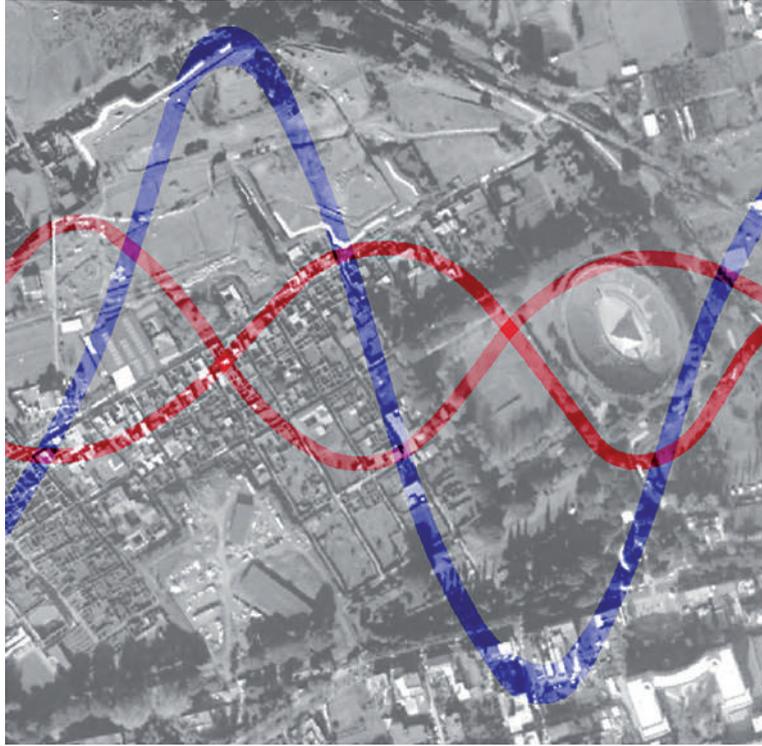


ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE and DESIGN

Carmine Gambardella

XVII INTERNATIONAL FORUM

Le Vie dei
Mercanti



WORLD HERITAGE and LEGACY

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Conference report 300 abstracts and 650 authors from 39 countries:

Albania, Australia, Benin, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brasil, Bulgaria, California, Chile, China, Cipro, Cuba, Egypt, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kosovo, Lalaysia, Malta, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montserrat, New Jersey, New York, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Texas, Tunisia, Turkey, United Kingdom.

Preface

The XVII Forum “World Heritage and Legacy” addresses the issue of the handed down in the sense of transmission over time of generation, at the state of knowledge, the material and immaterial heritage that comes from the past. A generational commitment to operate, in the cyclical temporal process, in order to preserve and protect the cultural heritage; a duty of the present generations to deliver to the future generations the legacy of the past at least in the same conditions in which it is received.

A commitment that takes on an even more meaningful significance in a historical moment that is crossed by destructive and iconoclastic wars and by great migration phenomena involving abandonment of territories undermining the identities of places, traditions, material and immaterial culture, which characterize the Cultural Landscapes. A re-appropriation by humanity of the value of a biological continuity that is traceable in its genetic complexity as a custodian and bearer of the memory of the past and, at the same time, belonging to those who live in the future by living the present. Moreover, “to the state of knowledge” should not be interpreted as a limitation but as an exhortation not to live on the position income and above all to remind men that they were not “made to live like brutes but to follow virtues and knowledge”.

Knowledge therefore contains an evolutionary value in the history of progress. Where knowledge is substituted by acts or policies conducted by brutal and unreasonable actions against Humanity and its Patrimony, a fracture on historical continuity is created, which produces a negative value due to the great expenditure of economic resources and loss of human values. Therefore, in the awareness that the value produced by the past generations, which have given us and above all entrusted as heritage to be transmitted to the future is not commensurable to the value of time to re-establish and restore continuity to the regenerative space of the common good, it is impossible to activate more and more moments of reflection and I would say to monitor the behavior of supranational cultural policies.

This in the spirit of inducing to avoid the disastrous temporal intervals that involve serious losses of the human heritage, which break the glue that binds the generations. Architecture, Cities, Infrastructures and Landscape not only represent the form of time but all the disciplines that have contributed to and contribute to their characterization. The form of time is the body of a cultural program of society and the modification project makes use of the knowledge at the date. Economics, mathematics, physics, in one the sciences are always traceable in the construction of man’s works, from the simple artifact to monumental architectures, to cities, to large infrastructures. In fact, with

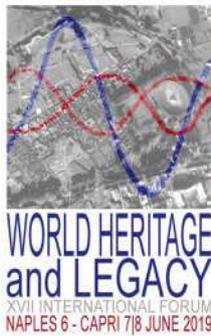
the previous sixteen editions of the International Forum “Le Vie dei Mercanti” an interdisciplinary community has been created of about 6000 scholars and researchers, coming from over 50 Countries of the World. These have presented realized projects, theoretical research, good practices, technological innovations, which are recognized in the principles and actions to be carried out so that the Planet with its species can always adapt itself to the needs of humanity in a sustainable reciprocal relationship for the salvation of the same Planet. And if Beauty will save the world, the principles and actions shared in these sixteen previous years will find with the seventeenth Forum a moment of evaluation of the state of art so that they can increasingly reach, interest and belong to as many people as possible such as Governments, Institutions, Universities, and Enterprises.

This is to create and disseminate a new Humanism that acts as a generational glue through a review of the inheritance concept, or of an ongoing heritage formed by resources intended as lot, which, declined as an income statement, create solidarity, peace, trust, work with art and quality of life.

For these reasons and for the history of the Forum, I am sure that the scientific community will establish a debate in Naples and Capri on 6th, 7th and 8th of June which will bring further richness to the discussion among researchers who have faced the protection and safeguard of heritage handed down to us and the researchers who through their works will be the bearers of the future legacy.

