

Architecture as propaganda
in twentieth-century totalitarian regimes

History and heritage

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EDIZIONI POLISTAMPA

Published with the aid of grants from
Fondazione Famiglia Rausing
Magnus Bergvalls Stiftelse
Åke Wibergs Stiftelse

Translations by
Penelope Eades, Francesco Gagliardi, Neele Reimann-Philipp, Anke Timmermann.

All articles (except the introduction chapter) were submitted to a double-blind peer review.

The English text was revised by Rebecca Montague.

www.polistampa.com

© 2018 EDIZIONI POLISTAMPA
Via Livorno, 8/32 - 50142 Firenze
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ISBN 978-88-596-1835-5

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Fascism/Urbanism: Town, New-Town, Non-Town

Raffaele Giannantonio

Non-Town, anti-urbanisation and rural city planning

Apart from the foundation of the Provinces,¹ the territory of Italy did not change significantly between the First and Second World War. However, the fascist regime, which considered the proletarian urbanized masses a potential threat to the stability of the system, issued legislative dispositions from 1926 onwards to influence demographic growth and distribution. A permanent Committee for internal migration was initially commissioned to handle the problem, and then to facilitate the flow of migrants “towards the less inhabited provinces in the south and on the islands”.² In this way, anti-urbanisation became an official ideology of the regime. In 1924 Mussolini had already defined fascism as a “mainly rural phenomenon”, because “all the relics of the old parties, the old sects, the old institutions were still rooted in the city”.³ Such a rural orientation may be considered a “reactionary revolution”: the regime wished to restore old social hierarchies that had been overthrown by the exodus of the agricultural proletarian masses to the city, and the subsequent birth of the popular urban classes.⁴

Anti-urbanisation: origins

In the period following the First World War Europe underwent a series of changes that would eventually create fascist anti-urbanisation. In *Der Untergang des Abendlandes*⁵ Oswald Spengler rejected democracy as a system of power which was ruled by the masses, and which, at the same time, scared and irritated the educated classes. Based on the opposition of the cosmopolitan city (*cosmopolis*) and the country (province) Spengler developed a cyclical theory: when a city becomes a cosmopolis, “civilized man” suffers from an anthropological degeneration. After the Great War and the October Revolution, the bourgeoisie’s trust in the power of science to prevent the uncontrolled growth of society and the irrationality of the proletarian masses waned. Some philosophers proposed as a countermeasure a reinvigoration of “the tired spirits of the European ruling classes” with “supplementary doses of willpower”.⁶ With these theoretical



Fig. 1. B. Mussolini, *Discorso dell'Ascensione* (Ascension speech), cover image. (www.marelibri.com)

principles at hand, Mussolini would fuel the *Fasci di combattimento*. In his introduction to the Italian translation of Richard Korrer's essay on the *Geburtenrückgang*, Spengler stated that being fertile was a real "political strength"; and explained that Mussolini alone understood the importance of this concept, particularly for a country like Italy, lacking natural raw materials.⁷ This idea was the starting point for the regime's war against urbanisation, officially beginning with the "Ascension Speech" delivered by the *Duce* at the Chamber of Deputies on 26 May 1927 (Fig. 1), which discussed the limitations of urban development, control of the population in the provinces, and the creation of a territorial network of services.⁸

The Twenties: the Mussolini brothers and urbanisation

In the second half of the 1920s, anti-urbanisation was also part of the "pronatalistic" policy launched by Mussolini.⁹ The *Duce* was worried about the low birth rate in many provinces, and identified the "disruptive industrial urbanisation that sterilizes people" as its main cause. He had supported "Italy's ruralisation" by accepting only the establishment of "healthy" industries, i.e. those which "work with agriculture and the sea".¹⁰ In order to facilitate population growth, the regime adopted binding measures in 1928, in agreement with Law No. 2961, in which a single article gave the Prefect the power to prohibit demographic growth in the city through legal decrees. One good example is Law No. 1092 (1939), which prohibited people from moving to a province of more than 25,000 inhabitants (or of recognized industrial importance) for non work-related reasons.

While Arnaldo Mussolini's ideological view on urbanisation may have been clearer than that of his elder brother, his own ideas were influenced by the contemporary political situation to a lesser extent. In December 1928, a few days after Law No. 2961 was promulgated, he mused in an editorial published by *Il Popolo*

d'Italia: “what have the unbelievably crowded post-war cities gained in terms of civilisation, and what have they acquired for history?”. Arnaldo focused his disapproval on the metropolis: he thought of the villages and small provincial organisms as responsible for the “elaboration” of countryside work, with the metropolis at their service, reversing the relationship between city and countryside. In this context, it is interesting to note that the journalist Luigi Barzini was asked by the *Duce*'s brother to prepare a news report on the phenomenon of urbanisation in the United States.¹¹ On 7 May 1929 Barzini reported back that he would not be able to write the requested articles for the Italian media, since “there was absolutely no analogy with our country”: the strong urbanisation in the US, a young and powerful economy, was based on its continuous expansion of industrial activity, but also balanced by “a big stream [of migrants] that seemed to go from the cities to the rural regions” without any actual “return to the countryside”¹² – thanks to the development of transport systems, most New York citizens now lived outside of the city and could travel on “countless railways that go under the rivers in any direction”.

The Thirties: the theoretical debate

In the 1930s urbanisation was considered a modern discipline that could be related to the economic, political and social aspects of the urban phenomenology. In November 1933 Eugenio Fuselli began to publish a series of articles in *Quadrante* that stated the necessity of an extended urbanistic plan for the Italian territory,¹³ with further perspectives published in 1934 and 1935:¹⁴ Gaetano Ciocca and Ernesto Nathan Rogers, Peressutti and the BBPR introduced the theory of “corporative urbanisation”, which was positioned against Marcello Piacentini's proposal of a mediation among economic, political and cultural interests, and aimed at rationalising the conflict between city and territory, i.e. between capital and workforce.¹⁵ According to Ciocca, Rogers *et al's* theory, the urban organism was “corporative” as a manifestation of the corporative essence of the regime, and it opposed both liberal anarchism and communist collectivism. Not everybody in the architectural environment agreed with this position. Edoardo Persico, for example, saw the “corporative city” as the “last disguise of Italian rationalism”, as well as “an inventory of common beliefs and question marks”.¹⁶ However, a Mussolini quotation from the 1936 “Regulatory Plan for the Italian economy” opened the catalogue of the 1937 Roman exhibition of the “Urban Development Plan for Valle d'Aosta”, edited for Adriano Olivetti by BBPR, Figini, Pollini and Bottoni – it was thought to be an implementation of the corporative urbanisation criteria.¹⁷

