

ITALY

LINGOTTO: TEST TRACK OR ROOF GARDEN?

Edoardo Currà, TICCIH, President of Aipai and Jacopo Ibello, President of SIH, Board of AIPAI

At the end of 2020, a 'restyling' of the iconic test track on the roof of the former FIAT Lingotto plant in Turin was announced. It is part of a larger project that intends to establish commercial activities in and around the multifunctional complex related to environmental sustainability and electric mobility. According to the team of architects led by Benedetto Camerana, the track will be transformed into an elevated park (or, more properly, a roof garden) inspired by the High Line, the linear park built on an abandoned elevated section of the New York Subway.

The Lingotto is one of the most important works of industrial heritage in Italian and international Modernism. It was built during the First World War in several stages, starting with the Shunting Garage (1916). This was followed by the long building of the Nuove Officine, consisting of two long production wings, five storeys high, around closed courtyards. The famous test track, located on the roof, was built in 1919, is about one and a half kilometres long and was designed to support the simultaneous testing of 50 cars.

The building has a reinforced concrete load-bearing skeleton. The shell is almost completely glazed to illuminate a mass-production line which, as the founder of FIAT Giovanni Agnelli (1866 – 1945) had seen in Ford's River Rouge factory, runs from the bottom upwards. The functional and architectural elements are many and were recognised by contemporaries very early on. The production lines were kilometers long and the finished products were tested in the innovative roof: a suspended track defined by Le Corbusier as 'one of the most impressive spectacles industry has ever offered'.

Over time, other buildings were added, among which the helicoidal ramp, a masterpiece of the complex's designer Giacomo Matté Trucco (1869-1934), stands out for its sensational engineering architecture. The northern ramp, built in 1926, is part of the building that links the Nuove Officine to the Officina di Smistamento.

In detail, the project called **Sky Drive** involves the construction of a park of over 6,000 m² at a height of 28 m. The use of a system of eco-sustainable tanks, which accumulate water and humidity to give the plants the right sustenance, will allow the creation of an apparently spontaneous garden, perfectly integrated into the context.

The arrangement of the green area will follow its own philosophy, with the creation of different thematic areas depending on the proximity of the flower beds to the Pinacoteca Agnelli which will use them for playful-educational activities aimed at children or the restaurant

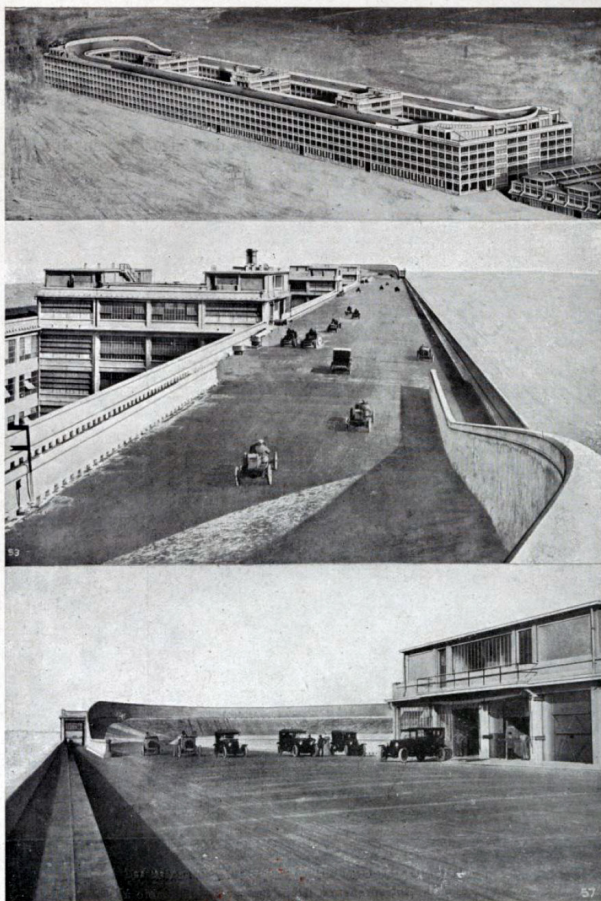


The northern helicoidal ramp of 1926 by engineer Giacomo Matté Trucco.

that will open on the roof of the track and which can be used as urban garden for zero-kilometer aromatic herbs. Or again, a green space that will tell the city's evolution. Sky Drive aims to be much more than a garden: a green-dedicated project showing the world of the New 500, the green interest of the FIAT brand and the new sustainable face of the subalpine capital. It's not all: on the fourth floor of the Pinacoteca Agnelli Casa 500 is planned, the museum dedicated to the history of the FIAT cult car between past, present and future.

