

The SNIA Village of Cesano
Maderno:
from “industrial ideal” to
“non-productive” suburbs

Ferdinando Zanzottera



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

*Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia*

A small town with just under 40,000 inhabitants, Cesano Maderno is a charming town in the upper Brenta valley in the northern suburban area of Milan. It became an autonomous municipality with the Royal Decree of 9 February 1869¹, which established the territorial union with the towns of Binzago and Cassina Savina, which today became suburbs of Casano Maderno, had a significant industrial development only in the first quarter of the twentieth century. In that period, in fact, some factories were installed on its territory, which transformed a place with an evident agricultural-craft vocation in an area with mixed attitude (artisan-industrial). In fact, some companies had already settled in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, continuing and mechanizing the woodworking processes and improving the methods of extraction and transformation of

1 Royal Decree n. 4892 of 9 February 1869. This unification took place only at the conclusion of a long process of study, proposals and analysis of proposals for the union of small municipalities, against which the autonomous demands of many small local realities were expressed. The affirmation of the autonomy of the Cesano fractions of Cassina Savina and of Binzago, for example, expressed themselves vehemently in the first half of the nineteenth century. In 1827, for example, the Municipal Councilor of Binzago gave a negative answer to the aggregation with the Municipality of Seregno (Letter of the Imperial Regelli Cancelliere Censuario of Barlassina Bicchierai sent October 26, 1827 to the Imperial Regia Provincial Delegation - Municipal Archives of Cesano Maderno, cart 8, fascice 3), while in the same year the Convocato di Binzago expressed himself not in favour of the union with the Municipality of Cesano Maderno (Letter of the Imperial Regelli Censuario of Barlassina Bicchierai sent on 12 January 1828 to Imperiale Regia Provincial Delegation - Municipal Archives of Cesano Maderno, cart 8, fasc 3). On that occasion the latter was the only one to vote for the aggregation with the City of Binzago, recalling the decision in favor of this union expressed repeatedly in 1818, 1820 and 1826 Letter of the Imperial Royal Chancellor Censuario di Barlassina Bicchierai sent October 27, 1827 to the Imperiale Regia Provincial Delegation - Municipal Archives of Cesano Maderno, cart. 8, fasc. 3). An attitude that turned out to be of great openness and which constitutes an essential element for understanding the cultural processes and partial political relaxation that had led in previous years the Municipalities of Binzago and Cesano Maderno to construct a unitary cemetery, perhaps even sensing the inevitable process of unification of small municipalities in reality more solid.

clay clays. Despite these industrial products favored by the railway infrastructure of the territory, the first settlements that offered great employment opportunities were the chemical factory Società di Coloranti Italica, which became in 1929 Associate National Chemical Companies (ACNA), and the Italian American Shipping Company (SNIA). These introduced new modern productive-building languages and innovated the linguistic styles of the popular-working-class dwelling, assimilating, in part, the lessons advocated by the Lombard industrial settlements and by some experiences of northern Europe.

“When the workday is over, the worker must return with pleasure under his roof: therefore, look for the entrepreneur that he is comfortable, quiet in peace: use every means to make the affection grow in his heart. love for the home. Who loves his home, loves his family, his country and will never be the victim of vice and sloth [...] He was followed by everyone, until a few years ago, the system of manufacturing large, multi-storey, capable houses to contain 10 and up to 20 families: this is a horror. There were barracks, not houses, where the cry of children, gossip among women, the noises of all kinds continually interrupt the stillness necessary for rest, life becomes almost in common, with grave danger of morality and of domestic peace, and the too close of families generates bad moods, which end up in fights or in fights.

Do not fool the industrialist to create a selected workforce using this construction system; he will always have wandering workers, only eager for greater gain. The model worker house must contain only one family and be surrounded by a small vegetable garden, separated from any communion with others. We remember the English workers ‘cities [...] We remember with greater satisfaction the workers’ district of Mulhouse, where the houses are isolated and divided into four parts, joined by the two sides converging in the same corner. They serve this way for four families; they are nicer but take up more space and cost more”². With these

2 R. Bossaglia, Crespi d’Adda: l’invenzione, l’idea, il monumento, in: AA.VV., *Worker villages in Italy. Val Padana and Crespi d’Adda*, Einaudi, 1981, p 119. The translation of the text by Benigno Crespi, as well as the translation of all the other citations present in this essay, was performed by Riccardo Federico Saggese.



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia

words was expressed Benigno Crespi in a speech given at the Congress of cotton mills held in 1896, in which he also gave reasons for his choices to create an 'ideal city for work' on the banks of the Adda. Around 1878, in fact, he had left Busto Arsizio to find a new cotton mill, building around the factory a village inspired by the modern criteria of enlightened paternalism. The village, which took its name from it, is still in situ and can be visited and in 1995 was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site³.

It represents one of the many positions towards the residential problem of the working class and the poorer classes which animated the cultural debate between the end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century and which ended up influencing many of the industrial building interventions carried out later in Lombardy and in the earth of the Brianza.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, in fact, there was a radical change in the social framework in Milan, which triggered the decision of the public administration to contribute economically to the creation of an institution specifically dedicated to residential construction, for less well-to-do workers and classes, already present embryonically in 1861.

The rapid industrialization of late-nineteenth-century Milan, precocious compared to the rest of Italy, but certainly not compared to the major European nations, had played a role in recalling the rural population, putting the housing problem in urgent and quantitative terms, with relevant important economic implications. and serious social consequences.

In the extraordinary session of the City Council of August 1, 1861, the administration of the city of Milan faced the problem of how to operate in favor of the less well-to-do classes and the opportunity to

3 Dominating the whole village is the castle, the residence of the entrepreneur's family, the cemetery and the church, from Crespi desired identical to the Bramante of the hometown. The rest of the large village consists of the orifice; from villas with gardens and from a few blocks to several lodgings, both for the workers; from buildings for social services: asylum; elementary School; salon for the musical body; a common kitchen for lunch at noon; a washhouse; cooperative warehouses; surgery; a hotel for foreigners.



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007

Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007

Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia

sell their own building areas for private companies free of charge⁴, so as to build workers' residential quarters destined to radically change the face of the city and, in particular, of the urban periphery.

