



SOAR

STRENGTHENING THE SECURITY AND RESILIENCE
AT-RISK RELIGIOUS SITES AND COMMUNITIES

Call for Architectural Best Practice Examples



for Security by Design for Places of Worship

Architects' Council of Europe
Conseil des Architectes d'Europe



The Network
for Religious
& Traditional
Peacemakers



In collaboration with



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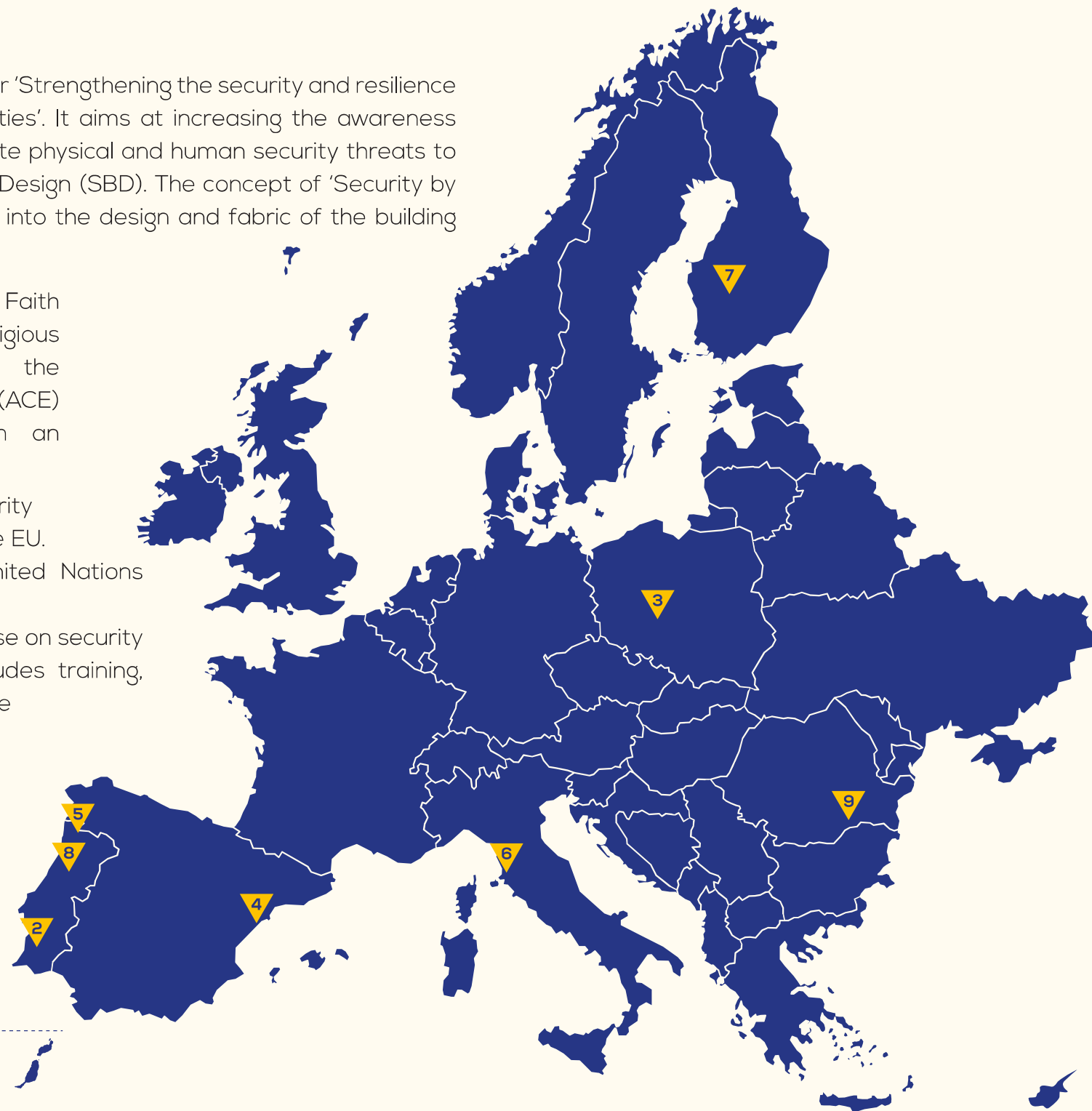
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The EU-funded project SOAR stands for 'Strengthening the security and resilience of at-risk religious sites and communities'. It aims at increasing the awareness of, and capacity to prevent and mitigate physical and human security threats to places of worship through Security by Design (SBD). The concept of 'Security by Design' incorporates security features into the design and fabric of the building and its urban context.

