

The Urban Book Series

Eugenio Arbizzani · Eliana Cangelli ·
Carola Clemente · Fabrizio Cumo ·
Francesca Giofrè · Anna Maria Giovenale ·
Massimo Palme · Spartaco Paris *Editors*

Technological Imagination in the Green and Digital Transition

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Contents

1	From a Liquid Society, Through Technological Imagination, to Beyond the Knowledge Society	1
	Anna Maria Giovenale	
2	Opening Lecture: Digital Spaces and the Material Culture	11
	Pietro Montani	
Part I Session Innovation		
3	Innovation for the Digitization Process of the AECO Sector	21
	Fabrizio Cumo	
4	The Digital Revolution and the Art of Co-creation	27
	Maurizio Talamo	
5	Toward a New Humanism of Technological Innovation in Design of the Built Environment	37
	Spartaco Paris	
6	A BIM-Based Approach to Energy Analysis of Existing Buildings in the Italian Context	47
	Marco Morini, Francesca Caffari, Nicolandrea Calabrese, and Giulia Centi	
7	Short-Term Wind Speed Forecasting Model Using Hybrid Neural Networks and Wavelet Packet Decomposition	57
	Adel Lakzadeh, Mohammad Hassani, Azim Heydari, Farshid Keynia, Daniele Groppi, and Davide Astiaso Garcia	
8	COGNIBUILD: Cognitive Digital Twin Framework for Advanced Building Management and Predictive Maintenance	69
	Sofia Agostinelli	

9 Design of CCHP System with the Help of Combined Chiller System, Solar Energy, and Gas Microturbine 79
Samaneh Safaei, Farshid Keynia, Sam Haghdaday,
Azim Heydari, and Mario Lamagna

10 Digital Construction and Management the Public’s Infrastructures 93
Giuseppe Orsini and Giuseppe Piras

11 An Innovative Multi-objective Optimization Digital Workflow for Social Housing Deep Energy Renovation Design Process 111
Adriana Ciardiello, Jacopo Dell’Olmo, Federica Rosso,
Lorenzo Mario Pastore, Marco Ferrero, and Ferdinando Salata

12 Digital Information Management in the Built Environment: Data-Driven Approaches for Building Process Optimization 123
Francesco Muzi, Riccardo Marzo, and Francesco Nardi

13 Immersive Facility Management—A Methodological Approach Based on BIM and Mixed Reality for Training and Maintenance Operations 133
Sofia Agostinelli and Benedetto Nastasi

14 A Digital Information Model for Coastal Maintenance and Waterfront Recovery 145
Francesca Ciampa

15 Sustainable Workplace: Space Planning Model to Optimize Environmental Impact 157
Alice Paola Pomè, Chiara Tagliaro, and Andrea Ciaramella

16 Digital Twin Models Supporting Cognitive Buildings for Ambient Assisted Living 167
Alessandra Corneli, Leonardo Binni, Berardo Naticchia,
and Massimo Vaccarini

17 Less Automation More Information: A Learning Tool for a Post-occupancy Operation and Evaluation 179
Chiara Tonelli, Barbara Cardone, Roberto D’Autilia,
and Giuliana Nardi

18 A Prosumer Approach for Feeding the Digital Twin. Testing the MUST Application in the Old Harbour Waterfront of Genoa 193
Serena Viola, Antonio Novellino, Alberto Zinno,
and Marco Di Ludovico

19 Untapping the Potential of the Digital Towards the Green Imperative: The Interdisciplinary BeXLab Experience 203
 Gisella Calcagno, Antonella Trombadore, Giacomo Pierucci, and Lucia Montoni

20 Digital—Twin for an Innovative Waterfront Management Strategy. Pilot Project DSH2030 217
 Maria Giovanna Pacifico, Maria Rita Pinto, and Antonio Novellino

21 BIM and BPMN 2.0 Integration for Interoperability Challenge in Construction Industry 227
 Hosam Al-Siah and Antonio Fioravanti

22 Digital Twin Approach for Maintenance Management 237
 Massimo Lauria and Maria Azzalin

23 Digital Infrastructure for Student Accommodation in European University Cities: The “HOME” Project 247
 Oscar Eugenio Bellini, Matteo Gambaro, Maria Teresa Gullace, Marianna Arcieri, Carla Álvarez Benito, Sabri Ben Rommane, Steven Boon, and Maria F. Figueira

Part II Session | Technology

24 Technologies for the Construction of Buildings and Cities of the Near Future 263
 Eugenio Arbizzani

25 The Living Lab for Autonomous Driving as Applied Research of MaaS Models in the Smart City: The Case Study of MASA—Modena Automotive Smart Area 273
 Francesco Leali and Francesco Pasquale

26 Expanding the Wave of Smartness: Smart Buildings, Another Frontier of the Digital Revolution 285
 Valentina Frighi

27 Sharing Innovation. The Acceptability of Off-site Industrialized Systems for Housing 295
 Gianluca Pozzi, Giulia Vignati, and Elisabetta Ginelli

28 3D Printing for Housing. Recurring Architectural Themes 309
 Giulio Paparella and Maura Percoco

