

SACRED SITE AND *MUSEUM OF ITSELF*. FLORENCE AND RIO DE JANEIRO, TWO CASE STUDIES

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Resumo: Esse trabalho introduz parte de uma pesquisa em andamento, “espaços sagrados e museus em si”, na qual a ideia de espaços sagrados é baseada no conceito de totemismo como expresso por Durkheim. Alguns desses espaços sagrados em particular possuem valores artísticos, arquitetônicos e simbólicos imponente que tornam os museus espaços de si mesmos e agregam um número expressivo de turistas e fiéis.

Considerando esse quadro de referências, um espaço sagrado pode ser também um espaço expositivo sem perder parte de sua especificidade? Pode um espaço manter seu caráter sagrado apesar do turismo em massa? Considerando que diferentes tipos de visitantes, turistas e fiéis possuem diferentes propósitos e prerrogativas, existe uma narrativa comum que possa alcançar a todos?

Para responder a esses questionamentos, esse trabalho investiga dois estudos de caso: o Complexo Monumental de Santa Croce, em Florença, e o Estádio do Maracanã, no Rio de Janeiro.

Palavras-chave: Espaços sagrados; Museus; Complexo Monumental de Santa Croce; Estádio do Maracanã.

Abstract: The paper introduces part of an on-going research on “sacred site and *museum of itself*”, in which the sacred sites idea is based on the concept of *totemism* expressed by Durkheim. Some sacred places have astonishing artistic, architectural, or symbolic values that make them *museums of themselves*, and recall huge numbers of both tourists and worshippers.

Considering this frame of reference, could a sacred site be also an exhibition space without losing part of his specificity? Can a space maintain its sacred character despite the mass tourism?

To answer to these questions, the study investigates two case studies: the Monumental Complex of Santa Croce, in Florence, and the Maracanã Stadium, in Rio de Janeiro.

Keywords: Sacred spaces; Museums; Monumental Complex of Santa Croce; Maracanã Stadium.

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FOREWORD

This paper is part of the research framework SiSMus, Site Specific Museum. SiSMus, led by Pirazzoli, Guerzoni, and Lanciotti, proposes a multidisciplinary project, where architecture and museography, economy, and law are the tools employed to analyze and understand the contemporary world of museums. SiSMus opposes the idea of global museums, and considers as fundamentals concepts like «the relationship between specific places and specific nature of the collections, the respect for diversity and social responsibility, the attention to social issues, the inclusion of local communities, the research for sustainability, the conservation, production, direction vision and content link to the site specific museum mission»¹. The recognition of the link between a specific place and the specific nature of the collections contrasts the idea of branded museums, summed by Koohlaas' saying «fuck the contest», in vogue in the 1990s, and that founds in the museum architecture a vast application². Particularly, site specific museums are «museums to exist in a certain place»³.

INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The research focuses on those places and spaces that have specific sacred connotations and are tourist attractions at the same time. Can spaces that are not museums merge with contemporary museum practices? And in particular, can sacred sites at large merge with contemporary museum practices? The objective is analyzing complex situations in order to provide, at the end, concrete solutions to museographical issues.

Although the literature toward each separated field, sacred spaces and museum practices, is huge, there are no references when the two themes are combined. The only sources are introductory thoughts about the difficulties of interpreting and managing such spaces. These appear in two books curated respectively by Gahtan and De Marchi and Pirazzoli.

¹ <http://www.sismus.org/> (accessed on 20/08/2016).

² GUERZONI, 2014; Cerri, 2014; PIRAZZOLI, 2011.

³ SiSMus derives from the union of two concepts: site specific artwork: "Artwork created to exist in a certain place" and museum, according to ICOM definition: "a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment." (ICOM – International Council of Museums)

To address the questions, the study investigates two case studies: the Monumental Complex of Santa Croce, in Florence, Italy, and the Maracanã Stadium, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. The first represents the classic sacred example, a historical sacred complex where tourism and faith coexist. The second is a secular contemporary case, where civic engagement, sporting faith, and tourism make the stadium one of the main attractions of the city.

The goal is to build a theoretical approach so to study complex situations. A deep understanding of the sites (we might consider: history, traditions, local context, uses, architecture, tangible and intangible contents, future projects, criticalities, peculiarities, etc.) is necessary before acting in a practical way. Two different case studies from two different geographic areas have been chosen. Apparently very different, they propose similarities in: their size, tourism capacity, fame, level of complexities, and presence of values, which, according to Durkheim, determine such spaces as sacred.

