

Modern and industrial: the new abandonment. The case of the canavese area

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sous la direction de
LAMIA HADDA
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Villages et quartiers à risque d'abandon

*Stratégies pour la connaissance,
la valorisation et la restauration*

TOME 2

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sous la direction de
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TOME 2



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MODERN AND INDUSTRIAL: THE NEW ABANDONMENT. THE CASE OF THE CANAVESE AREA

Rossella Maspoli
Politecnico di Torino-Italia


Teletype
Printer
Factory (ph.
R. Maspoli).

The Canavese area of the Piedmont Region is an example of an intermediate inland area in which marginality and a need for rebalancing were already emerging in the 1950s, generating an innovative plan for manufacturing, social, and educational hubs. The crisis of the economic and community model linked to Olivetti – the driving force behind the plan – in the 1980s led to a process of deindustrialization and further decline.

The inclusion of “Ivrea Industrial City of the XX Century” in the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites (2018) was an important international opportunity to ensure recognition of industrial heritage and landscapes and the most strategic initiative to the practicalities of conservation and compatible regeneration of the entire territory. The future is closely linked to how well these places will be able to reflect the value of the Olivettian industrial past and community, in terms of territorial branding and *imprinting* for sustainable innovation.

This paper aims to outline the industrial heritage developed between the 1950s and the 1970s and the factors behind the technical and economic feasibility of reuse regarding its role in local development, a recognition of architectural and testimonial value, technological/construction/architectural innovation, and current decay conditions. The goal is to overcome the traditionally opposite theme of the study of industrial history and a *recycling of the past*, in which disused industrial buildings cease to be seen as liabilities and become sought-after assets with great potential for redevelopment.

Key-words: Modern industrial heritage, intermediate internal areas, disposal, decay, regeneration

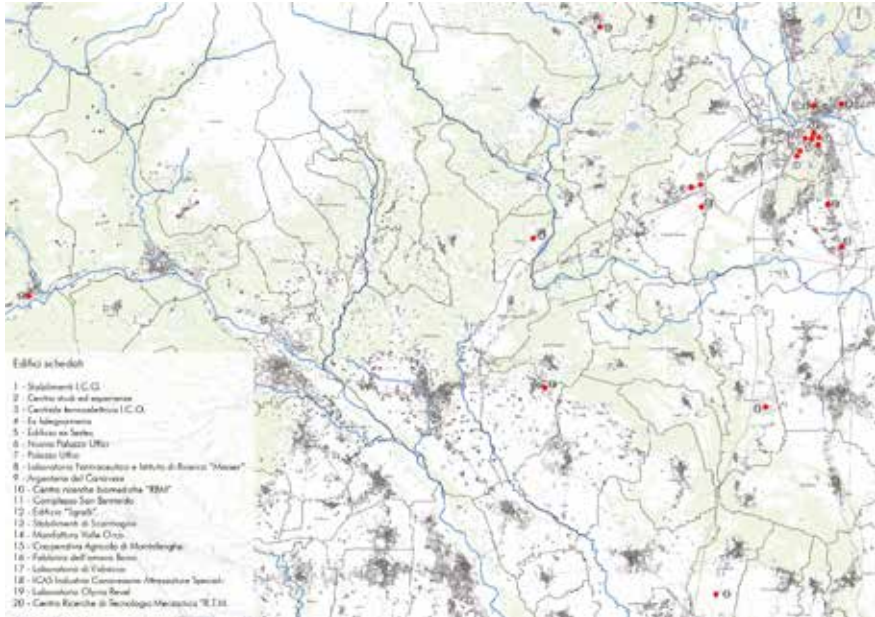
The Olivetti imprinting of the Canavese territory. Cultural and scientific background

From the early 1930s, in the inland Canavese area and the Casotto and Orco valleys the agricultural and craftsmanship sectors were affected by the industrial growth of Olivetti which was mainly concentrated in Ivrea at the beginning, and which left indelible marks on the local economy and landscape.

The cultural and industrial model introduced by Olivetti and the “Community Movement” political party was oriented towards challenging development issues in the area and its surroundings by promoting sustainable development and innovation in order to reduce unemployment and urban drift, and open the area up to cooperative approaches.



