

RISVEGLIO MARITTIMO

AWAKENING MARITIME IDENTITY IN MESSINA

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ExploreLab 35 - 2023

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I would like to thank my tutors Dr. Ir. Maurice Hartevelde, Ir. Jan van de Voort, and Prof. Dr. Ing. Carola Hein. All of them supported me in finding my own path, figuring out where the path was going, and arriving to the point I am at now. Further, I am very grateful to the people I met in Messina who contributed to telling the stories of their city. Without the support of my family, I would not have kept going. Grazie, to my parents Anna Laura and Walter, my sister Sophie, and my brother-in-law Mario. Grazie to my grandmother Mirella for the countless anecdotes of times past and to my grandfather Filippo, who infected all of us with his love for his home, Sicily.

Part I - What, Why, and How

Part II - Maritime Messina

Part III - In reflection



Strait of Messina, 2022

Part I - What, Why, and How

In this chapter, the framework of the thesis is presented. After introducing the overall topic and positioning myself as researcher and designer, the problem statement and research question are introduced. Following, the methodology and research outcome are explained.



Tindari, 1970s

Introduction

After a lucullan lunch at nonna Nunziatina's house in Olivieri, Filippo and Mirella decided to go for a walk to Tindari. The village on top of the mountain is not only a sanctuary for all Catholics of the region, who pray to the black Madonna of Tindari, but is also the site of the ancient settlement of Tyndaris, strategic point and vital colony of the Greek founded in 395 BC. The young couple as many others appreciate the place for its mystical aura emanating from the old church, the ancient ruins of passed times, the calm nature, and the magnificent view on the Aeolian Islands. Passing by the church and the ruins Filippo and Mirella arrive to Roccafemina the outmost point of the village overseeing the gulf of Patti to the West, the gulf of Milazzo to the East, and the Aeolian Islands to the North. Astonished by the beauty of the place Mirella ask her husband to plant a tree in this beautiful location for her.

Filippo and Mirella would return many times to Roccafemina, and Filippo takes Mirella's wish seriously. Sometime later, Filippo manages to purchase a piece of land on the promontory, plant a tree, and refurbish two existing shepherd's houses to build a vacation home for Mirella, their daughter Anna Laura, and himself. A place to return to after having moved to Rome and Trieste, a place to return to on his beloved island: Sicily.



falce, 2022

I have returned as much as possible to the place my grandparents fell in love with many decades ago. I have been experiencing the beauty of this place and the island of Sicily as much as I have been faced with the problems and struggles the island is facing. Sicily faces global challenges as climate change, Mediterranean issue as high unemployment rates (especially for young people), economic deficits, and local problems as the loss of heritage and collective identity, resulting in the abandonment and depreciation of places and their culture.

These developments are apparent in the entire metropolitan region of Messina, where Tindari is located. While Tindari is a secluded village in the mountains, the centerpiece of the region is the urban cluster of Messina, 60km westwards. The city is representative for many of the issues faced on a bigger scale but is specific in its role as centrality for the region and the role of port-city as gate to Sicily at the Strait of Messina, the closest point between Sicily and “the continent”.

It appears that Messina has lost its genuine character as a port city mediating between hinterland and sea, which has led to urban and social decay. As an architect the role the built environment plays in this process is worth investigating, trying to understand the problems, their origin, and the opportunities which an intervention on the built environment can offer. The objective of this thesis is to understand the



Strait of Messina, 2022

genuine character on Messina as a port city, rooted in its maritime identity and recognize possibilities to intervene on the built environment to awaken and fertilize Messina's maritime mindset for a future towards a port city.

Position

Before diving into the problem statement, research question, methodology, and theoretical framework applied for this thesis, I need to acknowledge my position as the author and therefore my preconceptions towards the topic and the city of Messina. As displayed in the introduction I got into contact with the city since a very young age. I experienced Tindari, Messina, and Sicily for summer vacation. Being born and raised in the very different context of Basel (Switzerland), my perception of the built environment is rooted in the comparison to Basel and formed through experiences of summertime and leisure. The image of Messina has in time changed by experiencing of different seasons, settings, and places and by my own growth and training as an architect but are constantly connotated with stories from the past. This research provided the opportunity to observe, learn, and perceive the city from a new position. This position allowed me to confirm, question, and change certain aspects of my perception of Messina.



urban development

Problem Statement

During the 20th century Messina has undergone significant changes which resulted in the fragile situation Messina finds itself today.

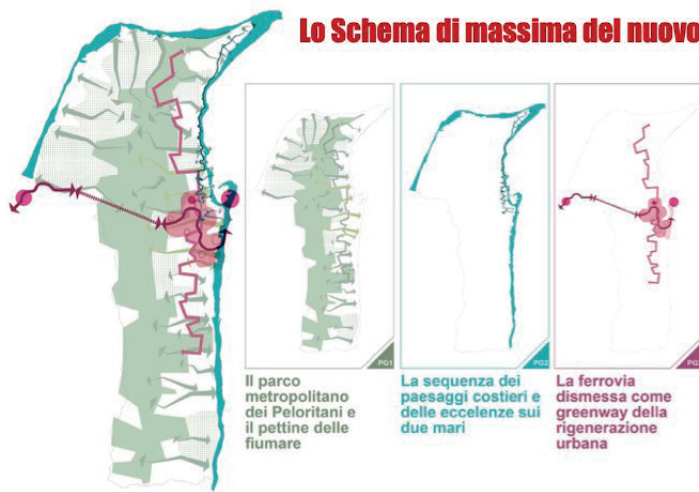
After the 1908 earthquake and tidal wave had destroyed most parts of the city, the urban fabric of the city was totally renewed. Luigi Borzi's masterplan for an earthquake resilient city imposed a grid structure on the city territory and new building regulations regarding height and construction techniques of buildings were implemented. Further, to protect Messina from future seaquakes the new city was offset from the waterfront by a significant distance (Borzi, 1919, p.1). This masterplan shifted the center of the city land inwards away from the sea and provoked an extension towards South. Until World War II no new tools for urban planning were applied to Messina. When in the 1970s new zoning plans were decided upon, the only tool used was the design of a new zoning plan opening rural areas to construction. This resulted in a vast urban sprawl (Piano Regolatore Generale, 2018, p.16). Today Messina's hills and mountains are littered with poorly constructed, and partly abandoned housing developments. This directly influenced the high vacancy of houses in the city and the resulting decrease of urban density.

Further, the urban sprawl has led to the neglect of the

Comune di Messina – Palazzo Zanca, Salone delle Bandiere – 20 aprile 2018

Carlo Gasparri

Lo Schema di massima del nuovo PRG di Messina



Piano Regolatore Generale, Comune di Messina, 2018

city – sea relationship. An infrastructural barrier between city and sea has developed. Highly used roads and train tracks have detached city and sea spatially. Besides minor recreational use of the coast the interaction between city and sea has been reduced to Ro-Ro (Roll on Roll off) traffic of ferries connecting Messina to mainland Italy. The arriving and departing car and truck traffic originating from three different ferry terminals ('San Francesco', 'porto storico', 'Tremestieri') results in massive congestions and pollution of the city.

To tackle these and other issues in 2018 a new masterplan for the metropolitan region Messina was developed. A careful analysis of the urban territory and the build environment is the basis for the 2018 masterplan. It focuses on imagining future scenarios for a socially, environmentally, and economically sustainable Messina. The focal points of the masterplan are (PRG, 2018, p.17):

- Valorization of territorial, natural, and historical assets*
- Resilience to natural hazards*
- Stop of urban sprawl and solutions for housing crisis*
- Improvement of the public mobility infrastructure*
- Development of diversified economies (tourism, culture, creativity, agriculture, port activities)*

While significant parts of the masterplan engage important topics and offer valid scenarios, the masterplan deals with the development of coast and hinterland separately.



porto di Messina, 2022

The topic is approached in an old-fashioned way to improve the relation between city and sea while at the same time being stated as a main goal (PRG, 2018, p.7). Similarly, to port-city developments of the past, the main idea of the masterplan is to move any “undesirable” port activity towards a new port outside of the city (Tremestieri) and to reduce port activities in proximity of the city center to cruise ship tourism. Additionally, waterfronts embellishments are proposed to offer recreational spaces for the citizens (PRG, 2018, p.208).