MUSEUM OF ITSELF

The objects of the research are places that show a dual character: sacred and touristic. They have astonishing artistic, architectural, or symbolic values, and attract huge numbers of people. They are sites that, like churches and public buildings, share special meanings. How can one call them? Definitely not museums, since they are not museum institutions. On the other hand, the way in which a part of the visitors behaves inside them might recall the museum rituals⁴. The coexistence of museum and other uses appeared since the ancient time⁵. Obviously, they were not called museums according to the contemporary Western meaning, given that the concept of museum would be born later⁶. Quatremère de Quincy sustains that the objects maintain their meaning only when they stay in-situ⁷, while Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Coppelotti propose the expression “museum of itself” to identify places that have the value of documents. In particular, Coppelotti describes as museums of themselves “the whole thing of buildings and monuments,” and recognizes them as the “complex cultural goods (such as public palaces, big monastic convents, etc.) that preserve their functions and are places to visit as if they were ‘museums’ at the same time.”

⁴ BOURDIEU & DARBEL, 1966.

⁵ GAHTAN, 2011; GIEBELHAUSEN, 2006; FINDLEN, 1989; POMIAN, 1987.

⁶ GIEBELHAUSEN, 2006; MACDONALD, 2006; HOOPER-GREENHILL, 1992; BOURDIEU & DARBEL, 1966.

⁷ SHERMAN, 1994.

SACRED AND RITUALS

According to the common Western culture⁸, the word “sacred” is related to religious values. Some scholars⁹ consider as sacred the rituals, the practices, and the beliefs that are not necessarily recognized as religious. Specifically, Durkheim defines some secular rites as sacred. To the anthropologist, primitive communities recognize themselves and practice rituals in places that are not commonly conceived as religious, and then, to this interpretation, both religious and secular locations might be part of the sacred sites category. After Durkheim, other academics¹⁰ deal with the themes of rites and rituals¹¹ looking for the various practices, and putting them in relations with the space. Anthropology of tourism puts in relation the rituals with the play and the pilgrimage. For example, Graburn finds a link between touristic rituals with the rituals described by Durkheim and Mauss. According to such interpretations, one might recognize different kinds of rituals in places that are not commonly defined as religious, and some of them are identified as touristic.

Considering this frame of reference, can a sacred site be also an exhibition space without losing part of his specificity? Can a space maintain its original character despite the mass tourism? Given the presence of different kinds of visitors that have different prerogatives and purposes, can a shared narrative reach them all?

MONUMENTAL COMPLEX OF SANTA CROCE, FLORENCE

Santa Croce is a medieval Franciscan convent, and it is one of the most important spots of the city of Florence. It is a reference point for the local community, because of its historical role and its geographical position, and it is one of the must-see places of the Florentine touristic circuit. The project of the church is attributed to the famous medieval architect Arnolfo di Cambio, and, as other Franciscan examples, the complex enlarged and enriched through the centuries. Layered constructions, and different users and owners determined the actual conformation of the site. It contains outstanding treasures and examples of remarkable architectures, like the big cloister by Rossellino, and the Cappella Pazzi by Brunelleschi. The artistic

⁸ DUSI & MARRONE, 2008; RIES, 1993; ACQUAVIVA & PACE, 1992.

⁹ OTTO, 2009; ELIADE, 1949; MAUSS, 1899.

¹⁰ CALLOIS, 2001; GOFFMANN, 1959.

¹¹ Ritual: «the performance of ceremonial acts prescribed by tradition or by sacerdotal decree. Ritual is a specific, observable mode of behavior exhibited by all known societies. It is thus possible to view ritual as a way of defining or describing humans». From Encyclopaedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/ritual> (accessed on 20/08/2016).

contents represent the most famous attractions; Giotto, Cimabue, and Bronzino are just some of the masters that one can admire there. The fame of the complex is linked also to its presence in non-Italian narratives. For example, Santa Croce appears frequently in the British literature, and was one of the classic stages of the Grand Tour in the 19th and 20th Centuries.

The convent used to be a reference point to the local Christian community. Now, a general reduction of the number of Christian worshippers and the need of a calm space reduced drastically Santa Croce devotee population. The Franciscan friars, still living there, are the responsible of the religious administration but are not the owner of the complex, as it belongs to the municipality and to the Italian State. That implies a particular managerial situation. The Opera di Santa Croce is the laic authority in charge of running the complex. Their tasks comprehend the promotion, the enhancement, and the preservation of the structures. As landmark of the Florentine panorama, Santa Croce is object of contemporary artistic initiatives, such as that of Risaliti and Paladino for Florens 2012¹², and the proposal by CrossingLab for the old cloister¹³.

