

Industrial Heritage in Action

Beyond Museification and Regeneration

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Abstract This paper proposes a reflection on the contemporary phenomenon of industrial heritage re-uses. It will do so by coupling a review of the extant debate on industrial heritage with a comparative appreciation of several micro-cases of industrial heritage re-use located in Italy. This will allow for a reconstruction of the main discourses and practices in and around industrial heritage sites, and it will be conducive to a reflection on which specific notions of 'culture' are mobilized in these discourses and concrete experiences. In particular, the paper will show the link between industrial heritage preservation discourses and museification practices and between strategic discourses and regeneration practices. On top of this, it will illustrate a case of site-specific artistic practice that activates a dialogue with industrial heritage, beyond museification or local regeneration intents. The paper will then discuss the meaning of culture in these discourses and practices, the implications of the dominant discourses and practices, together with the need to consider the manifold ways in which culture can relate to industrial heritage.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 The Rise of Industrial Heritage. – 3 Industrial Sites as Heritage: Preservation Discourses and Museification Practices. – 4 Industrial Heritage as Resources: Strategic Discourses and Regeneration Practices. – 5 An Alternative Approach: Cultural Intervention in Industrial Heritage. – 6 Conclusion.

Keywords Industrial Heritage. Cultural Re-uses. Preservation. Regeneration. Discourse. Practices.

1 Introduction

Starting from an acknowledgement of the growing and tighter relationship between 'industrial heritage' and 'culture' in our contemporary society, in this paper we intend to conduct a critical reflection on the nature of this claimed relationship. We will do so by unpacking the discourses of industrial heritage re-uses and reconstructing the main extant practices beneath

The chapter is the outcome of a joined work of the authors. However, some sections can be attributed to one of the authors for their main contribution - as follows: section 1 can be equally attributed to Maria Lusiani and Fabrizio Panozzo; sections 2, 3, and 4 can be attributed to Maria Lusiani; section 5 can be equally attributed to Maria Lusiani and Fabrizio Panozzo; section 6 can be attributed to Fabrizio Panozzo.

them, while inductively investigating which specific notions of ‘culture’ are mobilized in the different discourses and concrete experiences in and around industrial heritage sites.

In other words, the paper revolves around the relation between industrial heritage and culture, without embracing any pre-established definition of these constructs. Rather, it is their meaning that is object of research and discussion, as it emerges from a review of extant discourses and practices of industrial heritage re-uses.

In the last decades, there has been a surge of attention for industrial heritage, among policy makers, urban planners and researchers. In fact, we are witnessing, on the one hand, a growing availability of built spaces, mainly generated by de-industrialization processes, outsourcing of production in developing economies and obsolescence of some public infrastructures (e.g. old factories, old railways, old ports, military buildings, etc.). On the other hand, a growing demand for spaces of aggregation for new forms of co-working, production, distribution, innovation and cultural consumption by associations, entrepreneurs, and civil society at large (Bacchella et al. 2015). Taken together, these two phenomena explain policy makers’ and urban planners’ turn of attention for the re-use of former industrial sites for new social and cultural purposes. Indeed, the matter of industrial heritage and its destination has become prominent in the public debate: for example, 2015 has been declared the “European year of industrial and technical heritage” – an E-FAITH¹ initiative, upon a Council of Europe endorsement), as a way to address attention and resources towards the study and enhancement of the industrial heritage in Europe.

This industrial heritage discourse has been producing concrete consequences, such as the massive public spending by European institutions and local governments for the restoration and re-destination of former industrial sites. Yet, these regenerated sites are then often left unused, or filled with cultural activities with dubious effects in terms of regenerated local economy (Edwards, Llurdés 1996), or even of sustainability of those activities themselves in the long run (Bacchella et al. 2015).

Overall, a lot of debate has now accrued and many experiences have accumulated too in and around industrial heritage sites. It is probably time to understand what is going on. In particular, beyond simply reconstructing the state of the art, in this paper we will critically explore the extant discourses around industrial heritage and the related practices of re-use, particularly questioning the role and meaning of culture in these experiences.