29 Photovoltaic Breakthrough in Architecture: Integration and Innovation Best Practice 321
 Guido Callegari, Eleonora Merolla, and Paolo Simeone

30 Reworking Studio Design Education Driven by 3D Printing Technologies 335
 Jelena Milošević, Aleksandra Nenadović, Maša Žujović, Marko Gavrilović, and Milijana Živković

31 The New Technological Paradigm in the Post-digital Era. Three Convergent Paths Between Creative Action and Computational Tools 345
 Roberto Bianchi

32 Technological Innovation for Circularity and Sustainability Throughout Building Life Cycle: Policy, Initiatives, and Stakeholders’ Perspective 357
 Serena Giorgi

33 Fair Play: Why Reliable Data for Low-Tech Construction and Non-conventional Materials Are Needed 367
 Redina Mazelli, Martina Bocci, Arthur Bohn, Edwin Zea Escamilla, Guillaume Habert, and Andrea Bocco

Part III Session | Environment

34 Technological Innovation for the Next Ecosystem Transition: From a High-Tech to Low-Tech Intensity—High Efficiency Environment 383
 Carola Clemente

35 Technological Imagination to Stay Within Planetary Boundaries 391
 Massimo Palme

36 Quality-Based Design for Environmentally Conscious Architecture 399
 Helena Coch Roura and Pablo Garrido Torres

37 Digital Transformation Projects for the Future Digicircular Society 403
 Irene Fiesoli

38 The Regulatory Apparatus at the Service of Sustainable Planning of the Built Environment: The Case of Law 338/2000 ... 417
 Claudio Piferi

39 From Nature to Architecture for Low Tech Solutions: Biomimetic Principles for Climate-Adaptive Building Envelope ... 429
 Francesco Sommese and Gigliola Ausiello

40 Soft Technologies for the Circular Transition: Practical Experimentation of the Product “Material Passport” 439
 Tecla Caroli

41 Imagining a Carbon Neutral University 449
Antonella Violano and Monica Cannaviello

42 Life Cycle Assessment at the Early Stage of Building Design 461
Anna Dalla Valle

**43 Design Scenarios for a Circular Vision of Post-disaster
Temporary Settlements** 471
Maria Vittoria Arnetoli and Roberto Bologna

**44 Towards Climate Neutrality: Progressing Key Actions
for Positive Energy Districts Implementation** 483
Rosa Romano, Maria Beatrice Andreucci,
and Emanuela Giancola

**45 Remanufacturing Towards Circularity in the Construction
Sector: The Role of Digital Technologies** 493
Nazly Atta

**46 Territorial Energy Potential for Energy Community
and Climate Mitigation Actions: Experimentation on Pilot
Cases in Rome** 505
Paola Marrone and Ilaria Montella

**47 Integrated Design Approach to Build a Safe and Sustainable
Dual Intended Use Center in Praslin Island, Seychelles** 523
Vincenzo Gattulli, Elisabetta Palumbo, and Carlo Vannini

Part IV Session | Climate Changes

48 Climate Change: New Ways to Inhabit the Earth 537
Eliana Cangelli

**49 The Climate Report Informing the Response to Climate
Change in Urban Development** 547
Anna Pirani

**50 The Urban Riverfront Greenway: A Linear Attractor
for Sustainable Urban Development** 557
Luciana Mastrodonardo

**51 The Buildings Reuse for a Music District Aimed
at a Sustainable Urban Development** 567
Donatella Radogna

**52 Environmental Design for a Sustainable District and Civic
Hub** 577
Elena Mussinelli, Andrea Tartaglia, and Giovanni Castaldo

53 Earth Observation Technologies for Mitigating Urban Climate Changes 589
 Federico Cinquepalmi and Giuseppe Piras

54 A Systematic Catalogue of Design Solutions for the Regeneration of Urban Environment Contrasting the Climate Change Impact 601
 Roberto Bologna and Giulio Hasanaj

55 Digital Twins for Climate-Neutral and Resilient Cities. State of the Art and Future Development as Tools to Support Urban Decision-Making 617
 Guglielmo Ricciardi and Guido Callegari

56 The Urban Potential of Multifamily Housing Renovation 627
 Laura Daglio

57 A “Stepping Stone” Approach to Exploiting Urban Density 639
 Raffaella De Martino, Rossella Franchino, and Caterina Frettoloso

58 Metropolitan Farms: Long Term Agri-Food Systems for Sustainable Urban Landscapes 649
 Giancarlo Paganin, Filippo Orsini, Marco Migliore, Konstantinos Venis, and Matteo Poli

59 Resilient Design for Outdoor Sports Infrastructure 659
 Silvia Battaglia, Marta Cognigni, and Maria Pilar Vettori

60 Sustainable Reuse Indicators for Ecclesiastic Built Heritage Regeneration 669
 Maria Rita Pinto, Martina Bosone, and Francesca Ciampa

61 A Green Technological Rehabilitation of the Built Environment. From Public Residential Estates to Eco-Districts ... 683
 Lidia Errante

62 Adaptive Building Technologies for Building Envelopes Under Climate Change Conditions 695
 Martino Milardi

63 The Importance of Testing Activities for a “New” Generation of Building Envelope 703
 Martino Milardi, Evelyn Grillo, and Mariateresa Mandaglio

