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4 — 7

Urban / Nomadic
Urbano / Nomade

Marcello Balzani | Emanuela Chiavoni

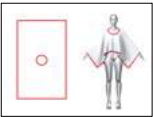
Ciammaichella
8 — 11

Massimiliano Ciammaichella
The Duty of Criticism in the Performative Act of Drawing and Knowledge as a Dance upon the Image
Massimiliano Ciammaichella
Il dovere della critica sull'atto performativo del Disegno e la conoscenza come una danza sull'immagine
Sandro Parrinello



nomadic | nomade
12 — 19

Digital nomadism and clothing practices for travelling subjectivities
Nomadismo digitale e pratiche di abbigliamento per soggettività in viaggio
Massimiliano Ciammaichella



urban | urbano
20 — 29

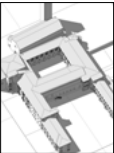
Inhospitable and fragile features between urban culture and nomadism: The 'Calanchi' park as a resource for re-inhabiting inner areas
Caratteri impervi e fragili tra cultura urbana e nomadismo: il parco dei "calanchi" come risorsa per ri-abitare le aree interne
A. Y. Jafari | A. Conte | M. Calia | R. Pedone | R. Laera | E. Borsci

urban | urbano
30 — 39

Documenting the Sensory Mosaic: An Integrated Methodological Proposal for the Analysis of Urban Antinomies in Guangzhou
Documentare il Mosaico Sensoriale: Una Proposta Metodologica Integrata per l'Analisi delle Antinomie Urbane a Guangzhou
G. Montanari | M. Suppa | C. Marcantonio

urban | urbano
40 — 51

Santi Felice e Fortunato of Vicenza: historical and architectural evolution from digital survey
Santi Felice e Fortunato a Vicenza: dal rilievo digitale all'evoluzione storico-architettonica
G. Lazzaretto | M. Perticarini | R. Tonin | F. Albarelli



nomadic | nomade
52 — 61

'Nomadic' adaptive analysis of heritage features through AI. Discovering Eladio Dieste's Cristo Obrero Church identities
Analisi adattiva 'nomade' delle caratteristiche del patrimonio attraverso l'IA. Alla scoperta delle caratteristiche della chiesa del Cristo Obrero di Eladio Dieste
Gabriele Giau



urban | urbano
62 — 71

Al'Ula, Resilient Nomadic Heritage. Interactive Experience for Community Empowerment
Al'Ula, Patrimonio Nomade Resiliente. Esperienze interattive per la valorizzazione della comunità
Giuseppe Amoruso | Marilyne Abi Saab



nomadic | nomade
72 — 79

Digital nomadism and new practices in heritage documentation
Nomadismo digitale e nuove pratiche di documentazione del patrimonio
G. Albini | L. Antognozzi | L. Del Chierico | A. Perez Amitrano



urban | urbano
80 — 87

Rethinking Heritage: Architectural Replicas Between Tradition and Innovation
Ripensare il patrimonio: Le repliche architettoniche tra tradizione e innovazione
Francesca Condorelli

urban | urbano
88 — 95

Earthen heritage in Chile and Abruzzo: Understanding, documenting, valorising vernacular architecture
Patrimonio in terra in Cile e Abruzzo: comprendere, documentare, valorizzare l'architettura vernacolare
E. De Santis | E. Chiavoni | N. Jorquera Silva

urban | urbano
96 — 103

Migrant Architectural Memory: The KNOW.it Project and the Italian Legacy in Brazil
Memoria architettonica migrante: il progetto KNOW.it e l'eredità italiana in Brasile
A. Ippolito | C. Bartolomei | D. Mezzino | C. Morganti | F. Rebecchini

urban | urbano
104 — 113

A cross-cultural initiative for urban exploration and international education aimed at architects and engineers
Un'iniziativa interculturale per l'esplorazione urbana e la formazione internazionale di architetti e ingegneri
C. Ferreyra | R. Ferraris | V. Ferraris | S. Barba



nomadic | nomade
114 — 123

The *drawing* of Berber Architecture in pre-Saharan Morocco
Il *disegno* delle architetture berbere nel Marocco presahariano
Alberto Pettineo | Sandro Parrinello



