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Re-Reading the Building's History by Merging Architectural, Technical, Historical, and Ethnographic Approaches

Interdisciplinarity is fundamental in the field of conservation, bridging heritage science and heritage studies. A particularly enriching approach is the integration of ethnographic research, oral history, architectural analysis, technical investigations, and archival sources, offering new insights into a building's history and its significance. In this context, we present a case study of the Servite Monastery in Koper/Capodistria, Slovenia, which exemplifies the potential of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary methods. Over 15 years of research have uncovered the site's historical layers, enhancing our understanding of its complex past, particularly in a region marked by contested historical narratives.

The study employed a range of methods: architectural analysis; historical imagery (early 20th-century photographs); ethnographic research based on 'group memory talks' and the 'photo-voice' method; and participatory citizen-science approaches via an online memory book. These methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the site, with a focus on its recent history, often neglected in traditional significance assessments that prioritise its monastic period. Recent research into the material qualities of the complex investigated discarded timber elements and their potential for reuse.

Our findings highlight the tangible (spaces, material qualities) and intangible (functions, affective dimensions) attributes of the site, particularly its role as a maternity hospital. The transdisciplinary approach has proven essential in fostering an inclusive and sustainable appreciation of the site, offering a broader, more nuanced interpretation of its value for both the local community and heritage-conservation practice. The environmental benefits from long-term reuse of the discarded timber elements add another dimension to the site's societal value.

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