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The city of Adriano: Functionalism out of the Box

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MAPIRANJE PROSTOROV MODERNISTIČNIH MEST V KONTEKSTU NAČEL CIAM-OVE ATENSKE LISTINE

MAPPING THE SPACES OF MODERNIST CITIES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CIAM'S ATHENS CHARTER

Zbornik prispevkov mednarodne konference projekta *Mapiranje urbanih prostorov slovenskih mest v zgodovinskem okviru: Nova Gorica in njeni konteksti*

Proceedings of the international conference of the project *Mapping the Urban Spaces of Slovenian Cities from the Historical Perspective: Modernism in Nova Gorica and its Contexts*

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4 POZABLJENA IN PROPADAJOČA INDUSTRIJSKA DEDIŠČINA
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The city of Adriano: Functionalism out of the Box

Giuliana DI MARI, Caterina FRANCHINI, Emilia GARDA, Alessandra RENZULLI

1. Italian historical framework. Le Corbusier and Italian architects

In the several International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM) architects present and discuss ideas and experimentations in progress or potential in different European cities regarding the space of living, on a domestic and urban scale, using a logical and deductive working method of neo-positivist matrix, which in some ways also seems to impose the structure and themes of the conferences: from the smaller scale, housing, to an increasingly larger scale, neighbourhood, city, and region.

The CIAM in Athens was a unique opportunity for Italian architects to interact with their master Le Corbusier. As Gino Pollini recalls in an interview, the pre-war congresses, like the CIAM IV in Athens in 1933, had seen Le Corbusier as an extremely active protagonist. Because of the situation determined by Nazism in Germany, the architects of the German group like Gropius were absent, and Le Corbusier could be the uncontested leader without other important personalities. On the occasion of Athens, he personally edited and published the results of the congress, known as the "Athens Charter". The inhabitable space that the Athens Charter wants to suggest has the open space as a central element, the green that would not be an element of separation between functions, a container of isolated objects, but rather an element to establish a relationship between different urban areas, different functions. The Italian group at CIAM in 1933 was formed by Gino Pollini with his wife Renata Melotti, Piero Bottoni, Piero Maria Bardi and Giuseppe Terragni.

In Bergamo in 1949 CIAM members met for the first time in Italy. It was a particular moment, Europe and the whole world were rearranging after the end of the war, the differences and difficulties between the various groups of nations, both from a political and cultural point of view, were emerging. Moreover, after the end of the war the CIAMs represented a real point of reference and convergence for all architects of the modern world, facing political and social issues and promoting the dialectic dialogue on these issues.

Surprisingly, at the VII Congress of Bergamo in 1949, Le Corbusier informed the members that "CIAM VII will aim to draw up a Habitat Charter,s" a topic that had never been introduced before but that, as Eric Mumford says, would become from that moment on the main argument of the CIAMs' work to the resumption of activities after the war, opening a new phase that would try to overcome the limits of the Athens Charter. A first attempt to re-establish a human habitat in the city.

Fig.1: Le Corbusier, Saporta, Terragni, Renata Pollini e Bottoni at CIAM in 1933 (© Le Corbusier in Italia (eds. Giovanni Denti, Andrea Savio, Gianni Calzà), Milano 1988, p. 35).

Fig.2: Le Corbusier, Saporta, Pollini e Terragni at CIAM in 1933 (© Le Corbusier in Italia (eds. Giovanni Denti, Andrea Savio, Gianni Calzà), Milano 1988, 37).

Among the topics addressed was the application of the Athens Charter through Le Corbusier's grid. Among the various examined there was that of Ivrea presented by Figini and Pollini for the project of the Olivetti building, its houses and collective services. Le Corbusier found that the project was satisfactory in particular for the optimal solution given by the problem of the orientation of the buildings and their insertion in the environment.

