

EVENTFULLY PRESERVED

TURIN'S HISTORIC HERITAGE IN THE POLICIES FOR URBAN REGENERATION OF THE LAST TWENTY YEARS

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ABSTRACT

Heritage has played a major role in the policies for Turin's urban regeneration over the last two decades, often in connection with strategies aimed at strengthening the city's cultural economy. Narratives focused on the preservation of historic heritage have been crucial for the local community, depicting Turin as a city capable of fighting its industrial decline and reinvent itself through a balanced association of the old and the new. Nevertheless, representations of urban heritage have also remained singularly unfocused and the emphasis placed by local elites upon international competition and urban marketing has favored an opportunistic use of an important symbolic resource.

Torino 1961 is the title of a book that was published to coincide with the celebrations of the centennial of Italy's unification, held in Turin and Rome in 1961. The book consisted of a selection of writings on the city illustrated by works from a number of contemporary artists (Caballo 1961). The illustration on the cover (*Fig. 1*) synthesized the two images of Turin that were at the core of the celebrations. Turin was presented as a center of modernity (as symbolized by a detail of the vault of a pavilion designed by Pier Luigi Nervi for the city's Fair Center, Torino Esposizioni) and a repository for historic values (as symbolized by the staircase of Filippo Juvarra's Palazzo Madama). These aspects were deemed to be important not only for the city but for Italy as a whole: it was Turin's industrial power that was leading the nation's economic

growth and it was Turin's historic role in the birth of the nation that provided a key to understand Italy's identity. The program of «Italia 61», the celebrative event organized in 1961, reflected this dual vision on a larger scale. The emphasis on modernity was clearly visible in the new buildings erected in the southern area of the city, such as Palazzo del Lavoro or Palazzo a Vela, while the focus on history had its central moment in an exhibition on the history of Italy's unification, held in Palazzo Carignano, and in the architectural restoration of a number of relevant monuments (Bernardi 1961; Chiorino, Pace and Rosso 2006).

The ideas of modernity and national identity that were celebrated in 1961 are today definitively outmoded: nevertheless, both the importance given to special events and the attention for architectural heritage – two of the elements that were at the core of «Italia 61» – are still at the forefront of Turin's urban strategies half a century later, when the city is preparing itself to host «Italia 150», an admittedly less ambitious program for the celebrations of the 150 years of Italy's unification.



Fig. 1.

The organization of great events (most notably the 2006 Winter Olympic Games) and the promotion of tourism in the historic center count among the policies that have marked the regeneration of Turin in recent times. They are certainly not the only aspects of a multi-faceted and stratified process of urban change, but it is symptomatic of recent trends in Turin's transformation that these strategies have tended to become increasingly prominent and have been increasingly perceived as complementing each other, in an attempt to provide a comprehensive answer to the crisis of Turin's «Fordist» pattern of economic development (Olmo and Bagnasco 2006).

1. CULTURE, HERITAGE, EVENTS AND URBAN STRATEGIES

These aspects of urban transformation have gained prominence in Turin at least since the early 1990s, a period when the city started to experiment ways to reposition itself in the context of European economy and to attenuate its decades-long dependence upon industrial production. A change in urban policies became especially visible under the mayorship of Valentino Castellani (1993-2001), the first mayor of the city to be appointed after the law of 1993 that introduced the direct election of Italy's «first citizens». In Turin, as in several other cities (Lumley and Foot 2004), the direct election of the mayor gave local administration a new political legitimation and a stronger stability than in the past – a condition that favored a marked change of style in local government. Part of the change, at least in the case of Turin, consisted in seeking new forms of governance that involved a large number of relevant actors and stakeholders (Baraggioli 2007). The discussion of major choices between urban forces was seen as a way to strengthen the city's «social capital» and to make decisions more effective, ensuring that the available resources were used to pursue a few widely shared objectives. Such an emphasis on collective decision and action found its apex in the choice to prepare a «strategic plan» for Turin, signed by a large number of public and private actors, in 2000 (Torino Internazionale 2000; Rosso 2004) (a second strategic plan was approved in 2006).

