

FIELD RESEARCH AND DOCUMENTATION ABOUT CULTURAL RESOURCES OF URBAN ENVIRONMENT  
**CINEMA PARADISE : Inventing the Natural and Harmonious Cinema Paradise Places  
in the Valley Bolognetta, Palermo, Sicily**

2020 CAMPUS ASIA Winter Workshop Busan



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# Above The Clouds

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## INTRODUCTION

The Winter Workshop “Cinema Paradise CAMPUS\_Asia: SUAE\_Asia 2021” brought to the attention of 14 teams and 5 Universities the challenge of contemporary architectural design in relation a site of great naturalistic importance. In fact, the Bolognetta Valley, and in particular the location of the cave and the San Nicola waterfall, are located in the Sicilian hinterland, not far from the city of Palermo, in a context free from the human presence. Here it is strong the necessity to find a design approach that can constitute a mediation between the built and the natural elements. The presence of the Milicia river then is also central to the whole understanding of the site, due to the restriction caused by the presence of the two promontories of Monte Torretta and Pizzo Cicero that allow the formation of natural waterfalls. The project presented by the LabCity Architecture Team aims to find a definition of this place, starting from its potentialities and proposing fun and experiential activities for enhancing and enjoying the site.



Fig. 1. Above the clouds (concept design), LabCity Architecture Team, 2021

## TEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

The challenge proposed in order to adapt the site to a place for small events raises the question of what designing an event means today and what its impact on the territory may be. The long tradition of temporary and ephemeral architecture therefore provides a pivotal reference for the contemporary architectural project, as it allows new practices to define a transformable architecture, which can be adapted to specific spatial and temporal needs. The theme of the time and the space of the project greatly differs from the static that is generally meant in the architectural project, in other words, from that widely known theme of Vitruvius' *firmitas* that has defined one of the unavoidable characteristics of architecture. The transformative operation can be linked not only to the place, which has the specificities of a natural territory, but especially to the formal features of the project. The idea of temporality referred to the events allows to define a new imaginary setting within which practices usually destined to very specific spaces take place. The unhinging between form and function, already announced at the end of the last century, constitutes a common *leitmotiv* of the contemporary, in favour of multi-temporal and multi-functional spaces.



Fig. 2. Instant City, Archigram, London, 1960.

At the end of the twentieth century the Avant-garde movements -and later, the critics- had unhinged not only the ways of representing art and architecture, but also the way of conceiving the project, through materials often foreign to architectural field. Specifically, the English group Archigram, formed in 1961 by W. Chalk, P. Cook, D. Crompton, D. Greene, R. Herron, M. Webb, with their long series of *Instant City* projects, has stimulated a new vision of architecture for events, capturing space as a practice of fun. The space proposed by Archigram is in fact a fluid space, characterized by mobile and inflatable structures, which colonize the ground as much as the sky. The scenario that the British group shows, in line with the historical period they lived in, represents a playful imaginary setting in which both the space of the city and the practices gained a figurative relief. Therefore, the projects shown highlight the evocative potential of the image, allowing a new conception of space to be spatially visualized. In this sense, the work produced by the English group constitutes a pivotal reference for the project of temporariness, also free from the geographical constraints of its site. Over time, this imagery has outlined a *culture of the event* that has made the temporary its cornerstone. Among the numerous projects designed from the 1960s to the present day, the project for the new roof of the Verona Arena presented by Typo Design studio in 2016 evokes this imaginary that

tries to define a shelter changeable in the programme and functional for an event -element that is temporary by definition. In this way, the aerial structure allows the entire roof to be transformed into a projection surface inside the arena, thus configuring a multimedia and immersive environment.



Fig. 3. Nuvola, Tipo Design, Verona, 2016.

### The enhancement of small towns

Understanding the potential of the territory is the prerogative of the research-action program on small towns, through an approach that considers the cultural element as an important catalyst for urban regeneration. This approach represents the design challenge carried out by the Final thesis Lab and research group LabCity Architecture that deals with the processes of transformation of the city and the territory through the architectural project.

The current research aims at the study of small rural towns in the Sicilian hinterland that share a strong but unexpressed potential for regeneration, that is intended to be explored through the architectural project in synergy with local communities. The numerous design reflections are united by the re-proposal of the Ancient Sicilian Trasversale<sup>1</sup> area that redraws the backbone of the entire island of Sicily, from Mozia to Kamarina. Along this ancient road there are numerous towns that suffer from a marginal condition, currently looking for new meanings capable of triggering practices and processes of regeneration.