The Italian architects of modernity who participated in the CIAM and made Le Corbusier their mentor, are the same who, thanks to Adriano Olivetti, participated in the realisation of what would soon become the industrial Ivrea, the city of Adriano.

They were not the only ones to recognise themselves in Le Corbusier's ideologies, Olivetti himself assimilated them and transposed them, creating what would become the thinking behind the city, the factory and society.

2. From Le Corbusier to Olivetti. Transposition of a thought

Olivetti was certainly Le Corbusier's preferential interlocutor in Italy, in a dialogue that began in 1934 and continued until the dead of the entrepreneur. Le Corbusier described

Adriano as:

> …a man who had a sense of public service, a sense of responsibility for his actions, a sense of good and evil, of the best and the worst. He had been able to create an atmosphere full of spirituality and quality around him. His research and the value of his attempts are not a providential fruit, but the result of great individual strength, great will, tireless perseverance.[1]

At first sight, there are many points of contact between Adriano Olivetti and Le Corbusier: the idea that technology is at the service of man, the attention towards the new world coming from the United States, in particular for the organisation of the Taylorist work, the need to theorise one's own society projects and then give them direction (Le Corbusier through CIAM, Olivetti with the Community Movement), a fund of spirituality, the understanding that the 20th century sees the masses bursting into history and therefore how it is necessary to rearrange them into new social morphologies.

Olivetti is an entrepreneur in his early thirties caged by Fascism, with whom he also has good relations in these "years of consensus", but he is working to transform his father's company into an international group, with a new concept of work and the relationship between the factory and the community. The architect and the entrepreneur would like to build non alienating factories in territories that are community spaces. This is the period of the *Valle d'Aosta Regulatory Plan* and the new buildings (the glass factory, the social services) of the young rationalist architects Figini and Pollini. Le Corbusier declares them his students and proposes a plan of large buildings, trying to override the two architects, who, of course, oppose each other. Olivetti also has some perplexities, both for the nature of the relationship and for the type of project, too magniloquent for little Ivrea. Le Corbusier, knowing of Olivetti's intention to create a neighbourhood for the employees, "with great confidence and authority", emphasises Bodei, aims to be the designer. But Olivetti replies that Figini and Pollini have already been assigned. Two years later, Le Corbusier and Olivetti meet in Ivrea to visit the area of the intervention, Le Corbusier persists with a series of objections to the two architects, moved by the desire to have a role in that project anyway. But the resistance of the two, even in front of the revered master, is resolute. And Olivetti agrees. He declared:

> … we are opposed to this collaboration that Le Corbusier wishes; and this for two reasons. From a political point of view, Le Corbusier's intervention would mean giving a weapon to our friends - the enemies of modern architecture - who, even recently, on the subject of Brera, have accused us of internationalism, communism, etc... Moreover, such an intervention, even a limited one, would represent in the shortest time a fact of public domain in Italy and abroad.

1 Renato ZORZI, Le Corbusier e il caso Olivetti, *Le Corbusier in Italia* (eds. Giovanni Denti, Andrea Savio, Gianni Calzà), Milano 1988, p. 91.

> And given that our plan has been published and known everywhere it would create a situation that would be unpleasant for us, such as to make our collaboration more or less impossible.[2]

A silence of almost 20 years followed. In 1953, Le Corbusier contacted the engineer of Ivrea and wanted to import Olivetti's community methods into his studio. In the meantime, Adriano was more committed than before to urban planning (since 1950 he has presided over the INU, Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica), and the *Edizioni di Comunità* published Lewis Mumford. In addition, his experiments on electronic calculators proceeded with extraordinary efficiency. In 1957 the first computers were built (*Elea 9001* and *Elea 9002*) and the following year, under the guidance of Mario Tchou, the *Elea 9003* was born, the first fully transistorised computer in the world. The Olivetti has become a giant in continuous expansion. And it is in this context that a document is drawn up, of which there is only a typewritten version, entitled "Reasons in favour of Arch. Le Corbusier's choice for the design of the new Olivetti electronic plant." The text, explains Bodei, "highlights that the architect's work was the main source of inspiration in the construction of the company's factories from 1936 onwards." And this for both the general philosophy and the design details. The project was assigned to Le Corbusier, who on 10 February 1960 wrote to Adriano thanking him and confirming that he was passionate about "the issues related to the machinist civilisation," especially when they are based "on human value and the binomial Man - Nature and aimed at the research of harmony." It seems the beginning at last of a virtuous collaboration between the architect and the entrepreneur, but destiny seems to break these hopes. The sudden death of Olivetti and the difficult years that followed make it impossible to carry out this project.