Carmine Gambardella

President and Founder of the Forum



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Architectural heritage for the scene. Renovation strategies: organizational models vs current production restrictions

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Abstract

Architecture and theatre are two art forms that can be measured through *space* and *time*, and architecture is a way create places suitable for theatre. The disruption of spatial rules that started in the first half of the 20th century was aimed at creating a new connection between actors and the audience, but it caused the loss of a bond between spaces and performances. New ideas about the audience's point of view, the obligation to take an active and participatory role, the contamination of art forms and theories, culminating in the Manifesto of Ivrea (1967), created a set of experiences that were useful to reaffirm the theatre's privileged role in everyday life, able to involve the whole community in a dynamic and emotional way. Performing Arts need a place where it is possible to host many genres, new stagings of the most recent drama works, a place where transformation can constantly affect the whole space and prove useful for actors: a space that is able to reinvent itself and re-design itself each time. This research confronted some emblematic cases chosen among the several theatre venues in Eastern Sicily and is aimed at: establishing rules to obtain a work-in-progress pathway, a long-term one as well as specific for each venue: this will help defining strategies for building and functional renovation; analysing technological innovations, distribution and production mechanisms within the field of theatre, as well as the present Italian norms about funding.

Keywords: renovation, theatre, flexibility, multi-functionality, restrictions

1. The crisis of theatres

1.1 Marginal theatre networks: the agony of provincial theatres

The research summarized in the present paper intends to provide a strategy, a technical and cultural support that is indispensable in order to carry out an integrated action of renovation and protection of existing facilities dedicated to performing arts, as well as to define criteria and parameters aimed at a new planning of theatre and artistic performances. During the last decades, theatres have experienced a deep crisis, and small provincial theatres, in particular, have been under constant threat. There are multiple causes behind this slow dereliction of theatre venues in smaller towns and their loss of importance: for instance, high production and hospitality costs, the spread of other entertainment practices (TV, home theatre systems, etc.), the lack of funding for live shows. All of that affects social communities, that are deprived of a significant portion of culture. Such state of things requires measures and reshaping from a legislative point of view, both at a regional and national level, as well as some ambitious and virtuous initiatives at a municipality level.

Buildings such as theatres and cinema-theatres - many of which are abandoned - need a rearrangement of their spaces and, above all, of their management in order to survive. Other visual arts, such as cinema, music, dance, painting, are considered very helpful as supporting strategies and are necessary to create fruitful contaminations. These venues, as a matter of fact, are the ideal places to gather people belonging to local associations and students who would make use of these spaces for several reasons: whether for social, cultural, learning or artistic purposes, they would bring these places back to life, and the whole town would benefit from this rebirth.

In order to know about the evolution of these venues dedicated to entertainment, it is necessary to carry out some historical, sociological and statistical surveys. The aim is to make diverse proposals for entertainment shows, with different production modes yet sharing at a common mission: to restore continuity in terms of artistic activities, taking into account production and hospitality.

These buildings are scattered around and are essential to convey the cultural proposals of a specific territory. Becoming aware of their value is indispensable in order to start some comprehensive plans aimed at the development of the whole territory where such buildings stand. These are the prerequisites to establish a monitoring unit – presently under constitution at the “ManUrba” Laboratory of the University of Catania – for theatres and cinemas scattered around the provinces of Siracusa, Ragusa and Catania. The objective of such monitoring unit is to draft an Atlas collecting all the useful information about such heritage and its present conditions, and make plans for the future. The result of the research may be replicated and it consists in using data to draft projects aimed at renovation strategies; the latter should be specific for each case and should consider the deep changes that affected theatre practices during the whole 20th century and ultimately caused the crisis of theatres, from a functional and emotional point of view. Another significant factor that contributed to such crisis was the advent of cinema: a spectacular new tool that was first underestimated. Theatres were rearranged in order to be used both as theatres and cinemas, allowing a peculiar architectural production. As a matter of fact, there were cases where different functions were available to users: leisure activities, games, food/drink serving, parties and celebrations, etc., in order to take advantage of such uncertainty.

Today, there is a trend envisaging a comeback to this multi-functionality, that could include other forms of leisure and artistic fruition. This fundamental aspect was included among the principles of the New Theatre (see the dedicated paragraph below), and was considered the best way to enact renovation, inspired by a strong motivation to preserve the theatre heritage.

Cinemas, smaller and free from structural and spatial constraints, are presently subject to transformations, splits, partial alienation and abandon. These small buildings are characterised by Art Nouveau and Art Deco architecture, as well as by rationalism, typical of the Fascist era: these styles were still used in Sicily in the 1950s and 1960s due to a slower change in architecture and technological languages than in the rest of Italy. Theatres that were turned into cinema-theatres “follow a simpler and more communicative concept of architecture. Such transformations apply very traditional criteria, characterised by high-level formal instruments, mainly by arranging spaces that are comprised in basic prismatic volumes” or reusing spaces originally conceived to host other activities (shops, coffee bars, houses) “that are transformed in a very appropriate way, sometimes in luxury, but not properly adapted to their new function”. [10, p. 23]

If this state of dereliction continues, thoughtless transformations will cause the loss of such heritage’s most typical features, and eventually the loss of entire buildings. The spatial features of these venues have actually favoured this “trend to undergo transformations”: thanks to their size, “houses can be adapted to the most diverse functions, so they can be turned into supermarkets, garages, discos, or even parking garages, banks or gyms. These solutions derive from the architectural characteristics of such buildings, that have very large entrances at the front, are located in the town/city centre and are often composed of different blocks. If transformations are taken to the extreme, they could even cause the actual disappearance of the original venues [...] that are actually as important as squares, because they provide meaningful historical continuity to towns and cities” [11].

1.2 The principles of the “New Theatre”.

The congress on the “New Theatre”, held in Ivrea (Italy) in 1967, provided an occasion to reflect on ongoing experimentations and the acquisition of new materials for the stage. Among the topics were: gestures, set parts, dramaturgy, sound, spatial management [1]. Particular attention was given to shed a light on the so-called “minor theatre companies” – where remarkable actors used to work, such as Carmelo Bene, Claudio Remondi and Carlo Quartucci – that appeared “true and genuine” as opposed to the “false” resident theatre companies. The latter conveyed the old dull values of a tradition that rejected all innovation; the New Theatre, instead, denied such an outdated system influenced by politics, and dominated by commercial criteria depending on the tastes of a typical middle-class audience, basically the mass of people who used to buy a season ticket. Before the congress took place, the concept of “group” had been acquiring a great importance, therefore theatre was considered a collective work. This theory emerged thanks to two factors: the ideological-political mood in Italy at the time, and the stimulus offered by the main European companies where collective theatre was leading to “the creation of new, independent aesthetic trends not conditioned by the text” [2]. The concepts of *theatre as a lab* and *collective theatre* were defined, envisaging experimental projects, new languages able to catch the audience’s attention and to allow their participation. “This heterogeneous group of people [...] chooses to watch the same show for a reason, not a coincidence, [...] the will to be there to be nourished by theatre – Pasolini used to call it “the cultural rite”. It means that theatre is addressing the whole people” [19]

