

Designing the future as a tool to save heritage

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Abstract

L'ambiente fisico è sempre stato uno strumento per scoprire la cultura di una civiltà. I Templi di Agrigento sono un patrimonio culturale mondiale, in quanto appartenenti a un periodo di massimo splendore culturale. Proporzione, posizionamento e design nel loro insieme sono la manifestazione dell'antico e sempre presente desiderio di ricerca dell'eterno, del divino. L'attuale tracciato stradale, i chioschi, i cassonetti per i rifiuti riflettono un atteggiamento d'indifferenza, di miopia e d'impoverimento culturale. Questo articolo evidenzia, attraverso alcuni esempi che giustificano la cultura architettonica dell'Autore nei riguardi della conservazione del patrimonio culturale, come la storia di ogni monumento deve essere conosciuta, interpretata e implementata negli interventi attuali. Questo atteggiamento culturale si esprime in alcuni progetti dell'Autore (come nel grande magazzino a Innsbruck, oppure nella reinterpretazione di una Cappella di famiglia a Fraxern, in Austria). Nel caso di Agrigento e del turismo ad esso collegato, ciò significa la necessità di un progetto architettonico rivolto ai servizi necessari e a quelli da migliorare. Un progetto che deve dialogare con i monumenti, ma non essere invasivo per non distrarre il visitatore. Un progetto che deve avere un carattere globale nella sua esteriorità formale, che deve trovare un filo conduttore dal disegno di un cestino portarifiuti al sistema delle illuminazioni, dalle cuffie senza fili per l'informazione agli spazi e ai luoghi per il ristoro. Due esempi citati nell'articolo (la nuova versione della Fiat 500 e la barca multi-funzionale dell'azienda tedesca Klepper) vengono presi a sostegno della teoria che l'innovazione deve essere basata sulla storia e può salvare il patrimonio culturale.

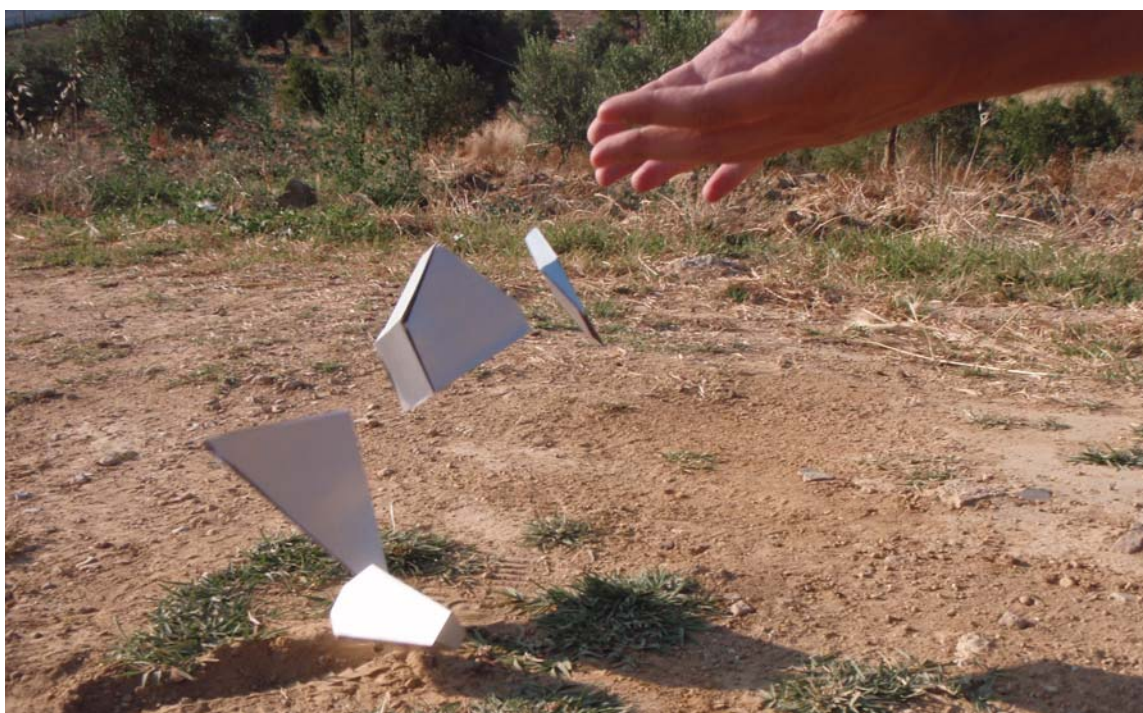
The seven Temples in Agrigento were designed and built in a period of high cultural level in this region of Sicily. The situation of today reflects the uncontrolled development of the area in recent decades without any design-concept. Kiosks, car parking areas and streets disturb this unique *World Cultural Heritage* in an unacceptable way.

