

Lecture Notes in Civil Engineering

Giuseppe Amoruso *Editor*

Putting Tradition into Practice: Heritage, Place and Design

Proceedings of 5th INTBAU International
Annual Event


I N T B A U

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Contents

Putting Tradition into Practice

Enhancing Not-Outstanding Cultural Landscapes in a European Perspective: A Challenge for Digitization	3
Rossella Salerno	
New Science, New Architecture... New Urban Agenda?	9
Michael W. Mehaffy	
How to Imbue Practice with Tradition	22
Alireza Sagharchi	
The Organic Reconstruction of the City 2.0 Keep It Simple	31
Gabriele Tagliaventi	

Building for the Future, Following a Disaster

True, False or Ordered? Some Architectures to Think About Reconstruction	45
Luca Guardigli and Andrea Guidotti	
The Environmental, Social and Economic Impacts of the Reconstruction Plan in Onna	55
Wittfrida Mitterer	
Developing Tradition: A Case of Heritage Foundation of Pakistan	61
Manalee Nanavati	
Survey and Earthquake: The Case of Visso	70
Enrica Pieragostini and Salvatore Santuccio	
Methodology of Analysis and Virtual Recomposition: The Case of Retrosi, Amatrice	75
Marco Canciani, Giovanna Spadafora, Laura Farroni, Matteo Flavio Mancini, Silvia Rinalduzzi, and Mauro Saccone	

The Architectural Heritage in Seismic Area: Geometrical Survey for Damage Analysis and Strengthening Design	84
Giuliana Cardani and Paola Belluco	
Project Design “Within” Survey. A Model of Action for Smaller Historic Centres Struck by Earthquakes	94
Alessandro Luigini	
The Reconstruction of L’Aquila: A New Role of Ancient Walls	105
Donato Di Ludovico, Quirino Crosta, and Pierluigi Properzi	
Design as a Tool for Bringing New Life to the Historic Centre of L’Aquila	115
Luca Guerrini	
Hydrogeological and Seismic Risk Mitigation Interventions. Interplay with the Existing Buildings and the Territory	125
Gianluca Paggi and Davide Sormani	
Learning Through Drawing	
Architectural Representation in the Spanish Renaissance: Some Examples from the City of Lugo	137
Josè Antonio Franco Taboada and Ana E. Goy Diz	
From the Ruin to the Temple, Passing by the Butchers. A Reconstitution of the Temple of Diana in Evora, Based on Literary and Iconographic Sources	147
Mariana Martins De Carvalho	
Use of Digital Collections as a Source of Architectural Treatises: Old Sources for the New Classical Architect	160
Pablo Alvarez Funes	
Represent and Enhance the Historical and Architectural Heritage: The Trident of Rome Between Tradition and Innovation	172
Daniele Calisi and Maria Grazia Cianci	
Francesco Valenti’s Restoration Design of Santissima Annunziata of Catalans Church in Messina. A Walkthrough Among Survey and Graphic Representation	181
Adriana Arena	
Notes on Historical Maps of Abruzzo: From <i>Itineraria Picta</i> to Maps	191
Alessia Maiolatesi	
A Critical Redrawing of the Tables Signed by Carlo Vanvitelli for the Construction of Villa Comunale in Naples	201
Carla Mottola	

The Camillo Boito Historical Heritage Photo Collection as an Iconographical Fund for the “National Stile” 211
 Federico Alberto Brunetti

Researches on Architectural Heritage Drawing Between Italy and Slovenia: The Antonio Lasciac’s Villa 217
 Paola Cochelli, Alberto Sdegno, and Diego Kuzmin

Rethinking Salerno After the 1954 Flood: The Arrival of Plinio Marconi in the City 227
 Simona Talenti

Gustavo Giovannoni: The Complete Architect 234
 Steven W. Semes

Between Tradition and Experimentation. The Balilla House in Teramo by Enrico Del Debbio. 246
 Stefano Brusaporci and Serena Troiano

Learning Through Discovery: Different Techniques to Represent the Forgotten Cultural Heritage. Knowing Cervia’s Colonia Varese Across Historical Analysis and Contemporary Design 256
 Fiamma Colette Invernizzi

The Renewal of the City of L’Aquila: The INA Palace by Vittorio Morpurgo. 266
 Pamela Maiezza

Designs by Louis de Soissons for the Commonwealth War Cemetery in Cassino 275
 Arturo Gallozzi and Marcello Zordan

Valorisation Experience Process for Raising Awareness of the Eastern Modernist Architecture Towards Layperson Audience 285
 Bogdan Stojanovic, Davide Spallazzo, and Raffaella Trocchianesi

Past Visions, Future Memories: The Drawings of William Hardy Wilson 292
 Yvette Putra

Sala Della Vigna at Belriguardo. A Polyphony of Proportions That the Renaissance Mind Comprehended and the Renaissance Eye was Able to See. 303
 Sergio Cariani

The Crociera Room of Villa Barbaro in Maser. Perspective Restitution of Architectural Frescoes 312
 Alberto Sdegno, Silvia Masserano, and Veronica Riavis

