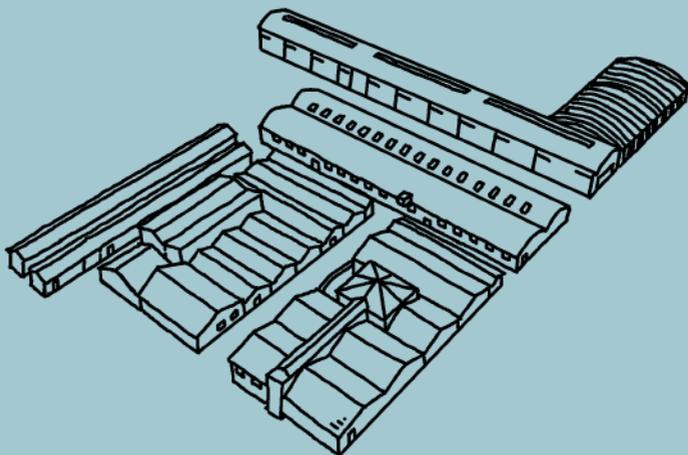


Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa

A district for cultural production
from 1995



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The Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa are located in Palermo in a 55,000 sqm area of industrial archeology, now transformed into factories of cultural and artistic production by a large collective project of urban regeneration. The area hosts 38 public and private organizations that bring life into the old pavilions with exhibitions, theater, music, film and cultural performances of all kinds.

After a long process that began in 1995, the Cantieri have established themselves in the national and international scene as an important center of independent cultural production and fruition, managed through an innovative public and private governance system.

It is a combination of unique spaces, skills and resources that hosts the most important educational institutions in the artistic and cultural field, international cultural centers, cultural spaces managed by the city and independent creative spaces enlivened by a wide range of associations, all in synergy with each other.



WHERE

The former industrial area where the Cantieri are located played a central role between the end of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. It housed wooden and metal Art Nouveau furniture designed by the Palermo architect Ernesto Basile in the Officine Ducrot and aircrafts designed by the engineer Giovanni Battista Caproni in the Aeronautica Sicula production spaces.

The recovery and renovation of spaces, carried out by the city administration during the 1990s, was followed by years of neglect and abandonment. Today the Cantieri are a true citadel of culture that has reactivated 32 spaces and 2 common courtyards: 3 spaces have been dedicated to dance, 2 to music, 3 to theater, 3 to cinema, 8 to visual arts, 1 to children, 12 to training, 13 are hybrid spaces and 2 became libraries.

CONTEXT

The area where the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa are located is close to the city center, between the working-class districts of Zisa and Noce, which are densely populated and lacking in services. It is a very fragmented and disconnected part of the city and, despite its proximity to the La Zisa palace and the center of the Arab-Norman Unesco itinerary, the area is strongly isolated from its context, also because of its perimeter walls.

In the 1950s and 1960s, the Cantieri area was engulfed by and partially subjected to a senseless and abnormal construction boom, the so-called "sack of Palermo", which distorted the architectural physiognomy of the city and destroyed many Art Nouveau buildings.

LOCATION

Urban

TYPE OF SPACE

Complex of buildings

ORIGINAL FUNCTION

Industrial (factory for the production of furniture, weapons, airplanes, railway cars)

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

Late 1800s

MAIN HISTORICAL FACTS

1891: during the National Exposition of 1892 the furniture factory of the Palermo entrepreneur Carlo Golia gained national recognition.

1902: The enterprise called "Impresa Carlo Golia e C." changed its name to "Ducrot Palermo, Successore di Golia & C. e di Solei Herbert" and became property of Vittorio Ducrot (adopted son of Carlo Golia), who entrusts the architect Ernesto Basile with the role of artistic director. The structures of the new company were located in Via Gili, the main road from which today the area can be accessed.

1912-1937: the Ducrot furniture factory expanded until the 1930s, when the factory grew from 200 to 2,000 workers, establishing itself as one of the largest Italian furniture factories and as one of the main suppliers of luxury Art Nouveau furniture at international level.

1936: a part of the factory was converted to aircraft production.

1939: the Zisa production halls became property of a Genoese group; after the Second World War, the business started its inevitable decline. From this moment on, the production of furniture coexisted with the aeronautical company that never took off and with a company that produced railway cars.

