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Co-Run program: double Master of Science in Urban Design

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15 October 2026

Politecnico di Torino

China Room REPORT 2024

Edited by Camilla Forina and Leonardo Ramondetti

Politecnico di Torino

CHINA ROOM

REPORT 2024

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Co-Run Program: Double Master of Science in Urban Design

DOUBLE DEGREE PROGRAMME

Master of Science: Join Master of Science between Politecnico di Torino and South China University of Technology

AY: 2020-2021 - ongoing

PROFESSORS

Mauro Berta (coordinator), Michele Bonino, Edoardo Bruno, Yi Huang (SCUT), Maria Paola Repellino, Yimin Sun (SCUT), Ping Su (SCUT), Ruifeng Tian (SCUT), Haohao Xu (SCUT), Cheng Wei (SCUT) - architecture

Marta Bottero, Federico Dell'Anna - economic evaluation

Francesco Novelli, Emanuele Morezzi - architectural heritage

Emiliano Matta - structural design

Cover | Royal Tobacco Factory of Torino. Masterplan for the renovation (credit: Nie Ziyi, Liu Ziyi, Wu Junsha, Wan Jinqiao, Pang Xinyi, Wang Qin).

The overall topic of the Design Studio, which brings every year 30 students to work on either Chinese or Italian case studies, is urban regeneration in suburban areas; the site chosen for the last edition of the course is the expected renovation of the former and now disused "Reale Manifattura Tabacchi" (Royal Tobacco Factory) of Torino, which will be converted in the next years into a new cultural district, mainly dedicated to host the archives of the two universities of the city as well as those of the local tribunal. Despite its peripheral location, the site holds a great interest, both from the architectural and urban points of view. The whole compound of the factory is the result of several historical phases of transformation: starting from the construction of the first buildings, on the grounds of the former "Viboccone" palace, in 1758; passing through the further extensions of the XIX century; until the last transformations of the XXth century, including the reconstruction of the northern and north-eastern wings, designed by the renowned structural engineer Pierluigi Nervi after the damages of the WWII bombings.

Besides the importance of the complex historical layering of the site, and besides the architectural relevance of its single parts, the Manifattura Tabacchi has been a crucial debate topic for the local planning for a long time. First because it is a wide derelict area, facing one of the most important environmental resources of the city, the Po

river park, but mainly because it assumes a major importance in the regeneration process of the whole surrounding neighbourhood and in the reorganization of the network of the cultural facilities at the urban scale (especially after the decision of the municipality to locate close to the factory one of the future stations of the new subway line, which is supposed to be completed in the next years). The Manifattura Tabacchi, thus, can be seen as a “grey” area - both in a metaphorical sense (the unhealthy smoke of the millions of cigarettes and cigars that came out of its gates for about two centuries), and in the proper meaning (following Jane Jacobs’ famous definition of the “grey zones” of the city) – which is supposed to be converted in a new “green core” of the district, aimed at reactivating the regeneration process of the surroundings, and particularly the requalification of the nearby former industrial village, which is now part of the city fabric and which is still recognizable in its morphology.

The students’ works started with a wide investigation on the factory and on the surrounding zone - made through historical maps, planning documents, data and figures etc. – and with a deep analysis of the spaces required by the main program. The Urban Design Studio, lead by Prof. Mauro Berta, is one of the courses included in the SCUT/ PoliTO Master’s Degree program in Urban Design, a Master’s Double Degree course founded and managed by the two universities. Politecnico di Torino, through its international research platform “China Room”, and South China University of Technology share a long standing cooperation that led, in more than a decade, of collaboration the research groups of both universities to share a number of research and didactic activities. The other course given by Italian professors within the M.Sc. program are: Infrastructural Design Studio, Urban Economy, Urban Restoration. A the end of their academic path the students prepare their final dissertation under the joint guide of the professors of both universities.