The Relationship Between Real and Illusory Architecture: Survey and Analysis of the Ex-refectory of Orsoline’s Convent in Rome	322
Francesca Porfiri and Gaia Lisa Tacchi	
Architectural Perspective in Two Seventeenth-Century Galleries in Genoa.	331
Cristina C�ndito	
Drawing as a Guide. Observing the Roman Seashore	342
Emanuela Chiavoni	
Developing Knowledge of Heritage	
3D Surveys and Virtual Explorations in the Places of Remembrance: The Chapel of Monte dei Poveri in Naples	353
Antonella Di Luggo	
Some Reflections on the Non-constructible Polygon in Santa Maria Novella, Florence.	362
Albert Samper, Pau Carazo, and Blas Herrera	
Formal Innovations in Two Sixteenth-Century Helicoidal Staircases of Vignola and Mascarino	371
Leonardo Paris	
Baroque Topologies: Novel Approaches to Analysis and Representation of the Baroque Interior in the Era of Big Data	381
Andrew Saunders	
Heritage and Places: Rediscovering and Enhancing Cultural Identities Lost Under 1669 Mount Etna Lava Flow	392
Cettina Santagati	
Survey for Knowledge and Communication of the Architectural Heritage: Case Study Rocca di Codiponte	402
Chiara Vernizzi	
The Survey Drawing as a Tool of Knowledge: The Case of Casamari Abbey in Veroli.	412
Marco Canciani, Manuela Michelin, and Alice Scortecci	
The Piazza Duomo of Acireale: Significance and Representation	421
Giuseppe Di Gregorio and Francesca Condorelli	
The Theme of the Kasbah in Islamic – Mediterranean Architecture. Settlements Along Dra� Valley, Morocco	431
Chiara Pietropaolo	

The Survey of Vernacular Architecture: Casa Grandeth 441
 Massimo Leserri, Juan Pablo Olmos Lorduy, Horacio Elias Castillo Ayazo,
 and Maria Alejandra Castillo Sarmiento

**Photo-Modeling for the Documentation of the Restoration Site.
 The Church of the Complex of the Ospedale dello Spirito Santo
 in Lecce** 449
 Giovanna Cacudi and Gabriele Rossi

**The Hermitage of Sant’Alberto in Butrio: Methodologies of Integrated
 Survey Between Tradition and Digital Innovation** 458
 Pietro Becherini and Raffaella De Marco

***Pinnettas*: Traditional Shepherds’ Huts of Sardinia. Geometry,
 Shape and Materials** 467
 Andrea Pirinu

**The Technologies of Architectural Survey: A New Comparison
 Based on the Tower of Sotillo de la Ribera, Burgos** 475
 Sara Morena, Salvatore Barba, Elena Gómez Merino,
 and José Ignacio Sánchez Rivera

**The Territories of Samarcanda Manuscript.
 A Draft of the Crusaders Krak Knights Representation in Syria.
 A “Model” for Future Memory** 485
 Gaetano Ginex

**The Scuola Officina Meccanica in Villaggio Monte Degli Ulivi in Riesi.
 Reading and Analysis Through Surveying** 496
 Francesco Di Paola and Cinzia De Luca

**The Digital Documentation of the Florentine Complex of Santa
 Maria Maddalena De’ Pazzi** 508
 Matteo Bigongiari

**Religious Festivals Machines as Transition from Popular Culture
 Towards Industrial Design: Construction and Interpretation
 of the *Giglio* of Barra and Nola in Southern Italy** 516
 Alfonso Morone

**An Integrated Programme for the Conservation and Valorisation
 of the Tower of Frederick in Enna** 526
 Alessio Cardaci and Antonella Versaci

**Survey of Comfort and Cityscape: Methodological Considerations
 for the Definition of a Graphic Code and Related
 Experimental Applications** 537
 Giorgio Garzino, Maurizio Marco Boconcinco, and Vincenzo Donato

A Development Project for the United Nations. The Digital Survey for the Planning of East Jerusalem 551
 Sandro Parrinello

Urban Regeneration of the Old Town Centre of Bari: A Holistic Approach 560
 Michele Ragone and Cecilia Surace

Communicating Through Digital Tools

A Virtual Museum for Appreciating Pescara’s Cultural Heritage. 571
 Pasquale Tunzi

Exploring the City. Valorisation of Culture Through Situated and Informal Learning 579
 Mauro Ceconello and Davide Spallazzo

Visual Devices for Representing, Communicating and Promoting the City 587
 Elena Ippoliti

Design Strategies for Cultural Heritage: Innovating Tradition Within Museums 595
 Eleonora Lupo and Giovanna Vitale

Digital Interactive Mollino. A Collection of 3D Models from Carlo Mollino’s Design Drawings 607
 Roberta Spallone and Francesco Carota

Enacting the *Genius Loci* of the Place Through a Digital Storyteller. Reflections from an Interactive Exhibit 618
 Davide Spallazzo and Mauro Ceconello

Communicating Heritage Through Intertwining Theory and Studio Based Course in Architectural Education 626
 Renata Jadresin Milic and Ana Nikezic

3D Printing in Presentation Architecture Projects 636
 Mercedes Valiente López, M. Carmen Sanz Contreras, and J. Ramon Osanz Díaz

Designing the Ideal City of Aristotle’s Thought 645
 Carlo Berizzi and Cesare Zizza

Hypothesis of Reconstruction of Ancient Cities Through 3D Printing: The Case-Study of Thurii 654
 Serena Andrea Brioschi and Salvatore Dario Marino

Physical Scale Models as Diffusion Tools of Disappeared Heritage. 662
 Joaquín A. Martínez-Moya, Jaime Gual-Ortí, and M. Jesús Máñez-Pitarch

The Classical Theatre and the Material Culture.
The Example of Lipari’s Masks 671
 Francesca Fatta and Andrea Marraffa

From Tradition to Practice: Bringing Up-to-Date the Holistic Approach of the Masters of the Past Through Digital Tools 682
 Massimiliano Lo Turco

ICT to Communicate, Represent and Enhance an Archaeological Area 692
 Tommaso Empler

The Last Supper Interactive Project. The Illusion of Reality: Perspective and Perception 703
 Franz Fischnaller

Saturnia Museum: The Architectural Survey for the Urban Museum and Enhancement of the Historic Centre 715
 Paola Puma