64 Data Visualization and Web-Based Mapping for SGDs and Adaptation to Climate Change in the Urban Environment ... 715
 Maria Canepa, Adriano Magliocco, and Nicola Pisani

65 Fog Water Harvesting Through Smart Façade for a Climate Resilient Built Environment 725
 Maria Giovanna Di Bitonto, Alara Kutlu, and Alessandra Zanelli

66 Building Façade Retrofit: A Comparison Between Current Methodologies and Innovative Membranes Strategies for Overcoming the Existing Retrofit Constraints 735
 Giulia Procaccini and Carol Monticelli

67 Technologies and Solutions for Collaborative Processes in Mutating Cities 745
 Daniele Fanzini, Irina Rotaru, and Nour Zreika

68 New Perspectives for the Building Heritage in Depopulated Areas: A Methodological Approach for Evaluating Sustainable Reuse and Upcycling Strategies 757
 Antonello Monsù Scolaro, Stefania De Medici, Salvatore Giuffrida, Maria Rosa Trovato, Cheren Cappello, Ludovica Nasca, and Fuat Emre Kaya

69 Climate Adaptation in Urban Regeneration: A Cross-Scale Digital Design Workflow 769
 Michele Morganti and Diletta Ricci

70 Adaptive “Velari” 783
 Alberto Raimondi and Laura Rosini

71 Temporary Climate Change Adaptation: 5 Measures for Outdoor Spaces of the Mid-Adriatic City 801
 Timothy Daniel Brownlee

72 A Serious Game Proposal for Exploring and Designing Urban Sustainability 811
 Manuela Romano and Alessandro Rogora

73 Energy Efficiency Improvement in Industrial Brownfield Heritage Buildings: Case Study of “Beko” 821
 Jelena Pavlović, Ana Šabanović, and Nataša Ćuković-Ignjatović

74 Industrial Heritage of Belgrade: Brownfield Sites Revitalization Status, Potentials and Opportunities Missed 831
 Jelena Pavlović, Ana Šabanović, and Nataša Ćuković-Ignjatović

75 Challenges and Potentials of Green Roof Retrofit: A Case Study 843
 Nikola Miletić, Bojana Zeković, Nataša Ćuković Ignjatović, and Dušan Ignjatović

76 Designing with Nature Climate-Resilient Cities: A Lesson from Copenhagen 853
 Maicol Negrello

77 New Urban Centralities: Universities as a Paradigm for a Sustainable City 863
Camilla Maitan and Emilio Faroldi

Part V Session | Health

78 Environment for Healthy Living 875
Francesca Giofrè

79 New Paradigms for Indoor Healthy Living 883
Alberto De Capua

80 Healthy and Empowering Life in Schoolyards. The Case of Dante Alighieri School in Milan 893
Valentina Dessì, Maria Fianchini, Franca Zuccoli, Raffaella Colombo, and Noemi Morrone

81 Design for Emergency: Inclusive Housing Solution 907
Francesca Giglio and Sara Sansotta

82 Environmental Sensing and Simulation for Healthy Districts: A Comparison Between Field Measurements and CFD Model 921
Matteo Giovanardi, Matteo Trane, and Riccardo Pollo

83 A Synthesis Paradigm as a Way of Bringing Back to Life the Artistic Monuments Inspired by the Motives of the People’s Liberation Struggle and Revolution of Yugoslavia 935
Meri Batakoja and Tihana Hrastar

84 Social Sustainability and Inclusive Environments in Neighbourhood Sustainability Assessment Tools 947
Rosaria Revellini

85 Inclusive Neighborhoods in a Healthy City: Walkability Assessment and Guidance in Rome 959
Mohamed Eledeisy

86 Tools and Strategies for Health Promotion in Urban Context: Technology and Innovation for Enhancing Parish Ecclesiastical Heritage Through Sport and Inclusion 969
Francesca Daprà, Davide Allegri, and Erica Isa Mosca

87 Nursing Homes During COVID-19 Pandemic—A Systematic Literature Review for COVID-19 Proof Architecture Design Strategies 981
Silvia Mangili, Tianzhi Sun, and Alexander Achille Johnson

88 A New Generation of Territorial Healthcare Infrastructures After COVID-19. The Transition to Community Homes and Community Hospitals into the Framework of the Italian Recovery Plan 991
Andrea Brambilla, Erica Brusamolín, Stefano Arruzzoli, and Stefano Capolongo

89 Wood Snoezelen. Multisensory Wooden Environments for the Care and Rehabilitation of People with Severe and Very Severe Cognitive Disabilities 1003
Agata Tonetti and Massimo Rossetti

90 The Proximity of Urban Green Spaces as Urban Health Strategy to Promote Active, Inclusive and Salutogenic Cities 1017
Maddalena Buffoli and Andrea Rebecchi

