



MEMORY IN STONE

From Ruin to Reflection: Exploring Spirituality Through Architecture

Helen Rasheed
Chalmers School of Architecture
Department of Architecture & Civil Engineering
Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability
Master Thesis 2026
Supervisor: Walter Unterrainer
Examiner: Paula Femenias

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Through Architecture*

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Abstract

Reuse of forgotten heritage is another side of saving a culture, identity and the history of a place. This cultural building heritage gives the opportunity to relate to the past in order to understand the present and dream about the future.

This thesis aims to investigate how to save the memory and the story of the remaining stones for a ruined church in Italy. To reuse it as a spiritual space in a modern context, and a place for meditation, reflection, and spiritual dialogue. Additionally, integrated into the surrounding natural and historical landscape along the ancient Via Flaminia Minor. The thesis will be a storytelling for the ruin and its heritage to wake up its history and the importance behind the place.

Social and cultural sustainability is an essential element of this research, therefore the thesis explores how the adaption and preservation of the ruin of Santa Maria Di Settefonti church can influence the community and people's appreciation and realization of heritage and historical importance.

The study will incorporate case studies to examine spatial qualities and design elements in selected existing projects. These insights will be complemented by a review of relevant literature, which will provide a theoretical framework and support the translation of findings into concrete design strategies. Together, this process will inform the development of a well integrated project proposal.

Keywords: Historical buildings, Ruin, Cultural Heritage, Adaptive Reuse, Preservation & Spirituality.

Glossary

Ruin: A ruin is the remaining part of a building that has been destroyed or has gradually collapsed over time, and no longer functions as it originally did. In an architectural context, ruins holds cultural, historical, and identity related value, as they reflect and communicate the story of what once existed.

(Slessor. C, 2017)

Adaptive Reuse: Adaptive reuse refers to the process of giving new life to abandoned or underused buildings by adapting them to meet current needs through preservation, adaptation, or conservation. It is both a design strategy and a sustainability approach, as it extends the life cycle of buildings, reduces demolition waste, and preserves embodied cultural and material value.

(Yazdani Mehr. S, 2019)

The adaptive reuse of cultural heritage: It's ensuring that cultural values are not compromised during the process of adaptation. When properly planned and carefully evaluated, it can contribute to social well-being, environmental improvement, and economic development, thereby supporting the sustainable development of cities.

(Rönn & Danielson, 2020)

AUTHOR'S BACKGROUND



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ABOUT AUTHOR

I am deeply interested in historic heritage buildings that carry a rich history, as they represent the remaining memory of past era shaped by important values and meanings that should not be forgotten.

Throughout my academic journey, I developed a strong interest in abandoned historic places and in the subtle details that can significantly shape how a place is experienced. At the same time, I discovered my ability to approach design challenges with both skills and creativity. Additionally, I believe in the role of architecture in combining beauty with functionality to create meaningful spaces that serve both individuals and communities.

EDUCATION

September 2024 - June 2026

M.Sc - Architecture & Building Design for Sustainability
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- Courses:
- Key projects for sustainable development in a local context
 - Prototypes and assemblages
 - Integrated sustainable building design, architects

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PURPOSE AND AIM

The aim of this thesis is to investigate how memory and identity of the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti church can be preserved and reused through a design strategy that supports social and cultural sustainability, enhancing the value of its stone. The study examines how architectural interventions can protect the material originality and symbolic meaning of the ruin while ensuring its continued existence in a modern context, with attention to the cultural and historical values embedded in the existing structure.

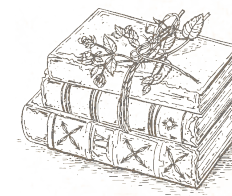
Grounded in adaptive reuse of ruin theory and principles of sustainable transformation, the project explores how the integration of new architectural elements can maintain its character and integrity. The proposal aims to enhance the architectural qualities, using architectural storytelling to communicate memory and significance. Through a careful balance between preservation and minimal intervention, the transformation will not be as a replacement, but as a continuation of the dialogue between past and present, creating a reflective, meditative and meaningful space for public use.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

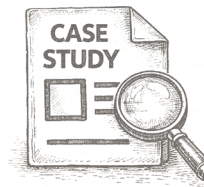
The thesis is expected to result in an exploration of the historical and cultural significance of the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti church, through a framework that highlights its memory, identity, and architectural value. The research will include a documented theoretical foundation and relevant case studies addressing ruin, heritage conservation, and spirituality.

In addition to the analytical work, the thesis will produce a detailed conceptual architectural design proposal for the preservation of the ruin. The design outcome will be presented through drawings, diagrams, maps, physical and digital models that illustrate the changing of the site and the integration of new elements within the historic essence. These interventions will support the long term accessibility of the site, reinforcing its role as a space for reflection, engagement, cultural and historical continuity.

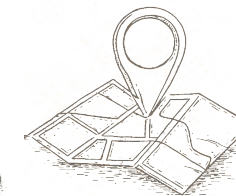
Methods & Tools



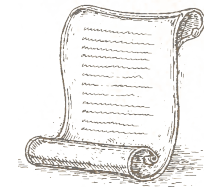
Theoretical
Research



Case Studies
Analysis



Site Investigation
+Site Visit



Survey &
Interview



Architectural
Design

This thesis is conducted as research for a design strategy and an architectural investigation. It employs a qualitative, design oriented research to explore how the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti can be reused, while preserving its cultural and historical significance. The methodology combines theoretical research, case study analysis, site visit and investigation, survey and interviews, and architectural design exploration.

Theoretical Framework

Is a review of literature related to adaptive reuse, ruin, heritage protection, and the sustainable transformation of historical buildings. AI tools were also used to assist with grammar checking and to improve the clarity and flow of the text.

Case Studies

It repurposed historic and religious buildings to understand different strategies for integrating new architectural interventions within existing heritage contexts.

Site Visit & Context Analysis

Investigation of the spatial qualities of the ruin and its relationship with the surrounding landscape. This analysis includes photographic documentation and surrounding analysis from the site visit, available drawings, and contextual research to better understand the physical and historical qualities of the site.

Survey & Interviews

Is conducted to gain insight into community perspectives and to incorporate local views into the design process.

Conceptual Architectural Proposal

The design explores how new architectural interventions can coexist with the existing ruin, preserving its historical identity while introducing a reflective space.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can new architectural interventions integrate with the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti to valorise the site and create a meditative atmosphere through spatial experience, while preserving its historical identity and heritage significance?

Sub-Questions

- 1. How can principles of adaptive reuse and heritage conservation be used in the transformation of a historic ruins?
- 2. How can reusing a historic ruin support cultural and social sustainability in a remote rural context?

Background and Prolem Description

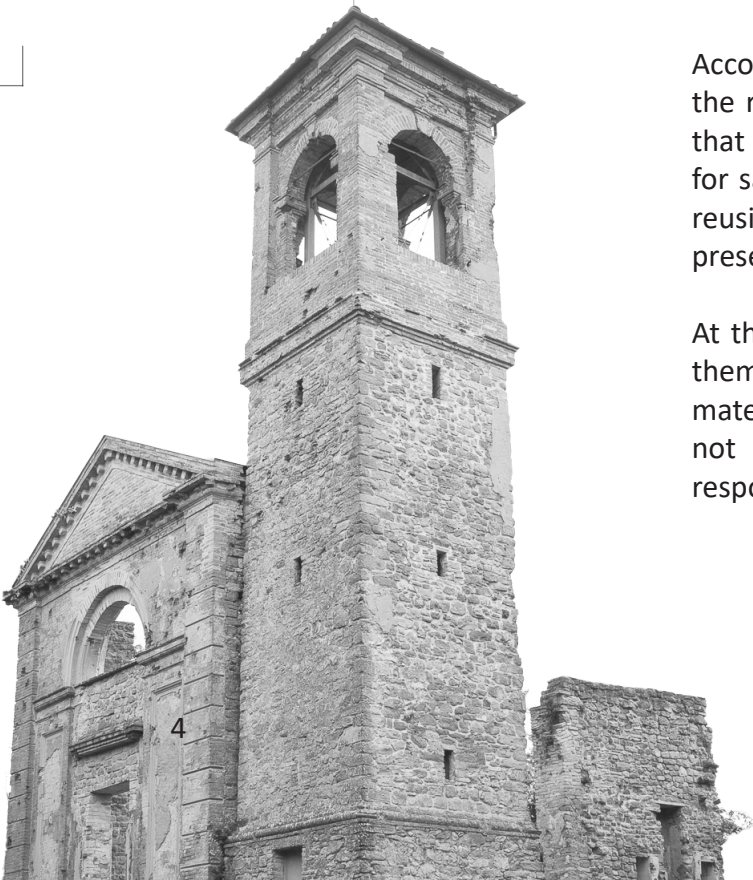
Santa Maria di Settefonti stands on the hills south of Ozzano dell’Emilia, overlooking the Idice valley and surrounded by the natural beauty of the Gessi Bolognesi and Calanchi dell’Abbadessa Park. The site reveals traces of earlier Roman and medieval religious structures, and reused Roman bricks integrated into the construction. The original layout is partly preserved in the apse and western wall, fragments of which have been recovered (Calanchi dell’Abbadessa, 2023).

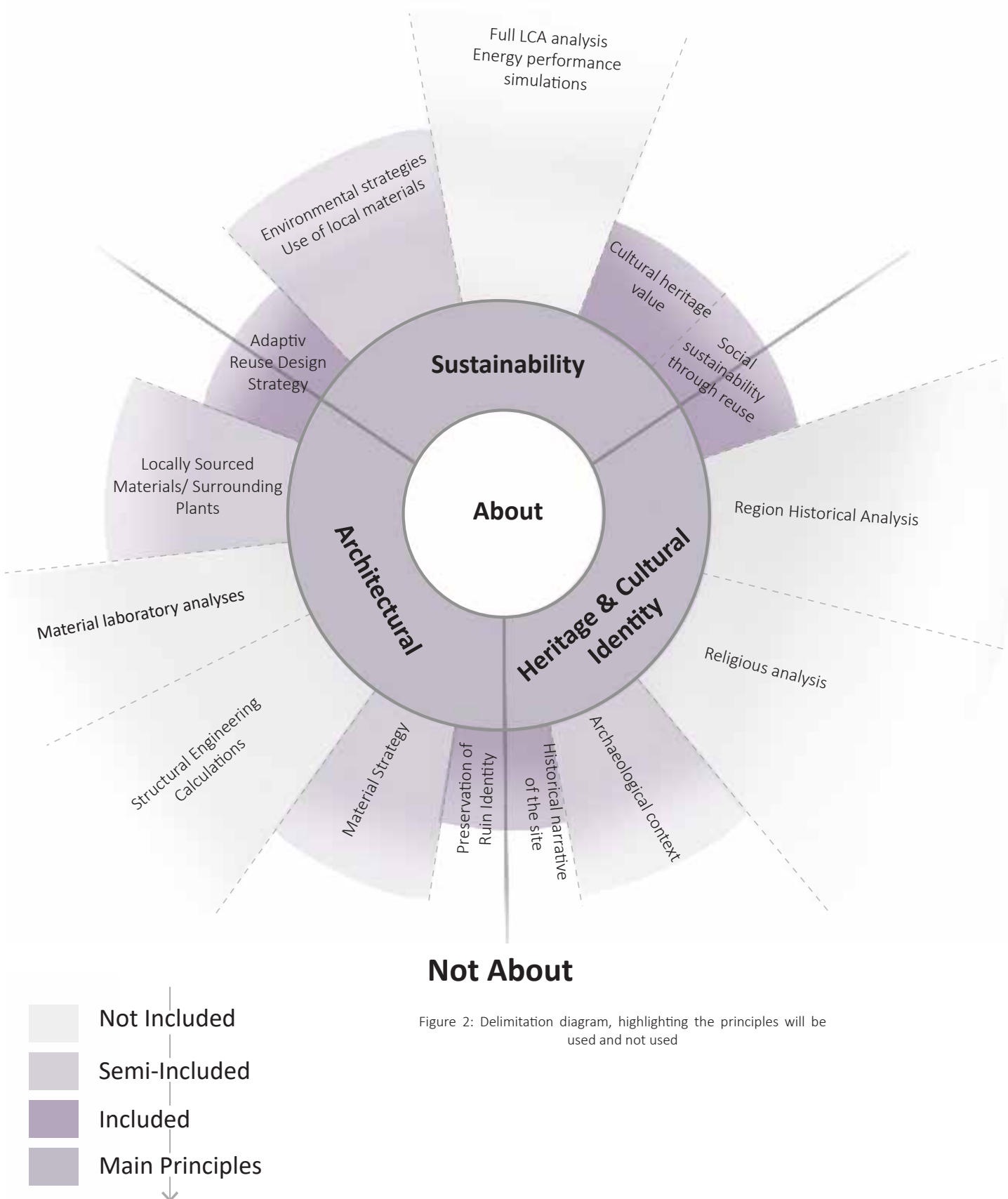
According to the company Reuse Italy (2025), this layered history of Roman, medieval, and Baroque positions Santa Maria di Settefonti as a valuable case study of a ruin in adaptive reuse and heritage preservation. The hill position is strategic and dominates the valleys below. Because of this, it has been inhabited since ancient times. The settlement known as “Castrum Septem Fontium” Castle of the Seven Springs.

Reuse Italy (2025), The original church was a Romanesque building constructed using recycled materials, including Roman-era “manubriated” bricks and blocks of selenite. In 1691, a new church was built on the remains of the previous one, preserving architectural elements of the original structure. It featured a single vaulted nave and a bell tower atached to the façade. A drawing from the half of the Nineteenth century shows the church, with a bit different façade, with the bell tower on the right, the rectory on the left and a small palace on the right. During World War II, the church suffered severe damage due to bombings along the Gothic Line.

According to the company Reuse Italy (2025), if no action is taken, the ruin in Italy faces the risk of total demolition, and nothing from that period will remain. For this reason, reusing the ruin is important for saving the cultural heritage of that period. Their vision is that by reusing and adapting it, the history of the site can be enhanced and preserved, rather than lost through demolition.

At the same time, reusing existing structures instead of demolishing them aligns with sustainable architectural approaches, as it reduces material waste and extends the life of historic resources. This approach not only protects cultural heritage but also contributes to more responsible use of environmental resources.