The aim to reduce Messina’s city-sea relation to a pretty waterfront with spaces for short term cruise ship tourism is to generic and short-sighted. The specific and genuine maritime identity of Messina should be embraced and used as an asset to strengthen Messina as a port-city, reactivating the strong interconnection between port, city, and sea. This thesis takes on the task to discover the residues of maritime identity in the city and understand how these can be awakened to support Messina as a port city.



Viale Giostra, 2022

Research Question

In opposition to the approach of the masterplan this research explores a more specific approach trying to grasp,

How can the concept of maritime identity facilitate the understanding of existing assets, and offer design opportunities towards Messina as a port city?

To answer this question the research aims at understanding Messina's maritime identity in its entirety on multiple scales. To read the city in depth micro-narratives are used to understand a vast variety of aspects, which cannot be analysed from a distance without confronting Messina's contemporary reality.

Methodology

Though this thesis acknowledges and argues the severity of the split between city and sea, it does not engage with the spatial theory of division between port and city argued in the 'Any-port model' (Bird, 1963) of the 20th century. While a spatial process of geographical separation between city and port can be observed with the development of the Tremestieri port and the aims of the 2019 masterplan, this thesis focuses on the specificity of Messina as a port-city.

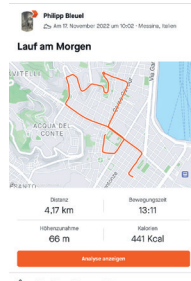
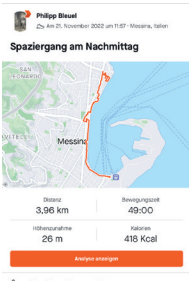
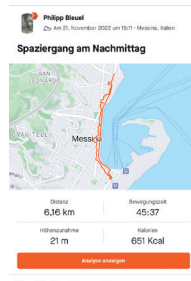


town hall, 2022

As proposed for the example of Rotterdam by Hartevelt in 2021 (Hartevelt, 2021), instead of looking at a linear historic development based on governance and its spatial implications micro-narratives rooted in the sociocultural context on the city in the present are researched. However, the origins and influences of these micro-narratives are tight back to a historic development to understand the reasons for their presence or disappearance from the present, collective maritime mindset.

The concept of Maritime Mindset is used and researched by a subgroup of the PortCitiesFutures (PCF) initiative by Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities. Generally, the term is explained as the “specific mentality or culture” (Sennema et al., 2021, p.154) in which “historical resilience of port cities is embedded” (Hein, 2020). In the contemporary context resilience asks for a sustainable, inclusive, and ecological development of port-cities.

Combining a series of micro-narratives, as proposed, enables for a speculative reading of the city and the forming of a biography of place. Rather than limiting the micro-narratives to a purely superficial connection between city and port the collected micro-narratives are rooted in Messina’s maritime mindset, which in some cases might be easily recognizable on the surface and in some cases is more complex and less obvious.



recordings field trip, 2022

The micro-narratives have been collected on multiple field work trips to Messina. To collect micro-narratives on the field trips mapping, informal interviews, archival research, and photography have been used as methods of documentation for the micro-narratives. The physical encounter on the field trips were the starting point for further research on certain narratives and later their reflection against the influence on the maritime identity of Messina. Accordingly, the structure of each micro-narrative is in three parts: the encounter, the background, and the maritime.

When organizing and discussing the most apparent elements of Messina's maritime identity, the focus is mostly on the waterfront. The little emergences of maritime are located at the edge of the water, e.g., the terminals for cruise ships and ferries and the most asked for maritime intervention is the development of a promenade on the waterfront. However, the discussion about maritime mindset cannot be limited to a linear space along the coast. To develop a complete understanding of Messina's maritime identity a look at the entire territory of Messina's metropolitan area is needed. To do so, this research proposes to look at the city orthogonally to the waterfront. Understanding the city as a part of the section from Peloritani mountains to the Strait of Messina can help understand the influence of the topography on the city and its relation to the sea, as the city is located in the



pettine delle fiumare

plain between the coast of the Ionian Sea and the Peloritani mountains. Further, the plain is dissected orthogonally to the coast by multiple streams running from the mountain to the sea. The streams have been the limits of the city's development for multiple centuries acting as natural lines along which fortifications have been build. With climate change the amount of water carried by the streams has changed drastically. The streams are carrying much less water and have developed into what in Southern Italy is called a "Fiumara", river or riverbeds which carry little to no water during arid month and are flooded during rainfall (Treccani, n.d.).

Outcome

Combining the collection of micro-narratives with the orthogonal approach mentioned above, this research collects micro-narratives along the major fiumare influencing the Messina. Micro-narratives along the fiumare of Giostre, Boccetta, Portalegni, Zaera, and Gazzi have been collected and organized in categories, assigning a category to each fiumara.

The categories to describe and organize the micro-narratives are Water + Environment, Production + Transformation, Heritage + Cultures, Threshold + Transition, Quotidianity + Symbols.

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Strait of Messina, 2022

Part II - Maritime Messina

The micro-stories joined together in this booklet, have been collected on field trips to Messina, discussed during talks with locals, and organized with the effort to shape a biography of place depicting Messinas maritime identity.



Viale Giostra

Giostra

The fiumara Giostra, has been covered and sealed. It has been converted to Viale Giostra, one of Messina's most important traffic arteries. Here it serves to display the micro-narratives of Thresholds + Transitions.



Viale Giostra, 2022

traffico

The highway system is free around Messina, instead of the usual toll, between Villafranca Tirrena and Tremestieri cars are supposed to use the elevated highway instead of filling up the streets of Messina. While the city center, which is car free anyway, the city still suffers from daily congestions and the highway thrones above the city with its concrete bridges. Especially on a rainy day it seems like the cars in the city multiply. Crowded streets, full crossings, and honking are the usual picture.



Viale Giostra, 2022

As public transport neither short-range nor mid-range is well established in the entire region, the car still is the primary vehicle to move across the spread-out metropolitan region. Additionally, every 20 minutes a new bunch of cars arrives to the city via ferry, temporarily and periodically worsening the situation. Due to the configuration of the city and the transformation of its streams into streets leading towards the highway, these wide arteries are full of cars. At the same time, they serve as spaces where most of daily shopping can be done – on the way from place to place. These phenomena together keep worsening the traffic situation in the city.

The arrival of groups of people by sea cannot be prevented, but there are many ways to travel across the strait without car. But arrived on the shore there is no way of changing to another modality of public transport. Moving by foot is also not an option as the streets are again governed by the cars.