Anti-urbanisation before the Urban Planning Law of 1942

The first Urban National Congress, which took place in Rome in 1937, offered a good opportunity for debate. In the opening speech the National Education

Minister Giuseppe Bottai encouraged control of the “pathological expansion” of the city and underlined the importance of the “*civitas*, the civilisation” for the vision of a global plan.¹⁸ Inspired by Giovanni’s principle of “deurbanisation” Bottai described urbanisation as “anti-urbanisation”, and encouraged architects to implement “rural urbanisation”. “It might seem a contradiction, but it is not, because this idea expresses our intention to establish new relationships between the city and the function of the countryside.” As mentioned above, in the 1930 Regulatory Plans and Urban Policy, Gustavo Giovannoni applauded the regime’s deurbanisation plan via the law for integral land reclamation.¹⁹ In the following year Virginio Testa presented a linear city project: Roma-Ostia, and with it the concept of “totalitarian urbanisation”.²⁰ Furthermore, in an article published in *Urbanistica* at the beginning of 1934, Luigi Piccinato adopted those of Spengler’s ideas which had already been accepted by Mussolini, and harshly criticized “demoplutocrat” cities that promoted world urbanisation in order to overturn the function of cities by means of urban decentralisation.²¹ While Le Corbusier called New York a “city of shy people”, Piccinato condemned the *metropolis* for draining all resources of the territory. In 1936, after being appointed commissioner for the design contest for the city of Aprilia, Giovannoni once more addressed the theme of “deurbanisation” and suggested that buildings with a decreasing density towards the periphery be built, “with harmonious relationship among their volumes, without following strict systems”.²² In this regard, “the formula of common sense and good taste should be very easy but very Italian”.

The tendency to deurbanize grew as the war broke out. In 1941 Alberto Calza Bini recommended territorial planning as a strategic instrument for deurbanisation, and Domenico Filippone coined the phrase “anti-air urbanisation”: a “diluted expansion of the territory” from the historical centres, where the density of high buildings was a danger for both the inhabitants and the monuments.²³ In the same year Giorgio Rigotti further transformed the “anti-air urbanisation” into “open deurbanisation”, with a model of the city based on buildings that were set back from the streets, in order to be functional for the war. In 1943 Armando Melis proposed “active evacuation” as a useful tool for the deurbanisation policy, whereas Gustavo Giovannoni considered the destruction of war an opportunity to eliminate the modern extensions of monuments.²⁴ Meanwhile, on 17 August 1942, Urban Planning Law No. 1150 was passed, which prevented cities from creating a new regulatory plan, and was criticized by Piacentini. This decision appeared antithetical to the “social necessity of clearing the cities”,²⁵ but the law’s first article quoted theories approved by the regime when it decreed that the Minister of Public Works had to “support deurbanisation and oppose the tendency to urbanise”.²⁶

New-Town, the new cities

The first new cities in Agro Pontino

Compared with the administrative dispositions the economical legislative measures had more effective outcomes in the urban field. For instance, the 1928 law on the integral land reclamation (*bonifica integrale*)²⁷ carried out a programmed relocation of people towards the south, and thus the foundation of new cities.²⁸ However, the reclamation and urbanisation of Agro Pontino or the region of Capitanata were more than a mere function of an agricultural renovation programme: they formed an expression of the above-mentioned deurbanisation policy. The status of the new settlements was not that of cities: although Littoria's dimensions were now larger than those of the original project, Mussolini refused to use the term "city" in the inauguration – this was the same for other settlements in Agro Pontino, but the requirements of propaganda pressured him into changing his mind. The resulting new organisms united and divided territorial bodies, promoted cities to provincial capitals and thereby embodied the administrative reorganisation operated by the Party-State.²⁹ With the architects' agreement to match the shape of cities to a political agenda, the orthogonal scheme grew to be the symbolic expression of the new rational order of State and Society. The "new cities" of Agro Pontino, for instance, with their rectilinear streets and regular shape, were reminiscent of a traditional city (Fig. 2). Once the first area had been drained, and before proceeding with agricultural remediation and settlement of its inhabitants, the *Opera Nazionale Combattenti* (ONC) designed a basic geometric scheme in which the territory is divided by canals and organized in an orthogonal structure for housing and the agricultural work, from the farmhouse to the farmyard.³⁰ A certain number of small farmhouses formed a borough, and a specific number of boroughs a city, so that the entire territory could easily be controlled by the regime's pyramidal bureaucratic administration.

The story of the new cities in Agro Pontino begins in 1926, with Mussolini's announcement that he would reclaim the swamplands.³¹ Six years later, on 18 December 1932, he personally inaugurated the new city of Littoria. Oriolo Frezzotti gave an urban look to the first of the working-class suburbs: his sunburst design focused on a wide central square, and certain architectural choices lent the buildings an essentially fascist appearance (Fig. 3).³² On 15 April 1934, the city of Sabaudia was inaugurated (Fig. 4), which was based on the designs by Gino Cancellotti, Eugenio Montuori, Luigi Piccinato and Alfredo Scalpelli who had won the previous year's national contest. Three central squares formed the core of the structure, which also included a residential nucleus and a small vacation centre on the banks of Lake Paola. Even though Piccinato would call Sabaudia and Littoria "agricultural towns", in their appearance and architecture they were truly urban.³³ The Sabaudia project

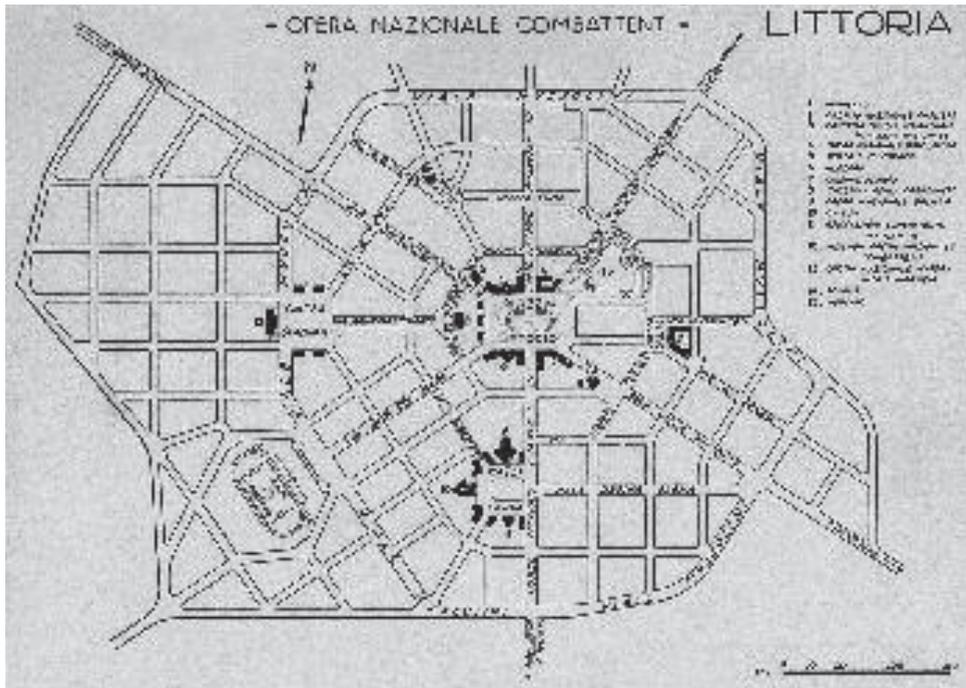


Fig. 2. Plan of Littoria, 1931, Oriolo Frezzotti. (www.casadellarchitettura.eu)

