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Update of the Heritage Alert for the Stadio Artemio Franchi, Florence, Italy

Review of events since the launch of the alert, and analysis of the results of the procedure initiated by the municipality of Florence

09 February 2023

After issuing the [Heritage Alert for the Artemio Franchi Stadium](#) by Pier Luigi Nervi in November 2020, ICOMOS, through its International Committee on 20th Century Heritage and Italian National Committee, has continued to follow the situation in coordination with the Pier Luigi Nervi Project Foundation, initial proposer of the Heritage Alert.

This update provides a summary of events since the Heritage Alert was issued and assesses the outcome of the procedure launched by the Municipality of Florence. Despite its intentions of regenerating the Stadium by 2026 whilst preserving its cultural, historical, and artistic values, the application of [Art. 55 bis of the legislative decree D. L. 76/2020](#) (Simplifications for interventions on sports facilities) has resulted in a proposed design, which, if fully implemented, in practice will heavily compromise Nervi's architectural masterpiece.

This change in the architectural heritage protection law will not only negatively impact the Stadio Artemio Franchi but could also have lasting repercussions on many other modern heritage places all over Italy.

Submission by the ACF Fiorentina to the Italian Ministry of Culture

On 16 November 2020, the ACF Fiorentina Football Club, with the endorsement of the Municipality of Florence made a submission to the Italian Ministry of Culture (MiC – previously called MiBACT). In this, "considering the serious structural criticalities of the Franchi Stadium and the significant deviations from UEFA standards, in view of the possible promotion of a renovation or building replacement of the same in order to ensure its adaptation to national and international standards of safety, health and public security" it requested, pursuant to Art. 55 bis of Legislative Decree no 76. of 16 July 2020, as amended by Law No. 120 of 11 September 2020, the Ministry "to identify only the specific structural, architectural or visual elements whose preservation or reproduction, even in forms and dimensions different from the original, is strictly necessary for testimonial purposes, and to indicate the ways and forms of their preservation, even detached, from the sports facility".

In reply, [the Ministry issued a formal act, dated 15 January 2021](#), defining: "the specific structural, architectural or visual elements whose preservation is strictly necessary for testimonial purposes"; "the modalities and forms of preservation [...] by means of renovation or replacement aimed at improving the usability of the facility itself deemed compatible with the need to preserve the testimonial value of the aforementioned elements together with the need to ensure the functionality of the facility itself for the purposes of public safety, health and security, as well as its conformity to international standards". The Ministry, by following the prescriptions of Art. 55 bis, allows the economic and functional requirements to prevail over the building's heritage listing.

International mobilisation and webinar by ICOMOS Italy

On 6 February 2021, as part of the [international campaign in defence of the Stadium](#), ICOMOS Italy, in association with the University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, hosted a webinar entitled ["Gli stadi di calcio in Italia: un patrimonio a rischio?"](#) (Soccer stadiums in Italy: a heritage at risk?), to discuss the case within a wider context. A complete chronological map of Italian soccer stadiums and 22 case studies were presented, discussing their values, critical design aspects, and current intervention proposals. After presenting ICOMOS advocacy for the Franchi Stadium in Florence and the Jožef

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Plečnik's stadium in Ljubljana, a multidisciplinary panel discussed the challenges of combining conservation with upgrades in historic stadiums, as part of the debate on Art. 55 bis of the legislative decree D. L. 76/2020, the so called "sblocca stadi", which not only jeopardises the survival of important sports facilities worthy of preservation but, by acting in derogation of Art. 9 of the Constitution, undermines the entire structure of Italian legislation for the protection of cultural heritage.

International design competition

In June 2021, the Municipality of Florence organised [an international competition](#) aimed at producing a high-quality design proposal for the conservation and upgrade of the Stadium together with a masterplan for the redevelopment of the surrounding Campo di Marte area. A foreseen 95 million euros of funding had been allocated in April 2021 for this purpose by the Ministry of Culture within the Covid 19 Pandemic National Recovery Plan.

31 designs were submitted anonymously to the first stage of the competition in September 2021. 8 finalist projects were allowed to enter the second stage, after which the results were announced on 7 March 2022. [The winning project](#) was presented by David Hirsch and Arup Italia, and is scheduled for completion in 2026.

Erroneous premises set by the call for tenders and Article 55 bis of the legislative decree D. L. 76/2020

Considering the global expressions of concern in response to the plans by the Municipality and ACF Fiorentina President to irreversibly alter the Franchi Stadium or to build an entirely new structure, the recently completed international competition could have seemed to constitute a happy ending to this troubled story.

However, the formulation of the call for tenders, and the designs submitted, are directly conditioned by the contents of the amended Art. 55-bis of Law Decree no. 76/2020, which was reproduced in its entirety in the Planning Guideline Document.

The procedure adopted and its outcome are a direct demonstration of the erroneous objectives pursued by the call for tenders. Quite anomalously for a legal text, Art. 55 bis 'self-justifies' itself with a series of motivations relevant to an administrative measure. Motivations, moreover, that are not at all convincing on their merits, especially if put forward on a general level.

