

Chieri, a textile town: the process of urban regeneration of the former “Felice Tabasso” cotton mill.

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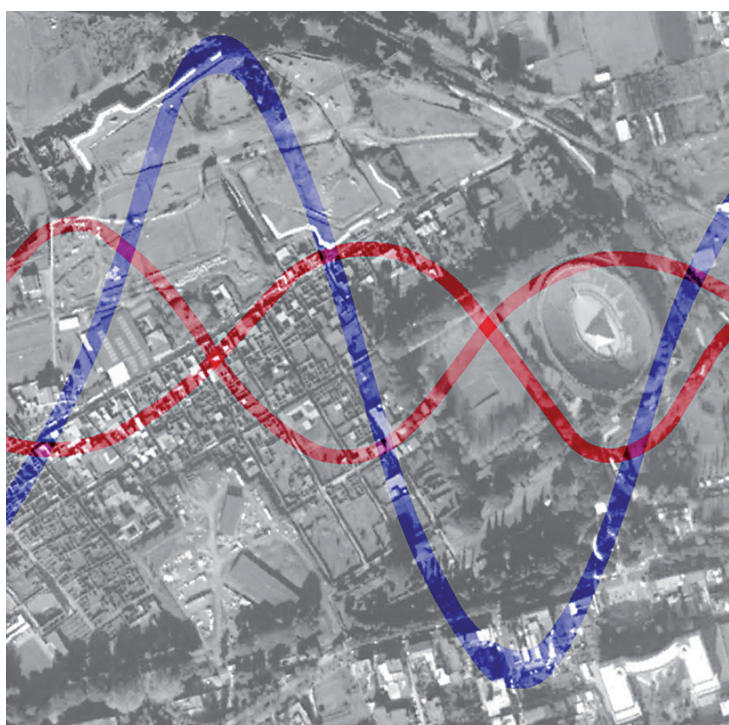
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ARCHITECTURE HERITAGE and DESIGN

Carmine Gambardella

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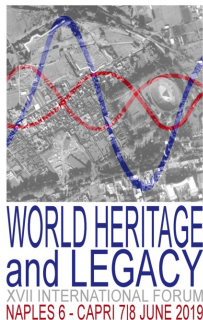
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## Chieri, a textile town: the process of urban regeneration of the former “Felice Tabasso” cotton mill.

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### Abstract

Tabasso cotton mill was built at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century inside the 18<sup>th</sup> century city walls, bringing about a deep transformation in a large urban area close to the historic city center. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this mill was one of the most productive factories in the Chieri area, thus initiating economic and social changes and promoting the physical and functional transformation of this town. In the 1980s' the globalization and the relocation of production affected the textile industry in general and brought this plant to bankruptcy and closure. The building and the surrounding area were bought by the municipality. Projects of urban redevelopment, although only partially implemented, have been defining new urban dynamics. Recently, the recognition of the building as a “common good” started off a process involving the community in the definition of future development scenarios for this area with the main goal of preserving the historical memory of this place.

**Keywords:** valorisation, industrial archeology, regeneration

The Tabasso area represents an interesting opportunity to investigate the theme of the valorization of cultural heritage. The set of buildings that made up the cotton mill are in part abandoned and used as storage pending the definition of reuse projects and partly converted for public use. The headquarters of the Post Office, the municipal library, the historical archive and a cafeteria are located in the office building and in the control and sampling buildings. New urban polarity and aggregation point, the Tabasso area still appears however with most of the buildings which, awaiting a congruent use, are used as municipal deposits and present significant degradation due mainly to the absence of maintenance and the presence of vandalism.

