



The Architectural and Cultural Heritage of Nisida

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Abstract. The complexity of working today in historicized contexts, rich in traces and ties of the past and strongly connected to the cultural identity of a place and a population, doesn't allow to act according to predetermined and repeatable techniques. An action that necessarily follows a well-structured analysis, aimed to the knowledge of the place, which can guide, once reached a profound knowledge, to the project strategies. The research work developed in Naples, Italy, on the small island of Nisida, a jewel of Neapolitan cultural and landscape heritage, which has always been cut out from the dynamics of the city, is based on a careful historical, landscape and architectural analysis aimed at recognizing the identity elements of the place, to overcome the critical issues and to bring out the potential. The study is in order to identify the actions essential to reconnect the island to the city, looking for solutions that promote better accessibility and use of these spaces characterized by a strong harmony between environmental and human factors. Trying to define a possible intervention strategy for the purpose of obtaining an image of the new in close relation with the existing heritage for its valorization and rethinking about new uses in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Paesaggio · Città · Patrimonio culturale

1 Introduction

1.1 Framing

The island of Nisida, is not accessible and so one of the unknown places on the west coast of Naples. Also with Procida, Ischia and Vivara forms the archipelago of the “Isole Flegree”. Placed between the Gulf of Naples and Pozzuoli, it acts as a physical connection between two different territorial systems. The island was born of many eruptions of a volcanic cone independent of the ancient eruptive cycle of the Campi Flegrei and has been transformed by the phenomenon of bradisismo like the whole area (Fig. 1).

The morphological configuration of the area appears today strongly marked by the action of atmospheric phenomena that have stressed the location and defined the new layout (Fig. 2).



Fig. 1. Carte du Golfe de Pouzzoles avec une partie des Champs Phlégréens De La Vega 1778



Fig. 2. The system of Campi Flegrei, 2016

In spite of its close to the city, the island represents an exceptionality for the richness in archaeological, naturalistic and anthropic signs in a territory now saturated and full of buildings and speculations at the expense of the landscape quality. A unique place, inaccessible to most people because of the restrictive functions that it has always hosted, as the historical analysis will show.

1.2 Historical Analysis

The origins of the island can be identified according to Victor Berard in Greek literature; the French writer, sure of the existence of the places Homer writes about, recognizes it as Nesis, the small island where Ulysses landed before reaching the cave of Polyphemus, identified in the cave of Seiano not far away from Nisida.

Leaving aside the mythological aspects, it is historically proven the presence of the Romans by the various literary testimonies: from the *Philippicae* of Cicero to the *Naturalis Historia* of Pliny and the verses of Stazio that praise the environmental and landscape beauties.

The island became part of the iconography of the Phlegrean fields starting from the 16th century with the late 16th century engraving by Mario Cartaro (*Ager Puteolanus* 1584), taken up by Claudio Duchetti in the *Ager Puteolanus* (1586), where for the first time Nisida is represented with the coastal watchtower made by Don Pedro di Toledo, (Viceroy of Naples between 1532 and 1553) an important and characteristic architectural element represented almost the same size as the island itself.

The representation of Giovanni Carafa, Duke of Noja, by Giovanni Carafa Topographic map of the city of Naples and its outlines (1750–1775), which accurately depicts the weaving of the various routes that lead from the valley side to the ridge, and then go down along the Porto Paone's slope where there's the large factory of the "Lavanderia Borbonica": a fascinating example of industrial archaeology, characterized by the typical Neapolitan yellow tuff, which still preserves a complex hydraulic system of the washtubs.

Important changes took place with the works for the construction of the tourist port by A. Maiuri, with the connection to the Chiuppino rock; the intervention included the construction of the east and west piers, with the implementation of the buildings on the dock. The complex was designed as a complex with all the functions necessary to transform the island into a seaport for "suspicious ships", with dormitories for men and women, hospital, custom duties, stocks. At the beginning of the 19th century the tower was transformed into a Penal Baths. The establishment of a prison structure on the island of Nisida, and especially inside the tower, was the result of logistical reasons for its strategic position; a place not accessible, but at the same time easy to reach from the city center.