ISSUES AND DELIMITATIONS

This thesis focuses on the architectural and cultural transformation of the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti through a design proposal. While the study is based on heritage conservation theory and principles of sustainable transformation, it is not intended to function as a technical restoration manual. Detailed structural engineering calculations, material analyses, and deep environmental performance simulations fall outside the area of this research.

The historical investigation focuses only on aspects that inform the architectural expression and spatial transformation of the site, rather than providing a complete historical or religious study of the ruin. Furthermore, the project does not extend to a broader regional planning strategy, but considerations of accessibility and visitor experience will be addressed only at the scale to support the conceptual reuse strategy.

The architectural proposal is presented as a a conceptual design supported by detailed architectural suggestions. It aims to highlight an approach to preserving and valorising the ruin and its symbolic meaning, rather than delivering a construction solution. The emphasis remains on cultural and social sustainability, with environmental strategies considered at a conceptual level to support the overall continuity between past and present.

SOFTWARE BEEN USED



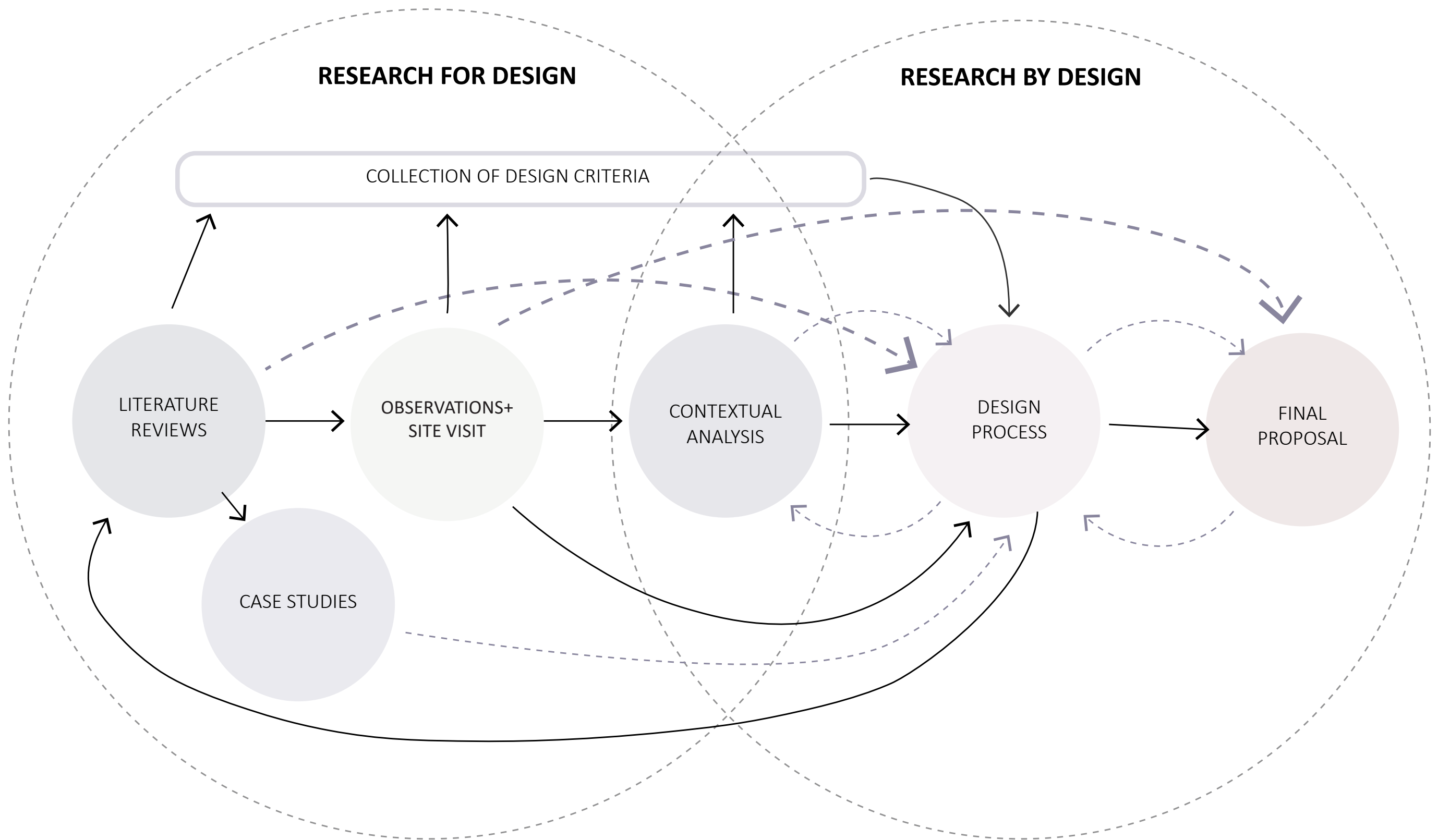


Figure 3: Process Diagram

2

Theoretical Framework



In Arab culture and its poetry ruins are very important, they are the remains of abandoned buildings and dwellings, what still stands of their traces after their inhabitants have departed (Ahmad, A.-F, 2023). They are a symbol of longing, memories, and the passage of time. For humans, ruins represent a historical record of civilizations and an emotional source that evokes nostalgia. In Arabic literature, they serve as a traditional introduction for expressing love, separation, and confronting the inevitability of the world's decline. In the medieval period, standing at the ruin was a ritual for expressing longing and nostalgia, a way of reliving memories of the past with loved ones. At the same time, it is a reflection of emotional and temporal emptiness after the strong damage that life has caused.

"I stood there, and tears from my eyes
Were flowing over its deserted dwellings.

Do you recognize the dwelling, the ruins, and the deserted remains?
They have increased the heart's sorrow despite its many afflictions.

It is the home of Asma, where she once lived,
And once, it had been a homeland for you "

The ruins are not just physical remains, they represent, Lost love, The passage of time, The disappearance of the past and emotional attachment to a place that no longer exists as it once did.

A poetry from ancient times, (Ahmad, A.-F, 2023)

According to Plevoets et al., (2019), a defining feature of a ruin is its abandonment and apparent lack of function. However, ruins are sometimes repurposed through often informal interventions characterized by minimalism and the use of recycled materials. Many countries choose to preserve the characteristics of the incomplete, rather than fully restored, structures. In this way, the reuse of ruins can serve as a bridge between the past, present, and future, allowing the material and emotions of a building to coexist into the future. They also argue that ruins lack the same soul as medieval examples and instead tend to evoke feelings of failure, abandonment, or solidity.

Plevoets et al., (2019) highlight that the ruin is not just a damaged object to be repaired. It can carry value through time, incompleteness, memory, and atmosphere. Furthermore, he sees that the ruin is a design condition, not only a conservation problem, these places have memory value and spatial value. At the same time, adaptive reuse can work to reactivate it instead of erasing it.

Van Cleempoel explains this through the idea of age value: the ruin's value is tied not to an ideal original state, but to the visible passage of time. "Reusing the ruin" can mean preserving the ruin to treat its existing spatial qualities as the starting point for a new intervention rather than restoring it to wholeness (Plevoets et al., 2019).

"Ruins are a reminder of architecture's transience, but they also embody often contested projections of meaning and memory" says Slessor (2017). Ruins have been seen as amusement, pleasure and instruction in many countries. But still there is a lot of people who call this ruin for home, at the same time it was a home for someone ones. However, the ruin reflects the history that created it. This has the effect of further impoverishing not only to the sites itself, but also the wider understanding of capital, race and history (Slessor, 2017).

In today's world, the need to safeguarded existing ruins to protect our environment not just from a sustainable aspect, but also because they carry a great historic significance behind (Plevoets et al., 2019). Furthermore, existing structures embody authenticity and the city's identity, something that is becoming more and more important in today's digital age. In addition, in a time when mass production dominates, there is a growing demand for spaces that evoke the individuality, identity and connection to what once was. Age within an object is a great value.

Spiritual Architecture

Architecture and spirituality are related ideas that have influenced human history and culture. Spiritual architecture is a design approach that evokes a sense of connection. It is a way to reconnect with the inner self and feel a deep sense of aliveness and reflect on life (Sonaye.S, 2025). It has always been a part of the civilization and for long time, it has been linked with architecture. Spirituality goes beyond the idea that they are just places for worship, they are a places to help people detach from the commercial world and makes them aware of the surroundings. This can be seen when architects talk about meaning, connection, poetics, atmosphere and beauty of a place. (Shah, 2022).

Shah (2022) also mentions that the idea behind a spiritual place is to let it communicate with us, and all we need is to listen and it will tell us how we can engage with the history, or convey a cultural context highlights today's time the idea of minimalism is very popular and it is simplifying the space and keeping it as open as possible, which allows people to be in the moment and connect with the past remaning.

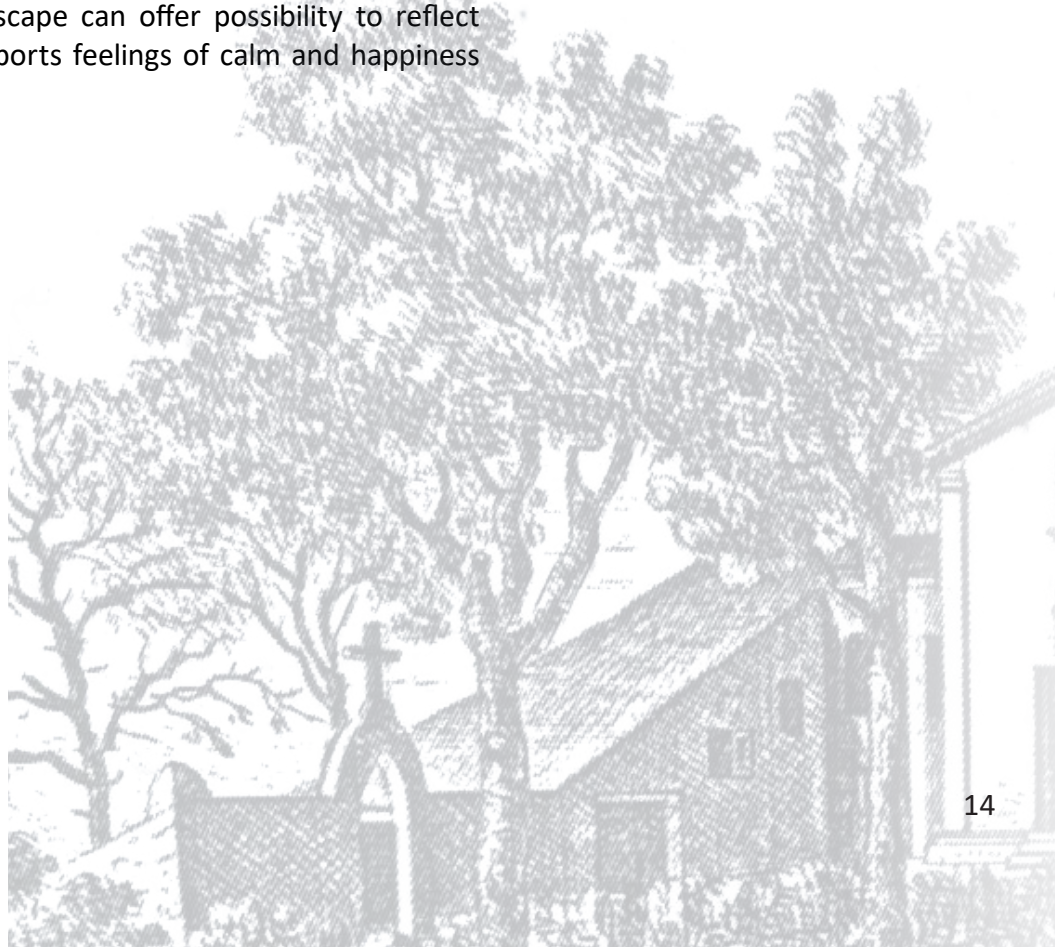
Another perspective of spiritual architecture that it is eventually about connection. This is a proof that architecture can heal, inspire and remind us of the memory and history of places (Moshe-katz, 2025). He emphasizes that a spiritual space is when time seems to pause, people lose track of hours and just live the present moment. Furthermore, to catch this timelessness is to achieve it through intention, not luxury places. Like choosing good lighting and materials to speak directly to the soul. In addition, the scale of buildings and spaces can be deeply spiritual (Moshe-katz, 2025).

In addition, some principles in spiritual architecture are cultural preservation. This can strengthen cultural identification which can benefit both people and communities. Through incorporating spiritual principles into architecture, can foster social interaction and a sense of community, and offer chances for individuals to gather and reflect. This can contribute to the development of belonging and connection that supports spiritual well-being (Sonaye, 2025).

Human presence and its relationship to the conception of place in terms of spirituality have encouraged the picture of cultural values and identity (De Marco, 2025). Religious expression is one of the cultural component supporting spirituality that is related to architectural heritage (De Marco, 2025).

De Marco (2025) Mention that another element related to spirituality in architectural heritage is landscape. It is perceived as a visual component of continuation in the meaning of an architectural site and the ecosystem between sites. The influence of architecture and landscape in preceiving and visualizing a spiritual value remains an important principle in spiritual architecture. In this way, the cultural heritage can be integrated and influence the perspectives of awareness and carrying memory around the history of sites (De Marco, 2025).

Furthermore, Sonaye highlights (2025) that integrating architectural design with spiritual principles can have a very positive effect in our lives and our mental and physical health. She emphasizes that greenery and natural light have a very relaxing impact and help lower anxiety and tension, making open spaces with a green landscape can offer possibility to reflect and meditate, which supports feelings of calm and happiness (Sonaye, 2025)



“.... it could be through discovering a hidden quiet courtyard, or a hush that falls over a chapel when people step inside, or a beautiful surprise of a window or door framing sky and tree like a living painting ”

(Moshe-katz, 2025)



Adaptive Reuse

Cultural and natural heritage is valuable resources that represent the shared memory and identity of people and societies. An important part of our common history disappears forever when it is lost through decay (Yazdani Mehr, S. 2019). In architecture, preserving these places is not only about protecting physical structures, but also about maintaining a meaningful connection between the past and the present within the built environment. Heritage buildings are evidence of traditions of a specific period of time, and the responsibility of communities is to protect these buildings.

