

Caring for cultural heritage is caring for people

The catacombs of Naples



NAPLES



914,758



Cultural heritage
for sustainable development



Challenge

The Rione Sanità, one of the most ancient districts in Naples, boasts a rich cultural heritage. It holds catacombs from the Hellenistic and Christian eras, including two still existing: the San Gennaro and San Gaudiso. However, it has suffered serious decline, with high poverty and crime rates. This has particularly affected the youth, with high rates of discontinuation of training programmes (27.6%) and youth unemployment (42%). Young people are often marginalised, sometimes leading to their participation in organised crime. The challenge was to create job opportunities for them through the enhancement of historical, archaeological and artistic heritage.



Solution

After years of neglect, the catacombs of Naples, which are privately owned by the Vatican, were entrusted to La Paranza social cooperative and reopened to the public. Through heritage, the cooperative empowered young people, created a safer environment in the Rione Sanità and revitalised the entire district. It is a story of transformation from degradation to recovery of a remarkable, hidden heritage.



How ?

- 1 In 2001, the arrival of a new parish priest at the Basilica of Santa Maria della Sanità, Don Antonio Loffredo, marked the beginning of a process of development of the district's cultural heritage.
- 2 In 2006 a group of young friends, led by the priest, founded the social cooperative "La Paranza" aiming to recover their local heritage and bring about the tangible revitalisation of the Sanità neighbourhood.
- 3 La Paranza immediately received support from the Archdiocese of Naples.
- 4 In the same year the catacombs of San Gaudioso opened to visitors and the first guided tours began.
- 5 In 2008, the cooperative responded to a call for proposals for cultural projects launched by the "Fondazione CON IL SUD" which provided the funding to begin the process of recovering and opening to the public the Catacombs of San Gennaro in 2009.
- 6 Training courses were created for the guides together with job placements. La Paranza's team includes archaeologists, restorers and art historians involved in the study, supervision and restoration of the frescoes and mosaics in the Catacombs.

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Budget/Financing

€ 1,860,000

The total cost of the activities has been €1,860,000. This includes the cost of the following restorations and projects:

- Catacombs of San Gennaro, Catacombs of San Gaudioso, San Gennaro Extra Moenia, Giardino degli Aranci, Casa dei Cristallini, Cloister of Santa Maria della Sanità, the theatre Nuovo Teatro Sanità, lighting system of the catacombs and the church of San Severo Fuori Le Mura.

All the funding came from private donations and sponsorship.



Management

- La Paranza ONLUS (non-profit organisation of social utility) is a social cooperative that has participated together with the Archdiocese of Naples, the L'Altra Napoli ONLUS Association and the Pontifical Commission for Sacred Archaeology, in the historic and artistic call for proposals from the CON IL SUD Foundation with a project titled "San Gennaro extra Moenia: a door from the past to the future".
- To give stability to what had already been achieved and to promote new projects, the San Gennaro Community Foundation was founded in 2014. It brings together all the organisations working in the local area.
- Within the San Gennaro Community Foundation, Cooperative La Paranza is a part of the Co-Operazione San Gennaro Association, bringing together third sector operators from Rione Sanità. This helps promote a culture of sharing and encourages social cohesion.



Transferability

- Involve the local community in the decision-making process and in the realisation of the activities.
- Create a model that cares for the people and their happiness. It should be based on the principles of solidarity, reciprocity and a collective commitment to the common good.
- Trust and invest in young people to bring about change.



Impact

- Annual visitors to the catacombs have increased from 5,000 to 130,000 in ten years. There were 160,000 visitors in 2019.
- The employees of La Paranza cooperative increased from 5 to 44.
- The economic impact generated by the opening of the catacombs of Naples in 2018 alone is estimated to be €32,844,339.
- The rehabilitation of Rione Sanità's image through the rediscovery of its cultural heritage and the implementation of an innovative, bottom-up management structure.
- The creation of a lively and safe area thanks to the support of local police authorities.
- Long-term investment of the municipality of Naples in cultural heritage of the area aiming to revitalise the abandoned Fontanelle cemetery.
- Return of hope in the local community, especially young people.



Links

- <https://catacombedinapoli.it>
- <https://www.facebook.com/CatacombeDiNapoli>
- <https://www.instagram.com/catacombedinapoli>
- <https://twitter.com/catacombenapoli>
- [European Heritage Award Winners 2022](#)



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