91 Environmental Attributes for Healthcare Professional’s Well-Being 1029
Zakia Hammouni and Walter Wittich

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Chapter 60

Sustainable Reuse Indicators for Ecclesiastic Built Heritage Regeneration



Maria Rita Pinto, Martina Bosone, and Francesca Ciampa

Abstract In the context of anthropogenic impacts on pollution and global warming scenarios, reject from the construction sector accounts for 36% of European waste. This waste percentage includes disused and abandoned buildings that have lost the value of their function over time. In order to reduce the ecological footprint they generate, the paper rethinks Recovery in its circular meaning to put these buildings back into a normal circuit of usability, improving the creation of resilient urban habitats. In particular, decommissioned ecclesiastical buildings constitute a huge quantity and significant quality heritage, as by cultural, perceptive, morphological and material values. The sustainable reuse of this heritage must act on its double impacting value: the tangible one linked to the material culture of the buildings and the intangible one, linked to the identity values of sediment instances. Through a comparison desk research of more than 140 cases of reuse on a European scale, the contribution arrives at a system of indicators that allow evaluating the reuse sustainable compatibility of these buildings, able to promote prosperity, inclusiveness and social equity. These indicators make it possible to assess the appropriateness of design actions aimed at mediating between the conservation of the built heritage and the transformative needs of contemporary instances. The results provide scenarios tool of sustainable recovery, capable of transforming waste into a resource, extending the life cycle of the ecclesiastical heritage and thus mitigating its environmental impact, as well as the cost related to the loss of cultural values and identity for the community.

Keywords Sustainable reuse indicators · Recovery · Ecclesiastic built heritage

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60.1 Introduction

In the European context, the role attributed to culture and its testimonies is consolidated into the Treaty on European Union (TEU). It referred to the desire to be inspired “by the cultural, religious and humanistic heritage of Europe, from which the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law have developed” (De Medici 2021). As indicated by the ex art. 2 of the Treaty (Article 3 in the current text), the European Union respects the richness of its cultural and linguistic diversity and supervises the preservation and development of European cultural heritage. In line with these principles, cultural heritage represents a strategic resource, able to determine positive externalities in the four sectors of sustainable development: economy, culture, society and environment (Pinto, 2004). To reduce the ecological footprint they generate, the contribution rethinks the rehabilitation, in its intrinsic circular meaning, to design scenarios capable of putting churches back in a normal circuit of usability, with the creation of sustainable urban habitats (Caterina 2013). The reuse of churches simultaneously affects the cultural heritage in cities and European cultural landscapes in the perspective of the circular economy as a model of sustainable development. The functional recovery of churches is able to generate positive impacts.

As highlighted in the Leeuwarden Declaration on Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage (ACE (Architects’ Council of Europe) 2018), adaptive reuse interventions have positive impacts on the circularity of sustainable development processes, simultaneously managing to preserve and strengthen the original cultural values and the physical consistency of the heritage. The complex interrelationships between culture, economy, society and environment make adaptive reuse a necessarily multidimensional process in which new forms of economy, promotion of social cohesion, well-being and environmental protection can be tested and adopted (Bosone and Iodice 2021). Interpreting the adaptive reuse of cultural heritage as a “restorative, regenerative and sustainable form of conservation” (Gravagnuolo et al. 2017) requires the adoption of a circular development model capable of achieving economic growth and well-being, “by separating growth from resource consumption” (Foundation 2013). Moreover, such a model, by fully aware a new use value to the reused assets, allows extending their useful lifecycle, reflecting exactly one of the characteristics of the circular economic model. The reuse of churches can bring benefits in environmental and socio-economic terms, limiting the consumption of non-reproducible material resources, handing down the traditional construction culture, favoring the use of labor, limiting the processes of industrial production of materials and components compared to what is required by the construction of new buildings (Pinto et al. 2017). The original values system represents the so-called “intrinsic value”, as accredited in the Burra Charter (Australia ICOMOS 1979). Intrinsic value is linked to the “spirit of place” and reflects the specific identity of a place, expressing the physical-spatial relationship that, over time, has bound communities to their environmental context. It is thus the result of a ‘social construction’ whose interpretation and evaluation require the participation of the local community in its various components.

In the processes of territorial enhancement and regeneration, the role of intrinsic value is fundamental in that it allows a direction to be set for the development and management of a site, a historic center, a city, consistent with the local history and with the value-bearing heritage embodied in its cultural heritage (Pinto et al. 2017). In these terms, reuse is an economic challenge for the construction sector, requiring a previous evaluation of the rehabilitated product through decision criteria for project (Robert 1991). The system of values attributed the potential for use identified in it, meanings for the church reuse process and contributing to the quality of location (construction, esthetic and dimensional) of existing buildings (Bianchi and De Medici 2023). The difficulties of reusing this type of building depend on the characteristics (for example, the presence of large rooms, the efficient thermal behavior, the reliability of lighting and natural ventilation systems, the use of durable materials), the skills of the workforce and the materials used not available on the market (Fitch 1990). This makes clear the need to identify suitable tools for the sustainable reuse of churches; therefore, the paper returns a system of indicators that allow evaluating the adequacy of the project actions, aimed at mediating between the conservation of the built heritage and the transformative needs of contemporary instances. These results provide scenarios of sustainable recovery, capable of transforming waste into a resource, lengthening the life cycle of the ecclesiastical heritage, and thus mitigating its environmental impact, as well as the cost linked to the loss of cultural and identity values for the community.