The project partners Enhancing Faith Institutions (EFI), the Network for Religious and Traditional Peacemakers, and the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) cooperate in this endeavour with an extensive network of professionals, including representatives from all majority and minority faiths practicing within the EU. The project is supported by the United Nations Alliance of Civilisations.

SOAR provides a unique knowledge base on security by design to its audiences. This includes training, guidance, and online resources, with the opportunity for engagement and the evolution of virtual networks and communities of practice. The project team works in seven pilot EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, and the Netherlands.



THE CALL FOR ARCHITECTURE BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES

06

The Call for Architecture Best Practice Examples is meant as a vehicle to promote and advance the expertise of European architects in Security by Design (SBD) of public spaces and in particular places of worship in their urban context. It is also a way to enhance the ACE policy positions on for instance the quality of architecture and urban spaces for cultural and social use.

In January 2022 the Call invited entries of new buildings and ensembles, as well as conservation, restoration, and interventions on existing Places of Worship. Architectural practices of any size could join and submit their best built project. Since SOAR is promoting interfaith activities, entries could be of any faith, as long as they demonstrated the application of SBD concepts. The buildings must be completed and should be located in Europe. Works must have been completed under the oversight of a qualified architectural team. The deadline was the end of April 2022.

The submitted projects were assessed by a professional jury appointed by the Architects' Council of Europe, applying the following evaluation criteria:

- Quality of the architectural design based on the Davos Declaration: functionality, environment, economy, diversity, context, sense of place and beauty.
- Governance, illustrated by the religious community in charge of the project.
- Effective (visible and invisible) security by design (SBD) elements for the benefit of users, worshipers and the general public.
- Whenever possible, the architects should reflect current advice and guidelines available or published through EC sources.

The selected projects are featured in a travelling exhibition in Brussels and Copenhagen, in this booklet and on the SOAR project website. Additionally, the results of this Best Practice Call assist the European Commission in developing design guidelines to improve security of religious sites.



▶ **Dr Selma Harrington**

Architect and Member of the Executive Board, Architects' Council of Europe (Ireland), Chair of the Jury

▶ **Dr. Csaba Szabó**

University lecturer - Doctoral School of Police Sciences and Law Enforcement (Hungary)

▶ **Daria Grouhi**

Director at Kuehn Malvezzi Architects (Germany)

▶ **Norman Lamisse**

Managing architect of the Civil Society of Architecture LAMISSE, Senior architect at ENTR'AXES ARCHITECTES (Belgium)

▶ **Dr. Ferenc Makovényi**

Managing Director at Pannon Termál Projekt Kft (Hungary)

▶ **Bénédicte Selfslagh**

World Heritage & Cultural Heritage Expert (Belgium)

▶ **Hans Scheving**

Architect and Head of Security at Over Byen Arkitekter (Denmark)

The entries represent practices from several countries (Spain, Finland, Portugal, Romania, Poland and Italy) and showcased completed work in the following categories: newly built churches, extensions, refurbishments and interior retrofits on existing religious sites, interventions in open public spaces, and a phased revitalization works on a derelict structure. Two of the projects differed from others in as much as they were not directly providing a religious community service, but instead had a valuable public function, pointing also to historic community use, identity, and memory of a place. Majority of projects demonstrated the engagement with the contemporary design language to articulate external and internal spaces, with the exception of one which used a themed expression, possibly harking back to the traditional local design.

The Jury discussed the imbalance in multi-denominational representation among submitted works which predominantly feature Christian, mainly Catholic community uses. The under-representation of other religious communities could possibly be attributed to the geographic scope of the project partnership, limitations of the call's outreach through the conventional advertising method, or other factors.