The Sky Drive park (which will be accessible by the public) covers 27,000 m² including, in addition to green areas, pedestrian and vehicular paths intended exclusively for electric and hybrid vehicles in EV mode. Camerana motivates the project idea with 'nature that takes possession of industrial architecture' and with the fact that 'before Senator Agnelli decided to build the plant, there was a farmhouse', with reference to the villa of the counts Robilant, in ruins at the time of construction and definitively demolished by FIAT after the Second World War.

Overall, therefore, familiar themes of the archaeo-industrial heritage



Les usines « Fiat » à Turin avec l'autodrome sur le toit.

The plate from Le Corbusier's *Vers un architecture* dedicated to the Lingotto runway (2nd edition 1925).

project, such as naturalisation, reuse, or recovery of the roofs, are called into play in this affair. Legitimate themes in themselves, but which do not seem to be motivated by the rank of the object, the state of conservation or an analysis of the values of the Lingotto runway. Transformed into a roof-garden, it will be impossible to understand how people could race there and dream of future modernity, just as Corbu did in a Fiat car. The vast track of polished asphalt, in the colourful views of the project, becomes a small road (albeit an ecological one) between roof-gardens and cycle paths, complete with lay-bys.

There are principles, affirmed in the TICCIH Nizhny-Tagil Charter or in the Dublin Joint ICOMOS – TICCIH Principles, with which the intervention appears in strong contrast. There are evaluation criteria, and for each criterion specific degrees with which the industrial heritage manifests its own values. Here we are faced with the maximum degree of uniqueness of the industrial and architectural event, the maximum degree of rarity of the object that bears witness to it, the excellent condition of integrity of the work still perceptible, one of the main physical testimonies associated with the history of the economy, work and society of the twentieth century in Italy.

When Renzo Piano Building Workshop 'landed' the floating silhouettes of the Gianni and Marella Agnelli Art Gallery at the edge of the Lingotto runway, the 'Bubble', a completely transparent cantilevered meeting room set as a counterweight to a helicopter runway suspended in the void, a new balance was created that took nothing away from the previous meanings, achieving a new expressive synthesis.

Transforming the test runway of the Lingotto with a roof-garden turns the futuristic roof of FIAT into an ordinary rural street. Perhaps we need to courageously verify that there is still a lack of awareness of the values of the industrial heritage that is not overcome in architectural practice. Nobody, I hope, would permanently put creepers on Antonelli's Mole or rural flower boxes on the balustrades of Palazzo Madama in Piazza Castello, but on the Lingotto it seems normal. AIPAI-TICCIH Italy is obviously and cordially ready for a debate.



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The possible new use for the famous roof track on the Lingotto FIAT factory in Turin. Sky Drive proposes a circular 'High Line' as part of a green scheme for the neighbourhood. The Italian industrial heritage association AIPAI/TICCIH Italia uses the Bulletin to express concern about this and another reuse proposal which run counter to TICCIH's conservation principles.

HARNESSING THE UNIQUE POTENTIAL OF OUR INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE

Dr Miles Oglethorpe, TICCIH President

Greetings from your President! It's mind-numbing to think that it is over a year since many of us went into our first CoVid19 lockdown. So much has happened since then, and not a lot of it has been good.

This issue contains several contributions from current and recent doctorate students, and we expect that the Bulletin will continue to provide a space in which early-career research can be publicised. Colleagues supervising research projects can encourage their students to explain their work on this platform.

For me, the last few weeks have been a time for reflection. Many organisations are going through a process of 're-imagining', focusing not only on post-pandemic recovery, but also trying to learn from the ordeal that we have all suffered and to emerge in a stronger position than before. I have written previously about the extraordinary digital revolution that has been a life-saver over the last year and has transformed the way we live and work. Whether we like it or not, very little is going to remain the same and in some respects that is a good thing.

Without doubt, the biggest issue facing us all is our climate crisis. The pandemic has radically altered patterns and volumes of human consumption and changed behaviour. Some of this transformation will be temporary, but some of it will not. In Scotland, our attention is now turning towards the challenge



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