Photography and Video for a Representation of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Abruzzo 727
 Antonella Salucci and Giuseppe Marino

Intangible Perspectives on Tangible Heritage. A New Way of Understanding and Communicating Architecture: The Case of Francesco Clerici’s Works 737
 Camilla Casonato

Intangible Cultural Heritage: Poetics of the Ephemeral in the Land of Abruzzo 746
 Maurizio Unali

The Use of Remote Monitored Mobile Tools for the Survey of Architectural and Archaeological Heritage 756
 Michela Cigola, Arturo Gallozzi, Luca J. Senatore, and Roberto Di Maccio

Developing Place Identity

Developing Semantic Models for the Historic Urban Landscape Regeneration 769
 Giuseppe Amoruso

Exploratory Catalog of Architectures and Rural Micro-Architectures in the National Park of Cilento 778
 Antonella Ranaldi

Inclusive Placemaking: Building Future on Local Heritage 783
 Tomasz Jeleński

Representation of Enjoyment in Ecomuseums. Analysis for Creative Placemaking	794
Cecilia Bolognesi	
Coding for Community	802
Christopher C. Miller	
Viewsheds and Cultural Landscape. A Geometrical Approach to Visual Spatial Analysis	811
Matteo Flavio Mancini and Giovanna Spadafora	
Different Matrixes of Sicilian Landscapes in <i>Le Cento Città d'Italia</i>. Social Identity, Cultural Landscape and Collective Consciousness In-Between Texts and Images	823
Martino Pavignano and Ursula Zich	
The Urban Landscape and Its Social Representation. A Cognitive Research Approach to Rethinking Historical Cultural Identities	834
Letizia Bollini	
Lookouts as a Tool for the Valorisation of Urban Landscape. The Case Study of Madrid	843
Eva J. Rodríguez Romero, Carlota Sáenz De Tejada Granados, and Rocío Santo-Tomás Muro	
Ancient Residences and Vineyards in the Park of the Turin Hills	852
Nadia Fabris	
Metamorphosis: Restoring the Manila Metropolitan Theatre in the Urban Imagination and Collective Memory	860
Gerard Lico and Timothy Augustus Ong	
Representing Place, Branding Place. Designing Place Identity Enhancing the Cultural Heritage	878
Enrico Cicalò	
Environmental Graphics as Atmospheres Generators	888
Fabio Candido	
Representation Tools for Pedestrian and Cyclistic Fruition of Urban Area	893
Marco Carpiceci and Michele Russo	
Signs and Structures of Oltrepò Pavese: Summary for the Graphic Representation of the Traditional Cityscape	904
Francesca Picchio and Anna Dell'Amico	
Strategic Design for the Enhancement of Cultural Itineraries and Related Territories. "Via Regina": A European Cultural Itinerary	914
Roberto de Paolis	

Exploring the Landscape Through Drawings, with Historic Routes and Contemporary Directions	928
Caterina Palestini	
Lost Highways. Sinan's Architectural and Urban Transformations in Thrace as Traces of the Ottoman Civilization and as Possible Cultural Landscape for the Future	938
Luca Orlandi	
Drawing for the Future: Micro-cities, Villages and Landscapes of Abruzzo	949
Giovanni Caffio	
To Retrain the Urban Space and the Residence: The Case of Porta Palazzo, Turin	957
Federica Capriolo	
Cultural Landscapes with a Strong Identity: Havana	965
Julio Caesar Perez Hernandez	
Paradigms for the Meta-Project of a Temporary Pavilion for Chamber Music in Sensitive Cultural Contexts	975
Marianna Pasetto	
The Identity Landscape in the Cataloging of Scattered Assets in the Area of Amelia	984
Fabio Bianconi, Sofia Catalucci, and Marco Filippucci	
Urban and Architectural Identity, the Meaning of the Architectural Vocabulary	994
Enrico Bascherini	
Learning from the Past: Water Heritage. Landscape Patterns Around Parma	1001
Michela Rossi	
Cremona City of Water: The River Architecture	1010
Maria Teresa Feraboli	
Towards the Knowledge and Conservation of Pre-industrial Architecture in Calabria: Formal, Typological and Constructive Features of Mills Buildings	1020
Brunella Canonaco and Francesca Bilotta	
Memories of Stone Among the Water Ways: The Mills Valley in Gragnano, Naples	1030
Claudia Sicignano	

Historical Towers in the Evolution of the Image of Perugia: Knowledge, Perception and Valorisation of the Landscape	1038
Alessandra Nebiolo, Michela Meschini, and Elisa Bettolini	
Built Landscape Typological Components	1045
Mario Gallarati	
History as Tradition. The Relationship with the Historical Context in Recent Projects in Sicily	1058
Carlo Berizzi	
Jaat Architecture, Mirror of the Past and Shadow of Future	1068
Monali Wankar Chakraborty and Bikramjit Chakraborty	
The White Stone of South-Eastern Sicily: Urban and Territorial Identity	1078
Tiziana Firrone	
Life Beyond Tourism[®] for Territories Valorisation	1087
Corinna Del Bianco	
Challenges for Re-use and Conservation	
Adaptive Reuse of Underused Industrial Sites, Case Study: The Superphosphate of Laç	1097
Boriana Vrusho and Frida Pashako	
New into the Ancient – Interventions of Architecture on the Archaeological Heritage of Santa Maria di Pulsano Abbey at Monte Sant’Angelo	1113
Claudia Casarano	
Language or Tradition? Continuity and Innovation in the Landscape of Ticino	1123
David Mayernik	
A Proposal for an Urban Regeneration Project in a Small Quarter in Andorra La Vella	1131
Anne Fairfax and Richard Sammons	
Houses in the Cultural Landscape of the Western Black Sea Coast	1138
Vladimir Popov	
Methodos, Processes for the Enhancement of Cultural Heritage: The Rehabilitation of the Minor Architecture in Liguria	1146
Marco Della Rocca	
Study of the Phenomenon of Upper Kama Architecture: Rehabilitation of Usolye Historic Site	1155
Kseniia Mezenina	