Historic buildings are forms of cultural heritage. Due to many reasons like economic and social problems, historic buildings are threatened by progressive abandonment. Their reuse could reduce the waste produced by demolition and the embodied energy (Plevoets et al., 2019). In addition, adaptive reuse has recently become more common, and it is used as a strategy for urban development, architecture, and conservation. It has become one of the most important topics in modern architectural discussions. In a time marked by limited land resources and the continuous increase of the built environment, reconsidering how we use existing buildings is not only an option but a necessity. It is widely recognized that a limited amount of land can't support unlimited development. Therefore, future architectural practice should prioritize the reuse and transformation of existing structures before expanding into undeveloped areas (Plevoets et al., 2019).

Plevoets et al., (2019) mention, buildings that have lost their original function can be reimagined and reintegrated into the life of the community, just as objects that can be repurposed to gain new value and meaning. The process of adaptive reuse varies from project to project. However, its foundation lies in redefining function by transforming abandoned structures into spaces that once again serve social, cultural, and environmental needs.

Among the most debated examples of adaptive reuse are religious buildings. These structures, deeply rooted in spiritual and cultural symbolism, also hold strong historical and emotional value. At the same time, beyond their sacred role, they are also physical spaces that occupy valuable land within both urban and rural contexts. When such buildings are not in use, the challenge becomes how to reactivate them respectfully, preserving their heritage and atmosphere while introducing new and meaningful functions that reconnect the buildings with the community (Palaghia, 2023).

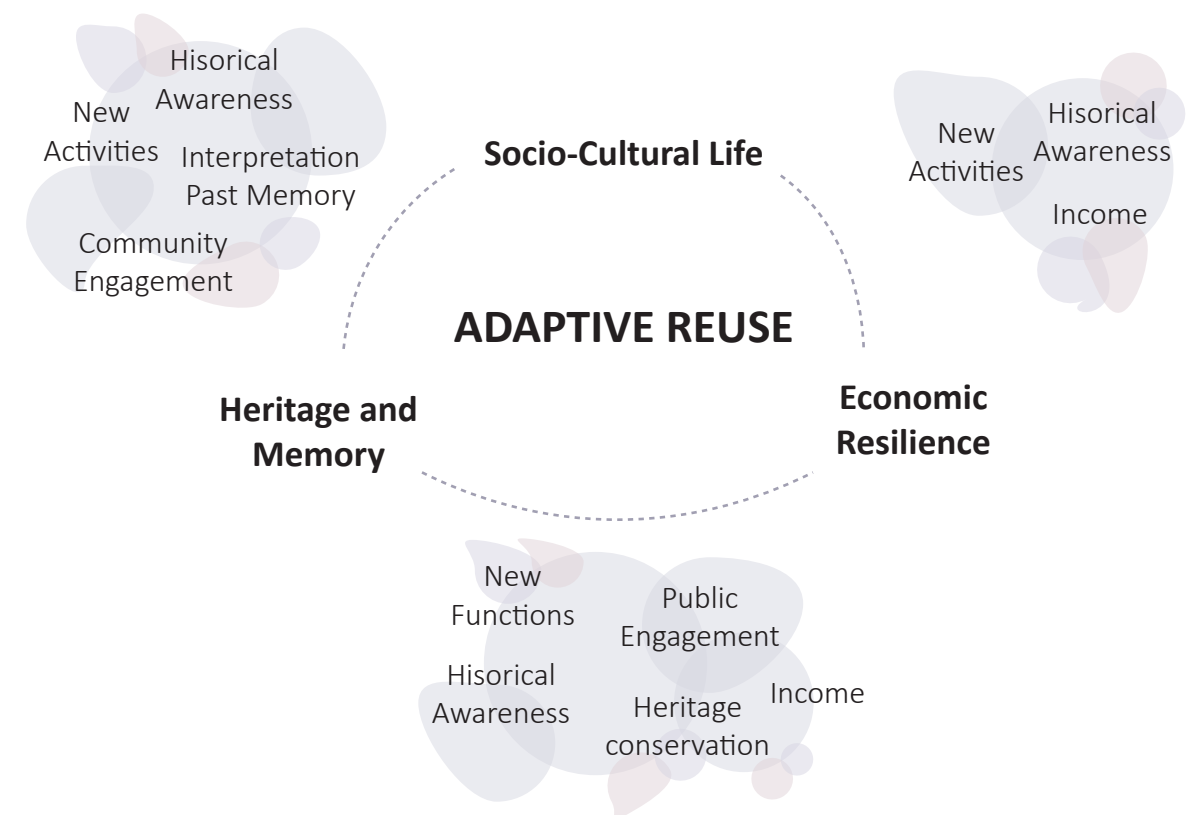


Figure 4: Adaptive Reuse Impact. By Author

“...the best means of preserving a building is to find a use for it, and to satisfy its requirements so completely that there shall be no occasion to make any changes”

Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, Viollet-le-Duc

(Yazdani Mehr, S. 2019)

Cultural Heritage Adaptive Reuse

In this context, adaptive reuse should not be understood as an act of deletion, but rather as a form of architectural continuity, a dialogue between past and present that sustains memory while allowing change (Palaghia, 2023). Across many European countries, traditional Christian communities have experienced a long term decrease in active membership, resulting in an increasing number of abandoned church buildings. Many studies focus on the cultural heritage embodied in these spiritual structures, exploring their architectural and social value within a changing societal context. While in some regions listed mosques and synagogues are also recognized as part of the shared cultural heritage, such examples remain relatively limited in Europe, highlighting the majority of Christian architecture within much of Europe’s historic built environment (Lindblad & Löfgren, 2016).

Cultural heritage adaptive reuse aims to ensure that cultural values are not damaged through the process of adaptation. Sometimes, global impact assessments lead to an underestimation of the true cultural value of heritage buildings within sustainable development frameworks. This challenge highlights the need for the use of suitable evaluation tools to support effective decision to make a processes that safeguard heritage value. In this context, the involvement of stakeholders and local communities is important to ensure that decisions align with social needs and cultural expectations (Rönn & Danielson, 2020).

Furthermore, several researchers emphasize the environmental benefits of adaptive reuse, particularly in terms of reducing energy consumption and improving life cycle performance, often assessed through Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) methodologies (Gravagnuolo, A. et al., 2024). At the international level, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) aim to decrease the emissions and global warming. The adaptive reuse and the optimized use of these historic buildings through “efficiency-renewable”, can reduce the environmental impacts of the demand for energy and materials (Jiang, L. et al., 2023)

Fusco Girard (Gravagnuolo, A. et al., 2024) further argues that the “ideal” adaptive reuse project transforms a “dead” site into a living system capable of resilience and continuous adaptation within a dynamic and changing context. However, unused historic buildings can be brought back to life by giving them new functions, which helps prevent demolition and reduces the risk of losing cultural identity.

However, throughout history, different theories of heritage conservation and restoration have emerged, generally highlighting maintenance with minimal necessary intervention. Furthermore, age value is considered an important contribution to the beauty of heritage buildings and should be preserved, as highlighted in the theory known as the “spirit of time” or “age value” (Yazdani Mehr, 2019).

Heritage Building Intervention Approaches

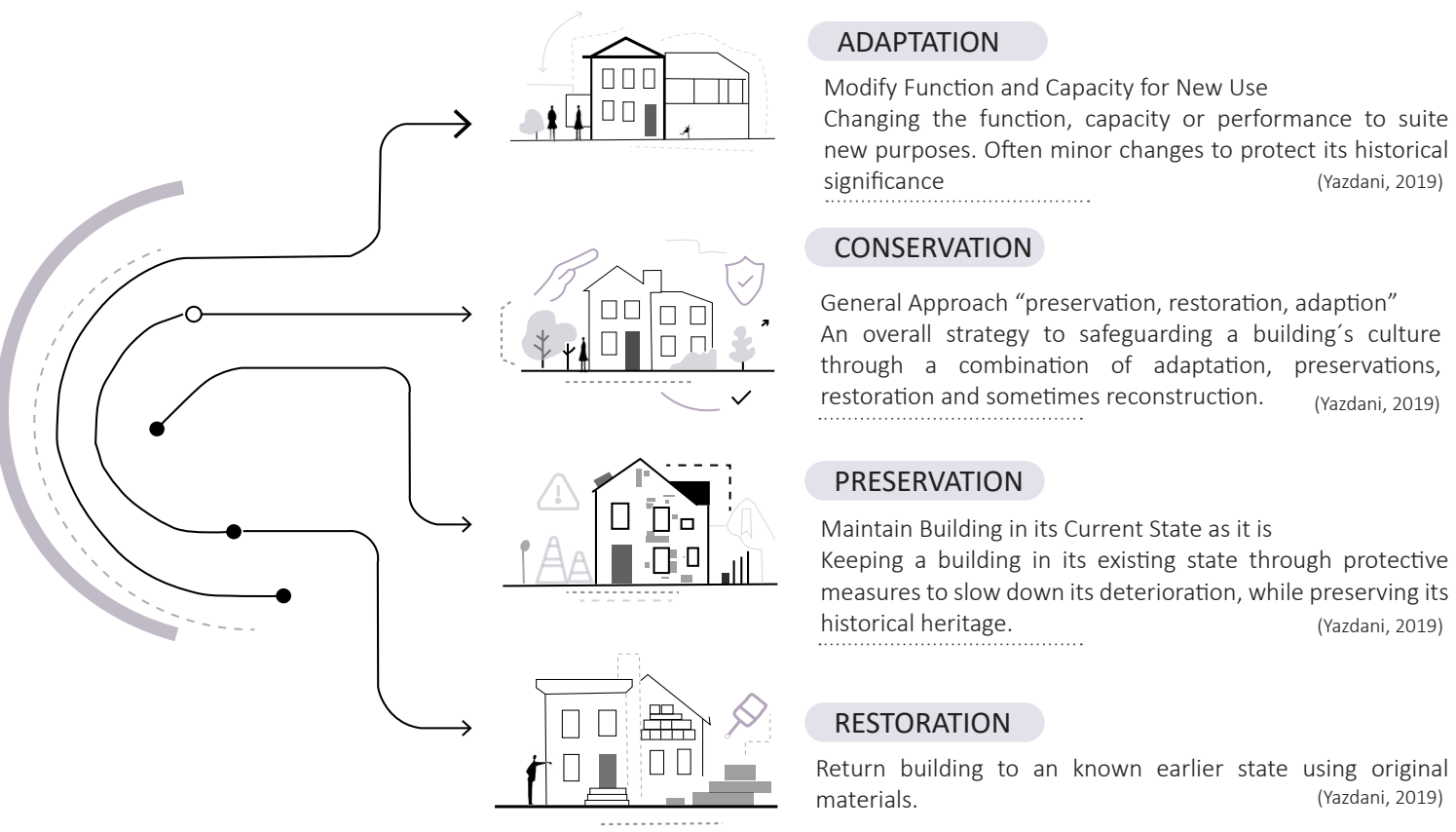


Figure 5: Heritage Building Intervention Approaches. By Author

Intervention Approaches Reflection

The approach that will be used in this project is conservation, which serves as a general strategy to safeguard the memory of the ruin and its cultural heritage. Due to the need for certain interventions within the ruin, a combined approach of adaptation and preservation is required. The municipality has already done some preservation efforts of the remains, but in order to adapt the existing construction to the new use of the site, some changes will be implemented throughout the design process.

This approach is needed to protect the memory of the stones and the ruin’s historical heritage. At the same time, the intervention will be carried out in a way that does not dominate the existing structure, but rather to breathe new life into the site.

Social and Cultur Sustainability

Sustainable transformation in architecture can be understood as the redevelopment of buildings and environments with a strong focus on climate responsibility, such as waste reduction, energy efficiency, and human well being. It aims to minimize the negative impacts that the built environment has on both local communities and the planet, while also encouraging healthier and more functional spaces (Rönn & Danielson, 2020).

These principles are relevant in the adaptive reuse of churches and religious buildings. In recent years, sustainability and the reuse of existing structures have gained growing importance, rather than demolishing them. Repurposing religious buildings is generally more environmentally responsible and also helps preserve their historical, social and cultural significance within communities. At the same time, current bad economic conditions have made large scale funding for heritage conservation more limited, encouraging governments and stakeholders to explore ways of transforming heritage buildings into valuable resources that can generate social, cultural and economic benefits (Plevoets et al., 2019).

However, when sustainable transformation is applied to historic churches, especially those that are partially abandoned or damaged, environmental strategies may not always be fully appropriate and can sometimes conflict with the architectural or spiritual character of the space (Rönn & Danielson, 2020).

In such cases, selecting materials carefully becomes important, because choosing materials that age over time can improve the long term sustainability of the project, while remaining suitable for the existing structure and its heritage values. Furthermore, it is important to observe how energy is used in the building and how the new spaces are used by the community (Plevoets et al., 2019). This helps to identify future conservation and maintenance needs, even potential economic benefits for the local community, they are important factors for ensuring the continued use of adapted religious buildings. Considering these aspects, it can ensure that the adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, not only supports environmental sustainability but also maintains cultural continuity, social relevance, and long term functionality of the buildings (Plevoets et al., 2019).

Sensual Experience

Sensual experience through using light, colour and other sensory components is a part of a whole design approach that contributes to a holistic spiritual experience. It aims to harmonize and promote more spirituality, and through using of a water element or natural materials can bring a greater sense of harmony and balance from inside to reflect nature (Sonaye.S, 2025). She mentions that the spiritual practices involve rituals which require a soecific spaces. As Sonaye (2025) gives an exmpel as a church with an altar, etc. or a meditation hall which may have a specific design to help people focus on their attention and energy.

Water has been a constant element in cultures and religions, it is considered as an element of birth, it is a symbol of purity and cleansing of the soul. It has reinforced its important role in renewal, religious and spiritual traditions. Eventually, it has even effected architectural design to support the spiritual experience and to foster reflective and meditative environments. The sound of dripping rain on stones, its rhythm is the sound of time itself and how natural elements work together in harmony (Kathrin, 2024).

The natural environment is valued for its positive effect on people to relax and having a good mental health. Even the flowers and their different and beautiful colors are used today by the landscape architects, because they also have an emotional and positive impact on people as relaxation and stress reduction (Zhang, L. et al., 2023).

“Flowers always make people better, happier and more helpful; they are sunshine, food and medicine for the soul.”

