

# Reimagining unfinished architectures: ruin perspectives between art and heritage

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## Abstract

For the past five decades, hundreds of unfinished public works have been erected in Italy as the result of inconsistent planning and the presence of corruption and organised crime. A third of these constructions are located in Sicily alone, and so, in 2007, a group of artists labelled this phenomenon an architectural style: *'Incompiuto Siciliano'*. Through this creative approach, the artists' objective is to put incompleteness back on the agenda by viewing it from a heritage perspective. This article reviews the different approaches that the artists have envisaged to handle unfinished public works; whether to finish them, demolish them, leave them as they are or opt for an 'active' arrested decay. The critical implications of these strategies are analysed in order to, ultimately, conclude that incompleteness is such a vast and complex issue that it will surely have more than one single solution; but rather a combination of these four. This is important because it opens up a debate on the broad spectrum of possibilities to tackle incompleteness – establishing this as one of the key contemporary urban themes not only in Italy but also in those countries affected by unfinished geographies after the 2008 financial crisis.

## Keywords

active arrested decay, critical heritage, demolition, entropy, modern ruins, unfinished architecture

## Introduction

In 2004, Alterazioni Video, the group of artists started by Paololuca Barbieri Marchi, Alberto Caffarelli, Matteo Erenbourg, Andrea Masu and Giacomo Porfiri, was founded in Milan, and today, they operate nationally and internationally. Throughout their career, their use of a disconcerting irreverence highlights heritage and artistic conventionalisms through the lens of popular culture. Anthropologist Ivan Bargna, who has occasionally collaborated with the artists, suggests that for Alterazioni Video, art is a medium through which they "bring out the underlying political logic of

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### Author biography

Pablo Arboleda has an architecture background and is a Spanish interdisciplinary researcher whose interest is on how the existence of modern ruins defies assumptions of progress while putting heritage dogmas into question. Within the University of Glasgow, he is a Postdoctoral Fellow funded by the Urban Studies Foundation, and his current project studies the processes by which abandoned buildings are reused as cultural assets while aesthetically remaining like ruins.