The Contemporary Urban Design for Living Today the Historic Areas of the City. The Case Study of the Historic Centre of Banyoles 1164
 Gaia Vicentelli

The Conques *Masia* Restoration Project 1173
 Romolo Continenza, Ilaria Trizio, and Arianna Tanfoni

Restoration and Improvement of Rural Building Heritage: The Trulli 1182
 Hilde Grazia Teresita Romanazzi

The Historical Buildings of Minori: A Preliminary Assessment for the Restoration of a Unesco Site 1191
 Federica Ribera and Chiara Romano

The Environmental Sustainability of the Manor Farm System 1201
 Valentina Adduci

Railway Transport and “City Gates” in the Development of the City: The Case of Matera 1209
 Letizia Musai Somma

GIS Model for Morpho-Typology in Historic Preservation and Contextual Design 1218
 Pedro P. Palazzo and Ana Laterza

Building According to Tradition

Restoring Traditional Architecture and Promoting Earth Building in the M’hamid Oasis: 2012–2014 Campaigns 1231
 Oriol Domínguez, Alejandro García Hermida, and Carmen Moreno

Traditional Earth Architecture in the Euro-Mediterranean Region. From Conservation to Knowledge for Sustainable Use 1241
 Valentina Pica

The Vault in Amiens Cathedral’s Transept 1253
 Jose Carlos Palacios

Study of Tradition and Research of Innovative Stereotomic Bond for Dome in Cut Stone 1262
 Roberta Gadaleta

Diagnosis for Preservation Design of Royal Villa of Monza Wooden Works 1271
 Francesco Augelli

An Unusual Landscape: Technological Design for Roof 1282
 Antonella Violano and Antonella Della Cioppa

**The Protection of Masonry Structures for the Requalification and Use of the Architectural Heritage:
The Historic Buildings of Lioni** 1293
Nicola Santopuoli, Miriam Vitale, Antonio Perretti,
and Giovanna De Filippo

The *Fina*: A Traditional Mediterranean Urban Design Concept Investigated in Belmonte Calabro Village, Italy. Learning Lessons for Contemporary Urban Policies 1303
Guglielmo Minervino and Valentino Canturi

Colour Plan of Valletti Historical Heritage in Varese Ligure 1313
Alberto Boccardo, Frenchi Ginocchio, Mirco Silvano, and Nadia Silvano

Recovering Chromatic Space as a Sign of Identity in the Historic City 1321
Ana Torres Barchino, Jorge Llopis Verdú, and Juan Serra Lluch

Variations of Identity: Tuff as Matter of Architecture. Shades of Light, Time and Colour 1329
Antonio Conte, Maria Bruna Pisciotta, and Valentina Spataro

Vista Alegre, to Transpose Form and to Prolong Use [1] 1340
Rita Filipe

Revisiting Text and Meaning

Utopia. The Design of the Ideal City 1353
Ubaldo Occhinegro

Sociologically Reframing Le Corbusier: Settler Colonialism, Modern Architecture and UNESCO 1365
Eric M. Nay

Urban Domestic Landscape. Architecture and Design of the Bourgeois House: A Cultural Heritage of the Act of Dwelling 1371
Giovanni Carli

The “Ephemeral Architectures” as an Example of Play and Re-invention in Shared Processes of Creative Knowledge 1379
Massimo Schinco and Sara Schinco

“Prospettiva”: A Contemporary Conceptual Method 1388
Francesco Tosetto

A Brand Design Strategy for Architects’ Creative Thinking: Florestano Di Fausto - A Case Study 1394
Ahmed Agiel

The Role of Public Space in Sustainable Urban Development 1402
 Ruth Marie I. Equipaje

Implementing the New Urban Agenda

Streets of Hope: An Urbane, Ecological Approach to Temporary Housing for E.U. Asylum Seekers 1413
 Richard Economakis

Living in Pemba Between Public and Private Space 1423
 Corinna Del Bianco

Codesign, Social Contracts, Environmental Citizenship. The Case Study of Umbrian Region’s Atlas of Objectives and Lake Trasimeno Landscape Contract 1432
 Marco Filippucci and Fabio Bianconi

Carta Di Norcia 2003: Present Situation and Prospects 1442
 Beatrice Marucci

The Sustainable Advanced Design for Cultural Institutions 1447
 Nadia Campadelli

Community-Based Care for a Living Heritage. The University Colleges of Urbino as a Case Study 1455
 Laura Baratin, Alice Devecchi, and Francesca Gasparetto

A Model Flexible Design for Pediatric Hospital 1464
 Enrico Sicignano, Luigi Petti, Giacomo Di Ruocco, and Natale Scarpitta

Designing Remains 1473
 Luciano Crespi, Anna Anzani, Claudia Caramel, Davide Crippa, Barbara Di Prete, and Emilio Lonardo

Urban Sustainability in Practice: Priorities in India 1483
 Deependra Prashad

Regeneration and Resistance: Exclusive Manchester 1494
 Eamonn Canniffe

Representative Tools for Participatory Planning in Landscape Heritage Evaluation 1501
 Elisa Bettolini, Michela Meschini, and Alessandra Nebiolo

University Workshops as a Way of Dissemination of Architectural Traditions: The Case of the Tile Vault 1511
 Julián García, Juan Antonio Rodríguez, and David Mencías

