***Heritage's Meaning in New Towns of Modern Era: Defining "Urban Heritage"
Starting from the Case Study of Italian's New Towns***

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Abstract
With the reclamation of the Pontine Marshes - known all over the world as the main unresolved Italian heritage - and the construction of the New Towns during the 30's, the Fascist Party achieves its most significant territorial project. This project becomes the first Regime's propagandistic instrument concluding, in less than ten years, the reclamation and the construction of New Towns in Agro Pontino. As a Fascist's propagandistic tools, the New Towns change drastically their meaning - and consequently their form- through time. Starting from this consideration three main questions arise: How the changing of culture can modify the urban space? How, this specific urban space, becomes Urban Heritage? What is the role of memory to defining the Urban Heritage in Modernist New Towns? Starting from the case study of Italian's New Towns this paper tries to highlight the meaning of Urban Heritage understood as a set of architectural artefacts, which constitute the city, and which over time reinvent themselves and adapt themselves to the society's new behaviors and models of life. With this paper I intend also to define the term "Urban Heritage" starting from the concept of resilience of modern buildings which, despite their symbolic meaning, are able to build – or to destroy – human relationship inside the city even today. Finally, the Urban Heritage will be used as a tool to read again these cities with a new perspective able to give a new meaning to the "historical memory" of the buildings and the cities of modern era.

Keywords: New Towns, Architecture, Propaganda, Urban Heritage, Utopia, Aprilia, Modern City

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New Towns in Agro Pontino: A Short Introduction

The new settlements system of Agro Pontino was newly designed in a geographic area contiguous to the capital city and directly connected to the integral reclamation project elaborated by the agricultural economist Arrigo Serpieri starting from 1923. The work is part of a wider policy of "displacement from the city" and "ruralization", reiterated by Mussolini in the famous "Ascension speech", pronounced at the Chamber of Deputies on May 26, 1927. In this background is central the role of the colonization process initiated by fascism to evacuate cities. All those settlers were laid inside the Agro Pontino to replace the relationship between man and land, and to set in motion all the social activities able to give life to a new Fascist society. The necessity to give to the settler socializing spaces is the reason of the birth of the New Towns in Agro Pontino. All these new settlements, - that are called Agro-Towns (in the case of the middle cities) and Rural Village (also called Borghi) -, were built following a polycentric system of "Core"- or Town Square – bounded by public facilities. The architecture and the urban composition of these buildings are specifically studied to become the tool to educate the masses[1] thanks to their ability to set in motion *formative processes of identity*. [2]

From the literature about the case study it is therefore clear the importance of the role of the architecture and the urban composition within the creation of new identity process inside the Fascist new towns. Thus, architecture becomes in Italy (at the same time as the definition of modern architecture was being defined) a totalitarian experiment. It doesn't matter therefore if the architecture is modern or traditional. The only important thing is that architecture has to be something Italian and something in which Italians can see their ideals mirrored. According to a former Mussolini's idea only the rationalist architecture was able to reflect the Fascist ideals, and that is why