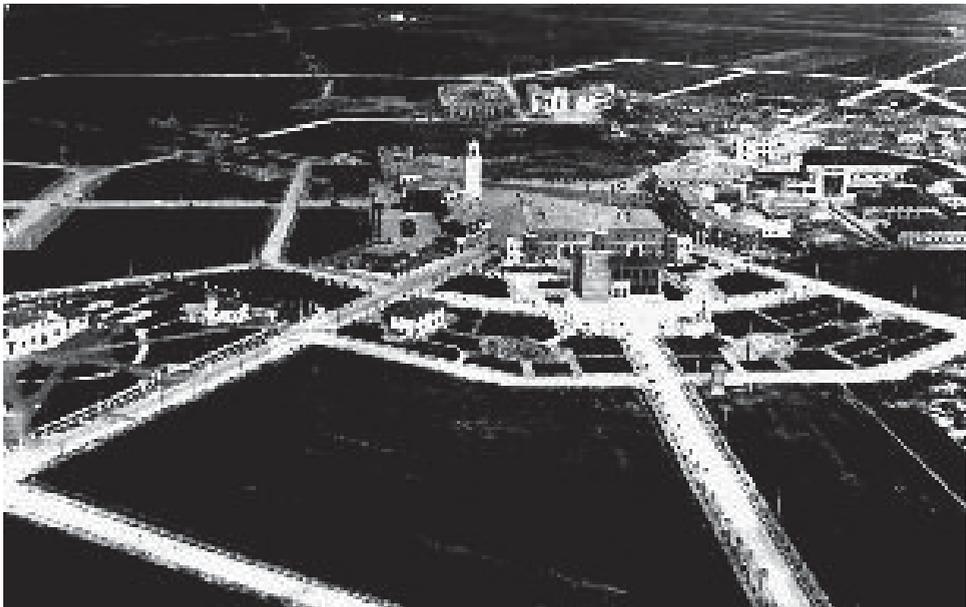


Fig. 3. Littoria, dated aerial photo. (www.saranistri.com)

earned the critics' strong disapproval, since its creators, despite having been granted space for experimentation and new solutions, chose a rather traditional orthogonal scheme and continued to use the typical characteristics favoured by the regime.³⁴ On 18 December 1935, exactly one month after the demo-plutocracy had imposed economic sanctions on Italy, Pontinia was inaugurated (Fig. 5).³⁵ Alfredo Pappalardo, engineer for the ONC Technical Office, had been assigned the project, and was assisted by Oriolo Frezzotti as artistic supervisor. The new city had shown the characteristics of a self-sufficient, rural hamlet that attracted Giuseppe Pagano's criticism. For him, Pontinia was a clear example of "how not to design a regulatory plan and how not to build".³⁶ Le Corbusier, who had expressed his opinion on Soviet "deurbanisation" as early as in 1930 (a "mystified interpretation of a Lenin's principle"),³⁷ travelled to Rome in June 1934 to deliver lectures.³⁸ During this trip he visited Littoria on two occasions (an "urban failure"),³⁹ as well as Sabaudia ("a refined village,



Fig. 4. Plan of Sabaudia, 1933, Gino Cancelotti, Eugenio Muntuori, Luigi Piccinato, & Alfredo Scalpelli. (Piccinato 1934)

developed by a big northern company, and with these in place, the traditional hand-crafted building systems could be surpassed. But Le Corbusier ignored the land reclamation policy's primary aim, which was to increase employment through the use of low-technology systems. At the beginning of the post-war period the State had contemplated an increase in employment in small local companies using hand-crafted techniques. This intention, in addition to the political scepticism of the regime towards Le Corbusier, made the proposal totally useless.

Completion of the project

The limits of the system put into practice emerged towards the end of the first phase: Littoria had grown beyond initial projections, and required a new regulatory method; Sabaudia had developed into a scenic design without urban meanings; Pontinia was an accumulation of public buildings with few residential blocks. As a result, the Agro Pontino urbanisation program ended with the last two cities, which had been designed for the province to enhance its status, rather than its productivity. The new interventions operated on the basis of "localism" a reinterpretation of traditional materials and architectural constructive and decorative systems, in appreciation of Italian rural architecture, and supported by Giuseppe Pagano.⁴¹ Aprilia (inaugurated on 29 October 1937),⁴² with a traditional environment around its only square, had been based on the award winning project of Concezio Petrucci, Luciano Turafoli, Emanuele Paolini and Riccardo Silenzi.⁴³ Marcello Piacentini strongly criticized this solution, comparing the mono-centric scheme with that of local hamlets in Lazio, which were built around a courtyard with linear and opened building elements.⁴⁴ Pomezia, which was inaugurated on 29 October 1939, was considered a drive-through hamlet for visitors of the recovered territories, and consequently, the men behind the Aprilia project were asked to give the new centre an urban look that would symbolize the entire operation. Regardless of their given task, Petrucci, Tufaroli, Paolini and Silenzi infused the new "city" with the same vernacular spirit, especially with the building façades in both the main square and the remainder of the town.⁴⁵