**An Innovative Training Model on Creative Entrepreneurship:
Integrating Local Stakeholders with Summer Academies
to Enhance Territorial Heritage.** 1520
Michele Melazzini, Arianna Vignati, Francesco Zurlo, and Secil Icke

**The Internet of Things as an Integrated Service Platform
to Increase Value to the Agriculture Stakeholders** 1529
Michael John Gomes

UAV/Drones as Useful Tools in the Agricultural Production Cycle 1537
Michael John Gomes

**Proposal for the Urban Regeneration of the Suburban District Zen in
Palermo, Italy** 1545
Ettore Maria Mazzola

Author Index. 1557

Saturnia Museum: The Architectural Survey for the Urban Museum and Enhancement of the Historic Centre

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Abstract. The ancient Tuscan town of Saturnia is both witness and custodian of a long sedimentation of history: a rich archaeological heritage is present in a very noticeable way even in its historical center and in the architectural remains and archaeological finds which have “decorated” the whole town in a spontaneous way; the Saturnia Museum project is dedicated to the musealisation of this important heritage of the town’s historical center.

Keywords: Saturnia · Archaeological survey measurements · Musealisation · Urban museum

1 Introduction

Saturnia is a small Tuscan town in the Maremma region, well known in the European thermal tourism scene with an ancient tradition that has its roots in a precious thermo-natural heritage, which makes the small town the most attractive area in the Municipality of Manciano, located in the province of Grosseto (with only 7,800 residents in the Municipality of Manciano, in 2015 the tourist inflow was approximately 220,000, source: Municipality of Manciano, Department of Tourism and Culture).

The wealth of sulfur springs, which in ancient times gave rise to a veritable cult of water, was already documented during the Roman colonial age, when the top of the massive travertine plateau, naturally well defended by steep walls, on which Saturnia stands (the city is located at an altitude of 294 mt) assumed the *forma urbis* regulated by an orthogonal system, city walls and a forum. The small village throughout the centuries gradually took on the structure as the perched center of a substantially intact territory that provides the town with a considerable heritage in terms of landscape and architecture, which the *Saturnia Museum* project has placed at the center of its intervention strategy.

1.1 Foundation: The Historical and Environmental Context

The position of Saturnia, at the confluence of two rivers that constituted natural access routes into Etruria - the Albegna river - and southern Etruria - the Fiora river - (Fig. 1)

is the most important factor that explains why humans settled in the region since ancient times: the first traces that the territory of Saturnia had been inhabited consist, in fact, of pre- and proto-historical findings, which testify the existence of scattered settlements [1] and, above all, in the Bronze Age, of a first uninterrupted settlement on the plateau, which is documented by places of worship, huts and burials.

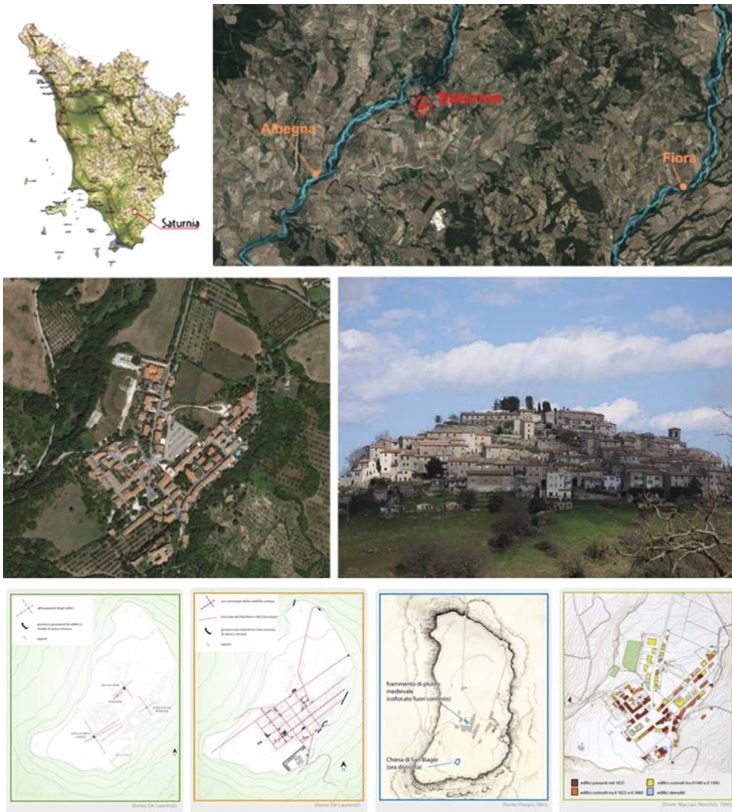


Fig. 1. Saturnia: geographical and historical background.

The ancient origins of Saturnia are subsequently found also in the structures of public buildings, homes and constructions used to retain water (to mention only the two most important: on top of the town, where the citadel was built in the 15th century, are the remains of a large concrete construction which incorporates in part the citadel itself; the construction materials and the finishing enamel have generated the hypothesis that it was a great *castellum aquae*, connected by lead pipes to the so-called Bagno Secco, a reservoir of water dug in travertine stone), constituting evidence in the 6th century B.C. of a town structured on a paved road, the current via Aurinia; the archaic and, then, Etruscan necropolis of Saturnia, which document its vitality since the Villanovan age, are located outside the town along a natural path: among them we mention the most

important, Pian di Palma – located approximately 3 km to the north of the town - used up to the Romanization period.

As a consequence of the first defeats inflicted on the Etruscans by the Romans (V-IV centuries), the trade routes retreated from the coast to the interior, a circumstance that favoured the development of trade in the Albegna and Fiora valleys, and the demographic and commercial expansion of Saturnia, which lasted for a short period due to the final fall of the most important commercial center in the region, Vulci.