In the 1930s during the Fascist regime, started the construction of the "Colonia Penitenziaria Agricola Minorile" and was built the connection between the small island of "Chiuppino" and the mainland.

Nisida is no longer an island and its image has changed forever: the tower, an identifying element characterizing the place, which for centuries had represented a symbol for the Flegrea coast was partially torn down to make space for others heterogeneous architecture. The colony was made up of 7 pavilions placed on different terracing along the ridge, some of them built and the others as open spaces where the different activities took place, connected by the new street that leads to the various terraces at different heights, until the southern area dedicated to the agricultural colony: four stalls and a silo with plots of land where olive trees and vineyards were cultivated (Fig. 3).

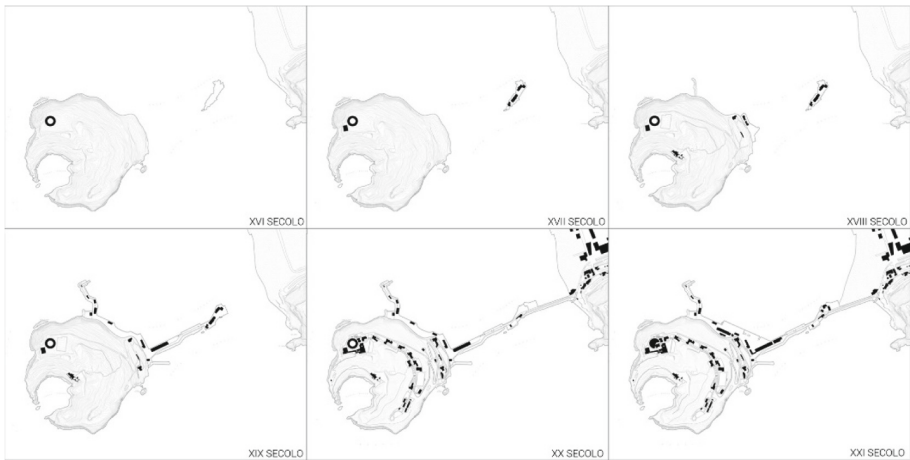


Fig. 3. Elaboration of historical developments.

1.3 The Island Today

Today the island is in a state of degradation; the concentration of the building in the basement of the island and in the acropolic part has denied a complete fruition, leading to the disuse and following end of part of paths that connected the different areas.

Although the historical analysis helps us to understand how the condition of Nisida has changed over the centuries with respect to the context and to better clarify its status, the strong contradiction that lives is dictated by the denial of that physical continuity due to the construction of the connecting pier that could have encourage an easier use of the island, denied instead by the strongly restrictive function of the prison.

Nisida hosts today the Juvenile Prison and its knowledge is limited to a few: a factor, however, that has allowed the preservation of a good part of the patrimony of the island, values that it would be right to share with the community for the spread of knowledge.

It is clear that the island has always been foreign to the logic of transformation of the city, and today, both iron and road transport passes close to the entrance to the pier without going through it, as if to deny the physical continuity of the island with the near context. The area is full of points of naturalistic, landscape and archaeological interest, such as the Grotta di Seiano, the Parco Archeologico Ambientale del Pausilypon, the Bay of Trentaremi and the Parco Sommerso di Gaiola, with which it could be linked. Despite the realization of the connection to the mainland, Nisida has always been the seat of the juvenile penitentiary institution that limits its accessibility. The research work explore a solution of coexistence between the reformatory, which over time has guaranteed the protection of the place from speculations, and the creation of a natural park, which would allow the opening to the community and the valorization of the heritage.

1.4 Intervention

The study aim to identifying the actions necessary to reconnect the island to the urban fabric, linking it to the points of interest that characterize the immediate context and looking for solutions that promote better accessibility and use of these spaces characterized by a strong interpenetration between environmental and human factors.

The importance of the study of the place for the knowledge of the events that have occurred, to understand and discover the traces the identity characters, to be re-interpreted in the contemporary world to define a design of the new in strict continuity with the past and the morphological and orographic features of the site.

