

Attached n.1: **THEME**

***X=DANISINNI: nel e per il quartiere Danisinni***

Danisinni is an ancient Arab neighbourhood of Palermo, part of UNESCO's Arab-Norman itinerary. Just a few steps away from the old town, it is surrounded by orchards and gardens. The district extends across a natural geological depression created by the waters of the river Papireto. Since the end of WWII Danisinni has been neglected by the institutions, generating serious repercussions on urban development, culture and society as a result. The consequences of such policies have been a falling schooling rate and a rise in the unemployment rate. The consequent social isolation is mitigated by the action of the parish of Sant'Agnese V.M. In the last 3 years a communal gym, a small theatre, a Ludobiblioteca and a petting zoo have been established.

**In order to convey the peculiar vibe of the residency, there follow 3 stories related to this territory. These are just a few starting points, the stepping stones towards the discovery of the culture and traditions of the area. The artists will by no means be obliged to work on the content of these stories. They will be free to choose their own path to reach a personal connection between their artistic perspective and the territory.**

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## Danisinni today (from *Meridionews* - Andrea Turco)

It is a well-known fact that Palermo is a thousand cities rolled into one. Perhaps this is the reason why it never ceases to surprise you. It is enough to visit Piazza Indipendenza at 12AM. It marks the beginning of Corso Vittorio Emanuele from one side, with its multitude of tourists; and it houses ARS's centres of power, as well as the regional administration, on the other. But if you take a stroll towards Piazza Danisinni, the whole picture changes in the blink of an eye. Here, as circus operator Daniele Nash tells us, you can breathe the <sapore di paese antico>: women in their pyjamas sunbathe on the streets until sunset, children run around shouting, the only friar in the area greets everyone by saying pace e bene. In this square, the heart of the ancient district from which the river Papireto used to meander to the sea, there aren't any shops, the only exception being those converted from small garages. After the closing down of the last two presidi sociali -the local kindergarten and a counselling centre- the whole district had plunged in an even more critical situation of poverty and underdevelopment that seemed irreversible. The last active presidio was the Sant'Agnese parish, run by Friar Mauro Billetta, friar and psychotherapist, along with some volunteers.

This was the state of things up until 2015, a year that marked the arrival of the Accademia di Belle Arti. Professor Valentina Console, along with fellow Professor Enzo Patti, has since then started several participatory artistic projects. She revisits their genesis: "Fra Mauro had encouraged us to explore this area numerous times in the past, promoting it in an artistic light. We found out that our colleague Angela La Ciura owned a 10.000 square meters plot, overlooking the church, which was formerly owned by a mobster. He used to run an illegal slaughterhouse in the place. After the area was assigned to the church, the public competition Boom! Polmoni Urbani took place 6 years ago and we applied, joining forces with the parish and a local association. We ranked 8<sup>th</sup>, but it was enough to be noticed by the municipality".

In 2015 thanks to DanisinniLab, the land surrounding the district was relieved from social degradation and unlawful building. Among other things, it has been turned into a fattoria didattica and a social vegetable garden. It has become a place for open socialization; the citizenship has taken it back. Children come here to play, animals are bred in total freedom, vegetables are grown, the university has even chosen this location to research on Permaculture. This was the place that brought about the rebirth of this district. Later, the municipality trusted us with a new project, along with 3 associations:

- Circ'all, organising social circus laboratories in which the children taking part to the project can act freely;

- CaravanSerai, dealing with street art;

- Neu, providing financial funding for social projects through the online platform produzionidalbasso.

It was a hit: Rambla Papireto turns Danisinni in an open-air art gallery. In May, several street artists -some of them from abroad- painted the decaying walls of the houses enclosing the square, giving new lights and new colours to the neighbourhood. These were incredible results, especially in such a difficult and isolated context, in which the population don't even experience the old city any more and where public transportation isn't provided.

Our goal is to bring the people of Palermo here, because many of them wouldn't be able to tell where Danisinni is, were they asked. Yet it is a place with a fascinating history: it is full of caves, it is where the public washtub used to be: women used to come here to do the laundry. There is also the small spring of the ancient river Papireto.























## **Water – the pivotal element in Danisinni's history**

The Danisinni district is considered the territory including via Cappuccini, Cipressi, Colonna Rotta e piazza Indipendenza. It is located on a geological depression that used to be the basin of the waters of the river Papireto, one of the two creeks crossing Palermo. The first glimpse into its history dates back to the Arab times: a Baghdad merchant named 'Ibn AhwQal, whom reached Palermo in the years 972-3, in his book 'On the trails and the realm', accounts for the existence of depression in the terrain on top of Mount Hàrat as-Saqàabdh – the present day Schiavoni district, one of the 5 into which the city was divided under Arab rule.

***“Quivi stendesi anco una fondura tutta coperta di papiro, ossia bardi ch'è proprio la pianta di cui si fabbricano i tumar (rotoli di foglio da scrivere)...***

Through this depression ran the mythical Papireto river, flanked by swamps. The creek, running along the city, reached the old port, nowadays a cove. According to local folklore, the river Papireto took in the waters of the river Nile, which through underground waterways poured out of the Great Danisinni Great Cave.