With the Romanization of South Etruria, probably during the first half of the third century BC, the *praefectura* was instituted in Saturnia, a phase preceding the *deductio* as a Roman colony. According to the attestation of Titus Livius, in fact, in 183 BC the triumvirate of Quinto Fabio Labeo, Caio Afranio Stello and Tiberio Sempronio Gracchus established the *civium Romanorum* colony of Saturnia [2]: the allocation of land to settlers thus marks the economic recovery of Roman Saturnia, which also sees the surroundings heavily modified by the new centurial regularization.

The settlement assumed the aspect of a city: walls were erected for its defense, with the urban plan based on an orthogonal grid and, above all, the large space of the current Piazza Vittorio Veneto was regularized and transformed into the forum, on whose margin stands the monumental cistern, perhaps a place dedicated to the cult of healthy and infernal waters: the dense network of works intended for water supply and storage, widely present in the surrounding area and the town itself, date back to this period.

Following defeat in the Sulla's civil wars in 82 A.D., the city was partially destroyed and initiated a long period of contraction and subsequent demographic and economic adjustment that culminated in the decline of the city during the Imperial age.

The history of Saturnia relevant for the present study, which is dedicated to the enhancement of the great archaeological heritage of Roman times that characterizes the town, ends here (Fig. 1).

1.2 Antecedents

As proof of the regular nature of the urban distribution of the old town plan, set on a *cardo* and a *decumanus* in connection with the four city gates, there are the numerous remains of Roman buildings which emerge from the subsoil of many houses as well as of the archpriest's church in Saturnia.

Large sections of the city walls are also conserved, on which, through the scenic Porta Romana, Via Clodia opens to frame the countryside; an angular pillar built with well squared blocks of travertine, which emerges from the ground for about three meters and to which adheres a half column (probably from an *horreum*), mosaics, portions of pavings made in *cocciopesto*, the cistern of Bagno Secco and dozens of movable archaeological finds such as *arae*, memorial stones, inscriptions, columns and drums, capitals, frame fragments, *stelae*, *tympani*, bas-reliefs and friezes with inscriptions, *lacunari* and lintels: a substantial collection of finds that as a result of the discoveries have been placed over decades in the town's open spaces and provide the visual backdrop and the constant presence which characterises this urban landscape in a truly unique way.

1.3 Hypothesis

But Saturnia is not only a place of memories: it is also typical example of the safeguarding of landscape values; the elevated position on the Maremma countryside provides the small village with a vantage point of view on the surrounding landscape, visible from the edge of the town and from the rare openings of the city walls in the area (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. The design assumptions of the place: the perceptual continuity between archeology and landscape.

The old town of Saturnia therefore vocationally presents the features of a town-museum where the continuous return of spatial landmarks between views of small and medium-scale objects and visuals of the landscape gradually unravel in the center a path that naturally integrates the archaeological heritage and the landscape in a series of spaces with a the strong character (Fig. 2).

The enhancement and deeper integration of the archaeological and landscape heritage are the main reason for the *Saturnia Museum* project, which is currently (April 2017) in its final phase.

2 Objectives

The *Saturnia Museum* project originated in 2011 with a platform of objectives focused on making visible and understandable as a unitary ensemble the multiplicity of structures and archaeological finds of the town's center, placed in a perceptual continuity with the surrounding landscape. On the one hand, in fact, the visitor comes across, mostly by chance, the various architectural points of archaeological interest and, on the other, the visit to the town is constantly punctuated by the movable finds randomly placed in flower beds, squares and *piazzette* that arouse the curiosity of the visitor without, however, providing any contextual information (Fig. 3).

In Saturnia an informal outdoor archaeological museum truly exists - assembled from a spontaneous collection of exhibits (the substantial archaeological heritage in this study was based on a fundamental census study by De Laurenzi A., *Saturnia-Regio VIII*, vol. XII, in *Forma Italiae*, in press) which has been classified but lacks a proper organization in terms of exhibition purposes - characterized by a dense presence of small areas or architectural points of interest and a series of amazing views of the Maremma countryside that required a museum design based on a few exhibition structures of minimal visual impact and on an adequately structured series of communication and information systems (Fig. 4).

If, in fact, the massive influx of tourists to the city is due to the presence of the spa, on the other hand, the Municipality of Manciano, of which Saturnia constitutes the busiest attraction, realized that a careful valorization of the archaeological and landscape heritage of the area could be the added value that would balance, in cultural terms, the existing tourism offer.

In coordination with the Municipality of Manciano, the project proposal has adopted a series of intrinsic quality prerequisites and objectives related to the local approach: the choice, for example, of carrying out minimal visual impact interventions that insert naturally into the consolidated urban landscape, as well as that of carrying out work preparations in proximity to the place of destination etc.

3 Research Methods and Processes or Developments

The methodology was divided into three different modes/stages and each marked out its own disciplinary specificity of principles, instrumentation and methodology and was properly governed by an overall strategy:

1. measurements and survey, documentation of the archaeological heritage and the urban context;
2. museological design concept;
3. abacus design.