The complexity of working today in historicized contexts, rich in traces and ties of the past, strongly connected to the cultural identity of a place and a population, doesn't allow to act according to predetermined and repeatable techniques. The research work carried out in Naples, Italy, on the small island of Nisida, a jewel of Neapolitan cultural heritage and landscape, which has always been on the edge of the city's development, is based on a careful analysis aimed at recognizing the identity elements of the place, the critical issues to be overcome and the potential to emerge.

The redrawing of the historical evolution aimed to better know the place and the facts is a necessary tool to achieve a quality of the project and its condition over the time by restoring interrupted movements, working on the paths, restoring old visual relationships and creating new ones.

The project focuses on the reading of the historical traces of the natural landscape, trying to keep together the artificial and natural conditions with a measured and prompt intervention to preserve the place and set new conditions, rediscovering all the paths to connect the island from east to west and from the base to the crown (vedi Fig. 4).

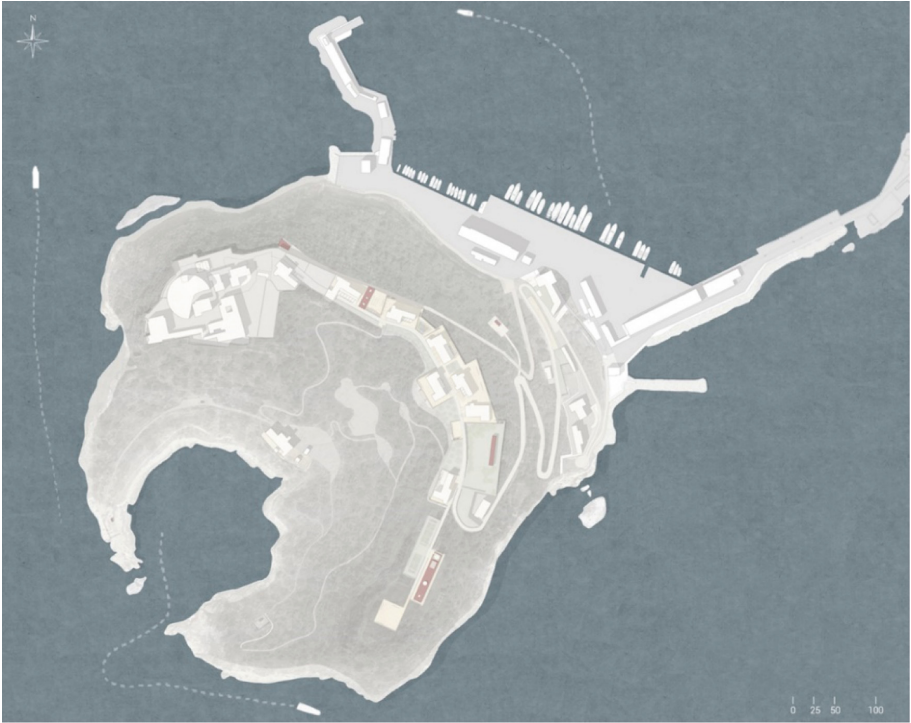


Fig. 4. Nisida: the masterplan

The strategy starts from the large scale to reconnect the island to the city by identifying the parking areas and activating a road transport system that connect the public transport system and the island. On a smaller scale, closely linked to the use of the island itself, the intervention is structured in three actions: the ascent up to the crown and the way down towards Porto Paone, through the reactivation of some historical routes and the project of a new system of terraces that redefine the limits of the crown and the new front on the city.

The major building developed on the ridge can be divided into three macro areas: the first plant to the north, in an acropolis position, the seat of the “Istituto Penale per Mi-norenni” with the part of the Tower (partially demolished during the fascist era) and the buildings around it; along the ridge there are a series of terraces with different heights that hosts the pavilions of the ‘30s, thus creating views sometimes towards the sea, sometimes towards the city; to the south, in the final part of the crown, there are a silo and a series of stalls and sheds that are part of the former agricultural colony, which are in a state of strong degradation and abandonment.

