



Enhancing of Heritage Awareness and  
Sustainability of Built Environment in  
Architectural and Urban Design Higher Education

# HANDBOOK

INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS ON RESEARCH AND DESIGN FOR  
THE SUSTAINABILITY OF HERITAGE



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# IO6 INTERNATIONAL HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS ON RESEARCH AND DESIGN FOR THE SUSTAINABILITY OF HERITAGE

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*Note:*

*The manuscripts were prepared by individual author/group of authors in relation to their professional expertise and backgrounds and in relation to values, themes and framework defined on the consortium level.*

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R04-SA

**research**

handbook for students

# RUIN, UNFINISHED, ABANDONMENT IN ARCHITECTURE. INCOMPIUTA CHURCH AS AN EXPERIMENTAL CASE STUDY FOR A MULTILAYERING METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH IN CONSERVATION.

Keywords

**Forgotten Heritage,  
Cultural and Collective Memory,  
Tangible and Intangible  
Heritage,  
Preventive Conservation,  
Cultural Heritage,  
Public Engagement**

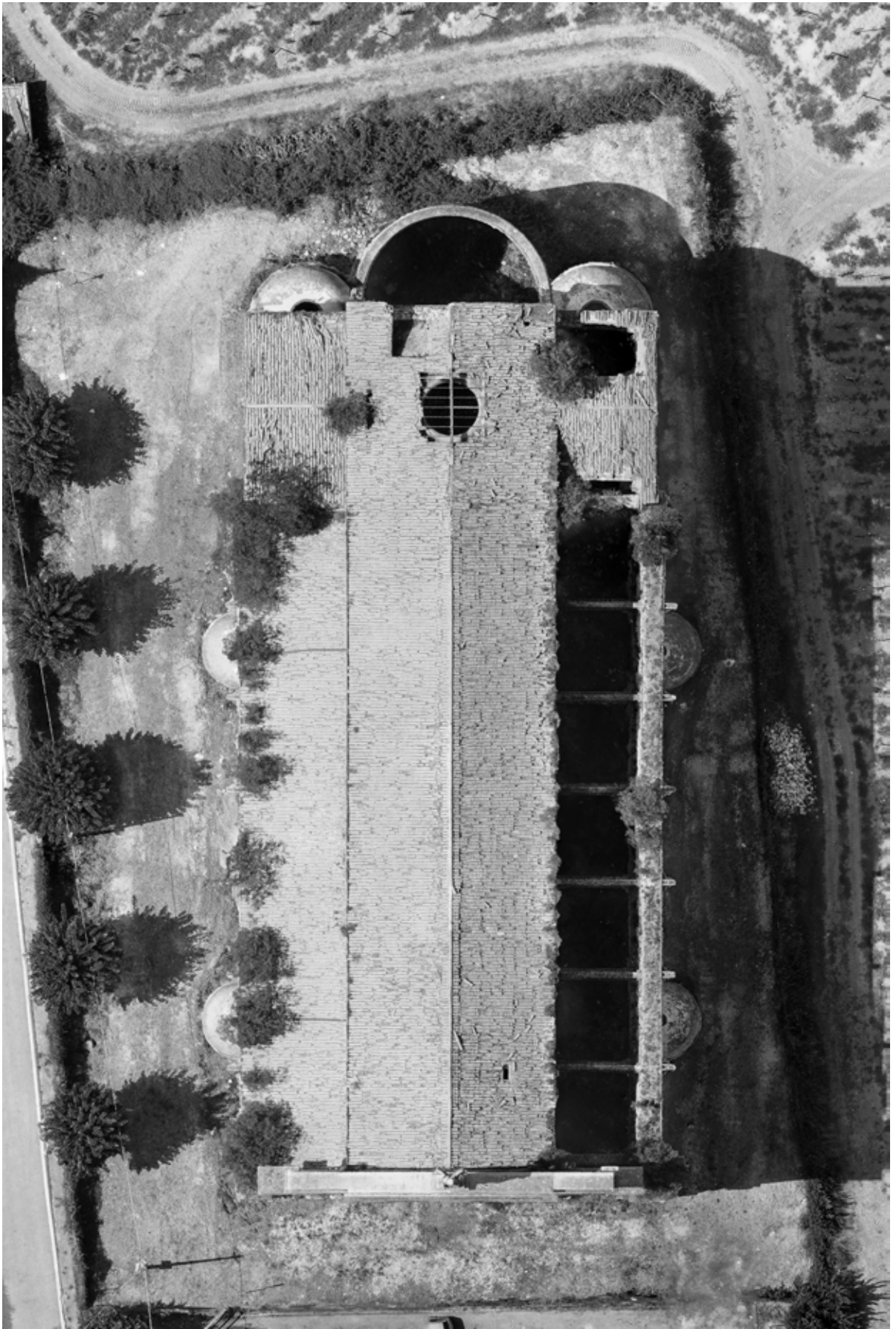
## **The Ruin. Abandonment and Conservation.**

The ruin represents a kaleidoscope of observation: it is an object both ancient and contemporary (Dillon 2011). This double life of ruin preserves an intangible dimension linked to time and a tangible dimension related to the matter. As Marc Augè (2003) pointed out, the contemporary production of architecture has radically changed the way buildings (and places) age, generating the well-known parallelism between “ruins” and “rubble”.