¹ European Federation of Associations of Industrial and Technical Heritage is a platform promoting contacts and co-operation between volunteers and non-profit volunteer associations in Europe. It is the place where these can meet, exchange experiences, learn from each other and support each other’s activities and campaigns (<http://www.e-faith.org/home/?q=content/what-e-faith>).

From a methodological point of view, we adopt a qualitative, inductive research design, generally considered the most suitable approach for exploring novel phenomena and building knowledge from rich and complex data (Langley 1999; Gioia et al. 2013). More precisely, we combine a review of secondary sources and extant debate, with a comparative appreciation of multiple ‘micro-cases’, and a more traditional in-depth case study approach (Yin 2013).

First, we reconstructed the debate around the notion of industrial heritage and explored who started talking about industrial heritage and when. We thus identified two intertwining discourses: a) a *preservation discourse*, which aimed at establishing and legitimizing former industrial sites as part of our cultural heritage deserving preservation and care; b) a *strategic discourse*, which shifted the focus on the potential value derived from the re-use of former industrial sites for cultural destinations.

Second, we accessed an archive of micro-cases collected and filed by an independent Italian cultural association devoted to fostering knowledge about industrial heritage in Italy and beyond.² The archive consists of about 40 files on industrial heritage sites in Italy and 20 files on industrial heritage sites in Europe. Each file briefly narrates the case by presenting basic technical information about the building, a data sheet about its former use and history, a description of its current state and destination, and information about the ownership and the management of the site. Although certainly not exhaustive, this case archive provides an illustrative mapping of the main practices of industrial heritage re-use. We coded each case by noting:

- the location;
- the type of former industrial use (e.g. factory, energetic central, storage, etc.) and the period in which it was active;
- the present use (e.g. museum, library, archive, park, multifunction cultural centre, etc.) and since when it was re-opened for the new destination;
- the actors involved (e.g. family owners, foundations, public agencies, policy-makers, entrepreneurs, universities, urban planners, etc.) and their roles (e.g. owners, managers, occupants, sponsors, etc.);
- the type of cultural content (e.g. the building itself, machineries, production traditions, archival material, cultural events, museum collections, etc.).

From this coding, two dominant clusters of practices emerged, reflecting the two abovementioned dominant discourses: a) *museification* - linked to the preservation discourse; b) *culture-led regeneration* - associable to

² <http://www.archeologiainindustriale.net>.

the strategic discourse. The first section of the paper will review these two main sets of discourses and practices.

We argue that these clusters of discourses and practices of industrial heritage reuse enact different notions of culture, based on different disciplinary approaches and sociopolitical discourses. First, also chronologically, is the preservation discourse that locates 'culture' in the historical value of the artefact and drives toward its preservation as a monument, often coupled with museum destination. Second comes a more developmental and strategic discourse that imagines 'culture' as the generic driver of regenerations, often linked to urban planning and real estate developments aimed at luring the 'creative class' into industrial heritage. The first section of the paper will therefore review the two main ways of interpreting 'culture' in and around industrial heritage.

The paper then further expands this reflection by addressing and illustrating a third, emergent, notion of culture that moves beyond museification and regeneration. One based on the activation of projects of contemporary art that are designed, curated and exhibited in and around industrial heritage without necessarily conceiving it as a museum or aiming at its regeneration. In this third case the notion of culture corresponds to 'contemporary artistic practice' that is site-specific and activates a kind of dialogue with industrial heritage. This practice will be illustrated through an empirical reconstruction of the birth and the becoming of an experience of 'contemporary artistic practice' in and around industrial heritage sites.

Finally, we will conclude discussing the meaning of culture in these discourses and practices, the implications of the dominant discourses and practices, together with the need to consider the manifold ways in which culture can relate to industrial heritage.

2 The Rise of Industrial Heritage

Until a few decades ago, industrial heritage was a term that did not even exist. Physical spaces of industrial production existed, but no particular attention was devoted to them beside their (present or past) functional dimension as plants or other infrastructure for productive activity. In more recent times - together with the so-called post-modern turn of attention for the symbolic dimension of production and of human activity at large - the concept of industrial heritage started to gain momentum and a whole discourse generated around it, around what it is, around the fact that it is worth being preserved or destined to new culture-related uses.