Luther Burbank – Plant Breeder, (Zhang, L. et al., 2023)

Colours are also a factor people notice quickly when entering a space. It is also connected to the landscape, the plants and the flowers in this space. Additionally, colours are also used as a treatment of different health conditions, it's also used in psychology and philosophy for better wellbeing. They mentioned that historically in ancient Egypt they used colours and nature as part of healing process (Hansen and Alvarez, 2010).

3

CASE STUDIES



This chapter presents eight different projects. Its purpose is to develop a better understanding of how new and existing materials from ruins can coexist within heritage contexts, especially through the use of contrasting materials, and how spiritual spaces are designed and used in the present day.

Photography by: Tamás Török

Ruins of the Szathmáry Palace

HISTORY & AIM

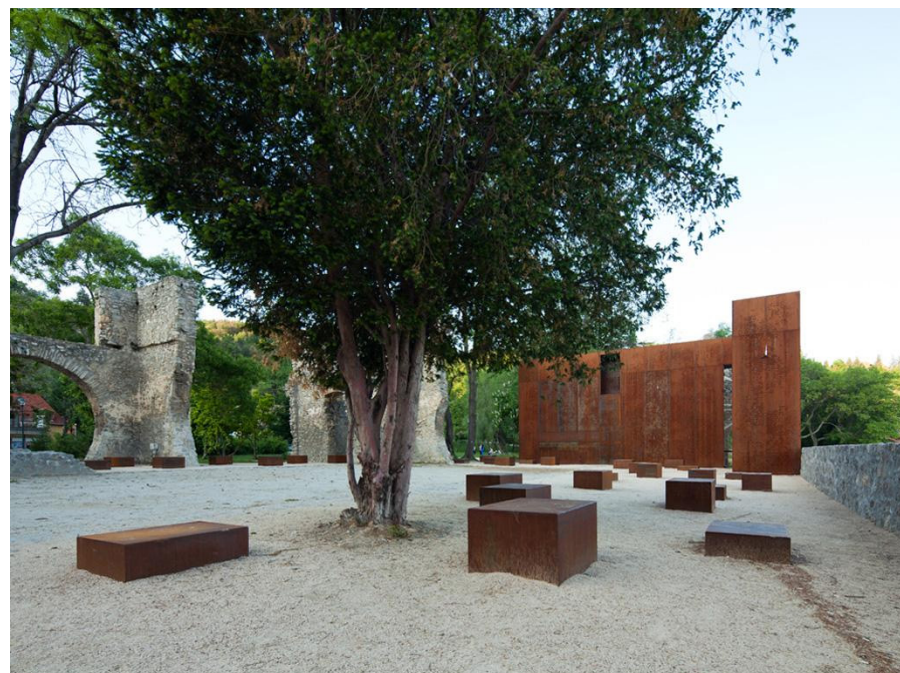
The ruin is one of Hungary's most valuable protected spaces. The palace is situated in the city of Pecs which is one of the oldest town of Hungary. The ruins are located in a park of Tettye Valley which is in the heart of the city, offering a magnificent view of the city from the top. After the long occupation of Hungary by the Ottoman Empire the building was left empty and its condition became worse. Despite its long history and location, the palace was not able to fulfil the proper role from its historical and architectural importance due to its bad condition. In 2010 Pecs was one of the European Capitals of Culture, and as part of this, a priority project focussed on the renewal of public areas including Szathmary Palace. The ruins of the protected historic renaissance palace became a new, exciting part of the urban spaces. The main goal, on the one hand, was to express the original character of the building, and on the other hand, to facilitate an open-air theatre to bring the site to the life.

Edittio. (2026)

MATERIAL: Metal.

CONCLUSIONS

The intervention preserves the building's historical heritage and showing the value of the ruin. Architecturally, the project successfully achieves adaptive reuse while maintaining the essence of its heritage. Even the addition offers a unique and refined perspective, enhancing the dialogue between the old and the new.



Photography by: Jordi Surroca. <https://www.dezeen.com/2012/07/26/convent-de-sant-francesc-by-david-closes/>

A medieval Irish church, in Kilkenny

HISTORY & AIM

The building is the starting point of the 'Medieval Mile' trail and houses the city's Civic Treasures and displays many important carved limestone tombs and funerary monuments from the Middle Ages to the 20th century. The medieval building, originally constructed in the 13th Century, required some extension for the display of artefacts in a controlled environment and the project became an experiment in the use of archaeology to help define an architectural solution.

McCullough Mulvin Architects has transformed the a 13th-century church into a museum for medieval artefacts. The old part has been joined by a new extension built from timber and lead that blends with the church's austere facade and blends with the sky. Inside the Medieval Mile Museum, a vast section of the original medieval timber roof has been left exposed, pulling the eyes upwards to dramatic effect.

(Thompson, 2019)

MATERIAL: Irish grey stone

CONCLUSIONS

The positive outcomes of this project, in my view, are, firstly, the strong connection established between the old and new constructions, which is particularly evident from the interior. This integration evokes both historical and contemporary atmospheres.

Secondly, the transformation allows visitors to experience and appreciate the rich cultural heritage of the church, gaining a deeper understanding of its historical evolution. However, from the exterior, the added architectural elements appear less sensitive to the sacred character of the original structure, which can be perceived as a drawback.



Illustration: McCullough Mulvin Architects, <https://archello.com/it/project/medieval-mile-museum>



Photography: Christian Richters, <https://thespaces.com/medieval-irish-church-is-reborn-as-a-museum-in-kilkenny/>

Cathedral Ruins in Hamar- Norway

HISTORY & AIM

The Cathedral's was build between 1232- 1252. It style was orginally built in the Romanesque architecture style. It has been demolished in 1567 during the Northern Seven Years War, by Swedish army. In 1987 they wanted to conserve the remains of the cathedral, which was completed in 1998. Today the ruins of the cathedral is protected by the most ambitious construction of its kind of glass and steel, undertaken by the Norwegian government. Today it is part of the Hedmark museum, it is a place to story tell the Narwigen story from the viking era.

(Domkirkeodden, 2025)

MATERIAL: Glass & steel.

CONCLUSIONS

The positive outcomes of this project include the protection of the site's heritage and the careful attention given to the significance of each stone and its story. The integration of steel and glass also introduces a sense of transparency within the interior, allowing visitors to perceive the spatial qualities of the structure even before entering. Furthermore, it has been recommended that future designs be thoughtfully developed with respect to the historical context, prioritizing the preservation of the site's heritage while ensuring appropriate protection and comfort for visitors.

Unfortunately, the new construction for me make it seems to look that it is unusable or untouchable. it's make it still missing something that should give the ruin more historical.



Photography:Anno Domkirkeoddens fotoarkiv, <https://domkirkeodden.no/en/medieval-ruins>

The risen Church

HISTORY & AIM

This church is located in Grottole Italy in an old town, half ruined. It has a Romanesque architecture style, its scale is small with a surface of 500 sqm. The church has a very attractive location, which makes it stand out from the surroundings.

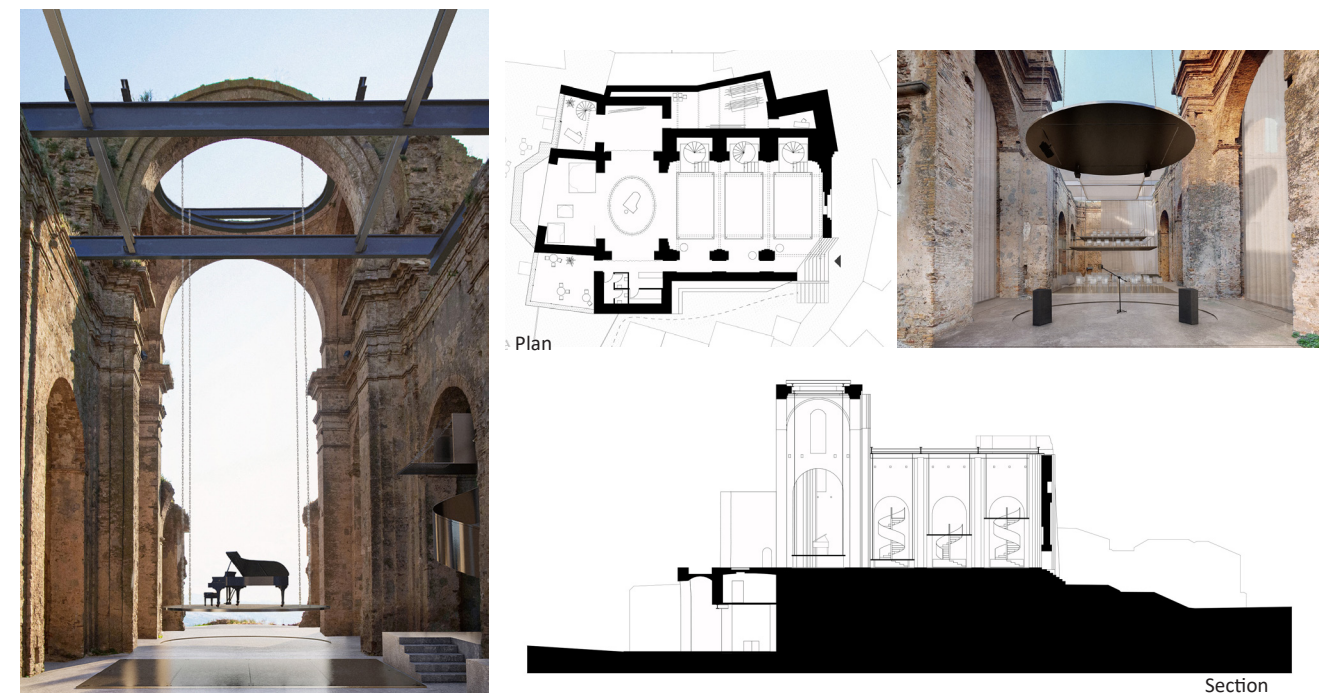
The design for this church is still a proposal not yet in reality, the architects want to have it as a culture space and at the same time play with the relationship to its landscape. They keep the open construction and add the steel girders to create the connection between old and new construction. At the same time it has a suspended sail as a weather protection. To create a wide variety of culture performances and open classical theater space.

Beta. (2021)

MATERIAL: Metal

CONCLUSIONS

The design proposal for the adaptive reuse of this church is notably ambitious and creative, breathing new life into a historically and culturally significant site. It preserves the building's heritage while making it more accessible and functional for contemporary purposes. The design also shows respect for the surrounding context and the site effectively. This transformation allows visitors to experience the age and cultural depth of the place, it also raises concerns that the site's heritage might be diminished, as it could become perceived more as a venue for music and events rather than a sacred historical landmark.



Photography: Illustration by Matthias Pabst & Florian Scharf, https://www.beta-architecture.com/the-risen-church-matthias-pabst-florian-scharf/#google_vignette

Church of Saint Francis' Convent, Santpedor

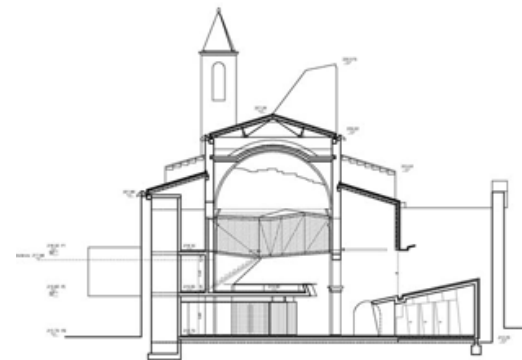
HISTORY & AIM

The church from 18th century in Catalonia, it is all that remains of a Franciscan convent. In 2000 the church was in a completely ruinous situation. It has been converted into an Auditorium. The new roof overlaps and shelters the existing ceiling remains damaged. The project aimed to not delete the process of deterioration and collapse that the church went through.

MATERIAL: Stone, glass & metal.

CONCLUSIONS

The intervention preserves the building's historical heritage while simultaneously introducing new values that highlight and distinguish the ancient church in a contemporary manner. Architecturally, the project successfully achieves adaptive reuse while maintaining the essence of its heritage. Even the addition of the modern glass staircase offers a unique and refined perspective, enhancing the dialogue between the old and the new.



CASE STUDY

Spiritual Places

Abbazia di San Galgano, Italy

HISTORY & AIM

Built in the Gothic-Cistercian style during the 13th century and dedicated to Saint Galgano, the Abbey of San Galgano now survives in a state of complete ruin. Only the perimeter walls remain standing, with the apse still clearly visible and perfectly oriented toward the east.

Today, the Abbey of San Galgano is among the most visited historical sites in Tuscany and also serves as a venue for weddings and cultural events. Nevertheless, the principal attraction for visitors remains the architectural and historical significance of the abbey itself. The site is located along the Strada Comunale di San Galgano, within the municipality of Chiusdino, and is set in relative isolation in the Tuscan countryside.

Access to the abbey is not particularly convenient, regardless of the direction of travel, even though thousands of tourists journey to the site each year in order to experience its atmosphere firsthand. Visitors frequently report a strong sense of peace and calm when they arrive, often attributing this impression to the surrounding landscape and the open, roofless structure, which together create a unique spatial and emotional experience.

eJamo.com. (2021)

CONCLUSIONS

This ruin and its location are very similar to Santa Maria di Settefonti. This example shows how a minimal intervention can be powerful, and how the identity of a place can be enough to create a strong sense of peace and calm, as many visitors have described.



Image: Abbazia di San Galgano. (2021, September 9). Toscana eJamo.com. <https://www.toscana.info/siena/provincia/abbazia-san-galgano/>

The Abbey of St. Mary in Glastonbury,UK

HISTORY & AIM

Glastonbury Abbey is located in southwestern England, on the slopes of a group of hills that rise from the valley of the River Brue to a height of approximately 158 metres above sea level. The Abbey of St. Mary at Glastonbury was possibly the oldest, and certainly one of the wealthiest, monastic institutions in England (Steves, 2022). This early structure, made of timber and wattle, survived until it was destroyed by fire in 1184. Following this disaster, rebuilding began, including the construction of a new St. Mary's Chapel (Steves, 2022).

According to Steves (2022), some traditions associate the wider Glastonbury landscape with spiritual beliefs, including the idea that nearby sites such as Stonehenge were constructed at the intersection of so-called "ley lines." These are theoretical alignments believed by some to carry magnetic or spiritual energy across the earth. In more recent times, these ideas have been adopted by New Age spiritual movements.