1957-1973: the production halls spread towards the Zisa district, reaching their maximum expansion. In 1973, a large portion of the area was destined for residential construction with a variant to the Master Plan.

1977: part of the area was demolished to construct a residential building.

1995: the City of Palermo bought what remained of the Ducrot factory at the

WHEN

TIME OF DAY USED

Morning 7am - 1pm 34%
Afternoon ... 1pm - 7pm 30%
Evening 7pm - 1am 35%
Night 1am - 7am 1%

Workdays: 50%
Weekends: 50%

Winter: 15%
Spring: 40%
Summer: 25%
Autumn: 30%

OPENING HOURS

The space is open daily until 9pm with special openings during events and shows.

AVERAGE USERS PER DAY

Around 500

WHAT

The Cantieri are a true citadel of culture that hosts and organizes exhibitions, training courses, theatrical, musical, and cinematographic activities, and community initiatives organized both by the managers of the individual spaces and by external cultural organizations. In 2019, 882 activities and initiatives were carried out within the area, of which 157 were carried out by temporarily hosted organizations. The result is a cultural proposal that goal the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa every day of the year, stimulating and solidifying the multifaceted community that inhabits these spaces on a daily basis: artists, creatives, makers, young students, inhabitants of the Zisa district, innovators who contribute to shaping the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa system.

SURFACE IN USE

38,500 sqm

THEMATIC AREAS

Commercial
Coworking and workspace
Culture and arts
Design, crafts and production
Ecology and environment
Education and training
Food and drink
Technology

CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Public art
Performing arts
Music
Visual arts
Game design

USER DEMOGRAPHIC

Artists and creatives
Associations and collectives
Children
Local community
Senior citizens
Young people

COLLABORATIONS

Artists and creatives
Associations and collectives
Citizens and local community
Companies
Other commons
Professionals and freelancers

NETWORK

Each of the cultural organizations inside Cantieri alla Zisa has its own network. In 2019, 742 partnerships were activated for the implementation of the activities.

WHO

The Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa are managed through a coordination of 38 public and private organizations. Some of the "residents of the Cantieri", as they call themselves, have created a second level organization, the third sector organization Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa, capable of bringing together and coordinating the entities sharing the spaces, taking into account the diversity

of their statutes and identities, in order to constitute the designated point of contact of the municipal administration. The spaces have been assigned by the City of Palermo, through lease contracts at a capped rent, since they offer free services to the city.

COMPOSITION

Network

NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

38

JURIDICAL FORM OF THE ORGANIZATION(S)

ETS (Third sector organization, 2019)

MANAGING ORGANIZATION(S)

Third sector organizations: Aopcs, Arci Tavola Tonda, Babel, CLAC, Comunità Ellenica, Consorzio Arca, Coop. Colorè, Ditirammu, G273, Legambiente Sicilia, Lumpen

Foreign organizations: Goethe-Institut, Goethe Zentrum, Institut Français Palermo, Verein Düsseldorf–Palermo e. V.

Public institutions: Accademia Belle Arti, Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia, Comune di Palermo, DAMS

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

433 activity managers

313 employees

120 volunteers

HOW

Not all the organisations that operate in Cantieri alla Zisa have joined the third sector organisation but they all participate in its management through the members meetings, where each space is represented by a delegate.

NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE

Bottom-up

TYPE OF MANAGEMENT

Horizontal

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

24% Public grants

12% Regular public funds

48% Self-funded

16% Sponsorships

TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

40% Free

60% Paid

Focus on the cultural production

Cultura in cantiere

A game event, which involved all the organizations operating inside the Cantieri, held in 2018 - the European Year of Cultural Heritage - to celebrate the integration of different cultures that work side by side in the city every day. During the game, people were invited to solve puzzles and pass tests together with the organizations that inhabit the Cantieri, ranging from music to illustration to foreign cultures. The themes that inspired the game (urban commons, cultural activities, Arab-Norman heritage) were chosen during the Partecip@ttivi process, promoted by the City of Palermo when it was awarded the title of Italian Capital of Culture for 2018, and some of the games were inspired by the participatory game design meetings that took place during the project. The game allowed the public to get to know the Cantieri better and to narrate, together with the local inhabitants, the different features of the spaces.





