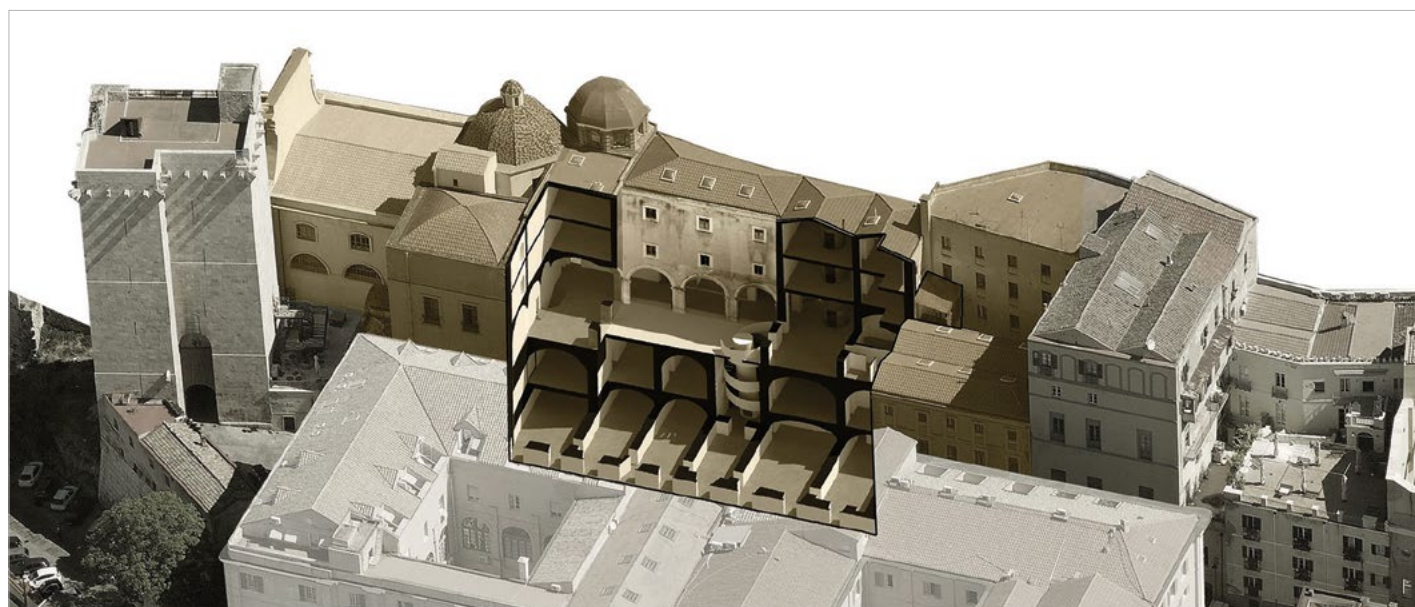
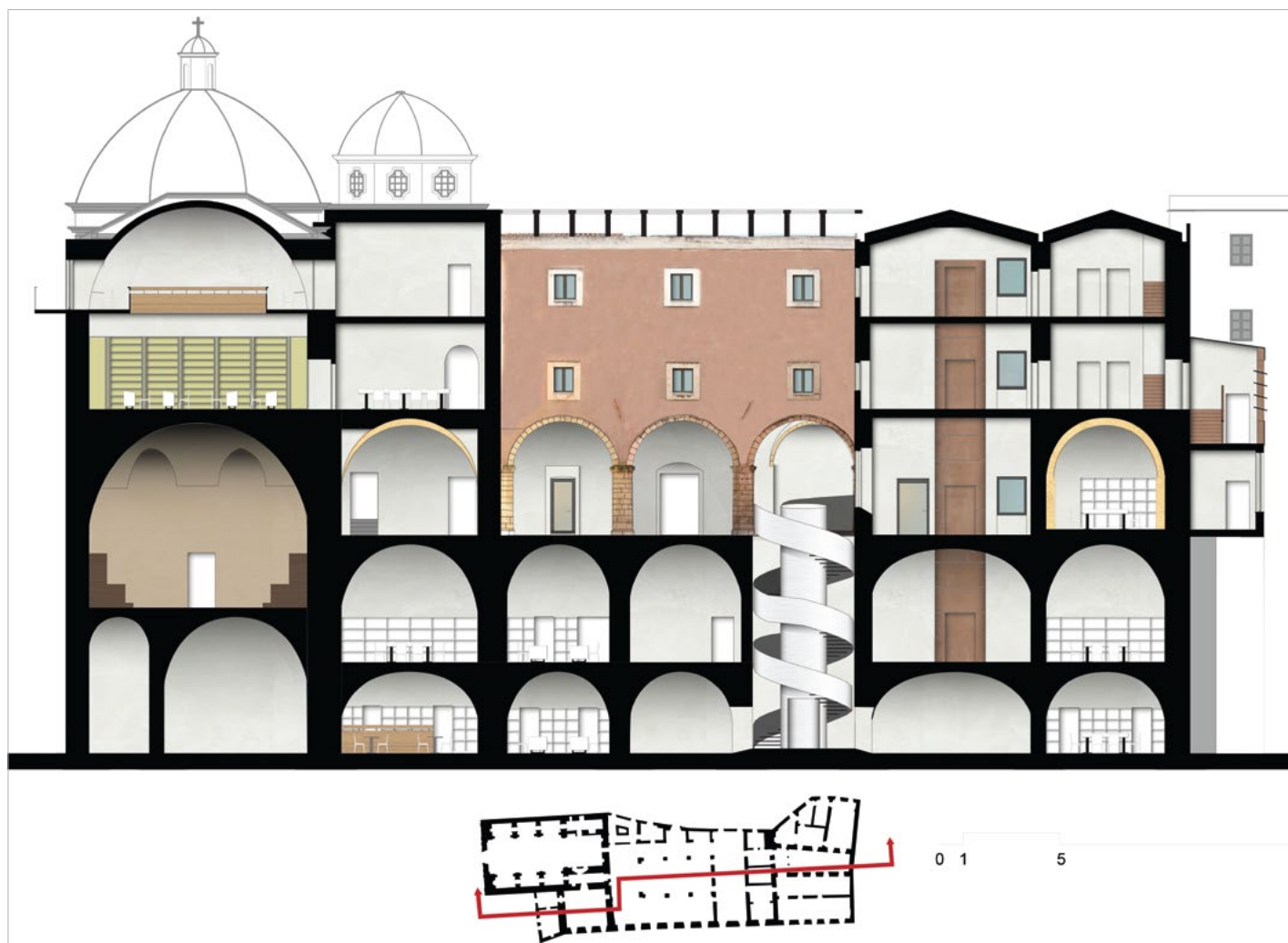