CONCLUSIONS

This ruin attracts visitors interested in history, personal reflection, and spiritual experience. It suggests that such places are often visited by people seeking calmness and more meaningful experience. This case study has reinforced my decision not to transform the ruin of Santa Maria into a tourist attraction, but instead to preserve its spirituality and quiet character.



Tikkanen, A. (2019). Glastonbury | England, United Kingdom | Britannica. In Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Glastonbury-England>

Chapel of the Holy Cross Sedona, USA

HISTORY & AIM

The Chapel of the Holy Cross in Sedona, Arizona, was completed in 1956. The project was initiated by sculptor Marguerite Brunswig Staude, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, and developed in collaboration with project architect Richard Hein and architect August K. Strotz. (Trevillyan, n.d). In 1957, the chapel received an Award of Honor from the American Institute of Architects.

Architecturally, the chapel is defined by its striking cross-shaped form, which appears to emerge directly from the surrounding red rock landscape. Large windows frame the structure and create the interior worship space, allowing natural light to play an important role in the atmosphere of the building. The design is minimalist, with simple forms and limited decoration, while the light and color inside reflect the visually powerful desert environment. The structure rises ca250 feet above the surrounding rock formations, making it highly visible within the landscape (Trevillyan,n.d).

CONCLUSIONS

This place is a symbol of shared identity and cultural connection. The idea of framing the landscape through the large window is what led me to choose this project. At the same time, the way it connects the community and gives people a place to share their reflections with others is equally meaningful.

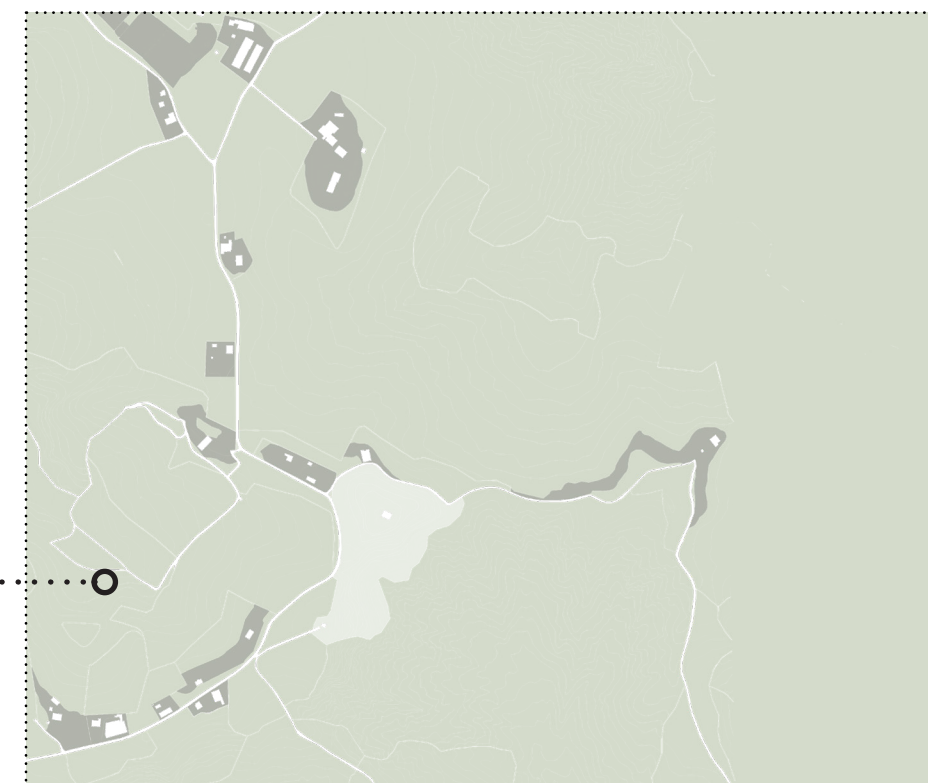


Photographs:Loredana Sava, <https://visitsedona.com/blog/chapel-of-the-holy-cross-architecture/>

4

CONTEXT & SITE





Green spaces



LEGEND

- Project Area
- Used Houses
- Public Spaces
- Unused Buildings
- Hiking Path

Land Use



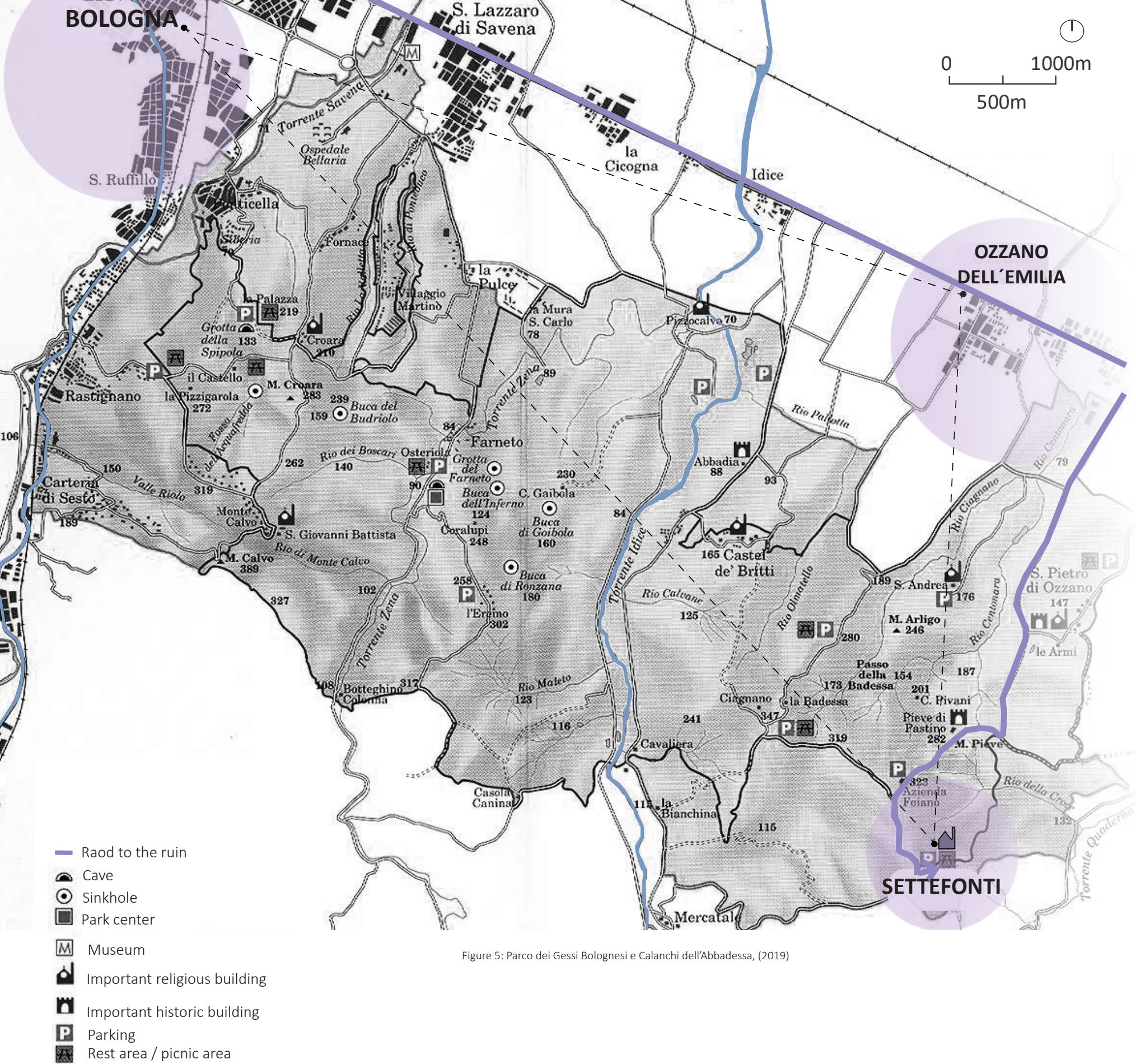


Figure 5: Parco dei Gessi Bolognesi e Calanchi dell'Abbadessa, (2019)

Bologna - Italy

The ruin is located in northern Italy, in the Ozzano dell'Emilia region, which belongs to the city of Bologna. It is famous for its heritage and historical buildings, like many other cities in Italy. As shown on the map, there are many churches in the region, and it is also a tourist city.

The ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti is 26.3 km from the center of Bologna, which takes approximately 32 minutes by car. In addition, it is 5 km from the nearest city, Ozzano dell'Emilia. There is no public transportation to the site, and the only ways for people to get there are by car or bicycle. Another option is to take public transportation to Ozzano dell'Emilia and walk to the site. It can be a beautiful but long hiking path, which takes about 1 hour and 40 minutes.

The population there is variable but the age group between 18-64 is dominant, especially since Bologna have one of the oldest universities in the world, which attract many youth (Britannica, 2019). That is why the focus of this project will be on the people living there more than attracting huge numbers of tourists. It aims to provide a space to reflect and meditate in the countryside and to give them an opportunity to reconnect with the history and the identity of the city.

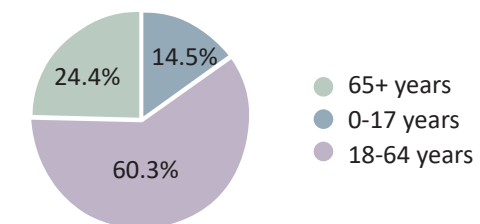


Figure 6: Age Group (Brinkhoff, 2026).

TIMELINE

• ~ 1170

- Settefonti mean "Seven Springs", in late 10th century it was a presence of several springs. Which according to myth and tradition, they were known for the pure and healing water.
- Today, they disappeared due to natural changes and human interventions.

• 1105

- Settefonti is a very ancient locality, first recorded in the 10th century as the site of Castrum Septem Fontium, which had a strategically position and make it as a defensive castle.

- Between the 13th and 14th centuries, the area developed into a small religious and civic center, while by the 17th century the castle had largely fallen into ruin.

• 1378

- The church, under the parish of San Giovanni, was originally Romanesque, with a single nave built from reused stone and brick and traces of frescoed plaster.

• 1691

- The church was rebuilt and became Santa Maria Di Settofonti.

• ~1700

- The church expand with houses and residence who started live nearby.

• 1874

- All the drawings of the church disappeared and it's not longer available, and gradually the community lost its religious function.

• 1945

- During World War II, the church suffered severe damage due to bombings, only the façade and the bell tower remain visible. No one knows if the church was a target or just wartime effected.

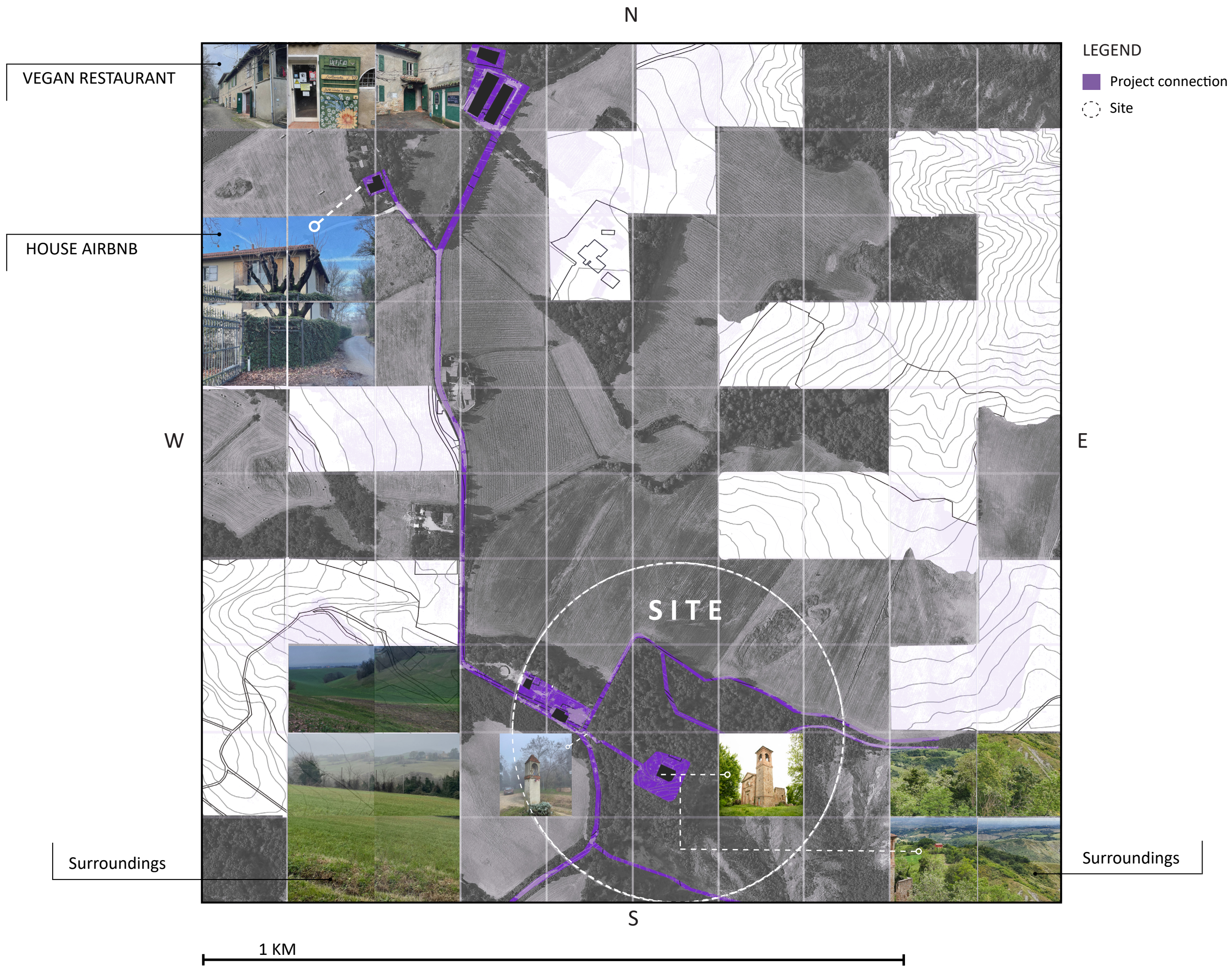
• 2001

- In 2001, restoration efforts were carried out to strengthen and highlight the remaining parts of the building, however, these interventions were not sufficient to hold the other part than the tower and the entrence wall.

