

Into the Deep

Naples short trip into the Subterranean City between past and present

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Located in Southern Italy, Naples has about one million inhabitants, administratively subdivided in 10 districts. It is the third largest municipality by population after Rome and Milan. This city has an ancient history with a stratigraphic dimension. In fact, Naples is characterised by a strong interdependence between the aboveground city and its subsoil, with a history that can be read through a sequence of underground layers. The first layer dates back to the Greek colonisation, when the yellow tuff material was used for aboveground buildings, and the underground was excavated for the burial sites and for water supply management. The second layer dates back to Roman times, when the city grew and the underground accommodated new facilities, such as aqueducts, thermal buildings, and catacombs. During the Middle Age, underground quarries supplied yellow tuff material for supporting the intensive aboveground urban development. Once dismissed, those quarries underneath the buildings were adapted as warehouses for local transformation activities or commercial activities. In modern times, some tuff cavities became burial places for the frequent epidemics triggered by overcrowding and poor sanitary conditions. Underground spaces were also important during the Bourbon Kingdom, when tunnelling and infrastructural works allowed the extension of the city, and continued to play a role in the Kingdom of Italy, when as part of the *Risanamento* of Naples (1885) the underground was used to build the sewerage system. During the Second World War, the underground continued to have a vital role, when urban cavities, equipped with electricity and water facilities, became air-raid shelters for citizens. After the war, cavities remained abandoned, or inaccessible, or used as storage for supplies or waste. Since the 60's, that abandonment provoked recurrent structural failures and demanded for investments in underground investigation, classification and monitoring. Since the 80s, the new subway, Linea 1, discovered and incorporated historical stratifications in its network of galleries and stations. In 1995, the Historic Centre of Naples was recognised UNESCO World Heritage Site (cultural), and it begun a new era with the heritagisation of the Naples underground, connected

to both touristic valorisation and exploitation. Over time, many underground routes have been opened to the public becoming more and more popular and visited. In that regard, the catacombs of San Gennaro and the catacombs of San Gaudioso are two virtuous examples of cultural tourism developed by a project of recovery of underground historical sites. They are paleo-Christian burials restored and managed (Catacombs of San Gaudioso in



Catacombs of San Gennaro (Naples) Photo: G. Pace



Fontanelle Cemetery (Naples) Photo: G. Pace

2006; Catacombs of San Gennaro in 2008) by a cooperative of young people, "La Paranza" of the Rione Sanità, one of the most ancient and poorest areas of the city. Given the precarious situation of the district, La Paranza's program can be properly considered a social experiment, and demonstrate that underground built heritage has the potential to become a resource for local communities.

U4V COST Action provided the opportunity of establishing a Living Lab for supporting a sustainable management of the Fontanelle Cemetery in the Rione Sanità, by organising meetings among the main stakeholders, and providing technical expertise.