Cities founded outside Agro Pontino

In territories outside Agro Pontino, the self-sufficient economy (*economia autarchica*) utilized the foundation of new organisms to provide a boost for their mining industry. In Istria, the city of Arsia (inaugurated on 4 November 1937) was designed by the Stuard Architecture Office in Trieste in 1920, and its founder was Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, who had graduated with Theodor Fischer in Munich.⁴⁶ In Sardinia, three new cities were completed: Mussolinia (today's Arborea) in 1928, Fertilia in 1936 and Carbonia in 1937.⁴⁷ For the working-class city of Carbonia, Cesare Valle, Ignazio Guidi and Eugenio Montuori adopted the zoning

technique to designate the urban spaces and the architectural style: for the residential area both an intensive and an extensive solution were adopted, the latter reacting to the massive immigration flows and prompting what seemed to be an excessive development of the area.⁴⁸ Guidonia (inaugurated on 31 October 1937), the “city of air”, which was built between Rome and Tivoli and designed by Giorgio Calza Bini and Giuseppe Nicolosi,⁴⁹ became one of most successful “new cities” – despite the fact that its general scheme still focused on a single piazza. The interesting architectural solutions adopted within it granted the city the first rank in the contemporary Italian architectural scene.⁵⁰ Segezia and the other cities built in the Capitanata region (in the current Province of Foggia) were part of the regime’s plan to support the autarchy. The Tavoliere plain, the “granary of Italy”, played a vital role.⁵¹ The first land development plan was worked out in 1932 by the *Consorzio del Tavoliere Centrale* (Ctc) and included the construction of twelve villages. Only two years later the engineer Roberto Curato was commissioned to develop a general reclamation plan.⁵² The execution of the 1934 plan turned out to be disappointing, since the Ctc managed to create only three villages and barely achieved the establishment of any farms (*appoderamento*) or the colonisation around them. And in 1938, once the operations in Agro Pontino led by Araldo di Crollalanza had been carried out successfully, the regime decided to invest in the Capitanata. With the replacement of the Ctc by the ONC, functions of the rural villages were reduced to the provision of main services to the colony. Araldo di Crollalanza then contacted Concezio Petrucci, whom Crollanza had put in charge of the Bari urban development plan, and who had excelled in the contest for the urban development plan for Foggia.⁵³ Therefore, in February 1939, Petrucci, Calza Bini and Ortensi were asked to present projects for three towns (Segezia, Incoronata and Daunilia) and three rural centres (Giardinetto di Troia, Stazione Cervaro and Arpi). Petrucci was to design the urban plan for Segezia, which he based upon four main streets that met in the central square.⁵⁴ Despite Giovanni’s advice to “stop the uniform continuity [...] using monuments”,⁵⁵ Petrucci offset the four sections so that they would utilize the main public buildings as a backdrop.⁵⁶ Most prominent was the Chiesa dell’Immacolata di Fatima with its bell-tower, which became the main visual reference for all surrounding buildings. Residential neighbourhoods were not created, neither in Segezia nor in the other “new cities”, and all the buildings that had been designed to provide services to the public lost their meaning. As a consequence, these new cities did not, as in Agro Pontino, become capitals (*capoluoghi*), and hardly even managed to survive in the reduced form.

After the Second World War the theme of the “new cities” did not attract much attention, in part because it was impossible to assign these fascist interventions to either “Rationalist” or “Monumentalist” approaches. Furthermore, from

an antifascist perspective, *Razionalismo* and *Monumentalismo* were two politically opposed architectural ideologies, saving ideas and actual buildings of the former, while considering the latter as an expression of the fascist regime. There was no understanding that they were often two sides of the same phenomenon.

The town and interventions on the consolidated city

Theories and procedure

For cities with much industrial activity: Milan, Turin, Genoa, and also Taranto, the regime decided to adapt the liberalist “urban machine” to the urban model of authoritarian capitalism: a renewal intended to contribute to civil progress, aiming for significant transformations of central sites within urban organisms, in order to impress on them the mark of the Party-State and the ruling powers.⁵⁷ In the ancient fabric, the “widespread demolition procedure” usually associated with Marcello Piacentini provided a contrast to Giovannoni’s “selective demolition procedure”, but could also, if in the wrong hands, be as invasive as the former.⁵⁸ In 1931 Giovannoni returned to the concept he had developed in two essays in 1913: *Vecchie città ed edilizia nuova* and *Il diradamento edilizio dei vecchi centri. Il quartiere della “Rinascenza” in Roma*.⁵⁹ Here Giovannoni deemed unacceptable the introduction of the necessities of modern life to cities with a complex history, but proposed that one should “evacuate the nucleus of the city and prevent the new city development from attributing to it a completely unsuitable function”.⁶⁰ The “selection” is intended to discreetly “seal off” the old centre, to grant it a higher economic value without disturbing the architectural features. With regard to Rome, in 1916, Marcello Piacentini agreed with Giovannoni, who had written: “We should leave the old city as it is, like it is now, and develop the new one somewhere else.”⁶¹ In 1907, based on this principle, Piacentini had (together with Giuseppe Quaroni) won the second public contest for the re-organisation of the space occupied by the Bergamo Fiera. Their project was the conservation of the entire medieval nucleus and the construction of the new city on the site of the Fiera, after the old, crumbling buildings had been demolished.⁶² But Piacentini seemed to have changed his mind completely roughly a decade later, when he destroyed a developed area of almost 19,000 square metres in the old centre of Brescia to build the new Piazza della Vittoria.⁶³ The transformation of historical structures was uniform across Italy: poorer families were “moved” from their run-down houses to the outskirts, and their former residences replaced by shops, offices and prestigious residential buildings. It is here that fascism impressed its image, and ambition for monumentality, onto the city. Official reasons given for the widespread demolitions were related to occupation and sanitation, and with

the adjustment of the road network the town was functionally adjusted to suit vehicles as well as the “promotion” of the emerging architectural and archaeological elements.⁶⁴

In the period between 1922 and 1937, 18,600,000 cubic metres of buildings were destroyed, and 16,500,000 were re-built on as little as half of the original surface. The reconstruction plans of the entire centre of Milan, and of half of the centre of Taranto and Bari⁶⁵ were designed; Milan and Turin were the first to be subjected to the demolition interventions, followed both by large cities (Rome, Naples) and smaller ones, like Trieste, Brescia, Padua and Livorno. However, during the 1929 “International Congress for Residences and Regulatory Plans” in Rome, Luigi Piccinato proposed a more measured version of Giovannoni’s theory of reduction. He attacked “the environmental conservation criterion [...] for which [...] the transformation of a city is all about the isolation of monuments, the symmetrical positioning of the main streets, the destruction of entire ancient blocks without any awareness of the environment in which the monument was born and raised”.⁶⁶ By contrast, Piccinato proposed the idea of a historical centre as the only “diffused” monument, the weakest parts of which needed protection.