On the other hand, there are positive developments; such as ideas for a new traffic concepts and digital information with headphones instead of posters. But other positive attempts seem to be politically unfeasible. It is difficult to convince the population and the politicians of the need for major changes. The invested money would give a return by at-

Agrigento, *Valle dei Templi*, costruzioni inaccettabili - *Unacceptable shop and constructions*



Concept: “*PEZZI ROTTI - BROKEN PIECES*”, del Workshop “*Valorizzazione e fruizione dell’area archeologica della Valle dei Templi. Problematiche di percorso e di collegamento*”(Agrigento, 15-19 Giugno 2009)





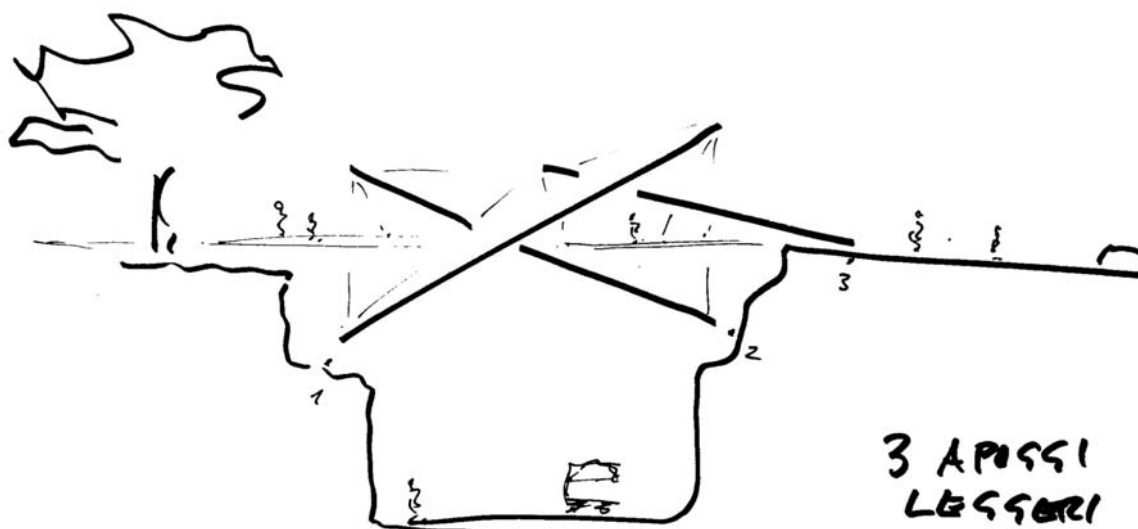
Concept: la materia riflettente - *Sketch reflecting material*
Concept: il volume che proietta l'ombra - *Sketch volume providing shadow*



tracting more international tourists and by lifting the image of the whole region.

While working intensively for one week with the students of the Architectural Department of Agrigento (University of Palermo) in June 2009, we asked ourselves: How can we provide all of the functions so as to help tourists enjoy the Temple complex in the best possible way? One answer was that all functional installations like kiosks, public toilets and points of information should not look like buildings. They should rather, be like functional furniture in the landscape. We decided to design everything out of the same material, being a slightly reflecting material, reflective of the color of the surrounding. One advanced material option, with the benefit of extreme lightness and

Concept: schizzo della passerella tensegrity - *Sketch of the tensegrity bridge*



easy installations would be a sandwich material out of carbon fiber with an integrated silver foil. We called the concept “*pezzi rotti*” or in English, “*broken pieces*”. The units would be able to close at night, to provide shadow during day and to collect energy on the inclined roofs. They would be shaped and put in position very carefully, yet the viewer would have the impression that they had been thrown temporarily to the landscape, as a strong contrast to the Temples which remain as if symbols of eternity. In this way the intervention of “*pezzi rotti*” would help to serve the “cult” of the Temples like the *Cinquecento* which supports the brand awareness of the Italian car company Fiat. This intervention would be unique. It would be different to other archeological areas and Italians would be proud of it like the ancient

Concept: modello di studio della passerella - *Model of the tensegrity bridge*



people were proud of their Temples. If contemporary politicians were proud of the Temples, they would make brave decisions to improve the current sad situation. In this context is the opportunity to continue the positive collaboration with the University as an institution with no commercial interest but, instead, able to focus on the cultural benefit of the territory.