Also the territory of the Bolognetta Valley is located in this context and it shows characteristics similar to those of the Sicilian Transversal small towns. Here, the Milicia river, squeezed between the promontories of Monte Torretta and Pizzo Cicero, flows along the valley to its mouth at the foot of the town of Altavilla, revealing its torrential character that in the winter season become often dangerous. As previously said, the entire territory is almost free from anthropogenic elements, although the presence of a small path allows people to easily reach the cave and the waterfall of San Nicola. The heterogeneity of the soil highlights the potential of the cavea on which the waterfall

<sup>1</sup> The Ancient Sicilian Transversal is a path of over 600 kilometers traced following the studies of archaeologists Biagio Pace and Giovanni Uggeri who identified a network of Sicilian Transversal from the Greek period. The route once connected the locality of Kamarina to the main Greek, indigenous and Punic cities of eastern and western Sicily, like Mozia. The Transversal was born as a route to transport goods and basic necessities such as salt, wheat, oil, wine, honey and sulfur and constituted a main infrastructural artery.

flows and in which a variety of plant and animal elements could be found. The aim of the project is therefore the design of a temporary space for events that respect the territory and at the same time respect the principles of environmental and climatic sustainability of the *Green Deal*.<sup>2</sup>



Fig. 4. Plan of Sicily and ancient sicilian transversal, LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021

### ABOVE THE CLOUDS: A FILM SCRIPT FOR THE BOLOGNETTA VALLEY<sup>3</sup>

The project developed as part of the Winter Workshop “Cinema Paradise CAMPUS\_Asia: SUAE\_Asia 2021” poses the hypothesis of the possibility of defining a relationship between natural elements and technological features of the project through the device of *performance*.

In order to emphasize the desire to restart, after the forced sanitary emergency, a new season of events dedicated to the *en plein air* exhibition -between cinema and performing arts- the natural place of the cavea of the San Nicola Waterfall was selected as a metatheatrical scenario of a new imaginary setting. In this way, we as a team have used this occasion as a way to compare different ideas for a project of enhancement related to the theme of the places of cinema in Sicily, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Academy Award to Maestro Giuseppe Tornatore.

Therefore, the natural site constitutes a *continuum* of the physical and symbolic narration of a specific event that aims, on the one hand, to celebrate the places of cinema, and on the other, to stress the specificities of the place. The choice of representing a dreamlike and fantastic imaginary, precisely in the place of San Nicola waterfalls in the Bolognetta Valley (Sicily), underlines the desire to relate the presence of man in the natural environment to the

<sup>2</sup> The European Green Deal is a set of policy initiatives by the European Commission with the overarching aim of making Europe climate neutral in 2050. An impact assessed plan will also be presented to increase the EU’s greenhouse gas emission reductions target for 2030 to at least 50% and towards 55% compared with 1990 levels. On 15 January 2020, the European Parliament voted to support the deal as well, with requests for higher ambition.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is to be attributed (only for the scope of scientific evaluation) to the PhD Candidate Bianca Andaloro.

performing and cinematographic arts. The project stages a metatheatrical imagery like an opera *libretto*. The ancient Greek theatrical tradition, which in Sicily reached wide diffusion in the Hellenic period and which today is part of the current local cultural tradition, represents the theme of the project, subverting the space and time of the performance. Here to guide the viewer, the myth of Nature and the Harvest, the Greek goddess Demeter observes the flow of events and seals the pact between man and nature.



Fig. 5. Above the clouds (libretto's cover), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021

The staged event is scheduled for a special day in which two favorable conditions occur: the full moon and the week of the Summer Solstice. This day corresponds to 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021 and only fifteen people will be able to take part to the event. The project requires the exclusive use of ephemeral elements and materials that (re)create the backdrops of the scenes –as if it can integrate with the natural context- that can be easily disassembled after the event. The access to the site is envisaged by the project from a parking lot located along Strada Provinciale 134, not far from the town of Bolognetta. From here, a pedestrian path winds along the valley of the Milicia river which leads the participants to the cave and waterfall of San Nicola, running parallel to the watercourse. The path is the main key to understand a part of the event, through an experiential journey that guides visitors and immerses them in a natural environment. In fact, along the way, the visitor comes into contact with the elements of the biodiversity of the place that contribute to define the dreamlike imagination until the end of the way, when they reach the waterfall.