Although the two personalities, Le Corbusier on the one hand and Olivetti on the other, have never been linked in the real realisation of a project, they have constantly influenced each other during thirty years of correspondence and meetings. Important writings at the basis of Olivetti's thought were *Le trois établissements humains*, translated by Edizioni di Comunità (founded by Olivetti himself), the Athens Charter, the two projects of Ronchamp and La Tourette. The factory model conceived by Olivetti must incorporate the surrounding landscape and contribute to creating a new one. He adopted Le Corbusier's idea that the "black factory", symbol of alienating fatigue, should be replaced by the "green factory", "which will re-establish the 'conditions of nature' around work." So "sun, space, green, will bring here, as in residential areas, cosmic influences, the response to the breath of the lungs, the virtues of the air, as the presence of that natural environment that accompanied the long and meticulous elaboration of the human being." This thought supports the commission to Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini to enlarge the Ivrea factory, up to the new buildings in via Jervis, is replicated by inviting Ignazio Gardella to realise the canteen,

2 Renato ZORZI, Le Corbusier e il caso Olivetti, *Le Corbusier in Italia* (eds. Giovanni Denti, Andrea Savio, Gianni Calzà), Milano 1988, p. 93.

and continued with the houses for the employees (again Figini and Pollini) and the other houses (Nizzoli and Fiocchi). Already in the Thirties, however, the reference to Le Corbusier is constant. The *pan de verre*, the large glass walls adopted by Figini and Pollini reflect the matrix of the Swiss master and translate the principle of social transparency, capable, writes Bodei, "of giving an image of dignity to the worker's work and continuous communication with the surrounding context and landscape."

3. The creation of the Adriano community concept

The maximum expression of Olivetti's thought turns into the definition of the concept of community. In the post war years, the "Movimento di Comunità" was set up in Italy in order to contribute to democratic reconstruction starting from institutions that considered the measure of man and the necessity of functional autonomism. The vision of a city of the CIAM, divided into three disciplinary matrices, is therefore found again. Reference is made, in this case, to the one that sees the centrality of the technical aspects and of working in synergy with the authorities, using the urban plan as an instrument to recompose the inequality between the parts of the city and their functions and re-establishing relations between them through an effective infrastructural system. This matrix is the one adopted mainly by the Dutch Van Eesteren group and supported by the Swiss.

Adriano Olivetti had developed the concept of "Comunità" by working on the regional plan of Valle d'Aosta, when in the mid 1930s he identified urban planning as a rational science capable of organising society and corporate economy. In the following decade he enhanced the personal value of the "Comunità" and definitively suppressed the corporatist, technocratic and excessively rationalist accents that had characterised the previous conception of town planning, even if in a modernist way he would have always lived the plan as "a valid instrument by which the creative power of the leaders of the 'Comunità' could express itself and work worthily." A planning that did not necessarily have to mean "authoritarian fixation of the quality and quantity of the entire national production," Olivetti emphasised what he had written during the Second World War and stated that the coordination of the public economy had to be supported by a private and free economy and have to go with urban planning, both subject to "a single territorial authority", the "Comunità". For Olivetti the need that derives from these reflections is for urban planners to bring organisational work to a single fundamental measure, simplifying it. If one assumes the second-level community, what Olivetti calls the true and vital "Comunità", on the human scale, as the fundamental organisation of planning, it is easy to understand how the first-level community plans underlying it constitute the true detailed, executive plans of the community. The regional plan (third-level community) will be the suitably modified and corrected overview of the fundamental plans of the second level communities.