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[1] Nicoloso, P. (2008-2011) Mussolini architetto. Propaganda fascista e paesaggio urbano nell'Italia Fascista. Torino: Einaudi Storia.
"Architecture becomes an instrument to educate the masses. Even if Mussolini at first used architecture to receive the support of the masses, he later made architecture a tool for his dictatorship. So, architecture was used to change the character, habits and mentality of Italians. Also, the thesis sustained here is that architecture becomes an indispensable element of the totalitarian turn of the regime. Mussolini uses architecture to educate the masses according to a fascist point of view using his powers of manipulation. Italian fascism stands out for implementing a mass policy based on myth; it was necessary for example, to unite the Roman imperial past with the present revolutionary: to weld the people and cement it in the figure of the Chief (Mussolini); to spread the model of the "new man", warrior and builder at the same time. The architecture is the tool used to build the immense theatrical scene for the new Italian Fascist Man. As we know, architecture has always played a fundamental role in the formative process of identity. The architectural monument can transmit meanings capable of reaching a whole community, which in it then comes to be recognized. [...] This determines the transition from an architecture instrument of consent to an instrument of education. [...] The preference is expressed for an architecture that is modern, but classic, well expressed by the E42 buildings. [...] An architecture that educates the masses must have clear forms, understandable by everyone. It is therefore necessary to "invent" a style that, without renouncing the characters of modernity, speaks to the memory of the nation, which is a synthesis of that classical tradition that had its original splendour in ancient Rome."
[2] Ivi:
"Architecture has always played a fundamental role in the formative process of identity. The architectural monument has the ability to transmit meanings capable of reaching a whole community, which in it then comes to be recognized. [...] This determines the transition from an architecture instrument of consent to an instrument of education. An architecture that educates the masses must have clear forms, understandable by everyone. It is therefore necessary to "invent" a style that, without renouncing the characters of modernity, speaks to the memory of the nation, which is a synthesis of that classical tradition that had its original splendour in ancient Rome. [Architecture] must be able to unite all Italians, now in the present, but also in a historical perception. In which the reference to classicism, a common feature of Italian art, will have to highlight its eternal character and universalistic vocation. Again, as in the past, through architecture we want to affirm the primacy of Italian civilization in the world. "

Pagano himself, in one of his articles[3] would designate Mussolini as the savior of modern Italian architecture. However, after just one year, Mussolini changed his mind and defined the traditionalist architecture (made of arches, static and trumpet symbolizing a return to Romanity) to be able to reflect the Fascist ideals. Therefore, architecture isn't important in itself, but is important as an instrument capable to transmit the sense of fascist power in the present and in the future.[4] We can easily say that Mussolini had the desired effect. As a matter of fact, today, inside fascist architecture we can clearly see the power of that time, but it is also possible to read the strong political contradictions that characterize the Fascist party. What is important here to remember is that, within the architectural history, the definition of Italian Modern Architecture is consistent with the definition of the Fascist Architecture. To this end, a series of articles were published in the most important architecture magazines, where the architects try to give a precise definition not of the Fascist architecture rather than the Italian modern architecture.
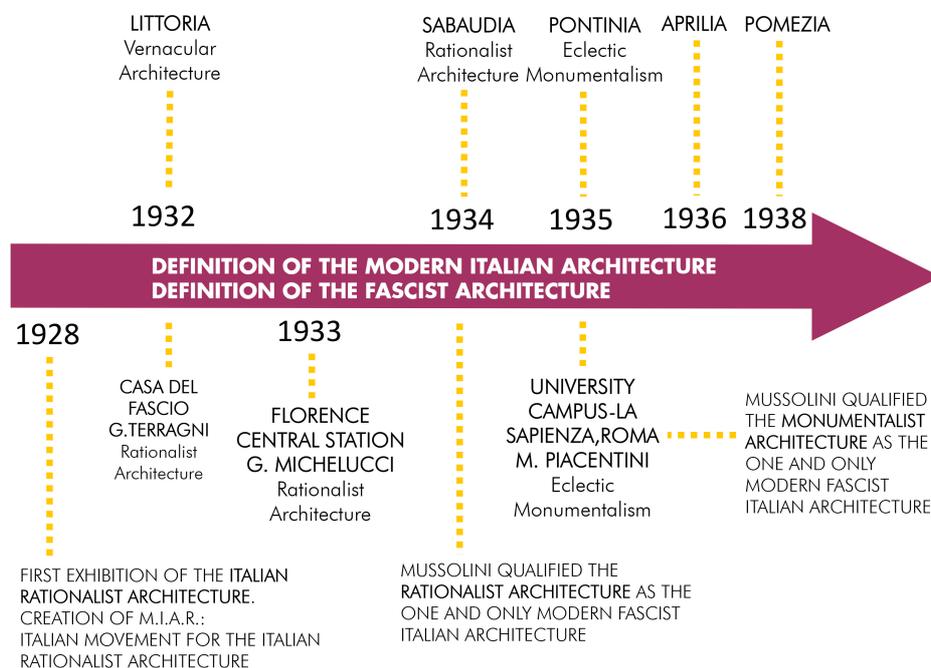
Figure 1: Timeline of main events and contradiction