nomadic | nomade
124 — 131

Memories in Motion: The Assietta Road
Memorie in Movimento: la Strada dell'Assietta
A. Osello | D. L. D. Aschieri | M. Zucco | L. Fiorino



landscape | paesaggio
132 — 139

Plug-and-Play. Video games as a tool for landscape representation
Plug-and-play. Il videogioco come strumento di rappresentazione per il paesaggio
L. Tiniti | B. Magagnoli | L. Falcone | G. Lobosco

reviews | recensioni
140 — 149

Discomfort Zone
Zona disagio
Giovanni Corbellini



reviews | recensioni
150 — 154

Architectures for inhabiting the earth
Architetture per abitare la terra
Nicola Marzot



Migrant Architectural Memory: The KNOW.it Project and the Italian Legacy in Brazil

Memoria architettonica migrante: il progetto KNOW.it e l'eredità italiana in Brasile

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The KNOW.it project aims to reclaim Italian architectural heritage through virtual experiences that restore its original context. The great Italian migrations of the 19th century made a millennia-old architectural language nomadic. Architectural practices traveled overseas, finding a home in South America. A significant part of Italian immigration to Brazil settled in the state of São Paulo, particularly in the towns of Jaú and São Carlos. Jaú, in particular, saw a large wave of Italian immigrants starting around 1888. This Italian influence has shaped the local architecture, with structures that reflect Italian heritage, often

overlooked but deeply rooted in the city's identity. The project aims to shed light on these architectures, allowing them to symbolically return to Italy through digital communication. The goal is to act a "virtual comeback" of architectural heritage that is located overseas but rooted in Italian culture, through a hypermedia collection composed of digital models made through ICT, and above all to propose an original form of communication through a digital platform and social networks to extend knowledge to different categories of users.

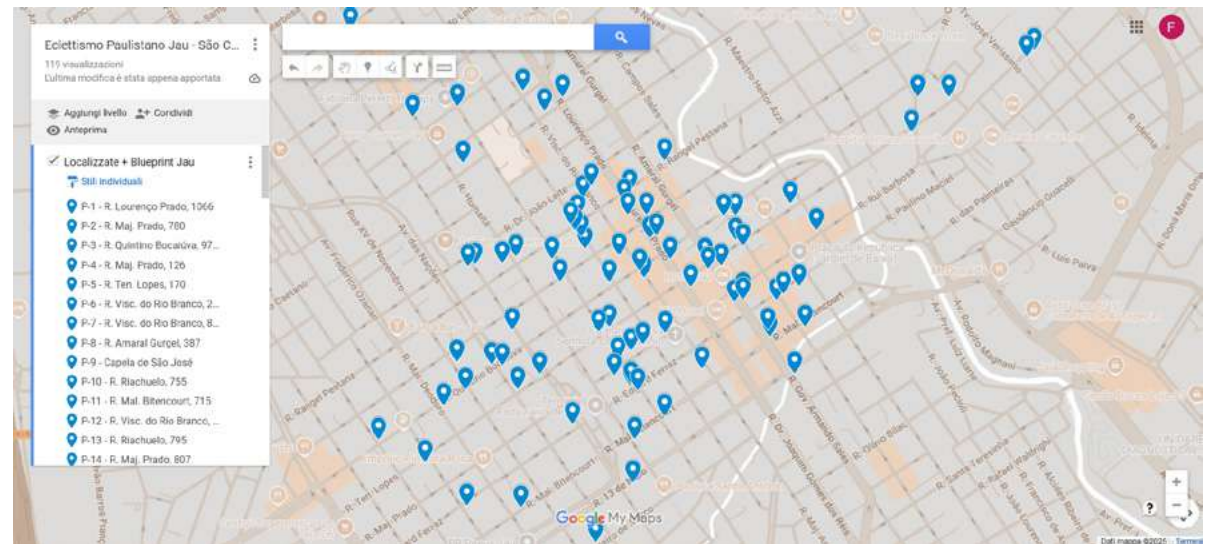
Il progetto KNOW.it nasce con l'obiettivo di recuperare il patrimonio architettonico italiano attraverso esperienze virtuali che ne restituiscano il contesto originario. Le grandi migrazioni italiane del XIX secolo hanno reso nomade un linguaggio architettonico millenario. Le pratiche architettoniche italiane hanno attraversato l'oceano, trovando una nuova casa in Sud America. Lo stato di San Paolo fu una delle principali destinazioni dell'immigrazione italiana in Brasile, soprattutto nelle città di Jaú e São Carlos. Jaú, in particolare, vide una grande ondata di immigrati italiani a partire dal 1888. Questa influenza italiana ha modellato l'architettura locale, con edifici che riflettono l'eredità italiana, spesso trascurata ma profondamente radicata nell'identità della città. Il progetto si propone di far emergere queste architetture, permettendo loro di "tornare simbolicamente" in Italia attraverso la comunicazione digitale. L'obiettivo è realizzare un "ritorno virtuale" del patrimonio architettonico che, pur trovandosi all'estero, affonda le sue radici nella cultura italiana, attraverso una collezione ipermediale composta da modelli digitali realizzati con le ICT, e soprattutto proporre una forma originale di comunicazione tramite una piattaforma digitale e i social network, per estendere la conoscenza a diverse categorie di utenti.