Stazione Marittima, 2022

The transition from land to sea and vice versa adds another layer to a common problem of contemporary city of Southern Europe. However, the many opportunities to travel across the strait rather shows opportunities for public transport rather than limiting it.



ferry boarding, 2022



Giostra, 2022



connections across the Strait

la traversata dello stretto

Crossing the Strait four times in a day in three different ways, is a little excessive. Driving the car onto the ferry and sitting behind the wheel for 30 minutes while looking into other people's car, sitting in a hydrofoil boat for 15 minutes while feeling like in a plane, taking a water taxi, or using the ferry but enjoying 30 minutes on the sunny deck, these are only a few ways to cross the strait, a train can also be used if it gets divided into carriages and put on a designated ferry.



ferry boat, 2022

The movement across the Strait needs a little more effort than just moving around on land, but it is very special. Commuting across the strait is a daily reality for many people. The hydrofoil service is fast, frequent, cheap, and reliable as long as there are no storms. However, the surroundings of the docks, are rather disappointing. While on the Calabrian side there is a small terminal with waiting rooms and toilets and a big parking lot, the Sicilian side is organized solely by some canopies to protect the waiting people from rain, nothing more. The spirit of the people is the same as the one of other commuters on land, nothing special. When arriving to the island from further away however, the transition from highway or train track to a boat wonderfully slows down the pace of travel, there is a big awareness of arriving to Sicily, a special, different place. The time on the ferry's deck opens a moment of break the often is used for small traditions e.g., the consumption of the first Sicilian delicacy like an arancino or a cannolo – a little snack Sicilian's all over the world cannot wait to taste again. Even when travelling from far away by train to Sicily the much-criticized process of disassembling the carriages and transferring them onto a ferry has something special about it, that turns us back into children that admire any kind of technology.



ferry boarding, 2022

These phenomena are so special and unique to Messina that losing them would be terrible. The plans for the bridge over the Strait would not only be a huge waste of money and have a negative ecological impact, but they would take away so much of the genuine character Messina has. Rather than abandoning this part of Messina's maritime identity it should be promoted and fostered.

The maritime and train station is a good example for this. Having both trains and ferries arriving in one building is a value. Unfortunately, maritime part of the station is abandoned and doesn't serve its purpose anymore.



ferry boarding Tremestieri, 2022



train on ferry, 2019



Piazza Catalani, 2022

crociere

In the days leading up to the arrival of a big cruise ship the size and time of arrival and stay of the ship is being discussed in bars and on the street. Even if it has become rare not to see a cruise ship in the harbor, especially in summer, the arrival of a new ship with new tourists triggers something in the city. The day of the arrival the exit of the cruise ship terminal and the surrounding streets get crowded. Street vendors and tourist guides start setting up shop to get the foreigners attention as fast as possible. The scenery of the street changes. When the ship lands in the harbor the tourist start flooding out of the ship. Most tourists don't even enter the city. A fleet of busses waits behind the barrier dividing city and ship and is ready to bring the tourists to bigger touristic locations as Tindari or Taormina. The brave visitors the pass the gate engage with the street vendors and guides. They flood the café closest to the terminal. Probably no local has ever set foot in this café and the adjacent souvenir shop. A few tourists keep walking past the café where more tour busses await and advertise city tours. Most of the tourist take up the offer and enter red-busses – the same ones found in London or Los Angeles. The most adventurous tourists start walking by themselves, they are following a route indicated by the tourist information, it follows the same path as the busses,



cruise ship tourist route, 2022

but instead to be driven up to Cristo Re to take some photos of the port and the cruise ship from a panoramic point, they walk up the stairs to the same destination encountering some shadier and dirtier corners of the city. After the few photos were taken the walk down along a different route starts. It leads the tourists by the Museum of contemporary art. Even if someone tried to get into passed the close doors and the narrow staircase to the gallery, they would arrive in a dark room, where a guardian would have to search for the light switch. After finding it he would tell a few vague facts to each piece of art, which could be read on the tags on the wall. After passing the museum the route leads back to the terminal. On the way a few restaurants try to fish for clients, that are easily recognizable as cruise ship tourists, but not many can be convinced, as the ship provides them with everything.



cruise terminal, 2022

The municipality and port authority are pushing the development of cruise ship tourism. Building more and bigger docks, for more and bigger ships. The result of such a strategy can be admired all over touristic cities around the Mediterranean. The most extreme case must be Venice, where this approach was pushed for the past 20-30 years, and now is seen as a clear failure. Even if the raw numbers indicate that a bigger amount of people is visiting Messina, there is no increased exchange between city and tourists. The interaction is very superficial and the little interaction there is, is based on generic and basic things that could happen in every other European city. It does not make sense to simply increase the number of visitors and use that as a reason to create more and more infrastructure. A change of how the city is represented is needed, a deeper understanding and exchange is the only way the increase in tourism could help in developing Messina.



cruise terminal, 2022

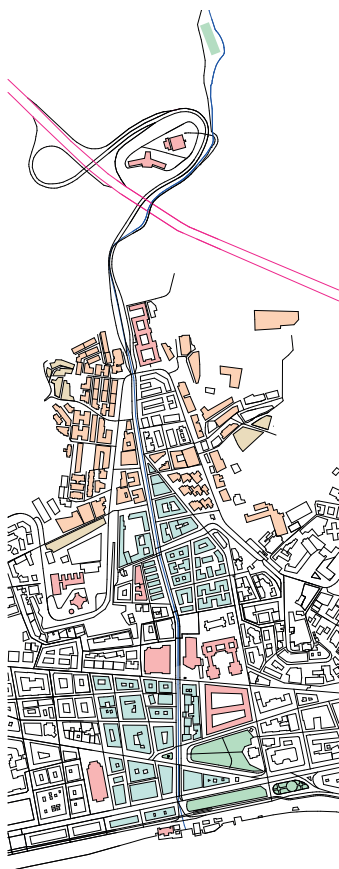
The arrival of tourist by ship from the sea cannot be the maritime identity of Messina and cannot be used to define Messina as a port city. The genuine identity of Messina must be emphasized and could then be used to promote a specific and valuable tourism.



Piazza Duomo, 2022



Cristo Re, 2022



Viale Boccetta

Boccetta

To reach the city center of Messina there is no way around Viale Boccetta. It has been relieved of the heavy traffic, by the development of additional highway access roads. It has become a more urban street. It shows the shows the daily life of Messina and represents the maritime notions in Quotidianity and Symbols.

pesce stocco a' ghiotta

- stoccafisso (ammollato)
- cipolla (rossa) a spicchi
- olive in salamoia
- pomodoro
- olio
- capperi

1. soffriggere cipolla, olive e capperi
2. sale e pepe q.b.
3. sfumare con vino bianco o acqua
4. aggiungere pomodoro
5. aggiungere stoccafisso
6. coprire e cuocere a fiamma bassa per ca. 30'

ricipe, pesce stocco a' ghiotta

pesce a pranzo

Traditional dishes are still the most popular in Messina. Products from land and sea are combined in exquisite ways. The ‘focaccia alla Messinese’ combines flour and water in the dough and tops it off with fresh salad, tomatoes, and anchovies. The ‘pesce stocco a’ ghiotta’ combines salted stockfish with tomatoes, capers, and red onions. The dishes show again how the process of conserving fresh food is part of the culinary and industrial heritage of Messina which is inevitably connected not only to the climatic circumstances but more importantly to the culture of sailors and the need to preserve food when going to sea.

Of course, fresh fish still plays a major role in the local cuisine, most of the fish consumed in Messina is fished in the waters of the strait, the Ionian, and Tyrrhenian Sea and can be bought in small shop across the city. While the building of the central fish market still stands, today it serves as a parking lot and the fish trade has left the city.



