

'San Giovanni' in Saluzzo. Studies and suggestions for the conservation of the bell tower

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This project presents the analysis of San Giovanni bell tower located in Saluzzo, a town characterized by the high presence of vertical elements.

San Giovanni bell tower was chosen because the church of which it is a part, is considered by the population as 'the church of Saluzzo' and not the cathedral, as the present urban layout could suggest.

The bell tower is the most significant in the panorama of Saluzzo not only because it is one of the oldest, but also because it is interesting from an architectonic point of view. It is part of a church-and-friary complex built on a pre-existing structure by Frederic II in 1376. A golden bronze cockerel, today replaced by a copy, was put at its top as a symbol of the French protection which the marquisate benefited from.

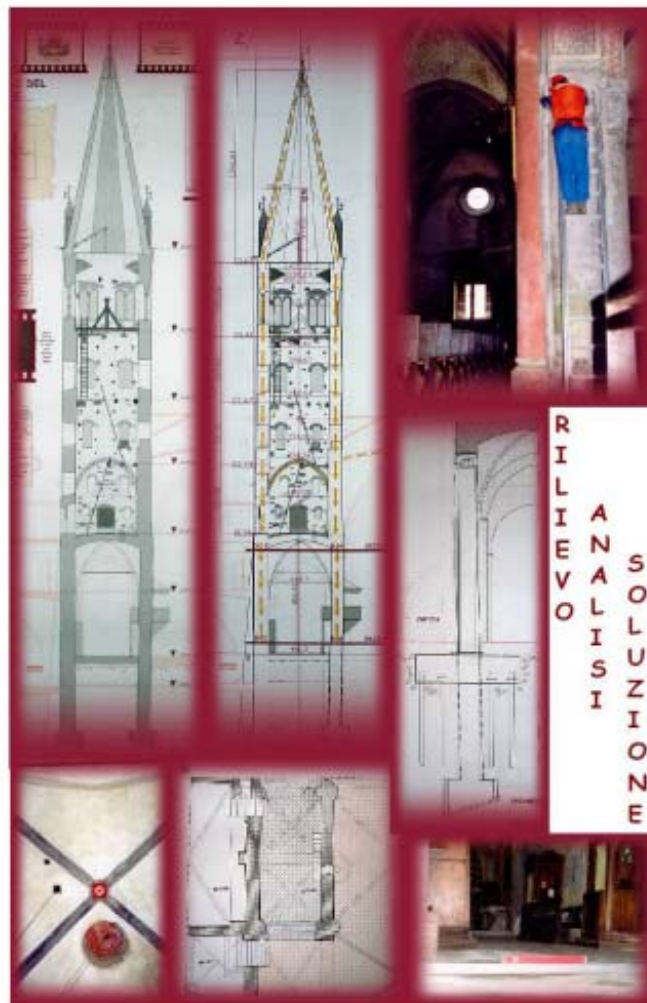


The bell tower in the San Giovanni complex.

The first chapters provide a brief historical framework of Saluzzo, the description of the raised elements in the town's skyline, a study of the building phases of the San Giovanni complex as well as the documented restoration work that has been carried out on it.

The subsequent chapters try to provide an accurate understanding of the bell tower both from the point of view of the materials and the building methods in order to establish the conditions for future restoration and possible reutilization. As no cartographic documentation on the tower had been found, a survey of the building was started. Following the survey, from the research carried out and the observations made on its actual state, it was noted how the static nature of the tower is undermined by the thinness of one of the two supporting walls visible in the church. This shows signs of settling and therefore makes the need for intervention clear.

While looking for the documentation concerning the complex, it was found that the stability of the tower had already been a matter of discussion in some documents written in 1869, following the survey of the engineers Ferrari and Ferrante. By restoring the bell tower, the cultural and architectural value of the monument would be increased. For this reason, a study of the actual state of dilapidation and instability was carried out. The instability problem was analyzed in depth in order to put forward two hypotheses for the consolidation of the tower. If the first suggested intervention would prove to be insufficient to guarantee the stability of the bell tower, it would be necessary to carry out the more invasive, though more effective one.



Studies and suggestions: survey, analysis of the instability and a possible solution to the thinness.

Moreover, in order to make the access to it easier, it was suggested to replace the existing ladders with a wood and metal staircase fitted with protective railings, to apply plaster on the intradoses of the slabs and a covering on the upper part of the slabs so as to improve their appearance.

The work is concluded with a proposal for the reutilization of the bell tower and of some adjacent premises which hosted the library of the complex up to 1996, when all the books and documents were transferred to the basilica of Superga, according to the instructions given by the person in charge of the 'Ordine dei Servi di Maria' (Order of St. Mary's Servants), Father Benedetto di Marengo (Legal representative of the Corporate Body of the Piedmontese Province of the "Ordine dei Servi di Maria" (Order of St. Mary's Servants) since 1996.), as the state of the five rooms put at risk the integrity of the above mentioned.

These rooms are presently disused and in an advanced state of deterioration due to rainwater infiltrations. This proposal provides for their restoration in order to reutilize them partly as a library and partly as a small museum for the complex, with a special section for the bell tower.

The aim is also that of setting up a guided tour of the bell tower, which would thus become itself a museum, making it an integral part of the existing museum for the church and the complex. This would give visitors the chance to visit the whole structure up to the belfry.

The argument studied during the development of the thesis turned out to be extremely interesting because, in recent years, the Complex of San Giovanni has become the focal point of intense discussions and strong controversy on its future use.

Today the Friary is inhabited by one friar only: Father Lorenzo Merivot who is in charge of the religious services. Consequent to the execution of the project, which is still unofficial, he would be moved to some other premises, which would go against the will of the population.

According to the suggested plans, the Friary should be converted into a hotel which would be used to host some of the organizers and some important people involved in the 2006 Olympic Games. The population would like the monument to be accessible to everybody in the future.

The transformation of a wing of the friary into a hotel would certainly result in an invasive intervention as it would be necessary to disfigure the building in order to insert the sanitary equipment for each room, along with all the works required for this transformation.

The only access to the bell tower runs along the part of the friary which would be converted into a hotel and this would probably be closed to the public, with the subsequent non-accessibility to the bell tower or to all the part of the building which would not be reachable by visitors.

Through the research of a detailed understanding of San Giovanni bell tower, this work suggests a way to increase the architectural and cultural value of the building.



The state of the bell tower during the preparation of the thesis

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