Olivettian territorialism.
The places of industry (R. Maspoli, L. Locatelli).



In 1954, the “Institute for Urban and Rural Renewal” I-RUR was founded by Adriano Olivetti. This structure acted as a territorial development agency, launching initiatives and providing technical assistance to private investors, local groups, and town administrations. This experiment is universally considered exemplary and architecture was an essential element of the initiative, revamping locations and promoting new development and stimulating the cultural milieu of rationalism and design.

Ivrea’s recent recognition as industrial city model has paved the way for enhancement, industrial tourism and settlement of the digital-ICT and creative industry in the “UNESCO Nominated Properties” sites. These perspectives have not *rebounded* on the inland areas beyond the “Buffer Zone”. The landscapes and sites of industry in the city are under specific legislative protection of the Superintendence, while the Canavese countryside heritage has no protection restriction or enjoys degrees of minor control, generally within the municipal planning system.

Place-based conservation involves the understanding of landscape value and territory, and an informed approach is the first condition for ensuring intervention and management planning, beyond the Buffer Zone. *Olivetti territorialism* is a concept that includes the co-evolution of human life, work and places, and the interrelated

transformation of societies and territories. After *territorialisation* and *de-territorialisation*, the prospective of *re-territorialisation* can be actualized through recognizing the identity values of a place, emphasizing the critical phenomena inherent to the contemporary territory. It may be said that de-territorialisation has been characterized by the loss of vital energy - cultural and social, entrepreneurial and economic - and by progressive marginalization and consequential process of decommissioning. Re-territorialisation can take place by re-reading the material and cultural legacy and their meanings and connecting in some way with territorial innovations.

Approach and methodology

The study deals with the census and cataloguing of the industrial and social service heritage from the Olivetti territorialisation of the 50s-70s, by identifying: Type; Construction features; History; Commissioner; Authors; Historical uses; Current condition; Enhancement perspectives; Types of intervention. The pre-analysis highlights conservation - adaptive reuse conditions for sustainable redevelopment and soil saving¹.

The industrial sites “UNESCO Nominated property”

The first part of the study concerns the comparison with the centre of the territorial system, which has already been the subject of several investigations and of the UNESCO “Application Dossier” and “Management Plan” (Control Room, 2017).

The beginning is the Red Brick Factory - I.C.O. along the axis of via Jervis, the external architectural image is preserved, while the interior spaces have minimal traces of the first building, still characterized by functional transformations to the productions of the 60s-70s. The recent ICONA project (2018) places a significantly perspective of heritage led regeneration, bringing together entrepreneurial subjects who have shared the vision of bringing places back to international reference.

The first expansion of the I.C.O. (1934-36), based on an architectural project by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini, follows the open space model of evolution production. The building is exemplary in its innovative structural, technological and formal choices of industrial architecture; the second and third extensions (1939-49) continue the theme of the structural mesh in reinforced concrete with a double-skin glazed façade and the solar radiation control of the mainly south façade.

¹ The study is the result of research activities on industrial heritage (Politecnico, AIPAI), teaching of the Atelier Redevelopment of the consolidated city B of the Politecnico di Torino (A.Y. 2019-20) and the Master's thesis: Lorenzo Locatelli, *Analysis, evaluation, adaptive recovery and reuse of the Olivetti industrial, tertiary and service heritage. The case study “Pharmaceutical Laboratory and Research Institute Marzer” in Loranze, supervisor R. Maspoli, 2020.*



**Olivetti
Mechanical
Workshop and
Thermal Power,
San Bernardo**
(ph. L. Locatelli,
R. Maspoli) -
present.



The systematic recovery of the street-facing façades (Giacopelli 2006) constitutes an exemplary case of conservation of the image of the modern, involving analyses, localized replacements, restoration and cleaning. Lastly, the fourth extension (1960-62) is integrated into the elegant closure of the internal courtyard, the “Officine ad H” (1955-60), with the introduction of the metal structure based on a module of 12 m per side of steel pillars, to form a square mesh network.