"Comunità", the name says it and the programme confirms it. It is a Movement that aims to unite, not divide, it aims to collaborate, it wishes to teach, it aims to build. We have not

come, therefore, to divide but to exalt the best, to protect the weak, to raise the ignorant, to discover vocations.[3]

A concept that does not remain utopian, but which Olivetti truly concretises with antiracist ideals and high human values within his factories. In a speech to the workers of Ivrea he affirms why he never asked, at the time of the assumption, which religious faith they belonged to, in which political group they militated or from which region of Italy they came from.

And he continues:

> …our "Comunità" must be concrete, visible, tangible, "Comunità" that is neither too large nor too small, territorially defined, dated with wide powers, that gives all activities that indispensable coordination, that efficiency, that respect for human personality, culture and the arts that human civilisation has achieved in its best places. "Comunità" that is too small is incapable of allowing sufficient development of man and of the Community itself; on the other hand, the great metropolises in their concentrated and monopolistic forms atomise man and depersonalise him: between the two there is the *optimum*.[4]

Technique and culture lead towards decentralisation, towards the federation of small cities with intense life, where harmony, peace, green, silence, far from the current state of overcrowded metropolises, as well as from the isolation and dismay of man alone.

4. The concretisation of the Adriano community concept

The conditions for "Comunità" to express itself are:

- An optimum of living space that can be organised, meaning the territory;
- An adequate administrative structure;
- Organisation of the Community with a view to its manifestation.

This last condition is specific to town planners as it is identified with a formal plan. A fourth condition remains unexpressed but is the most important: the inclusion of spiritual values in the city.

The place for civil development is the factory. It is a utopian idea but one that can easily be translated into reality. The factory needed to accommodate all the principles of modernisation of workplaces, to encourage the socialisation of those who entered and to create different material and living conditions. The industrial city of Olivetti in Ivrea is based on these reasons and aims to promote the new industrial culture of community-reforming inspiration.

To the "Comunità" adds the "concreta" term, with an optimal size of one hundred thousand

3 Adriano OLIVETTI, *Città dell'uomo*, Milano 1960.

4 OLIVETTI 1960 (n. 4).

Fig. 3: Olivetti factories along via Jervis (© Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti, Ivrea).

Fig. 4: Adriano Olivetti portrayed discussing with his workers in a factory in Ivrea (© Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti, Ivrea).

inhabitants. The "Comunità concreta" is dominated by the four spiritual forces that are the foundation and end of all true social progress: truth, justice, beauty and love. From it, in federal stages, one rises to the regional states, to the nation state, to the European state, and finally to the world state. "Comunità" is the natural place to develop the person, who is not an isolated individual ("Society does not exist. There are individuals" – Margaret Thatcher, 31 October 1987) nor a collective in which the individual is dissolved (as in totalitarianism). In the "Comunità", a fundamental propulsive role, in Adriano's thought, is played by the factory, not only by investing its profits externally on the territory, but also by becoming fully democratic internally. At the end of a transition process, the factory will be based on the tripartition of work, culture, city.

Adriano tried to realise his ideas in his small homeland, the Canavese. It had begun to transform itself into community centres, direct emanations of "Movimento di Comunità", and into a network of small industrial and agricultural companies, spread throughout the territory, the result of local initiatives but strongly supported by the technicians of the Olivetti company. So why did this experience collapse with the death of Adriano? Because he was a small heretical island surrounded by an adverse environment and because the necessary investments from the profits ground up in those years by Olivetti were lacking.

But after an eclipse that lasted about twenty years following his death, Adriano Olivetti's

Fig.5: Palazzo Uffici in Ivrea, Olivetti Headquarters (view from the main lobby with hexagonal staircase) (photo Studio Casati).