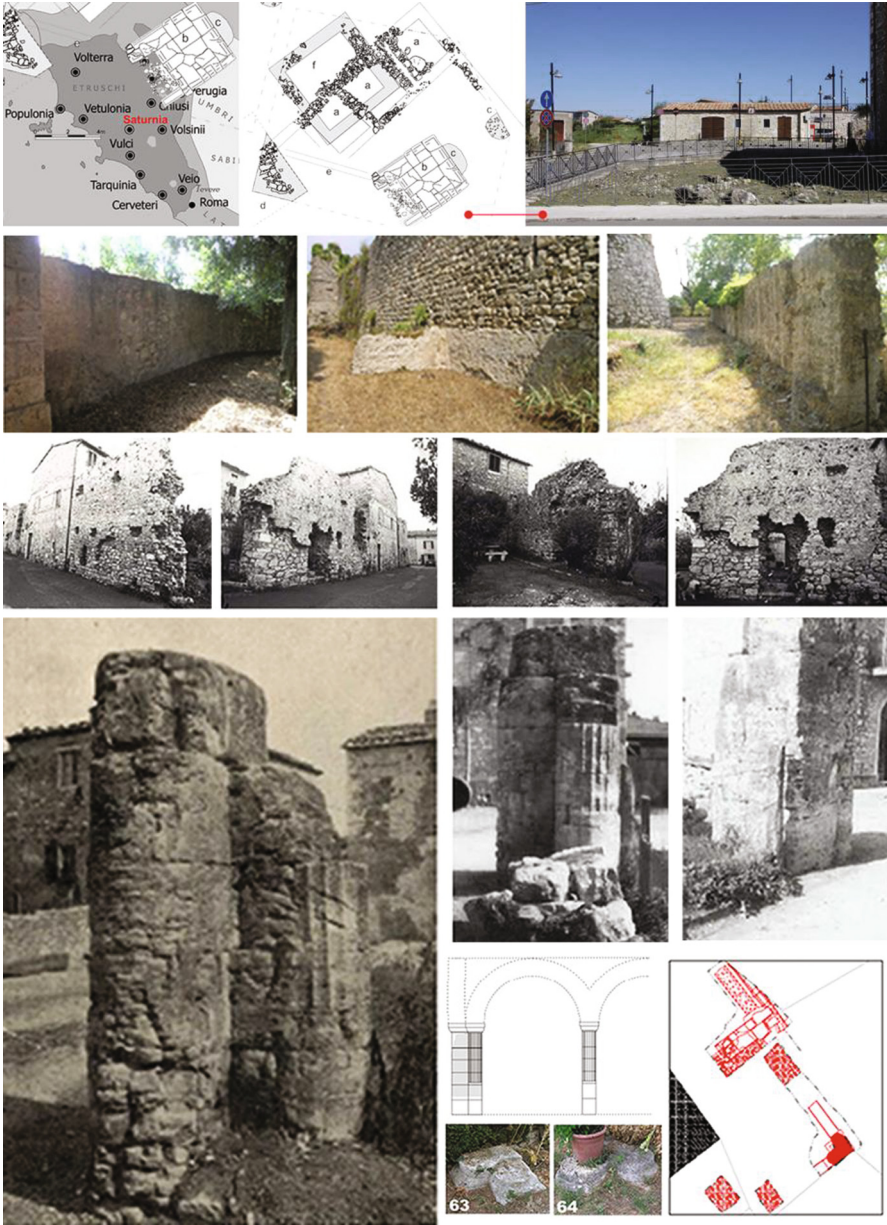


Fig. 3. The archaeological urban heritage of Saturnia.

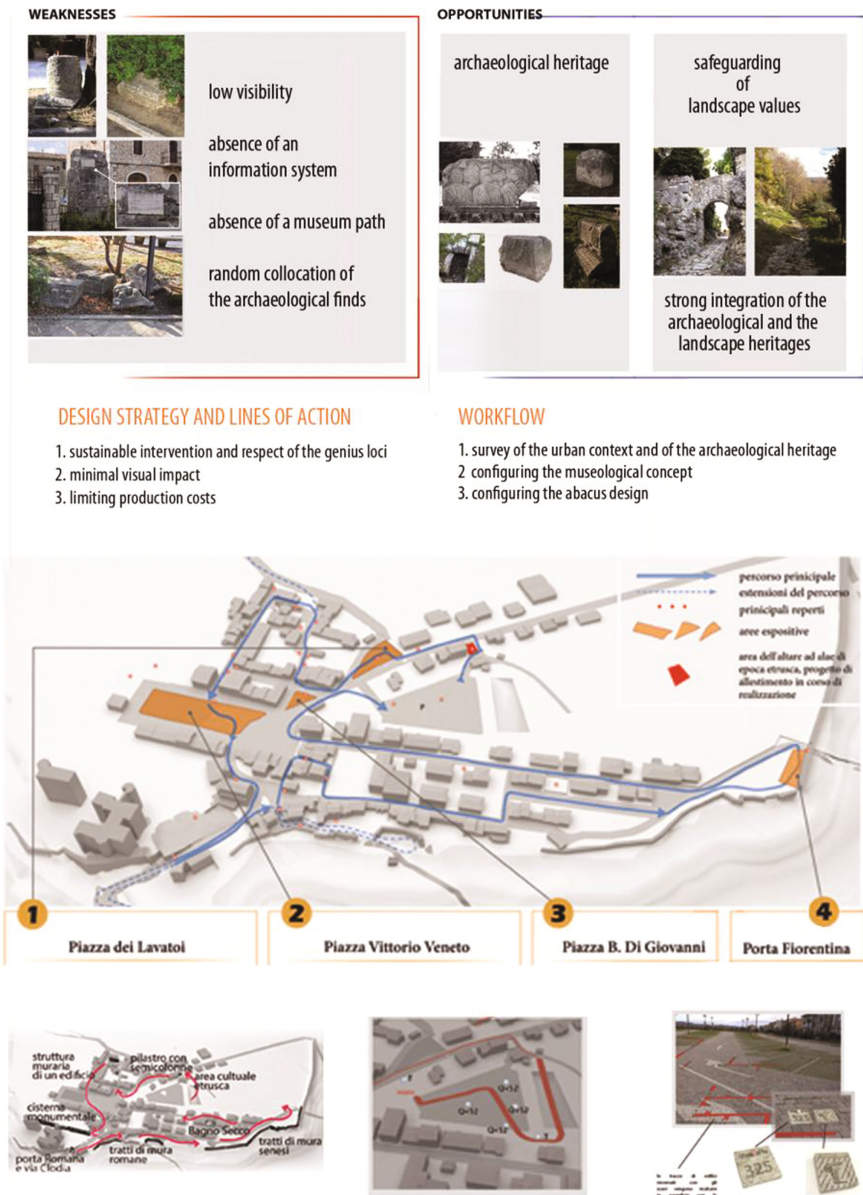


Fig. 4. Design strategy and lines of action.