The factory as functional rationality and standardization corresponds to a new symbolic expression, dominated by the conquest of light: the “glass factory” is the first sign of adherence to contemporary international models of rationalism.

The decentralization of production functions, territorial redistribution and internationalization have led to the progressive loss of production activities since the 1970s, while adaptability of volumes and building system standardization have facilitated its functional reorganization and *mixité*. The ICOs have been the subject of subsequent refurbishment interventions, and the Officina H has become an iconic space for exhibitions and events.

The axis of via Jervis is the context of the other tertiary-production “UNESCO Nominated Property” sites such as the Thermoelectric Power Plant I.C.O. (1956-59) by Vittoria, currently under design and awaiting recovery; the former Olivetti joinery by Ottavio Cascio (1954-55), the rationalist expansion and redesign of the technical building of the 1920s, which became the seat of environmental services; the former SERTEC building by Ezio Sgrelli (1968-72) in exposed concrete, in dissonant connection to a historic villa, currently





**Olivetti
industrial plant
in Scarmagno**
(ph. P. Mazzo) -
present.

being restored; the Olivetti Study and Experience Centre based on an architectural project by Vittoria (1954-55). The building is the subject of the refurbishment project by Ettore Sottsass Jr and Marco Zanini (1999-2000) which contrasted a new, more material vision of the staircase - a functional and compositional pivot of the building - and then of Pegaso's project for the new Olivetti headquarters (2018-19). The transformation is significant in the various phases following Olivetti's period: first as the innovation for training in interaction design, then the role of national hub to support the digitalization of companies. Finally, the large complexes of the Office Building (1960-64) designed by Bernasconi, Fiocchi, Nizzoli and the New Office Building (1986-88) by Gino Valle conclude the Olivetti system of via Jervis, at present in underused conditions but which do not demonstrate any conditions of physical-environmental degradation and are *redefinable* in active conservation policies.

The sites of Olivetti's territorialism and productive differentiation

The second part of the study concerns, however, the Canavese sites of modern architecture and innovation in construction technologies and industrial research, which often represent a perspective of enhancement in terms of re-development input, in relation to the conditions of conservation thereof.

The sites of architectural and testimonial significance in San Bernardo are the Teletype Printer Factory based on an architectural project by Ezio Sgrelli (1961-63) and the O.M.O. - Olivetti Mechanical Workshop by Vittoria (1955-62).

Outside the city, the focus is on the complex of Scarmagno (1967-70) and others minor activities linked to Olivetti commissioning: the Marxer Research Centre and

Pharmaceutical Laboratory (1964) by Alberto Galardi and the Argenterie del Canavese (1962) silverware manufacture by Carlo Viligiardi, in Loranze; the R.B.M. Biomedical Research Centre (1972) by Eduardo Vittoria, in Collettero Giacosa.

The Teletype Printer Factory - which was completion of a previous settlement, object of industrial regeneration and conversion for the “Citadel of Music” - is a three-storey building, characterized by a free plan, functional to the production flow. The technological and design quality emerges in the evident structure and vertical towers in exposed concrete, with modular cladding. In relation to the protracted disposal, the plant presents increasingly critical conditions, with alteration of the coatings, deterioration of the windows and accessory bodies. This case study is indicative of some typical criticalities of the materials and experimental technologies of the Modern, used for technical components, coatings and finishes. They are often characterised by a short useful life and loss of aesthetic quality over time, as well as obsolescence as they are difficult to replace being discontinued in industrial production.

The O.M.O. factories, in the same area, continue instead Vittoria’s experimentation in metal construction with the “Covre” system, which allows the industrialization with the rapid completion. The composite pillars support the high spatial lattice beams arranged in both directions, supporting the roof with a large structural mesh (16x8 m) and the perimeter walls have glass areas and modular opaque panels. During the industrial decline, conditions of decay emerged, faced with the recovery, which substantially maintained the original plant, but leaving the iconic thermal power plant abandoned and demolishing its chimneys.