60.2 Methods and Materials

The care of building systems is the strategy of protection for the conservation and transmission of common goods to future generations. Based on the essential role of maintenance and reuse operations, they are guarantors of the ideal choice of a new functional purpose compatible with the character and meaning of the building on which to intervene (Bosone and Ciampa 2021).

In this research, the adoption of an analytical-making process aims at highlighting the necessity of adopting a systemic perspective to understand the complex interrelationships between culture, economy, society and the environment. In this perspective the adaptive reuse is considered as an interdisciplinary process, in which the creative and collaborative dialogue between different professions of expert and common knowledge leads to the elaboration of a tool able to re-interpret the needs expressed by the stakeholders as requirements for the reuse project (Pinto, 2004). This first co-design phase ensures that the tool can be used by the experts not only to preserve the building but also to valorize tangible and intangible values linked to the new use. The elaboration of an analytic tool becomes the opportunity to facilitate not only the involvement of religious and civil communities in knowledge and decision-making processes, but also the dialogue between them and expert knowledge, overcoming the traditional view of top-down projects imposed on passive and unaware communities. The opportunity to elaborate a preferred choice, through the analysis of a wide range

of cases, derives from the ecclesiastical building witnessed as growing disposal of churches abandonment (Bullen and Love 2011). For this reason, the research focuses on a selection of 140 church reuse cases, considered good experimental practices of the literature, starting from the observation of experiences that stimulate a reflection on the contribution of the built environment rehabilitation project with respect to contemporary instances. The selected cases refer to virtuous practices of reuse of churches carried out in the last 30 years. These are case studies that, for the design made, have been awarded or indicated in literature and in international scientific journals as best practices. In particular, this selection of cases was also chosen to meet the current guidelines and guidelines described and addressed in the previous paragraph. These case studies have led to the triggering of transformation processes with experimental consequences and significant repercussions on the rehabilitation project innovation in the built environment management. The selection of these good practices has been structured with the aim of returning a scenario of the appropriate uses to safeguard and, when possible, increase the values of a disused church. This is aimed at deepening practices and behavioral correspondence to the adoption of different uses. Each card highlights the need to establish a previous description of the church to be reused, in order to study the opportunities for intervention offered and the criteria adopted for the new function inclusion (Fig. 60.1).

The card returns the system of requirement categories and features attributed to the intervention and the image of the potential use expressed by the function, this in order to provide useful indicators for the reuse design of deconsecrated churches. The terms of investigation that make up the structure of each individual intervention, return and discrete the card-type of four parts. The data relating to the first part are a particular report established for each own case. It concerns the location site, useful information to analyze the type of territorial geography distribution about the interventions conducted; the period of construction, useful information to indicate the time interval of existence of the building; and the typology, information aimed at understanding the original planning structure. The original use and any changes of it can be deduced from the type of cult in reference before the intervention, information necessary to understand any choices imposed by previous operations; the features of the building, information necessary for the description of the intervention following the insertion of the new function.

The second part contains data relating to the framework of the reuse project with reference to the period of intervention; the commission, given that it influences the interests acting on the choice of the new function inserted. It concerns also the new use, given that it affects the type of interventions to be carried out to adapt the structure to the new function; the presence of volumes added above ground or underground, given that it determines a transformation of the envelope of the structure and therefore of the image perceived by its users. The third part of the card consists of dimension the reuse project, which inevitably generates a new identity for the church deriving from the integration between the original characteristics of the building and the new use

S. GIUSEPPE CHURCH | *Spazio Kor*

Piemonte, Asti (AT)

THE BUILDING

Period of construction

1660

Typology

Latin cross with rectangular single-nave church

Original use

Church

Previous use

Military building

Building features

The church has a rectangular floor plan with a single nave, punctuated by two deep communicating chapels on each side.



REUSE PROJECT

Commission

Asti Municipality

New use

Theatre and Museum

Additional volumes above or below ground level

yes no

Period of reuse

2016

DIMENSION

Environmental Sustainability

Social-Cultural Sustainability

Technological-Economic Sustainability

REQUIREMENT

Morphological-dimensional features

- Preservation of the interior spaces original geometric configuration: yes no
- Preservation of the existing building dimension: yes no
- Preservation of aesthetic relationships with the context: yes no

Perceptive-cultural features

- Recognisability of the transformation: yes no
- Reversibility of transformation: yes no
- Acceptance of transformation: yes no
- Respect for collective memory: yes no

Material-constructive features

- Compatibility of transformation: yes no
- Conservation of technic elements: yes no
- Respect for the construction system: yes no
- Life-length of transformation: yes no

DESCRIPTION

The church has been reused as a theatre: the chancel welcomes the tribune and the nave the stage. The sacristy has been reused as foyer, ticket office and toilets for the audience; the rectory as dressing rooms, actor rooms and toilets. The elongated block behind the presbitery is a stagecraft museum.

ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEM		TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEM	
ENVIRONMENTAL UNIT	ORIGINAL SPATIAL ELEMENTS	TECHNOLOGICAL UNIT	NEW TECHNIC ELEMENTS
Theatre Hall	Single nave	Closure	Exterior vertical fixtures Ground floor Roofs
Foyer + Ticket Office + Toilets	Presbytery		
Dressing rooms + Artist rooms + Toilets	Sacristy	Vertical int. partition	Vertical internal walls Vertical internal fixtures Protective elements
Exhibition Hall	Rectory		
	Chapel	Inclined int. partition	Internal stairs

Fig. 60.1 Example of church card

that is made of it about Environmental, Social-Cultural and Technological-Economic Sustainability.

The acquisition of data, schematized within the previous parts of the card, allows analyzing each case through a decomposition into respective three features: Morphological-dimensional, Perceptive-cultural and Material-constructive (De Medici and Pinto, 2012).

The first one features, attitude of the building or its parts to represent stylistic and artistic canons recognized. The limitations concern the preservation of the interior spaces about the original geometric configuration and preservation of the existing building dimension. In addition, the preservation of the interior spaces original geometric configuration, in order not to change the balances present in the area, altering the vocations of development that determine its recognizability. In particular, the preservation of aesthetic relationships with the context, in order not to vary the morphological, dimensional and proportion relationships between the building and the environment surround.

The second one features, aptitude of the building or its parts to constitute evidence of historical events or periods; in many cases, the changes that over time have affected the built—due to variations in use or the changing needs of users—constitute overlapping stratifications, which highlight its role as a historical document. The limitations aimed at the permanence of this feature in the choice of new functions and in the interventions that follow concern the recognizability of the transformations in order to ensure the clear distinction between the new and the elements, avoiding camouflage. This principle aims to preserve the identity of the asset, allowing a clear dating of the interventions suffered by it. Also, the reversibility of the transformations, aimed at allowing the possibility of removing the added elements or materials or restoring those removed. In fact, it is necessary to provide both that the development of technological research makes available, over time, intervention solutions with a greater degree of compatibility, and that the changing needs of use of the good requires new changes. In these cases, it is necessary to be able to bring the building back to a condition as close as possible previous to the transformation, limiting the loss of matter and identity. The acceptance of the transformations, to ensure that variations in use, is shared not only by the client and the designers, but also by the direct, indirect and potential users of the building. This must be verified during the planning through the respect for collective memory, aimed at ensuring that transformations do not alter the recognizability of the good as a representative element of the identity of social groups, which attribute specific symbolic values to it.

The third one features, attitude of the building or its parts to represent the material and constructive culture of a place or an era. The limitations imposed by the compatibility of transformation concerns conserving technic elements in order to respect the technological and construction system. It aimed at ensuring the permanence of the materials present using building products compatible with them and technological solutions that allow minimizing the loss of material. In addition, it concerns the respect for the construction system, in order to protect the construction techniques present and the system of relationships that binds the elements that make up the building organism, testimonies of the material culture of a given historical moment

or its evolution over time. The possibility to recognize the constructive conception of the asset, using materials and techniques that do not hide its traces. Moreover, the life-long transformation, with the aim of avoiding that the interventions carried out are subject to a rapid process of degradation, induces negative effects on up-cycling the elements (Figs. 60.2 and 60.3).

The fourth card part concerns the breakdown of the project description according to the systemic conception of Architectural Technology, divided into Environmental and Technological systems. The first one describes the link between the Environmental Unit and the original spatial elements, specifically what use are located into

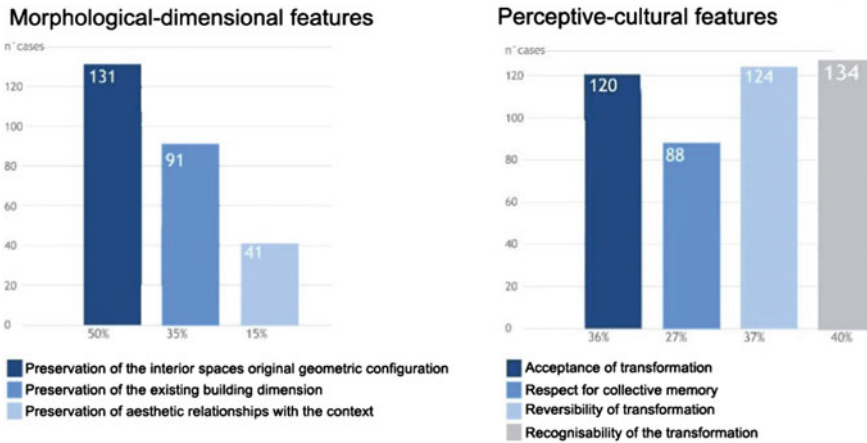


Fig. 60.2 Reuse features analysis (morphological-dimensional and perceptive-cultural)

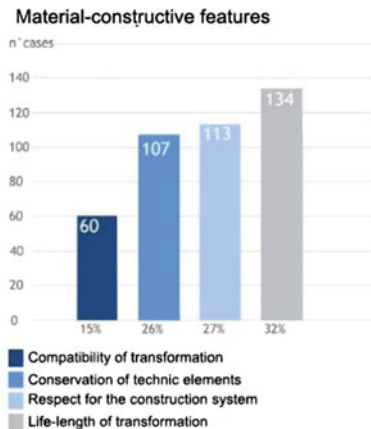


Fig. 60.3 Reuse features analysis (material-constructive)

original spatial elements, connoting new activities established and the physical transformations. The second one describes the link between technological unit and new technic elements, respectively returned by the physicality of the functional compartments and by the elements that allow their transformation. This comparison allows relating how spatial elements are more predisposed to accommodate certain functions rather than others.