Fig. 11 - Cagliari, San Giuseppe Piarist College, longitudinal cross-section of the design project showing vertical connections (master's degree thesis M. Barrui, S. Tavera, A. Murgia).

Fig. 12 - Cagliari, San Giuseppe Piarist College, axonometric projection of the design project with the relationships among different levels and buildings (master's degree thesis M. Barrui, S. Tavera, A. Murgia).

was to keep these elements as a testimony of a local 'restoration history' in the twentieth century. However, in some points, they have been taken as elements of sacrifice for the addition of new technical elements and services, preserving historical masonries and meeting the minimum intervention criteria (Fig. 12).

As in the case of Santa Chiara and also in the case of the former convent of San Giuseppe, it was fundamental to have a preliminary moment of cooperation with the Municipality and the community for the analysis of



criticalities, the identification of needs, and the choice of new functions. Furthermore, the ‘second life’ of the convent – the School of Art – once again oriented new functions in terms of continuity and compatibility. The third case study is the former Jesuit novitiate of St. Michael, the Amerigo De Murtas Barrack, which has been used as a military hospital since 1848. The situation is different in some ways because, unlike the other two former convents, it is still in use. What it has in common with the other two former convents is that the community cannot enjoy the site as a cultural asset because of its military use.

As mentioned above, the ancient Jesuit Novitiate of St. Michael was included as a pilot project among the several architectural complexes scientifically investigated within the collaboration between the University of Cagliari and the Ministry of Defence. It became the case study of several teaching laboratories and some master’s degree theses in architecture (Fig. 12).

Specifically, the studies focused on a possible dual use, investigating the possibility of using the complex for cultural purposes and sharing it with institutions and cultural associations, which could expand access for citizens and tourists while still preserving its current military function.

Developing a ‘sustainable’ proposal for civil-military coexistence was possible due to constant dialogue with the military staff involved in the agreement. The project developed a possible tour inside the building that includes the fascinating historical spaces from the monument’s oldest phases (Fig. 13).