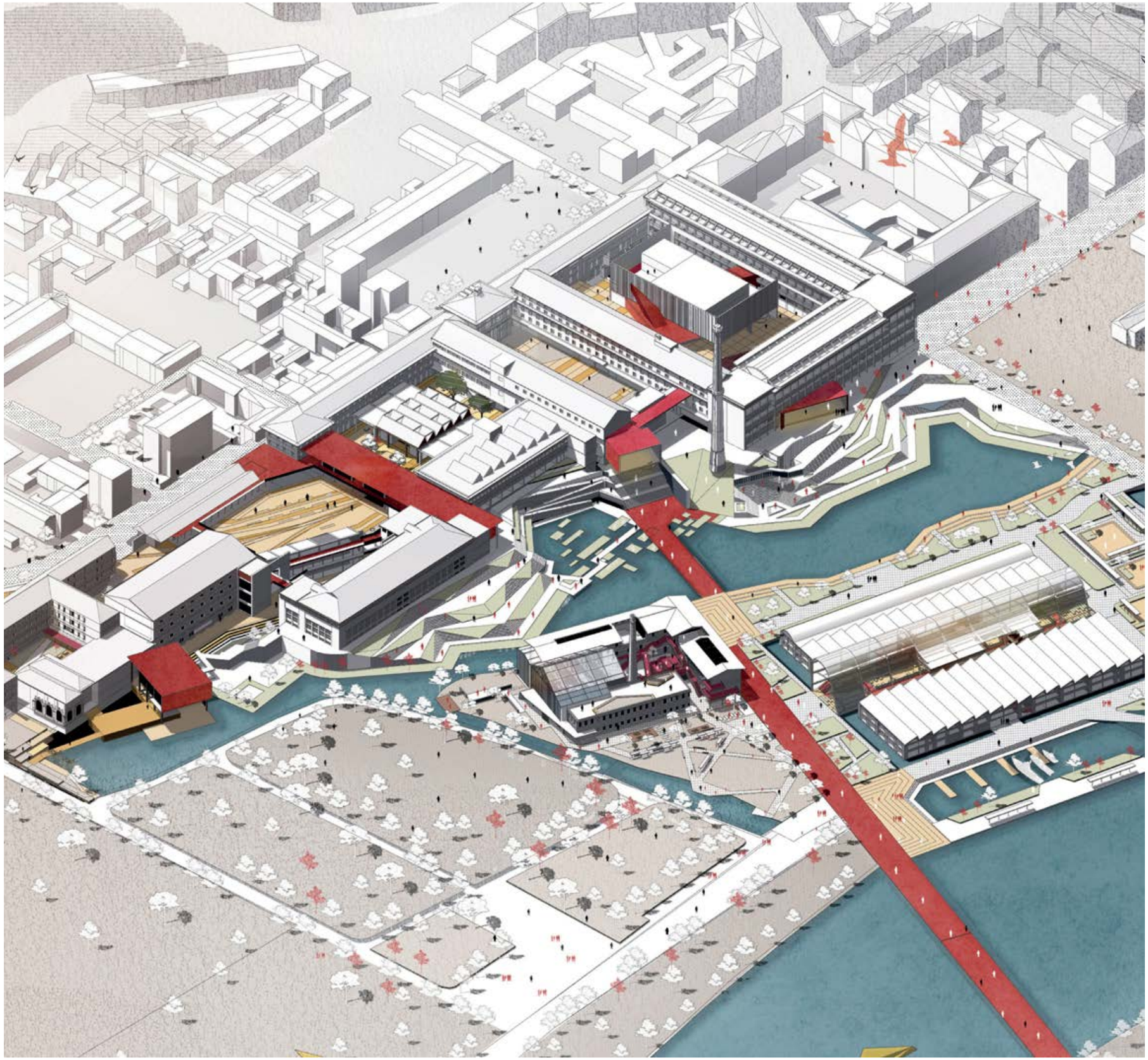

Fig. 1 | Royal Tobacco Factory of Torino. Masterplan for the renovation (credit: Liang Jinhu, Zeng Zezhong, Wang Lifan, Huang Luohuai, Xie Gehang).

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People

Francesca GOVERNA - Director

Francesca Governa, PhD, Urban Geographer and Professor of Economic and Political Geography at the Interateneo Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning - DIST, Politecnico di Torino, is the director of the China Room. She is engaged in national and international research activities on four main topics: local development processes and policies; global infrastructure and urbanization processes; urban China and urbanisation processes in the Global South. She has authored about 200 scientific publications and she is the Principal Investigator of various research program at national and international levels. She has carried out field research in European, North African and Chinese cities.

francesca.governa@polito.it

Camilla FORINA - Coordinator of the Design Activities

Camilla Forina, B.Arch at Roma Tre University and M.Arch with honours at Politecnico di Torino, is research assistant at Politecnico di Torino, and Ph.D. candidate at Politecnico di Torino and Tsinghua University (Beijing) in the double Ph.D. programme “Transnational Architectural Models in a Globalized World”. Since 2023 she is also coordinator of the research activities of the China Room research group. Her research is part of the Polito Studio framework, aiming to explore the opportunities and potentialities of a community of practice that mediates between academia and the profession specifically investigating the effectiveness of design projects as research activities. She participated in the transformation of the Oxygen Factory within the Big Air Venue for the XXIV Olympic Winter Games, Shougang - Beijing 2022 and has been Assistant Curator for 2019 UABB Shenzhen Bi-city Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture within the exhibtiion “Eyes of the City”.

camilla.forina@polito.it

Leonardo RAMONDETTI - Coordinator of the Research Activities

Leonardo Ramondetti, architect, graduated with a Ph.D. in Urban and Regional Development from Politecnico di Torino and Università di Torino, Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning (DIST). His field of research is contemporary urban design theories and planning cultures, with particular focus on the processes of infrastructure-led urbanisation. As a postdoctoral scholar, he is currently working at the research project of national relevance (PRIN) Rescaling the Belt and Road Initiative: urbanization processes, innovation patterns and global investments in urban China (2020-2023) carried out by Politecnico di Torino and Università di Macerata, and financed by the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research. He is the author of the book *The Enriched Field. Urbanising the Central Plains of China* (Birkhäuser, 2022).

