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The paradox of 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park' or how to mock heritage to make heritage

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ABSTRACT

During the last 50 years, and due to the dilapidation of public funds, hundreds of unfinished public works have been erected Italy. In 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video declared these ruins a formal architectural style – 'Incompiuto Siciliano' – and, in doing so, their aim is to change the buildings' dark side and turn it into something positive. One of the tangible outcomes within the artists' proposal is the eventual creation of the 'Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park' in Giarre, a Sicilian medium-sized village that has the highest density of unfinished public works in Italy. This article analyses how such a provocative project contains serious implications in terms of heritage. It is stated that, in order to forge a positivized 'unfinished heritage', Incompiuto Siciliano Archaeological Park builds bridges between aspects that, in principle, seem to be the opposite of each other. This opens the possibility of putting traditional heritage assumptions in question through the production of a critical heritage whose novelty lies in the constructive use of irony, sarcasm and double meaning.

Introduction

For the past 50 years Italy has focused part of its modernisation on the erection of public works. However, due to malpractice which involved inaccurate cost estimates, a disregard for building regulations or design errors driven by political corruption and mafia networks (Santangelo 2009; Accattini 2011), around 400 public works have remained unfinished. Approximately a third of these ruins are located in Sicily alone, and thus, in 2007, the group of artists Alterazioni Video labelled this phenomenon as if it were a formal architectural style, 'Incompiuto Siciliano' – or 'Sicilian Incompletion' in English.[1] The artists trace back to film director Pietro Germi's words to justify the term 'Siciliano' as a representative factor of the whole of Italian society: 'I believe in Sicily the general Italian characters are slightly exaggerated, I would say that Sicily is Italy twice, that all Italians are Sicilians, but Sicilians are just more' (1964). Yet far from stigmatising a single Italian region, Incompiuto Siciliano refers to a systematic national problem (Alterazioni Video 2008), in which an unfinished public work is Incompiuto Siciliano regardless of its location in the country. Moreover, something becomes a 'style' when it is replicated, and the unfinished works caused by the 2008 speculative crisis in Spain (Concheiro 2012), Ireland (Kitchin, O'Callaghan, and Gleeson 2014), Iceland (Pálsson 2012) or any other country in the world (Moreno and Blanco 2014) lead us to think that Italian problematics are just prevenient, not unique.

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