

POLYTECHNIC OF TORINO  
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE  
Degree in Architecture  
Honors theses

---

**Politics and Social and Urban Dynamics of the Northeast Suburbs of Turin, Italy**

by Emanuela Dellavalle

Tutor: Angelo Detragiache

In the analysis of the urban and social aspects that have characterized the northeast suburbs of Turin from the post-World War II era to the present, I thoroughly examined two particular zones which distinguish it: "Falchera" and "Pietra alta".

Falchera is a quarter of "double immigration" which arose from two different time periods. Today, it is still essentially divided into two sections, be it socially or territorially: Old Falchera and New Falchera. The former, which dates back to 1954, was designed by a group of urban developers, directed by Giovanni Astengo. The scheme was based upon the "garden-city" model proposed by Howard and previously experimented with in some European and North American cities. Old Falchera was allotted to a decidedly heterogenous population of immigrants that flowed during that period into Turin, attracted by the modern industrial world and by the availability of work. The insufficiency of public utilities and basic social services, the incapability of social integration and overall isolation from the rest of the city were the major problems that this first nucleus of immigrants encountered at the outset and which even now, has been unable to overcome.

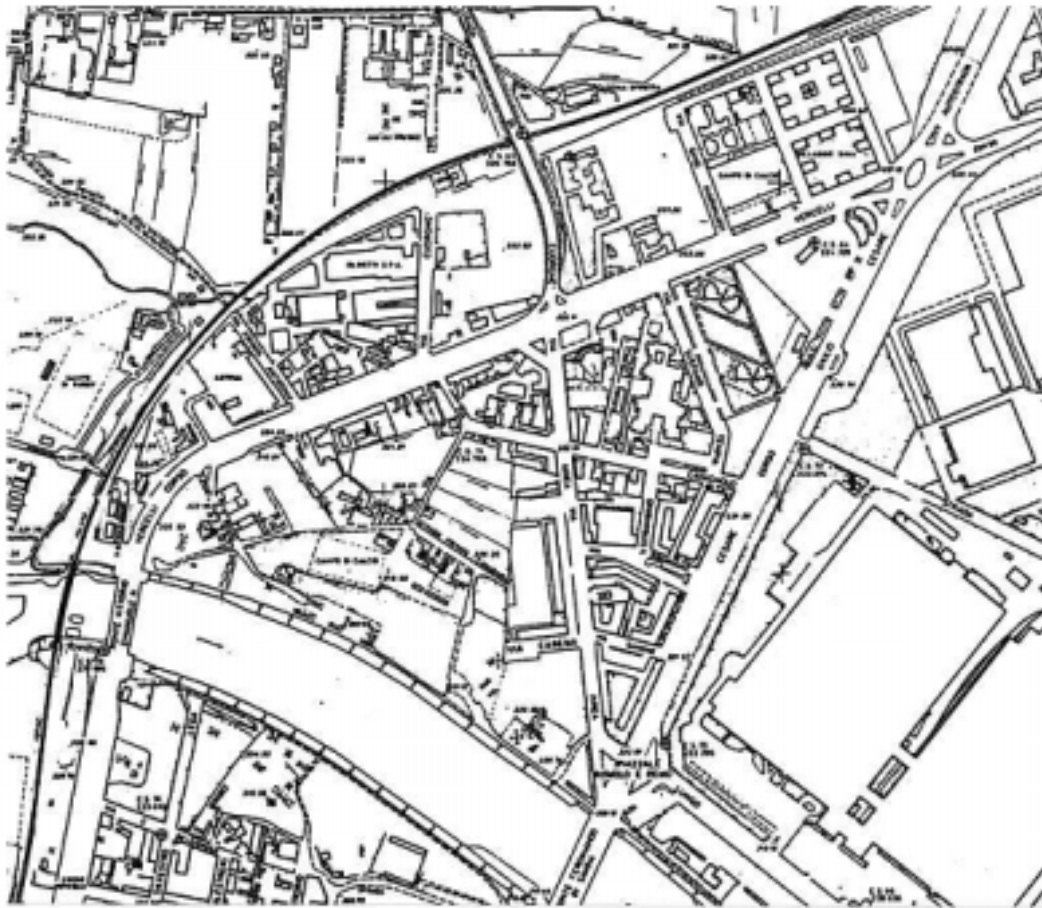


Residential Unit "La Falchera" . One notes in the foreground the center of 1954 with its characteristic red bricks, and in the background that of 1970, marked by the tall buildings (built using a tower-concept) that surround it. Photo taken from "Panorama", 28 April, 1991, p. 34