Mercato Ittico, 2023

Just around Capo Peloro there is a second port city: Milazzo. Not only has it become the major industrial for of the region, due to the development of its oil refinery, but also has developed into the most important shipment point for fish. The reason behind the shift from Messina to Milazzo is connected to tourism. In front of Milazzo the Eolian Islands attract the biggest amount of tourist in the region, especially economically powerful tourists. To grant the luxury hotels and restaurants of the eolian islands an easier access to the fish market Milazzo, which maintains the biggest connection to the Eolian Islands through ferry traffic, has been established as the new central fish trading location.



quadrilatero, 2023

It seems that important identity-forming places like the fish market, that has turned into an important centrality in most other Mediterranean cities, in Messina has been sacrificed to better assist seasonal tourism.



fish cart, 2022



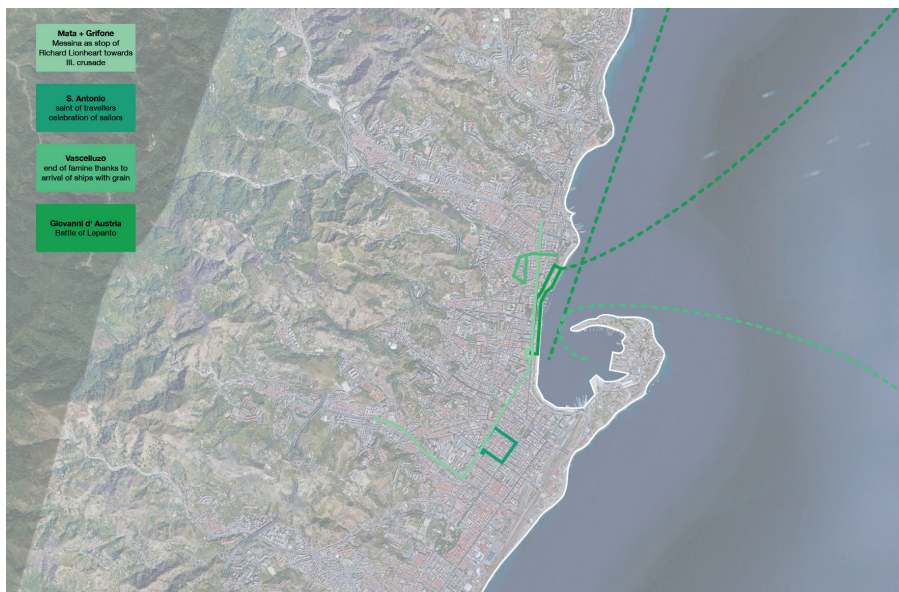
vegetable cart, 2022



Vascelluzzo (FoodTourSicily)

processioni

The Vascelluzzo is a silver model of a ship that on Corpus Christi is carried through the city on a procession. The procession commemorates the madonna della lettera and how she miraculously saved the citizens of Messina during the famine of 1301 by leading ships full of grain to Messina. During the year the church of Santa Maria di porto salvo dei marinai (holy Mary of the save haven of the sailors) is home to the Vascelluzzo and once a year the silver object is brought outside.



parades in Messina

Processions especially related to catholic faith are very popular in Sicily. The processions for Easter can be found all over the island. Each city, town, and village additionally have their own and unique processions rooted in the city's history and culture. In Messina the most important processions that are not rooted in catholic holidays are the 'vara', the 'giganti mata e grifone', the 'vascelluzzo', and 'sbarco di don Giovanni d'austria'. In all these occasions a parade through the city is followed by thousands of citizens and accompanied by big feasts in the street. While by now all these processions have been integrated into the catholic calendar by moving them to occur during catholic holidays, most of them have a history rooted in the city's maritime past.

During the 'vara' a statue of Mary is carried through the city and the virgin mother is celebrated. However, the 'vara' parade originates in the landing of Karl V in Messina upon his return from the battle of Tunis and the celebratory parade that was held in Messina.

During the processions for the 'giganti mata e grifone' said to be the founders of Messina, two enormous statues of a female and male giant are carried through the city. The origin of the procession is debated: The more mystical story tells the love story between the local Mata and a giant Moor that arrived on the shore of Messina and fell in love with Mata. After their marriage the two founded the city of Messina. The



Mata e Grifone (L' eco del sud)

other, more historically rooted origin is connected to Richard Lionheart. Due to its strategical position in the Mediterranean Messina was chosen by Richard Lionheart as the starting point towards the third crusade. The city was oppressed by Greek Moors and through the influence of Richard Lionheart the power dynamics were reorganized. The giants are said to be allegorical figures for the coexistence of the different cultures.

For the landing of John of Austria, the parade does not take place in the streets but on the water, where historical ships enter the port to remember the arrival of John of Austria after the Battle of Lepanto.



Palio a mare (Comune di Messina)

These processions all lead back to Messina's past as an active port city. The transition of people, cultures, and goods through the Strait and their influence on the city are celebrated. The processions can also be seen as a rather conservative and traditional tool for celebrating collective moments. Especially the strong connection between these and the Catholic faith are somewhat problematic as they are exclusive to a certain belief. However, the idea of celebrating the history of the city collectively in the streets can be a valuable tool to reflect on the city's identity.

The example of the 'palio delle contrade' is an example for competitive, but collective celebration of the maritime past of the city. Boating was the only leisure activity in Messina. In memory of past times, once a year different neighborhoods compete in a boat race in front of Messina.



symbols of the maritime

“dello Stretto”

While walking through the city there are symbols or notions that attract the attention when looking for the maritime in Messina. While there are a series of obvious symbols that evoke the maritime, which are somewhat generic to every maritime city e.g., fish, waves, tridents, and boats. A notion that is very specific to Messina is the naming of all kinds of activities ‘dello stretto’. From bars, to insurances, to the local ballet. They are all called ‘dello stretto’ – of the strait. Rather than simply identifying with the sea the perception in Messina is very strongly connected to the strait, therefore with the notion of sea and land. There is no such thing as the typical horizon on the water in Messina.



Antenna Cariddi, 2022

Since in ancient times the legends of Scylla and Caddis have influenced the character of the Strait of Messina. The strong currents and active tectonic plates marked the Strait as a dangerous space. However, the funnel between Italy and the Mediterranean's biggest island has been an important passage for travelers and trade forever. Further, the natural habitat of the strait is unique due to the meeting of the two seas and results in a marvelous natural setting.



proposed sites for bridge over the Strait of Messina

The Strait is at the same time a separation and connection for Sicily. While it creates a barrier between Europe and the island, it is the place where the most connection between the island and the rest of the world. The plans to build a bridge over the Strait are as old as the city itself. However, the plans have never been realized and hopefully never will. The existence of the Strait as a threshold between Sicily and Italy creates specific situations that require a local approach to deal with them. The myths of the past, the ferry traffic of the present, and the maritime of the future are deeply rooted in the existence of the Strait.



'Il paguro' (Behance)

“il paguro”

On the back wall of the Ex-Silos a huge mural showing a man hunting a sword fish and a mollusk with a city on its shell is painted. In a very unlikely place, a very strong and beautiful image tells a lot about Messina. It shows the city and its character in a maritime allegory. The sailor, citizen of Messina, hunting the local swordfish with a fork, to eat and survive, and the mollusk renewing its own house the city every time it is destroyed.



Lillo il Marinaio, 2023

The mural is part of a series of street art interventions across the city. The project started by the municipality began as a rather generic project, to promote hip and very “instagramable” art in the city to give it on a contemporary vibe taking advantage of the big number of abandoned buildings and surfaces. However, the artist chosen to contribute all chose maritime themes and articulated them in rather beautiful way.



tram stop, 2022



tram stop, 2022



Via Tommaso Cannizzaro

Portalegni

The 'portalegni' stream was the Southern boarder of Messina until the 1908 earthquake. With the development of the city the 'portalegni' also developed. From stream, to fiumara, to street. In this context the 'portalegni' will tell the stories of heritage and cultures.



Dinnamare, 2022

Forti Umbertini

The highest point of the Peloritani Mountains in the hinterland of the city is Dinnamare. A point from which you can perceive the extraordinary position of Messina at the edge between the Ionian and Tyrrhenian Sea. Today, Dinnamare is a place with a small chapel and a weather station. However, originally the constructions were planned as a fort. One of a series of forts build along the Strait of Messina on both the Sicilian and Calabrian site: the Forti Umbertini.



Forti Umbertini (Comune di Messina)

In the second half on the 19th century multiple forts were built along the two coasts of the Strait. Rather than being erected along the coastline to protect the city at its threshold with the sea, the forts were located on the hills. Therefore, rather than protecting the city itself, they were meant to protect the space on the water in front of the city. Since then, the forts have been abandoned, until small independent citizen's collectives have begun to appropriate them as spaces for encounter, leisure, and education. Most of the forts on the Sicilian side of the strait have been refurbished and are in use today. While the projects started are very valuable as they have a focus on local communities, art and culture, and the local environment, unfortunately they are not very visible or accessible to outsider's missing out on the chance to increase the influence of these great values.