Reversing the regulatory hierarchy, the new regulation allows, in the name of functionality, efficiency and economic-financial sustainability, a derogation from a Decree of declaration of cultural interest. The Decrees of cultural interest are directly referable to Art. 9 of the Italian Constitution, reflecting one of its fundamental principles. This derogation, possible in administrative practice only in the case of a radical change in the prerequisites on which the Decree of declaration of cultural interest was based, is here provided for by legislation and only for sports facilities!

This totally contradicts paragraph 1 of [Art. 20 of the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code](#), according to which cultural assets may not be destroyed, deteriorated, damaged, or used for non-compatible purposes. Art. 55 bis allows for the renovation or replacement of buildings aimed at improving the usability of the facility. In addition to this, the Ministry of Culture, in charge of ensuring compliance with paragraph 1 of Art. 20 of the Cultural Heritage and Landscape Code, should take on the unprecedented and contradictory function of indicating modalities and forms of conservation, even if these are "detached from the new sports facility" (as stated in the text). Considering that public safety, functionality, and sustainability are also required for other public facilities, such as theatres, cinemas, auditoriums, museums, hospitals, schools, and public offices, it is not clear why the imaginative transgressions allowed by Art. 55 bis have not been extended to other public buildings and buildings open to the public. Thus, a new category of cultural property has been created that is not, however, established in the Code of Cultural and Landscape Heritage (Art. 10, 11).

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Requirements set by the Call for tenders

[The call for tenders](#) included a series of mandatory requirements. Among other, the stadium is to have a net capacity of 40,000 seats. Whilst requirements of the master plan include the preservation of the existing, new inner curves adjacent to the playing field are allowed, in addition to the pre-existing ones, and new covered volumes may be created. Coverage of all seats is required. New functions to be included adjacent to the stadium include a planned 15 000 m² to be divided into logistics, commercial and tourism/hospitality.

Objective of the call and its results

The requirements of the call for tenders made certain design choices inevitable: while a roof was mandatory for the new design of the arena, accommodating a supplementary number of seats forced the addition of supplementary bleachers. This resulted in the proposed solution of building a stadium within the stadium.

All the submitted designs, even if they do not touch its forms and materials, put the Franchi stadium 'out of scale'. Remaining where it is and as it is, deprived of its functions, it will be overwhelmed by the new structures and the freedom of its forms and its historic relationship with the urban context denied. The idea was to solve a problem of territorial scale, closely connected to the current economic and urban needs of the Tuscan capital, by implementing an intervention within the constraints of the architectural 'measure' of a masterpiece, which resulted in the erroneous size of the proposed intervention.

See a rendering of a general view of the project here:

https://www.artribune.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/27TUHEZMF6T9_Render_1.jpg

See a rendering of the new roof designed for the stadium:

https://www.artribune.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/27TUHEZMF6T9_Render_3.jpg

Composition of the International competition jury

No architectural historian was included in the jury¹ selected by the Municipality of Florence. No historiographical evaluation was commissioned from the jury, for an intervention destined to affect a strongly historic context. This is especially surprising in a nation that is considered the cradle of architectural history and for an intervention on a masterpiece of an architect, Pier Luigi Nervi, whose designs and "unique" use of reinforced concrete and ferrocement have made a remarkable contribution to modern heritage in Italy and world-wide.

What is the ultimate purpose of the international competition?

The question remains whether the funds allocated by the Italian National Recovery Fund to the regeneration of Nervi's masterpiece will serve the purpose they were meant for. Ultimately, while the funding from the European Recovery Fund [was intended to enhance the value of the Franchi Stadium](#), officially recognized as a cultural asset and a "major cultural attraction", the call for tenders seems to have been aimed at the construction of a new stadium for the local soccer team – the Fiorentina –, effectively putting a tombstone on the work of Pier Luigi Nervi and its significance for Florence and international architecture.

Next steps for ICOMOS and the Pier Luigi Nervi Foundation

The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage, ICOMOS Italy and the Pier Luigi Nervi Foundation will analyse the winning proposal in detail to demonstrate how the different

¹ Composition of the Jury: Arch. Goncalo Byrne, Arch. Giovanna Carnevali, Arch. Antonia Pasqua Recchia, Arch. Odile Decq, Ing. Carla Cappiello, Ing. Luigi Ludovici, Dott. Eike Schmidt, Arch. Andy Simons, Dott. Andre Santini (as substitute members: Arch. Vito Redaelli e Ing. Andrea Gnudi)

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solutions chosen in the proposed design will heavily impact Nervi's original structure, contradicting the announced intention to preserve its original values.

Further reading

"Stadio Franchi: si può alterare un'opera anche senza toccarla" by Ugo Carughi, ICOMOS Italy member and Past President of Docomomo Italy, on the pages of "Il Giornale dell'Architettura" (available at: <https://partnership.ilgiornaledellarchitettura.com/2019/07/14/ancora-sul-franchi-si-puo-alterare-unopera-anche-senza-toccarla/>).

Update prepared by Ugo Carughi (ICOMOS Italy Board member) and the working group for this Heritage Alert, including Elisabetta Margiotta Nervi (PLN), Thomas Leslie and Gunny Harboe (ISC20C Past President), together with the ICOMOS International Secretariat.