INTRODUCTION

The KNOW.it project aims to explore and virtually reconstruct a significant portion of the Italian architectural heritage resulting from emigration to Brazil starting in the late 19th century. The initiative stems from the awareness that the cultural and construction legacy left by Italians in Brazilian territory represents a widespread cultural asset, often overlooked but deeply rooted in local urban dynamics. The project involves three Italian research units: the Department of History, Drawing and Restoration of Architecture at Sapienza, University of Rome, the Department of Architecture at the University of Bologna, and the Department of Humanities at IULM University. These are supported by important collaborations with cultural institutions and academic bodies located in the State of São Paulo, Brazil. The migratory context forms the historical backdrop of the research. Following the abolition of slavery in 1888, the State of São Paulo promoted a vast immigration campaign, welcoming over 1.5 million Italians between 1870 and 1920 (Avagliano, 1994). This influx substantially contributed to the demographic, cultural, and material transformation of the region. Italian immigrants brought with them technical and artistic skills that were expressed in both public and private architectural works, leaving visible traces in the urban landscape and building forms (Rosso Del Brenna, 1999). Eclectic architecture – marked by a mixture of stylistic languages such as Neoclassical, Neo-Gothic, Baroque, and Renaissance – became a tangible expression of this cultural encounter (Lemos, 1989). A crucial factor that motivated the launch of KNOW.it was the observation of the progressive degradation of historic architectural heritage in many Brazilian urban

01.

02.



03.

Pins on a Google MyMaps map highlighting the surveyed and recorded architecture. Other layers can show identified or demolished buildings.

04.

Spreadsheet where all identified and surveyed architecture is recorded. Each project has an ID code associated with numerical and textual information to be integrated into the digital archive.

[illegible]

The research identified two case study cities – Jaú and São Carlos – which, although lesser-known in the Brazilian context, preserve architectural heritage clearly rooted in Italian traditions (De Oliveira, 2012). In Jaú, it was possible to access detailed historical technical drawings (blueprints), useful for the compositional and construction analysis of the buildings. In São Carlos, however, the lack of graphic materials required an integrated approach based on photographic sources, textual documents, and oral testimonies [Fig. 01.]. In both cities, data collection was supported by a participatory initiative called “Call for Memory” [Fig. 02.], launched via social media to directly involve local citizens. This allowed archival research to be enriched with collective memories, historical photographs, and scattered documentary materials.

Once the material had been collected, a systematic cataloguing process was initiated. Each building was recorded in a database structured according to consistent and standardized criteria (Valenti, 2000).

A unique identification code was assigned to each project, and specific fields were defined concerning general data, location [Fig. 03.], intended use, architectural description, and state of conservation [Fig. 04.].

98

platform will be designed as a relational system, capable of interconnecting the various documentary and iconographic components.

