

Architecture, Archaeology and Tourism The Val di Noto Territory Between Ancient and Contemporary Landscapes

Università degli Studi di Catania, SDS Architettura Siracusa |
Siracusa, Ancient Noto, Palazzolo Acreide Italy
5th international architecture workshop

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Promoted by

Designing Heritage Tourism Landscapes
international network of schools of architecture

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workshop introduction

South-eastern Sicily is characterised by the presence of some of the most important ancient settlements in the Mediterranean. These settlements include cities that developed across the centuries, generating interesting, but also problematic, urban palimpsests. Classical ruins coexist with extraordinary Norman, Byzantine and late Baroque buildings (which are part of the Unesco heritage of the Val di Noto). Siracusa, Noto and Palazzolo Acreide, the main centres of the Ibleo-Siracusan area, belong to this context. Three cities with different dimensions, marked by some common factors of identity: the ancient and late antique archaeology that testifies their origin, the geographical peculiarity of the ibleo territory which is their reference scenario, the baroque city with its most representative architectures and its outstanding urban scenography. These values have historically attracted travellers, scholars, artists, architects, and literate throughout Europe. The Sicily of Val di Noto, in fact, has been one of the most important destinations of the Grand Tour tradition. This is a territory where the phenomenon of tourism originated in its deepest etymological sense.

workshop program

The territory of south-eastern Sicily, with UNESCO heritage sites, including Siracusa, Noto and Palazzolo Acreide, is characterized by extraordinary historical-archaeological heritage, but often excluded from the contemporary urban life. We need to reconsider the relationship between city and archaeology according to new design strategies that can be essential for a new vision of the future of the cities. The archaeological ruin, in this sense, should not be seen as a problem to be circumscribed in a field of protection, often abstract and far from the context, but as a resource that has new roles in the redesigning of the territory and the city. The perimeter of archaeological sites, by means of a physical boundary, emphasizes the segregation and separation of city-specific places. These are enclaves that contribute to the proliferation of urban blight. Instead, restoring a permeability between the urban tissues and the archaeological sites, through mediation places (and not boundaries), can be a strategy to trigger new opportunities for urban development and regeneration. This is a starting point for redefining the urban space and the archaeology landscape and questioning the dynamics of the city's development in relation to the potential of the archaeological heritage. Thinking about how to use archaeological sites can be a design incipit to understand how to establish a new dialectical relationship between the past, the present and the future of the city. A dialogue in which the phenomenon of the so-called heritage tourism can play a main role, an economic driver for the territory and its cities, and a driving force for urban regeneration.

general aims of the workshop

The workshop is an opportunity to discuss the role of the contemporary project in solving the problematic relationships between parts that are different according to their origin, form and dynamics, such as the contemporary city and the archaeological sites. In particular, we want to focus on the possibilities that the phenomenon of heritage tourism can create, taking on a mediation role between the two entities. The sites which have been chosen in the three main cities of the Val di Noto, the Siracusa territory (Siracusa, Noto, Palazzolo Acreide), represent different dimensions and characteristics of the relationship between city and archaeology. Above all, they are characterised by very different conditions concerning the relationship between the archaeological sites and the margins of the urban, historic or contemporary, settlements.

Through the architectural project, from the urban scale to the scale of the small intervention, we want explore the specific issues that characterize the problematic relationship between city and archaeology of these sites: distance, marginality, accessibility, usability, permeability, recognisability, conservation and innovation.

workshop sites

site 1 > Siracusa, Neapolis-Eurialo

Siracusa was one of the most important Greek cities in the West. Today it's listed in the UNESCO "World Heritage List". The city was founded in 743 B.C. by a group of Corinthians led by the ecista Archia. The first colonists settled in Ortigia island which was the first nucleus of the ancient city.

During the Classical Period Siracusa became the great Neapolis with five neighbourhoods being one of the most important metropolis of the ancient world. After the Roman conquest its decline started and lasted until the Norman period when the city was reduced in size occupying only the Ortigia Island.

Siracusa is today a layered city that still presents the traces of its important past, from the archaeological complex of the Neapolis Park to the Apollo and Atena Temples which are now included in the contemporary city.

The archaeological park of the Neapolis is located in-between the compact urban fabric which resulted from the expansion of the city during the first half of the XX century and the dispersed and sometimes empty urban fabric of the city periphery which is located at the edge of one of the two main entrance routes to the city, Viale Paolo Orsi. The Park extends for about 240.000 sq.m. and is an extraordinary palimpsest of the history of the ancient Siracusa. The current system of entrances to the site is made up of two distinct parts which are totally inadequate to the growing number of visitors that increase during the period of the classical performances. Its isolation from the surrounding urban context doesn't allow for a proper integration into the vital structure of the city. Integration which was always desired but never implemented.

The remains of the archaeological complex of Eurialo Castle are located in the higher western extremity of the ancient defensive system of the Dionisio's Walls - long about 25 kilometres.

This was a defensive system dating back to the V century B.C. that completed the city walls. During the time the Castle was transformed and enlarges. Today it presents a system of moats and complex tunnels while the ruins of the overlying fortifications, with their geometry, represent an unicum among the defensive systems of the classical world.

The current entrance to the Castle doesn't allow to appreciate the primary functions of the complex military structure and its original functions. The entrance, in fact, seems to be "accidental" so altering the philological reading of the monument which is also distorted by the lack of appropriate paths.

site 2 > Ancient Noto

Annexed to the walls are the Royal Castle with a huge armoury and the stables and some remains of the towers, among which the main one dates back to 1431, and the ancient prison where many graffiti and low reliefs done by the prisoners are still visible. Many graffiti report the name of the author and represents the boats of the time. Many time also a game with pawns is also represented.

The structure was built in 1091 by the Duke Giordano d'Altavilla on the remains of a previous Arab fortress. In 1430 the Duke Pietro d'Aragona enlarged the complex which were done again in 1600 ca to host the guns. Close to the entrance of the door of the mountain the opening for the cannons are still visible. The earthquake destroyed most of the Castle.

site 3 > Akrai

Palazzolo Acreide is a Baroque town with Greek origins, a settlement in the plateau of the Iblei Mountains non far from the Anapo River and the Necropolis of Pantalica. In 2002 the town was listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List together with the Val di Noto area, due to its late baroque churches of San Paolo and San Sebastiano. Moreover, the town is part of the network "borghi più belli d'Italia". The historical and cultural heritage of the town is enriched by the Greek archaeological site of Akrai, on the namesake plateau dominating the town, and the site of the Medieval Castel of Acremonte, from which the neighbourhood close to the San Paolo Basilica was originated.

the goals

site 1 > Siracusa, Neapolis-Eurialo

Archaeological Park of the Neapolis > project of the new entrance to the site (Teatro Greco, Anfiteatro Romano, Ara di Leone, Latomie del Paradiso) and project of the external area Casina Cuti with visitors' services.

Ruins of Eurialo Castle and Dionisio's Walls > project of the entrance and paths for the archaeological park sites and visitors' services.

site 2 > Ancient Noto

Ruins of the Castle > project of the new entrance system to the site, visitors' services and possible new configuration for some parts of the complex, such as the church of San Michele al Castello.

site 3 > Akrai

Archaeological site of Akrai > project of the new entrance and services.

Medieval Castle site > project of the new entrance and paths to visit the ruins, visitors' services.