Palazzo Madonna delle Grazie – Retreat House

B.Sc. 3rd year project – Conservation

Matthew Axiak

The aim of this project is to revitalise Palazzo Madonna delle Grazie, a late 18th century palazzo located in the heart of Żebbuġ, by converting it into a spiritual retreat house for youths. The site includes a large garden which forms part of a green oasis within the densely-populated city, and the proposed retreat house mirrors this by being an oasis of spirituality within today’s fast-paced and hectic lifestyle. The strategy adopted takes into account the palazzo’s aesthetic, historic and socio-cultural values and it revolves around conserving as much of the original building fabric as possible. The project also aims towards sustainability by maximising existing passive environmental design features and incorporating them into the proposed interventions. These include the completion of the palazzo’s unfinished west wing, construction of a lift within the annex to allow for improved accessibility, and the addition of timber canopies and a reflection space within the garden which are meant to allow users to fully experience this space as an integral part of their retreat. Internally, a minimalist approach is adopted which helps to foster reflection whilst also creating a contrast between the old and the new. To accommodate for users’ particular needs, spaces of different scales are provided: larger group sessions can be held within the palazzo itself, while smaller groups or individuals can use either the building or the garden. Through the physical regeneration of the building, this project strives to allow its users to regenerate spiritually.