The most critical case of industrial decommissioning concerns the Scarmagno complex, on a 1,100,000 m² area in the plains, constructed for the first long structure (Building “A”) with a 12 m² module steel system, based on an architectural design by Ottavio Cascio, and for Buildings “B”, “C”, and “D” based on a design by Vittoria and Zanuso.

The emergence of the exposed structure and the contiguity with the contemporary technological innovation of reinforced concrete, highlight the role of factories in the great season of Italian engineering. The light closing walls are in panels intended for disassembly in future plant expansions. The skylights made of barrel-shaped and overlapping polyester resin sheets are the result of technological research analogous to that used by Louis Kahn for the Olivetti Harrisburg. The buildings represented both technological innovation and the *final utopia* of the modular and infinite factory permitting maximum organizational variation, until production was discontinued in the 90s.

Tertiary-productive reuse was subject to subsequent divestments and “Building C” fell victim to thefts and vandalism following a fire in 2013. Emergency reparative maintenance interventions, with localized replacement of roofing and interior elements, have often been



Marxer Research Centre and Pharmaceutical Laboratory in Loranze (ph. L. Locatelli) - present.

inadequate in maintaining modern architecture. The light casing elements show degraded conditions, while the supporting structure generally appears in good condition, but would need to be subjected to tests to see its compliance with safety standards. The industrial-tertiary conversion as well as the hypothesis of partial demolition require significant redevelopment work and adaptation of the hygro-thermal and acoustic performance and the overall reconstruction of the plant systems.

Another significant case of abandonment is the Marxer in Loranze, built on the direct assignment of Adriano Olivetti as an industrial innovation between production and research, a pioneer for the pharmaceutical industrial development in the area. The complex is characterized by the modernist geometry of the parallelepipeds, emerges for the choice of mainly raw materials - concrete, metal and glass - and for the solar shading systems in *béton brut* of the facades.

The works of Alberto Galardi, Ezio Sgrella and Marco Zanuso testify to the Milanese school's experimentation on exposed reinforced concrete, in adherence to international constructive and formal models of the modern. At present, all the systems are unusable and most of the internal construction elements are severely damaged or absent. However,



the buildings are significantly resilient thanks to their concrete structures and façades, but the reuse thereof would require analogic reconstruction of the glass casing, partitions and technological systems performance for thermal and acoustic comfort, consolidation and surface restoration works of concrete, while checking also for static safety.

Different conditions of use and conservation concern the nearby R.B.M., which consists of five single-storey buildings arranged around a covered distribution path. The sheet metal cladding of the structural beams forms a cover that juts out from the plastered and strictly white perimeter walls, alternating the intermediate horizontal windows and accentuating the light-dark effect in the natural context. The R.B.M. is a case of very high functional development of the site, which led to an overall transformation for the needs of the production. Some elements of Vittoria's original design are still present, but the *recognition* of the original technological and architectural system is limited.

Highlighting of significance of a modern architecture - already reported and published - can, however, encourage respect and appreciation, also in terms of the real estate market and corporate cultural tourism.

**Vidracco
Laboratory
in Vidracco;
Mechanical
Technology
Research Centre
in Vico Canavese**
(ph. L. Locatelli) -
present.



The sites of territorialism for community reconstruction

The third series of sites concerns the interventions promoted by I-RUR and Olivetti to improve the social and economic conditions of the Canavese area, aimed at making the new productive structures “authentic communities of workers”, framing the whole activity in a democratic plan of economic development and human settlement (Serafini, 1982).

Over a 15-year time span, the I-RUR and Olivetti commissioned the Social Winery of Piverone and the Agricultural cooperative of Montalenghe by Giorgio Raineri (1958). The company commissioned in the social-industrial diversification field are the Vidracco Laboratory by Eduardo Vittoria (1964), the I.C.A.S. Pharmacy Furniture Factory (1959), the Research Centre of Mechanical Technology R.T.M. in Vico Canavese by Nello Renacco (1963-64), the Valle Orco Plastic Manufacture (1957), the Amaro Bairro liquor factory (1958), and the Baltea Motori mechanical factory (1956). The sites are identified according to the strategic role in the area and as the legacy, as some of these are significant for the architecture and construction system.