Forte Petrazza (Lettera EMME)

The forts are remembrances of the maritime mindset of Messina's past. They are physical memories of how important the relation between land and sea has been. The forts disclose the influence of the sea on the entire territory, the sea a central part of the territory itself. The coastline is not a linear barrier between two separate and independent places, it is not comparable to a city wall. Understanding this difference to non-maritime cities is central to grasp the intricate influences between hinterland, city, and sea.



Messina

la forma della città

The city center of Messina is characterized by a strict grid and a homogeneous appearance. The grid is made up by 12m high liberty buildings and 14m wide streets. This grid is oriented orthogonally to the coastline constantly opening views towards the sea and the strait. The fresh breeze from the sea can permeate the city easily giving it a pleasant climate. When looking the other way towards the mountains, big apartment buildings of the 1970s obstruct the view towards the hills.

The building speculation on the hills spread uncontrollably after WWII. When walking on the streets of these neighborhoods the sea seems much further away. As the construction is on the hills the streets are no longer oriented towards the coastline, but rather are parallel to it. The streets lose any quality for pedestrians as they are also simply built for cars.



Via Trieste, 2022

During its history Messina faced destruction multiple times. The most influential events are the earthquakes of 1783 and 1908. In both cases the city was razed to the ground and had to be rebuilt by the resilient residents of Messina.

The city as we know it today is based on Luigi Borzi's master plan of 1911. Borzi's master plan carefully tried to preserve the surviving structures and the possibility to rebuild important monuments (Autorità Portuale di Messina, 2007, p.20). Borzi's master plan kept the city centre in the same place. However, it extended the city's boundaries, surpassing the natural limits of the streams Bocceta (to the North) and Portalegni (to the South). The streams Camaro in the South and Annunziata in the North set the new boundaries. For over 60 years no new regulating tools were developed by the municipality. While the informal settlements created after the earthquake developed as independent parts of town with a slum-like character new land along the Peloritani was used for unauthorized building speculation (abusivismo).

Only in the 1970s a significant change in the urban development occurred when in a new masterplan was developed for the city more land around the city was designated to construction. Promoted by post war reconstruction and public-private building speculation, the hills of the Peloritani were designated as construction land. Apartment buildings started sprouting on the hills uncontrollably which today register a high vacancy of



Messina, 2022

housing blocks and a high lack of urbanity.

At the same time the biggest Fiumare were developed into artery-roads for the new settlements. The Fiumare were partly covered by concrete slabs and the water carrying layer has been moved underground.



Via Consolato del Mare, 2022

The separation between sea and city has occurred on multiple levels. In this example it shows how the urban structure has detached itself from the sea. Together the physical barriers created at the waterfront and the neglect of the visual presence of the sea resulted in a psychological distance between city, its inhabitants, and the sea. The presence of the physical maritime and its perception is needed in the city to strengthen the awareness of the maritime strengthening it as the anchor for the future development of the city.



Via Palmara, 2022



Via Trieste, 2022



Fondo Fucile, 2022

baracche

What now is simply a pile of debris, was the home of many families only a few months ago. An entire neighborhood was torn down and the inhabitants were moved to somewhere else. This was part of a project reallocating citizens into existing vacant buildings. The old neighborhood was a very advanced form of slum. These types of settlements can be found across the city.



baracche via Taormina, 2022

After the violent earthquake and tidal wave had destroyed most of the city in 1908. The city was rebuilt according to a masterplan introducing the grid which shapes the city today. However, in the time between the earthquake and the completion of the new buildings, most people were left to live in informal settlements called baracche – meaning huts. While construction went on more and more people moved into the new houses. The families without the means to afford the new homes were left in these slums. Over time more people left for other housing projects, but also the baracche developed into more formal constructions and today the old settlements are neighborhoods with vibrant communities. Unfortunately, the infrastructure is still very bad and crime and social issues are also still present. At the same time, many of the apartment blocks built in the second half of the 20th century are vacant. The municipality and independent groups have developed different projects to tackle these problems. Some projects help citizens to buy and renovate abandoned buildings, others help improve the infrastructure of existing settlements, and others again introduce new community buildings in the existing fabric.



Fiera di Messina, 2022

Messina's fragility towards natural disasters and the social consequences it has brought in the past are a close relation between socio-economic and natural issues. Freeing up spaces, reusing existing buildings and improving the urban conditions are valuable efforts that can improve the city and the life in it radically.



SS Annunziata dei Catalani, 2022

Santissima Annunziata dei Catalani

In the middle of a typical street there is a small square where a building stands on a sunken plaza. There are Christian symbols like a cross on the top. Greek columns lie flat on the ground next to the building. And part of the roof is a round dome remembering Arabic architecture.



SS Annunziata dei Catalani, 2022

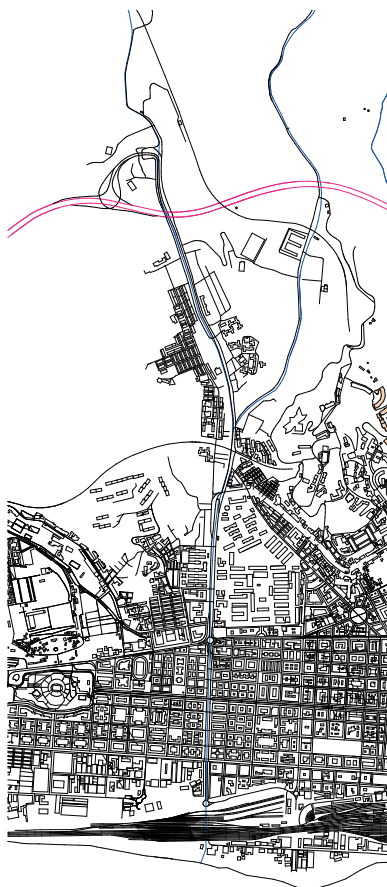
Santissima Annunziata dei Catalani is a church wonderfully bringing together all the cultures which called Messina home during history. The former temple, mosque, and now church was originally a temple of the Greek. All the cultures passing by and staying in Messina appropriated the space and made it their own. The city was reined by the Greek, the Romans, the Arabs, the Normans, the Spanish, and the Italian. All these cultures left a part of heritage in the city, that can not only be found in buildings, but also in daily things like the language or cuisine.

The presence of Islamic culture becomes very interesting in the contemporary context. While the Arabic rein in Sicily is part of the city's heritage, there is a xenophobia towards Islamic immigrants arriving today. Many persons fear a sort of Islamic take over in near future and therefore want to distance themselves from anything Islamic.



SS Annunziata dei Catalani, 2022

The very own heritage of Messina is proved that the exchange of cultures and their mix is a very fruitful process. This vivid exchange, arrival, and departure of cultures is clearly rooted to the maritime mindset in Messina's past. This has to be acknowledged and brought into contemporary thinking to insure positive and integrative social development embracing diversity as a strength rather than something what has to be feared.



Viale Europa, 2022

Zaera

The 'zaera' starts to cross the margins of the city. The buildings along the 'zaera' are no longer only offices and housing. The former production district still is full of artisans and industrial ruins. The stories of production and transformation of goods is told along the 'zaera'.



San Placido Calonerò, 2022

agrumi

In the area around San Placido Calonerò the hills of the Peloritani impress with their distinct shape. The mountains are entirely covered by terraces stepping down the slope. While now it appears like nature is reconquering these terraces by hand of the grass and bushes growing on and around them, there are still a few very clean and clearly visible containment walls. A small group of people has begun to reuse these terraces in the way they were intended originally – agriculture. One of the major products cultivated in and around Messina were lemons.