The start of a shared development process of the complex is confronted in the first place with the need to define new destinations of use congruent with both the needs and the identifying characteristics of the city, both with the constraints that individual artefacts express in their specificity. The vastness of the area awaiting reconversion and the industrial peculiarities of the buildings are compared in the planning phase with the scarcity of economic resources both for the realization of the intervention, and for its subsequent maintenance. In any case, it is significant that scenarios involving the demolition and reconstruction of the buildings have led to the desire for conservation and re-functionalization even where there is no constraint to protect them. The change, in part certainly due to the failure of the real estate policies underlying the demolition proposals, also expresses the progressive recognition of the memorial value of the places by the citizens. The industrial past that involved most of the citizens in textile production re-emerged after years of *damnatio memoriae* linked to the numerous failures and the consequent closures of the factories [1].

The process of recognition and attribution of the value of the Tabasso occurred in recent years and led to the request by the citizens to trigger a process of recovery of the buildings and their re-use in public form. The current social situation sees the need for re-appropriation of spaces and preservation of the historical memory of a population that has its roots in textiles emerge. In this sense, the formulation of project proposals on the area in its complexity highlights the cogent need to identify congruent and sustainable uses for abandoned portions but also to identify and communicate the tangible and

intangible assets that make up the complex system of the heritage linked to the culture of textiles in Chieri [2].

The collaboration with the Municipality of Chieri, owner of the property and the Polytechnic of Turin that brought the students of the *Atelier Compatibility and sustainability of architectural restoration*, which is part of the Master's Degree course in Architecture for the sustainability design, to know the specificities of the asset and to outline possible scenarios of conservation and enhancement [3].

The specificities of the case study offered the opportunity to develop the project proposals outlining two possible distinct but strongly connected scenarios. One of conservation and re-functionalization and another of valorisation of identity characters through conscious and inclusive communication operations. In both cases the networking of the identity and value elements of the asset benefited from the role of cultural aggregation that is currently recognized in the former Tabasso.

The results were heterogeneous starting from a consolidated analysis the relief, the restoration and the representation merge together in order to best achieve the common goal. Since the concept of cultural heritage passed from the univocal identification of the single architecture, to its contextualization, up to the "monumentalization of the context", the knowledge base of the cultural heritage has been enormously expanded, highlighting not only the peculiarities of the single units architectural but above all the web of qualitative and quantitative relationships that arise with the reference environment, factors able to select and guide the operational choices regarding the actions of protection and enhancement of the heritage itself.

In this perspective, on the one hand, the value of the survey becomes fundamental, capable of assuming the role of "organizer" of the different phases of knowledge of a building in order to identify, analyze and interpret the significant features in the historical aspect, morphological, dimensional, figurative, technological, to facilitate actions directed at governing cultural heritage over time. On the other hand, the role of representation is gaining more and more importance, which through the current digital technologies increasingly supports the different needs of cultural heritage.

The significant operation, referring to an architectural structure of complex morphological and formal structuring, must be understood as an open cognitive process, able to define the actual consistency of the architectural organism investigated with a system of investigations that involve different disciplinary competences: the history, surveying, restoration, urban planning, technology, sociology, administrative policies.

Also in the case of the former cotton mill it was necessary to construct an open cognitive investigation, which contemplated the use of different systems of detection, cataloging, management and processing of the heterogeneous data collected, a methodology constructed through the deconstruction of the complexity investigated in specific subsectors. The large amount of information collected, deriving from specific multidisciplinary analyzes, has been critically interpreted, always having in mind the purpose of the investigation, linked to the protection and management of the Chieri textile cultural heritage.

Starting from the identification of the material and immaterial identifying characteristics of the building, the innumerable potentialities of the property and the possible links with the historical and current city were highlighted. The methodology of analysis developed has constituted a method of reading and interpretation of the architectural artefact and its context, capable of highlighting, from time to time, peculiarities, structural models and relational systems. The objective was the identification of all those functional organizations, structural laws and evolutionary events of industrial settlement, whose knowledge is particularly necessary for identifying best practices in the field of restoration and for defining the intervention criteria in the area of enhancement of existing heritage.

The next step was the overall reading of the architectural complex to identify those functional and distributive elements, both of what has been recovered today and of the abandoned part, today almost abandoned, highlighting the problems of project financing approved by the administration between 2007 and 2011, but never took off [4].

