

Chapter 21

Digital Explorations in Archive Drawings: A Project for Cannaregio Ovest in Venice by Luciano Semerani, 1978

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ABSTRACT

The chapter shows some of the outcomes of a research project begun in 2021 in collaboration with the Archivio Progetti Iuav of Venice, with the aim of disseminating the drawings, documents, and projects preserved. On the basis of the documentary collection including pieces, projects, models, together with a conspicuous repository of photographs and reproductions, the research deepens a little-explored aspect of an unbuilt Venice, circumscribing the investigation scope to the 20th century masters of architecture who contributed in rethinking the urban form of the lagoon city, such as Luciano Semerani's project for the sestiere of Cannaregio Ovest in 1978. The discussion on the Venetian structural system, the urban trace, and the architectural configuration is re-established in a dialogue between its history and its contemporaneity. This is achieved starting from the digital models and virtual tours with in-depth texts that integrate the information actions with respect to the qualities of the architectures and urban spaces activated and consulted with the exploration of the model.

INTRODUCTION

The digitisation process of the different graphic and documentary information, preserved at the Archivio Progetti Iuav, addresses the communication of heritage, elaborating scenarios consistent with the need to promote forms of knowledge easily shared. This information can be made available on interactive online platforms, through the use of immersive techniques and technologies for data processing and restitution.

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They can combine theoretical and design aspects of the investigated drawings while providing new narrative strategies for immersive fruition.

Contextually to the fervent debate on the use of digital technologies for an increasingly open access to the cultural heritage, some outcomes of the broader research started in 2021 are shown, which saw the collaboration between the Project Support Lab of Iuav and the Archivio Progetti Iuav developed around the common objective of enhancing the documentary, graphic and photographic heritage contained therein by means of accessible, sharable and popular digital solutions. The subject of the research was the International Competition organised by Iuav in 1978¹ during which the city of Venice became a field of testing and intellectual speculation on themes such as the regeneration of historic city centres, the relationship between contemporary design and the existing fabric, the rethinking of infrastructural connections (by land and sea) between the lagoon city and the mainland, and the question of living in relation to building typology, public spaces and services.

The area of intervention concerned the sestiere of Cannaregio Ovest, which the ten protagonists of the Competition considered as a model of possibility capable of assuming a new social, economic and urban development (Figure 1). A place from which industrial and technological changes would provide interference and stimuli for a new architectural vision. The ten proposals show approaches and strategies that differ in terms of intervention scale, typological choices on architectural organisms, infrastructural network, connection (physical or visual) with the historical city, design references and fields of investigation developed.

BACKGROUND

The current reflection posed on Digital Heritage determines a constant rethinking on the ways of visualisation, communication and dissemination of cultural heritage across different research fields and disciplines “from museography to computer graphics, from archaeology to design, from art history to engineering, from archives to statistics, etc. It is therefore an overarching term, encompassing many ICT topics and heritage themes” (Pescarin, 2016, p. 1), increasingly leading to an overlap and interconnection between different knowledge. The era of large ‘digital meta-collections’ is taking shape in an increasingly massive way, bringing into its domain not only groupings of digital information pertaining to specific institutions, but also and above all their interoperability and ability to define a dissemination of knowledge increasingly relying on shared and networked exploration (Windhager et al., 2016).

Along the lines of the definitions given by UNESCO to the concepts of tangible and intangible cultural heritage (UNESCO, 2003), looking at the use and development of digital technologies for the preservation and enhancement of heritage makes it possible to develop ways of accessing even those cultural assets that are difficult to reach or even just to consult, based on the assumption that preserving heritage means documenting, protecting, reconstructing and disseminating (Skubilewska-Paszkowska et al., 2022).

There has long been talk of increasingly democratic ways of access aimed at an open science, making people increasingly aware of their heritage and thus of the need to safeguard it through participatory processes: “the application of technology in a democratic manner could refer to access to the technology for all, as well as use of the technology to actually serve democratic purposes. This prompts us [...] to consider whether the user driven approaches to the collection of digital heritage data in some ways represents the Heritage community taken control of the digital agenda” (Laing, 2020, p. 2).

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