The urban character

Outside the territory of the old city centre, city and countryside are less clearly differentiated. Grand public interventions to transform the central areas into suburban residential neighbourhoods turned the rural areas into “medium completion” zones, which raised their real estate value. While the old centres highlighted the differences between the original and the re-built parts, new multi-storey residential buildings for the middle classes were created where axiality and a monumental character dominated the scene. These buildings featured courtyards along the main roads. In the outskirts, the lower-class population was housed in the so-called *casermoni* (“big barracks”) or, if they were luckier, in garden cities; and monumental public structures such as stadiums, hospitals, military and civil facilities were added later. The “urban character” of fascism enhanced the “passion for scenography” already present in the 19th century through the creation of great architectural works in the national territory. Examples are EUR in Rome, the Arengario complex and the Piazza Diaz in Milan, via Roma in Turin, the road that connected Piazza del Municipio and the Rettifilo in Naples, Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, the Complesso della Foce in Genoa, and the seafront of Bari, Taranto, Reggio Calabria, Messina and La Spezia.⁶⁷ It was not only the big cities however, but also medium and small-sized centres such as Cremona, Forlì, Arezzo and Lecce that expressed the fascist character through their porticos, squares for gatherings, and *torri littorie*. The regime applied its “signature” in different ways by turning the buildings into symbols.⁶⁸ In

the transformation of the buildings, urbanism was considered “big scale architecture” in which the perspectival drawings anticipated and expressed the monumental spatial arrangement of the plan.⁶⁹

The Brescia case

The case of the urban development plan for Brescia provides a good example for the relationship between the central power and the provincial administration, and between the politicians and the local entrepreneurs.⁷⁰ In 1913, Egidio Dabbeni presented a first proposal for the area relevant to the above-mentioned plan, and drafted the project on behalf of the entrepreneur Pietro Pisa; a year later Giuliano Massaroni would propose an idea similar to a town planning scheme, which proved much harder to execute. Due to the procedural difficulties and the high cost of the expropriations, neither of the proposals were taken into consideration by the City Hall; similarly, the approval for the expansion plan studied by the *Ufficio Tecnico Comunale* (Utc) in 1921 was halted due to interference from politicians and some local businessmen. In 1926 the situation changed as a result of important events: Pietro Calzoni became first *podestà*, and Augusto Turati became National Secretary of the Fascist Party, which allowed Brescia to fully enter the renewal plan which fascism had anticipated; a contest was held for the development plan submitted in December to the *podestà* by Alfredo Giarra on behalf of the industrialist Giulio Togni. Togni, who knew that the plans involved moving the railway south for the development of local industry and fully comprehended the competition's potential, offered 50,000 lire as a prize. He also appointed the jury (Piacentini and himself), which also led Piacentini to his next position as consultant.⁷¹ The ranking for the contest was published in June 1928, with the Aschieri, Gennari, Pisa and Venturi group in top position, followed by the Roman Urbanist Group (Gur), and then a group from Brescia made up of Bordoni, Giarratana and Marchetti. However, when the results were revealed, most of the works included in the plan had already been executed by the Utc, as the administration was more interested in a plan for the older centre than in an expansion plan. At this point, Togni lost control of the situation, and every important decision was made by Augusto Turati, such as putting Marcello Piacentini, considered the only architect able to hold that position, in charge of the plan. Thanks to his connections both inside and outside the National Fascist Party, Piacentini was the perfect man for the glorification of the fascist era and its leaders.⁷² In Brescia's old city the Pescherie area was demolished to create a new shopping zone between the Loggia and the market, while the urban planning office of the Utc began drafting the definitive version of the plan by elaborating on the best proposals from the 1927 contest. Piacentini was the sole author of the intervention and was also in charge of the Albergo Vittoria (previously commissioned to the Brescian engineer Egidio Dabbeni).⁷³ In order to mitigate the contrasts

between Piacentini and the Brescia technical community a new commission was created, which had been commissioned to coordinate the design of new buildings with the trusted local engineers.⁷⁴ In reality, the urban decisions had already been made, and consequently the commission had very little impact. Within the commission, Giarratana had proposed modest cuts to the Pescherie neighbourhood, and aimed to operate mainly in the suburbs. By contrast, Piacentini and Aschieri supported the idea of large-scale demolitions within the historical centre.⁷⁵ Giarratana was forced to resign from the commission, and this gesture showed the estrangement of the Brescia entrepreneurs from urban politics (as evidenced by the fact that very few local companies acquired the sites of future buildings on the Piazza della Vittoria).⁷⁶ Piacentini's plan resembled a modern "forum", in direct contact with the Piazza del Mercato, Piazza Loggia, and Piazza Duomo, and with connecting streets to the new north-south and east-west arterial roads (Fig. 6). The failure to complete the transversal arterial roads changed the urban role of the Piazza, which remained isolated from traffic instead of representing the nexus. According to Giorgio Ciucci, Piacentini's idea was to combine Giovannoni's theory of "selected demolition" with the need to create a representative image of the regime, especially through the forum. Fascism endeavoured to represent a new face of Italy through the forum, and to adhere to consolidated tradition, or rather blend with it.⁷⁷ As a consequence, Piacentini's plan did not stand out as a new idea for the Brescia business community, except for the determination in its realisation, despite the estrangement of Brescia's private entrepreneurs: while the industrialists required means to promote the urban

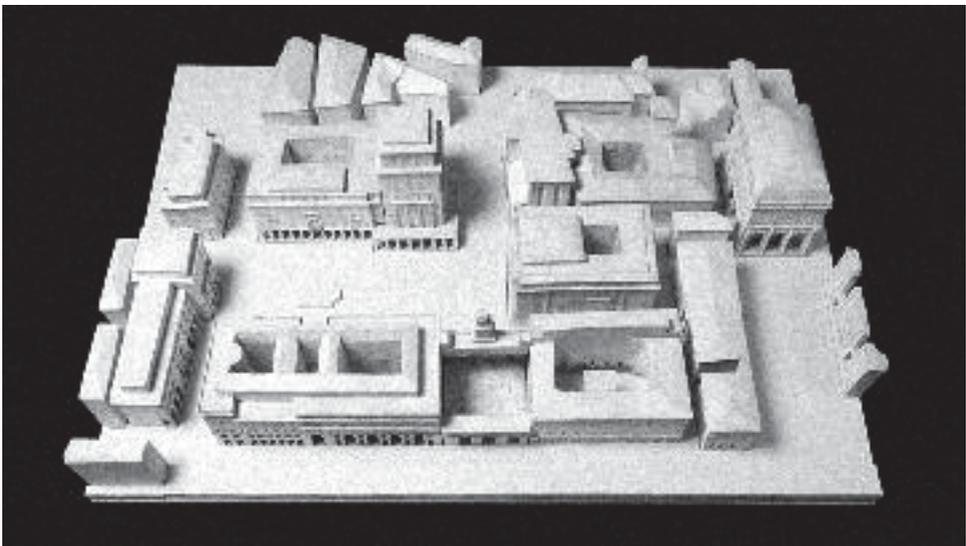


Fig. 6. Model for Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, Marcello Piacentini. (www.bresciatoday.it)

development of Brescia through the construction of a primary urban infrastructure, Turati and Piacentini designed a propaganda intervention, with all its advantages and disadvantages (Figs. 7-8).



