

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Honors theses

New spaces to give time a sense in the *Casa Circondariale Lorusso e Cutugno* in Turin

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Almost everyone when confronted with our idea of doing a thesis on prisons asked: "why prisons?". To everyone our choice seemed strange, even absurd.

The answer that first comes to our minds is: "Why not?"

At first it seemed odd, then we realized that most people's reaction of astonishment was "normal". The fact is that the prison system is a public service, a service for society but that society marginalizes. As important as the need for security that most people feel, is the need for a clean conscience.

The modern prison system was born in the eighteenth century because of the need to eliminate the public execution of justice in squares. As if this constituted a reduction of violence and not just a way to delete it from the public's view, continuing to practice it in other forms.

The fact that our interlocutors wondered about our topic, shows the marginalization of the prison reality within contemporary Italian society.

We approached the topic of prisons almost by chance, only later did we realize how complicated it was, how many problems characterize it, and how much humanity gravitates around it. So we started to study it: finding a lot of historical literature but, especially in Italian, little contemporary research, we realized that it is a topic scarcely studied, especially from the architectural point of view. Delving into the subject we found that the issues concerning the prison reality are many and varied. There are difficulties inherent to the prison system as a whole, often due to its own organization, and on which it is difficult to intervene as architects, while other problems relate to individual prisons's organization, both administratively and spatially. Spatial organization was what we specifically dealt with in our work on the prison *Casa Circondariale Lorusso e Cutugno* in Turin.

In dealing with such work it is necessary to delve into prison life, understanding the dynamics that mortify the existence of those who live there. It mustn't be forgotten that prisons are perceived in as many different ways as the great number of people who live there. Only by identifying with them and entering into the dynamics and problems of the prison facility, we can try to contribute to improve it, and especially, to improve the lives of everyone who lives in it.



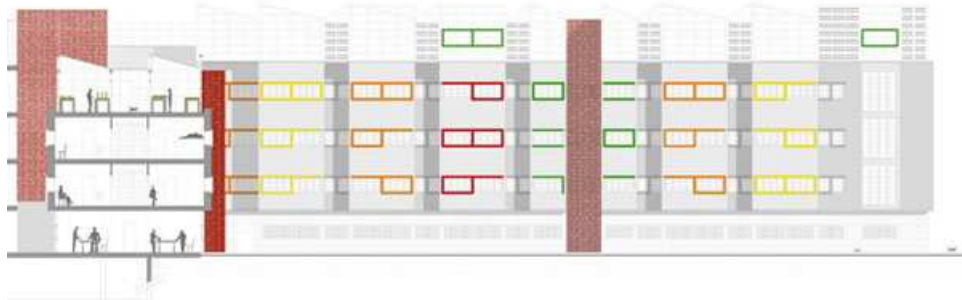
View from a cell



Prison cell

We chose to pursue a hands-on approach to the subject, visiting several times the *Lorusso e Cutugno*, noting the spaces, activities and life within it. Fundamental were the verbal sources, the stories of those who experience the prison reality every day and understand it better than us.

After a comprehensive study of the spaces within the institution, we chose to intervene on the cell blocks trying to improve living conditions for both prisoners and workers. The project involves the use of currently unused spaces and the refunctionalization of others, with the aim of creating workshops and laboratories, places of *creation* that can provide the prisoners with a sense of time, thus achieving greater consistency with the intended purpose of the prison sentence.



Project: west front of a cell block

It is important to note one more thing: to act concretely it is unthinkable to believe to be able to solve all problems at once. Understanding the difference between outside and inside life is necessary to grasp the meaning of the values of a completely different reality, to identify its priorities and intervene in ways that don't necessarily have to be shocking, but that can, instead, be practical and useful and that can, even if more gradually, make a difference.

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