There was a common and heart-felt need to rethink the relationship between the audience and the stage, between actors and the public, trying to eliminate all separation between them in order to achieve a full involvement of the public into the creative process. So, it was time to change the old conception of an audience “from the middle class, mentally lazy as usual, who goes to the theatre just for recreation, not willing to reflect, not welcoming towards new, thought-provoking proposals. It is necessary to involve a new public, composed of workers, farmers and young people who, back in those years, were on average more educated than it used to be in the past, and proved more available and willing to welcome novelties in every cultural sector. This new public was to be gathered outside usual networks: it could be found in cultural clubs, after-work recreational groups, universities, squares, small towns, industrial marginal areas, rural towns”. [19].

There are also new ideas about where to do theatre: performances were prepared especially in places not traditionally dedicated to theatre, such as working-class neighbourhoods and working premises. Such components led to write new scripts where the lives of people living and working in those very places are vividly present, contributing to drama: basements, clubs, depots, factories, abandoned buildings, all places where a diverse public could gather and hold a dialogue.

The congress at the premises of Olivetti lasted three days, representing a remarkable event and a testimony of that historic change: it was also an attempt to establish some important and shared principles that were included in a manifesto. The latter represented the turning point for Italian theatre, already influenced by overseas novelties. Despite this, the meeting was not able to define a New Theatre due to the disparate nature of participants who, despite common needs and beyond aesthetical matters, conceived theatre as a free place, where to discuss freely. Several articles about the meeting reported about the great confusion caused by those “assorted ideas” expressed by the several people who signed the manifesto; they denied being a single group, since many different ideas, methods and ambitions had emerged. So, no unity was forged in Ivrea, and many doubts still existed [2]. “The manifesto summarises vanguard ideas but does not denote what it was supposed to “reorganise”; it contains some outdated passages as well as some surprising openness towards a post-modern concept of theatre” [2]. The congress was also an occasion to present some innovative works, such as the methodological research by Eugenio Barba – at his debut back then – and the experimental works by Leo de Berardinis and Perla Peragallo [2, pp.82-83].

Having assimilated other experiences such as political theatre and foreign productions (from the USA: *Living Theatre* and *Performing Groups*, Allan Kaprow's *process art*, as well as from the rest of Europe: Artaud, Brook, Grotowski) the Italian theatre companies, in those years, used to go out of theatres and work in the open, choosing the most popular spots in the city. Two years later, in 1969, despite denying the will to engage in political theatre [1, p.125], Luca Ronconi dared to stage a transposition of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* by Edoardo Sanguineti at the 12th Festival dei Due Mondi di Spoleto. Uberto Bertacca designed the set in the deconsecrated Church of St. Niccolò, creating a whirlwind of actions and parallel plots. It was pure innovation in terms of place, script, set design, simultaneous actions and participation by the audience.

2. Theatre products: requirements and restrictions

2.1 Production technologies

Each performance is a product created by a theatre company, but the logic usually supporting production and management, aimed at marketing, is not appropriate. It is difficult to apply such logic to artistic productions, trying to “sell artistic culture according to the logics dictated by the market. [...] Business men have always interpreted the inflexibility characterising the world of performing arts as a whim, typically inspired by creativity” that can be defined as an artistic constraint” [20]. There are several cultural and artistic expressions that are precisely created for the market, some of which (theatre, museums, exhibitions) focus on art products. Theatre is included among the products aimed at expanding culture rather than mere entertainment: this is the key difference between theatre and other art works.

“Cultivated” theatre (accompanied by a symphonic orchestra and chamber music) as well as painting and sculpture, are the outcomes of a production technology aimed at creating “prototypes”, actually not reproducible in an identical way, and therefore unique, differing from other media such as cinema, records, publishing industry [20].(fig.1). If compared to production processes in other fields, theatre, as a matter of fact, applies a “creative strategy escaping all codes and structures, yet harmonious and effective”, which is very difficult to pigeonhole in a formal, rigid scheme [20].

Since it is not possible to separate theatre production from its reception, the artistic value of theatre works has always been evaluated depending on the public's appreciation, moving from the assumption that not many are able to understand such value; therefore there is an élite rejecting the trends imposed by the show business/market, and a consequent disaffection by the public [18, p.17].

The very requirements of “theatre products” (more in general of live performances) make them unique. They are intangible, performance cannot be separated from fruition, they are perishable (fruition cannot differ from performance), changeable (quality may change each time), they provide immediate satisfaction (thanks to a direct contact with the audience) [15]. Lastly, it is worth to consider that “theatre products” are actually accompanied by other secondary products (ticket offices, bookshops, coffee bars, cloakrooms) as well as auxiliary products (parking facilities, buses, restaurants offering special rates), all fostering other production chains [20].

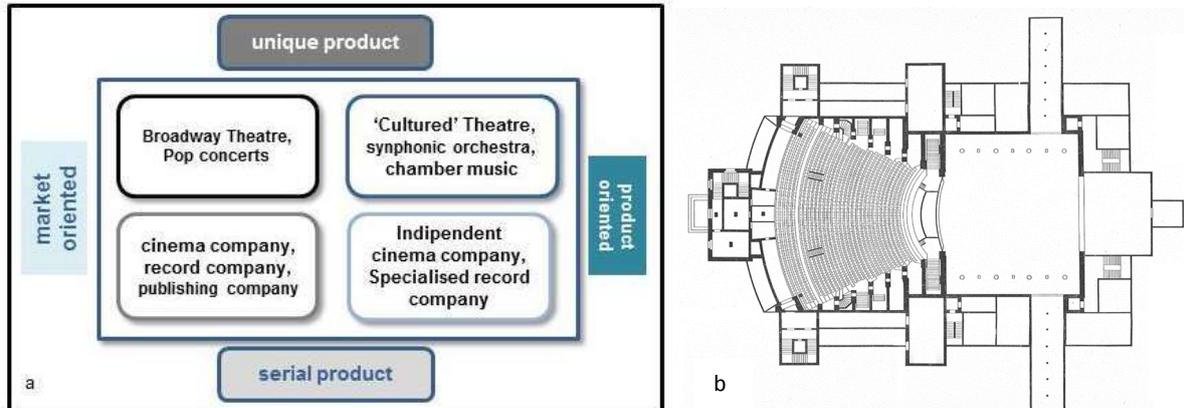


Fig. 1: a. Re-elaborated version of Colbert’s matrix, from Colbert F. (2001), *Marketing culture and the arts*. Paul & Co Pub Consortium [20]; b. Layout of the *Festspielhaus* by R. Wagner and G. Semper, Bayreuth (1872).

