

ARGENTIERA

SITE

L'Argentiera lies about 40 km from Sassari, on the western coast of Sardinia. It is located on the Nurra tableland, an area with low residential density, known for the iron ore deposits which were mined until the mid 20th century: the territory still bears traces of this industry, consisting in the ruins of ore extraction and processing plants. Argentiera originated as a miners' village, and was named after one of the oldest silver-bearing lead and zinc deposits on the island. The industrial archeology complex of Argentiera is a prime example of a mining settlement dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It is situated north of Cape Argentiera along the section of coast included between the inlet of Porto S. Nicola and Porto Palmas.

BACKGROUND

Mining activity, which had probably begun in the Roman period and continued in medieval times, was resumed in 1867, when Marquis Angela Tola di San Saturnino was issued a mining license by Royal Decree. Due to the high cost of ore transport and rock instability in the galleries, the mine was sold to the General Mine Company. Thus all buildings constructed were mining-related: housing for the miners and engineers, offices, an ore washery (which separated the ore from the waste materials by exploiting their different specific weights) – built close to the beach for easy transport by sea. In the late 1800s the deposit was transferred to the Correboi company, and activity flourished also thanks to the arrival of new entrepreneurs, led by Baron Andrea Podestà, who held other mining concessions in Sardinia. In this period, an extraction pit was excavated – and named after the Baron – and the village was equipped with new facilities, such as the mine clinic and new technical and administrative offices. Expansion of mining activity in the early 20th century was accompanied by progressive growth of the village, with new housing for mine and plant workers, the church and the school. After World War I, a pier was built in the roads of San Nicolò, in front of the washery, to enable loading of the ore onto larger ships, thus allowing further increase in output. Around the mid 1920s, old-style operations were replaced by more advanced techniques, managed by Pertusola and the wooden washery was built. After the start of World War II and as a consequence of depletion of the deposit, mine operations came to a halt. The concession for Argentiera was revoked in 1963.

NOTABLE FEATURES

The village, marked by a scarcely organic development and basic architectural forms, is still of great interest regarding to urban layout and architectural features, although the buildings are in an extreme state of decay. The village largely consists in low-rise housing of simple design (according to the construction criteria of the local craft-type building industry, tending towards practical, simple solutions, functional and inexpensive), scattered among the various mine buildings, without following any precise zoning plan, but certainly according to a logic dictated by the specific activity. The only "public spaces" present are the square located at the entrance to the village and the Church of San Nicola. The current layout of the washery complex and the mechanical and electrical workshops, belonging to a larger system of buildings, which reaches the beach, is the end result of a series of developments which spanned a century (based on different concepts and developments in the regional mining industry).

The settlement consists in various historical building clusters that differ as to construction period, style and original intended use:

1. The complex of all the industrial buildings, formerly housing mine production activities and the main ore extraction and processing operations: Washery -Podestà Pit -Plata Pit. Under the 'Mine Museum' project, these buildings should be reserved for museum and heritage purposes, and restoration works should be strictly for conservation purposes.
2. The complex of ancillary buildings supporting mine activities and maintenance, including: warehouses, mechanical and other workshops, sawmills, carpentry workshop, offices, electrical substations. Under the Mine Museum project, these buildings will provide miscellaneous services supporting museum activity (exhibition rooms, info points, refreshments and catering...). Restoration works should respect the original materials, construction techniques and architectural style.
3. Complex of the special-purpose buildings in rationalist style, which have been sold to private owners and which have undergone heavy and debatable restructuring (former Cinema - Mine Manager's House - former Guest Quarters - Church). The Mine Museum project foresees for these buildings more vigilant protection on the part of heritage and local authorities (Sassari built heritage office - Soprintendenza ai beni Architettonici - Municipality of Sassari) and/or possible acquisition of currently unused buildings (former Cinema).
4. Residential building complex (old miners' houses or dorms) located near the industrial complexes (historical village of Argentiero, Rietto locality, Calaonanu locality). Under the "Mine Museum" project, these buildings should be used for tourist accommodation and residential purposes. Renovation works should respect the original materials, construction techniques, architectural style and environmental setting.
5. Complex of dilapidated buildings, roads and paths. Under the Mine Museum project these buildings should be reserved for museum and heritage purposes, and should be restored strictly for conservation purposes, for inclusion in the Park's sightseeing and cultural paths.

Overall, the area comprises about 96 buildings, with different uses.

CONTEXT

Argentiera belongs to the municipal territory of Sassari, bordering to the north with the municipalities of Porto Torres, Sennori, Sorso and Stintino, to the east with Osilo, to the south with Alghero, Muros, Olmedo, Ossi, Tissi, Usini, Uri, to the west with the Sardinian Sea. Sassari's very extensive territory, covering 546 km², displays a variety of environments, ranging from beaches - on a coast stretching for 32 km - to the old mining areas – exploited since the Roman period - including those of Argentiera and Canaglia, and to various natural and archaeological heritage sites, bearing witness to the presence of human settlements since the New Stone Age.

Argentiera is today included in the Geo-mining Park listed as zone 5 Argentiera-Nurra. Its 61 km² area accounts for less than 2% of total park surface.

The bounded area includes various sectors, all rich in landscape and environmental features:

- the northern sector, with a stretch of coast with steep walls, such as the rock of Cape Argentiera, an area of particular geo-mining interest, where the Argentiera village is located;
- the central sector, with the Porto Ferro inlet, marked by a reddish sand beach;
- the southern sector, marked by the cliffs of the limestone spur of Cape Caccia and the caves dotting this stretch of coast, such as Grotta Verde (*Green Cave*), Grotta dei Richiami (*Cave of Calls*) and Grotta di Nettuno (*Neptune's Cave*).

Main infrastructure includes:

- State Road 131 Carlo Felice linking Sassari to Porto Torres and to central and southern Sardinia;
- State Road 672 Sassari-Tempio: a rapid transit highway linking Sassari to Tempio Pausania, offering an alternative route to State Road 127 Settentrionale Sarda;
- State Road 199 of Monti linking Sassari to Gallura and Olbia.

The whole area is also served by the railroad network linking Sassari to Cagliari, Olbia and Porto Torres and by local lines - Ferrovie della Sardegna - linking it to several nearby towns – Alghero, Sorso and Tempio Pausania being the main links.

THEME

This late-19th century miners' village, built around a small cove provided with berthing is an exceptional example of industrial archaeology. The village is currently being reclaimed by the local authority and a complex project is under way for the creation of a "Mine Museum:" it aims to exploit the potential of this site through creation of a series of functions such as museum and exhibition activities and ancillary services enhancing its attractiveness as an historic and cultural heritage site. The aim of this project would seem to be not so much re-use and adaptation of existing buildings, but restoration and enhancement, turning the mining complex into "its own museum". Possible themes for reflection include overall regeneration, taking into account issues of accessibility and parking, and the relationship with the residential and landscape context as well as the vaster area marked by other mining heritage sites and minor historical settlements. Some themes are linked to strengthening the site's attractiveness, and may include proposals for light infrastructure linked to services for site visitors, beach resources and nature tourism, so as to add to its character as a cultural pole the function of hub of a network of local services supporting nature itineraries. This complementary approach would see residential and tourist/accommodation services located outside the village, in nearby hamlets and buildings.

Proposals should refer to the goals, guidelines and criteria of the RLP. The present suggestions provided are in no way binding to competitors who are free to supplement and integrate them with other considerations deriving from the study of the village and its relations with the surrounding context.