Fig.6: Facade of Officine ICO, one of the additions by Luigi Figini and Gino Pollini (photo Gianluca Giordano).

experience and ideas have re-emerged and both their legacy and current events have been rediscovered: the reintroduction in Italy of sociology, the start of regulatory plans and decentralised planning, the development of industrial design, an original approach to the long-standing southern question, and much more. The introduction of democracy in the factory and the right of workers to a widespread social welfare. The topicality concerns above all the demand for community and participation, never affirmed as much as today, and that he had tried to make real and operative.

5. Ivrea nowadays. Between MaAM and UNESCO heritage

The topic of urban requalification of the city was limited, in Italy and until before the 1990s, only to the historical tissue. After those years, the redevelopment extended to the existing city, beyond the historic centre, in the areas that had grown from the nineteenth century onwards. This meant for Ivrea to consider the urban tissue that defines the modern city of Olivetti, recognising its historical value linked to modern Italian architecture. Ivrea's master plan therefore includes the rationalist districts of the city: Via Jervis, Canton Vesco and Bellavista. In this sense, the open air museum *Museo a cielo aperto dell'Architettura Moderna di Ivrea* (MaAM) represented an important step in enhancing the legacy left by Adriano Olivetti in the field of architecture and urban planning, that is, the design workshop where the architects of the Modern Movement

experimented with new architectural and urban languages. The museum also represents a stimulus for collective awareness for the preservation of the heritage and its conservation.

Historical values are recognised in Ivrea through systematic historical surveys and through updated building and urban planning regulations. In Ivrea, a unique case in the world, there are three modern unitary districts of considerable size, built over a period of about forty years.

The Master Plan identifies building and urban planning interventions aimed at transforming the modern heritage with a view to protecting and enhancing the physical and morphological features. Moreover, the cataloguing has made it possible to identify about two hundred buildings of Olivetti's modern heritage in the territory, of which at least forty are "monuments" of the modern history of architecture. The process of reuse and adaptation offers Ivrea an innovative contribution to urban and architectural culture by continuing to bring these districts and buildings to life, protecting them but not embalming them.

Developed on a path of almost two kilometres, starting from Via Jervis, the MaAM leads to the discovery of the main achievements related to Olivetti, already the destination of several hundred visits every year. The architectural project of the MaAM consists in the construction of seven thematic information stations, located along the public pedestrian paths in such a succession as to constitute a possible route of visit and characterised by a strong integration with the urban tissue. The themes illustrated by the stations concern the events inherent in Olivetti's involvement in architecture, urban planning, industrial design and advertising graphics and the cultural contexts within which these events take place. The thematic stations are: Olivetti and Ivrea; the community and its social policies; production architecture; industrial design; territorial planning; product and image; housing. Together with the stations, an Information and Reception Centre has been set up, hosted inside the *Centro Servizi Sociali* building where visitors are led to discover the themes and contents developed during the visit.

The MaAM is a different institution from a traditional architectural museum or even from a simple system of organising itineraries to visit architectures. The museum must be considered as an institution that, among other aims, has to provide visitors with the architectural heritage of the city. In this way the heritage becomes more and more an asset shared by a public of visitors, specialised and not, as well as by the inhabitants themselves.

An important instrument of this regeneration process has been the regulations drawn up with the coordination of the *Commissione Igienico Edilizia della Città di Ivrea*. This regulation provided for different levels of intervention: from a more restrictive one aimed at the most valuable buildings and coinciding with a philological restoration, to one inspired by awareness and common sense aimed at buildings of lower value.

The museum was an opportunity to experiment with models of reorganisation of public spaces in harmony with the characteristics of the pre-existing urban environment, which could be proposed as examples that could be reproduced in other cities.