The area of the prison is bounded by the prison enclosure and it’s a not accessible area intended for the penitentiary. It was therefore decided to try to act on the edge of this boundary by giving a new sense to these spaces and the use of the island to the community. From the access to the island, there are two roads that can be followed: one is via Nisida, a road that leads to the top by car, the other the so-called Bourbon route

that coasts the port and is now in disuse. The project of reconnection between the routes comes to life just at the first bends, where the two roads are flanked: the integration of Via Nisida/“Bourbon route” defines a new sense to the experience of enjoying the architectural promenade. The institution of the juvenile penitentiary bounded by high fence walls that exclude the old track, has destined to become an aimless road, abandoned to a infesting vegetation that has hidden its traces and made it lose the original meaning of reconnection with the Tower.

In the project it becomes a new viewpoint over the Gulf of Pozzuoli, a route capable of offering different experiences and atmospheres and at the same time “revive lost relationships” (A. Ferlenga, 2014).

The new project is composed of a few new buildings that become in addition to the system of terraces and paths the new structure of the crown. At the ends of the route there are two panoramic terraces that form the beginning and end of the walking. The first is a “belvedere” rest area that is located on the Bourbon route, at the point where the prison fence wall now stands, which has effectively excluded the old path. In the project, the belvedere over the Gulf of Pozzuoli becomes the new northern limit of the crown.

The Bourbon track borders on a small space, now used as a car park, at a different height, so the idea to make it the new access point to the crown through a system of stairs inserted in the slip of the walls containing the terraces. In the project, the new access square becomes the first space for parking and reception with a small bar/restaurant designed transversally to the street and the existing pavilions, marking the new limit with respect to the institute, thus maintaining the full-empty rhythm of the existing terraces, marking the will to be something else and acting as a filter between the ascent and way down where the anthropic and natural conditions are better mixed (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. Nisida: the axonometric. The new sequence of public spaces

From here starts the new public path that connects, through a complex system of ramps and stairs, the various heights of the terraces, produced different levels of walkway and designing a new geometry of the ground: a large sequence of public spaces, which allows a continuous use of the horizontal levels and as you cross, the point of view changes, setting up continuous relationships with the landscape and the city.

The desire is to hold the variation of the full and empty terraces, redefining the spaces between the buildings in order to valorize the existing architecture; this process allows a complete perception of the context limiting the difference between the front and the back of buildings. Through a research about the local essences, the unbuilt terraces become thematic gardens with Mediterranean flora.

The project is consists of simple elements, the planes and the wall that contains existing and project terracing, which redesigns the space between the buildings already present and the new front on the city. A wall that defines the morphology of the upper terraces, hosting small ramps and stairs that connect and offer panoramic views of the city and the landscape (Fig. 6).

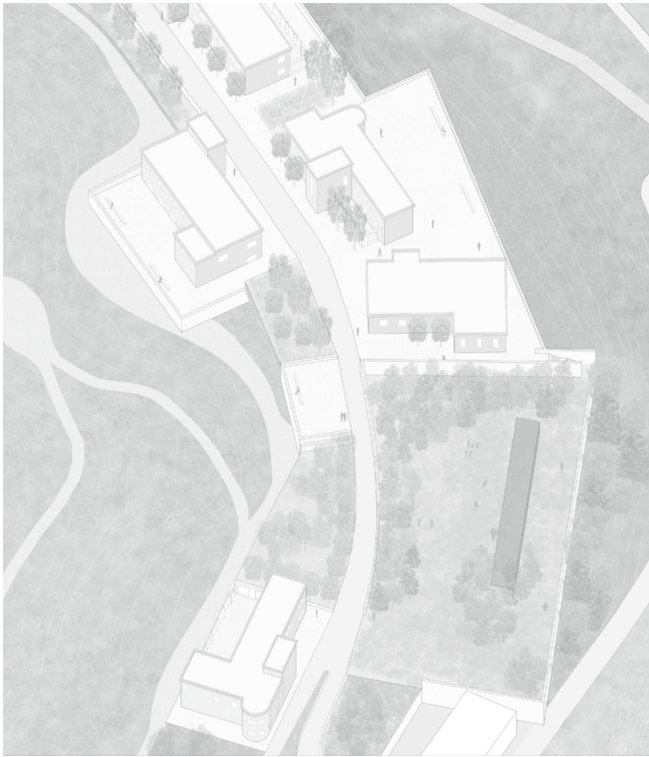


Fig. 6. Nisida: the axonometric. The new sequence of public spaces

At the end of the path, where once there was the agricultural colony, an area rich in vineyards and olive groves that today is in a state of abandonment. A new small restaurant built on the edge of the old grain silo, with annexed oil mill and can-tina will be a place to involve young prisoners in work activities aimed at social reintegration (Fig 7).