2.2 Financial constraints: Italian norms and issues

Theatre has always been dealing with the “problems that affect society”. However, it seems that today the same theatre is actually affected by problems. “In a society where creativity is addressing a mass of people, theatre – par excellence unprofitable and always in need of funds – falls on hard times”; it was written by Graziano Gregori, who noticed that such a crisis has two main aspects: an economic one and a cultural one [13]. Considering these premises, it is obvious that the younger generations of artists experience more precarious conditions, because they are often denied access to venues and funds. “More experienced groups, who started their activity before this crisis started, denounce that they having difficulties too” [13].

Public funds should ensure unaltered quality levels for live performances, by providing appropriate salaries; avoid the disappearance of some sectors (support quantity), in order to ensure “several types of activities and the search for new exchange models between producers and consumers (democratic principle)”. [...] «The Constitutional Court of Italy – in judgment n. 255 of 08/07/2004 – stated that “public funding is indispensable for the promotion and development of activities that, generally, cannot rely on the usual market laws» [18]. “No theatre in Italy could survive without public funds. [...] Theatres, theatre festivals and networks draft their budgets by relying on the sole funds provided by the Ministry and local bodies» [8]. Such state of things is denounced in a pamphlet by Massimiliano Civica and Attilio Scarpellini, who stress that performers have no serious motivation to attract more public, because they are already satisfied enough in living off that income; all of that diminishes theatre which is reduced to a welfare safety net, in contrast with the definition of “live performance” [8]. However, cultural institutions in general struggle to reach a financial stability, suffering from the so-called “Baumol’s cost disease” [18]. If public funds are lacking, the constant increase of relative costs will inevitably reduce the market of productions to stagnating technology [18], that is, deprived of the possible advantages provided by technology innovation.

Theatre companies are classified in large categories: production and distribution theatres, theatre companies, theatres hosting touring companies or city’s companies [20]; there exist further subdivisions in order to better identify the companies entitled to public funds.

Assignments devised in the Single Fund for Performing Arts (Law 30th April 1985, n.163) address theatre activities entitled to benefit from Ministerial funds. These are: theatre of words – including innovation theatre and juvenile theatre -, street theatre, musical comedies and operetta. Ministerial Decree of 12/11/2007 regulates criteria to allocate funds for theatre activities (production, distribution, functioning, advertising, seasons, festivals) promoting research, innovation and experimentation, facilitating the production of new works, protecting and enhancing the classical repertory, promoting the reuse of venues not originally conceived to host performances.

The above-mentioned decree, in article 5, devises extra points for activities promoting relationships with schools and universities, or enhancing the historical and architectural heritage, or consolidating relationships with local bodies and cultural institutions, or proposing projects that provide benefits to the local community [15].

In 2014, Ministerial Decree of 01/07/14 entered into force: it introduced new types of subjects eligible for funds and regulated criteria and modes with regard to different categories of recipients. It is highly selective as far as planning skills and historical significance are concerned, however it aims at facilitating young companies and projects envisaging a three-year plan [15]. A three-year span is considered appropriate to develop multidisciplinary projects, to encourage the establishment of resident theatre companies and to propose new management and internationalization models for projects [4]. The comparative/competitive system caused several problems since there were cases of excellent proposals being excluded from funding, a consequent discontent and several appeals [9]. The approach which was supposed to guarantee equality and transparency, relied instead on an algorithm which was based on criteria not extensively agreed upon, with different modes of interpreting and highly misleading.

Yet, real problems affect the very survival and operating possibilities of theatre companies. "The reform cancelled any opposition between touring companies and resident companies that has always characterized the life of Italian companies, that used to bring about problems as well as a fertile inspiration; similarly, it cancelled the relationship between "centre" and "margins" within the theatre system, that is, the relationship and connections between "upper" and "lower" theatre, between tradition and research, between official and alternative networks". This statement by Massimiliano Civica demonstrates his concern about several alternative and avant-garde networks that suffer from having become "invisible" and "nonprofessional": they were marginalized and not integrated within the "top-ranking theatre" [7].

3. Strategies for renovation

3.1 Innovation in organizational and spatial models

The distribution of theatre shows in Italy tends to invest on the most popular personalities rather than in new productions, thus penalising provincial theatre companies. Festivals tend to propose pieces that were produced elsewhere, excluding local works and groups. These phenomena worsen the whole situation: a few stable artists struggle to work, constantly affected by cuts in funding, the latter being the utter cause of the crisis presently experienced by all performing arts.

Theatre venues and their renovation are included among activities planned by Municipalities, that envisage specific funds; yet, they are not fully implemented and are often left unachieved and neglected. These are the places where, instead, the spirit of a community can be fully represented, where the same community has a chance to recognise itself: these places hold a cultural potential that is able to nourish renovation projects, indicating rules and the path to follow in order to trigger a work-in-progress, proactive mood that could ensure success in the long term. People living in those places, people who participate in projects (actors, audience, community) are a substantial part of those projects: they make requests, they evaluate, they test them, they experience, they approve positive results achieved by projects of building and functional renovation.

Renovation is the ideal solution: it addresses this kind of heritage including goals in terms of redevelopment, revitalisation, the possibility of temporary additions and integrations; in some occasions these venues have dramatically been altered in the course of time, have undergone –partial – transformations, or have been abandoned for a long time. Yet a single building, if renovated in full respect of historical memory, culture and sustainability, can restore the meaning of these places.