The deliberations and the debate of public administrators constitute, therefore, an important document of the commitment made by some councilors, first of all by Tullio Massarani, and by the early commitment of the administration to operate for the construction of low-cost residential buildings, temporally second in Italy only in Florence. The industrialists, politicians, economists, the Church and the Milan intelligentsia worked actively to try to provide concrete answers to the needs of the city, observing with great interest and lively curiosity the housing solutions adopted in the main European cities (as London, Berlin, Brussels, Paris, Mulhouse, etc.) and to the knowledge of which the special municipal commission made up of Eng. Emilio Bignami, from cav. Romolo Griffini, from dr. Bartolomeo Malfatti, from ing. Cesare Osango and the same commissioner Massarani. The scientific literature and the archival documentation concerning the history of Milan and Lombardy document the ability of the Milanese society to listen to theories produced in Europe by scholars of the humanitarian economy and modern philanthropy, among which are the economic issues advocated by Ducpétiaux, Vischers, Duprat, Girardin, Robert, Chambers, Ashpitel, Whichcord, Cape, Gourlier and Müller.

In Milan, moreover, in those same years there were also the first explicit and direct workers' demands, the expression of a discontent that had arisen with the industrial revolution. Before the beginning of the century, as V. Hunecke noted in his studies on

⁴ It was the Società Edificatrice for workers, toilets and public washrooms established in 1860 with an official program divided into numerous articles approved on September 26 of the same year.

the Milan working class, the house was a completely secondary need for the worker⁵, since most of his salary was destined to satisfy the most basic needs of food and drink, minimally, of the clothing. The remaining money was then invested in the rent, but often these were marginal figures, which forced the individual workers or their families to live in unseemly and undignified conditions⁶.

With the beginning of the century, the Milanese workers, who had achieved significant political and economic growth through the strikes led by the Chamber of Labor, decided to place a “decent” house among their fighting objectives, identifying in the Municipality, governed by a new “popular administration”, the privileged interlocutor.

“The growing needs of social life”, stated a flyer from the Milan Chamber of Labor on the occasion of May 1, 1901, “combined with the dictates of moral hygiene, have influenced the soul of the working class to be forced to abandon the old hovels and lose the use of living in unhealthy promiscuity, to look for places in healthy and airy neighborhoods with enough rooms for their family. Sick is the building of Milan. Although it has received a strong impulse from this fact, it did not take care, in the election of new buildings, to divide rooms into small apartments of 1, 2 or 3 rooms with tenants’ washrooms”⁷. Although there are unpublished claims in the flyer for a philanthropic managerial paternalism, it is an important testimony of the commitment of the Executive Committee of the Milan Chamber of Labor and its ability to act as an

5 Cfr. V. Hunecke, *Classe operaia e rivoluzione industriale a Milano, 1859-1892*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1982.

6 For the theme of the transformation of the city of Milan and the process of industrialization between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see: F. Zanzottera, *La modernizzazione di Milano tra XIX e XX secolo e il problema dell’edilizia residenziale popolare nei primi anni del Novecento*, Institute for the History of Lombard Art, Milan, 2016.

7 Leaflet prepared by the Executive Committee of the Milan Chamber of Labor on the occasion of May 1, 1901 (Civic Historical Archives of the Municipality of Milan, Fondo Strade OO.PP., cart.2).



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007

Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

*Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007*

*Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia*

authoritative and preferential interlocutor. The text of the flyer comes to advance concrete and programmatic proposals and to summarize the positions of the entire Chamber of Labor as regards the reasons that had to push the administration to build popular housing and the urgency with which the business world and the Municipality had to intervene. Reasons that will come in the months and years later filed in specific applications submitted directly to the municipal bodies. The Chamber of Commerce, in fact, argued that public or private charity had “done its time” and that there was no “modern man” asking for the charity and resolution of a matter of public interest such as that of housing for workers. The recognized social needs must therefore automatically provide the social body that represented the community. Working in this way, in the attempt to solve the housing problem, the Municipality did not perform philanthropic acts, but simply “due deeds”.

Recognizing that this position was not fully shared by all the municipal institutions and philanthropic and semi-anthropoc organizations existing in the city, the Chamber of Labor maintained that the municipality and the private sector had in the past “in no place” been able to satisfy the housing requirement of the working class, the task to the capital made available by capitalists-entrepreneurs, still linked to a vision of “public charity”, was so disproportionate.

“Since the working class is therefore a great social necessity”, the work chamber continues, “and it cannot derive neither from private capitalism nor from charity, it is necessary the direct intervention of the local community, of the municipality”⁸. Therefore, it wanted a decisive intervention by the public administration, called upon to assume the task of building and managing houses for the workers. This political-philosophical and socio-cultural position aimed at the creation of a municipal entity that would deal with the home and the workers’ condition on a regular basis and with rationality.

8 Typewritten report of the Commission for the workers’ houses of the Milan Chamber of Labor dated 1902.



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia

The proposal of the Chamber of Labor went so far as to indicate, as a solution to the problem, the general expropriation of all land built and in the process of building, and, in particular, the acquisition of large areas close to the industries bordering Porta Ticinese, Porta Tenaglia, Porta Nuova and Porta Ludovica, to then build four groups of municipal workers' houses.

Having enunciated the general principles, the Milanese commercial institution considered it opportune to better enumerate its thought articulated in phases. Both in case of partial expropriation, and in the case of complete expropriation, the Municipality could also provide for the construction of the four districts slowly and with implementation programs spread over the years, also because it was not necessary to manufacture on the entire lot or the whole area acquired.

In the case of partial expropriation, the cost of land needed for each of the four quarters should not exceed one million. To find the necessary funds the City of Milan did not have to issue new titles, but to stipulate a loan that would allow the purchase of the area and the construction of the apartments, to be put eventually to redemption. The money necessary for the operation was not meticulously estimated by the Chamber of Labor, which, however, identified in the figure of twelve million lire a plausible financial commitment to complete each phase of the project. Moreover, the Municipality should not be afraid of issuing a loan of this entity, because this could also be granted in different economic modalities. Subsequent loans would instead have been guaranteed by the income produced by the same houses built with the first intervention.

“The financial outcome of the first four districts”, the authors of the executive committee report still affirmed, “will soon enable the Municipality to repeat the operation for other districts”.