How did your story begin?

In 1995, the City of Palermo purchased what was left of the Ducrot factory and began a slow metamorphosis that was only partially governed. The mayor of the city, Leoluca Orlando, assigned the only building then accessible to the Goethe Institut, which, being a foreign cultural institute, proposed cultural activities without requesting funds from the city administration. Without the presence of the Goethe Institute, the whole process would not have started. At the same time the then-councilor for culture invited some important personalities of European

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culture to Cantieri, like Wim Wenders and Pina Bausch, who were impressed by the place, and chose it as a venue for artistic productions and some major events in collaboration with local artists. Between the late 1990s and early 2000s Nick Cave, 99 Posse, and Subsonica performed here: there was a great cultural excitement around the area. A few years later, more structural recovery interventions were funded, and so the ZAC (Zisa Arte Contemporanea)

exhibition space was restored. However, no further cultural events were organized: for ten years the city administration, which had changed in the meantime, focused its attention on other spaces. The attention on Cantieri was reignited in 2011, when it was feared that they may be turned into a shopping center. So the area was occupied and there was a strong opinion movement that associated, in a symbolic way, the reactivation of Cantieri with the reopening of Cinema De Seta, the only public cinema in all of Sicily. People were angry at the time because the culture workers of the city were in a severe economic crisis due to the cut in funds for culture, so much so that many cultural production companies were forced to close. At the same time, however, new dynamic organizations emerged.

In this situation, the movement “I cantieri che vogliamo” (The Cantieri We Want) was created, involving at first culture workers and then artists, lawyers, notaries, and academics. The first public assembly was attended by 300 people, then the movement grew, welcoming all the cultural organizations that did not have a home. We organized conferences, public meetings, and concerts until we decided to occupy the cinema and to share the statute of the movement, written collectively by constitutionalists and culture workers.

After a moment of unprecedented political involvement during the electoral campaign for the regional and municipal elections in Palermo, a difficult period began because in the meantime, with the economic crisis, the city no longer had the same funds available as in the past.

However, we began to debate the applicability of the “Regulations for Urban Commons” and of the concept of “fiscal loss” (the loss caused by a city administration when it leaves a property abandoned). In order to proceed with the Cantieri project, we turned to the Fondazione per il Sud which, having the necessary funds at its disposal, accused the city administration of committing fiscal damage by leaving the area abandoned. In this way, the Foundation for the South took over the assignment of the spaces, and then managed the allocation of the spaces.

Is there a practice or value that represents you and you think may be an inspiration to others?

The process of building Cantieri Culturali is constantly in progress, because it is a 55,000 square meter area, with 18 assignees, at least 30 organizations, and thousands of activities that inevitably tend to overlap. Given the complexity, the process must be structured, made functional. Despite the difficulties with the city administration, we continued to work in the direction of greater integration and coordination among the organizations participating to Cantieri Culturali; for this reason in 2018 we promoted the activity “Comunità che si organizzano” (Self-Organizing Communities), because we needed a legal entity that could interface with the municipality. We invited other organizations that, like us, were thinking about establishing a more official identity. So in 2019 we created the ETS (third sector organization) Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa that brings together the entities that operate inside the Cantieri Culturali alla Zisa. With the ETS we tried to initiate the shared physical planning of the area and at the same time, to work on a shared calendar of activities in order to avoid overlap and generate synergy. The most ambitious goal of the ETS is to build a community that can recognize itself not only within the identities of individual cultural centers but also within the organization that contains them. This is done through the exchange of users and audiences and through continuous representation of the needs that emerge in the management of shared spaces.

What is the secret ingredient that makes your story unique?

We are guided by the idea of making the Cantieri a driving force for the community, pushing the people of the neighborhood to experience these spaces, in an idea of a local ecosystem that includes every social and age group. That’s why the space, after risking being closed and turned into a shopping center, today involves such a big critical mass that it cannot be shut down. We would like to further open up to the neighborhood. After the metaphorical openings with cultural activities, we would like to create a “physical” opening in the walls surrounding the space, making it easier to access.

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Interview with: Filippo Pistoia