Among these, the Vidracco project sees the extension of a balcony over the landscape in contiguity and dissonance with the historic centre. The modular square system in reinforced concrete is divided into two lateral lots connected by a central body, lower and set back. The asset, in a state of decay after its decommissioning in the 80s, was recovered (2004) through its external conservation and partial respecting the modern architecture. The re-functionalization has a confined role of local socio-economic regeneration.



The option of *territorial heritage strategy*

Olivetti's *territorialism* - between localism and internationalization - currently constitutes a resource for *re-territorialism*, because it was the expression of an integrated, innovative and human centred approach, beyond the Fordism model.

The industrial architectural projects are developed, in the 50s-60s, in harmony with the social and cultural texture of the host territories, while in accordance with growing strategies of productive diversification and integrated design.

Cultural activities are at the centre of a process characterized by interdisciplinary research in mechanics and automation, social progress and environmental protection, publishing and communication, architectural rationalism and product design. They found themselves, in the 80s, in the centre of an evolved systemic and organizational process, articulated internationally and integrated in the sectors of “industrial design, identification system, interior design, architectural design, exhibition design, type-face design and graphic design & advertising” (Shapira 1979).

The *progressive peripheralization* of the Canavese, since the 90s, has followed the steps of the retreat of Olivetti and the consequent weaken of community strategies, managerial culture and innovation that represented one of the crucial passages of Italian capitalism. The

relative industrial loss of rank and apparatus of the North-West, in the 10's of 2000, also overlapped. Following the decay, the signs of a *milieu available for innovation* emerge, combining international perspectives in the fields of information technology and digital evolution and recognised excellence in the field of bio-industry and technological systems for automotive.

Nowadays, the UNESCO World Heritage Site designation is a coveted brand of approval, which can open the association of well-established heritage, tourist attractions and social-economic redevelopment.

The Olivettian utopia left, in fact, an entire piece of modern city built in Ivrea and pieces of this city also scattered throughout the territory.

Critical framing and industrial heritage potential

Functional reuse calls into question the *respect and care* of existing heritage, according to bright spaces, sequences of iterated elements, unity of shapes and light colours, rigorous but flexible organization of the continuous activity and socialising areas. The open space set-out is in line with goals of economy and the representation of a new sociality of work, potentially comply with the objectives of reuse.

The industrial heritage, under study, has been subject to continuity of use and not always adaptive reuse in some cases, to philological restoration and enhancement of the legacy in few cases. Several cases show - on the contrary - different levels of decay in partial-to-total decommissioning or transformation conditions that have compromised their architectural character or are awaiting new use. However, these may constitute *options* for the future of the Canavese area, which is currently being debated by local institutions, entrepreneurs and the community.

The *post-industrial containers* may become locations for creative industries, services for hospitality and reception in cultural tourism and educational sectors, social inclusion and corporate social responsibility poles - continuing Olivetti's industrial humanism - as centres for contemporary art, environmental education and technological innovation such as industrial memory museums. Surveys undertaken by the territorial bodies (Control room for the nominations Ivrea, 2017) indicate other possible re-destinations of the heritage according to redevelopment policies, such as innovation poles of the New Economy, start-up accelerator, enterprises competence centre, incubators in the Human Talent Factory perspective.

The impact of the New Economy, the awareness of territorial identity, the *recognition* of modern heritage and the environmental consciousness are open and contingent issues.

The project needs to confront the re-use and conservation feasibility of modern industrial heritage, in particular the issues related to choice of compatible uses, energy improvement and retrofitting, as well as structural performance adjustment, environmental remediation and strategies of eco-biocompatibility. The adoption of systematized analysis methods and technical support services, relating to the state of the building, have the objectives of study the building structures and envelopes, in order to determine its overall performance and the definition of the energy requirements and starting targeted interventions, able to guarantee new transmittance performance, efficiency and energy requirements.

The *heritage future* needs validated diagnostic procedures, pre-feasibility analysis, guide line and best practices for intervention process and *neo-urbanism* code for sustainable conservation and reuse.