So we are witnessing to the rise of an architecture based mostly on a political meanings rather than an innovative and modernist vision; on a communicative rather than functional vision; an architecture where the hierarchy of spaces and the treatment of facades has nothing to do with the intended use (it is not a coincidence that they used to put over the main facade writing as "school" or "power plant" that clarify the intended use [5]); an architecture where the vernacular is reinterpreted in a monumental key to become itself the mausoleum of the state; an architecture capable of

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[3] G. Pagano (1934) "Mussolini salva l'architettura italiana", in *Casabella*, 78

[4] Cfr. P. M. Bardi (1931) "Rapporto sull'architettura per Mussolini" in *Critica Fascista*, 131- 132
"Building for Fascism means "to stay". A fortunate effort awaits the generation of today, in all the pictures of national activity: but it is certainly to the builders that the most delicate task is entrusted: forming with the consistency of stone, cement, steel and the noblest and most enduring elements of nature and ingenuity, with a breath of Italian art, the gigantic footprint of Mussolini, so that posterity will be amazed"

[5] Ciammaruconi, C. (2009) Tra estetica del potere ed esigenze identitarie. Iconografie "scritture d'apparato" e "scritture esposte" fasciste nell'Agro Pontino. *Studi Storici,* 1 , 15-56

representing the State through the definition of its own style: The Eclectic Monumentalism.[6]

Italian New Towns as an Historical Evidence

What is clear looking the architecture and the urban composition of Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia, is how the Agro-Towns were the physical laboratories where the research of the canons of modern Italian architecture was carried out. To better understand the process of definition of a national modern style we cannot forget that the strong political influence of the Regime did not allow the development of a sufficiently clear and defined architectural current. It also must be always remembered that even those architects who proposed a more "contemporary" style aimed for a definition of the fascist architecture, rather than a definition of an Italian rational modern architecture. Despite the heated debate and the contrasting achievements of the first years of the 20th century in Italy - before the architectural realizations assumed a common figuration under the guidance of Piacentini - it is possible to clearly read the evolution of modern Italian architecture looking at the artifacts and at the urban composition of the Italian New Towns in Agro Pontino.

Vernacular elements reworked and proposed at first following an eclectic monumental key are all collected in the great book written by Littoria, Sabaudia and Pontinia. The architecture that characterize these buildings, despite being the symbol of a political ideology, assume their value not as representative of it, but as physical documents that bear witness to the historical evolution of Italian modern architecture. The architecture of Frezzotti, the architect who followed the works, is therefore the testimony (Fig 2 and 3) of how modern architecture has evolved within a heated debate between modernity and tradition, and it is the result of the strong political influence applied by Fascism.

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[6] Mariani, R. (1976) *Fascismo e città nuove*, Milano: Feltrinelli
"Their result [of the traditionalist architects] came much closer to what Mussolini meant by architecture, by city, than moderns proposed; his biological reading of his history, his adherence to the criterion of the cycles of civilizations, ended when alienated from the earth, imposed on him considerations and parameters much more sensitive to the idea of the great style intended as an element of growth like a plant, which not for a more or less articulated, but intellectual and cumbersome system.
The meaning of an architecture that was not in fact neither classical nor really traditional, nor national, but only Monumental Eclectism or better Eclectic Monumentalism, gave Mussolini the possibility of creating spaces in which to gather that "rural civilization" that was partially building. "

Figure 2: Oriolo Frezzotti 1932, Littoria. Porch in Square of the Square (Piazza del Quadrato) (Photo of the author)