The recognition of the value of this heritage allowed in 2008, on the initiative of the *Comune di Ivrea* and the *Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, the candidacy of *Ivrea Città Industriale del XX secolo* as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. From that moment on, the process began, which achieved a first important result in May 2012 with the inscription of the proposal in the UNESCO Tentative List. After this date the *Comune di Ivrea*, the *Ministero dei Beni e delle attività culturali e turistiche*, together with the *Fondazione Adriano Olivetti*, the *Fondazione Guelpa* and with the active participation of the *Regione Piemonte* and the *Provincia di Torino* (then "Città Metropolitana"), worked on the preparation of the Nomination File, starting the complex work of designing the Management Plan, which identifies the fundamental objectives, as required by UNESCO, of protection, conservation and transmission to future generations of the candidate area, with the involvement of all those active in the territory.

The key words of the candidacy of "Ivrea città Industriale del XX Secolo" as a World Heritage Site are: pride, history and belonging. Words that bring the possibility to preserve and transmit an exceptional memory together with the hope of a renewal for future generations.

It was not possible to deal only with the open-air museum of the city of Ivrea and the UNESCO candidacy without telling the incredible thought that for more than fifty years Olivetti has applied to the city together with his community. It would be necessary to retrace, even in short steps, the path traced and nestled in the architecture to completely understand the great value that Ivrea holds. The industrial heritage here is not related to the single building but permeates the entire urban tissue. Through its three seasons: the birth of the industrial heritage together with the construction of a community, the disposal of the industrial heritage and the recognition of the material and immaterial heritage, and finally the last stage - the most recent - the candidacy as World Heritage Site, Ivrea gives us back an example, perhaps unique in the world, of an environmental architectural laboratory where beauty springs inevitably and unequivocally from the necessity/functionality of these buildings designed for man and his dedicated social progress.

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Adrianovo mesto: funkcionalizem izven okvirov

Povzetek

Ivrea je arhetipski primer industrijskega mesta, ki je edinstveno tako v svojih namenih kot arhitekturnih rezultatih. Članek poskuša videti zgodovino Ivree skozi tri obdobja: od Olivettijeve izkušnje industrijske krize in s tem povezanega konca proizvodnega sistema, do nedavne prijave na Unescov seznam svetovne dediščine in posledično do uvrstitve mesta na seznam. Ivrea, kot izjemen gradbeni laboratorij, ki je vključeval najbolj inovativne arhitekte tistega časa, je v svojem prvem obdobju doživel povečan občutek skupnosti – Adriano je z izrazom »Comunità« poimenoval tudi svojo revijo – in močnih povezav z okolico. Prav ta občutek pripadnosti je tisti, ki predstavlja vrednost edinstvenosti te izkušnje. Odstranitev industrijske dediščine zaradi neizogibne krize proizvodnega sistema je morala upoštevati oprijemljivo dediščino tega obdobja, metode za njeno ohranitev in izboljšanje, ohranjanje preostalih kvalitetnih elementov in zelo inovativno vsebino »nepreizkušenega eksperimentiranja«. V tem kontekstu je zasnovana izkušnja muzeja *Museo all'aperto delle architetture moderne olivettiane* (MaAM, 2001). Muzej je z oblikovanjem smernic za upravljanje transformacij nedvomno spodbudil kolektivno zavedanje o ohranitvi in varovanju te dediščine. Ta pobuda je bila v nadgrajeni obliki vključena v mestni načrt, ki sprejema vrednote muzeja, lansira njegov nadaljnji razvoj in mu podeljuje izobraževalni namen v primerih postopkov obnove industrijske dediščine. Leta 2008 so vložili kandidaturo, na podlagi katere je leta 2018 Unesco mesto razglasil za industrijsko mesto 20. stoletja, zahvaljujoč njegovim posebnostim, ki temeljijo na družbenem in proizvodnem sistemu, navdahnjenem s skupnostjo, ki združuje človeške, okoljske in arhitekturne vrednote.

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