According to this vision it would be up to the City to treat and regulate the construction of industrial buildings, which until then had arisen “here and there without having a rule in order”. In the neighborhoods where the residential architecture had been built

in the vicinity of manufacturing and industrial plants, it was necessary for the municipality to intervene through the construction of an infrastructural network also connected to the railways. Particular attention to design had to be put in the services to be offered to the new resident population who, necessarily, had to include public baths, laundry, meeting places and education and all kinds of services of collective interest.

In this way the City would have satisfied the industrialists, who could hardly hope to find plots of land connected to the railways.

Even the workers who were called to live in complete and hygienic neighborhoods would be satisfied, even improving the urban viability, because many large loads of incoming raw materials and materials worked at the start would no longer have traveled the Milanese urban streets.

The Chamber of Labor was certain of the validity of its proposal, which would have achieved even better results in subsequent years, when Milan would be directly connected to the rest of Europe through the construction of the Sempione tunnel, celebrated by the Milan International Exposition (EXPO) of 1906 and which should have also served as an attraction for foreign companies.

The intervention of the Chamber of Labor in the debate on residential construction, which in the following decades led to increasingly higher social demands, despite containing some ingenuity of utopian matrix, is one of the first attempts to pose the problem of the popular classes on a scale wider, that of the “city” and of the “social services”, shifting the attention from the single building to the whole district or to larger portions of suburban territory.

The College of Engineers of Milan was among the first to collect the requests of the Chamber of Labor. On January 6, 1902, he invited to talk about the topic, eng. Nino Sacerdoti, considered an expert in economic-popular construction⁹.

9 The text of the report was published in the same month by the Journal of Engineer, Civil and Industrial Architect “Il Politecnico” (Cfr. N. Sacerdoti, La questione delle case operaie in Milano, in “Il Politecnico”, January 1902, pp. 37-55)



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007

Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

*Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007*

*Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia*

After an initial analysis of the foreign examples, he declared himself in favor of Milan adopting the “great type of collective, multi-storey housing”, to be built according to special rules and not directly deduced from the structures built in other European centers. He believed, not without some polemical annotation and a subdued arrogant self-referentiality, that all the technicians should agree with him on the inability to pay attention to the types of houses, single or terraced, and on the convenience of building larger architectures. Eng. Priests, in fact, believed that from the hygienic point of view the house and the “small type” constituted the best solution up to that moment elaborated. At its use, however, there were economic reasons that, in that specific situation, could only have the “upper hand”. In order to find economically viable solutions, it was necessary to build the workers’ houses in the suburbs, far from the city, where they could identify areas at advantageous prices, as the municipal administration of Paris, London and many other large European cities had done. This choice, however, would have meant for the worker a series of “serious inconveniences” and “damages”¹⁰, which had to be necessarily adequately considered.

Many workers, in fact, needed to live near the workplace to avoid expensive travel and to enjoy the other services offered by the city, in which they had “wanted” to enter for functional reasons. The proximity between home and work could also guarantee further employment opportunities because women and children could more easily perceive “extra income”, working as housemaids in homes inhabited by “other classes of people”. In this way, however, he demonstrated that he did not fully understand the Milanese working situation and the social change that had led to a drastic decrease in the number of people employed in the domestic services of the wealthier classes. In his reasoning he also considered the greater ease and convenience for workers to buy food at affordable prices, perhaps in major city markets, forgetting how in the city the cost of products was higher than those of goods sold in the suburbs.

He, however, was well aware of the existence of a tramway public transport network in Milan but believed that this could not in any way reasonably influence the

10 Ibidem. p. 39.

central theme of the location of the popular settlements, also due to the high cost of the tickets. Eng. Sacerdoti, moreover, wondered pleonastically if Milan had a sufficient number of means of transport to meet all the possible needs for the transfer of the mass of the workers: from the home to the workplace and from the factory to the house. Given the structural insufficiency, therefore, Milan would have to build new connection facilities, equip itself with a greater number of vehicles and grant large discounts to workers to buy tickets for public transport, otherwise the economic impossibility for the less well-to-do sectors to use the collective transport service. Choices that, according to the professional, would have made the plants themselves financially non-remunerative. “Let’s imagine a large neighborhood of workers along the avenue of Monza” Eng. Priests, “that morning and evening should go to Milan and return! How would our city tram to transport thousands of people at the same time, at very low prices, and therefore at a loss or almost, which should adopt, moreover with a huge waste of material, inevitable with such kind of passengers?”¹¹.

For these reasons he considered the type of detached single-family house, or the multi-family house, absolutely incompatible with the structuring of the urban fabric of the city, since too many highs were in running costs. It did not affect the possibility that it was presented to the worker to be able to buy “the small house” in which he resided by annuity amortization, since he considered it a romantic view economically not always sustainable by users and could not win on the inconveniences associated with high investments necessary by the municipality to adapt the public urban transport network. Furthermore, the speaker was well aware of the problem of vacancies and insolvency on the part of the tenants who lived in apartments and premises made available by the cooperative world, explicitly mentioning what was happening in Milan and what happened to the company Edificatrice di Milano, forced to take back many of the houses that he had already sold and decide not to rent more to redeem the houses in their

11 Ibidem. p. 41.

possession, because they became too burdensome. He therefore considered the formula of the redemption of a house a “sentimental” phenomenon that obtained “unhappy results”, a logical consequence of the insufficiently good economic conditions of the workers. In fact, few people could afford the luxury of adding to the rent the amount of depreciation and could make up for the costs quite serious for repairs, which the house periodically required. The consequent contractual rescission caused economic damage to the programming of the cooperatives or, even worse, left the house in the hands of speculators who distorted the first purpose of the construction, or neglected the necessary maintenance works without which the house quickly wasted¹².