New Falchera, on the other hand, was built at the beginning of the 1970's to the north of the former and poorly imitated the urban model. With construction not yet complete, this district was a seat of disorganization and of massive uncontrolled and illegal settling by a majority population of southern Italians. Pouring unrestrictedly into the area, they were searching for an infrastructure and better existence that was as yet lacking there during its primary stages of development. After an initial period of "club-like" grouping (political, social, etc.) or "associationism" and of struggle for personal rights, this heavily proletariat class passed through a stage of indifference and non-involvement with respect to the surrounding community. This disinterest was brought about by the typical problems found today (the chief among these being unemployment and socio-economic segregation from and by the city itself) which induce individuals to isolate themselves from the rest of society.

Survivors of this ordeal, the two zones still struggle to find the right equilibrium for a peaceful cohabitation in society.

The second entity that I analyzed was "Pietra alta", a neighborhood situated immediately to the south of Falchera and bordered by the Stura River, Corso Vercelli and Corso Giulio Cesare.



Planimetry of Pietra alta

Pietra alta, an historic settlement populated by authentic, "old-fashioned" Piedmontians, was the focal point of a great influx of immigrants during the 1980's along with the construction of some extremely poor quality apartment buildings and two skyscrapers (of twenty stories) by Di Vittorio. Likewise, the insufficiency of basic utilities and services and the isolation from the rest of the urban nucleus spurred the hardship experienced by this population. But, above all it was the unexpected arrival of a certain quantity of multi-problem families that upset the life of the community and transformed it into a zone of problematic social discrepancies, where often the most "difficult" ended up becoming the most powerful.

One clearly notes therefore, three distinct worlds from different time periods which have encountered similar problems, reacted differently and interferred amongst themselves. At the root of all is the origin in time of the settlements which has distinguished them from each other: the Fifties for Old Falchera, years of reconstruction following World War II, of rapid industrialization, and of abundant employment opportunity; the Seventies for New Falchera, years of the birth of small enterprises, of approval of public programs for the disadvantaged, and of the last great migratory influxes which were prolonged from 1961 until 1975, causing significant population augmentation in the neo-urban centers of the city; the Eighties for Pietra alta, years in which there was considerable mobility within the city, where a discreet number of people belonging to a lower social class, relocated from the city into the suburbs...

These origins characterize the type of population found in the suburbs of Turin, its manner of relating to the city/neighborhood, and its manner in confronting the problems of living isolated, marginalized, segregated...

To discover this world and delve personally into the heart of the difficulties confronting them, beyond having executed diverse statistical analyses, I spent some time "on location". There I participated in several initiatives proposed by volunteer organizations and spoke at length with several privileged witnesses (the most significant of these are cited in the appendix) and sought to stimulate their memories of the past, in comparison to the present and in view of the future.

The themes I have principally touched upon have been: the difficult integration between the various ethnic groups, the relative mobility of the population in time, the development of relations with the city, the principal problems people confront and their evolution with the passage of time, for how much has been accomplished thusfar, and what we hope shall be done in the future.

In conclusion, at the completion of the analysis, I became aware of how this part of the suburbs of Turin, with the history of its formation and the characteristics of its population, may be a particularly representative example of the various phases that cities have undergone with respect to the great immigrations, and of how, too often, the errors of the past might not have been taken as examples for the future, but may have even constituted the foundation upon which subsequent errors were committed. The concept of the "suburbs" has in fact, through time, transformed itself from a place of residence for the new working class to an arena in which are found the most difficult problems of the city.

Fortunately though, change is occurring, above all in the absence of further immigration (a first result of the "de-urbanization" phenomenon which we are witnessing) and for the recent stagnation of population growth together with its progressive aging and general maturation. This has veritably brought about an increasing awareness of the various forms of hardship people have had to confront through time (unemployment, juvenile delinquency/deviance, drug addiction...) as well as consequent interventions of associations, cultural centers, and sporting and religious clubs/communities. Today, there are some active programs, whether at the social level (prevention of juvenile distress/delinquency) or at the urban level (the Plan for Urban Restoration) which are directed at the betterment of the area. Continuing therefore, to revive the spirit of initiative and solidarity, including the youth ever more, and seeking to more attentively analyze the phenomena that build up the city, hope shall increase for the future, in order to present to the nascent generations a more peaceful and serene reality, truly "a better place to live".

*Note: As an integral facet of this work I filmed a VHS video, 20 minutes duration, titled: "Pietra alta - quando una borgata diventa periferia" ("Pietra alta - When a Housing Community Becomes a Suburb").*