Subsequently the geometric survey, the analysis of the materials, of the technological elements and of the construction techniques, and finally the investigation on the state of conservation and degradation have allowed to collect all those elements that concur to define the knowledge of the general architectural characteristics and of detail, from which to propose an adequate conservation and enhancement project

In this phase it is decisive that the complex system of data collected, although of a different nature and often acquired through the use of different investigations and operations, are compared and interrelated by the general to the particular, with the aim of an ever greater understanding of the object investigated. It is therefore necessary that all the information selected be appropriately structured and made congruent: it was therefore a question of having the various phases of the survey speak with the same language, of finding common elements, of relating to each other, even before the results, the data that to these are underlying. But very often structuring the data means rethinking the achievable results: all this is certainly a constraint, an additional work, but it becomes effective, it becomes an extra value when using the results.



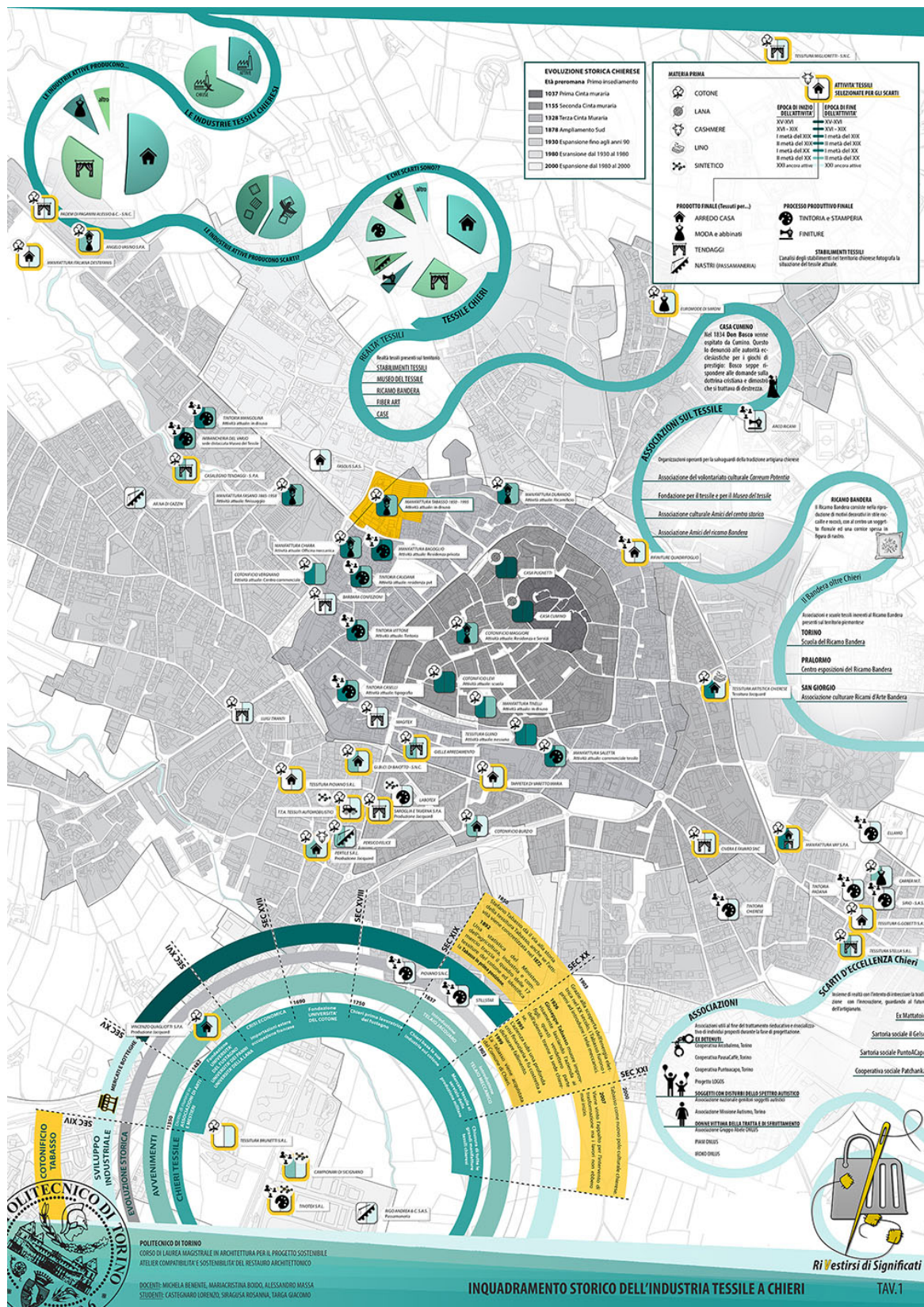


Fig. 1: Historic setting of the textile industry in Chieri, Lorenzo Castegnaro, Rosanna Siragusa, Giacomo Targa [3].