leonardo.ramondetti@polito.it

Mauro BERTA - Fellow

Mauro Berta, Architect Ph.D., Associate Professor of Architectural and Urban Design and Head of Design of the China Room of the Politecnico di Torino, Scientific Board member of Politecnico’s FULL - Future Urban Legacy Lab, member of Politecnico’s Japan Hub. He works mainly on urban regeneration and sustainable design. Scientific responsible and visiting professor of the Dual M.Sc. in Urban Design co-run by South China University of Technology of Guangzhou and Politecnico di Torino; visiting lecturer in several other Universities in China, Japan and Philippines. He was scientific coordinator of the winning team of “Solar Decathlon China 2018” and he has been awarded in several international design competitions. He authored and co-authored about 130 scientific works.

mauro.berta@polito.it

Michele BONINO - Fellow

Michele Bonino, Professor of Architecture and Urban Design, is the Head of the Department of Architecture and Design and the Director of the China Center at Politecnico di Torino. He was Visiting Professor at Tsinghua University and Visiting Scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. On behalf of the Politecnico di Torino, he was principal architect for the transformation of the Oxygen Factory within the Big Air Venue for the XXIV Olympic Winter Games - Beijing 2022, and Academic Curator of the 2019 Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture - Shenzhen (with Sun Y.). He was invited to the Venice Biennale of Architecture in 2004, 2010, 2012, 2021. His current research focuses on the innovation of design and its practices according to models of transnational exchange. Among his recent books, *The Story of a Section. Designing the Shougang Oxygen Factory* (ORO 2022, with E. Bruno, A. Armando, G. Durbiano), *China Goes Urban. The City to Come* (Skira 2020, with F. Carota, F. Governa, S. Pellecchia).

michele.bonino@polito.it

Edoardo BRUNO - Fellow

Edoardo Bruno is an architect and post-doc researcher at Politecnico di Torino. He received a MArch and a Ph.D. in the same institution, with a dissertation on the Guangzhou southern urban extension. From 2015 he has been responsible for the activities of the South China – Torino Collaboration Lab, and was among the curators of the Italian Pavilion realized during the 2018 Shenzhen Design Week. As part of the China Room research group, he was a project architect for the transformation of the Oxygen Factory within the Big Air Venue for the XXIV Olympic Winter Games, Shougang - Beijing 2022 and Executive Curator for the exhibition “Eyes of the City” for 2019 Edition of UABB Shenzhen Biennale.

edoardo.bruno@polito.it

Francesco CAROTA - Fellow

Francesco Carota, Ph.D, is Assistant Professor at the School of Architecture & Design, University of Kansas. His work focuses on the design and understanding of the intertwined relations that weave architecture and urban development process together, particularly in China and more recently in less developed countries. On these topics, he published a variety of academic articles and he coedited the volume *China Goes Urban. The City to Come* for Skira Editore. He was scientific director of the *China Goes Urban* exhibition at MAO (Turin) in 2020, co-curator of the Italian Pavilion at the 2018 Shenzhen Design Week, and co-curator of the exhibition *Design Assemblies* at the 2023 Singapore Design Week. He works as a licensed architect, and he is the cofounder and principal of the architecture and design firm Calibro Zero Srl. His work appeared in different media sources, and among the many the Italian magazine *Domus*, the Singapore based *d+a Design and Architecture*, the fashion magazine *Vogue* and the architecture platform *Archdaily*.

francesco.carota@polito.it

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TEXT CREDITS
Mauro Berta: 116-119;
Edoardo Bruno: 70-75; 164-169;
Edoardo Bruno and Giorgia Greco: 158-163;
Edoardo Bruno and Camilla Forina: 100-105; 106-113;
Valeria Federighi: 76-81; 176;
Camilla Forina: 82-89; 144-145;
Francesca La Monaca: 22-27; 148-151;
Sofia Leoni: 152-157;
Xian Lu: 90-95;
Giulia Montanaro: 96-99;
Monica Naso: 52-57;
Andrea Pollio: 28-31; 50-51;
Lidia Preti: 18-21; 138-143;
Leonardo Ramondetti: 12-17; 44-49; 58-63; 120-121; 128-135; 136-137; 173;
Maria Paola Repellino: 64-69;
Astrid Safina: 40-43; 172;
Agostino Strina: 120-125;
Alberto Valz Gris: 36-39; 174; 175.

China Room is a research center whose scholars belong to DAD - Department of Architecture and Design and DIST - Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning

china.room@polito.it | www.chinaroom.polito.it
Politecnico di Torino | Castello del Valentino
Viale Pier Andrea Mattioli, 39, 10125 Turin, Italy

Department of Architecture and Design

Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning

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The publication collects the outputs of the research activities of the China Room of the Politecnico di Torino referring to the period 2017 - 2020. Texts, images and graphics are the result of the work of professors, researchers and PhD students of the China Room or of collaborations with students, institutions and external research groups. The aim is to present and disseminate the China Room's research themes and methods to the academic world. The information provided is intended as a general guide throughout a selection of a wider material production.

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China Room

www.chinaroom.polito.it
china.room@polito.it
china.room.library@polito.it

Politecnico di Torino
Castello del Valentino
Viale Pier Andrea Mattioli 39, 10125
Turin, Italy