It was also noted that the SDB measures are a new element in the scope of architectural and other professional expertise and that the presented works modestly or not at all deal with such measures. The Jury concluded that the submitted entries reflect on the current practices and building activity in this domain in the partnering countries and that future investigations are needed to address the balanced multi-denominational representation, as well as the need and scope for the SDB knowledge exchange, risk assessment, training, and measures.

CALLING ALL ARCHITECTS GET YOUR WORK NOTICED

BY A DISTINGUISHED PANEL OF JUDGES

A CALL FOR ARCHITECTURE
BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES FOR
SECURITY BY DESIGN
FOR PLACES OF WORSHIP

SUBMIT YOUR ENTRY

soarproject.eu/competition



Promotional banner image used on the project social media. Clockwise from the top-left corner:
Dr. Selma Harrington, Dr. Csaba Szabó, Daria Grouhi, Norman Lamisse, Dr. Ferenc Makovényi,
Bénédicte Selfslagh, Hans Scheving.

Dr. Selma Harrington *Architect MRIBA HonAIA | Executive Board Member of the Architects' Council of Europe (ACE) (Ireland), Coordinator of Research & Development at the ACE | Chair of the SOAR Jury.*

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The design for a religious space presents a relatively rare, specialised and complex brief for any architectural practice. The demand for a design of a religious space is cyclical and dependent on many social, economic, cultural and environmental factors, mirroring the overall dynamics of the way we live. We can consider a religious space as part of a public domain and a public space, albeit usually adapted and customised to serve a distinct community. The sense of belonging to a religious community is a special and specific ingredient of such public space but, equally, every religious space, regardless of the form of faith and beliefs, commands respect, care and integrity of its sacredness for the communities.

Therefore, designing for a religious community, practice and ritual creates a different brief for an architect, whereby his or her clients are not only institutional religious representatives but the whole community. That calls for a cultural sensitivity, research and knowledge, as well as dedication and skill in appropriate decision making during the design process. The architect's role, among other, incorporates responsibilities for technical components of the project and for assessing the risk for human health and safety, during and after the execution of works. The latter usually forms a part of specific architects' additional training in professional practice during and after the study. The responsibility for health and safety is shared among other disciplines in the design and construction teams.

The risks of active vandalism or destruction of religious property and life present a specific challenge of our time and require a careful study of precedents in order to adequately assess the need for training and measures that the architects could include in the risk assessment elements while designing the briefs for religious buildings and sites.

Most architects favour a holistic approach to the design and carry that vision in mind until the completion of the project. In other words, complex technical or regulatory requirements cannot and should not be considered as a linear box-ticking exercise, which cannot deliver the wholesomeness to which we strive. The selection of practices and accomplished projects presented within the SOAR project Call demonstrate the skill and dedication of architects across Europe to their clients and their craft, each one of them responding to the specific requirements of location, culture and client's brief.





Monastery of the Capuchins

in Alferrara, Portugal

Architect	VMSA Victor Mestre Sofia Aleixo, www.mestrealaixo.pt
Location	Estrada das Machadas, Setúbal, Portugal
Type of project	Security interventions in a historic structure
Year	2010-2012
Faith	Catholic Church
Built-up area	755 smq (gross)
Budget	€ 125.000,00
Client	Association of Municipalities of the Setúbal Region (AMRS)
Collaborators	Nuno Gaspar, Daniel Pires, Carlos Graça, architects
Conservation	António Vasques, conservator
Structural stabilization	A2P Consult - João Appleton and Pedro Ribeiro, engineers
Site supervision	AMRS
General contractor	Nova Conservação, Lda. - Nuno Proença
Photo credits	VMSA architects, José Manuel



Comment of the jury

Very thoughtful intervention to preserve the historic monument and prevent it from being vandalised and becoming ruins that people are scared to access because of their undefined status and neglect. Instead the simple but beautiful wooden supports together with the involvement of diverse local stakeholders make it a vernacular landmark and a place of historic interest and identity. This entry showcases a long-term restoration and rejuvenation of the derelict monastic site. It is a specific solution tackling decay and vandalism, as well as emergency and securing structural measures to reactivate the disused site. The jury suggests to use this SBD concept in the (current) war context. A very different approach to SBD than expected, but a very valid and timely one.