Fig. 6. Site plan, LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021

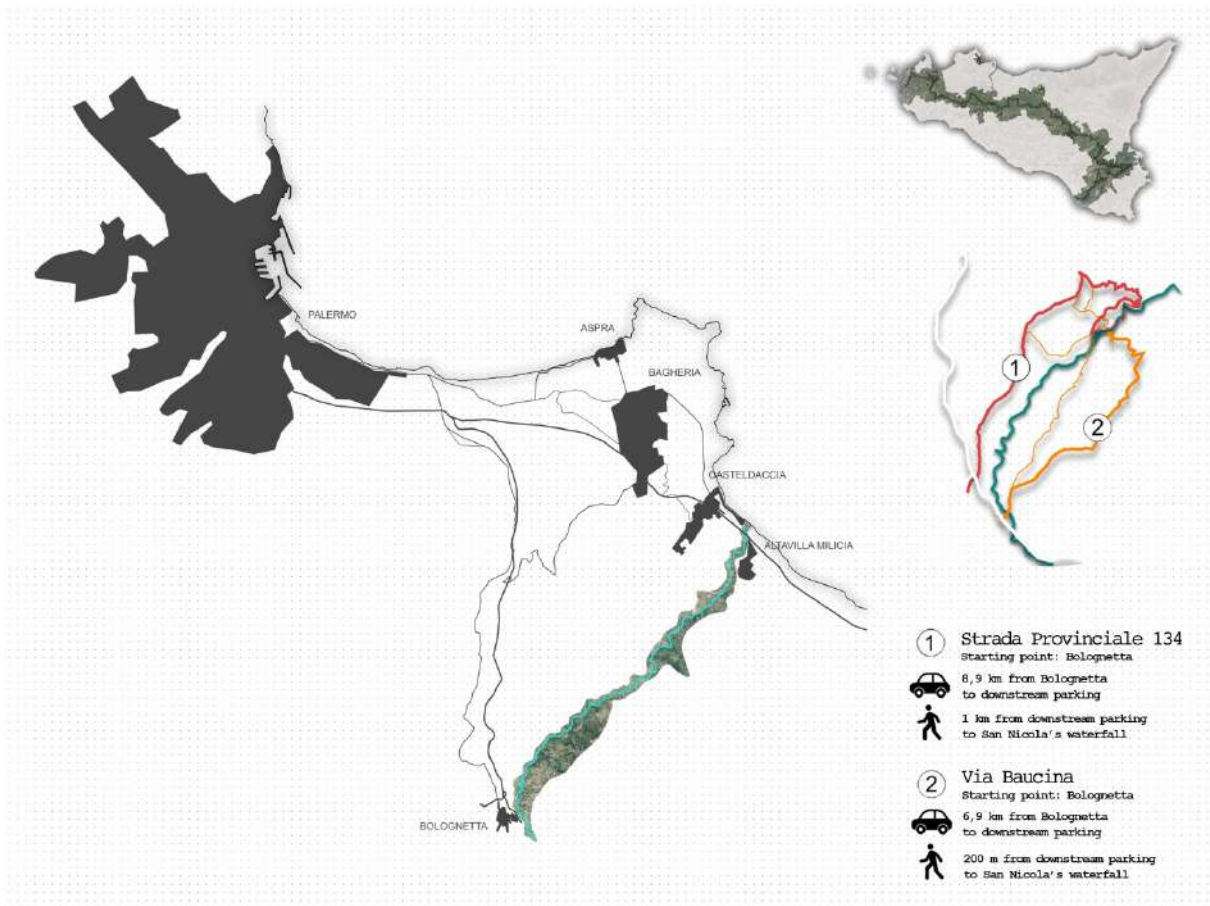


Fig. 7. Site plan and directions, LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021



Fig. 8. Above the clouds (Sections of the site), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021



Fig. 9. Above the clouds (Sections of the site), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021