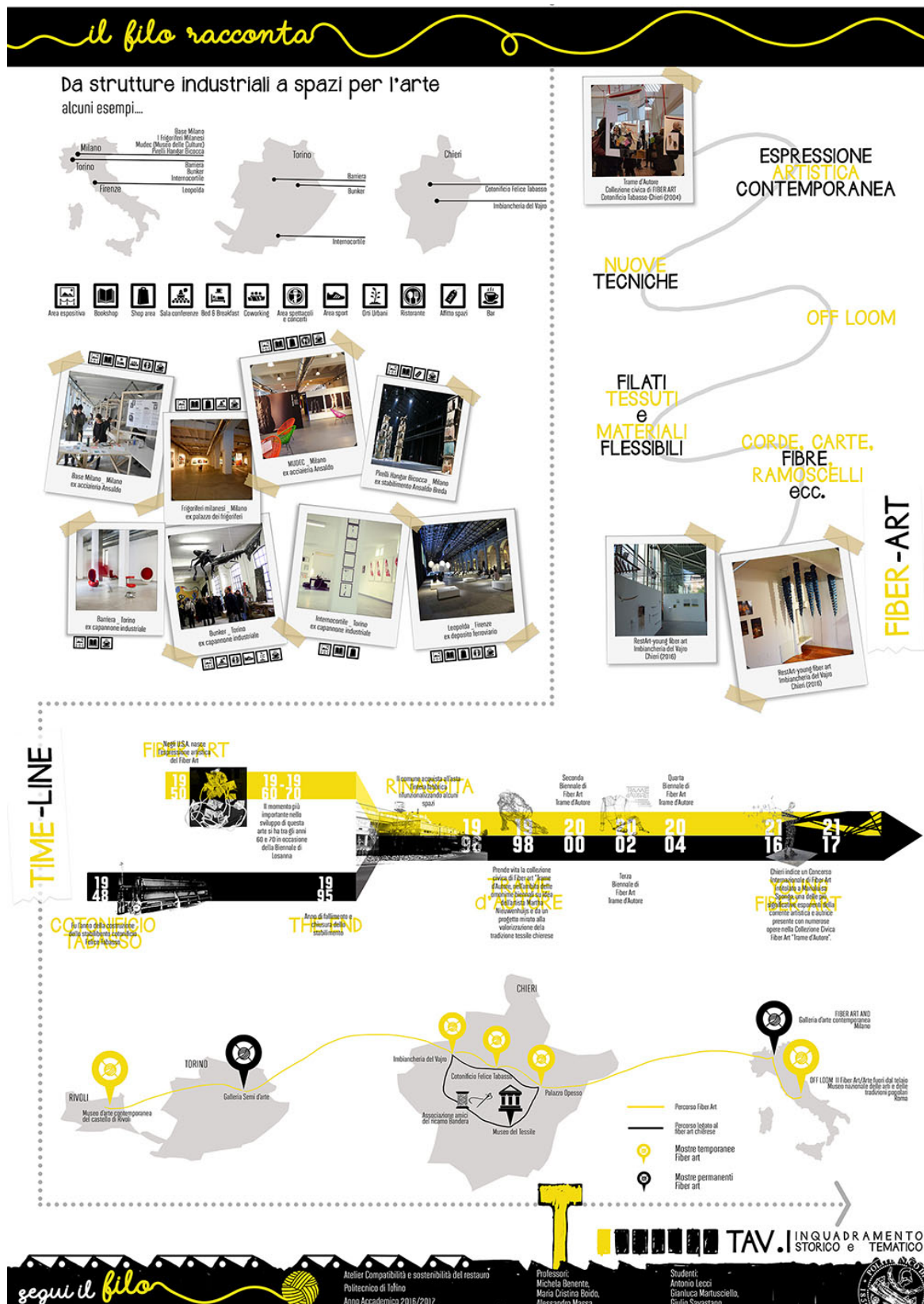


Fig. 2: Historical and thematic framework, Antonio Lecci, Gianluca Martusciello, Giulio Savastano [3].