Debates of this period were marked by a growing awareness of the role that culture and heritage could play in fostering and accelerating urban change (Bagnasco 1990). Culture, museums and architectural heritage were seen as resources that could help to make the city more attractive not only for tourists but also for potential new citizens. The importance of culture and heritage was clearly stated in the first strategic plan: of the six «strategic lines» outlined by the document, one was the promotion of Turin «as a city of culture, tourism, commerce and sport», a goal that included the ambition to «enhance and develop the cultural heritage» and to «develop the tourism industry». The historic city also implicitly played a part in other strategies, especially in the actions directed at improving «urban quality» through the promotion of projects for public spaces (Torino Internazionale 2000). Culture was perceived as «not only a service to the citizens but a factor of tourist attraction», and an «extraordinary resource» that could «help to redress the balance of [...] a socio-economic system in crisis» (Città di Torino 2006: 5).

Policies for Turin increasingly insisted on the importance of communication and city marketing as key potential factors of urban change (Martina 2006). In an international context marked by harsh competition between European cities, Turin's elite deemed it important to counter the negative representations that had been associated to the city at the peak of its industrial powers, when many guidebooks seemed to consider Turin as a boring caketown barely worth a visit. Analyses of the image of the city and the need to change it were therefore recurrent in the literature on Turin (Scamuzzi 2001). Culture and heritage were called on to contribute to the promotion as a more balanced image of Turin as an innovative, highly dynamic city («Turin, always on the move» was one of the slogans of the city's advertising campaigns) where cultural opportunities were plenty and where the built and natural environment offered a variety of places to enjoy.

Local institutions and other urban actors were highly conscious of the need to attract external resources to the city, since locally available resources were unlikely to be adequate for the ambitious programs of urban regeneration that it seemed necessary to promote. Hence an increasing tendency of the city to compete for external funding, as in the

case of the «Urban» funds from the European Union. The choice to compete for the organization of special events was part of such a tendency. Great events were seen as special occasions to let new images of the city enjoy international circulation, and to test the managerial and organizational skills of the local system. In this context, the bid for the 2006 Winter Olympics, greeted with success in 1999, marked a watershed: it could be seen as a confirmation that Turin had become increasingly competitive on the international scene and it provided local society an important collective goal to be pursued for the following years.

In short, not only the organization of special events and the attention for architectural heritage were important policies for the city, but they evoked highly symbolic aspects of the issues that were at stake in Turin's ongoing transformation. Both themes were the object of powerful narratives that seemed to be widely shared by Turin's leaders and citizens. The new face of the city center symbolized the way the city was rediscovering its once-hidden beauty, while the organization of the Olympics gave many citizens the sense that Turin's history had taken a new direction. Building upon the perception of the crisis of the industrial Turin of old, narratives upon the restoration of the historic center and the opportunities offered by the great event jointly told the tale of a community capable of fighting decline and reinvent itself through a balanced association of the old and the new.

2. COMPETING IMAGES OF HERITAGE

Given the importance reserved to Turin's heritage in recent policies, it may be interesting to question which images of this heritage were conveyed by the strategies for the city. Such an analysis must bring us back, for a short while, to the years of Italy's economic boom, when the historic fabric of the city was subjected to one of the most intense phases of demographic pressure and physical dilapidation of its centuries-long history. Between the mid-1950s and the mid-1970s, as an effect of growth due to the expansion of the automobile industry, Turin registered a notable increase in population, from about 800,000 residents in 1955 to

about 1,200,000 in 1974 (Tranfaglia 1999; Levi and Maida 2002). Most of this growth was connected to mass migration to the city from several regions of Italy, and especially from the Southern regions. The waves of migration and the accelerated displacement of individuals and groups in Turin's metropolitan space put the existing structure and services of the city under severe strain. As many observers of those years reported (Canteri 1964; Fofi 1964), a relevant part of the new population arriving in Turin found a dwelling – be it provisional or relatively stable – in the older parts of the center and in other existing buildings of the periphery. The inadequate provision of public housing and the tendency of the real estate market to specialize in modern residential buildings for the urban middle classes turned the existing housing stock into one of the most readily available resources for new immigrants, and a potentially lucrative affair for the owners. The impact of these uses upon the historic fabric of Turin was critical. Lack of private and public investment and poor housing conditions favored a deterioration of the existing housing stock that became a cause for growing concern.