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PROGRAM

In Alferrara, a slope overlooking the city of Setúbal - Portugal, relies the 1578 Monastery of Our Lady of Conceição of the Franciscan Capuchins monks, here simply named the Monastery of the Capuchins. These monks decided to fully devote themselves to a religious life, away from society, living either alone (as hermits) or, later, in an organized community.

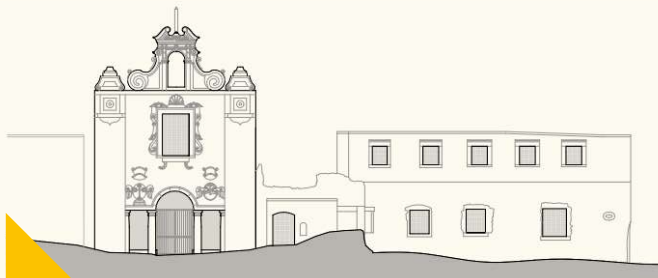
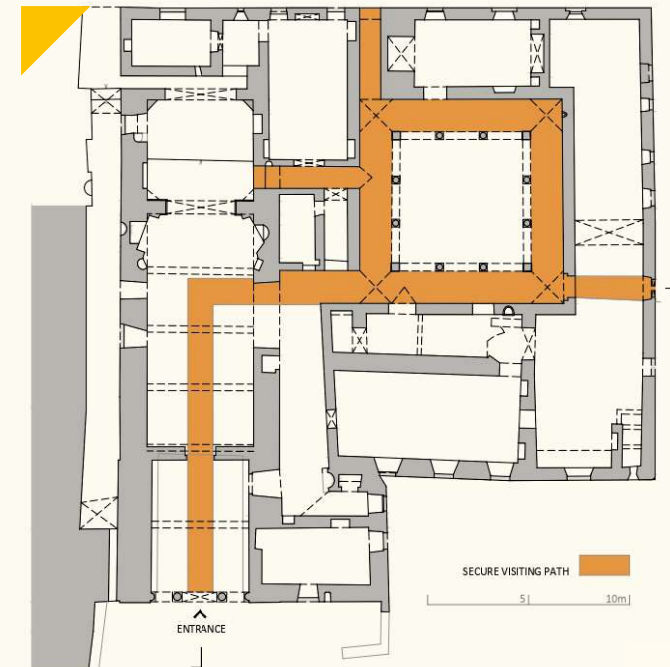
Restored at the end of the 17th century, the monastery was occupied by the French troops during the Iberian Peninsula War (1807 – 1813) when the monks abandoned the place, soon to be followed by the Extinction of the religious orders in Portugal (1834). After the abandonment, their ruins suggest a different use of the space, even though the original function still subliminally remains, along with its sociocultural value.

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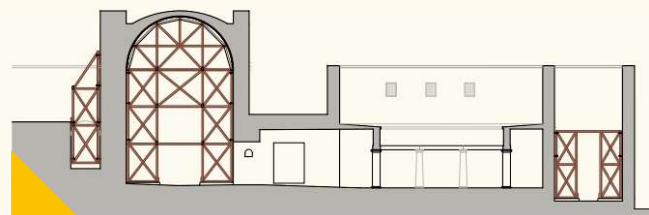
In a state of decay and vandalism, in 2010 urgent emergency procedures

started to prevent collapse and to minimise further development of decline and vandalism – such as loving dedications inscribed in walls and stolen tiles.

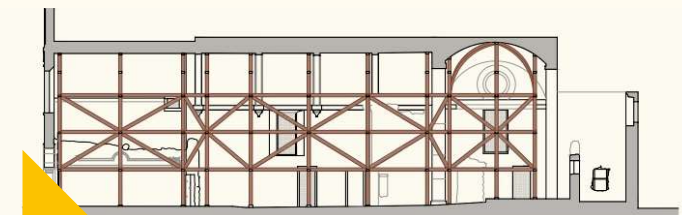
The security of this religious site needed therefore to be improved so that visitors could admire, feel and breath the values in place, in a full respect for the place, open to nature, weather and wind, while at the same time making them more secure through minimal physical protection measures that would still allow people to walk about freely and safely. We believe that cultural heritage not only refers to material remnants, such as ruined churches and convents, but also to intangible elements including sense of place, memories, faith, and character of place. We further believe that local communities, groups, and some specific individuals who use religious heritage places are important actors in the processes of safeguarding, maintenance, and transmission of cultural heritage from the past, including their secure and qualified use and/or adaptation for contemporary needs, purposes, and pleasures.