The general context then is the one of the move from the industrial to the post-industrial society, starting to take place in the '60s in the UK, and in the '80s in Italy. As the functional value of industrial sites started declining with social and technical innovations leading to new produc-

tion processes or a change in demand, the cultural-historic values of these sites, instead, did not suffer the same decline and even increased (Dewulf, Baarveld, Smith 2013). In other words, the growing abandonment of industrial areas due to the outsourcing of production in developing economies, the obsolescence of some public infrastructures and the more general changes of the new economy opened up the issue that these sites are, first, testimony of some material and immaterial culture (e.g. heritage of the industrial revolutions) and, in turn, of what to do with them (Celano, Chirico 2011).

3 Industrial Sites as Heritage: *Preservation Discourses and Museification Practices*

At first the emphasis was on raising people's awareness on the value of industrial sites as a form of heritage in itself (Hudson 1963; Alfrey et al. 1992). The first efforts in the debate were about reattributing value to industrial 'voids' as the only alternative to abandonment and oblivion (Celano 2011). In Italy, a formal recognition of industrial heritage as cultural heritage arrived relatively late and by decree (d.lgs. 62/2008), where industrial heritage found a legal definition as "a complex of physical remnants, testimony of the organization of an industry in a territory". What descends from this definition is that industrial heritage should not be read in isolation, yet instead in relation to the modifications of the territory generated by the industrialization. This bears also an interdisciplinary dimension, as far as industrial heritage can be conceived of as a bundle of physical artefacts (e.g. buildings, plants and machineries), but also as their meanings and their historical and social contextualization.

As soon as the concept of industrial heritage - or industrial archaeology - stopped being perceived as an oxymoron, newly established documentation centres or national associations (in Italy the main actor is the AIPAI - Associazione Italiana per il Patrimonio Archeologico Industriale, founded in 1997 and dedicated to research and cataloguing of the Italian industrial heritage) started identifying and cataloguing these sites.

Then the attention shifted to the importance of preservation and interpretation of these sites (Sýkora et al. 2010) and on the technical implications of preservation acts: not only should the material and built heritage be physically recovered ('hardware' part), but also, because of their very nature, reflections on the good as a former working place and as a part of social, cultural or other contextual transformations ('software' part) should be secured (Celano 2011). The underlying idea is that through a sustainable and well-conceived renovation we can rediscover our past within the context of the traditional life style (Celano 2011). This obviously requires interdisciplinary preservation efforts, including architecture restoration

competences, but also historical, urban planning, cultural planning and public policy ones.

The dominant practice emerging from our analysis of the re-uses of industrial heritage is the following: family owned businesses closed down the activity or moved it elsewhere; in the 2000s-2010s many of them restored and re-opened the industrial site as a museum and/or an archive to preserve and exhibit the factory history and production-related traditions embodied in documents, photographs, or machineries to celebrate the glory of the company business or its industry. Within this dominant practice of 'museification of industrial production' two sub-patterns can be found, depending on the main actors involved and on who drove the transformation.

First, 'family-led museification' of the factories that are often still active. In these cases, it is the business owning family (sometimes in the form of a family private Foundation) who decides to transform the site into a museum and who finances restoration works. In these cases, the family or family-related Foundation is the owner and often also the manager of the museum/archive. This is the case for example of Birra Menabrea, a beer factory located in Biella, now in part transformed into a museum and library on the history of beer production with a connected restaurant, all owned and run by the Group Birra Forst; or the case of Fabbrica di Liquirizia Amarelli, a liquorice factory located in Rossano, Calabria, and partly transformed into a museum on the history of the family business itself.

Second, 'publicly-led museification' of formerly private factories or other industrial sites, then acquired by a local government and transformed into museums and archive. This is for example the case of the 'ex stabilimento Florio delle tonnare', a large fish storage site in Favignana, Sicily, owned by the Region of Sicily and managed and restored by the Trapani Superintendence for cultural and environmental heritage upon European Union funds. The site now hosts exhibitions of maritime archaeology, a video-installation of old workers' memories about their past activity and a permanent exhibition of fishing activity-related photographs. Another example is Centrale Montemartini in Rome, a thermoelectric central dismissed in 1963. Owned by the Municipality and run by ACEA, the local public utility company, the site was transformed into a museum of its past activity in 1997 (displaying machineries and documents about thermoelectric activity) and, in a second stage, as a permanent exhibition site hosting a section of the Municipal Museums collections.

