On 9 May 2015, the old San Cosimato complex played host to the results of a research programme that studied the urban fabric of Rome’s Trastevere district. The research was particularly in-depth in the Master’s Degree courses run by the Faculty of Architecture in Rome.

With the clinical directorate of Santa Regina Margherita hospital in attendance, a series of design-oriented observations regarding the fabric of Trastevere and its urban area between Viale Trastevere and Piazza San Cosimato was presented.

Those participating in the meeting included professors Franco Purini and Giuseppe Strappa, Francesco Scoppola (the interim regional director for the BCPA, the Abruzzo region’s Department of Cultural Heritage and Landscape), Professor Joan Barclay Lloyd, the director of the school of restoration at Rome Sapienza University’s Faculty of Architecture, Professor Daniela Esposito and Paolo Maddalena, president of Italy’s Constitutional Court, as well as many of the associations working in the Trastevere district that are directly involved in protecting the San Cosimato complex, such as Mica Aurea, which thanks to the efforts of Gemma Guerrini, also helped organise the meeting.

The urban space that the research focused on includes the extraordinary architectural layers of the San Cosimato complex: a construction typical of Rome’s historic centre that, starting in the second to third centuries B.C., continued to evolve both in form and function. The site was originally a residential area (a third-century domus) that later became a public area devoted to healthy recreation and leisure activities (naumachia naval games or spas), and only in the ninth century saw the development of the architectural organism that gradually grew from a modest convent to reach the complexity of today’s architectural structure. Though it followed the rules that govern the formation of convent building ‘types’, subsequent extensions altered the convent building until it reached its current status as a hospital, carving out a route that is alien to the district’s rationale and, in actual fact, deprived Rome’s historic centre of this rare thirteenth-century monument.

This meeting was the first in a series of opportunities for discussion on the city of Rome organised by ISUFITALY, the Architettura e Restauro training course, Rome Sapienza University’s LPA Architectural Project and Interpretation workshop (run by the DIAP Department of Architecture and Design) as well as the DrACO Architecture and Design PhD. These are opportunities designed to encourage proposals regarding the issue of regenerating historic and historicised areas. It is an attempt to provide an answer to the problem that has been plaguing Rome for some time: serious analytical, planning observations on historic districts that have been left prey to a continuous and minute transformation that nonetheless continually alters and disfigures that peerless synthesis expressed by the historic centre, that once managed to combine the past with the future using ever-novel architectural forms, the precursors of an art of building, a benchmark for generations of architects that could still contribute a great deal to architectural culture for contemporary designs.