Among these, it is essential to remember here the so-called ‘Satta Hall’, an evocative space where it is still possible to observe traces of the vaulted ceiling of a former liturgical space; the small room was built during the mid-nineteenth century and it was used as a library. By applying a rigorous protocol of investigations into materials and structures, it was possible to outline the conservative restoration of the surfaces and the integration of architectural gaps. At the same time, the students developed the project for its reuse as a small conference room, designing six display cabinets, installed in the existing niches between the pillars that support the trusses. The idea was to display the vast collection of historical military items related to the old hospital; furthermore, it was urgent to set up environmental control and lighting systems for a different kind of fruition. The project was implemented thanks to the financial support of a Sardinian bank foundation and the cooperation with volunteers from the Italian Institute of Castles, and the new museum hall was officially inaugurated on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2022 (Fig. 14).

Moreover, the monument was open to visitors regularly, by appointment, one Saturday a month, thanks to the cooperation with the

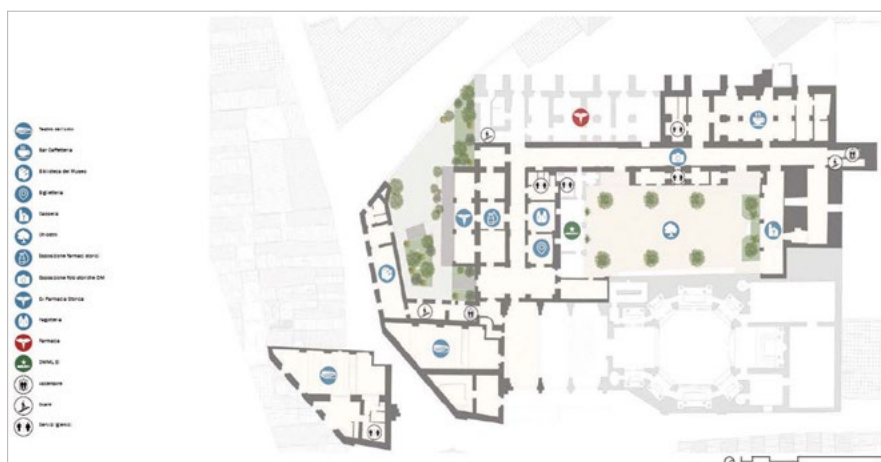


Fig. 13 – Cagliari, St. Michael Novitiate, now De Murtas Barrack, plan of the museum uses of the ground floor (master’s degree thesis C. Contu, C. Muzzu, S. Vargiu).



Fig. 14 - Cagliari, St. Michael Novitiate, now De Murtas Barrack, current view of the Satta Hall with the new showcases and the former project simulation designed by students.

afore-mentioned association. The visitors, accompanied by military personnel and guided by the University's staff and volunteers, could cross and explore spaces traditionally closed to the community. On the ground floor, the visit included the monumental entry, the cloister, the chapel, the pharmacy and the buvette. Then, in the mezzanine, it was



possible to look at the vast collection of ancient medical tools, books and uniforms and visit some rooms that are untouched from when the building was a novitiate (Fig. 15).

The last step was the old urban tower, embedded in the multilayered military architecture and the Satta Hall with the terrace, which offers a stunning view of the city and the port.

These activities also encouraged the realisation of many small works of ordinary maintenance, which, conceived within a well-defined framework of interventions, have brought significant results in the conservation and enhancement of the ancient monument. Three exhibitions were set up to showcase documents, projects and panels portraying the building's history.

In addition to guided tours by volunteers, the Istituto Italiano dei Castelli has launched a worthwhile collaboration with the city's high schools, training young students as tourist guides. Every Saturday morning, in groups, they take visitors on a guided tour of the monument, telling them about its religious and military history. This and the academic activity have allowed mutual contamination between the civil and military world, sharing skills and knowledge among researchers and military personnel (Fig. 16).

### 3. Towards conservation and beyond conservation

The experiments conducted on the large religious buildings in Cagliari reveal many points of contact with the principles and projects elaborated by Carla Bartolozzi for the restoration and revitalisation of similar religious complexes. In particular, the regeneration proposals for the convent of St. Gabriello in Capua<sup>8</sup>, the monastery of Santa Chiara, and the former Holy Spirit Church in Turin<sup>9</sup> provided some methodological inspiration for the definition of a sustainable process for the conservation of the monuments and the activation of circular and low impact adaptive reuse, leveraging the social demands and potential of the 'third sector'.