In this cultural context, certainly evolved from fifteen years of social and industrial development, develops the idea of building the SNIA Village¹³ in the outskirts of the municipality of Cesano Maderno in the early twentieth century, which, as already

12 Ibidem, pp. 50-51.

13 Although this is not the right place to propose a complete bibliography on the SNIA Village, it is considered appropriate to point out the following publications: AA.VV., 50 anni per una chiesa, Parrocchia di SS. Ambrogio e Carlo, Cesano Maderno, 1989; AA.VV., Villaggio SNIA Cesano Maderno. Il Villaggio si ripresenta, Amici del Villaggio SNIA, Cesano Maderno, s.d.; M. Balduzzi, S. Laffi, Il Sabato del villaggio, special number of the magazine published with the FEI contribution, September 2014; G. Cattaneo, Il Villaggio SNIA e la sua storia. Gli abitanti tra le due guerre, in “Il Cittadino”, 15 December 1990; A. Crepaldi, I cinquant’anni della chiesa della SNIA. Villaggio, un flash-back dal ‘60, in “Il Cittadino”, 15 dicembre 1990; A. Crepaldi, Volti e storie di una città. Cesano Maderno raccontata da Il Cittadino: 1976-2001, Il Cittadino, Monza, 2002; L. Crusca, Realizzazione del Villaggio SNIA di Cesano Maderno (1921-1940). Un’analisi del processo decisionale, Tesi di Laurea, Politecnico di Milano, Facoltà di Architettura, rel. prof. L. Mazza, dattiloscritto, a.a. 1995-1996; A. Garlandina, B. Micheletti, P. Poggio, Il patrimonio storico-industriale della Lombardia. Censimento regionale, Fondazione Micheletti, Brescia, 1991; V. E. Nicoli, Il Villaggio SNIA, Esercitazione del corso di Storia e Tecnica del Restauro, prof. M. A. Crippa, Politecnico di Milano, Facoltà di Ingegneria Edile, dattiloscritto, a.a. 2006-2007; L. Ramorini, Villaggio SNIA a



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

*Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia*

mentioned, today constitutes a media town in the northern suburbs of the province of Milan located in the southern foothills of the administrative province of Monza and Brianza.

Known to the admirers of art and architecture for some significant testimonies of “living in the villa” and for the presence of noble palaces of rare splendor, the city of Cesano Maderno has an ancient history. Some scholars, in fact, place its foundation in Roman times, making its name descend from the name of person “Caesius” or “Cisius”. The “Maderno” lemma, instead, derives from the Latin term “maternus”, indicating that the first urban nucleus and its properties would be inherited according to the female genealogy. Despite the uncertain Roman origins of the city, in medieval times it was unquestionably an important property of the monastery of Arona.

Among the oldest names used to indicate this village, in the eleventh century we find the term “Castro Zisano” (1081), while in “The Acts of the City of Milan until the year 1216” is referred to as “Cixanum”.

The greatest period of artistic prosperity of the inhabited center of Cesano Maderno is however connected to the figure of Bartolomeo Arese, president of the Milan Senate, who in the first half of the seventeenth century had one of the most significant

Cesano Maderno: storia, analisi e indicazioni per un recupero finalizzato al risparmio energetico, Tesi di Laurea, Politecnico di Milano, Facoltà di Ingegneria Edile, rel. prof. F. Zanzottera, dattiloscritto, a.a. 206-2007; F. Zanzottera, Il recupero energetico del Villaggio SNIA di Cesano Maderno: spunti di riflessione per un incontro tra “feticismo conservativo” e amnesia storica”, in “Ingegneria. Tecnica, cultura e progetto”, n. 7, gennaio-febbraio 2010, pp. 18-25; F. Zanzottera, Il Villaggio SNIA a Cesano Maderno: storia di una ‘città ideale’ minore, in: Ferdinando Zanzottera (a cura di), 30x40x50 SUBURBS OF THE WORLD – MINOR CITIES. Cesano Maderno: built environment and social life, Istituto per la Storia dell’Arte Lombarda, 2018, pp. 127-155. It is specified that from these last two essays, ample excerpts for the drafting of this text have been taken up.



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli

2007

Villaggio SNIA

Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli

2007

Povoado SNIA

Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia

testimonies of the noble residences of the Brianza territory. The maximum territorial development, however, occurred in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the aggregation of the municipalities of Cesano Maderno, Cassina Savina and Binzago. The real social development occurred, however, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, when important industrial realities settled on the municipal territory. Among these, the main one was certainly the SNIA Viscosa industry, a company born from the economic evolution of the nineteenth-century SNIA (Italian-American Navigation Company) established on 18 July 1917 in Turin. Three years later, the Company of Navigation for Industry and Commerce, it expanded its interests in the textile sector, specializing in the search for synthetic fibers. In a short time, it became a national financial colossus that acquired, among other companies, the Società Viscosa di Pavia (1920), the Italian Fabbriche Viscosa di Venaria (1920), the Società Italiana Materie Coloranti Bonelli (1920), the Italian Artificial Silk Company (1920), the Italian Artificial Silk of Cesano Maderno (1921) and the Varedo and Magenta plants of the Artificial Silk Group (1925).

After a first phase of continuous expansion followed a second decline, determined by the famous world economic crisis of 1929. The new company found a renewed productive impulse under the direction of Senator Borletti and Franco Marinotti, when the factory developed new production of textile fibers, limited, until the thirties, only to the manufacture of the raion. From the advanced research of the SNIA Viscose, so many new products were born, among them the lanital, the merinova, the raion cord, the bow, the koplón, the lilion, the velicrem, the acetate and the wistel.

In Cesano Maderno the company built an important production center, whose settlement began in 1920 with a first phase of deforestation and preparation of the area to be built. In the years immediately following, the company engaged in the construction of industrial pavilions, in the manufacture of some residential realities aimed at hosting new workers (immigrants from many regions of Italy) and collaborated in the construction of a new church, conceived as a place of real encounter and identity of a new social fabric transferred here.

Partially taking back the paternalistic convictions of the European and Lombard entrepreneurship of the previous decades and the typological-architectural experience of the beginning of the century, the company conceived the Cesanese's settlement as a sort of "happy oasis" or "ideal city" for workers, who next to the house they found the place of work, leisure and convivial meeting. The first settlement was composed of thirty buildings, which offered housing for around 1,900 people, many of which belonged to families of more than six people.

The first industrial village built by SNIA Viscosa also included: three large buildings used as a boarding school for dependent girls, whose management was entrusted to the female religious order of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians; an elementary school; a table for employees; some rooms, equipped with bars, used as a company after work, transformed with the passing of time in a cinema-theater hall; a chapel for festive celebrations; the keeper's house; two buildings used as a residence for the managerial class.

In the village were also incorporated some existing buildings, such as, for example, the Cascina Agricola Mombelloni. The new citadel, therefore, became a complex reality in which there were also a trattoria-tobacconist, an inn, two kilns (with adjoining houses) and two public wash-houses.