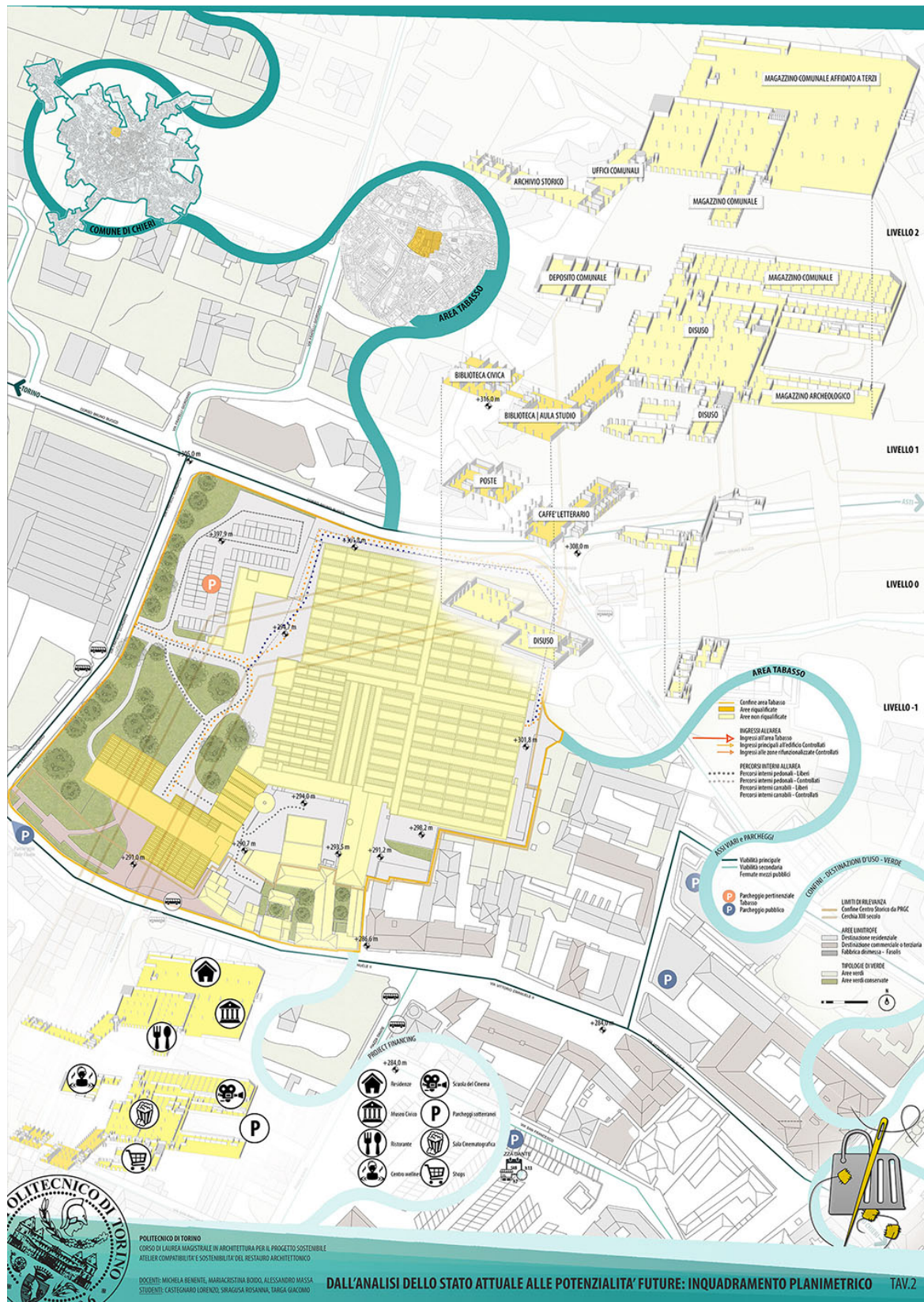


Fig. 3: From the analysis of the current state to the future potential: planimetric framework, Lorenzo Castegnaro, Rosanna Siragusa, Giacomo Targa [3].