They aimed at ensuring the compatibility of transformations to avoid that the use of inadequate materials and technologies or the variation of elements or spaces configuration can cause damage or accelerate its degradation process preserving the life-long transformation (Figs. 60.4 and 60.5).

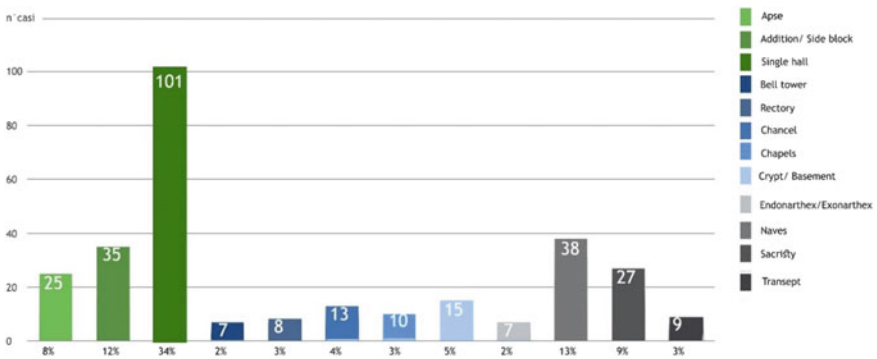


Fig. 60.4 Most frequent original spatial element analysis

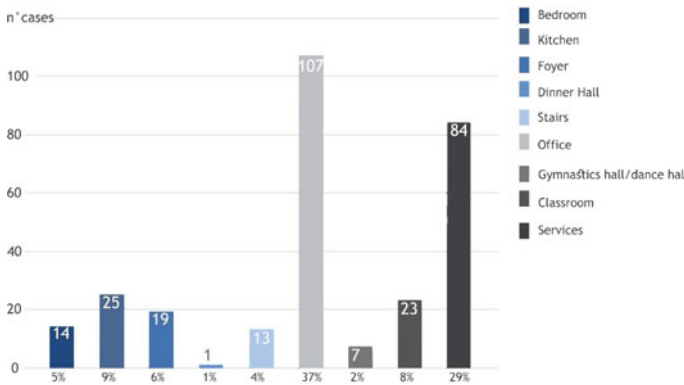


Fig. 60.5 Most frequent environmental unit analysis

This relationship in the functional field of space reuse is inextricably linked to the dominant technological units used in the reuse project to perform the function, detailed in the dominant technic elements to meet the performance requirements related to the new use (Figs. 60.6 and 60.7).

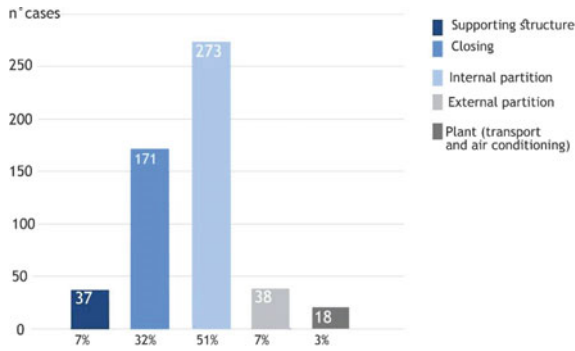


Fig. 60.6 Most frequent technological unit analysis

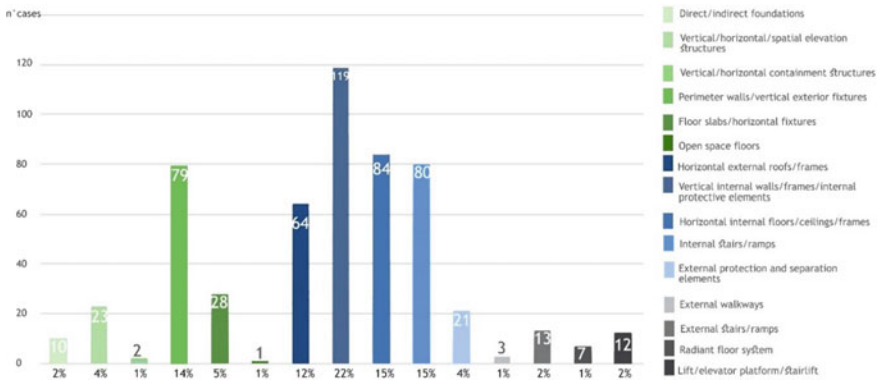


Fig. 60.7 Most frequent technic element analysis

60.3 Results and Discussion

These analyses reveal the existence of a link between the intended reuse and its transformative impact on the built cultural heritage. From the elaboration, the original spatial elements have been reused in accordance with the vocations of the environmental units, using technical elements not detrimental to the cultural image of the site, the techniques and materials existing in it. There is, therefore, the possibility of identifying and preferring certain design rather than others based on the new use and the environmental and technological units that derive from it. The insertion of a new function must inevitably consider the significance of the patrimony of ecclesiastical religious architecture as this value could remain also after the intervention of reuse. It is a meaning that is not abandoned with the reuse but influences the physical transformations of the heritage, determining appropriate project and compatible with the sacred character of the place. In particular, the church can also be deconsecrated and used with a new profane purpose, but it is this intrinsic value of the cultural heritage built to guide the most appropriate transformation.