The first company residential development developed, therefore, in the first half of the twenties (1921-1924), parallel to the construction of the SNIA Viscosa textile factory. The planimetric layout and the spatial and functional organization of the new industrial village were inspired by the models for the working residence of beyond the Alps and, in particular, the residential complexes of the second industrial revolution, the Anglo-Saxon industrial villages, the French citées ouvrières and to the kolonien of the Germanic world. References, however, are not without some architectural-cultural allusions to Italian philanthropic settlements.

The design of the entire complex was entrusted to Eng. Gianoletti who, in this work, demonstrated his ability to make the needs of containment of the costs of construction of residential properties coexist with the company's ambition to create a qualitatively high urban model. Furthermore, he was able to harmonize the company's infrastructural needs with the areas of public fruition and social cohesion. On this last aspect it is probable that the company paid a lot of attention, because it was aware of the possible problems caused by the insertion of impressive immigrant communities of Venetian, Bergamo, Brescia and southern origin, who were unable to integrate fully into a social environment already structured and economically not very developed. Therefore, the cultural cornerstones and regulations of social coexistence imposed by the company must be clear, to which the new citizens had to adapt if they wanted to maintain the acquired working privileges, also in anticipation of personal social and professional growth. Moreover, the houses were the exclusive property of the company and the eventual loss of work coincided, in the twenties, with the immediate removal from the house, causing a complete rupture of the social bonds of subsidiarity painstakingly created over time.

Eng. Gianoletti designed the new industrial village based on simple and fundamental rules of rationalist urbanism, placing the different volumes on the edge of a main urban axis, which physically and ideally connected the factory to the church. A plant, therefore, very accurate even under the symbolic profile that, however, found justification even in the simple industrial rhetoric of the time, which saw in this settlement a call "to the design of a butterfly" whose wings were constituted by housing for workers.

Although the proposed settlement models were aligned with the search for the minimal existential spaces already adopted in numerous experiments of residential architecture for the workers and for the less-environment classes, the buildings for the company employees constituted a qualitative improvement of the residential building of Cesano Maderno, on average, of a large part of the Brianza area. Each real estate unit, in fact, was equipped with internal private toilets or obtained in the stairwells, which were opposed to the shared bathrooms built at the end of the balconies of the railing houses



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia

or built in the center of the court, which characterized the residential historical center and of the remaining urban fabric of the town and of the adjacent agricultural context. The SNIA Village, therefore, also represented the import of a residential building model that was not widespread in the municipal area, until then marked by court buildings with a craftsman's and agricultural vocation. These were the typical expression of the economic and social models of the Lombard tradition, completely different from the new industrial intentions advocated by SNIA. Models that aroused curiosity and envy in the historic residents of Cesano Maderno, who went to observe the new simple buildings with different moods. In fact, some historical testimonies document this process of encountering heterogeneous cultures.

The traditional reality linked to the territory of Brianza, the expression of a peasant-craft knowledge in which the living spaces also served as laboratories and places for the breeding of the silkworm, was called to open up to the wealth of knowledge of immigrants. The latter were, in turn, catapulted into a new world, the center of an industrial production process marked by a cultural mix and by heterogeneous dialects, not always immediately comprehensible.

The sentiments that the new buildings aroused are well expressed in the testimony of Mr. Mario Pinelli gathered on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the building up of this industrious industrial citadel¹⁴. He arrived in the SNIA Village in 1936 when he was ten years old. "In those days", he says, "the houses of the Village were really beautiful: built a few years ago with fairly advanced techniques for those times. The inhabitants of Cesano or other countries that came to see this new complex, this village, gave him the nickname «Milanin», little Milan, and this name lasted a few decades [...] We guys had plenty of space to play : many meadows, especially around the famous wash-houses,

14 A. Crepaldi, *Volte e storie di una città. Cesano Maderno raccontata da Il Cittadino: 1976-2001*, Il Cittadino, Monza, 2002.



Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia di Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Villaggio SNIA
Periferia di Cesano Maderno - Italia

Fototeca ISAL, Fotografia de Virna Elisa Nicoli
2007
Povoado SNIA
Periferia de Cesano Maderno - Italia

many plants that are still present today and a belt of woods that surrounded the village [...] After the war many workers who lived in the houses of SNIA built their house in the areas adjacent to the Village. I remember the first houses were built along a path that has now become Via Lucania”.

Even the two mentioned washrooms, characterized by a dome cover, were perceived with curiosity. For the many women, used to washing clothes in the rivers, the presence of those tanks with continuous clean water constituted a sort of great technological progress, as well as the place where the social aggregation and cultural encounter manifested itself. In fact, housewives and housewives who talked about their personal experiences and exchanged opinions on the main events that took place in the factory, in the family or in the entire municipal area met the washrooms.

Considered to be a significant expression of modernity and of the architectural and residential workers' culture, the houses of the SNIA Village were taken as a model by many professionals. Among these also Eng. Natale Bizzozero, author of the project of the new cemetery of Cassina Savina (hamlet of Cesano Maderno), which was inspired by the houses designed by Eng. Gianoletti to design in 1925 “a building for the use of its workers” for the Pietro Secondi & C. Company of Cesano Maderno¹⁵.

After the war, SNIA Viscosa suffered from the economic boom. In the fifties the Village was the subject of a new wave of migration, which corresponded to the enlargement and modernization of the industry and the construction of new residential buildings. In the following decade, with the money accumulated during the years of service at SNIA, many factory employees built small houses and new residential buildings, leaving the original apartments free. These were immediately occupied by the new wave of immigration

15 Application for a building permit signed by Ing. Christmas Bizzozero dated June 25, 1925 (Archivio Comunale di Cesano Maderno, Cart. 35, Cat. X, Cl. 10, Fasc. 1).

between 1962 and 1964, when the company “recruited” new workers sending agents and coaches to the south of Italy, promising a home and a safe job.

Suddenly, the social fabric was called to a new transformation, which underwent a further “revolution” with the economic crisis of the early seventies and the years between 1979 and 1981, in which SNIA put about seven hundred employees in layoffs. In the same period the company decided to sell the houses of the Village to obtain new capital to be included in the industrial process, referring to others the problem of the inevitable architectural obsolescence of numerous buildings.