Selected cases illustrate some small theatre venues now excluded from production networks, that are not able to survive even with nonprofessional companies, almost invisible and excluded from virtuous growth processes. Also, the exchange of shows, generally constituting relationships among theatres in terms of production and planning, cannot happen because the costs to transport set apparatuses are too high for one show, and the limitations represented by the small size of stages, with poor equipment, make hospitality impossible, preventing exchange policies, actual openness and the development of research.

Considering all these reasons, a possible solution to the problem is multifunctionality: to host several art genres that would alternate and thus make renovation a sustainable project, offering a concrete chance of reuse and a constant flow of proposals in the course of time.

3.2 Theatre as a whole: stakeholders in cultural projects

Massimo Castri states that new cultural projects should be based on "retrieving the audience's attention and truly dialectic relationships". This recalls the concept expressed by B. Brecht about the function attributed by artists to theatre and audience: "his choices in visual terms, the purity of his dramatic space, absolutely real, would become an important reference – also a formal one - for the years to come"; such space was conceived to attract spectators, even physically, and not as a mere object of contemplation [15]. It is necessary to create a new space and to address a new audience, composed of people from different social classes and generations; younger people show a greater openness and interest towards all novelties in every domain of culture. This new audience must be

found outside traditional networks, where theatre products are distributed and disseminated by non-specialised cultural bodies (reading clubs, institutes, schools, local and grass-roots associations). [17] Such concepts are supported and developed in the Decree of 01/07/2014: the aim is to facilitate social cohesion and inclusion, and to attract the audience thanks to new organisational structures.

The broad project proposed in the present paper envisages a synergy among local cultural associations animating the territory where the building stands; these associations denounce the lack of appropriate spaces where to carry out their activities, rehearse, stage their works. The analysis on a territorial scale allows to calculate the number of users, making it possible to plan the number of repeat performances and to reduce costs. Temporary stays can represent an occasion to provide stability over a three-year span to a theatre company, which therefore would be able to grow and focus on production, as well as to understand the surrounding environment, taking inspiration from the local community, providing cultural development and care in building a “theatre company” using marginal spaces, retrieving the pairing research/lab and involving locals [5]. Article 45 of the above-mentioned decree envisages funding (40% by the State, 60% by Regional authorities) for: mobility of artists, enhancing younger generations and emerging artists, implementation of original projects in connection with local territories, defining temporary stays as a “space-place where to create art and plan cultural activities, managed by a well-organised professional”. This generated some positive outcomes but, unfortunately, it restricts show duration to 15 days, addressing a specialised public and therefore does not produce growth in the field of performing arts. The hoped for solution would be a research project able to generate more research. The creation of a network of stays is necessary in order to raise awareness among other facilities and in order to prevent marginalisation, as well as the creation of international connections that could spread experimental works, new languages and new ways of creating theatre products [4].

3.3. Emblematic case studies and venue potentials

In order to illustrate the project, it is worth to give a short description of two different categories of buildings, where spaces seem appropriate to host contemporary performances. The selected cases are buildings presenting some key characteristics to host exhibitions/theatre shows: highly flexible, totally dedicated to arts, featuring practicability, spatial continuity and allowing acting in a very “physical” way, ideal places to become experienced, neutral, serving as a gathering place for people, permanent with an “interrupted functionality”. [5]. In dealing with totality, the famous project by Gropius comes to mind: *Total Theater* (1927) that materialises Erwin Piscator’s concept of theatre as a changeable and involving device; Majerchold’s utopian theatre (Barkin and Vachtangov, 1935) is based on the same principles, allowing the theatre to enter urban life.

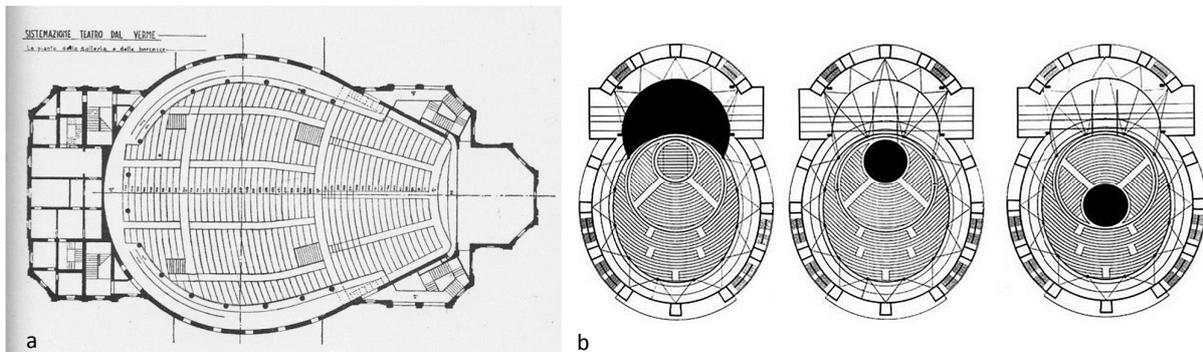


fig. 2: a. *Dal Verme cinema-theatre*, Milan; renovation by Cavallè and Viganò (1947) of the same theatre (1871) damaged during World War 2; b. Walter Gropius, *Total Theater* (1927).

Continuity is also represented in Peter Brook’s and Micheline Rozan’s project that makes a clever use of the theatre called *Bouffe du Nord* (1974) in Paris, that benefitted from financial support by the *Festival d’Automne*. Such theatre features classic proportions and is not suitable to welcome changes inspired by a cold, contemporary concept. Its past scars are still visible and are among its most noticeable features; it lacks a stage and a curtain but these defects are considered its strong points. Some museums and exhibitions venues (where shows can be performed in order to have a permanent theatre), ranging from the *Guggenheim* in New York (Wright, 1943) to *Schaulager* in Basel (Herzog & de Meuron, 2003), promote such kinds of shows, thus strengthening permanent theatre through a composition scheme recalling the traditional Italian theatre. Practicability is illustrated in the famous project by Jurgen Sawade (1978) about the reuse of *Cinema Universum* by Mendelshon in Berlin (1927-28) that would host the *Schaubüne*. The rectangular space with apse can be divided through tripartite sliding panels allowing more simultaneous actions; the floor is subdivided into mobile surfaces and is able to change spaces in height, allowing to host both classical and contemporary theatre. This is also present in the beautiful project by Maurizio Sacripanti submitted in occasion of the

competition for the *Teatro Lirico* in Cagliari (1965): it seems to have drawn inspiration from the set machineries by Gordon Craig: his *Screens* (1912).