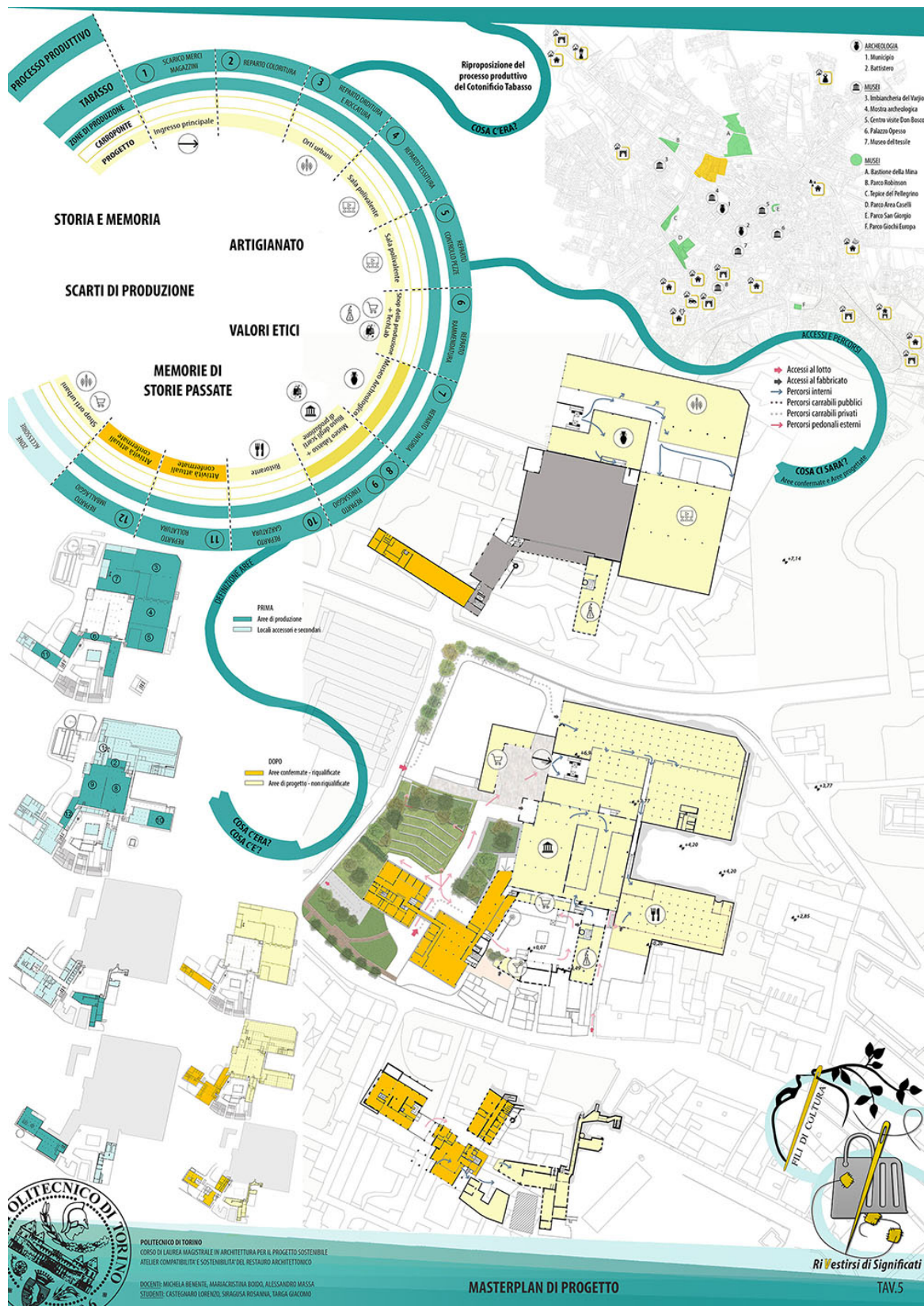


Fig. 5: Project masterplan, Lorenzo Castegnaro, Rosanna Siragusa, Giacomo Targa [3].





Fig. 6: Project, Antonio Lecci, Gianluca Martusciello, Giulio Savastano [3].