Taken together, despite some differences, these cases share the same feature of having an industrial site restored and converted into some kind of exhibition centres, mainly for celebrative purposes, as testimony of the material and immaterial culture related to the history of the site. This is why we labelled this first practice *museification*.

Clearly, the practice of museification of industrial heritage sites well

relates to the discourses of industrial heritage preservation. What is the place for culture in these discourses and practices? Here 'culture' is the cultural heritage in/of the industrial complex that is the material artefacts, documents and photographs or video material, as a repository of a past – and sometimes lost – intangible culture linked to the industrial production techniques and traditions. Consequently, the focus (in the form of flows of resources and attention) tends to be on the preservation of the 'container' (the industrial building itself) and of its related artefacts. Culture can then here be seen as the *object* of an action and as an end in itself.

4 Industrial Heritage as Resources: Strategic Discourses and Regeneration Practices

Very soon the discourse shifted to claiming the value of industrial heritage as a strategic resource to be restored, modernized and re-used as cultural destinations for some consequent presupposed job creation, territorial competitiveness and local development (Edwards, Llurdés 1996; Hospers 2002; Pawlikowska-Piechotka 2009; Lamparska 2013).

One of the first contributions that set the scene for this view of industrial heritage was Alfrey and colleagues' book (1992), which addressed the issue not only of how industrial heritage resources can be identified, but also about how they can be exploited. Essentially, Alfrey et al. (1992) made an influential argument in favour of planning for new uses in CH sites: this sounded new in itself at that time, as opposed to a rhetoric of mere preservation. Since then the idea that industrial heritage sites constitute a valuable resource started establishing itself in people's minds.

For example, Edwards and Llurdés (1996) proposed a typology of industrial heritage and claimed about their potential as new tourism attractions. Other scholars moved the argument beyond, positing that, through tourism, industrial heritage sites were a potential great resource for local economic development (Xie 2006; Lamparska 2013). Similarly, Hospers (2002) claimed that industrial heritage serves more than just increased tourism flows: it is about potential regional renewal. On the same note, Pawlikowska-Piechotka (2009) and Sýkora et al. (2010) argued for the value of industrial architecture that, once modernized and re-used as museums, galleries, and other tourism and leisure needs, is supposed to generate social, historical, aesthetical and economic enrichment. Connected to this are some functionalist, normative contributions hinting at the best strategies to make industrial cultural heritage fruitful as a resource, as for example McIntosh and Prentice (1999) on the importance of encoding the experience of the industrial heritage site with people's personal meanings, something that would increase the sense of perceived authenticity.

Mapping the repertoire of micro-cases of industrial heritage re-uses, a second practice emerges. This is about public entities financing the recovery and restoration of industrial heritage sites for further entrustment to third parties (cultural associations of any kind) for unspecified future culture-related uses.

A notable example in Italy is Laboratori Urbani ('Urban Labs') initiative of the Puglia Region. The Puglia Region identified 151 dismissed buildings with former public functions, such as abandoned schools, industrial plants, monasteries, market places, military buildings. The Region finances their restoration and re-destination as public spaces for young local people. The design and management of the activities to be installed in these spaces is demanded to private companies or associations through public competitions for every so called Urban Lab. So far the initiative entailed an investment of over €50 million and resulted in the recovery and restoration of about 100,000 square meters, for 151 buildings spread throughout 169 Municipalities. The Urban Labs that started their activity in these spaces range from the establishment of visual or performing arts activities, the use of spaces for social purposes, co-workings, research on new technologies, consulting and training services for young entrepreneurship, exhibition spaces, and so on.

Another example in this sense is the one of the Ex Ansaldo factory in Milan. In this case a massive formerly industrial space of about 6,000 square meters has been recently devolved (upon public competition) by the City of Milan to an association of firms (Esterni, Avanzi, Make a Cube, Arci Milano and H+). The definition of the new functions and of the activities that will take place in this site is in progress, but it rests on a general concept of contemporary cultural production. The project aims at hybridizing training, creativity, events, entrepreneurship, restoration and leisure, as a multi-functional cultural centre.