A solid methodological reference for the development of the project was Ataral.es, Atlas de Arquitectura Almohade (Ataral, n.d.), created by the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando, due to its structural and functional similarities with the current initiative. The portal geolocates and documents architectural heritage in an integrated way through orthophotos, surveys, images, and critical content, organized within an interactive, categorized map. All graphic and photographic materials are freely accessible and downloadable, promoting the broad dissemination and reuse of data. In parallel with the documentary research, on-site surveying campaigns were conducted using advanced technologies such as 3D laser scanning and terrestrial photogrammetry. These operations took place during various missions between 2023 and 2025, involving research unit members in data acquisition and graphical restitution activities. The resulting point clouds were processed to produce orthophotos and digital models, which formed the basis for generating 2D and 3D drawings [Fig. 05.]. The drawings were standardized according to shared criteria among all draftspeople, including uniform layouts, standard graphic scales (1:50 for elevations, 1:20 for details), informative headers, and codified symbols [Fig. 06.]. The use of a shared CTB file in AutoCAD ensured graphical consistency regardless of the institutional origin of the various teams. This approach guaranteed coherence and quality in the production of materials, enabling analytical comparisons between historical drawings and updated models.

The digital cataloging was conceived in a modular and structured manner, building upon guidelines previously adopted in earlier research projects (Carbonari, Chiavoni, Docci, Gandolfi, Gentile, Ottavianelli, 2016). In addition to architectural data, the platform will include sections dedicated to location (with current and historical addresses, Google Maps links and geographic coordinates), textual and photographic documentation, bibliographic references, and the digital files produced. Special attention was given to defining the resources associated with each project, which include photographs, 2D/3D models, scanned archival documents, and materials derived from on-site surveys. Each resource is identified through a unique code tied to the corresponding project.

FUTURE SCENARIOS

The KNOW.it project represents a significant milestone in the broader process of digitizing and enhancing Italian architectural heritage abroad, particularly the works built by Italian emigrants in Brazil. The initiative seeks to reestablish a cultural and symbolic connection between these architectural testimonies and their regions of origin, contributing to a transnational reinterpretation of architectural history.

The surveying and documentation of the selected architecture allow for a more precise understanding of the contributions made by Italian architects in the State of São Paulo, outlining a more nuanced picture of the local architectural context. In particular, the variety of design solutions and the diversity of contributors highlight a strong connection with Paulistano eclecticism, a stylistic movement widespread during the 20th century (Campos, 2005; Campos, 2008; Fabris, 1993). However, further critical analysis and comparison with similar research (Instituto de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da USP, n.d.) is necessary to support the preservation and transmission of a still partly hidden and fragmented historical heritage.

In this context, the future Digital Archive is the conceptual and operational core of the entire project: a dynamic environment for the collection, organization, and dissemination of data, digital models, and multimedia content. The archive's effectiveness depends not only on the quantity and quality of the acquired information but also on its ability to engage a diverse audience of scholars, professionals, institutions, and lay citizens.

A key strategic axis is the active involvement of the community. The implementation of an accessible