South facade



Transversal section



Longitudinal section

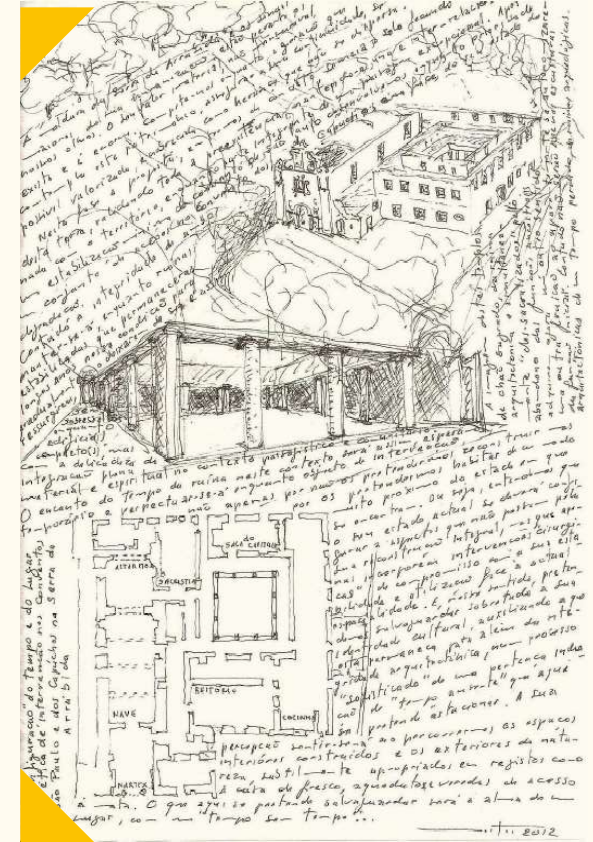
ARCHITECTURAL APPROACH

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In 2011 preliminary work included a topographical and architectural survey, deforestation, provision of access, and an assessment of the structural conditions were executed. Although it was necessary to attend immediately to the collapsing structures, there was still time to record the conservation condition of the built structures, the context of the cultural landscape, the atmosphere, the aura, the genius loci, and the feelings aroused by the experience of these empty spaces, full of light, shadows, and sound. For this, we used “drawn writing” to better understand the observed situation, in which time and place became one.

To rescue this building from the ruined condition, a planned strategy for 25 years was designed. We set up a think tank, by grouping a body of experts to provide advice and ideas on specific ethical and heritage problems found in this place. This group, coordinated by the conservation architect, comprised the owner, a structural engineer, a stone expert, a landscape architect, a hydrology expert, an archaeologist, an art historian, and an expert on the history of monasticism. As an interdisciplinary team, it provided a solid basis for raising awareness about the heritage value of the place and explaining it to the owner, and, as well as the relevance of making good decisions, rather than rushed ones, regarding the future of the place.

The intervention was guided by the aim to establish a way to achieve a sustainable management of this cultural heritage, so that afterwards, partners, together with local stakeholders (from e.g. culture, education, innovation, community), could develop and test new approaches to define the next strategic steps to be taken in this place, to propose and jointly work on new creative and cultural initiatives.



Before the intervention



After the intervention

SECURITY BY DESIGN

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The intervention used Security By Design (SBD) as a tool for gaining users' trust in intervening the least possible in the spiritual spaces whose attractiveness and openness were enhanced by the wooden structure and filtered light, along a trail of orange gravel on the floor, enabling large public attendance with effective protection. Therefore, SBD was at the very beginning of the planning process and design of this intervention. In the design of future interventions, security aspects will also be considered guiding principles to be duly incorporated.

Strategic measures were implemented on site in order to preserve the resilience and robustness of the existing building structures, to reduce vulnerability, secure visitors and to enable socio cultural activities on site: wooden structures and waterproofing materials were placed on rooftops; a secure circuit was outlined, below the structures; and openings were closed, by strategically placing perforated concrete blocks in windows controlling the light, fitting gates and railings to doors avoiding unwanted access to the site and preventing the recurring vandalism. As protective temporary and easily removable measures, when the future decides how to intervene in the whole, they can be taken out.