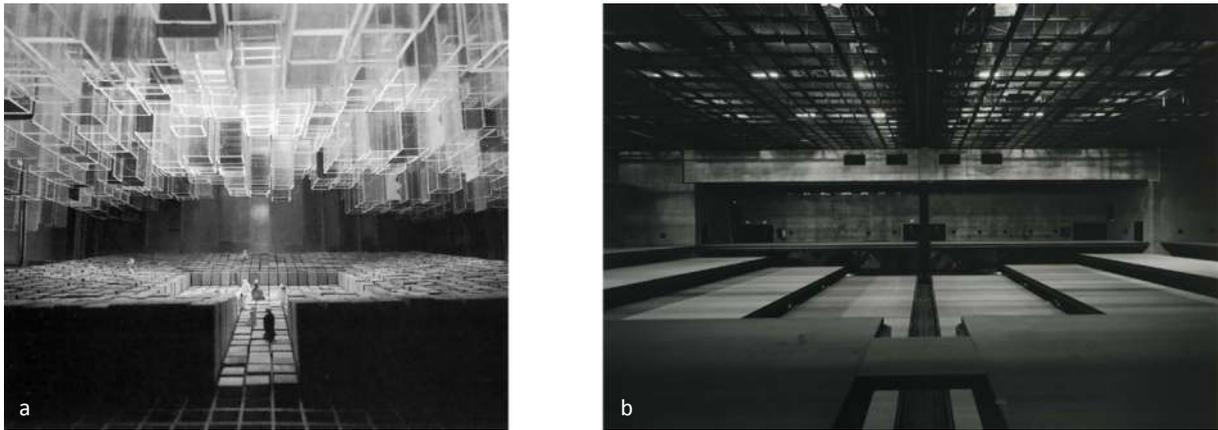


Fig. 3: a. Project for Cagliari's *Teatro Lirico*, Maurizio Sacripanti (1965); b. Jurgen Sawade, *Schaubühne*, Berlin (1978), reuse of Mendelshon's *Cinema Universum* (1927-28).

Neutrality can be easily understood by observing the project for the *Teatro India* (1999) that Mario Martone (along with G. Filippucci) obtained from a Mira Lanza factory on the shores of the Tevere river (the Roman area known as "the old gasometre"). In this project, the actor is at the core and demands neutrality. In a three-nave brick building, with sloping roofs, the architect created two halls that allow the public to watch the set and, at the same time, actors performing different actions: there are circular layouts moving on several levels and allowing to see the signs of the building's industrial history. These venues do not have rich decorations like the traditional Italian-style theatres (decorations are considered as elements able to distract the public from the performance's emotional impact) and host minimal performances that are mainly based on bodily dynamics.

3.4 The Atlas of theatres: two examples

For more than a decade the author has been studying these subjects – by coordinating research at the *ManUrba Lab* – and about 50 cases of mostly abandoned buildings. Thanks to special agreements with several theatre management bodies and experimental university dissertations, the double character of such venues was studied: renovation of theatrical functions and retrieval of their social and urban values, proposing renovation and reuse in order to host several types of performances, ensuring the conservation of spaces and architecture features. The selected cases deal with two of the most recurrent problems: a partially destroyed Italian-style theatre and an abandoned cinema-theatre dating back to the 1950s. They both had inflexible features and potentials: it was possible to implement projects consistent with present needs expressed by performing arts, yet preserving their original matters and peculiarities.

- *Teatro Bellini* in Acireale (Catania). Built in 1862 by architect Carmelo Sciuto Patti and decorated by local artist Giuseppe Spina Capritti, it was inaugurated in 1870, and hosted excellent *bel canto* artists, such as Enrico Caruso. Due to crisis, it was downgraded to the status of cinema and suffered a devastating fire in 1952. The three orders of dais with gallery had been built in a wooden framework with thin pillars, and were severely damaged by the fire. It was abandoned for 23 years and its conditions worsened. In 1970 the project by Pennisi-Savelli demolished the interiors, leaving the perimeter walls: these were used to host small overhanging dais in reinforced concrete, and the L-shaped layout was noticeably modified, taking an U-shape. Engineer Scaccianocce retrieved the project but it was never completed. Today, it is a bare skeleton in reinforced concrete, with no stage and it looks desolated, its stage tower looks like an empty container (only its framework is left).

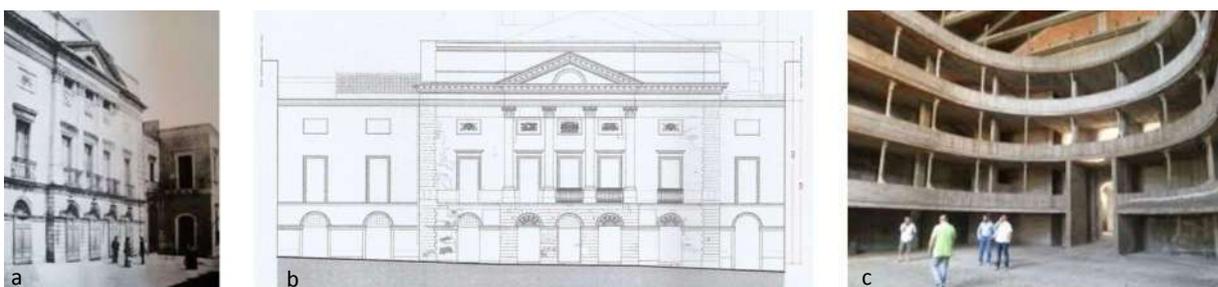


fig. 4: *Teatro Bellini*, Acireale (Catania), Carmelo Sciuto Patti (1862-70): a. vintage picture; b. main façade; c. house, present state.