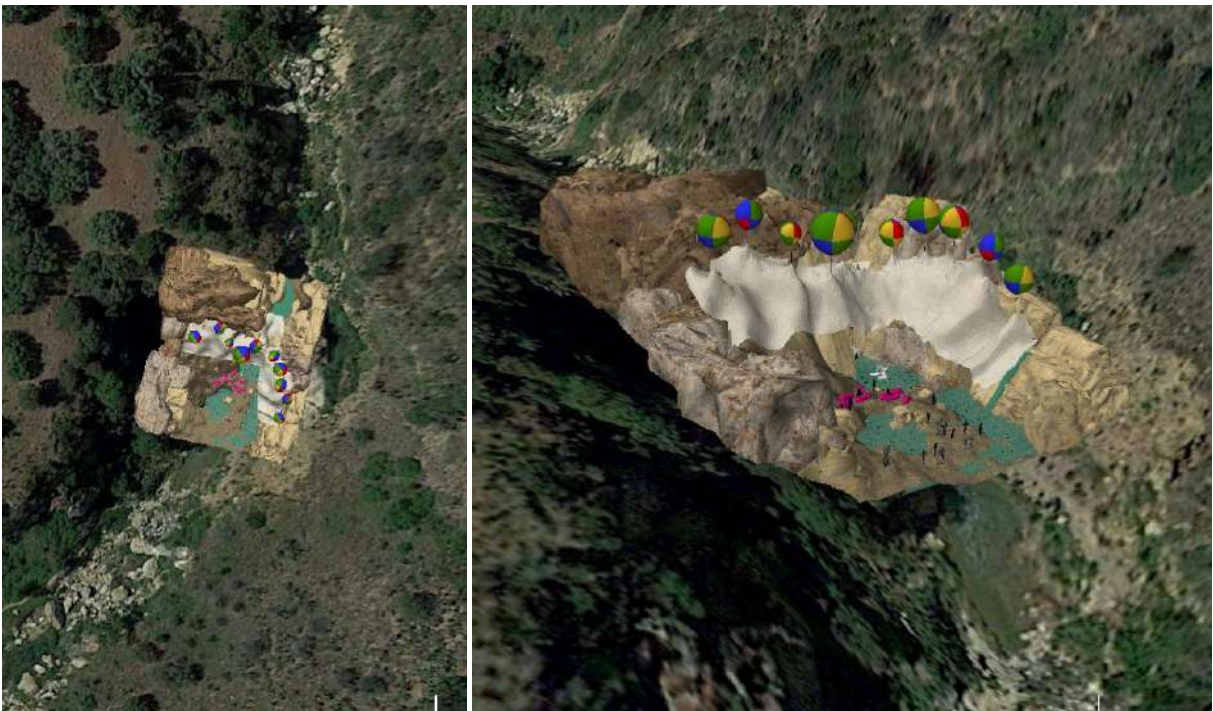


Fig. 10~11. Above the clouds (3D model imported in Google Earth), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021





Fig. 12. Above the clouds (Daylight scene: Fellinian juggling), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021



Fig. 13. Above the clouds (Nightlight scene: Cinema paradise), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021



Fig. 14. Above the clouds (materials of the project), LabCity Architecture, DARCH Unipa, 2021

Once at the cavea, the event stages two key moments that highlight the peculiarities of the place and emphasize the multi-temporal character of the project. Two performances are represented here, the first that takes place during the daylight and the second that is scheduled from sunset until late evening. On a hand, the daytime event consists of a juggling show that physically represents some scenes from the film “Clown” by the Maestro director Federico Fellini; on the other, the night event, reminding the space of the Greek tragedy representation, is dedicated to the projection a film festival dedicated to Maestro Giuseppe Tornatore. Therefore, the temporary project sets many mobile elements placed in front of the waterfall, consisting of soft ropes and inflatable cushions for the spectators to watch the show standing or seated. The juggling takes place before lunch and an happy-hour, in order to allow people to spend the whole day in the shelter of the vegetation and in a convivial way.

The film is screened at sunset on a large canopy suspended by inflatables balloons anchored to the ground. They build a temporary cover on which people can watch the film festival, lying on long inflatable cushions. It is a *plug-in* that on the one hand evokes the well-known scenarios of Archigram; on the other it reconstructs the imagery of a *pièce* to suggest the spectators that the idea of estrangement that defines the dreamlike horizon of the project. The ground is also designed to place small artificial photovoltaic lights, a metaphor for fireflies in the night camps. In this way, the expressive potential of cinema is emphasized, as well as its potentiality of building a sense of community and man’s closeness to nature.

The event comes to an end by retracing the path in reverse under the starry sky illuminated by the full moon. Through the journey the visitor can go through the different scenes in his memory, recreating this unique, original and unrepeatable show. Only the narrative, as an evocative element of this place, can bring an added value to these territories of the small towns, aiming to initiate renewed processes of cultural and human regeneration.

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