One of the tasks of the *Workshop* in Agrigento was to design a pede-

Gli Allievi al Workshop 2009 con i Proff. KLASZ e De Giovanni - *Photo during the Workshop 2009 with Prof. KLASZ and Prof. De Giovanni*



La Fiat 500 (1964) e il suo redesign - *Fiat 500 (1964) and his redesign*



strian bridge to connect the two areas of the seven Temples. At the final public exhibition we offered three different options for this bridge. All of them were very unique and all of them had been developed following an intensive dialog with the students. Prof. Giuseppe de Giovanni and I prefer the concept “*tensegrity*” shown in the images of this article.

The concept consists of a structure of a closed static system constructed with tubes and cables. We want to use extreme light and strong tubes and cables of carbon. The weight of the structure including the suspended walkway would be approximate three tons. It could be transported and installed easily. It would touch the area slightly, causing only minimal impact on three small point foundations.

On the other hand it would also be very easy to deconstruct or disassemble bridge at any time. It is a silvery dematerialized temporary sculpture to walk through and to show tourists that Greek architects didn't stop being innovative in old times. The concept was developed during the *Workshop* with a strong input of the students who are the “new greek generation of architects”, working hard on models and drawings.

The recent history of Italian car industry is a well known testimonial for my theory mentioned in the title, that appropriate design of the future could be a tool to save heritage.

The redesign of the *Fiat 500* was the salvation of the huge company Fiat and it is rich heritage. In the recent years the company has suffered in the midst too, of a economically global financial crisis. But the new design of the *Fiat 500* was able to regenerate the famous cult of “*Fiat*” again.

People buy the car because they wish to buy Italian lifestyle. Because of the new *Fiat 500* more people have remembered the cult of the old one. It is a car with a small engine, is far smaller than the average, but it is nice to look at and it reflects a certain attitude: to be proud of being different. This design provokes emotions such as enjoying life, taking time, being individual and being Italian.

Architecture can evoke emotions, just like cars or boats do. But sadly neither architects nor journalists speak or write about this aspect in the public press. Discussing the interventions in the Temple complex we also asked ourselves which emotional reaction our interven-

tions would cause. During the final exhibition at the end of the *Workshop* journalists and visitors seemed to be fascinated by our individual, but not “shouting” architectural language based on the concept of designing furniture or art and not kiosks or a bridge. Visitors of the exhibition felt well and inspired. We can interpret this as a serious, positive critic.

For two years my office in Innsbruck has been designing and developing a new product for the well known traditional boat company Klepper in Germany. The new product, called *Backyak*, is not designed to replace the traditional folding kayak. Instead, *Backyak* is a multi-functional reinterpretation of the famous idea of a boat transported in the backpack. It will help to reactivate the cult of the company Klepper which is based upon enjoying nature in a very individual way. Recently, we have convinced the owners of the company to invest in

Backyak



producing the patented innovation. We as designers and developers know as well as the managers that only the right investment in the future will keep the cult of Klepper alive. The new innovation which is based on the traditional philosophy of Klepper will support economic success in the long run. In May 2011 there will be the public launch of *Backyak* in Munich. Prior to that date I am not allowed to publish specific details, except the emotional image in the water and a studio photo of the form finding process with the help of 1:8 and 1:6 models. I am convinced that *Backyak* can create similar brand awareness for Klepper, like the *Cinquecento* did and does for Fiat.

Designing the multifunctional boat and also leading the project with respect to marketing and cultural success. I became increasingly aware of the fact, that we as architects should really focus on the main responsibility of our profession. In my eyes, the main task is keeping the goal

Backyak, la ricerca del processo formale - *Form finding process*



of the physical development of our environment in mind or in other words in leading projects and complex processes to the intended direction. Because of the diversification of most professions nowadays this holistic attitude is becoming increasingly important. The architect has the responsibility to look after the built culture like a doctor looks after his ill patient. And concerning the basic attitude, there is not a big difference when designing a boat or a church in our *Office Kłaskleeberger* at any one time. We architects need to “stop” and prevent a development when it is not serving the cultural benefit. Sometimes lower classes don’t accept positive unconventional projects because they don’t want to understand it or nobody has really tried to explain it. Self-publi-

Spazi sociali e reazione (“STOP”) dei cittadini di Gibellina - *Social living and the reaction (“STOP”) of the population of Gibellina*



cizing architecture, without any context in social and cultural life can be reasonably ignored by society. People (and even Professors of Architecture) prefer enjoying real social life by sharing “carciofo” (artichokes) with a family which has invited us spontaneously while passing by the more or less abandoned streets of Gibellina.

