

FIRENZE EXPERIENCE & IMPRESSION

SFU ITALIA DESIGN 2007 WOOJIN CHO

SS Annunziata

SS Annunziata was “designed” by Filippo Brunelleschi in 1419 in Renaissance style. Piazza della SS Annunziata consists of symmetrical patterns running along the front bay of the structures. The piazza can be described as a master painting with its composition in perfect unity. The piazza was an experiment for Brunelleschi to employ the Roman architectural style in Florence. The structures around the piazza consists of arches with columns that support the loggias. The geometric patterns repeat regularly, resembling that of Renaissance architecture. The commission came from the Arte della Seta (wealthy silk screen guild) and is intended to impact its surroundings. Ospedale degli Innocenti and Basilica of SS Annunziata were designed by Brunelleschi and the west part of the square, the Servi di Maria, was constructed by Giovanni Battista Caccini. It is a symmetrical piazza mirroring the west and east side of the piazza. As a primary axis, Grand Duke Ferdinand I statue stands in the center of the piazza. The architecture was flawless as Brunelleschi used perspective and mathematics as the basis of his work. The ratios of the structures were calculated to prevent error and maximize functionalities. The significance of the area is often taken for granted as many may not realize that Piazza SS Annunziata revolutionized Florentine architecture.

The harmonious piazza is one of the master projects accomplished by Brunelleschi using mathematical perfection and balance between order and complexity. If he has only complexity in his work there would be little chance for order to occur but if his works have only order, there would be a “lack of unpredictability and complexity,” creating an ordinary and predictable space. The architecture of the piazza is symmetrical and uniform compared to the street pattern, incorporating complexity and chaos into the space. Mathematically, the width and height of the elements have been “juxtaposed” to create proportion, setting up tension while creating absolute symmetry. Piazza SS Annunziata is represented as the mathematical law of harmony unfolding its beauty and the complexity is used to create visual weight for the architecture to create harmony.



Basilica of SS Annunziata



Ospedale degli Innocenti



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There was no distinctive style which divide the architectures of Piazza SS Annunziata but the unity of the structures together creates overall harmony of the buildings. There are two kinds of patterns: coherent diversity and the theory of proportion. Brunelleschi managed to work on extraordinary projects without obstructing social interactions in the “enclosed” space. It is a static piazza that allows traffics of people and motor vehicles to pass by without interrupting each other. The height of the building does not tower over the piazza, instead, it allows light to enter the piazza and opens it up to the sky. A metaphorical understanding of the structural importance is the link to heaven and earth.

Piazza SS Annunziata connects to the Duomo from the south entrance and the east and west entrances lead to the Florentine walls. The piazza is a good example of a “cohere[nce of] composition that stands out from its surroundings.” The piazza is seemingly chaotic with streets running through, leading people into parts of the town. From my visual study of the Piazza SS Annunziata, people either gather together to continue on their way to Duomo or to other significant structures, or eat, sit on the steps of the Ospedale degli Innocenti, away from the sun. The piazza is a multi-layered space composed of all kinds of activities, serving its main purpose as a social attractor.

I took my lunch down to the steps of the Ospedale and observed the streets and the piazza as I enjoyed my lunch. There was an event being held at the Ospedale and there were more cars parked in that square than usual. Currently the piazza is composed of two apartments, two hotels, one cafe, one church, and one museum. There aren't specific areas for tourists; the piazza is more of a place to connect to exhibitions. Most of the tourists either pass by or stop to take pictures. Locals stay in the piazza for a longer period of time compared to the tourists, standing or sitting, taking shelter from the sun under the loggias. The area is a combination of socially intensive and multi-layered space that acts as a social attractor, for people to have somewhere to rest between Piazza Duomo and Piazza St. Marco. It also has a major bus stop for easy transportation.



Brunelleschi's perspective drawing



Duomo back from SS Annunziata



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The seating arrangement of the stairs takes into account the sun's position and the way the light comes into the piazza is calculated. The main pedestrian entrance into the piazza is easily recognized, taking dominance over the other entrances because it leads to the goal attractor, the Duomo. Rather than an oversized walkway though, the area has another purpose - social interaction. The piazza is a convenient meeting point away from the over populated tourism of many other attractions. Some locals utilize the space to easily locate their friends in a short amount of time. It is more of a socializing and pedestrian square that is not distant to the center - the Duomo.



There is a road that crossed the piazza near the basilica, Via della Colonna, for motor vehicles such as scooters, cars and buses. People with scooters occasionally walk across the piazza to Via della Colonna to save time from going around the external side of the Florentine wall. This is a shortcut scooters use frequently. Where parking is concerned, bikes can be easily locked up at one of the 6 bike racks whereas scooters and motor vehicles have to be parked on the south side of the piazza which takes up 1% of the piazza space. Vehicles play a minor role in interaction if it were to go through the Piazza SS Annunziata.



car parking space at the Piazza SS Annunziata

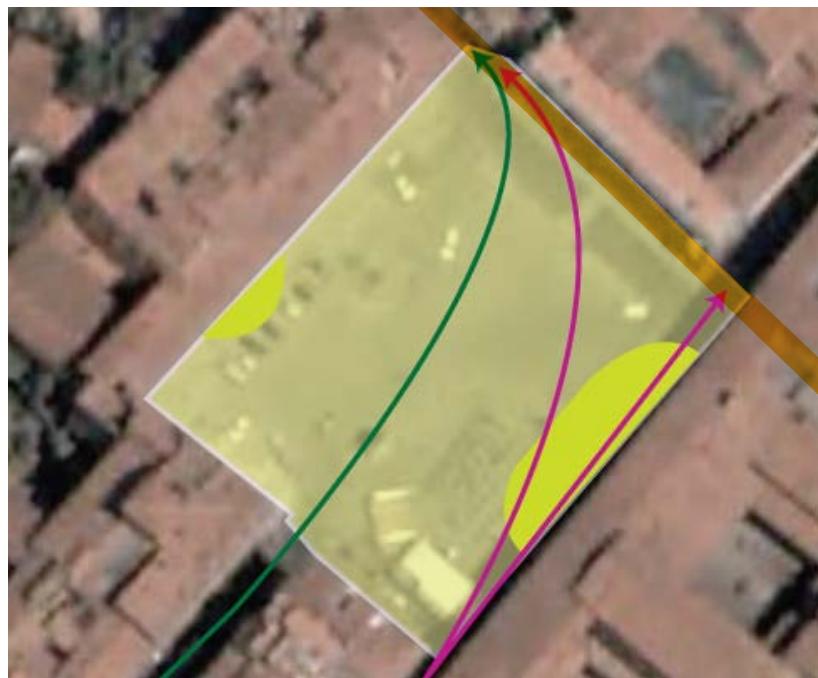


bike parking at the Piazza SS Annunziata

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Piazza SS. Annunziata is a special place because it flourished Florence, adding to this major city of Italy. It carries with it a reminder of the significant value of harmony and architectural style and history of Florence. Piazza SS Annunziata is a well-balanced space that emerged as an intensive and multi-layered piazza because its purpose varies depending on the days of the week and times of the day; it can be used as a church, a socially interactive space or a resting area away from the sun. The piazza keeps people away from traffic without rerouting Via della Colonna on which the vehicles travel through. It separates people from vehicles while maintaining the boundary between open and closed space; it is not too open for the pedestrian to step into traffic and at the same time not restricting when they exit the piazza.



The circular **lime** spots represents the seating cluster in the Piazza.

The **pink** represents the path which the scooter crosses the Piazza.

The **green** represents the main pathway the people cycle through the Piazza.

The **orange** represents the motor path.