Sanderson & Co., 2022

Already hundreds of years ago local farmers developed techniques to gain citric acid and other essential oils from the lemons. The mastery of these processes was carried out by the agrumari. Having developed these techniques proved to be of high economic value for the city, as citric acid could be used to preserve food well, a handy process for the sailors stopping in the port of Messina on their travels across the Mediterranean Sea. The value of the citric acid relived another boom around 1900, where the production of calcium citric acid reached new heights in Messina. German and British companies as Sanderson and Sons, Co. built factories in and around Messina to promote the production of a globally demanded product. In the first half of the 20th century the citric industries were highly valuable to Messina. The influenced the entire territory. The production in the hinterland, the transformation in the city, and the trade with foreign countries.

When technologies to produce calcium citric acid synthetically were developed the economy in Messina crashed. The result today is that the terraces and the old factories are abandoned. While the abandoned factories are rather singular occurrences, the abandoned agricultural land is a widespread phenomenon impacting the people and the environment.



Via Luciano Manara, 2022

Other agricultural products also have met similar fate. Many of the region's plantations and agricultural fields are abandoned. These developments are not directly correlated to the citric crisis but result in the same unfortunate reality. As the region is very mountainous and the ownership of land is very fragmented the production of agricultural products is not very competitive with other locations in the Mediterranean. However, looking at the example of the citrus production of the past century, these spaces can be an opportunity for the future. The demand for locally and organically produced fruit and vegetable is growing all over Europe. Agriculture is rooted in Messina's history as the natural circumstances are favorable. Unfortunately, there is very little drive behind a possible agricultural revival, as with the transformation of society towards a service economy working in agriculture is not valued as much.



terraces near Messina, 2022



Via Luciano Manara, 2022



fishing man, 2022

Pesce Spada

Fishermen still show up on the coast of Messina for leisure. Fishery has been an integral part of the city's identity for ever. While the fish market has been abandoned, there is still the pride to continue the tradition of hunting sword fish. The emphasis here is on hunting rather than fishing. The Strait of Messina is highly populated by swordfish, due to its geographical location along the migration routes of the fish and the ecological circumstances (e.g, different water temperatures due to the exchange between the Ionian and Tyrrhenian Sea) which favor marine life in the Strait.



feluca (Riserva Capo Peloro)

As the swordfish is a highly crafty and big fish, it cannot be fished in a conventional way. It is hunted down with harpoons from aboard a specific boat called 'feluca'. Its characteristics are a high tower from which the swordfish can be sighted and a long bridge at the front of the boat from where the harpoon can be launched without closing in the 'feluca' too closely to the prey. The process of hunting down the swordfish is accompanied by multiple small traditions and habits that date back hundreds of years. Some have pragmatic origins, some rather ideological roots. For example, it is tradition to always start hunting the female swordfish first, as most swordfish move in pairs and the male fish will not leave the area of the female's capture with the goal of finding his partner, giving the hunters a higher chance to capture the male fish with more ease. Upon capture the harpooner marks the prey's face with a grid scratched with his bare hands to acknowledge the swordfish's fight. Hunting down swordfish requires a lot of skill and practice. Therefore, the mastery of the hunt is passed on from generation to generation and protected in a collective knowledge. There are a controlled number of families/groups that are allowed to hunt the swordfish and there is a very clear set of rules of when, where, and how much swordfish each is allowed to hunt. This not only affects the ritual of hunting itself, but it also has a sustainable effect on the development of swordfish population in the Strait



cardata da cruci (Vito Finocchiaro)

resulting in a positive effect for both hunters and fish and ultimately protecting the environment and the economic security of the hunters.



greek coin painted on wall, 2022

The swordfish influences the identity of Messina on multiple levels, it is part of its natural environment, it creates work for the inhabitants on the city, and it nurtures the citizens as it is deeply rooted in traditional and contemporary cuisine to the point of being a Europe wide specialty.



Viale Gazzi

Gazzi

Marking the south border of Messina, Gazzi is a surrounded by a much less urbanized area. There are still multiple settlements south of the 'fiumara Gazzi', but here the role of Environment and Water becomes more pronounced.



Comune di Messina
Dipartimento Protezione Civile





**PIANO COMUNALE di
PROTEZIONE CIVILE**

COSA FARE PER NON RISCHIARE DI ESSERE TRAVOLTI DAI TORRENTI
 TIENITI SEMPRE INFORMATO SULLE CRITICITA' PREVISTE SUL TERRITORIO COMUNALE E SULLE MISURE ADOTTATE
IN CASO DI PIOGGE FORTI O DI ALLERTA METEO (GIALLA / ARANCIONE / ROSSA)

NON TRANSITARE LUNGO LE PASSERELLE O LE STRADE INTERNE AI TORRENTI
 IL LIVELLO DEI TORRENTI POTREBBE AUMENTARE RAPIDAMENTE, SENZA PREAVVISO TRASPORTANDO MASSI E ALBERI
 NON CERCARE DI RAGGIUNGERE A TUTTI I COSTI LA PROPRIA ABITAZIONE O ATTIVITA' LAVORATIVA
 ALLONTANARSI RAPIDAMENTE RAGGIUNGENDO ZONE PIU' SICURE ED ALTE
 NON PERCORRERE A PIEDI O IN MACCHINA STRADE INONDATE E SOTTOPASSI



15 cm di acqua in movimento possono far cadere un adulto con possibile annegamento



30 cm di acqua in movimento possono far perdere il controllo di un'auto



50 cm di acqua in movimento possono trascinare auto, e fuoristrada

ABANDONARE IMMEDIATAMENTE L'AUTO SENZA INTRALCIARE LA VIABILITA' - CERCARE RIPARO NELL'EDIFICIO PIU' VICINO CHIEDENDO OSPITALITA' - SE SI RIMANE ALL'APERTO NON SOSTARE IN PROSSIMITA' O SOTTO PENDI MOLTO RIPIDI, ALBERI ISOLATI, PALI E TRALICCI ELETTRICI - PRESTARE MASSIMA ATTENZIONE E PRUDENZA, ANCHE CON SCARSA PIOVOSITA' NEL TORRENTE, SPECIALMENTE DI NOTTE O QUANDO LA VISIBILITA' E' LIMITATA, IN MONTAGNA POTREBBE ANCORA PIOVERE CON RIFERCUSSIONI A VALLE, ATTENDERE FINCHE' LA SITUAZIONE NON SIA NORMALIZZATA
 DOPO UNA ALLUVIONE ATTENDERE CHE LE AUTORITA' ACCERTINO L'AGIBILITA' DEGLI ATTRAVERSAMENTI

SE CI SI TROVA IN DIFFICOLTA' CHIAMARE I NUMERI SOTTO INDICATI



800 458 787
Sala Operativa



112
SOS



115
VIGILI DEL FUOCO



090 22866
PROTEZIONE CIVILE MESSINA



090 771000
POLIZIA MUNICIPALE MESSINA

Gampilieri, 2022

Giampilieri

Across most villages along the Ionian coast these sings can be found. They appear in groups clustered next to Fiumare. In Giampilieri, additionally to these signs there is massive concrete structure meandering up the mountain and ending up in a massive containment wall that is the last piece of a series of concrete structures build to channel water and prevent landslides.



Gampilieri, 2009 (Gazzetta del Sud)

During the night between October 1st and 2nd of 2009 heavy rainfalls occurred in the entire Messina region. The amount of water falling towards the territory was massive and in multiple location the earth was not able to absorb the water and the streams were not able to carry the water in their designated riverbeds. Flooding and landslides were the result. No place was hit as violently as the village of Giampilieri located southwards of Messina along the Ionian coast. The citizens were abruptly wakened by masses of water and mud pouring down from the mountain. Destruction and death of multiple persons was the result of the disaster. The memory of the 2009 events is very present the minds of Giampilieri's citizens. The main square of the town facing the Ionian coast south of Messina has been renamed to "Largo Vittime dell'Alluvione" (Largo "of the victims of the flood") and a massive concrete riverbed has been constructed along the fiumara splitting the town in two.