<sup>8</sup> Mariarosaria Angrisano, Carla Bartolozzi, Martina Bosone, Luigi Fusco Girard, Antonia Gravagnuolo, Francesco Novelli, *Conventi dismessi e nuove strategie di riuso: il caso virtuoso degli edifici mondo nella città di salerno e l'ex convento San Gabriello a Capua*, in Andrea Longhi (ed), *Urban processes of adaptation and resilience between permanence and precariousness*, Aisu International 2024, Torino 224, pages 827-839.

<sup>9</sup> Carla Bartolozzi, Francesco Novelli, Daniele Dabbene, *Adaptive reuse di beni architettonici religiosi. Restauro e inclusione sociale in alcuni casi studio torinesi*, in «BDC», FedOAPress (Federico II Open Access Press), vol. 19, I, Napoli 2019.

Fig. 15 – Cagliari, St. Michael Novitiate, now De Murtas Barrack, current view of the Museum Room with the temporary exhibition on military health.





Fig. 16 – Cagliari, St. Michael Novitiate, now De Murtas Barrack, group of students (ITC Levi, Quartu Sant'Elena) involved in the guided tours with the Italian Institute of Castles, Sardinia Section.



During an informal interview between myself and Carla in September 2024 in relation to the case studies considered in this contribution, she mentioned three essential conceptual steps for coping with the challenge of rehabilitating former convents: scientific knowledge, community consent, and actions for triggering positive processes (Fig. 16). Thinking beyond conservation is the only way to ensure conservation. What we did – scientifically and practically – with the three monuments seems to be on the right path. In addition to conservation, the Sardinian projects have pursued a strong social and inclusive objective. The strategy aimed to use cultural heritage for inclusion, social facilitation, training and economic development. These places are expected to become social laboratories for the community, places to develop projects and research, spaces for exhibitions and temporary events, and cultural spaces available to tourists and locals. Identifying a function cannot be crystallised within the traditional patterns of museum use but must respond to contemporary cultural, social and educational needs. Active and integrated conservation principles require thorough knowledge to guide the reuse and valorisation project as the basis of any process. A careful preliminary assessment of the impacts must also guide and orient the design process, unravelling the “knots” step by step, using all possible means of public consultation and participatory design (co-creation), refining the strategy to identify the most ‘satisfactory’ design solution for the protection of the monument and the needs of the territorial and social context. For this reason, solutions should always consider the entire urban heritage system and not only be restricted to the individual case. At the same time, the design should respect religious and sentimental values to strengthen the inner sense of belonging to the local community. Aspects of protection, dialogue between the Church and the Ministry for Cultural Heritage together with the other institutional stakeholders,

the legislation of the Italian State and canon laws, restoration rules and charters, good practices and guidelines of the Sacred Art Commissions are the various facets of a single design topic, emerging as disciplinary contributions of multiple sectors, which had to find their voice in the general strategy toward dialogue, sharing of goals, and interdisciplinary work.

Constantly sharing the design choices in each phase triggers an innovative 'co-learning' process driven by the territorial circular economy model and hinged in the context of participatory governance. The applicability of the method adopted by Carla Bartolozzi for large religious complexes can be realistically transferred and implemented in the Sardinian context and on other types of large non-religious architectural complexes, as it does not offer 'standard' design solutions but a dynamic and adaptive process model based on sharing, co-design and co-evaluation. As a result of this process, the degree of compatibility of this heritage with new functions in terms of conservation is questioned. The interventions carried out within these processes are, in most cases, low impact, aimed at the reorganisation of interior spaces and functions and the adaptation of plans inspired by minimal alterations and environmental and economic sustainability, as the functions installed tend to be located within areas of typological affinity. For this reason, it is mainly the 'second life' of buildings that prevails in the revitalisation of complexes.

In addition to knowledge and consensus-building, the triggering phase is essential. Experience has shown that many long-term projects, even over 20 years, have failed. The time taken between the disposal and the definition of new functions has in most cases caused a period of isolation of the monument and consequently the disaffection by the communities. At the end of the process, social and urban changes in the context have often made the project unsuitable to respond to the real needs of the locals.

The successful examples shown by Carla Bartolozzi, such as ethical hotels or Piazza dei mestieri, recall the role played in these strategies by banking foundations, fundraising campaigns, temporary uses in favour of the 'third sector', and the contaminations of mixed-public-private use. In this challenging process, the role of scientific research played by universities is confirmed as crucial in order to identify the needs of the contemporary world, ensuring democratic solutions for an increasingly inclusive city and a concrete and non-rhetorical permeability and availability of public assets to communities as common goods.



Fig. 17 – Cagliari, a moment of the interview with Carla Bartolozzi at the University of Cagliari.