Fig. 7. The new Piazza della Vittoria in Brescia, dated aerial photo. (www.bresciavintage.it)



Fig. 8. Piazza della Vittoria, Brescia, current view. (www.turismobrescia.it)

Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be noted that urban interventions like the ones carried out in Brescia had already been proposed in the pre-fascist era, and would be proposed again later, after the fall of fascism. Their originality lay in “the previously unknown popularity”⁷⁸ that fascism was able to give to town-planning, which was relevant to the masses while being a technique of the elite, and therefore achieved an intentional, wide consensus. While using the regulatory plan, the means which was characteristic of the new “Urban Science”,⁷⁹ the Italian scene of the 1920s positioned itself between the two extremes represented by the architects’ “aesthetic” method and the municipal technicians’ “scientific” method. However, some “enlightened” municipal administrations realized the necessity of training specialized personnel in the urban sector – a need removed in 1930 by the foundation of the *Istituto di Urbanistica* (later *Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica*, INU), which advanced the success of urbanist architects. In some cases the *Federazione delle Proprietà Edilizie* was consulted as a mediator between the concrete interests of the middle classes and the theoretical hypotheses of the urbanist architects.⁸⁰ One case is Sulmona’s regulatory plan, which involved Pietro Aschieri, Paolo Rossi de Paoli, Gustavo Giovannoni, and others.⁸¹ Similarly, the urbanist architects who formed groups at INU and the magazine *Urbanistica* were opposed by those who had chosen *Casabella* as a point of reference, although both groups recognized the fundamental importance of the plan both from a historical and from a professional perspective.⁸²

In the course of the 1930s, after the regime had considered the territory as the actual ground for the design of the plan, the professionals involved in planning the city were asked to provide technical details about the cultivation changes, land reclamation and infrastructures, which would reserve the urban functions for the cities alone.⁸³ At the same time, the urban model turned out to be different from the actual development of cities, and therefore acquired a theoretical status in the academic world. Finally, the idea of a “national plan” grew to be only an experimental, at times even improvised concept (cp. the “New Cities” in Agro Pontino), while the drafting of the regulatory plans was based on quantitative principles, on the modelling of the “Face of the Regime” in the new towns or in the expansion areas of the existing ones.⁸⁴ It is further important to note how the provincialism imposed by the regime on all of Italian culture also contaminated the urban environment, and this prevented the continuation of the inter-war urban debate during the Italian Republic.

As a proof of such an omission, one should remember that Forlì, the capital of Mussolini’s home province, had to go through a collective *damnatio memoriae*, caused by a real “Duce complex”.⁸⁵ This affected both entire cities and single

buildings – among them the villa of the Camilluccia, built in Rome for the family of Mussolini's lover Claretta Petacci by Vincenzo Monaco and Amedeo Luccichenti. Architects like these were the creators of one of the best examples of modern Italian architecture of the period (1938-1939),⁸⁶ which shows the ambivalence of Italian architecture in the inter-war period, and in the debate between modern rationalism and traditionalism. Four solutions were proposed for the villa project, all of which reference Le Corbusier, with whom the two architects had been fascinated throughout their careers – evidence for the fact that the Italian technical community was not reluctant to embrace modern architecture. In this way, the theory that the works of Master architects, such as Le Corbusier, are “inimitable” needs to be reconsidered. Their four proposals presented different versions of the same two-storey scheme, centred around a wide hall with the rigid setting of the building allowing the external into the internal space. Elements of Le Corbusier's villa, such as the independent façade, ribbon windows, the round pillars (*pilotis*), continuous paths and the loggias enclosed in the stereometric volumes, were widely accepted.⁸⁷ In 1947 the authors described the villa as a “volume of golden and crystal travertine, with inventive stairs and delicate shelters”, defined by “strong contrasts of light and shadow” and “wide cavities which isolate constructive geometrical forms in their purity”.⁸⁸ Period pictures of the completed building show a protruding façade above the round pillars, and therefore a “free” façade in the direction indicated by the “Five Points”. The frontal highlights were the continuous sequence of glass wall on the ground floor; a *fenêtre en longueur* on the first floor, and a loggia with a helical staircase on the second floor. The façades are totally independent from each other as shown by the front of the bedrooms, which is marked with slight rectangular openings. The exteriors are articulate and complex, decorated with horizontal white-stoned slabs, while the external surfaces of staircases and pillars are made using *béton brut*. The interiors consist of luxurious furniture and materials (black, green and white marble, red porphyry and pearl grey opaline), especially in the room in which Claretta would receive the *Duce*.⁸⁹ The entire space is dominated by a flight of stairs, a clear reference to Le Corbusier's *promenade architecturale*. In separation from traditionalism the circular pillars supporting the stairs do not seem to refer to Le Corbusier's *pilotis*, but rather to Marcello Piacentini's modern classicism (he was the owner of the villa located next to Petacci's). This “grey area” between the ancient and the modern is also present in many other works from this period, such as (to mention well-known examples in Rome) the palaces built by Vittorio Ballio Morpugo (1934-1952) while constructing the Piazza Augusto Imperatore, and the large building complex created in view of the E42 (current EUR) in which the Piacentini's classical code assumes a metaphysical character. Such features are influenced by the same timeless classical style that inspired Gunnar Asplund in Sweden. It is no coincidence that

Giulio Pediconi, one of the protagonists of the 1930s *Nouvelle Vague*, confessed that many young Italian architects represented a “return to the classical style of the north”, explicitly referring to Asplund.⁹⁰

The Petacci villa, however, did not meet with a happy ending. In 1975, after having been sold to the Palazzi family and converted into a restaurant, it was completely destroyed and replaced with the Iraqi embassy; this has been considered one of the most striking episodes of *damnatio memoriae* that affected Italian inter-war architecture. It is important to note that this was not a work by the regime, but a private building evoking Le Corbusier and in particular Villa Stein-de Monzie in Garches (1926-28). It was Vincenzo Monaco himself who, in 1944, pointed out the “strong tendency” of Italy “to make politics interfere with every single event”. At the beginning of the economic boom, in 1960, when the expansion of Italian cities appeared to have destroyed the past regime’s anti-urbanisation, Adalberto Libera would state that in Italy the term “rational” is an insult akin to the term “fascist”.⁹¹