Fig. 7. Nisida: the axonometric. The new sequence of public spaces

The aim is to follow the local agricultural tradition, implementing the olive trees and vineyards. The restaurant is characterized by a wall as element that includes together the pre-existence of the granile establishing a continuous dialogue between the “old and new”.

The different conditions between the spaces and their function are clear through the articulated section.

Proceeding along the path you will reach the final limit of the crown: a large belvedere, a square terrace, empty space that symbolically opposes the great weight left by the tower, which allows a view of the great Bay of Naples. An element that rises slightly from the ground touching, along the perimeter, the infesting vegetation (Fig. 8).

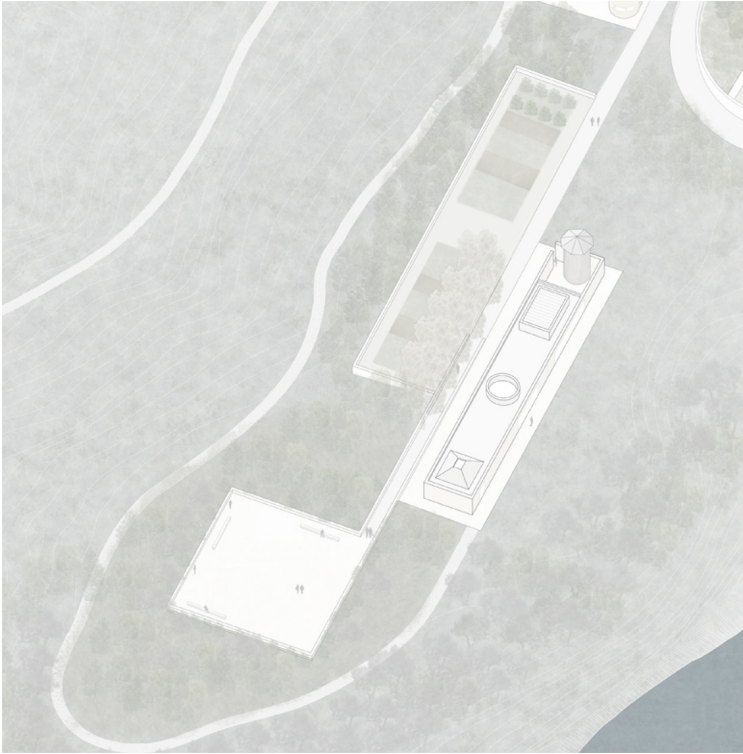


Fig. 8. Nisida: the axonometric. The new belvedere and the restaurant

The design of the new, although in close relationship with the existing, responds to a clear geometry a sequence of planes kept together by an articulated system of ramps and stairs that solves the discontinuity of the place and defines a system of public space where paved spaces alternate with gardens, rest area, visual point that set up visual relations with the landscape and the city.

The project must both make us recognize the traces, often hidden, of places rich in memories and identities, and be able to accommodate new uses of urban space. This small intervention tries to connect all the existing buildings to generate a new public path with the purpose of gaining an architectural image of the new in close relationship with nature, trying to continue the lessons of the past and build to valorize the existing conditions and respond to the necessities of contemporaneity.

1.5 Conclusion

The proposed intervention looks for a strong dialogue with the context, through an architecture that measures itself with the place, that intervenes when necessary to restore obscured relationships and interrupted movements, that is able to link fragments of the natural, landscape, cultural heritage making them accessible and part of city life.

The exceptionality of Nisida lies in the synthesis between human and natural values, a condition that must be preserved and passed on to future generations. The presence of the prison is evaluated in this case as an opportunities rather than a restriction.

The project aims to offer an alternative to the exodus of these places, involving their integration into the urban processes from which they have been totally cut off for years and designing new transformative scenarios. It is undeniable the strategic value of the island of Nisida for the entire metropolitan area of Naples as a connection between parts of the territory, turning its status from a forbidden place to a naturalistic oasis open to the city.

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