Sacred and secular mix in Santa Croce, and, as introduced by Gahtan, several European churches show a similar matter. Saint Denis, near Paris, represents one of the most outstanding examples. There, the Abbé Suger conceived the cathedral so as to accommodate different needs for different receivers. Beside believers, visitors were welcomed in visiting the spaces¹⁴. Something similar to Saint Denis happens in Santa Croce. The difficulties in receiving people are represented by the physical space itself that is designed for religious ceremonies and for the friars, instead of mass tourism. This raises questions about the management and the design of the space that have to deal with the duality of the users. Nowadays, the church is divided in two areas: touristic and of preying. To visit some parts of the complex, the guests have to pay a ticket. Although the efforts of the Opera, the adopted solutions limit to those used in museums. The visitors may find maps and flyers with basic information at the entrance, or in alternative, one might download the interactive guide for mobile phones. The modality of fruition and the supports recall traditional museums. The so-called Museum of Santa Croce is now placed in the sacristy¹⁵. Occupying a core part of the site, the title “museum” placed side

¹² <http://www.arte.it/notizie/firenze/florens-2012-al-via-con-una-spettacolare-installazione-di-paladino-7957> (accessed on 20/08/2016).

¹³ CERRI & PIRAZZOLI, 2014; PIRAZZOLI, 2013.

¹⁴ PANOFSKY, 1979.

¹⁵ The museum changed recently its venue for safety reasons. Before 2014, the works of art were placed into the *refectorium* wing. This part of the complex was the most damaged after the flood of 1966, and is still dangerous in case of floods.



Fig. 1.
Santa Croce square,
the main façade.

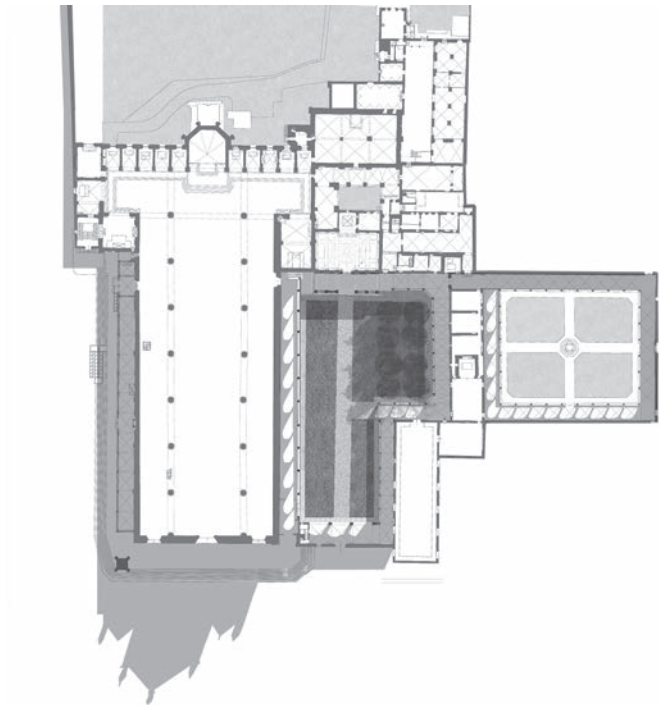


Fig. 2.
Plan of the complex:
church and cloisters.

by side to that of sacristy changes the meaning of the latter. In general, the absence of explanations about the monastic life denies people to understand the reasons of such spaces. Furthermore, although the behavioral warnings at the entrance, there is not an atmosphere of meditation and the silence that usually characterize sacred spaces, and, especially during high-season periods, the church is crowded and noisy.

Next to the splendors, Santa Croce presents several issues. The presence of variety of fluxes, mass tourism, difficulties in introducing new services, clear communication, and ad-hoc narratives are the matters that need to be solved through museum solutions. Above all, the high risk of musealization represents the most critical topic.

MARACANÃ STADIUM

Locally and universally considered as the temple of soccer, the Maracanã Stadium (Estádio Jornalista Mário Filho) is the “mecca” for supporters, the second tourist spot in Rio, and the most important secular symbol for Brazilians. The history of the country is linked to that of the stadium, as well as of the soccer. The stadium is historically recognized as a monument, not because of its architecture, but for the meaning that it represents. It is considered a civic and secular site. When Brazil is born, a young nation without history and composed by several ethnicities, the sports became a sort of national glue. Soon, soccer turned out to be one of the most important values for Brazilians. The local teams represent the local identities, while the *seleção* is a national proud.

To some scholars, the activities of the cheers and the play recall sacred values, so the stadium might be something more than the representation of civic principles. This vision, referring to Durkheim’s totemism, is explained by Callois, who refers to Huizinga and his *The Man and the Sacred*, and da Matta, a Brazilian anthropologist, who analyses the relationship between Brazilians and football.