• 2025

- The Ruin remain important historical and landscape landmarks within the Regional Park. In addition a company did a competition to make it alive again.

ANALYSING MAP



Area Plants



Lavender



Wisteria

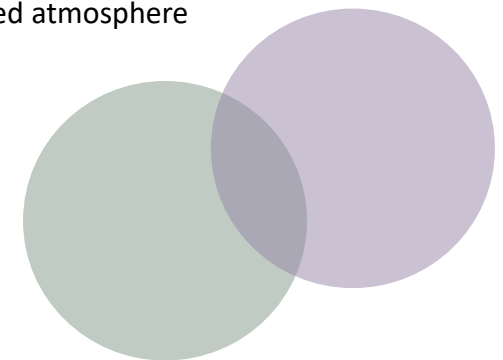


Vine Tree

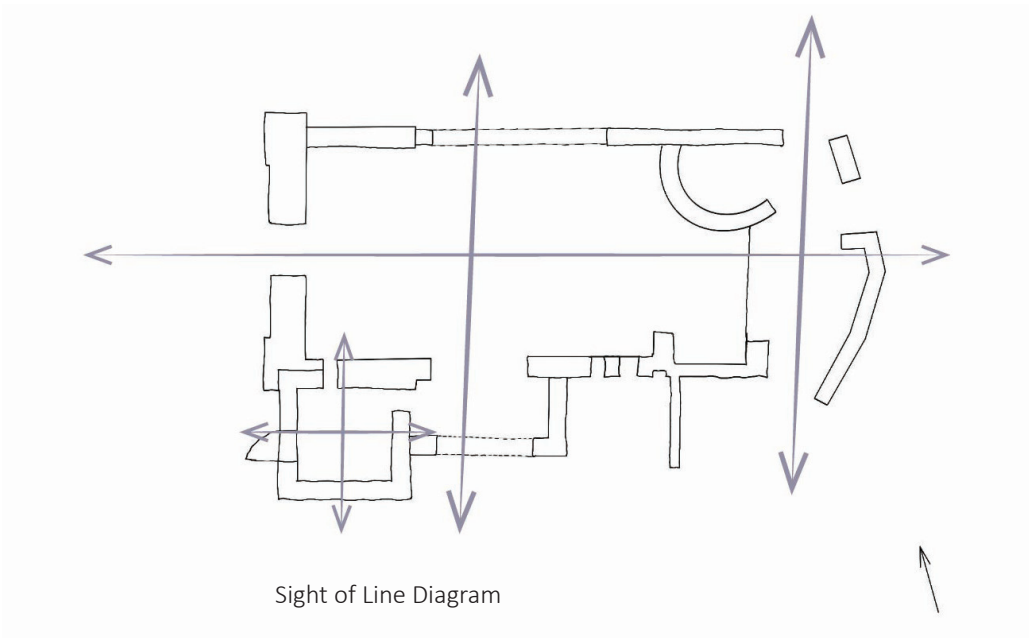
Based on the interview with the agronomy specialist, as well as research into the most well-known plants and flowers in the area, lavender, wisteria, and vine were identified as some of the most characteristic plants of Settefonti. This botanical reading of the site was further supported by the theoretical framework, which emphasizes the role of sensory experience in shaping spatial observations. In this context, plants, colour, and water are understood not only as landscape elements, but also as atmospheric tools that can strengthen the emotional and experiential qualities of a place. These findings informed the landscape strategy of the project, leading to adapt the proposal to the trees and plants today's positions and saving all the plants rather than cut it down. Furthermore, it leads to use of the local flowers and sensory elements that support a calm and meditative atmosphere along the path and around the ruin.

"..Colours are also a factor people notice quickly when entering a space. It is also connected to the landscape, the plants, and the flowers in this space. Additionally, colours are also used as a treatment for different health conditions,"

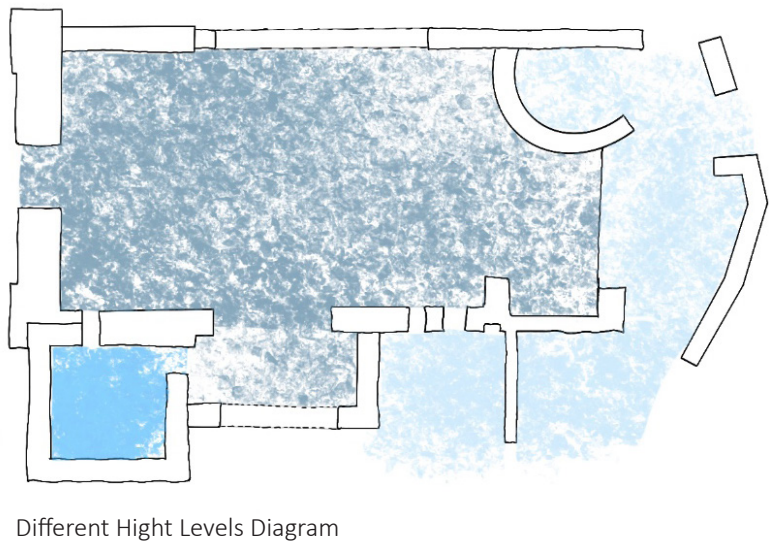
Within this context, purple became particularly significant, as it is closely linked to lavender and wisteria, two of the most representative flowering species in the area. In addition, purple is often associated in psychological studies with calmness and mental relaxation. Together with green, which reflects the surrounding vegetation and landscape, purple was therefore selected as one of the dominant colours in this thesis. Purple was not only used as a representative colour in the thesis graphics, but also as a visual presence in the colour of the chosen materials and in planting more lavender and wisteria around the ruin and the path, due to their ability to support the intended atmosphere of reflection, calmness, and spiritual experience.



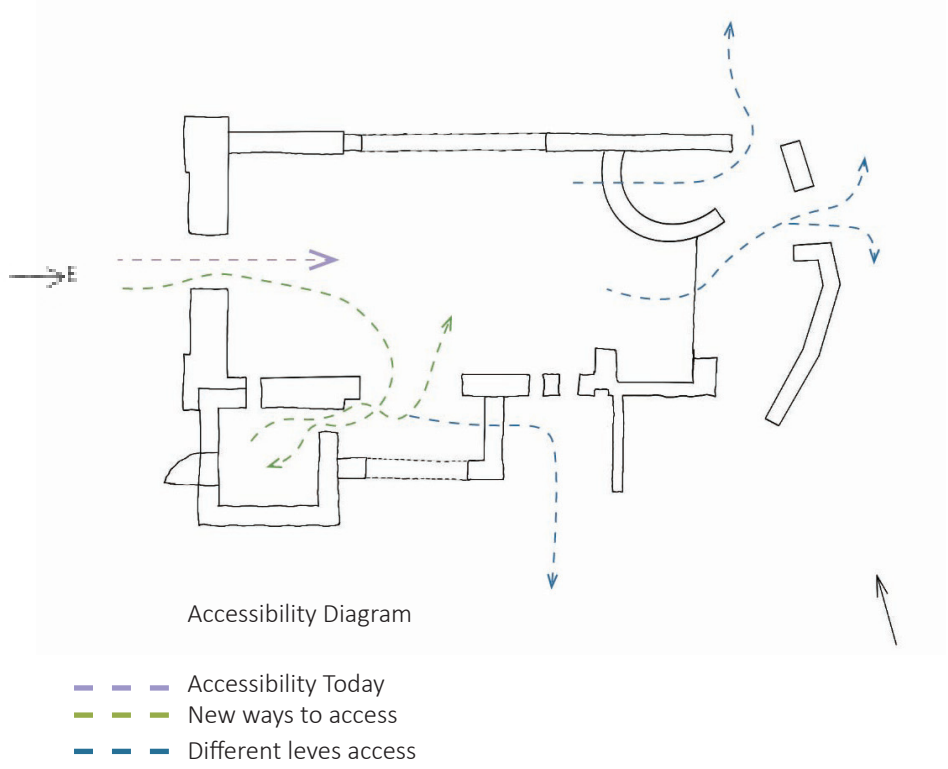
ANALYSIS



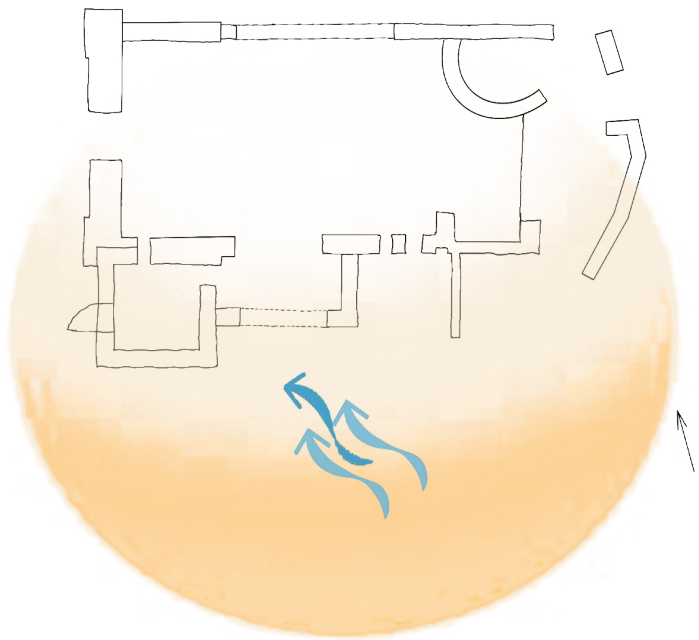
Due to the low height of the remaining walls, visual openness within the ruin is significant, allowing the surrounding landscape to be seen from almost every position inside the site. The most important axis is the central one, which frames the landscape through the main doorway and extends visually through the entire ruin toward the view beyond.



The site is currently not fully accessible due to the differences in height across the ruin. At present, it is difficult to move between different areas without leaving the ruin and walking around it. It is also not possible to access the tower.



To make the axis and the different parts of the ruin more accessible, certain interventions are needed. However, in order to preserve the central axis as it exists today, no high or large scale intervention will be introduced.



The wind direction in the region is SouthWest (Meteoblue, 2026). The center interior of the ruin is so expos for the wind.



SITE VISITE
Pictures



Picture 1



Picture 2



Picture 3



Picture 4



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7



Picture 8



Picture 9



Picture 10



Picture 11



Picture 12



Picture 13



Picture 14



Picture 15



Picture 16



Picture 17



Picture 18



Observations from the Site Visit

The ruin is located on top of a hill in a relatively isolated setting. It is still not far from nearby town and the basic services that visitors may need. The journey to the site by car or walk is particularly memorable and charming. The road is surrounded by greenery on both sides, creating a calm and peaceful atmosphere even before arriving at the ruin (see Picture 1).

The path leading up to the ruin was muddy and covered with slush, which made the walk somewhat difficult and even created a risk of slipping (see Picture 4). This condition highlighted potential accessibility challenges for visitors.

The moment of first seeing the ruin was particularly impressive (see Picture 5). The tall bell tower and the large entrance wall create a powerful and welcoming presence, immediately highlight the historical significance and scale of the structure.

During the visit, the sense of peace and quietness experienced was exceptional. This feeling lead me to my intention to connect the ruin with ideas of reflection and meditation for future visitors.

Even though I visited the site in January, the weather was not too cold, and the surrounding greenery still had a beautiful presence. Despite the trees not having leaves during this season, the landscape maintained a strong atmosphere that contributed to the overall experience of the place.

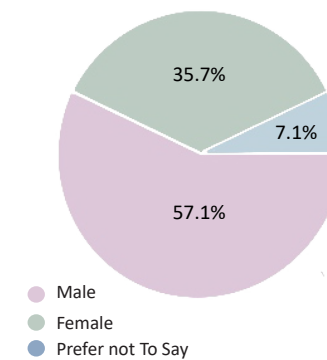
In addition, there are significant differences in height levels throughout the site, which currently make several areas difficult to access. This lack of accessibility is an important aspect to consider in the future transformation of the site.

However, there was a huge lack of information about the site. The limited information that was available was only written in Italian, which may make it difficult for international visitors to understand the history and importance of the ruin.

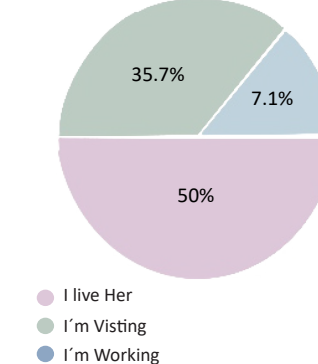
SURVEY

This survey was carry among both local and non-local residents in the Bologna area and near the ruin, and 14 people have responded to the survey. Its purpose is to gain a better understanding of what people know about the ruine and to collect their opinions regarding the potential reuse. The survey aims to include and consider visitors perspectives in the design process and to understand how the site is perceived by the surrounding community.