In the last two decades the SNIA Village has been affected by a partial residential renovation and new migratory phenomena, characterized by the arrival in Cesano Maderno of people mainly coming from Eastern Europe, Asia and North Africa.

Currently the residential area of the original SNIA Village is characterized by the presence of 33 buildings for homes, of which 15 are four-storey buildings with two staircases each, 15 are small buildings with three floors and a single stairwell and 3 are units two-family houses dating back to the fifties. Some changes to the internal structures that followed over the decades have profoundly changed the types of housing and have changed housing cuts. Approximately it is possible to assume that of the approximately 500 apartments, which the company sources assert endowed with a total of 1350 rooms, today there are about 400, since many tenants have provided over time to aggregate more housing units, expanding the spaces and volumes of their homes. So, there are discrepancies between the original project and what has come down to us, which do not help to make full clarity between the contradictions found between the documents. The company literature, in fact, speaks of the phase of the twenties in which SNIA would have built 1350 rooms, while unpublished documents kept at the Municipal Archives speak of a much greater number. In a typewritten without date, in fact, the mayor rag. Paolo

Strada, who curiously signs himself “mayor”, asserts that the “premises of the workers’ houses of SNIA Viscosa” that would have been “in the near future” were 1,600¹⁶.

Although unitary in the general compositional characteristics, the SNIA Village, since its establishment, presented some typological variations concerning the internal distribution of the rooms, the surface finishes and the dimensions of some architectural elements. Among these, by way of example, we can mention the depth of the entrance rooms, which help to move the facades with simple chiaroscuro effects and the alternation of full and empty spaces.

Characteristic elements of the original buildings are the geometric decorations still visible on some buildings, or the plinths that reach almost two meters in height. These unitary characters, however, today have undergone numerous manipulations also determined by interventions that are not always respectful of the original buildings. Changes, even of great importance, have occurred on the facades, today affected by numerous diseases of degradation. Among the major degradations present are superficial detachments, oxidation of metal elements, exfoliations, stains, presence of incoherencies, fractures and cracks in the surface layers, washouts, surface deposits, chromatic alterations, salt efflorescence, swelling and pulverization of the plasters. Diseases that are to be added to the numerous different anthropic degradations and the not perfect maintenance of wooden windows and plants for the disposal of rainwater. In some buildings, where the deterioration is greater, the façades show the loss of large plaster surfaces, leaving the wall system without protection and defense from atmospheric agents. The increase and the persistence of this situation over time have led to the loss of numerous elements in terracotta and the joints of the mortar, causing the formation of new degradation pathologies even inside buildings.

16 Incomplete typescript and without date (but after March 25, 1927) signed by the prefect Paolo Strada (Municipal Archive of Cesano Maderno, Cart. 13, Cat. V, Cl. 1, Fasc. 1).

In the history of this urban complex, adequate and proper attention to the original architectural language and to the preservation of the unity of the industrial town is not always witnessed. For example, little attention has been paid to the façade shapes, some of which have undergone partial tampering through the creation of new openings. Generalized changes have also been made to window frames or entrance doors, which are now heterogeneous in shape, color and material.

A worsening of the conservative state has occurred in the last decades, in which the degradation pathologies of the exteriors are generally increased in number and have intensified their intensity. In the eighties, in fact, the architect Boffi presented a project for the general redevelopment of the industrial village, for which he proposed to realize a plan of color and urban interventions. The preliminary analysis of this project and the careful study of the existing building and of the degradations that afflicted it, today constitute an important historical testimony. It is in fact possible to compare the situation then detected with the current status or with the new analyzes conducted in the academic year 2006-2007 by some students of the Politecnico di Milano on the course of History of Contemporary Building (Prof. Ferdinando Zanzottera) and History and Technique of Restoration (Prof. Maria Antonietta Crippa), which reveal a general worsening of the situation. In this period of time, the surfaces of the buildings that require restoration work on the plasters in most of the facades, with consequent verification of the stability of the remaining plaster, are doubled. A worrying phenomenon can also be found through the comparison of the current state with the timely photographic campaign created in 2007 by Virna Lisa Nicoli, which compares the photographs of the architect. Boffi with new shots with the same shot¹⁷.

17 V. E. Nicoli, Il Villaggio SNIA, Exercise of the History and Technique of Restoration course, prof. M. A. Crippa, Polytechnic of Milan, Faculty of Building Engineering, typescript, a.a. 2006-2007.

Today, therefore, despite the great commitment of some of its citizens and the world of cultural associations, the conservative state of the whole SNIA Village does not appear on average good, even if some buildings have been the subject of extraordinary maintenance. These, however, did not concern energy transformations or the improvement of the building envelopes. To evaluate the feasibility of an intervention in this field, some studies were carried out on a sample basis and, in particular, the focus was on a representative building of the urban fabric of the industrial village. The analyzes carried out as part of a master's thesis in Building Engineering at the Politecnico di Milano¹⁸ assigned to the building investigated the energy class G and presented a series of interventions aimed at the significant improvement of its performance. The research investigated the shape, orientation and envelope of the building, characterized by perimeter walls of 30 cm thickness. masonry bearing in full bricks. The complete absence of thermal insulation in the vertical parietal elements, in the roof and in the horizontal slabs of the top floor and in the basement was also detected in the building.

The simulation of an intervention aimed at energy improvement, therefore, was based on a thermal insulation of the external walls through the creation of a classic "coat" characterized by an insulating panel covered with a layer of plaster and a surface finish. For specific reasons, the calculation model envisaged the use of Rockwool panels 431 and 520 with an insulation thickness of 8 cm and the replacement of existing window frames with double-glazing units (Planibel Low Energ model) with a low-emission selective coating for protection solar and insulation, mounted on Domal aluminum frames with thermal break, aimed at eliminating surface condensation. The project also proposed the insertion of thermostatic valves to the radiating structures present and the replacement of the existing boiler with a new condensing boiler for high-performance methane gas, with a modulating burner for open-sealed room operation (Vitocrossal

18 L. Ramorini, Villaggio SNIA a Cesano Maderno: storia, analisi e indicazioni per un recupero finalizzato al risparmio energetico, Politecnico di Milano, Facoltà di Ingegneria Edile, rel. prof. F. Zanzottera, typescript, a.a. 2006/2007.