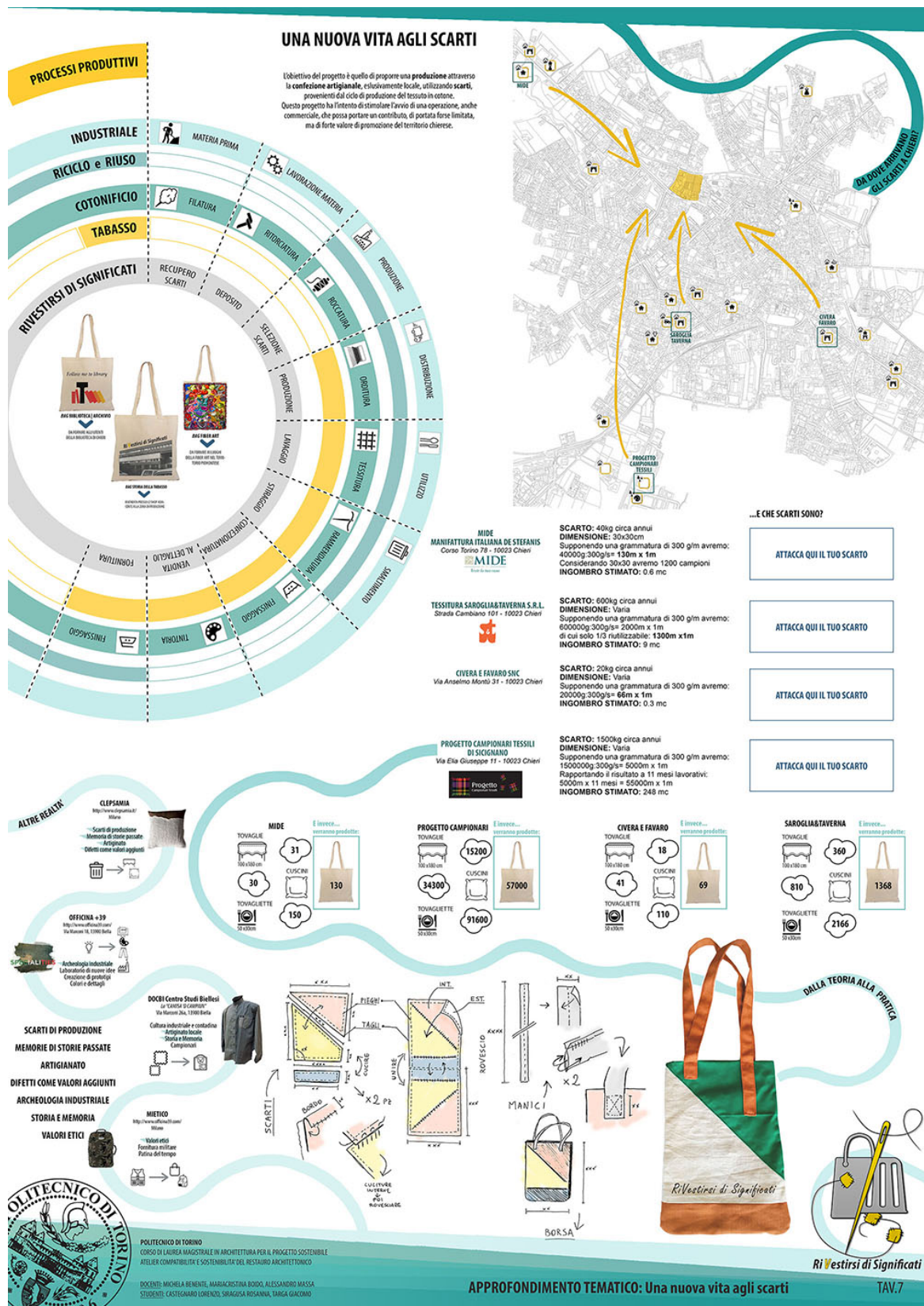


Fig. 7: In-depth study: a new life for waste, Lorenzo Castegnaro, Rosanna Siragusa, Giacomo Targa [3].



The elaboration of the masterplan and the construction of precise design hypotheses have given rise to specific suggestions, the result of the specific awareness and sensitivity of the students, but always the result of the valorisation strategies implemented. The memorial value attributed to the good is compared with the principles of sustainability and inclusion, combining together testimonies of the past and ethical values. The definition of new intended uses congruent with the peculiarities of the asset requires a comparison both physical with spaces and construction elements and conceptual with the intangible elements. The interweaving of these constraints leads to the definition of proposals that not only provide for the conservation of the artifact and its reuse but also the enhancement of the memories of which the good is testimony. Attention to the production process, for example, offered the opportunity to integrate and enhance spaces and elements that are now fragmented to the overall picture to which they belonged. The spaces and the elements they contain thus acquire a functional but also narrative and memorial role.

The narration of the connoting characters develops on different levels, from the identification of a destination of use to the organization of internal and external spaces, from the creation of multimedia tools to forms of communication and alternative sharing. The knowledge and analysis of the history of the good, of its current potentialities and the comparison with what keeps alive the historical memory of Chieri, the city of textiles, has led, for example, to a project that gives new life to production waste. The synergy with