Constructing these massive concrete structures was the answer the municipality offered to combat the danger of future events. While the structures were built near Giampilieri the rest of the region was disregarded. This raises questions and issues on multiple levels. The approach of building massive concrete structures to protect the town appears to be a mere relief for the symptoms of a bigger issue rather than a serious approach to solve the main hydrologic issue.



Camaro, 2022

The fiumare which can be found across not only the Messina region, but all (southern) Italy have been moved underground during the 20th century and they have been built upon without regard for hydrological changes. Climate change triggers more extreme weather conditions. Very arid summers combined with heavy rainfall are a dangerous mix. While the concrete structures might protect Giampilieri, the danger continuous to exists for most other settlements in the region. Spaces for water must be part of the future planning of the city and the build environment. It is no longer feasible to add more and more material to pretend to control water. A change in the approach must happen.



San Francesco, 2022

Divieto di balneazione

Just north of the Rada San Francesco the only easily accessible beach of the city is plastered with signs of “Divieto di balneazione” (bathing prohibited). And “aque inquinate” (polluted water). Instead of being used as a recreational space close to the city center the beach evokes images of a waste dump. Abandoned structures, broken ships, and waste construction material cover the beach rather than beach umbrellas and towels.



Giostra, 2022

Most of the coastline is not accessible to the citizens anyway. A major part is occupied by infrastructural facilities of the port. Ferry terminals, shipyards, docks, and their adjacent barriers to keep people away block the access to the sea. Thus, the little amount of coast accessible for citizens is in a very bad ecological state and cannot be used for recreational purposes. Most of the pollution derives from port activities and wastewater from the city. Ferries and cruise ships and similar port activities pollute the waters through oil and fuel residues and wastewater from their passengers. While this problem is rather directly influenceable it doesn't pose the biggest issue. Wastewater originating from the city is much more critical. Many of the formal and informal settlements of the 20th century are not properly connected to a central sewage system. The apartment buildings and houses are just connected to a pipe system that carries the wastewater to the nearest Fiumara. There the polluted waters arrive directly and unfiltered to the sea. This problem is mostly disregarded as it happens underground. Only in summer when a seasonal increase of population occurs, and the wastewater starts smelling the issue is brought up. Most of the time an additional piece of stream is sealed on the surface to move the problem to the coast, which is not accessible in the first place, so complaints are not as frequent. Iteratively, as the points where the streams meet the sea are unpleasant, polluted, and abandoned they have



San Francesco beach, 2022

*become an informal dumping site for all kind of waste.
There are ongoing initiatives to clean up the streams and the coast. Unfortunately, even while the municipality is trying to solve the problem most actions are lost in bureaucracy.*



Via Don Blasco, 2022

All in all, this disgraceful situation creates an additional barrier between city and sea. On one hand spatially – in addition to existing physical barriers- and on the other hand mentally as the coastline and water become a “dirty” space. Ironically, this could be seen as a reason why there is a lack of appreciation and care for the beautiful coastline facing the strait in proximity of the city, what again leads to lack of awareness of the urgent need to care and protect for the natural coast.



Molo Norrimberga, 2022



Via Don Blasco, 2022

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Strait of Messina, 2023

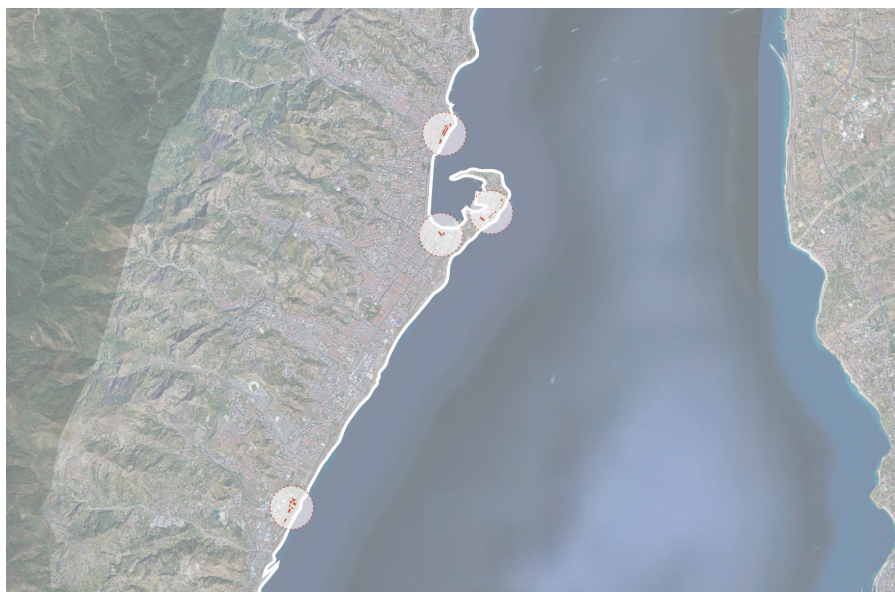
Part III - In reflection

This chapter reflects my position as a researcher and designer, the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen methodology, the relevance of this thesis, the iterative exchange between research and design, a review of the overall outcome of the thesis, and finally an outlook on the final phase of this graduation project.

Overview

The thesis “Risveglio Marittimo - Awakening Maritime Identity in Messina” answers the question of how the concept of maritime identity facilitates the understanding of existing assets and offers opportunities for the design of Messina as a port city. Through the collection of micro-narratives and their organization into categories, Messina’s maritime identity was (re)discovered in its history, its environment, its position between mountains and sea, its role in the transformation and production of goods, the abandoned sites and the everyday references to the sea and the strait spread throughout the city.

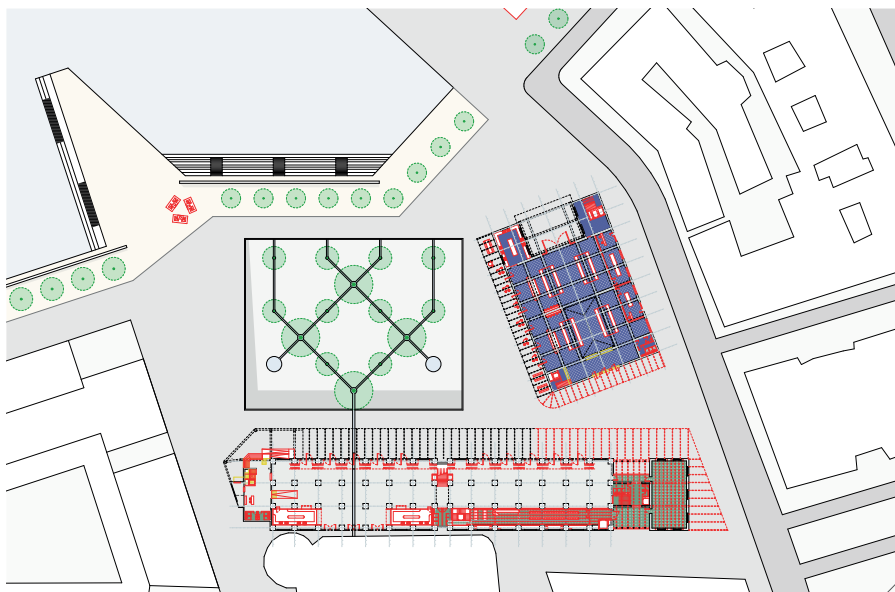
The ‘quadrilatero’ site, between the ‘Ex-Granai’ and the maritime station, was chosen to design a new maritime space, with the aim of fertilizing the perception and value of Messina’s maritime identity. The renovation of the abandoned silos and the fish market allows to offer spaces for culinary products of the sea and the hinterland and their consumption on the edge between land and sea, creating a vibrant public space for exchange and transition at the most important traffic node bridging land and sea transportation.



abandoned sites

The general decision for a site was based on the theme of abandonment. There are several abandoned sites all over Messina. Some of them are of high architectural value. Some are examples of modern architecture in Messina (Stazione Marittima, Fiera), some represent industrial heritage (Ex Granai, Sanderson & Sons, Cantieri Navali), others historical heritage (Forti Umbertini, Cittàdella) and still others abandoned institutions (Grand Hotel, Dogana, Università, Ospedale Regina Margherita). The chosen site should be an example and a fertilizer for the development of other abandoned sites.