The perspectives regarding the sites of Olivetti *re-territorialism* are currently linked, therefore, to the increase in the attractiveness of the Modern Architecture legacy and quality of places, in relation to option of total space conservation or *under volumetric architecture* or new volumetric integration.

Role of community participation and audience engagement in heritage conservation

The *territorial heritage strategy* to handle challenges requires giving new form to consulting, communication, technical support management services, adaptive leadership and comprehensive community approach in order to activate the terms - potentially in opposition - of compatible redevelopment and conservation-restoration.

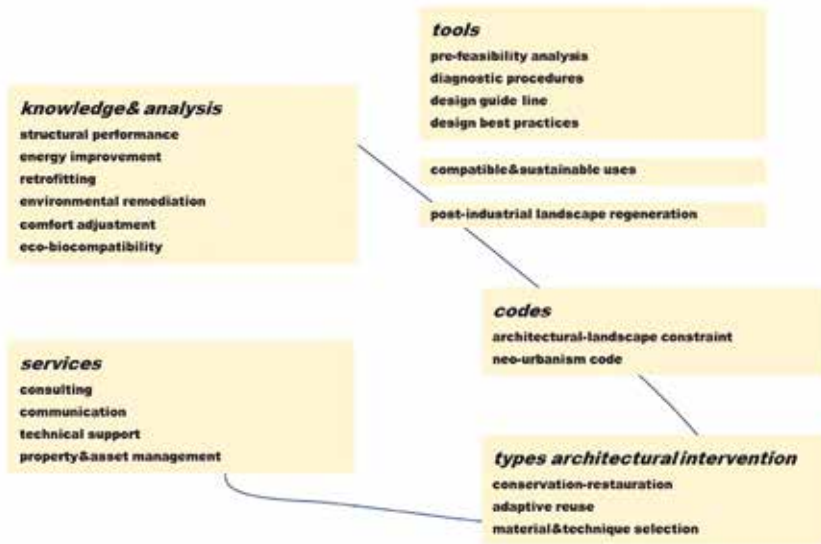
The UNESCO Operational Guidelines (2019) further contend that the heritage's "boundaries often cannot incorporate all the attributes" and the assets that can convey the Outstanding Universal Value and essential factor is "ensure ... participation of a wide variety of stakeholders and rights-holders, including ... local communities, ... non-governmental organizations".

In this perspective, it is even more important to "adopt general policies to give the heritage a function in the life of the community". The choices of conservation and enhancement of the heritage require to stimulate new forms of analysis and sharing of the patrimonial community of Ivrea and its context.

The first perspective is of a new survey, extending from the "Nominated Properties" to the "buffer zone" and the Olivetti territory, to verify the engagement and the current and potential ways of living and experiencing the legacy. It is essential to build up a new narrative for the modern heritage, accessible by the various co-present and in changing communities and



Territorial heritage strategy.
Potential configuration diagram.



city users, from heritage tourists to residents, from new generations to immigrants. The participatory model concerns, to *re-built* the collective memory and the values to entice local communities into engaging and collaborating. The communication and social networking are keys to active processes of recognition and to consent forms of implicit / explicit participation, from simple listeners to proactive *prosumers*. Industrial elements and outdoor spaces - public and private - in state of disuse or decay may be suitable for care interventions by collaboration agreements between citizens, local stakeholders and the City.

A central role has a shift from *government* towards *governance* - implying an active involvement of relevant stakeholders - and towards *participatory governance* - involving private actors, civil society organisations and interested citizens - in the whole process of decision making, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cultural heritage policies.

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Villages et quartiers à risque d'abandon sont aujourd'hui une problématique commune à des nombreuses régions de la Méditerranée, considérée comme un point stratégique dans les nouvelles politiques européennes. L'abandon progressif des zones internes est une constante dans les pays caractérisés par le sous-développement économique, avec les phénomènes d'émigration et de fragmentation du patrimoine culturel. Cela entraîne des problèmes d'architecture et de gestion du territoire. L'objectif principal de ce travail de recherche est de créer un espace de discussion qui comprend l'étude du patrimoine architectural et du paysage ainsi que les témoignages démo-ethno-anthropologiques.