300 - Viessmann). For the production of hot water for hygienic-sanitary uses, on the other hand, the project envisaged the insertion of a centralized system with solar panels.

The proposed intervention, not without margins for improvement, allowed to bring the building into energy class C, with a coefficient of 75.8 kWh / sqm.

The entire cost of the transaction is certainly not derisory, and the mathematical model has calculated its amortization in about twenty-two years, on condition of obtaining the substantial non-repayable funding for energy recovery required by the law then in force.

The design exercise on the buildings of the SNIA Village therefore proposes the difficulty of recovering part of the existing building stock at sustainable costs and further emphasizes the fundamental importance of the state contributions. It also emphasizes one of the cornerstones of the restoration discipline: the dialogue between innovation and tradition. If it is not, in fact, certainly acceptable that whole parts of society continue to live in “highly polluting” buildings with high energy consumption, it is not as desirable that in the name of unbridled technicality we proceed without any evaluation to the destruction of important historical buildings passed. Once again it is clear that every restoration operation, extraordinary maintenance and transformation must undergo a careful historical analysis that leads to a value judgment.

In this sense, the topic of energy saving is combined with the problems of the discipline of restoration and restoration of historic exceptional cases, to the misevaluation of the building. The architectural work must therefore consciously (*cum scire* = awareness of being) consider the variation of use, the licit transformation and, in some cases, be willing to sacrifice the demolition. The city, and with it its architectural expressions, peripheral or not, are in fact dynamic manifestations of an evolving society that cannot constantly disregard progress but cannot even forget its own history and its identity. We need to work so that conservation and transformation can be met by embracing harmoniously the notion of Building Heritage and of Cultural Heritage, to the point

of recovering the very meaning of doing Architecture. The interesting case study of the SNIA Village of Cesano Maderno can only lead to question the future of Italian building practice and the way of conceiving the outskirts of the Lombard cities, which must necessarily reject the conservative fetishism of those who hope for the illusory “total conservation” And the design blindness of those who advocate historical amnesia as a model of development inspired by the tabula rasa, corroborated by a certain revival of the Modern Movement. The bricks and plasters of this industrial village, therefore, require us to reflect on the indispensable opportunity to subject the dynamic conservation-demolition to careful scrutiny of evaluative critique, which can only lead to increasingly detailed and multidisciplinary studies.

Today, technological science offers unthinkable opportunities even just a few years ago, but it requires a wise use and a capacity for discernment not always found in the examples supported by current publicity and current architectural practice. In seeing some recovery interventions carried out in recent years on individual buildings or entire areas of the Italian suburbs, they cannot in fact come to mind some dramatic and dramatic visions of Eugène Ionesco dedicated to the language of contemporary man.

What is needed for the buildings of the SNIA Village, therefore, is a reversal of perspective, which no longer conceives this peripheral industrial citadel, once an ‘ideal city of work’ with envied residences, as a place of abandonment and degradation, but consider it as a real resource to operate on the wider municipal and provincial territory. To do this it is necessary to recover an intellectual honesty that confronts reality in a pure and freeway from prejudices and that is able to recognize the existing difficulties by rejecting the falsification of technical-architectural data and scientific prescheck as a methodological basis of work. Also, for this reason farsighted were some projects conducted with enthusiasm and constancy in recent years, among which stood out The Village Saturday, an initiative, which took place from July 2013 to June of the following year, which was financed by the European Fund for the Integration of third-country nationals, and which saw the Municipality of Cesano Maderno as the leader.

The aim of the project was to promote integration by identifying “a series of proven devices to promote intercultural dialogue and overcoming a climate of mistrust and social distance, such as the market, food, the care of common areas, the party, childhood, stories and family photos, the local newspaper”¹⁹, transforming the heritage of knowledge into concrete actions.

Today it is therefore necessary to promote a further cognitive process of the history of the place in the enhancement of the current situation, recovering and promoting what is still preserved in the homes of private individuals, in company archives and in public administration documents. Only in this way, through the construction of a shared history and consciousness, will it be possible to recognize this periphery as a territorial resource and Bene Cultural, comprehending it fully in its dual aesthetic and meaning polarity.

Today 3,974 “foreigners” live in Cesano Maderno, constituting a plurilingual and pluricultural community equal to 10.19% of the total population²⁰. Interesting and significant is the increase in the number of minors in constant growth, which, with 904 children, teenagers and adolescents, accounts for 23% of the total number of “foreigners”; a figure that influences the overall percentage of minors living in the municipality (which includes them), equal to 17% of the total residents.

While the number of cesanese’s “births” continues to decrease in percentage terms, today it stands at 13,924 units representing 35.7% of the total population, the number of inhabitants of the SNIA Village is growing. It is the most populous district of the city,

19 <https://www.codiciricerche.it/it/progetti/sabato-del-villaggio/> (last consultation: November 2018)

20 <https://www.codiciricerche.it/it/progetti/sabato-del-villaggio/> (last consultation: November 2018).

with the exception of the urban center, marked by a large administrative area that houses 10,966 residents (of which 9,700 Italians and 1,266 foreigners, equal to 11.54%). In the original 'ideal industrial city', in fact, today 3,474 people live permanently, including 2,609 Italians and 865 "foreigners", equal to 24.90%. The SNIA Village, therefore, constitutes an interesting peripheral area characterized by an ethnic mix that poses new challenges of 'meeting between peoples' and of integration between extremely heterogeneous communities. In this process it is evident that many residents do not recognize the original popular-industrial housing as representative elements of their identity, despite, in some cases, there is an attitude that pushes them to recognize their value and quality.

The ancient melting pot of regional cultures that identified this populous suburb of the municipality of Cesano Maderno, once characterized by significant phenomena of national immigration that had seen many communities coming from the south of Italy, has now turned into a much more articulate society multi-ethnic, with communities coming from the Asian continent and from the African continent. Heterogeneous conflicting and contradictory feelings therefore seem to coexist in this portion of the city, where the memories of the people born or living here for decades, mingle with the new voices of those who tell distant worlds and complex journeys to reach this new frontier, in which to build a radiant future.

Hopes and memories, therefore, constitute the sentiments of this new cesanese multi-ethnic society, a melting pot of 'postmodern cultures' and a concrete resource to better understand the territory of the first and second industrialization of the area, populated by significant examples of Italian twentieth century architecture.