But architecture, especially in an historical context, is of course far more complex than designing a boat or a car. We cannot just simply put old architecture into the museum and replace it by new one, when it's not successful or out dated. When my new boat for Klepper is unable to convince, people will not buy it. When built architectural interventions are not really convincing it is mostly already bought and nevertheless

Vita sociale negli spazi pubblici di Gibellina - Social life in the public spaces of Gibellina



Architetti in visita a Gibellina - Visiting architects in the streets of Gibellina



people will live with it because they have no other options. Our physical environment is mainly the result of different social, political and commercial processes which are more or less controlled or sadly enough, quite often developed by accident. But what we can learn from car and boat design is to take the reaction of the users seriously and the awareness of serving the goals of the company which can be summarized in the main goal of brand identification. The main goal of the salvation of cultural heritage must not focus on salvation but on reinterpretation and creating a link from the history to the future.

To prove my thesis I will finally show four projects of my home country Austria, which doesn't mean that there are no examples in Italy. The first three selected projects were designed by internationally recognised architects, realized in the historical center of Innsbruck. The last three projects were designed by my Office each in a very unique context. All six projects have in common:

- that they have been discussed controversially in the public and among politicians because of the costs and the modern language in the historical context;
- that they finally were accepted and loved by the majority of the population and users;
- that they are attracting visitors and tourists.

Shopping Center "Tyrol" by David Chipperfield

The building of the *Historical Kaufhaus* tirol in the center of Innsbruck couldn't be used or adapted for the needs of modern shopping any more. As everywhere people tend to prefer modern shopping centers outside of the cities where car parking is provided and where people can find different shops in one building. The *Shopping Center Tyrol* tries to break this tendency by making modern shopping in a historical center as attractive as possible. At the same time David Chipperfield has achieved with the new architecture an interesting link to the historical town. The entrance is marked with the knitted form of the façade without any overt advertising. As material he used a stone of a quite tone. The big covered hall inside the shopping center is

respectful of the urban structure in a way that makes the inner façade continue the frontline of the neighbor buildings. All the shops have been forced to cut their logos in the common metallic banner without using colors. The *Kaufhaus Tyrol* is a very important building to reactivate commercially the historical center of Innsbruck. Inhabitants and tourists love it and consider it as part of the historical center of the city.

Kaufhaus Tyrol, veduta esterna e interna - *Kaufhaus Tyrol from outside and inside*



Redesign of the pedestrian area “Maria Theresienstraße”

This project was designed by the young office from Vienna called “Alles wird gut”. They won the competition for the redesign of the pedestrian area because of a modest but very convincing intervention. They decided to create a quite usual pavement but to design all urban furniture like lights, benches bicycle parking and so on out of the same material. They chose brass fittings creating an association with the so called golden roof, which is the landmark of Innsbruck. This project shows that a very modern intervention in the historical center can help to focus people’s eyes on the old buildings and not on the new designed pedestrian area. Most of the tourists don’t even notice the redesign of the area. They just feel well in the city because nothing is disturbing them.

Both examples are very different but successful interventions in the protected historical area of Innsbruck. Both are an enrichment for the existing heritage of the city. Finally I will show some different aspects concerning my thesis, mentioned in the title of the article referring to

Area pedonale Maria Theresienstraße - *Pedestrian area Maria Theresienstraße*



two built architectural projects of my office:

Cinerarium Wilten - This cinerarium was realized in 2008 by my *Office Klaszkleeberger* for the historical Cemetery Wilten in Innsbruck. We have chosen to design the cinerarium as a sculpture out of three partly covered pieces which refer to the Holy Trinity. A parapet which provide a place for the anonymous graves leads the visitor along the prolongation of the historical arcade to the Cinerarium. The specially treated rusty steel refers to the mortality of human body as well as to eternity.

The new intervention causes no conflict to the historical graves next to it. It is rather a furniture or a sculpture where people go to, not only to visit deceaseds but also to experience silence and this interesting special quality.

Veduta esterna e interna del Cineraium Wilten - *Cinerarium Wilten, Klaszkleeberger
Innsbruck, from outside and inside*



Familienkapelle Fraxern - I would like to finish with a project that has something to do with the “cult” of the seven Temples in Agrigento. The recently finished Familienkapelle Fraxern is located in a beautiful landscape in Vorarlberg. The main qualities can be described by the precise proportion and positioning of the architecture in the landscape to give the visitor a strong experience of space.