Notes

- ¹ Ciucci, 1976; Mantero & Bruni 1976; Mioni 1980.
- ² Sernini 1980, 296, 299.
- ³ Cresti 1986, 112.
- ⁴ Treves 1980, 319-320.
- ⁵ Spengler 1918-1922.
- ⁶ Breschi 2007, 172.
- ⁷ Korherr 1928, 28-29.
- ⁸ Mussolini 1927.
- ⁹ Treves 2001.
- ¹⁰ Mussolini 1957, 366-367.
- ¹¹ Breschi 2007, 178-179.
- ¹² Barzini 1929.
- ¹³ Fuselli 1933, 10.
- ¹⁴ The articles published in *Quadrante* are Ciocca 1934; Ciocca & Rogers 1934; Banfi & Barbiano di Belgioioso 1934a; Banfi & Barbiano di Belgioioso 1934b; Peressutti 1934; Banfi *et al.* 1935; *Quadrante* 1935.
- ¹⁵ Cresti 1986, 130-131; Ciucci 1989, 34; Brunetti 1998, 278.
- ¹⁶ Persico 1934, 6.
- ¹⁷ Galleria di Roma 1937.
- ¹⁸ Bottai 1937, 4.
- ¹⁹ Giovannoni 1930.
- ²⁰ Vottari 2004, 83.
- ²¹ Piccinato 1934, 10.
- ²² Giovannoni 1936, 17-18.
- ²³ Muntoni 2004, 41.
- ²⁴ Giovannoni 1943.
- ²⁵ Piacentini 1942.

- ²⁶ L. 1942.
- ²⁷ L. 1928.
- ²⁸ Mariani 1976; Martinelli & Nuti 1978a; Nuti & Martinelli 1981; Nuti 1988; Besana *et al.* 2002; Pellegrini 2006; Pennacchi 2008.
- ²⁹ Alici 2001.
- ³⁰ Serpieri 1957; Stabile 1977; Riva 1983.
- ³¹ Pnf Federazione Laziale - Sabina 1923, 9-10; Piacentini 1939, 19-21; Vittori & Pennacchi 2001.
- ³² Orsolini Cencelli 1932; Schwarz 1933; *Littoria* 1936; Stabile 1982; Cefaly, 1984; Cresti 1986, 119 ff.; Muntoni 1990; Folchi 1992; Pellegrini 2006; Zevi 2009.
- ³³ Piccinato 1934.
- ³⁴ Puglietti 1963; Briani 1989; Pieghi 1999; Mambro 2006.
- ³⁵ Buffoli 1980; Galeazzi 1998.
- ³⁶ Pagano Pogatschnig 1935a.
- ³⁷ Kopp 1972, 272. During the Thirties, in the Soviet Union “deurbanisation meant the association of the socialist life with the dispersion of soviet urban and rural territories”. Further, since it was considered a movement inspired by Trotsky, it disappeared because of “modernism”. Chiaia 1979, 28.
- ³⁸ Muntoni 2004, 38.
- ³⁹ Ciucci 1980, 66-68.
- ⁴⁰ Tentori 2006, 72.
- ⁴¹ Pagano Pogatschnig 1935b.
- ⁴² *La conquista della terra* 1937.
- ⁴³ Tofani 1984; Papi 2005; Costa 2005-2006.
- ⁴⁴ Piacentini 1936.
- ⁴⁵ Caracciolo 1938; Piacentini 1938; Marconi 1939.
- ⁴⁶ Krecic 2012.
- ⁴⁷ Martinelli & Nuti 1978a; Martinelli & Nuti 1978b; Lino 1998.
- ⁴⁸ *Architettura* 1940; Delogu 1988; Pintus 1993; Pisano 1998; *Carbonia, città del Novecento* 2009.
- ⁴⁹ Cresti 1986, 129-130.
- ⁵⁰ Pennacchi 2003; Giansanti 2003; Vicario & Moschetti 2003.
- ⁵¹ Festa Campanile & Fittipaldi 1931.
- ⁵² Armillotta 2010.
- ⁵³ Marconi 1929; Paniconi 1932; Giovanoni 1932.
- ⁵⁴ Stanis Ruinas 1943?; Di Fazio *et al.* 2003-2004; Robusto 2005.
- ⁵⁵ Giovannoni 1913a, 457.
- ⁵⁶ Armillotta 2001.
- ⁵⁷ Di Mauro & Perrone 1976.
- ⁵⁸ Mioni 1980, 34.
- ⁵⁹ Giovannoni 1913a; Giovannoni 1913b.
- ⁶⁰ Giovannoni 1913a, 460.
- ⁶¹ Piacentini 1916, 11 ff.
- ⁶² Piacentini 1916; *La città di Bergamo e il suo nuovo centro* 1925; Muzio 1925.
- ⁶³ Ciucci 1989, 29 ff.
- ⁶⁴ Giannantonio 1996.
- ⁶⁵ Mangone 2003.
- ⁶⁶ Piccinato 1975.
- ⁶⁷ Mioni 1980, 42.
- ⁶⁸ Giannantonio 2006.

- ⁶⁹ Mioni 1980, 43.
- ⁷⁰ Mirini 1988.
- ⁷¹ Letter from Giulio Togni 1926.
- ⁷² Benevolo & Bettinelli 1981.
- ⁷³ Robecchi 2014.
- ⁷⁴ Letter from the *podestà* 1929.
- ⁷⁵ Giarratana 1971. About the conflict between Pietro Ascieri and young urbanists for the procedure of ancient centres demolition, see Giannantonio 2000, 87 ff.
- ⁷⁶ The societies from Brescia were replaced with Perogallo, entrepreneur from Genoa, *Banca Commerciale Italiana*, *Istituto Nazionale delle Assicurazioni* and *Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà*. The *Ministero delle Comunicazioni* and the *Cassa Nazionale delle Assicurazioni Sociali* were among the investors.
- ⁷⁷ Ciucci 1982, 273 ff.
- ⁷⁸ Mioni 1980, 47.
- ⁷⁹ Ciucci 1989, 12-13.
- ⁸⁰ A member of the *Federazione Nazionale Fascista dei proprietari di fabbricati* needed to be one of the jurors for the regulatory plan contest. *L'Ingegnere* 1935.
- ⁸¹ Giannantonio 2000, 87.
- ⁸² Aristone & Tamburini 1989, 13-14.
- ⁸³ Bortolotti 1978.
- ⁸⁴ Ciucci 1989, 28-29.
- ⁸⁵ Balzani 2011.
- ⁸⁶ Castelli & Rossi 1999; Melis 2011; Giannantonio 2014, 52.
- ⁸⁷ Castelli & Rossi 1999, 91.
- ⁸⁸ Melis 2011, 57.
- ⁸⁹ Castelli & Rossi 1999, 91.
- ⁹⁰ Angelone 1999, 432.
- ⁹¹ Both quotations in Melis 2011, 59.