3.1 Survey and Documentation of the Urban Context and of the Elements of the Archaeological Heritage

The specialized sources [3, 7, 13, 14, 17], provided the guidance for the identification and classification of the elements to be taken into account, which we identified as

“architectural finds”, “object exhibits” and “track finds”; each of them was carried out by a morphometric reconnaissance (whenever the full survey followed by representations of the individual elements was not indispensable for the purposes of the project) and the respective metric documentation of their placing in the context, a decisive element for the next decision phase.

3.2 Configuring the Museological Concept

The outdoor museum is the physical materializing of a process that embodies the information design and display system through signaling and/or informational, as well as exhibition elements; the system is therefore articulated into:

- the information design has been deployed through totems, lecterns and panels, corner plates, pavement markers (Fig. 5a):
 - positioning of the totems that address the visual alignments from one point of interest to the other;
 - lecterns that integrate panels to indicate the presence of nearby significant places of interest, describing their characteristics with info-graphic contents in two languages;
 - corner plates and labels that indicate on walls the “architectural finds” which refer to many architectural episodes existing in the urban fabric, among which 17 points were identified to illustrate the path;
 - markers and/or plates on the ground that indicate 27 points classified and identified as “trace remains” where it is documented that there existed (or still exist but are not visible because they have been buried after discovery) archaeological materials now incorporated into buildings, or which are exposed but de-contextualized;
- the exposure system is constituted instead by structural elements that form the basis for the ordered and designed positioning of finds (Fig. 5b):
 - bases positioned on the ground with descriptive plaques and lighting for the placing of “object finds”, among which, in the first phase of intervention, 24 movable finds existing in open spaces have been classified and identified.

3.3 Configuring the Abacus Design

After the concept design phase and in coordination with the consultant archaeologists, Corten was chosen as the material for the production of the wayfinding system and for the design of information elements of the abacus, due to the characteristics of “historicised language” that characterize it and to the chromatic affordance with the materials to which it must be juxtaposed (mainly marble and travertine).

The exhibition bases on which the “object finds” were placed (simply lifted from the ground and put in evidence thanks to the new position and to the series of arrangement of the bases) are made of colored cement paste with insertion of



EXHIBITION SYSTEM



Fig. 5. Synopsis of the designed information and exhibition systems.

crankcases made with Corten, which provide information (bilingual inscriptions in laser cutting) and hide the lighting elements that during the night allow the reading of the plates and emphasize the exhibition.

As regards the sizes and shapes of elements, the survey provided dimensional guidance for the purposes of a careful insertion that favours the visibility of elements without disturbing the consolidated existing urban environment, while the formal



Fig. 6. General map of the planned interventions and realization of the first phase; Piazza Veneto before and after the intervention.

concept adhered to a process of signic thinning, favouring essential geometric and simple shapes.

4 Results and Conclusions

The open-air museum includes a series of stations equipped differently according to their features (to inform or to expose) with key points in 4 squares (Piazza dei Lavatoi, Piazza Di Giovanni, Piazza Vittorio Veneto, Porta Fiorentina) among which the central Piazza Vittorio Veneto, which we have chosen to carry out the first stage of the placing of the exhibition pedestals, concurrent with the general configuration of the system through the use of totems and information panels.

The second stage of intervention envisages the installation of pavement and wall markers, in addition to further exhibition pedestals.

The vocation as urban museum of the old town of Saturnia and the significance of the archaeological heritage very clearly represented, at the start of the work, the conditions for an enhancement proposal based on few fundamental topics: to overcome the critical factors due to the lack of any information apparatus, to the haphazard positioning of the movable finds (making them incomprehensible in their material, historical and typological nature), the lack of characterization of an open-air museum path (which could easily emerge with few, gentle and easy interventions), to a deficiency of a truly integrated interpretation of the continuum between the findings, the urban architectural scene, and the system of open spaces at both the environmental and landscape scales. Saving was therefore assumed as a general guideline for the intervention in terms of minimal visual impact, of limiting production costs and of choosing rewarding local production in order to achieve an overall sustainable intervention: deliberately minimal and respectful both of the *genius loci* and of the identity of the community (Fig. 6).

Acknowledgment. The first formulation of the idea - which was to become the project for the *Saturnia Museum* is due to the collaboration with Dr. Andrea Camilli, Chief Archaeologist of the Archaeological Superintendence of Tuscany. The idea first took the form of a Master's degree thesis (see: Paoli F., *Archaeological walk in Saturnia: an open-air museum to discover the city and its history*) and was later transformed into a proper architectural design which resulted in the work currently in progress, thanks also to eng. Giulio Detti as Assessor of the Department for Tourism and Culture of the City of Manciano, and the architect Stefano Baldi, who developed the work between 2014 and 2016 in cooperation with the Archaeological Superintendence of Tuscany (scientific consultants: Dr. Mariangela Turchetti, Dr. Valentina Leonini, and Dr. Massimo Cardosa).

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