The 'Ex-Granai' were chosen for several reasons. First, they are in a very central location in the city. Located on the old site of the Royal Palace, the 'Ex-Granai' are situated between the waterfront, the train station, the bus station, and the central 'Piazza Cairolì'. Second, they have been discussed several times for redevelopment, which have never taken place. Third, they are spatially and conceptually connected to several other abandoned sites. Fourth, the buildings of the silos and the fish market are of high architectural value but in poor condition. Fifth, the area of the 'quadrilatero' ('Ex-Granai' + fish market + train station + port) is a gate to the city and the island. Lastly, a silo and a fish market reassemble the idea of land and sea being connected very nicely.



siteplan

The underlying concepts for the site are directly derived from the results of the research.

The waterfront is redesigned to loosen the straight and hard edge between the city and the sea, the public space is characterized by the presence of heritage and water, the existing buildings are gently renovated to accommodate old and new functions, and a new volume is added to reinforce the new maritime centrality in the city and give a new identity to the place.

The waterfront is shifted back and forth to create new spaces on both sides of the land edge, and a pier is added to create a walkway into the sea to allow the perception of the city from the water. The fish market is designed to recover its original use and the water is brought closer to the building to facilitate the arrival of the fishermen. The Silo has several functions. On the one hand, it welcomes travelers to and from the island by offering service spaces for the transition between land and sea, and on the other hand, it will be used again for agricultural products coming from the hinterland. Inside the second half of the silos, there is a space for transformation of food products. The two towers on either side of the silo will house work spaces to inform the program inside the two large halls.

All in all, the project creates a new maritime public space on the waterfront and surrounds it with spaces of production, consumption and reflection of Messina's maritime narratives.

Position

Before reflecting on the thesis, I have to discuss my position as author and therefore my prejudices towards the subject. I have been in contact with the city since young age. I experienced Messina and its context every year during my vacations. Born and raised in the very different city of Basel, my perception of Messina as a city is rooted in the contrast with Basel and shaped by experiences of summertime and leisure. The image of Messina has changed over time through the experience of different seasons, settings and places, and through my own growth and training as an architect, but it is always connected to stories from the past. In sum, this leads to a certain romanticizing of the place, a certain distortion of perception due to affection, but also an optimistic urge to see the potential of the city.

This bias not only acted as a limit to my research, but also provided an interesting lens through which to view the city. By being partially an insider and part of the city, but at the same time an outsider, it allowed for a specific perception from outside the bubble of the city without falling into an alienated vantage point looking at the city from the outside. Finally, this research provided the opportunity to observe, learn, and perceive the city from a new position. This position allowed me to confirm, question and change certain aspects of my perception of Messina.

Method

The method of collecting micro-narratives to create an image of a place is very powerful. In this case, it allows the communication of an accurate, relatable and human representation of Messina to the reader. It does not only reproduce raw data and factual truths about a place, but the collection of narratives creates an image of Messina and helps to evoke the atmosphere and aura of the place and its people through easily understandable and relatable stories. Each micro-narrative is like a stroke of an impressionist painting.

Moreover, the effort to understand the maritime identity of Messina by studying the territorial section from the mountains to the sea deepens the specific understanding of Messina's reality. A reduction to the study of the coast would have misrepresented Messina and equated it with other port cities.

While recognizing the strength of the above-mentioned tools, I must admit the vulnerability of the generalist intention of the approach. It is very difficult to understand a port city in its entirety and all the factors that influence its identity and reality. A collection of micro-narratives on a larger scale would have been more appropriate, but would have exceeded the scope of this work. By limiting the sample size of micro-narratives, my bias of my personal perception

of the city during the limited number of site visits has a significant impact on the results. To increase the precision of the research, the scope could have been limited to a more specific topic or a more specific lens could have been used.

Relevance

This thesis allowed me to research the identity of a specific city and translate the findings into an architectural vision. The outcome of the research not only provided insight at the city level, but also informed design decisions at the scale of the building and architectural detail. At the same time, understanding architectural decisions at multiple scales allows one to anticipate how architecture can inform the city in return.

While the research and design are limited to a specific site with its constraints, the economic, social and environmental challenges faced by Messina are representative of those faced by many Mediterranean port cities. Situated at the interface between land and sea, these cities are uniquely exposed to changes in climate, weather and the global economy. As advocated by the PortCitiesFuture initiatives, we as planners have a responsibility to recognize the qualities embedded in the maritime identity of these places and seek to nurture and develop them into the future. This thesis can be seen as a small but valuable piece of the puzzle in this

collective effort to imagine port cities as environmentally and socially sustainable places.

Research and Design

While the research clearly preceded the design, and the outcome of the research presented a qualitative program for the chosen site, the process cannot be divided into two successive parts. In the beginning, the fascination and personal connection to the region triggered design and research questions. Furthermore, as an architect, the numerous abandoned spaces of high architectural value in Messina started a creative process. While the first part of the graduation studio focused on research and later on design, research and design were developed together in an iterative process. Each narrative collected during the research informed the design in a very direct and specific way, such as the decision to make the water flows from the mountain and the sea visible on the ground, and vice versa, each architectural decision triggered the investigation of further stories to test the design choice, such as the choice of materials leading to the investigation of stories related to stone quarries and steel recovered from shipyards.

Review

Having mentioned the pros and cons of the methodology chosen earlier a reflection on the thesis as a whole is in order at this point. After reviewing the successful and unsuccessful aspects of my own work, an insight will be given into what could have been done differently from the beginning and what might be possible with an additional year of work on the thesis.

The research allowed me to deepen my understanding of Messina as a port city. While the expected significance of the city's history as a place of transition has been reinforced, the role of the environmental conditions and the city's role as a transition between the hinterland and the sea have emerged as very important aspects that have received far too little attention. The proposed design shows a strong position towards the revaluation of the existing assets by improving the quality of the existing buildings. Furthermore, it offers public indoor and outdoor spaces for the exchange of goods, people and values, hopefully triggering a better understanding of the city's role not only in the dialogue between hinterland and sea, but also as a hub for the flows of people moving through Messina.

Because both the research and the design address Messina's maritime identity on multiple levels, they may lack some specificity and therefore readability. The subject of maritime

identity is very complex. Port cities have a huge number of parameters that inform and influence their development. The aim of the thesis is to understand this complex network on all scales, from the territory to the object. However, this is also the biggest problem of the thesis: The lens used may be too large. A much more specific topic, such as the food consumed and produced along the mountain-to-coast route and its socio-economic implications, could have been used as an example of the relationship between hinterland, city and sea, and acted as a representative of the larger competition. However, this alternative approach could have left out many important aspects that are covered by the present thesis.

Starting my thesis again with only one specific example could be interesting as a test to see if a very specific topic would have had the potential to carry the complexity of the whole topic and if it would lead to an easily understandable design that recalls the maritime identity in its complexity. On the other hand, if I had another year to work on the project, it would be interesting to enrich my research with more stories and later apply the result on a larger urban scale in the form of a master plan, and finally choose a specific site again and use it to develop one facet of maritime identity while being aware of its role as a specific example.

(Un)fortunately, the duration of the project is limited and has reached its final stage. I am looking forward, to go back to

Messina to test my proposals and keep on reflecting on this thesis to trigger new questions and keep on exploring my role as a designer and architect.