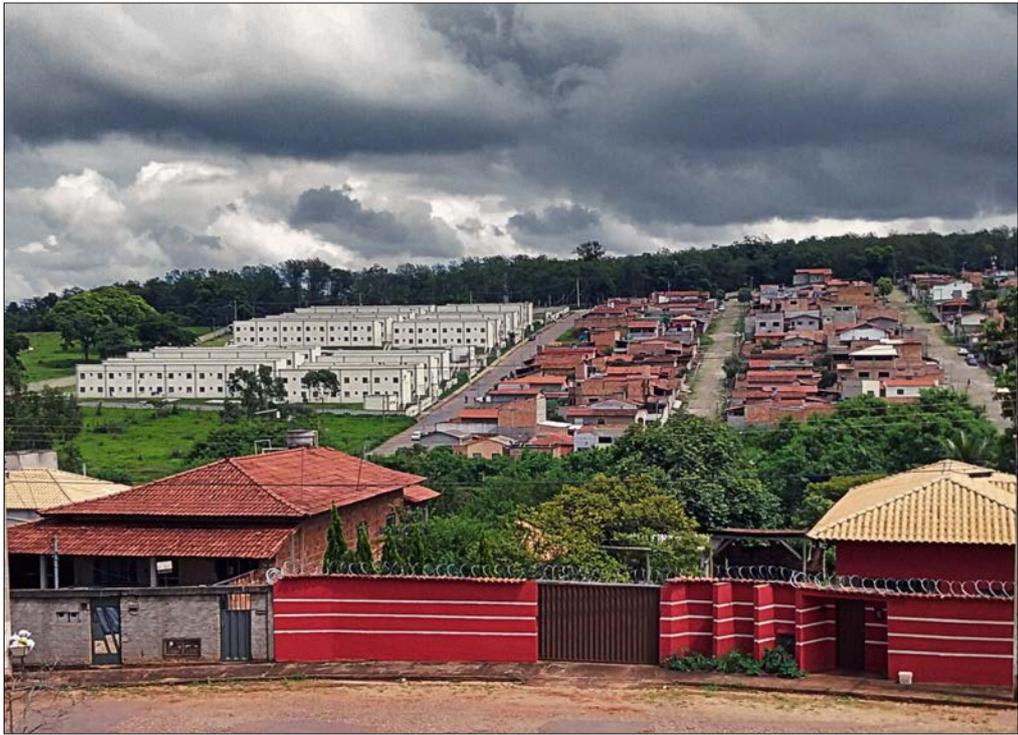
Alfio Conti e Gustavo A. T. Martinez
(Curadoria)

30 x 40 x 50
SUBURBS OF THE WORLD
MINOR CITIES



Pará de Minas:
ambiente construído e vida social

30 x 40 x 50
SUBURBS OF THE WORLD
MINOR CITIES
Pará de Minas
Ambiente construído e vida social



Alfio Conti e Gustavo A. T. Martínez
(Curadoria de)

30 x 40 x 50
SUBURBS OF THE WORLD
MINOR CITIES
Pará de Minas
Ambiente construído e vida social

Curadoria:

Alfio Conti e Gustavo Adolfo Tinoco Martinez

O conteúdo desse catálogo foi avaliado por parte de comitê editorial internacional.

Diagramação

Gustavo Adolfo Tinoco Martinez

2018

Impresso no Brasil

Printed in Brazil

Créditos fotográficos

Os autores das fotografia são indicados nas legendas das fotos.

Agradecimentos

- Secretária de Cultura e Comunicação Institucional da Prefeitura Municipal de Pará de Minas por ter acolhido essa iniciativa.
- José Roberto Pereira pela amigável recepção, cordialidade e disponibilidade.
- Cleysi Mara Pinto de Souza pela ajuda em viabilizar essa iniciativa.
- Copiadora Objetiva pelo patrocínio.
- Studio Giardino22 art lab pela consultoria e colaboração.

Apoio

Laboratório de Geoprocessamento do Departamento de Urbanismo da Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais – GEOPROEA

<http://geoproea.arq.ufmg.br/>

Esse livro, assim como suas partes, não podem ser duplicadas, reproduzidas ou transmitidas de qualquer forma ou meio (eletrônico, digital, analógico, mecânico ou outro) sem a autorização dos autores.

Perfil dos autores

ALFIO CONTI,

professor do Departamento de Urbanismo da Escola de Arquitetura da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Graduado em Planejamento Urbano e Territorial na Università IUAV na Itália em 1996. Em 1999 conclui o Mestrado em Arquitetura e em 2009 o Doutorado em Geografia – Tratamento da Informação Espacial na Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais - PUCMinas na EAUFMG. Atualmente seus interesses de pesquisa estão ligados ao planejamento urbano e regional e às políticas habitacionais.

FERDINANDO ZANZOTTERA,

professor de história da arquitetura no Politecnico di Milano (Dipartimento di Architettura e Studi Urbani) é diretor do Dipartimento di Valorizzazione dei Beni Culturali e Conservatore degli Archivi e della Fototeca ISAL.

Coordena projetos de pesquisa e catalogação SIRBeC.

Os temas de pesquisa de interesse são aqueles que envolvem a recuperação e o restauro de edificações antigas e modernas, dando atenção ao contexto ambiental, urbano e territorial, á arquitetura como momento complexo de síntese das artes, á conservação e aos problemas da restauração. As numerosas publicações de sua autoria se relacionam a âmbitos diferentes da historia da arquitetura, da arte e da cidade. Nos últimos anos suas pesquisas se orientam á proteção, tutela e recuperação dos bens históricos e ambientais e a busca da relação existente entre matéria, arquitetura e arte.

Índice

Apresentação	p.	07
Um olhar para as periferias das cidades de Pará de Minas e Itaúna <i>Alfio Conti</i>	p.	11
Italian outskirts: reflections for a debate <i>Ferdinando Zanzottera</i>	p.	23
Repertório iconográfico Alfio Conti e Gustavo A. T. Martínez (Curadoria de)	p.	39
Insight temáticos	p.	141
The SNIA Village of Cesano Maderno: from “industrial ideal” to “non-productive” suburbs <i>Ferdinando Zanzottera</i>	p.	143
Falando da periferia do Brasil Alfio Conti	p.	177
Perfil dos autores	p.	203
Índice	p.	205