The pattern shared by these practices is one of massive public financing campaigns for major restoration projects to qualify urban areas and create new spaces for cultural and entrepreneurial activities to be subsequently identified. The emphasis of these interventions is therefore on the creation of spaces for other activity, supposedly triggering local cultural and economic growth. This is why we labelled this practice "culture-led regeneration".

The practice of culture-led regeneration of industrial heritage matches indeed the strategic discourses of industrial heritage re-uses. What is the meaning of culture here? Here 'culture' becomes the new function for the previously industrial site, which in turn works as something instrumental to other ends (tourism attraction, new job creation, regeneration of urban areas, etc.). The focus in terms of flows of resources and attention tends again to be on the container, but rather in the form of restoration and functional requalification of the spaces to host a variety of new pos-

sible businesses or other initiatives (incubators, hubs, offices, co-working spaces, cultural centres, cafés, etc.). In other words, culture is here the *tool*, the means to other ends, or a strategic resource, instrumental for some (supposed) other local development.

5 An Alternative Approach: Cultural Intervention in Industrial Heritage

All in all, what emerges in the mainstream discourses and practices in and around industrial heritage is a shared focus on the restoration, preservation or requalification of the container, where culture is either the ‘object’ of these actions, or the ‘tool’ to other ends. But what about culture as the ‘subject’? And what about the contents, beside the containers?

Arguably, an alternative practice can be identified. It is the one about art interventions in industrial heritage sites that are not designed by family business owners for self-celebrating purposes, nor are commissioned by policy-makers in the name of some supposed local regeneration. It is about individuals or collectives of artists who spontaneously take up an industrial site to perform their activity in the name of culture, sometimes just on a temporary base.

An example in this sense is the one of Dolomiti Contemporanee - in-environment visual arts lab, a major curatorial project that was initiated in 2011 by Gianluca D’Incà Levis, a contemporary art curator, with a background in architecture. By the time of the first DC cultural intervention, the Dolomites, a range of the North-Eastern Italian Alps, had just become a UNESCO World Heritage site (2009). These mountains had been hosting hubs where people had lived and worked for centuries, constituting an immense motor of local identity and of social and economic development. Crises of several kinds have turned these motors down in the past decades. The mountains economy has declined and then changed in favour of tourism exploitation - and many of these sites linger abandoned.

The first intervention took place in Sass Muss, a former chemical hub located in Sospirolo (Belluno) beneath the Dolomites. The chemical factory, built in 1924, had flourished in the ‘20-’30s, then, damaged by WWII bombing, started a rapid decline and was completely dismissed in the ‘60s. In the early 2000s a publicly owned agency (Attiva spa, an operating agency mainly participated by local governments of the Veneto region, aimed at developing and commercializing urban and industrial areas) acquired the abandoned site and undertook a major restoration project through European funds, yet left it then empty and unused. In 2011, Gianluca D’Incà Levis decided to occupy and transform the former industrial complex of Sass Muss for three months (August-October) into a contemporary art exhibition centre, creating a sort of “creative citadel”. The citadel included

an international residency for artists; the former warehouses became exhibition rooms; the surrounding mountain environment became the training ground for the artists and the invited curators who worked on the identity of the site and its surroundings, by inhabiting them.

The operating budget was €400,000 and expenditures were covered through public funding (€80,000) and through material support by 100 local partners (providing maintenance services, tools and materials, food, transportation, communication services, etc.), as well as a large base of volunteers, found through a door to door communication campaign by DC staff prior to the launch of the project. In those three months of activity, 70 artists from ten different Countries lived and worked at Sass Muss, over 100,000 visitors came, ten exhibitions and ten public events of other kind were held, and over 200 articles on the initiative appeared in the press and online. The local community came back to the factory, finally re-opened, to visit it. Following the three months event, many of the partners who had contributed to the project decided to transfer their own commercial activities within the site, renting the spaces. The site came back to life and was returned to the local territory, re-activating it. After the initiative, the curator/initiator left, leaving behind a site that was back into the map, even with some commercial activities that had moved there.