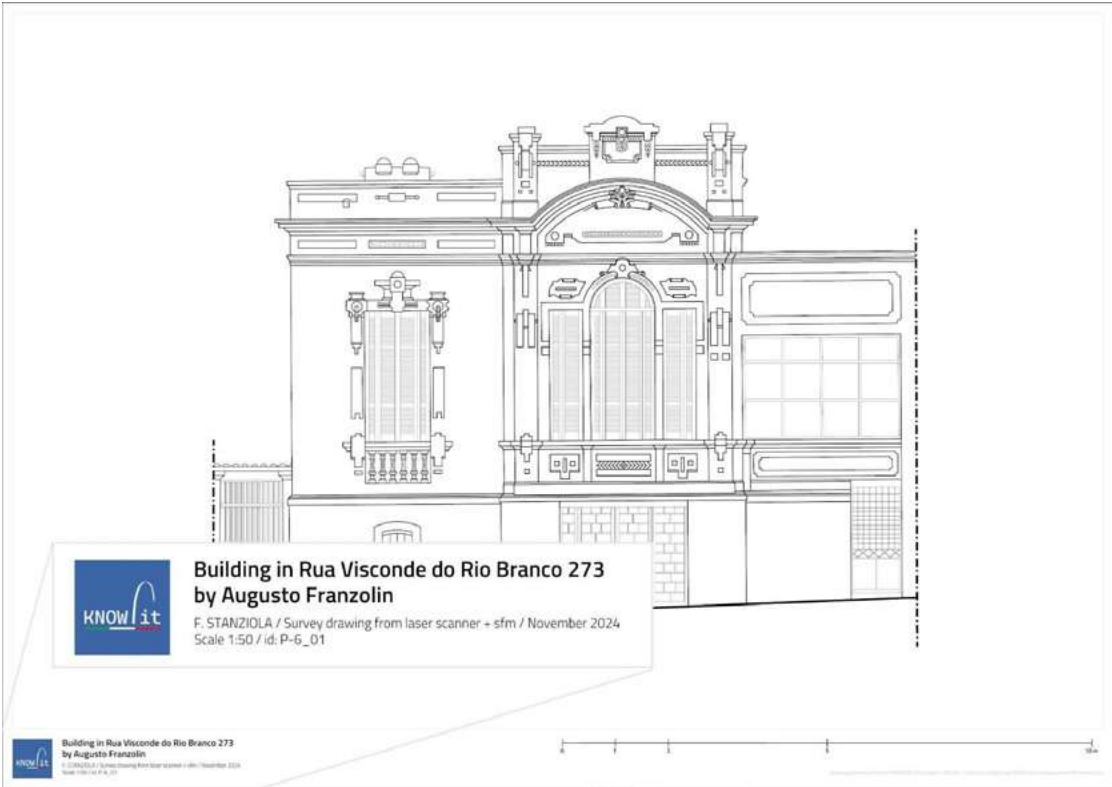


05.

Overlay of orthophoto and survey drawing of Casa Peccioli (Jaú).
Processed by Aly ElGabalay.

platform will enable direct contributions from researchers, institutions, and citizens through the sharing of documents, photographs, oral histories, and unpublished materials—strengthening cultural belonging and promoting widespread awareness of the value of migrant architectural heritage. Looking ahead, the project may expand to include other Brazilian cities with significant Italian influence, and link with archival collections and international platforms to create a broader and more comprehensive reconstruction of migratory flows. The integration of historical photographs, personal correspondence, and biographical sources will further enrich the understanding of the historical, social, and economic contexts that enabled the realization of the studied architecture. At the same time, the creation of a transnational scientific network will foster the exchange of expertise, data, and

Final elevation of a building in Jaú, ready for upload to the platform. The header highlights project information, drawing author, year and type of survey, as well as the drawing's scale and ID. Processed by Francesco Stanzola.



methodologies, encouraging an interdisciplinary and innovative approach. Collaborative agreements, outreach initiatives, and public events have already been organized thanks to support from AJAC – Associação Jauense de Ambiente e Cultura (AJAC, n.d.), which works to preserve Jaú's environment and cultural heritage; the José Raphael Toscano Municipal Museum of Jahu, source of thousands of drawings and archival images; the Fundação Pró-Memória de São Carlos (Promemória São Carlos, n.d.), which protects and disseminates the city's tangible and intangible heritage; and the Instituto de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo, affiliated with the state's largest and most prestigious university.

To ensure the results reach the widest possible audience, an integrated communication strategy is already in place. A structured social media presence, the organization of online events, and thematic seminars are increasing the project's visibility, consolidating it as a key reference in the study of Italo-Brazilian heritage. At the same time, the publication of scientific and popular articles in academic and sector journals reinforces the academic legitimacy of the initiative, with the hope of encouraging its replication in other contexts.

Finally, collaboration with cultural and academic institutions in both Italy and Brazil will be essential to ensuring continuity, resource sharing, and financial sustainability. Access to international funding opportunities can support the long-term development of the archive and the realization of virtual exhibitions and interactive displays, capable of engaging not only specialists but also a broader public interested in the history of Italian emigration and its architectural legacy.

In conclusion, the KNOW.it project represents a unique opportunity for the recovery and promotion of Italian architectural heritage abroad. Through the integration of technology and community participation, the project has the potential to evolve into a complex digital ecosystem dedicated to safeguarding and transmitting the historical memory of Italian architecture worldwide.

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