It represents an ideal occasion to create a 360-degree theatre, since it would be impossible to reconstruct it following philological criteria because its present state differs from its original project. It can host theatre performances and exhibitions as well, thanks to the insertion of large glass windows between the support beams of the stage tower that allow natural light to come in. To provide darkening, some bends in elastic fabric anchored to the floor are used, a special material used in contemporary stagecraft (*Wind Elastico*, Peroni s.p.a.®). Each glass window leads to an exterior safety staircase placed at the back of the building, that constitutes an emergency way out in compliance with safety norms. The whole space is highly flexible thanks to its ceiling, constituted by a “scenic device” hanging from a circular gridiron made of steel tubes surmounting the hall, and some hanging panels in *Gobelin* tulle (another scenic material created by Peroni s.p.a.®). The latter are used as backdrops or light partitions; thanks to their high-quality material they are suitable for projections and back projections, they can also be moved vertically from the floor to the ceiling, and placed at different heights. It is a clear reference to the fabulous set design created by Joseph Svoboda for *Faust frammenti*, directed by Giorgio Strehler, where a tulle spiral represented the endless, untouchable universe dominating Goethe’s tragedy.

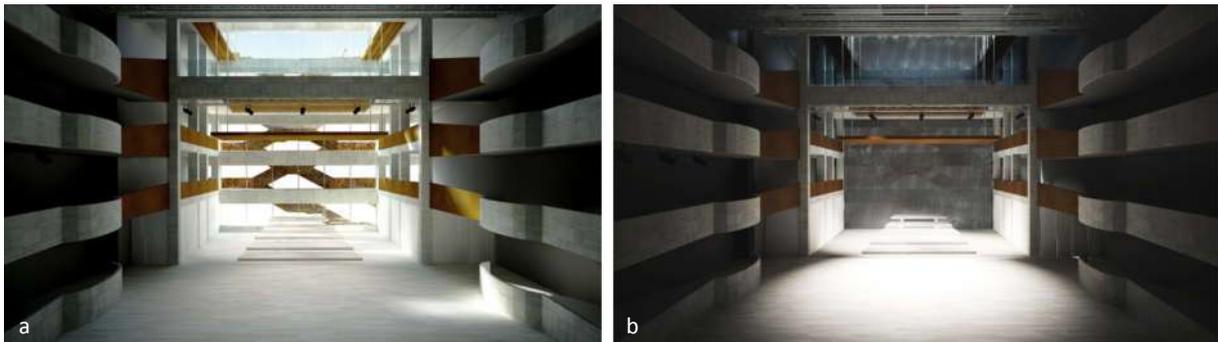


fig. 5: *Teatro Bellini*, Acireale, project for stage tower to host exhibitions (a) and shows (darkened, b). (graphic elaboration by architect Stella Viglianisi).

It is a highly symbolic set design, enriched by the set designer’s technical expertise: on that same sky, he projected night, day, dawn and sunset, dark clouds threatening the audience and even the same actors (it happened at Milan’s *Teatro Studio* in 1988-89); last, an unexpected move towards the ground, and the protagonist will be eventually caught forever.

Such reference gives more flexibility to the hall, that has no specific type of spaces thanks to a lack of restrictions. Below the device, on the ground, are circular mobile platforms around a bigger, revolving circular platform, allowing maximum flexibility.

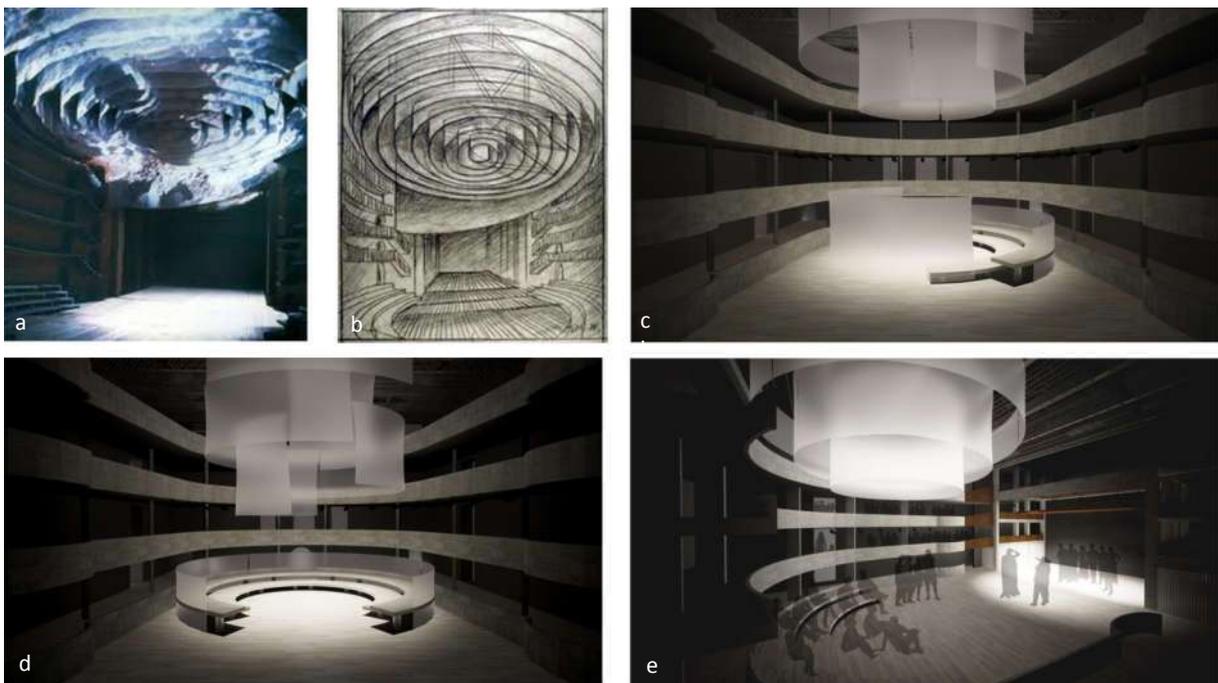


fig. 6: J. Svoboda, *Faust, frammenti*, director G. Strehler, *Teatro Studio*, Milan, 1988-89 (a, b); *Teatro Bellini*, Acireale, flexibility project (c, d, e). (graphic elaboration by architect Stella Viglianisi).

- *Cine-Teatro Metropol*, Caltagirone (Catania). Built in the 1950s, when the centre of the “new town” was still popular, it lost its original importance due to the town’s further expansion. Its front façade is sided by two much taller buildings, its back façade overlooks a public garden where young people use to gather. It was originally designed to host 2,000 people (1,200 in the stalls area and 800 in the parterre), it used to have a large stage (270 sq. metres), a large foyer, a cafeteria, a tobacco seller, a game room and a reception hall on the first floor. Back then, it was listed among the 10 largest cinema-theatres in Italy.