Figure 3: Oriolo Frezzotti 1935, Littoria. Porch in People's Square (Photo of the author)

Thus, this text wants to highlight the importance of a new retelling of the fascist new towns able to determine the importance that they have today and that they assume over time. They would therefore require a new critical re-reading not influenced by current or past political conditions. Only through an objective reading of its physical elements and their variations, will be possible to identify, within these artefacts, the role of architecture in the years of Fascism and consequently, identify them as Modern Urban Heritage. Also, these architectural products assume even more value today because they show, in their current conformation, the danger of the human approach to the "modern" heritage, under the influence of the political perception of the story.

Uncomfortable Memories: Potential and Danger of The Heritage Definition

To give an answer to the three questions arisen in the abstract, is essential to know the definition of the word "Heritage". As we know, the word Heritage has a lot of

meanings nowadays. The concept of Heritage can be understood on one hand as physical reminders – or tangible heritage - in the case of concrete evidence (i.e. a building); in the other hand as intangible heritage. In this case the value of an entity (i.e. the identity process set in motion in a specific place) arise from its ability to define and forward – even in the future- cultural values belonged to a past society.

But what happen when people do not want to preserve this kind of memory? The first big mistake - and the most danger - is the overlap of the two Heritage definition described above. In particular, for the case study of Italian new towns, the problem starts when the value of the intangible heritage is strictly related to specific identities and behaviours belonging to a specific society. In this case, the preservation of memory translates firstly into preservation of the Fascist values as intangible heritage- first mistake – and secondly into the tangible heritage, making the architecture and the urban composition the physical expression of the intangible heritage – second mistake.

This overlapping happened in a specific area inside the Agro Pontino. This is the case of the city of Aprilia, built in 1936 by Petrucci, Tufaroli, Paolini and Silenzi. In 1944 the city, called "The Factory" was completely destroyed after the Battle of Anzio. At the end of the WWII the standing buildings were only the Casa del Fascio, the Church- without the bell tower- and the Town Hall with a huge scar left by the tank tower, symbol of the union between eclectic monumentalism and modern functionalism. In 1946 started the reconstruction work following the original drawing. The aqueduct and the train station were rebuilt in the same place and the buildings inside the downtown acquire the original form. At the end of the '50s technicians start to talk about the reconstruction of the two main towers- the bell tower and the civic tower that should have followed the original design but with some technical transformation related to the new technologies. The reconstruction project of the two towers will not be carried out because too expensive, but at the end of the 60s the "Perimetro Petrucci" and its volume was almost completely replaced with the exception of the two verticals elements. The drama starts in the 1972, when the Town Hall and the Casa del Fascio, both considered as minor architecture, were demolished in the name of a new modern expansion full of new values, changing drastically – and irreparably- the urban image of the downtown. As Giovanni Papi says[7] in that case the *damnatio memoriae* took over:

" *The buildings were again demolished to eliminate the indirect "posthumous" testimonies of a detested past. Unfortunately, the second reconstruction also violated the planimetric layout, which, as we know, of an urban organism constitutes the most basic (and fundamental) level of protection of historical memory.*"

The very interesting thing is that today, after the right detachment by the history, inhabitants loudly demanded to replace the original "decoro" of the city, restoring the original project by Piccinato, Tufaroli, Paolini and Silenzi. But it is well known that history repeats itself. As a matter of fact, until few years ago, in the other Italian new towns, something similar happened (and sometimes still happening). Most of the buildings, hollowed out, empty of the previous moral value, were abandoned and left

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[7] Papi, G. (2006). Ricostruzioni e trasformazioni del centro storico. In Carli, C.F., Papi, G. (Eds.), *Aprilia, città della terra. Arte, architettura, Urbanistica*. (pp. 100-107) Roma: Gangemi Editore

to themselves waiting the moment when they would be to dangerous for the citizen and in need to be demolished. A change of direction was taken some years ago, when a new community arrived in the Agro Pontino: the Sikh Community[8]. People, migrants, from India start to use the urban space in the same way as the settler during the 30s: using architecture to create a new sense of community. The Fascist public building, ceased to be "Fascist" and start to be only "Public" proving their abilities – so their resilience- even today, to create a sense of community and new behaviours despite their intrinsic political value.

