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OFFICINE MONCENISIO IN CONDOVE: Opportunity of social housing for Susa valley

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Officine Moncenisio represented a typical case of industrialization in Turin valleys. In the specific case of Susa valley, it was the realization of the Turin-Modane railway completed in 1871, to promote the arrival of industrial entrepreneurs in the area, attracted by the possibility of exchanging goods between the capital of the new kingdom and the transalpine neighbours.

The plant, founded in 1906 by Sir Fortunato Bauchiero, modified the landscape and history of Condove forever, representing the modernity start in the mountain village. The leadership of the company promoted important urban works for the community over the decades: streets, avenues, squares and places of entertainment that will give Condove - more than other local realities - the image of a planned and tidy town. In particular, the employer made several working-class (and not) neighborhoods for the factory workers. For their design talented professionals of the period, as the engineer Gaetano Ciocca were engaged. Today, walking along the main streets of the town (Viale Bauchiero, via Roma, via Torino) you can find evidence of these interventions of subsidized housing, a witness not only of an architectural evolution but of the history of Italian social housing, too : from "Case Operaie" realized with the funds got from the Luzzati law to Mussolini's village built thanks to TU plans and finally "Case Fanfani" realized with INA-CASA funds.

The golden age of Officine Moncenisio was between the two World Wars; manufactory added commodity war (war planes, missiles and bombs) to the production of railway equipment (cars, tracks, uniforms and so on).

From the 60s onwards, for the plant a slow decline started until the crisis experienced by the present owner. Today there are fewer than one hundred workers, the production has reduced and most of the fifty-six thousand square meters of departments are empty.

In a probable conjecture of an imminent abandonment of the factory, an opportunity to recycle the vast area of one hundred twenty-five thousand square meters is thought.

Market analysis, to quantify the value of the property assuming an income four times higher than that amount, recognizes the amount of a new building necessary to grant the convertibility of the area.



Top view of factory and project

The fifty thousand square meters new residence will be realized by demolishing the departments of more recent construction, while in the historical department of the beginning of the century and in the best preserved ones, the trade and services for the community will be set.

A great many new inhabitants (about one thousand four hundred according to the PRGC rules) can be justified from the point of view of urban planning declaring an interest within the municipal circle. The area is making itself responsible for the social house emergency pointed out by Province Observatory among the lower Susa valley providing a house for more than a third of the families who need social housing. Pursuing low-cost and resources reuse, the residences will be made of recycled and insulated containers granting a minimum energy requirement. A lot of materials used for insulation and interior trim will be produced by local virtuous companies. The same containers, to be used, will have to be processed by skilled labour in the use of steel, which will be found among the workers of the plant (used today in the manufacturing of the bars and steel rods).

The “zero kilometers“ residence will be integrated into the urban skyline, using court types and low-rise buildings; the containers stacked and put aside will be partially hidden by other elements of the composition (sloping roofs, picturesque scene, gables, arches), that remind the original forms of the plant and other roundabout artifacts.



Social-housing front view

The project ultimately takes the form of a car-free neighborhood with social and low-cost flats having a catchment area extended to the entire valley, not a “ghetto“, but a place where citizenship and new residents can live and enjoy the new services such as the municipal swimming pool and the one hectare and a half public park.



Recovery of old factory units in public green

Officine Moncenisio return to be a place of change and innovation in the history of the area, going back to the tradition of social housing, promoted by past leaderships of the plant for nearly a century.

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