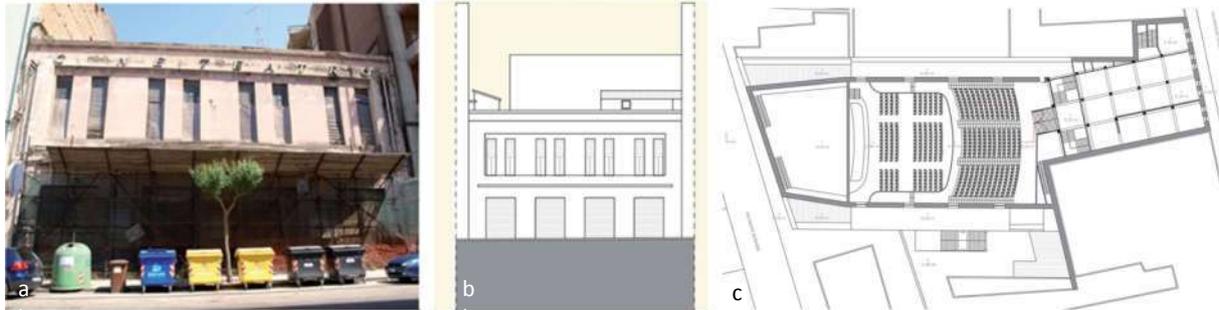


fig. 7: *Cine-Teatro Metropol*, Caltagirone (Catania) (1955, closed in 1999); present state (a), survey (b, c).

It was closed in 1999, when it was auctioned, but not sold. Catania’s Provincial authority eventually purchased it, during an unlucky electoral campaign. The building’s large size allows it to be divided into three halls, since the parterre was conceived to be divided in two. This allows a simultaneous use to host shows having less spectators. The renovation project allows people to cross the building in both senses, and one side of the building overlooks the street, allowing an interaction between the town and the theatre. Alternating activities is a good strategy: if an accurate schedule is planned, it will be possible to host theatre, music and art courses, as well as the many local cultural associations. A new level was added, now hosting a coffee bar not belonging to the theatre, open even when the theatre is closed and overlooking a green area. The rear façade – the one overlooking the public garden – allowed to create an extra corridor near the dressing rooms, with a transparent side placed on the pre-existing wall that is still visible. The front façade, severe and asymmetrical, rises high towards the sky with an overhanging glass volume protecting the entrance. Among windows on the first floor are displayed the letters forming the word METROPOL, that is now part of the building’s architecture. The new level is subdivided thanks to light curved partitions that form independent rooms, equipped with skylights and able to host several types of activities.

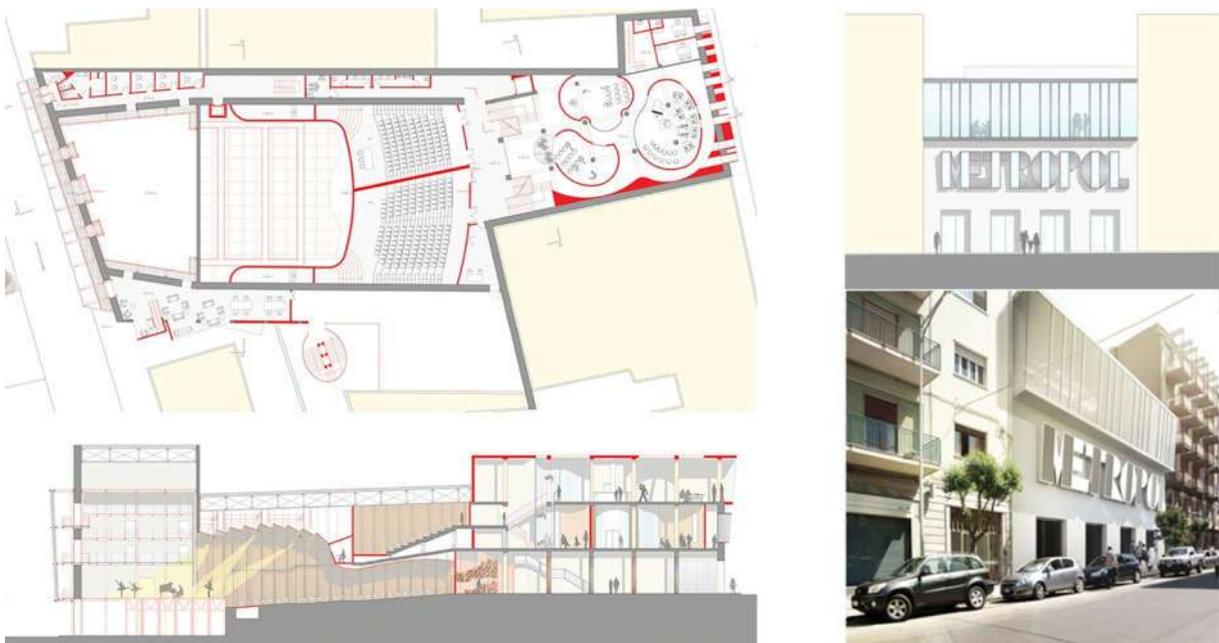


fig. 8: *Cine-Teatro Metropol*, Caltagirone (Catania), project (graphic elaboration by architect Roberta Ali).

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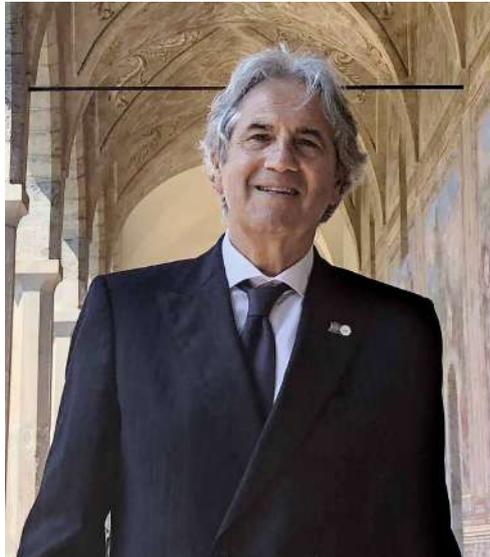
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