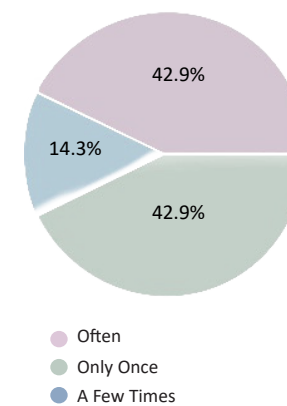
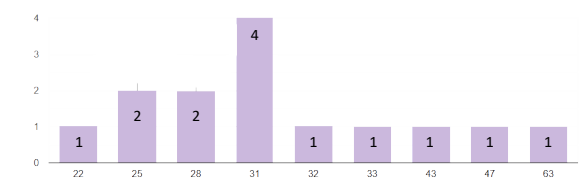
Gender



Living



Age



The activities they usually do there:

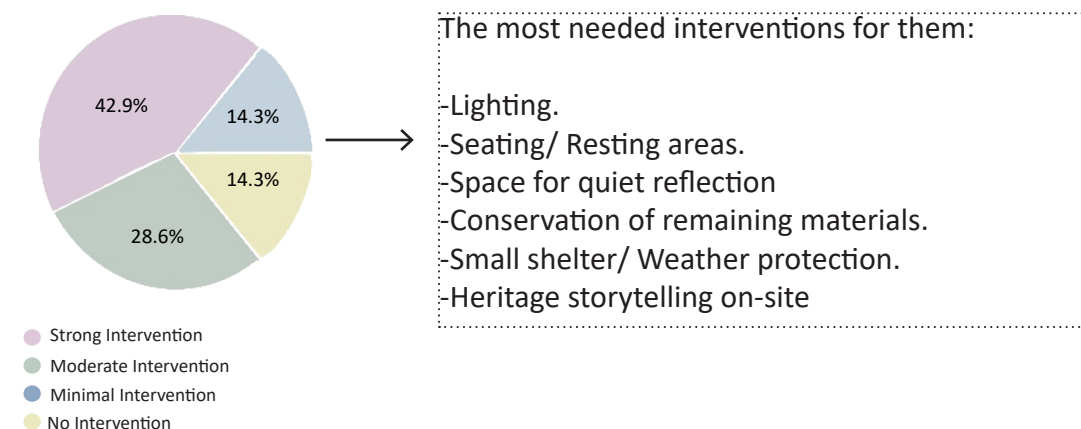
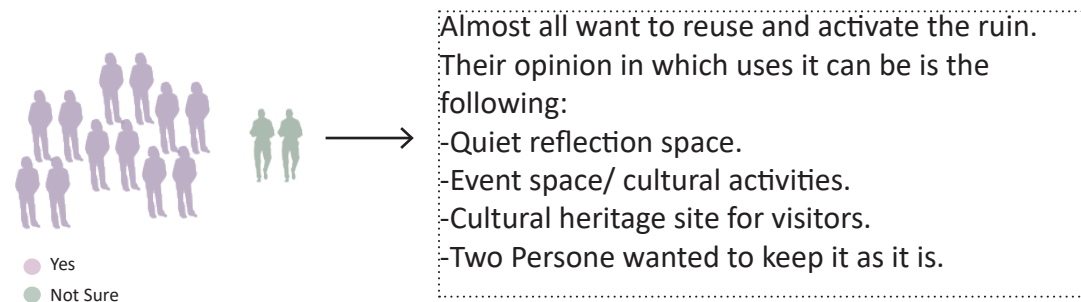
- Observe the reuin
- Walk through/ Hiking
- Take photos
- Reflect /Meditate

The place atmosepheer:

- Peaceful
- Spiritual
- Inspiring
- Mysterious
- Unsafe

Their knowledge about the ruins history:

- "The church was built on the foundations of a castle, Which is linked to a legend"
- "Between the 13th and 14th centuries, there was a castle"
- "The church was built in 1600, but during the Second World War it was hit by bombings, and today only the ruins remain"
- "I know it was a church and that it's linked to the legend of the abbess and the knight"
- "I think it's nice that the history of this place isn't so well known, it makes it a bit secret and special. I wouldn't want it to turn into a tourist attraction"



Their concern about reusing the site:

- The connection with the community and the territory.
- It may be excessively defaced; its "beauty" lies precisely in its being somewhat isolated and dilapidated.
- It may be carefully considered with the local community.
- It may be vandalized, and the existing materials will be destroyed.
- Probably that it become a closed place where you have to pay to enter, and that the interventions disturb the surrounding nature for no good reason.

Survey Summary

Taking the survey results into consideration, together with the aim of developing a valuable and sustainable architectural design, several key insights can be identified. The atmosphere of the site was most described as peaceful, spiritual, and inspiring, although a one respondents mentioned a sense of mystery or insecurity. These highlight the strong emotional and experiential qualities of the ruin, which support its transformation into a space for reflection and cultural engagement.

In addition, almost all respondents expressed a positive attitude toward the reuse of the ruin. Suggested future uses included a quiet space for reflection, cultural activities, and a heritage site accessible to visitors. These responses shows that the public recognizes the potential of the ruin to serve both cultural and social functions, and to show the place history and identity.

In summury, the survey results shows that the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti is perceived as a place with strong cultural and atmospheric value. The findings support the idea of transforming the ruin into a spirtual and reflective space while respecting its existing character. These insights support the design approach based on preservation and minimal, sensitive architectural interventions that could be positively received by both local residents and visitors.

Interviews

Three semi structured interviews were conducted with people living in Ozzono. The aim was to gain deeper insight into the ruin of the church. Two interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and the third one lasted for one hour with an Agronomy. The Interviews was recorded and transcribed, and the data is analyzed using thematic analysis.

Participants emphasized the importance of the culture heritage and how important the ruin of the church are for the people living in Ozzono. Interviewee 1 lives approximately 100 meters from the ruin, stated:

“Local residents appreciate when researchers and visitors show interest in the history and heritage buildings of the area, as the region contains many historic buildings”

According to her, Italians generally place great importance on preserving ruins and historic buildings, as these buildings represent an important connection to their past and cultural identity. Another interview highlighted the common presence of historic churches in Italy and the way many of them gradually fall into abandonment. According to the interviewee, abandoned historical buildings are often accepted as part of the landscape.

However, this situation also raises concerns, as new construction projects are regularly prioritized while existing heritage structures are left without enough care or restoration. All three interviewee emphasized that more attention should be given to preserving historic buildings rather than expanding with new developments.

The interview also revealed that the church of Santa Maria di Settefonti is not widely known, even among residents of Bologna. Its relatively remote location and the lack of organized tourism in the area contribute to this limited awareness. Most visitors who reach the site are hikers, cyclists, or historical intrested people who discover the ruin through research rather than tourism promotion. As a result, the church appears to be more recognized among international researchers than among the general local population.

The interviewee also discussed the symbolic role of vegetation of the site. Plants such as wisteria, lavender, olive, and grape vines were mentioned as kinds that are closely connected to the local landscape and cultural traditions of the region. Interviewee 2 stated:

“These plants not only represent the natural character of the area but also carry symbolic meanings related to peace, spirituality, and cultural identity.”

The conversation also addressed historically and todays construction materials in northern Italy. According to the interviewee, materials such as clay, stone, and brick remain widely available in the region due to their natural presence in the landscape. The interviewee explained that the structure was built using locally available materials, especially selenite stone, which is characteristic of the geological context of the region.

During the medieval period, buildings were typically constructed using materials found directly within the surrounding landscape. This resulted in architectural forms closely connected to the natural environment and local resources. However, concrete has become the most commonly used construction material in modern development.

The interviewee expressed concern about the growing number of abandoned buildings across Italy, noting that many new constructions are built despite the existence of numerous unused buildings. This situation highlights the importance of adaptive reuse as a strategy for preserving heritage buildings while responding to modern needs. Reusing existing structures can help prevent unnecessary extensions while maintaining cultural and historical continuity within the built environment. These perspectives support the relevance of exploring adaptive reuse strategies for the Santa Maria di Settefonti ruin as a way to reconnect the site with modern society.

5

DESIGN PROPOSAL



LANDSCAPE

The landscape design for the ruin area includes a starting point for arrivals and services. Continued with a main wooden path that artfully weaves through the site up to the ruin, following the surrounding landscape. Around the ruin, there are two paths that meander around the trees, with three individual spots to sit, enjoy, and meditate within the landscape.

Additionally, there is a myth that tells a story behind the first church that was built. According to the legend, Rolando rode each morning along the path crossing the badlands to the convent of his beloved. The church, located along the ridge, was built around the year 1000 on the ruins of a temple dedicated to the god Pan, and the path remains today around the ruin. When Lucia finally met Rolando, they confessed their love, but she refused to betray her vows and asked him never to return. At that time, there was no water in the springs. Rolando left as a crusader for the Holy Land, while Lucia, already very ill, died. In Palestine, he was captured and imprisoned. One night, Lucia appeared to him in a dream to announce her death. When he awoke, he found himself miraculously freed beside her tomb, and through his tears, the seven springs surrounding the church began to flow again (Strazzari, 2021).

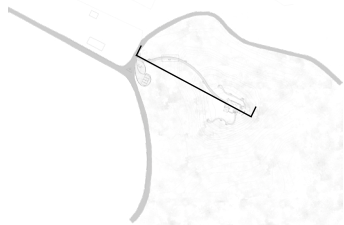
Due to this beautiful myth, these individual spots are directed toward the position of the Seven Springs, which once existed in the area and now no longer visible. Each idea in the proposal is designed to respect and preserve the history and identity of the site. Even the trees are preserved, and not a single one has been cut down. In addition, the two most popular flowers will be planted more throughout the proposal.





Considering the site's remote location, there is some lack of needed services such as bathroom and parking. Therefore, some service points are needed to make the place and the experience more accessible. A parking spot, bicycles parking and a bathroom cabin are included in the entrance area of the site, which is 5 min walk to the ruin. Today, there is already a waiting area before entering the path, that I will keep as it is and use it as a welcoming/ waiting area.



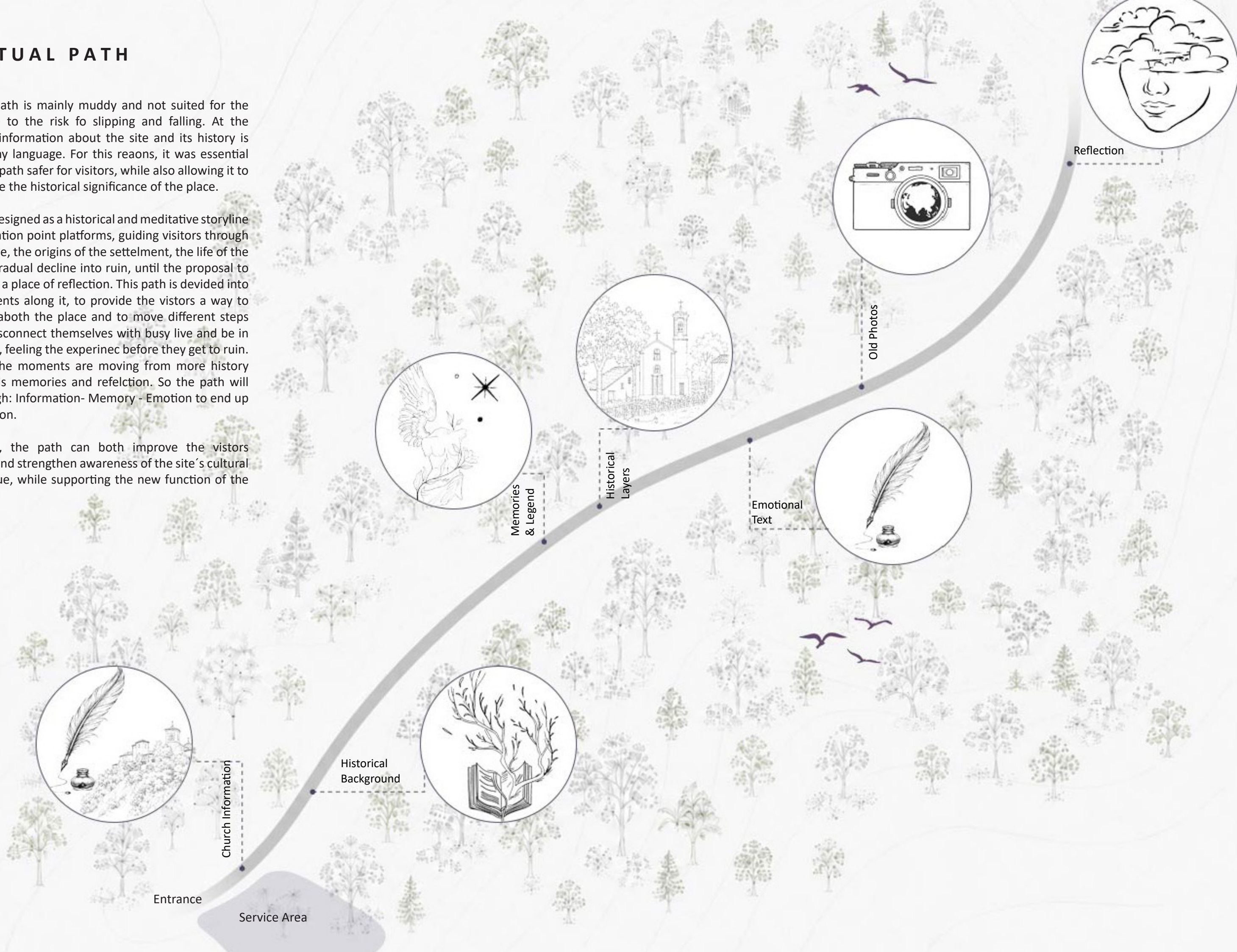


SPIRITUAL PATH

Today, the path is mainly muddy and not suited for the visitors, due to the risk of slipping and falling. At the same time, information about the site and its history is limited in any language. For these reasons, it was essential to make the path safer for visitors, while also allowing it to communicate the historical significance of the place.

The path is designed as a historical and meditative storyline with information point platforms, guiding visitors through the landscape, the origins of the settlement, the life of the church, its gradual decline into ruin, until the proposal to reframing as a place of reflection. This path is divided into seven moments along it, to provide the visitors a way to learn more about the place and to move through different steps until they disconnect themselves with busy life and be in the moment, feeling the experience before they get to ruin. That's why the moments are moving from more history heavy towards memories and reflection. So the path will move through: Information - Memory - Emotion to end up with Reflection.

In this way, the path can both improve the visitors' experience and strengthen awareness of the site's cultural heritage value, while supporting the new function of the site.





The ruin is located on a very high hill, which makes the path steep. To avoid slipperiness a donkey stair is designed, providing a more comfortable experience on the way up to the ruin.