Uncomfortable Memories: How to Overcome The *Damnatio Memoriae*

Reading literature about the case study of Aprilia, It is clear how can be dangerous the overlapping, described above, between the two heritage meanings. Today, after the Aprilia's experience we know the results of the cancellation of historical memory. To overcome the *damnatio memoriae* it is therefore necessary to re-establish the definition of memory and the definition of realism (understood as the comprehension of a specific reality). These two definitions help us to perceive the concept of urban heritage in all its complexity. Nowadays the main point about the "definition" of the Urban Heritage is to find a general book of rules able to survive to the continuous cultural change that characterize our dynamic era. As a matter of fact, today our political, sociological, religious and even aesthetic values change at any moment. And most of the new values arise from the contradiction of the previous ones. This contradiction, if brought to the extreme, such as the example of Aprilia, risks the cancellation or demolition of previous memories. This means, in our dynamic society, the risk of cancelling too much or even the risk of not saving anything for the future.

Thus, the definition of a certain reality (and its contextualization as a historical memory) and the definition of the concept of memory becomes fundamental in cases, such as the one of the Agro Pontino, where the political and social aspect of an epoch finds its direct physical materialization in architecture and urban design. It is therefore necessary to investigate the relationship between architecture and realism: visualization of reality passes from a perceptive process that includes our actions, and our personal cultural baggage. I believe that this is not a one-way process, as a matter of fact, it cannot only allow the reality to be perceived through our actions, but also allows our actions to give concrete form to a specific reality. The product of man then becomes the physical representation of the reality that man is experiencing at that precise moment. And one of the products of man par excellence, according to Pagano[9], is architecture. To support that thesis, I would also be referring to the definition of Ernesto Nathan Rogers where architecture means setting an era inside space. Definition that starts from the Proust's postulate where the literary work is only a sort of optical instrument that the writer (or the man in general) offers to the reader to allow him to discover what, without a book, he wouldn't have seen in himself.

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[8] Today the case of the Sikh is strictly connected to the reletionship beetween immigration and integration inside other communities. To better understand see the Documusical "The Harvest" product by SMK videofactory to denounce the current working conditions of the Sikh community in Agro Pontino: https://www.theharvest.it/

[9] Pagano, G. (1940). Centre for the Arts in Milan. Presentation. *"But who wants to deny architecture to be the most formidable social expression: an absolute document of the greatness and misery of peoples?"*

In the chaos of the infinite definitions of reality that have come to us, is with these thought from Rogers and Pagano that I would limit the concept of realism in architecture. That is possible to summarize as follow: the reality (that is personal) is a dynamic entity in continuous evolution and never equal to itself, assimilable by man through a process of perceptive action. Moreover, it can be represented by man through the creation of a perceptible object, concrete and observable by several subjects simultaneously.

However, it would be spontaneous to define architecture as an art, a museum piece. But as many other architects have already explained - Rogers himself explains this concept with mastery - architecture plays a fundamental role as a man-made product to create man's space. A space in which humans put into practice all those social dynamics which represent a specific reality. Since architecture is the space in which man lives, we can configure it as the most complete representation of a determined and specific reality.

After a short definition of the role of reality within the architecture, becomes essential to understand the role of memory. Once again, the strong relationship between the work and the user is emphasized, and the concept of experience becomes fundamental. As already wrote above, the architectural work becomes an object capable of representing a specific reality in space and time and therefore it is confronted with the world not only in a well-defined physical space, but also in its evolution and transformation over time. This means that the perception of the single architectural artifact is not reduced to a single historical moment. A a matter of fact, the entire definition will arise only taking into account even the perception – so the experience- that comes from the past. It is indeed clear that every man observes the world - and therefore architecture too - through the experiences previously made, so his reading of "reality" will undoubtedly be filtered by the experiences previously lived out of his own past.