The origin of the name Danisinni is probably related to one of the springs that used to feed the river. It is likely to be the one which sprung forth from the aforementioned cave. The spring – mentioned by 'Ibn Hawqal – was called Ayu'abi Sa'Idin ( Abu Said's source ). It might have been named so after a fair princess, the daughter of a wali, nicknamed 'the guest', whom built his dwellings on top of the cave.

In the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the pollution found in both river and swamp reached such high levels of toxicity that the Palermo Parliament was compelled to issue a law in order to drain the river and reclaim the swamp. The project had the channelling of the waters to the cove. It came to be enacted only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to Magistrate Salazar. The channel, still in existence, is located roughly 8 metres below Danisinni.

It is indeed due to these environmental issues that this hearsay was born and spread: if a woman was stung by an insect in that area during her period, she would die. It is told that husbands eager to get rid of their wives would them for a stroll along this swampy path.

The pristine quality of Danisinni water was praised in an old folk song:

***“cu vivi l'acqua ri Denesinni campa quantu Noè, novicent'anni”***

Once the river bed had been reclaimed, it was turned into fine vegetable gardens and a population growth followed. To the lodgings for the 'pirriatura' – the miners -, those for peasants were added. They wouldn't have been able to afford a dwelling within the city walls. This allowed them to live within walking distance from the old city. Oftentimes their shacks were built leaning onto the cave walls near the river banks. Most of them were made up by a reshaping of the cave to which an entranceway and a door followed. At the Danisinni cave, where the pristine gushing water has always flowed, the washerwomen used to do the laundry for the Palermo nobility. The municipality commissioned the building of a public laundry room in 1884 in order to avoid the spreading of contagious diseases:

***“Ognuno conosce come può esservi nella lavatura degli abiti e delle mutande un mezzo di diffusione di certe malattie contagiose, con questo scopo volle l'autorità municipale regolare questo servizio ed un primo stabilimento di questo genere è già compito, ma non è***

***stato ancora consegnato alle lavandaie di Danisinni che lo reclamano.  
E a sperarsi che, rimossi certi ostacoli frapposti da privati interessi illegittimi, l'autorità  
proceda al compimento del progetto”***

The laundry room had a custodian. There's nearly nothing left of it nowadays. Several small houses have been built around it since then. These days you can still catch a glimpse of a few lunette windows and the main door. It might be possible to dig up the washtubs still buried underneath the floor. The Danisinni cave is no longer visible, as it is hidden by a building, but the water is still gushing forth.

From the 1800's up until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many undertook the search for mysterious Saracen treasure, the so-called 'truvatura'. According to the legend, the belongings of an Arab nobleman were buried with his corpse, so as to avoid the riding of his tomb by his brother to the detriment of the rightful heiress, the stunningly beautiful princess Aynsindi, Abu Said's alleged daughter. The search continued as long as the farmers' patience allowed.

The Danisinni stone, a hard calcarenite, has also been used as building material in the construction of the Palazzo dei Normanni and more recently in the building of the Teatro Massimo.





## **The story of Fano Morello**

Just a few steps from the square on via Danisinni, there has been since the 80's a small shrine portraying Sant'Antonio, but it hasn't always been there. Until the 50's San Giuseppe was worshipped there as a way to commemorate the killing of Stefano Morello, a man turned legend, who was gunned down in cold blood on a dark night in March, 1922. Stefano, also known as Fano Morello, was a principled and courageous individual. He was a decorated war hero. He had a big heart, he was kind and loving and a free spirit. He loved adventure, he couldn't stand injustice and was sympathetic to the downtrodden. He never joined any organisation.

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Palermo zù Fano, loved and respected by the common folk, stepped onto the wrong person's toes and this led to his killing. Whoever killed him didn't have the guts to fight him up-close. He was well trained in hand-to-hand combat; therefore better to act aided by the shadows, armed with a handgun. Better to keep one's distance from a man who had once been able to single-handedly defeat a whole Austrian officer squad.

It was a fair evening in mid-March, spring was in the air, Easter was coming up. Fano was on his way home. He had bought a sheep-shaped cake for his daughter. He smiled as he thought of his wife expecting. The killer was hiding behind a cornerstone, shrouded by darkness. A lightning flashed in the dark, the first gunshot hit him between the shoulderblades. Fano was barely able to turn. He threw his knife but he missed by a couple of centimetres. The knife wound up stuck in a stake which made up the fence of a vegetable garden. The killer shot repeatedly. Fano fell down with arms spread wide; he felt the end was near. He was groping in the dark for the package containing the sheep-shaped cake for his daughter. He couldn't find it. He stared up at the sky praying the Lord for forgiveness. He prayed San Giuseppe to look after his daughter, his wife and the second child he would never meet. When the police arrived, they found no one, not even the man whom tried to help him and had heard his last prayer and closed his eyes. There, where Fano Morello fell, a small votive niche was built. It was enshrined to San Giuseppe and a picture of Morello was placed there, in order to induce passer-bys to pray for him.