CONCEPT PLAN

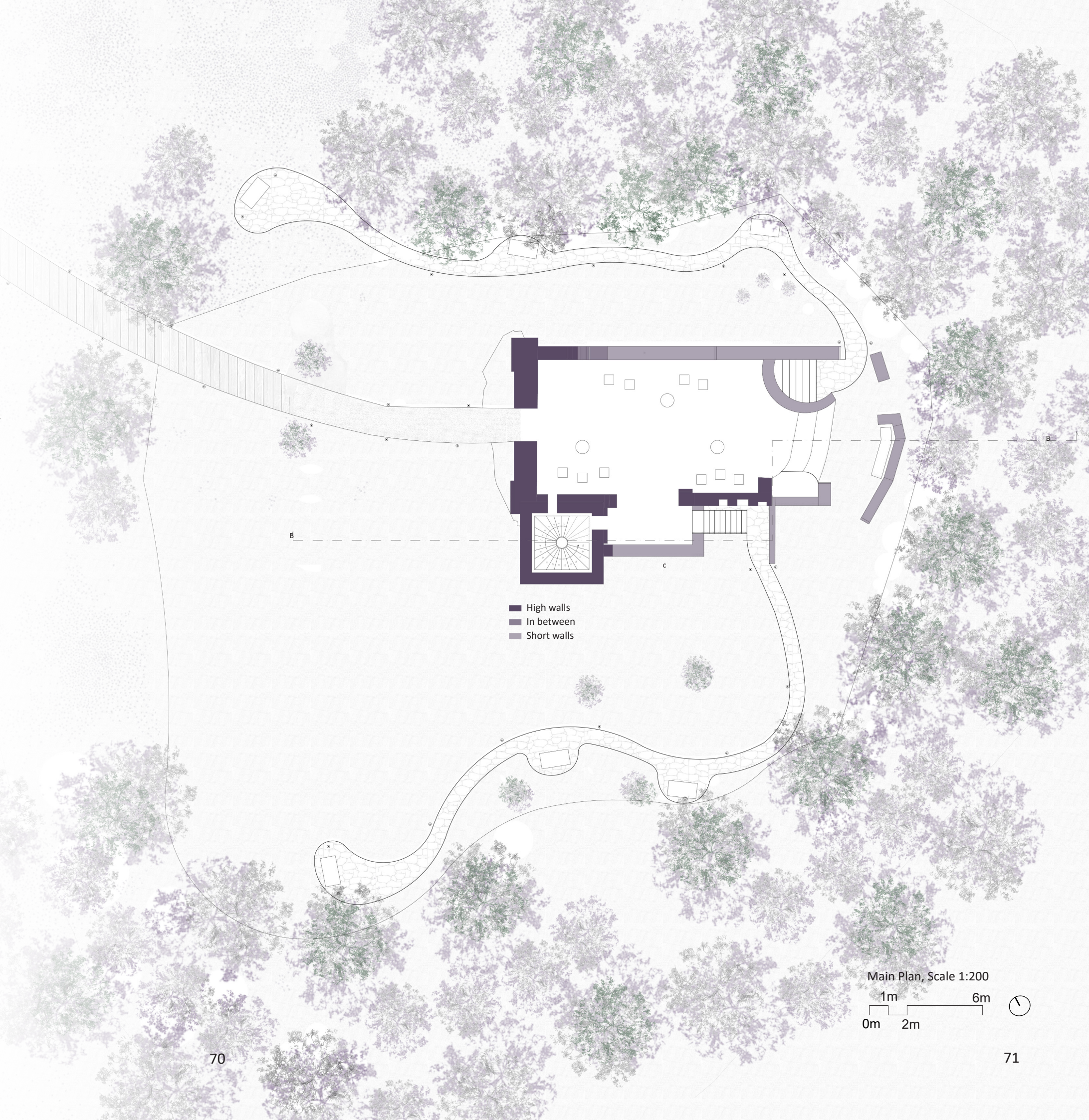
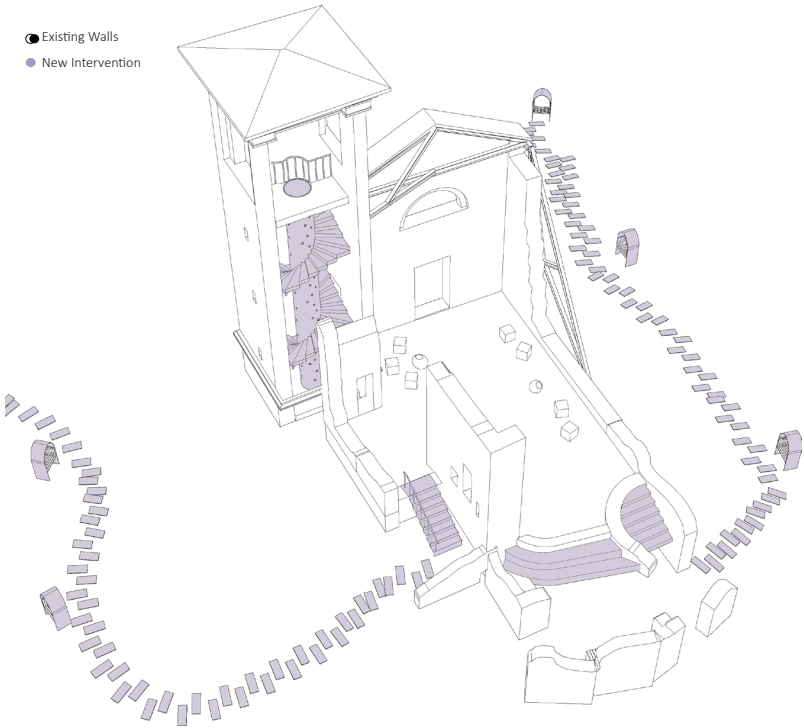
The experience continues after the path ends. Approaching the ruin, face the heavy walls that have remained over time, and entering its interior is another layer of the spiritual experience. This part of the project focuses on preserving the memory of the remaining stone and the identity of the ruin.

Today, the site consists of the remaining walls of an old church, fully open to the surrounding landscape and the natural environment. While this openness gives the ruin much of its spiritual atmosphere, the site currently lacks the basic spatial elements needed for sitting, meditating or moving between its different hight levels. At the same time, the ruin carries a strong sense of calmness and peaceful character. Therefore, the proposal follows a minimal intervention approach by introducing wooden seating blocks, and three large selenite stones which is already exisit, used as water collecting elements and to present one of the stones that ruin was built of. It is relatively easy to find in northern Italy, and it was an important building material in ancient times. These elements are intended to reinforce a sense of calmness.

In addition, as mentioned earlier, the ruin contains several different height levels, which makes stair interventions necessary in specific areas. Each staircase leads to a path connected to the individual spots. Among them, a wider stepped stairs is introduced to function as a platform for sitting or lying down, depending on the visitors’ needs.

These interventions allow visitors to continue hearing, smelling and seeing the surrounding environment, including the birds and the wind. These sensory qualities are also an essential part of the spiritual experience the site is intended to offer.

INTERVENTIONS DIAGRAM



Main Plan, Scale 1:200

0m 1m 2m 6m

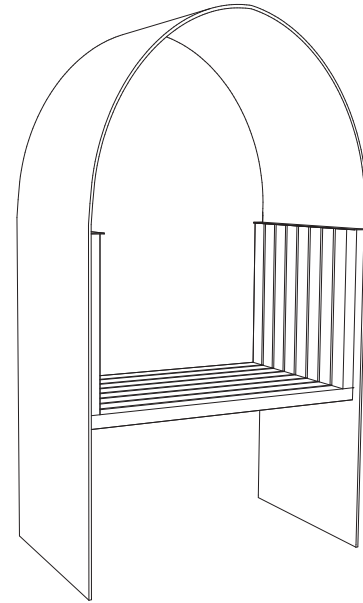


SECTION B-B



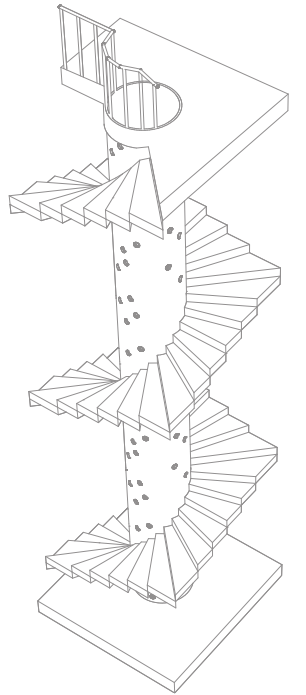
Six individual seating places are designed to give visitors the opportunity to isolate themselves and experience a sense of closeness through the arched chair form in relation to the landscape. These spots are oriented toward the locations of the seven springs that were once part of the legend of the area.

The reason behind the design of these chairs is that arches were a very common architectural element when the old church was built. Through these seating interventions, a familiar architectural language is reintroduced to the site, allowing this historic element to come alive again in a modern way.



The tower is an important part of both the ruin and the project, most likely it was functioned primarily as a bell tower belonging to the church, while its elevated position within a medieval settlement may also have given it a secondary visual and orienting role in the landscape. Furthermore, it frames the surrounding landscape through its windows, which give a high quality experience for the visitors. To make this experience accessible, a staircase is also designed in the tower, allowing visitors to go up and engage with the significance of the landscape.

The staircase is designed as a square metal spiral stair with an independent structure, allowing the walls of the tower to remain untouched. It is wide enough for two people to use safely, and due to the dimensions of the slab, only two people will be able to stand together at the top of the tower.





A Visual Journey Through My Master Thesis Proposal:
<https://youtu.be/QkMSjKONqmc>

LIGHTING

Based on survey findings and site observations, the site in its current condition cannot be considered fully safe at the afternoon, in term of visibility, as no lighting is provided within the area. Due to that, adding lighting is an essential part of the proposal in order to improve safety and support evening use of the site.

The lighting strategy is therefore integrates from the entrance point, around the parking area, and along the path in a regular yet visually gentle manner, with an approximate spacing of 6 meters in between. In addition, to improving orientation and safety, this approach also allows visitors to read the historical information during the evening. All the introduces lighting is a working on solar energy.

The proposed lighting elements take the form of short bollards, approximately 800 mm in height and 150 mm in diameter. Their proportions are intended to provide sufficient illumination for the path and surrounding areas while maintaining a calm and visual presence that is sites atmosphere.

The same lighting language is continued along the secondary paths leading to the individual seating spots, making it accessible and usable during the evening as well. In this way, light is not limited to circulation only, but also supports the quieter and more reflective atmosphere. At the same time a soft extension of light reaches into the sacred ruin. To strengthen the sense of safety within the ruin itself, additional low level ground mounted uplights were placed inside the ruin, allowing the light to spread more evenly across the interior without overpowering the atmosphere of the space.

Within the tower, lighting is integrated into the new structure in order to preserve the historic masonry and avoid direct intervention in the walls. This strategy also allows light to be distributed more effectively throughout the tower interior. The proposal introduces lighting within the central column of the staircase, allowing it to emerge through the openings positioned along the vertical core.

In this way, the lighting becomes part of the new architectural intervention while remaining respectful of the historic elements.



MATERIAL CHOICE



Preserving the identity of the ruin and the memory that the stones holding in it was one of the most important approaches in the design. Another key approach was to create a dialogue between past and present through the introduction of modern architectural elements. Using stone within a stone ruin would allow the new intervention to blend in too closely. For this site, it felt more appropriate to introduce materials that could stand out in a calm and respectful way, such as metal and wood. They can influence how a space is perceived and create a clear contrast between old and new within a historic context. These materials can help enhance and reinforce the historical atmosphere of the ruin, its identity, and the visitor's experience.

Stone is a strong and timeless material that has traditionally been used in the construction of churches and historic buildings. It symbolizes permanence and stability. At the same time, selecting a material that stands apart carefully can support the historical significance of the site while respecting the original materials. Therefore, the selected materials were chosen as a contrast of stone. Wood introduces a natural warmth that can create a welcoming atmosphere, strengthen the visitor's experience, and establish a sense of harmony with nature. Metal creates a clear contrast that makes the age and value of the ruin's stone more visible. It reads as an independent modern element within the historic context. At the same time, it's also a light and a quiet material so it allows the remaining stone structure to remain visually dominant. In this way, it strengthens the dialogue between past and present without overpowering the existing atmosphere of the site.

6

Discussion & Results

This place and its history made me feel something I had been missing, it reminded me of personal things and thoughts I had forgotten. When I visited this place, it made me think about the principles and ideas I carry within me. I felt a sense of freedom to feel, think, and reflect in whatever way I wanted. It reminded me of many places that are now also abandoned after war. It reminded me of my own home, which I left behind because of war, and bring life into the ruin felt that bringing life in my abandoned home.

Above all, I felt the calmness I had been missing in this busy world. I found the peace to simply stand there, look into the landscape, think, relax, and fall in love with myself. This place truly touched my heart, and that is why I chose it for my master thesis. I wanted to bring it to life again in exactly the same way it made me feel alive, through the calmness it gave me. The questions I asked for this Master Thesis was:

How can new architectural interventions integrate with the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti to valorise the site and create a meditative atmosphere while preserving its historical identity and cultural heritage value?

1. How can principles of adaptive reuse and heritage conservation be used in the transformation of a historic ruin?
2. How can reusing a historic ruin support cultural and social sustainability in a remote rural context?

This thesis explores how new architectural interventions can integrate with the ruin of Santa Maria di Settefonti in a way that enhances the site's usability and creates a meditative atmosphere while preserving its value and identity. The proposal is based on the idea that the strength of the site already lies in its existing condition, in its atmosphere, material presence and relationship to the landscape. For this reason, the project does not attempt to redo what has been lost, but instead works with the ruin as it is, respecting the remaining stones as the main carrier of memory and identity.

The new function responds to the quiet and contemplative character of the site. By transforming the ruin into a place for meditation, and spiritual dialogue, the project reactivates an abandoned historic ruin through a meaningful modern use that remains sensitive to its atmosphere. In this way, the site is not turned into a conventional tourist destination, rather than a space that reconnects visitors and the local community to its cultural and historical value.

The project shows that principles of adaptive reuse and heritage conservation can be integrated through minimal, reversible and clearly modern interventions. Since the ruin has already been structurally stabilized by the municipality, through metal beams. The proposal avoids direct adjustment of the remaining ruin, and introduces the elements necessary to support the new function, such as paths, seating, stairs and lighting. In addition, one of the most important approaches was choosing another material for everything new, to respect the existing ruin and pointed out the new interventions. These additions remain visually secondary to the ruin, allowing the historic remains to stay dominant, while creating a clear dialogue between past and present.

All of the architectural interventions were necessary to enhance the site and support its new function. However, the proposal does not aim to make the site fully accessible for wheelchair users. Within the current proposal, wheelchair users may still be able to participate with the assistance of others in order to ensure their safety.

The reuse of the ruin is also supporting cultural and social sustainability. Through the storytelling path, the spots. The proposal helps visitors engage with the site in a more personal and meaningful way. In this way, the project preserves not only the physical ruin, but also its narrative, atmosphere and cultural significance. In the future, the site could be more strongly connected to the local legend and the locations of the springs through a hiking path across the landscape. However, this remains beyond the scope of the present thesis.

Overall, the thesis concludes that new interventions can successfully integrate with the ruin when they are guided by reversibility and respect for the existing structure and atmosphere. Through this approach, Santa Maria di Settefonti can be reactivated as a place of reflection and spiritual experience while preserving its identity and heritage value for future generations.

Physical Model



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