

## Storytelling cities: voices from history hidden in the architecture

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### ABSTRACT:

Cities represent a unique place of cultural stratification, material and immaterial. Their identity also lies in their ability to express various possible narratives, defining itineraries through their heritage. Some traces found in architecture can suggest keys to interpreting such uniqueness in history, traditions, and memory. Graffiti is commonly understood as a social and cultural manifestation of mural painting based on expressing one's creativity. Graffiti, understood not as a specific social movement, consists of the general desire to convey any information over a material surface. This specific activity arose in antiquity. Inscriptions through engravings, epigraphs, and epitaphs identify people's desire to preserve their voices and thoughts over time, handing them down to future people and using architecture as a sub-layer. These textual pieces of information represent the communication instrument of the time, through which words and thoughts are conveyed, with electoral, celebratory, and identifying purposes. In Pompeii, more than 5,000 pieces of graffiti are distributed throughout the city for electoral purposes. These traces of the past thus become a fundamental historical resource since in them lies the voice of the people, an intangible heritage transmitted through the materiality of architecture. Unfortunately, many of these inscriptions are today hidden or barely visible within cities. It happens for several reasons. First, their location is often unknown and unmapped in the architecture, hidden by a morphological complexity or a limitation of accessibility. Also, their decoding is related to the type of handwriting, the engraving technique, and the content conveyed, studied predominantly within the domain of paleography. Finally, in today's society, there is a prevalent dominance of the image with clearly conveyed content, relegating these kinds of cultural products to an omitting background.

The rediscovery of these sources from history thus becomes an exciting topic, not only to give back a voice to those who reported traces but also to recover an intangible heritage identifying place and history. The use of writing as a means of communication thus becomes essential to rediscover the lives of those who passed through those places and left a trace of them, carving messages into history. In this perspective, architectures become narrative palimpsests, capable of telling stories of lived life. If narrative museums were born at the end of the 19th century out of the need to communicate the complex contents of collections to a broader audience, narrative cities, on the other hand, have always existed. It happened precisely because of the need of people themselves to convey concepts or leave a trace of their presence. The research project is developed within Rome, a place characterized by deep cultural stratification. The activity aims to map some inscriptions and build narrative itineraries throughout the city, starting from a study of the presence of these particular traces within the architecture. Through these routes, it will be possible to give voice again to a past and an intangible culture that characterizes those places, rediscovering an intangible heritage stratified and hidden in the city.

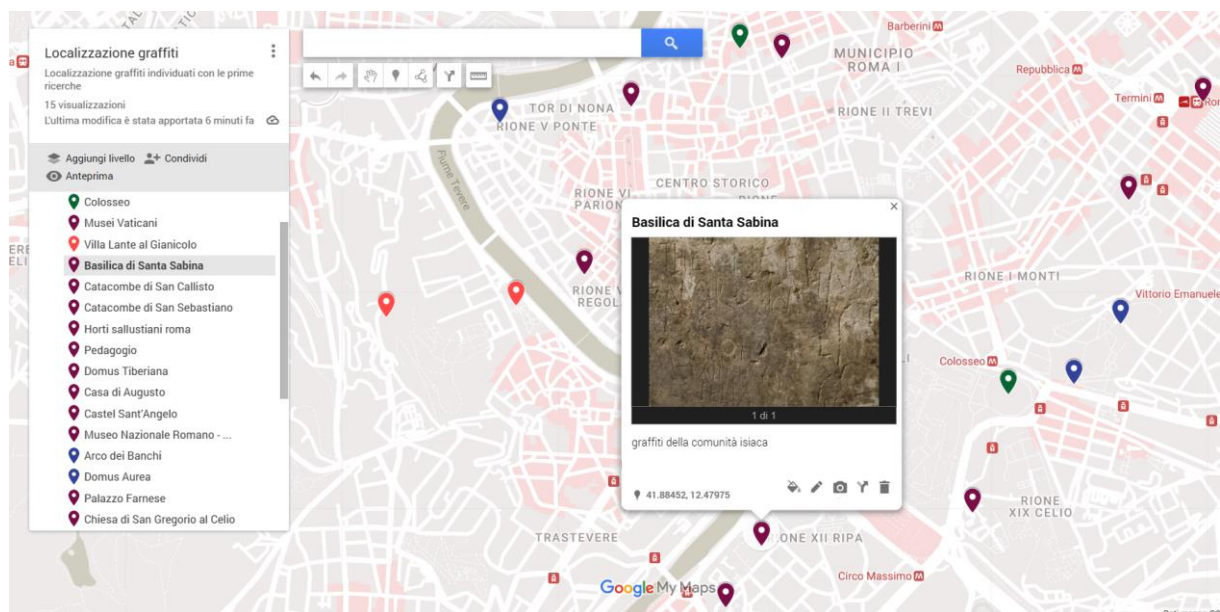


Figure 1. Picture of one graffiti example preserved in Santa Sabina and localization of other case studies for future itineraries.