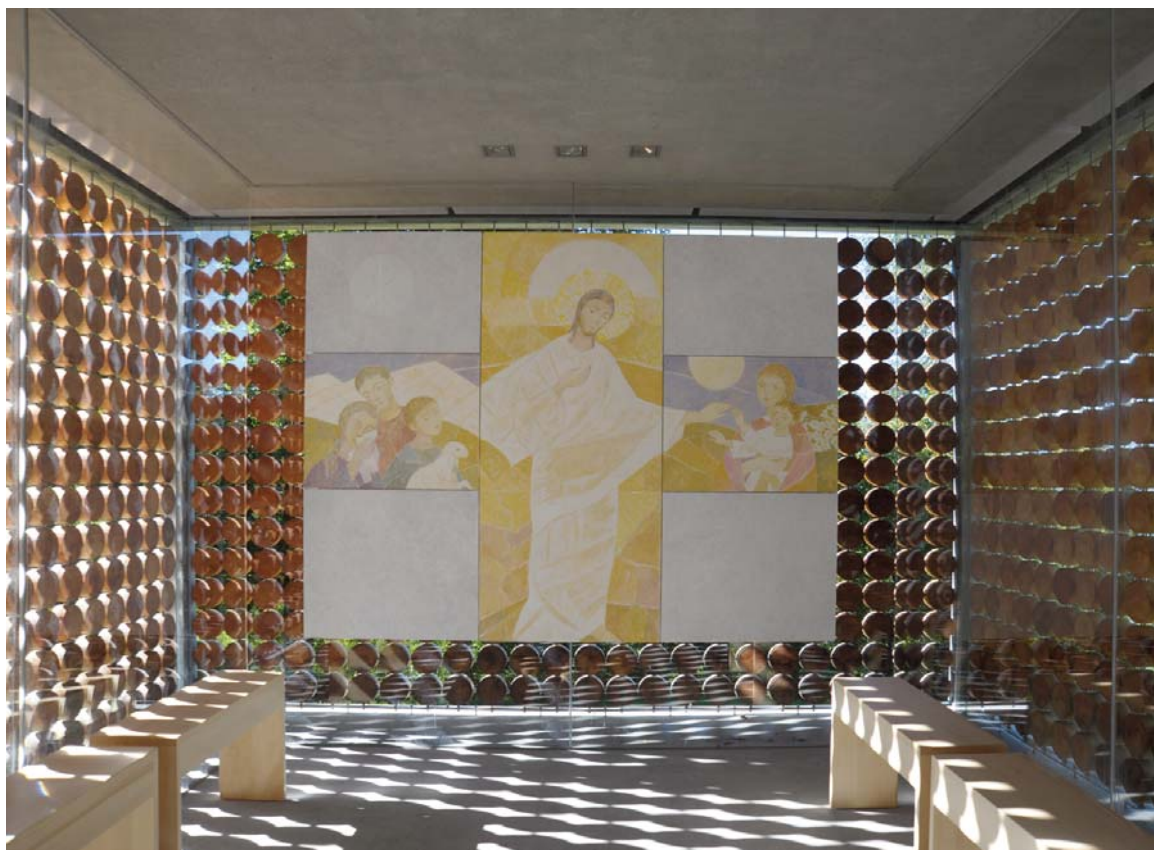
Similar to the Temples the experience of space around the building and the view to the building is as important as being inside. Another similarity to the Temples is the reduction of materials used.

Veduta esterna della Cappella Fraxern - *Familienkapelle Fraxern from outside*



Of course the Temples of Agrigento are far better architecture but I want to emphasize the fact that an authentic way to show respect for *Heritage* and to save the attitudes behind it is to learn from it. In other words putting kiosks and car parking and usual dust bins in front of the Temples reflects an attitude of ignorance and cultural pauperization. The young students from the University of Palermo and Agrigento have shown me during the intensive *Workshops* the fresh Grecian spirit of the younger generation which is based on the ancient cultural value of looking for, or getting closer to eternity.

Veduta interna della Cappella Fraxern - *Familienkapelle Fraxern from inside*



Workshop “Valorizzazione e fruizione dell’area archeologica della Valle dei Templi. Problematiche di percorso e di collegamento” (Agrigento, 15-19 Giugno 2009)

