

POLYTECHNIC OF TORINO
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE 1
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Honors theses

The conservation of the modern: the worker's village of Villar Perosa

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With particular interest placed in pursuing the knowledge and conservation of the heritage of industrial architecture, this study treats the analysis of the lifespan (from its birth to its aging) of the worker's village which Giovanni Agnelli had built in Villar Perosa (province of Turin) in the first half of the twentieth-century.

The interest taken in it is due to the fact that with its system of industry villages it represents a coherent and integrated example of twentieth-century industrial history, which today is definitively marked by a crisis of modernity. This phenomenon has induced a series of important transformations in the management of building, exposing it to modifications which often take little notice of the values it represents.



Thus the micro-urban reality of the village has been considered as a cultural and environmental asset both with reference to paragraph 1 of the Venice Charter in 1964, and to the considerations in the Amsterdam Declaration in 1975 concerning integrated conservation; these principles have been reaffirmed in the recent Krakow Charter (2000), whereby conservation is seen as a means of awareness for a communion of history and destinies which subtends and integrates the cultural differences between European citizens, recognizing the architectural heritage as a fundamental educational value.

On the basis of these assumptions this research work consists of three parts:

- **the historical analysis**, which is mostly based on archives material (both the archives of the building companies and of the firm), which is partly gathered and reproduced; the information has been compared with the news supplied by the local weekly publications in the two historic newspapers: the “L’Eco del Chisone” and the “Giornale del Pinerolese (La Lanterna)” in the timespan of about forty years. This research made it possible to chronologically define the development of the industrial settlement, which rose beside the “Officine di Villar Perosa” (specialized in the production of ball bearings), and revealed it to be the result of synergies and a variety of contributions. Here the needs expressed by Giovanni Agnelli and his model of Corporate paternalism, achieved from 1906 onwards, meet the skills of esteemed professional figures from Turin both in the field of industrial projecting, such as Giacomo Mattè Trucco and Vittorio Bonadè Bottino, and in the area of arts and architecture, the likes of Carlo Ceppi and Giovanni Chevalley, Carlo Charbonnet, Edoardo Rubino and Giorgio Ceragioli, and furthermore the competence of important construction firms, from G.A. Porcheddu (Hennebique patentee) to F.lli Giay. The historical itinerary registers the evolution of the settlement from its origin to its reconstruction after the damage suffered during the Second World War;

- **the cataloguing** of goods, used as a preparatory tool for conservation, by means of a special chart aimed at highlighting the transformations sustained by the buildings in almost a century. The cataloguing has been carried out accordingly to the disposition established by the “Istituto Centrale per il Catalogo e la Documentazione” (Central Institute of Cataloguing and Documentation);

- **the elaboration of a proposal for a conservation safeguard**, reached after observing some specific cases (restoration operations in residential areas of great importance, being works by the masters of the modernist movement – Weissenhof in Stuttgart, Frugès in Pessac, Werbundsiedlungen in Vienna, and others; and also more generically defined operations of retrieval of existing building heritage and concerning historical centres, working-class neighbourhoods and particularly significant worker’s villages) and after analyzing the state of conservation of the artefacts.

Considering the background of current debates regarding the subject of conservation, the proposal found its resolution in a series of guidelines oriented towards “pure conservation”, aimed at regulating transformation with the intention of stopping the present self-assured approach to replacement maintenance, which pays too little attention to permanency and stratification. Such regulations would permit communities who recognize themselves in their architectural heritage to perceive the value of identity and memory in today’s world.

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