Tracing this framework of tangible and intangible limit means following the border space between matter and history. Experimenting with this limit has led to the research determining thematic categories of architectural analysis that could offer a vision of the ruin in its contemporary meaning: the relationship between abandonment and conservation.

On this topic, Università Iuav di Venezia conducted (and is being conducted) an investigation on the case study of San Michele Arcangelo church in Brendola -today known as “Incompiuta” (unfinished) [Figure 1] - that crosses research with the tools of the third university mission and has a systemic approach to the reconnection between ruin and society through public actions engagement.





**Figure 1.** The unfinished San Michele Arcangelo church in Brendola. Ortophoto by Università luav di Venezia. Brendola 2021.

**The unfinished. San Michele Arcangelo church in Brendola.** //////////////////////////////////////

Designed in the early 1930s by the engineer and architect Fausto Franco (Battista 2017), (Liguori 2011), (Spada 2017), the church has a social and collective value for the community: both concerning the relationship between the landscape image (consolidated over the years as an unfinished ruin) and the limit (theoretical and practical) of its conservation in a perspective of reuse and perception of the church between finished and unfinished (Sorbo, Spironelli 2021a).

The monumental architectural language of the church - located in the historical period between the wars and an inflexion point in the panorama of Italian constructions – is combined with a constructive hybridization hidden inside the architectural elements. The revealing action of time on materials made it possible to identify the use of “modern” materials, such as reinforced concrete elements and patented SAP-type structures made up of reinforced bricks.

In the forties of the twentieth century, the lack of funds necessary to complete the church led to an interruption of the works and the halt of the construction site, leaving the work unfinished. The current precarious conservation status, determined by the presence of localized collapses and important phenomena of deterioration [Figure 2], raises theoretical questions in the cultural approach to the conservative project: on the one hand, the enhancement of material traces is compared with the functional needs of accessibility and safe use of the spaces, on the other hand, the intangible component linked to the social value and the collective memory of community imposes minimal intervention actions that highlight a stratigraphic reading between the history of the church and the historical events of the community.

In this sense, the study carried out by the research group of Università Iuav di Venezia, in collaboration with the Municipality of Brendola and the Superintendency of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape for the provinces of Verona, Rovigo and Vicenza, promoted an operational and methodological approach based on an archaeological reading of the built environment through photogrammetric, laser scanning, topographic survey operations and scan-to-bim semantic discretization operations related to the historical construction phases of the building. This preliminary knowledge was the basis for identifying project actions aimed at preserving the tangible and intangible values associated with the architectural elements of the church (Sorbo, Spironelli 2021b), (Sorbo, Spironelli 2021c) arriving at the definition of a preliminary project approved by the local authorities in April 2022.



**Figure 2.** The unfinished San Michele Arcangelo church in Brendola. West aisle. Photo by Università luav di Venezia. Brendola 2022.

The objectives for the preservation and enhancement of the church were elaborated within a twofold polarity: on the one hand, with the purpose to preserve the collective social values (both tangible and intangible) that the church has assumed over time (Sorbo 2017) and, on the other hand, the need to return it to the community by ensuring its public fruition (in safety) without altering its authenticity. These objectives outlined the possibility of identifying a series of project action aimed to conserve the image of an unfinished ruin:

- to avoid demolition and substitution as a strategy of consolidation;
- to select vulnerable architectural elements to be reinforced in the project with light metallic structure in addition to the existing ones;
- to restore and enhance surfaces damaged during the years with a controlled cleaning operation, selected consolidation works, removals of vegetation and repairs of the rainwater disposal system;
- to improve the accessibility with new paths and flooring system.

In the idea of re-enforcing the community value of the Unfinished Church, the research group promoted a series of public engagement activities aimed at sharing the tools used, the methodologies, the research and the project actions with the local community.

Therefore, the outcomes of the research activities became the subject of a public seminar: «Il limite della rovina. Processi metodologici di condivisione per la conservazione e valorizzazione della Chiesa 'Incompiuta' di Brendola» (The limit of ruin. Shared methodological processes for the preservation of the 'Unfinished' Church of Brendola), and an exhibition «Lapis Memoriae. Scenari creativi per un non finito architettonico. Il caso studio della chiesa 'Incompiuta' di Brendola» (Lapis Memoriae. Creative scenarios for an unfinished architecture. The case study of the 'Unfinished' church in Brendola") which involved: the municipal administration, the local Superintendency, the Veneto region, the team of technicians designated by the municipality, experts in the field of European funding, the press and local broadcasters to present to the community the processes of material and immaterial restitution of the site.

**Reveal memories.** //////////////////////////////////////

Unlike the nineteenth-century experience of approaching the ruin where the aesthetic value is connected to the presence of nature in the ancient ruin (Simmel 1911), the perception of contemporary ruins after the Second World War is intimately linked to the evolution of society in the balance between an action capable of revealing memory, enhancing history and conserving/reintegrating matter. According to this premise, in the described path emerges the centrality of the preliminary knowledge process for the restoration project. The research, theoretically and practically, is drawn up as a “storytelling of the memory of the place” since, for ruin, the evocative capacity of memory could be opened only through the detailed study of the matter: an in-depth analysis of each relationship between the construction techniques and the symbolic value hidden behind the architectural elements.

This limit, the conservation of “ruined image”, became a new field of research to experiment with a process, where the centrality of method (based on the cognitive tools to investigate and define the identity of the temporality) constituted a new horizon to redefine the link between the ruin and the society.



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