The experimentation allows creating a comparison matrix from which sustainable reuse indicators for ecclesiastic built heritage regeneration can be extrapolated (Fig. 60.8). By using sustainability factors as dimensions, you can determine the requirement category associated with their features. The latter, compared with the actions determined by the design, referring to the more frequent technic and environmental elements determine the system of indicators. The latter present different forms of measurement demonstrating the degree of mixture and complexity of the processing obtained. The ability to aggregate them allows you to also dissociate them, using them if necessary only for the verification of a certain dimension of the project or at the end to compare its verifiability.

Dimension	Requirement Category	Features	Indicators	Unit of Measure	Actions: Intervention Project Choice	
					More frequent Technic Elements	More frequent Spatial Elements
Social-Cultural Sustainability	Perceptivo-cultural	Recognisability of the transformation	Materials, finishing, technic elements or construction techniques clearly distinct from the original ones	%	Vertical exterior fixtures/ Vertical and horizontal internal walls/frames	Chancel Endonarthex/Exonarthex
				n./sqm	Floor slabs/horizontal fixtures External and internal/protection and separation elements	
		Reversibility of transformation	Materials, finishing or technic elements without permanently transform the existing building	%	Internal stairs/ramps	Sacristy
				n./sqm	Radiant floor system	Single hall
		Acceptance of the transformation	Materials, finishing, technic elements or construction techniques which preserve the geometric configuration and the aesthetic value of the existing building	%	Vertical internal walls/frames/internal protective elements	Transsept
				n./sqm	External protection and separation elements	Addition/Side block
Acceptance of the transformation	Materials, finishing, technic elements or construction techniques which preserve the geometric configuration and the aesthetic value of the existing building	%	Vertical exterior fixtures/ Vertical and horizontal internal walls/frames	Chancel Endonarthex/Exonarthex		
Respect for collective memory	Aesthetic elements characterizing the building identity value in the time	%	Floor slabs/horizontal fixtures	Chancel Endonarthex/Exonarthex		
Environmental sustainability	Morfological-dimensional	Preservation of the existing building dimension	Volume preserved	%	Vertical and horizontal exterior walls/frames	Addition/Side block
		Preservation of aesthetic relationship with the context	Spatial elements which integrate the building into its context	%	Vertical and horizontal internal walls/frames	Bell tower
Technological-economic Sustainability	Material-constructive	Compatibility of transformation	Materials, finishing, technic elements or construction techniques without compromise the existing building degradation	%	Perimeter walls/vertical exterior fixtures	Naves
				n./sqm	Open space floors	
		Conservation of technic elements	Previous technical elements	%	Vertical exterior and internal fixtures	Bell tower
				n./sqm	Perimeter walls/vertical exterior and internal fixtures/ Vertical and horizontal internal walls/frames	Rectory
		Respect for the construction system	Innovative construction system without compromise the existing building performances	Yes/No	Perimeter walls/vertical exterior and internal fixtures/ Vertical and horizontal internal walls/frames	Naves Chapels Apsse
				n./sqm	Radiant floor system	Single hall
Life-length of transformation	Reused technic elements	%	External stairs/ramps	Bell tower		
		n./sqm	External protection and separation elements	Addition/Side block		

Fig. 60.8 Sustainable reuse indicators for ecclesiastic built heritage regeneration

60.4 Conclusion

The indicators deriving from the elaboration of the cards have highlighted, in most cases, the need to mediate between the operations of conservation, often reason of its abandonment, or otherwise the inappropriate functions that determine the loss of the church identity. From this develops the need to recognize these indicators as elements guaranteeing the balance to be maintained between transformation and permanence.

The reuse intervention through these indicators can also represent a tool for revealing the hidden values of the property, revitalizing not only the potential of the building but reactivating dynamics lost over time.

Considering the cultural heritage as the result of the interaction between people and their living context, consequently it is the bearer of both tangible and intangible values (environmental, social/cultural, economic, symbolic, aesthetic, historical, spiritual, etc.) between which symbiotic relationships exist (Fusco Girard 2019). In fact, in turn, the environment shapes people's behavior as the quality of places, infrastructures, human and social capital and institutions affects the entire productivity of an urban system, influencing the quality of life of the people who live there. This circular, symbiotic and reciprocal process between man and the built cultural heritage represents a permanence factor in the transformative dynamics of cultural heritage and landscape, ensuring an evolutionary continuity based on the co-evolution and regeneration of material and immaterial values. The reuse project must also be based on this process, so that the regeneration of disused assets contributes to the reconstruction of symbiotic relationships between people and the environmental and cultural contexts in which they live, preserving and regenerating existing values and generating new ones.

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