The implementation of Security by Design principles

in the intervention enabled the visit of the empty spaces, full of history and memories, in its original and current natural context for cultural and social use. The improvement of security of this religious site provides the required time to be safely used by communities. Several cultural activities have since then taken place, from visiting guided tours, to music events, to workshops, etc., bringing people to see, use and enjoy this place.

The project has increased the awareness of communities for the benefits of usufruct of such social and cultural asset mitigating its human security threats, in the meaningful spaces. It further delivers time to think, study and reflect on how to prevent and mitigate physical threats to places of worship, and so select in



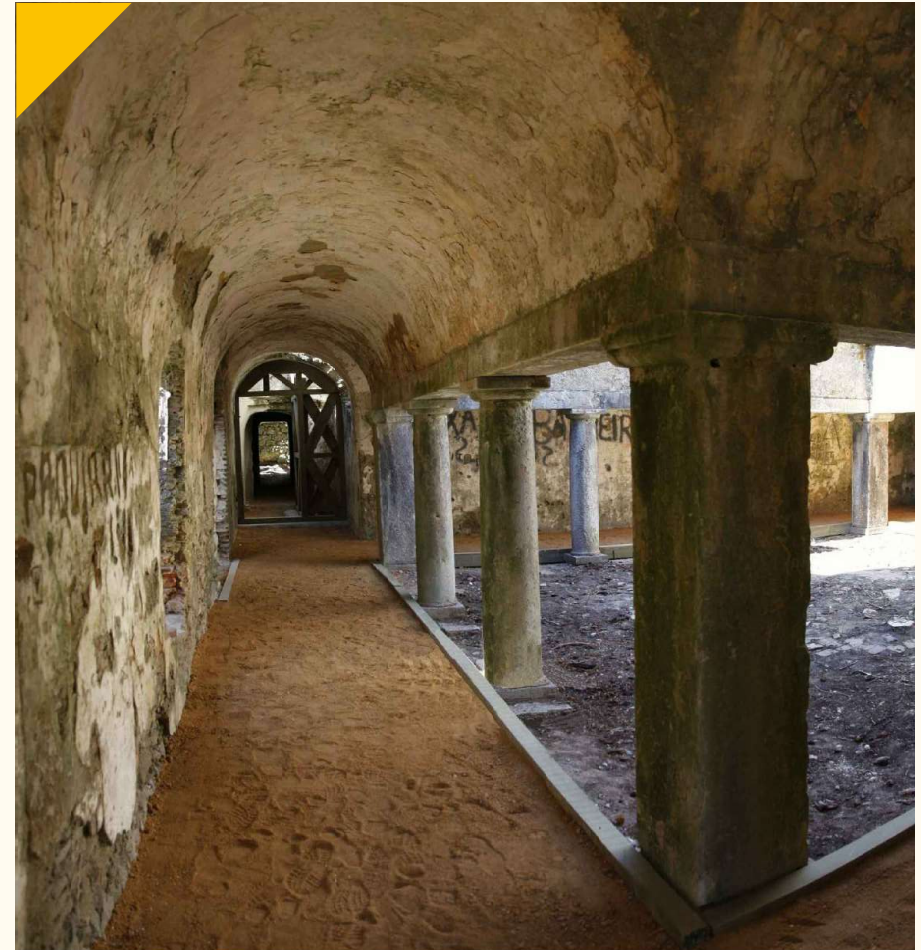


full consciousness the best interventions, such as conservation or restoration, to be conducted on existing structures.

To do so, at an immediate stage, there was no need to call upon the most recent technology of architecture towards conservation, but merely to basic construction tools, methods, and materials. The time gained with this intervention, which stop the degradation of this religious site by implementing simple Security by Design measures, enables knowledge to be produced to advance the

protection and safeguarding of places for worship, and to better answer to challenges raised by degraded fabric and its increasingly challenges for the future of our historic built environment.