At this point it is possible to approach the essay "Matter and memories" of Bergson[10], where the sense of memory becomes fundamental. He imagines the relationship between past and present as an inverted cone where the base represents the memory and the vertex the present. The summit is also the point of contact of reality. According to this scheme, therefore, memory and perception of reality cannot be distinguished because they are the same thing, one is formed on the other. The theory of the inverted cone of Bergson is well suited to the vision of Rogers who intends the architecture produced in the present as an element able to come into contact with the plane of reality and which, at the same time, is the human product and therefore the product of a set of experiences lived and belonging to the past. It is therefore essential for architecture the past, and therefore the memory. Furthermore, it is possible to introduce the theories of Heisenberg and Paci which intend the reality as a continuous becoming, a form never defined, a principle where mutation is essential. Everything changes and is generated in relation to what has already been, so in relation to common experiences or, in detail, to one's own experiences. The reality is therefore something that cannot be objectifiable because it is filtered by a single man eyes, with his own (pre)judice, it will never be knowable in absolute terms, but can still be

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[10] Bergson, H. (1896-2004), *Matter and memory. Essay on the relation of body and spirit*. Mineola, New York: Dover publications, INC.

represented in its dynamism and incompleteness. And as claimed by Rogers, it is the architect the one who is the best representative of reality because he/her can create, almost always, the synthesis between the social, moral, technical and physical world that characterize, according to his experiences and perceptions, the reality of that precise moment.

At least, leafing through any book about history of architecture it is easy to understand that architecture doesn't always represent only a specific type of reality, but often becomes the spokesman of a utopia, of an ideal that unites men. Ideal that they pursue in the hope of abandoning their reality to reach a better one. So, the architecture becomes, in particular for this case study, the material expression of a Utopia.

Conclusions

In conclusion it is possible to say that all the Fascist new towns were built to give life to a conception of a common reality, and therefore to make men and women recognize within a specific social group. So, the new towns represent a sort of materialization of a utopian reality. Summing up, they do not represent the concrete reality perceived by men in that precise historical moment but represent the utopian reality to which, those same men aspired: the idea of a city, which is not a city but a rural centre able to accommodate the public activities of the worker, materialized in the hope of giving life to a new reality, a reality that is therefore utopian. We can therefore say that paradoxically, through the newly founded fascist cities, we are witnessing to the real presence of utopia. The utopia which then becomes concrete, which leaves the world of possibilities and penetrates the world of perceptions, thus becomes concrete even if it is not completely realized.

As we know, from the first years after the foundation, it became immediately clear how difficult it was, if not impossible, to pursue certain ideological goals. To demonstrate this, or the concrete materialization of utopia through the city, is the perception that these cities have taken over time. As a product of Fascist politics, they represented, especially in the years immediately following the war, a memory difficult to face and preserve. A physical weight on territory that did not deserve to be preserved only for that utopian ideal that they represented. Therefore, even in the passing of time, these cities were read as the physical reality of a utopia and not as the product of the men who lived in a certain reality. The results of this type of perception are devastating today. Just think once again to Aprilia, "razed to the ground" with the sole objective of erasing the weight of the memory they represented. Only nowadays, after the succession of years necessary to adopt the necessary detachment, we realize that we have erased a fundamental piece of history and therefore the reality that represents us and constitute us.

Defining the Italian new towns of modern era as Urban Heritage help us to understand how is important to accept the political meaning of an artifact only as a document of a specific era. Trying to delete the physical expression of a Utopia will always mean the destruction of a piece of our history good or bad that it is. And humans are made to collect memories to define themselves.

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