With the construction of three shelters in the Valle dei Templi of Agrigento, the “Architecture x Archeological Sites” meetings identify new modular and flexible types for archaeological sites.

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With the construction of three shelters in the Valle dei Templi of Agrigento, the management of the Park Agency is carrying out an experimental action which can produce innovation in the context of archaeology. The fruit of a proposal by Director Giuseppe Parello and Carmelo Bennardo in collaboration with the Japan Institute of Architecture-JIA, the international “Architecture x Archeological Sites” architecture meetings explore the state of the art in terms of works protecting archaeological landmarks, with the goal of identifying new modular and flexible types which are adaptable to the diverse needs of archaeological sites.
The Park, which covers approximately 1,300 hectares, preserves an extraordinary monumental and landscape patrimony which includes the remains of the ancient city of Akragas – one of the most important Greek colonies in Sicily – and the territory surrounding it reaching to the sea. One of the largest archaeological complexes of the Mediterranean can be found in the Valle dei Templi – immersed in an agricultural landscape of rare beauty – and declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1997.

Though visited by millions of tourists, the archaeological sites are not appropriately equipped for tourist use. To better use this enormous cultural resource and to make it an active agent of the regional economy, it is of strategic importance to equip it with new facilities which are appropriate for today. It is necessary to plan and build adequate structures which are now missing, and to adjust the cultural and environmental assets for better use.

For this purpose, the summer school has seen professors and students of the Politecnico di Milano (Marco Imperadori and Andrea Vanossi), of the University of Palermo, Agrigento branch (Fausta Occhipinti), and of the University of Tokyo (Salvator-John A. Liotta and Yuta Ito) involved in the construction of experimental prototypes for the protection of archaeological finds and excavation sites. The construction of the shelters — in addition to posing technical problems related to anchoring to uneven ground — transforms the site in that it inevitably adds a new element to the archaeological landscape. The projects have been interpreted as a shape to be managed in continuity with the landscape, something which does not conflict with it but rather merges with it. In this sense, the projects have in part attempted a dialogue with the context — they listened to and answered it — and in part — in the most extreme manner — attempt to merge and cancel themselves in it in order to disappear.
We have witnessed a true debate between the various participating schools, both in the planning and in the construction. Parametric software and digital fabrication techniques alternated with handmade sketches and craftsmanship skills pushed to the extreme. We went from the search for a dematerialized and wooden architecture – in contrast with the solidity of the Greek temples – to the use of materials found within the Valley, from the stripping of river reeds to the collection of rocks used as an integral part of the shelter structure. The work shows the willingness to systematize the great potential value which the interdisciplinary prospect of integration between architecture and archaeology offer to both disciplines, both in terms of research and analysis and also in terms of how the planning pertains to the execution of avant-garde interventions.

The Japanese and Italian students interacted profitably, both with the local authorities and with the park functionaries and architects: Giuseppe Amico, Calogero Liotta, Michele Bevilacqua and Antonio La Gaipa. The architectural design meeting took advantage of Kengo Kuma’s scientific supervision as well as the contributions of subject matter experts like Giuseppe Guerrera and Walter Angelico. The union of these synergies – university, public functionaries and craftsmanship – represents a unique moment of exchange and growth which opens new paths to explore.

The three shelters produced during “Architecture x Archeological Sites” – other than having a functional and aesthetic value – form the first nucleus of that which Director Parello imagines to be a park of modern architecture within an archaeological park.