Our new conservation approach argues for a comprehensive methodology that goes far beyond funding the conservation, or reconstruction, of neglected, vandalised or destruct religious heritage. It argues for time...it claims that to stop existing decay, and enable a continuous use of places of faith, is possible, with not very costly interventions. It considers the threat of decay as an opportunity to begin the planning, not to quickly be reconstructed, but to provide safe places in the future.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The SOAR project team would like to thank the architects and the jurors who made this call possible.

Editors

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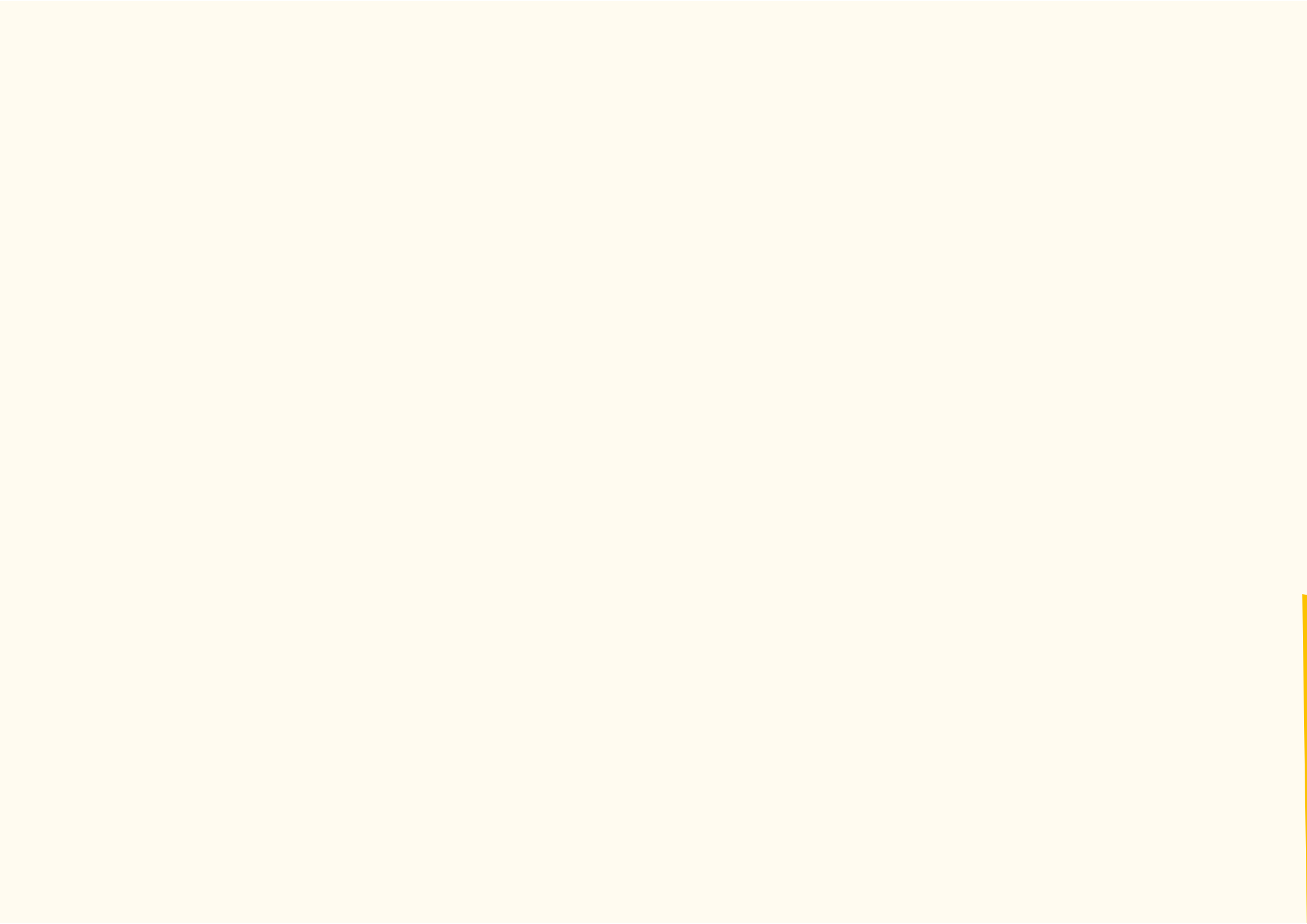
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