Survey, communication and valorization of the automotive heritage

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Valuing industrial heritage in the Anthropocene

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On the 5th July, 2015, UNESCO inscribed Rjukan-Notodden Industrial Heritage Site on the World Heritage list. This represents great opportunities for the local communities of Rjukan and Notodden, located in the interior southern part of Norway. According to the proposal, the site is a unique expression of new industrial developments during the second industrial revolution, based on hydroelectric power production, industry, transport system and urban communities. However, the development of industry here depended totally on the presence of the water landscape, so that the cultural and physical features of this landscape is here a total production system (Birkeland 2015).

How are we to value industrial heritage in the Anthropocene? The Anthropocene refers to the human-dominated geological epoch that we are now living in. It is a concept that covers the last 250 years’ immense human impact on the earth where global warming, environmental degradation and unsustainable development are huge warning signs.
The scenario of the ‘historic automotive heritage’ emerges in relation to a new prospect of territorial brand, valorizing the industrial past in relation to innovative re-development.

Different UNESCO designations In the case of ‘Motown’, the architectural heritage consists of a few sites recognized of high architectural value – Ford Piquette Plant at Detroit [see TICCIH Bulletin #64]. Lingotto at Torino, Fort Dunlop at Birmingham … - and many sites of architectural-testimonial value, which may be designated heritage assets.

Reference to the ‘automotive heritage’, the framework of the UNESCO initiatives concerns the designation of Outstanding Universal Value (‘World Heritage List’, ‘Intangible Heritage’, ‘Memory of the World’), and the ‘Creative Cities Network’, in perspective to develop international cooperation among cities that have identified creativity – from the past to the future - as a strategic factor for sustainable social, economic and cultural development.

In the designation of Torino a UNESCO Creative City, the car industry, the material traditions, the creative design, the technological innovation during 150 years are defined as cross-elements of knowledge to be transmitted in order to promote the identity conscious re-development, to increase the cultural/creative production, to train the local attraction and the tourism. The designation of ‘Creative City’ promises to be an opportunity to preserve and to emphasize the historic and modern ‘car brand heritage’.

‘Automotive heritage’ and the industrial tourism The automotive industry was absent from the international heritage arena until the end of the ‘90s. The approach changed with the opening of highly at¬tractive industrial ‘car corporate brand’ sites, the Volkswagen Group’s ‘Autostadt’ in Wolfsburg and after BMW, Daimler, Opel and Audi in Germany, Toyota in Japan and FCA in Italy have opened centers offering more interaction between the firms and their customers. Nowadays, the automotive sector shows promotion strategies, and success is related to the long-lived and high symbolic value of the products.

The collective consciousness - and not only the ‘spectacularization’ - of the ‘automotive heritage’, is connected to educational and informational programs and to the storytelling of the automobile industry and labor, it is a condition to promote conservation policies and to vivify the memory with new languages. The international perspectives of the ‘historic car heritage’ network regards the knowledge integration, the improvement of accessibility and interaction design, the extension of heritage points and routes. Emergent research and dissemination topic is related to industrial tourism and innovative and creative industries, based on automotive traditions.
The FIAT Lingotto plant was converted by Renzo Piano, here showing the route up to the famous test track on the roof.

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