The Maracanã is labeled as *temple* by several sport commentators or football fans all over the world. It is part of the Rio de Janeiro trademark along with the carnival, and the beaches¹⁶. The stadium is a public building, managed by the State of Rio de Janeiro and the Municipality, but, because of international rules, FIFA might influence the Brazilian decisions.

In 2014, it has been internally renovated to align it to the international safety regulations, so to host the FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Olympic games. Since the Institute for National Historic and Artistic Heritage of Brazil gave the listed-building status to the stadium, the external walls has been conserved whereas the inside is completely new. Still recognizable by its gigantic dimension, now internally the stadium looks like any other stadium in the world. It lost some of its trademarks, like the *geral*¹⁷, but it gains in safety, passing from the capacity of 175,000 to almost 79,000 seats.

While worldwide there is the tendency to build the museum stadium inside or nearby the arena, the Maracaña does not have a museum or a gallery. The visitors can make a tour, free or guided¹⁸. When the matches are not on stages, only the touristic rituals take place. The ticket boxes are placed out of the stadium gates, to

¹⁶ GAFFNEY, 2013; —, 2010; —, 2008.

¹⁷ The *geral*, literally “general space,” was the cheapest space of the stadium. Generally occupied by who cannot afford the seated places, it contained until 25,000 people.

¹⁸ The Stadium is a public property of Rio de Janeiro State, but the services and the management are provided by external societies.



Fig. 3.
The Maracãna Stadium
before 2014.



Fig. 4.
The Maracãna Stadium
during the 2014 World Cup.

enter into the stadium the “pilgrims” have to cross the merchandising shops, and the visit starts in the guess-hall. Inside, there are not information totems, mobile apps, or audio-guides (for single visitors), and neither mentions about the history of the stadium. The tour focuses on the new stadium and on its recent history. Few relics are placed in the hall, which works more as an introductory space than as an exhibition gallery. The visit includes: the changing room, the pressroom, the stands, the press area, the VIP area, and the field.

During the matches, there are at list 3 categories of users: who works inside the stadium (teams, employees, etc.), the supporters, and the tourists. This is a particular situation, in which the spectators observe the game, and the tourists watch both the players and the supporters, since the Brazilian cheer (*torcida organizada*) is

considered an attraction too. As explained by Huizinga, Callois, and Durkheim, during the matches all the rituals take place.

As well as Santa Croce, the Maracanã presents several difficulties: lack of narrative, lost of traditions, disaffections and lack of supporters (due to new habits, expensive tickets, pay-tv, etc.), FIFA rules., etc. It is a complicated situation, from a museographic point of view, the risk of musealization and monumentalization represent the main danger.

CONCLUSION

Through the two case studies, the research shows the complexities of specific spaces with a strong sacred connotation and that are tourist attractions at the same time. Such analyses are necessary to understand which are the actual uses of the places, the management strategies to undertake, and the professions to involve.

Although the study is still to an early stage, it appears clear which are the issues and the risks to avoid. In the case of Santa Croce, the main risk is the musealization of the complex. The commercialization of the spaces, and the possible future dislocation of the friars to other structures would determine the transformation of the church in something similar to a theme park. In order to give meaning to the spaces and the works of art, a particular attention has to be concentrate on the sacred rites and the religious traditions. Therefore, all the architectural and museum interventions have to be carefully inserted. Visitors from China, for example, could understand certain artistic works only if these are inserted in their proper contexts. From the museographic point of view, the narrative, composed by physical elements and theoretical contents, has to be strategically planned.

Paradoxically, the internationalization of the Maracanã represents the main danger. If on one side the last restoration allowed it to survive, on the other one it determined the lost of specific historical elements and the estrangement of the *carioca* supporters. The ongoing transformations turned the stadium in an international environment, without the atmosphere that created the legend of the most important stadium in the world. The disaffection of the local public and the alternatives to watch the matches and the events, represented by the pay-tv programs, are the main detractors. The principal risk is that the stadium becomes a nostalgic representation of itself without authenticity. A further outcome might be the transformation of the stadium in a mere monument, following the same fate of the Pacaembù Stadium in San Paolo¹⁹.

¹⁹ Currently, the Pacaembù Stadium hosts a museum and a research center. Rarely, it is the venue of football matches.

In conclusion, the analyses of the two case studies acknowledge the setting up of a study model that allows the study, the comprehension, and the practical approaches to other spaces. In particular, such model might simplify the architectural design study of complex site-specific sites.

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