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The Italian, Soviet Union and German pavilions in International Exhibitions 1925-1939

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Au vingtième siècle, il y aura une nation extraordinaire. Cette nation sera grande, ce qui ne l'empêchera pas d'être libre. Elle sera illustre, riche, pensante, pacifique, cordiale au reste de l'humanité. Elle aura la gravité douce d'une aînée. [...]. Une bataille entre Italiens et Allemands, entre Anglais et Russes, entre Prussiens et Français, lui apparaîtra comme nous apparaît une bataille entre Picards et Bourguignons. Elle considérera le gaspillage du sang humain comme inutile [...] Voilà quelle sera cette nation. Cette nation aura pour capitale Paris, et ne s'appellera point la France; elle s'appellera l'Europe.¹

With these words Victor Hugo (1802-1885) starts his introduction to the *Guide de l'exposition universelle de 1867* dedicated to the *Histoire du travail*. Before the Great War nullified Hugo's words, there had been three more Exhibitions in Paris, after the first one in 1867: in 1878 (the first time with a pavilion from the United States), in 1889 (*Centenaire de la Révolution française*), and in 1900 (dedicated to *Le bilan d'un siècle*). Hugo, who died in 1885, could not attend the last two, but he would have most likely taken part in them, including a fifth Paris Exhibition announced in 1910 and scheduled to take place in 1915. However, the Great War, which engulfed Europe and involved those very nations mentioned by Hugo, delayed the fifth Exhibition from happening until 1925. At the end of the conflict, the European situation had changed drastically with the creation of new political and territorial structures. In 1917 the Tsarist regime ended and between 1918-1922 the German, Austro-Hungarian, and Ottoman empires fell. The League of Nations, created in Versailles in 1919 as an international institution whose goal was to resolve the conflicts between nations by diplomacy, was launched without Germany (which was being punished) and without the United States, the new power that had made a name for itself on the international scene after joining the Great War in 1917.

Due to this new political context, there have been three "genetic mutations", which permanently marked the history of the world, favouring the rise of the three totalitarian regimes: Soviet Union in Russia, Fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany. The USSR (Soviet Union) was consolidated in 1929 after the Russian

Revolution in 1917, the creation of the USSR in December 1922, and the death of Lenin in 1924. At the same time in Italy, the Fascist Party was founded in 1919 as a “revolutionary movement” and Mussolini was nominated Prime Minister in 1922 (i.e. a peaceful takeover of power). Only in 1925 did the power progressively start concentrating in the hands of Mussolini leading to the consolidation of the totalitarian regime. In Germany the coming to power of Hitler in 1933, leader of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party since 1921, determined a quick and radical consolidation of the totalitarianism. The time in power of the three dictators ended only with their death: 20 years for Mussolini (from 1922 to 1943), 25 years for Stalin (from 1928 to 1953), and 12 years for Hitler (from 1933 to 1945).

I have reported these facts and well-known sequences to provide a temporal context for my presentation, in which I address the theme of the presence of Italian, Soviet and German pavilions (in the order which they occur) at International Exhibitions organized between 1925 and 1939: Paris 1925, Barcelona 1929, Chicago 1933, Brussels 1935, Paris 1937, and New York 1939. Pavilions from these three nations express, at the highest level, the political contents and the specific identities of three different forms of totalitarian governments. Either as a background or an element of comparison, I will also refer to other nations’ pavilions such as Spain, Great Britain, Poland, Finland, Belgium, Austria and Czechoslovakia, to name a few. These countries need to be mentioned, as they were very much involved with the three countries we are here focusing on. It is also useful to note that Italy is the only nation to be present at all Exhibitions: the USSR participated three times, whereas Germany only twice. These presences and absences have precise meanings related to ideological and political matters.

Paris 1925

In 1925, in Paris, the “brotherhood pact” that Hugo had praised 50 years earlier no longer existed. Germany was not invited, the United States chose not to attend, officially due to economic reasons. The list of nations that participated is not very long: in addition to the 14 European countries (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Great Britain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Luxembourg, Monaco, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) Japan, Turkey and the USSR also attended. The latter was invited at the very last moment, a few days after France recognized the Soviet government on 1 November 1924, following the British and Italian recognition of the government of the USSR. It is no coincidence that, to build its pavilion, the USSR was given a plot of land next to the British and Italian construction sites.

Before examining the Soviet and Italian pavilions, it is important briefly to concentrate on the programme of this Parisian event. The title, *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, indicated a comparison between the decorative art known as Art Nouveau, Jugendstil, Secession, Arts and Crafts, Stile floreale, which had established itself at the end of 19th century in Europe, and the industrial production of household furnishing items. Therefore, Paris hosted pavilions from the department stores Grand Magasins du Printemps (designed by Henry Sauvage, George Wybo), Magasin au Bon Marché (by Louis H. Boileau), and Galeries Lafayette (by Joseph Hiriart, Georges Triboud and Georges Beau) together with interior design stands such as the *Fumoir d'une ambassade française organisée par la Société des artistes décorateurs* (by Jean Dunand) and the *Maison d'un collectionniste* (by Jacques-Émile Ruhlmann). Among the architects, although they were not working at the best of their abilities, it is important to remember Josef Hoffmann, who designed the Austrian pavilion, and Victor Horta who completed the Belgian pavilion. There were also young architects such as Kay Fisker from Denmark and Josef Gočár from Czechoslovakia. It is also important to recall the *Esprit Nouveau* pavilion designed by Le Corbusier (named after his own avant-garde magazine founded in 1920 together with Amedée Ozenfant and Paul Dermée), who launched a supranational programme against the Exhibition itself: *Nier l'Art Décoratif*, which hosted works of art by the Lithuanian artist Jacques Lipchitz and by the Spanish painter Juan Gris. Le Corbusier's pavilion also included his own works as well as pieces by Amedée Ozenfant, Fernand Léger and some Austrian and English furniture (by Thonet and Marple).

Le Corbusier's stance seemed quite radical, as did Konstantin Melnikov's extremist idea for the USSR pavilion (Fig. 1). Melnikov was selected to design the Soviet Union's exhibition space. He was the youngest among eleven Russian architects who received the invitation to present a proposal for the building which, according to a document of that period, was expected to "communicate the completely different character of Soviet Russia"; therefore, the building had to "adhere to the spirit of a purely modern architecture, and from an ideological standpoint represent the USSR as a country of farmers and labourers, and as a fraternal union of different nationalities".² In a report presented in March 1925 at the Soviet Academy of Arts and Sciences, a member of the Exhibition Committee states: "Here's our building, which we completed only using wood and glass with its flagpole reaching for the sky. It stands next to the enormous British and Italian buildings, in front of marbles and golden decorations. Not only it does not look overshadowed but it rather stands out due to its simplicity and audacity [...] The French art magazine show the 'Banker's living room' and the 'Count's office' but we chose to show our Soviet culture, instead."³