This first intervention marked the beginning of DC, a serial curatorial art project through which the curator strives to identify relevant abandoned sites on the Dolomites, such as large factories, other complexes of industrial archaeology, or residential settlements that are no longer active, and to reactivate their potential by rethinking their relationship with the surrounding nature and civilization in a non-trivial and non-stereotyped way, through the curatorship of temporary visual arts events. In fact, in the next few years (2012-2016) similar experiences were replicated by DC in other sites (Blocco di Taibon in 2012, Spazio Casso in the Vajont area in 2013, the Ex Villaggio Eni in Borca di Cadore in 2014) with similar enduring outcomes.

Because of the entrepreneurial impetus of similar approaches moved essentially by the willingness to “make culture”, we labelled this practice *cultural intervention*. What is the place of culture here? The 2011 art intervention was not designed and commissioned by public policies in the name of some supposed local regeneration. It was an entrepreneurial act led by an individual curator who goes, does, leaves, deliberately, to act elsewhere by “cultural blitzes”. The focus was on the content in relation with the container, on the substance within the form, as a whole, and culture was the originating ‘bother’, not a strategic resource to other ends. Rather, we see DC initiative as representative of other similar cases that perform a strong denouncing act of the disjunction between form and substance in the mainstream industrial heritage discourse and in the practice of planning for the containers before (or even without) the cultural content.

6 Conclusion

Building on these insights and considerations, two (intertwined) issues can be brought up for discussion: the issue of materiality and the issue of functional determinism.

First, it should not be surprising that most of the strategies in place around industrial sites are about the creation of containers through museification or through functional requalification of the spaces. These interventions require enormous capital for restoration and design, but also, because of their materiality and endurance, tangible visibility for the policy-makers or the private bodies who finance these operations. The largest shares of financial resources allocated to enhancing the 'value' of industrial heritage are indeed spent on restorations and/or architectural regeneration. Such an almost exclusive focus on the materiality of industrial heritage has fundamental consequences on the actual notion of 'culture' that gets activated. More precisely, the allocation of resources traces a rather neat line between an idea of culture as preservation or exploitation of the material or as promotion of the artistic contemporary production. The focus on materiality tends to declare less relevant the cultural or social processes that get (or do not get) activated, the artists themselves or the forms of culture that flow through these spaces. In cultural planning attempts, there seem to be serious problems in terms of resource allocation: most of the limited amount of available resources goes to large investments for restorations or other interventions on the built heritage, and nothing remains for operating costs and for the planning of cultural contents for these sites. In other words, in the industrial heritage landscape all is 'materialized' too much or too fast.

Second, in our view this all is creating many 'containers without a content'; the content comes after - when it does - and instrumentally. We see all this as part of the more general discourse on culture-led regeneration (McCarthy 1998; Bailey, Miles, Startk 2004) that considers the territory as the context where cultural processes can be encouraged and used to transform the economy, and culture as a strategic resource at the service of urban strategies, of the vision that a territory has of itself, and of its vcourse is its inherent functional determinism. Put simply, the assumption is: 'you restore, something will happen' in terms of enrichment, economic development and competitiveness. Moreover, the effects of this supposed functionalism are not determined at all: 'you restore, something will happen, sometimes nothing happens'. How much are those industrial heritage museums actually visited? How much are those archives or libraries actually used? How many cultural associations or other entrepreneurial activities actually operate in those very spaces and manage to survive and grow? The immediate risk is then a passive and uncritical acceptance of the leading paradigm of a culture-driven development in the case of

industrial heritage too, with potentially dreadful consequences in terms of public money waste.

Indeed, both the preservation discourse (and related museification practice) and the strategic discourse (and related regeneration practice) of industrial heritage can be subsumed as cases of 'spaces in search of meaning', albeit in different ways, as opposed to the cases of cultural intervention, which can be considered 'meaning in search of spaces'.

We conclude provocatively, noting that industrial heritage sites are many and pervasive: do they really need all to be restored and reused, if sometimes there is no demand then for whatever is produced in there, or no obvious virtuous economic cycle, as instead claimed? In any case, we should at least stop producing containers before contents. Careful attention should be placed by industrial heritage policies in escaping functional determinism by reversing its inner logic: culture - content - should be on top.

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