the Textile Museum and, in particular with the "Sartoria sociale", represents an opportunity to cover recovered and handcrafted materials turned into shoppers. The use of different materials makes each shopper unique, conceived and designed not only to tell a piece of the city's history but also to connote and disseminate the knowledge of the different opportunities that are found in the former Tabasso area.

The idea of the communication tool, in many cases conceived as an element of inclusion of the different users, represents an opportunity to give access to the cultural heritage involving with a democratic participation and becoming a promoter of cultural initiatives that, emphasizing the value and the potential of the cultural heritage uses it as a resource for sustainable development and quality of life [5].

## Bibliographical References

[1] The case under examination is significant with respect to the recognition of the value of industrial archeological evidence. See what was discussed in the volume NATOLI, Cristina, RAMELLO, Manuel. *Strategie di rigenerazione del patrimonio industriale. Creative factory, heritage telling, temporary use, business model*. Firenze: Edifir 2018. With regard to the subject, see also the website <https://archeologiaindustriale.net/>

[2] RONCHETTA, Chiara, TRISCIUGLIO, Marco. *Progettare per il patrimonio industriale*. Torino: Celid, 2008.

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[4] <http://www.fffesrl.com/index.php/project-financing> and <http://www.chieri.info/contents/Tabasso-bloccata-dalla-crisi.php?print=1>

[5] It refers to the provisions of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the value of cultural heritage for society, 2005, articles 12, 14. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/culture-and-heritage/faro-convention>