During the same period, Turin's architectural heritage was the object of a growing number of studies carried out by art and architectural historians: in particular, Turin's important role in the history of European Baroque architecture brought the city, for a while, to the forefront of international research (Dal Pozzolo and Benente 2006). The exhibition on Baroque art and architecture held in 1963 marked the starting point of a wave of locally-promoted research in the field (Viale 1963; Griseri 1967; *Guarino Guarini* 1970), while the studies of Richard Pommer exemplify the international popularity enjoyed by the topic (Pommer 1967). It was often recognized that Turin's interest lay not only in the physically built examples of the work of such architects as Guarini, Juvarra, Alfieri or Vittonè, but more generally in the way the city seemed to have been designed and built, at least in part, as a coherent whole. Such a view inspired, in 1968, a collective research project directed by Augusto Cavallari Murat that developed the methods of typological urban analysis previously promoted in Venice and Rome by Saverio Muratori (Istituto di Architettura Tecnica 1968).

During the 1970s, photographic campaigns documented the dramatic conditions of some parts of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-

century city, implicitly invoking action against what was presented as a steady decline of historic Turin (Bubbio 1975; Seren Gay 1978). Policies for a rehabilitation of parts of the historic center were increasingly advocated, with the aim of promoting a full restoration of historic parts of the city while avoiding social expulsion from it (Abriani 1981). These were partly building on other Italian experiences, like the plans for the historic center of Bologna of 1969-71, and reflected a wider European consensus around the «integrated» conservation of historic sectors, as expressed in the European Charter of Architectural Heritage, adopted in 1975 (Council of Europe 1975). The end of the cycle of demographic expansion in the mid-1970s created more favorable conditions for the protection of the historic parts of the city and helped promote the discussion of ambitious projects in this respect. A relevant initiative came with the plan for the city discussed by the Communist-led municipal council in 1980: although the plan was never implemented, some of the documents prepared for it had a remarkable impact on the way the historic city was represented in the following years. These studies presented the built fabric of the city as a dense continuum where the stratifications of the past (from antiquity to the early 20th century) were numerous and needed to be preserved as much as possible. Great emphasis was placed on those recurrent elements of the built environment and those parts of the urban structure that seemed to give Turin's baroque and 19th-century planning their distinctive characters (Dipartimento Casa-Città 1984).

In the early 1980s, a wide consensus seemed to be established in large sectors of the intellectual elite of the city about the importance of pursuing wide-reaching policies of urban preservation. In addition to several initiatives for the restoration of single buildings, policies like the «plan of the colors» for the city provided guiding tools for the interventions on large sections of the existing building stock (Brino and Rosso 1980). A further multiplication of studies on Turin's baroque and 19th-century «urbanism» ensured widespread recognition for the key historic concepts behind this vision (Comoli Mandracci 1983).

The hegemonic potential of this vision reached its apex on the occasion of the elaboration of the new general plan for the city, entrusted by the city to the Milan-based firm Gregotti Associati and approved

in 1995 (Spaziante 2008). The plan was a typical example of the contamination between planning and large-scale architectural design that was a recurrent theme in the Italian planning debates of the late 1980s (Secchi 1989). The document dedicated great attention to the regeneration of former industrial sites, in connection with a large-scale infrastructural change (especially connected to a new organization of the railway system) that was already under way. The proposed design for the spatial organization of post-industrial Turin was largely indebted to the images of the historic structure of the city that had been elaborated in the previous years. The most relevant design element proposed for the city, the «Central Backbone» – a large boulevard that crossed Turin from North to South, touching many of the areas designated for future redevelopment – was presented as a contemporary interpretation of the system of long-distance perspectives that had characterized Turin's spatial structure in the Baroque period (*Qualità e valori* 1992; De Pieri 2009). The plan also embraced the idea that systematic preservation policies had to be implemented for specific parts of the city, especially its historic center.

In the same years when spatial planning seemed to definitively share the notion that Turin's historic urban structure was based upon a set of characters and traits that it was important to preserve, the growing emphasis on strategic planning started to shift the attention from the overall preservation of the historic city towards a more selective notion of preservation, focused on buildings and places that were considered useful for the success of specific urban policies. These forms of planning saw urban preservation not as an end in itself but as a way to promote a new image of the city and foster change in its economy and culture. Such an attitude was already at work in the programs for the rehabilitation of specific *piazze* of the city center implemented by Turin's municipal administration in the mid-1990s (De Rossi and Durbiano 2006). It could especially be found in the many strategies put in place for the «museums system» of the city through the 1990s. Coordination between the actions of the cultural institutions of the city was seen as an important element for strengthening Turin's tourism potential (Fitzcarraldo 1997). A partnership between a number of public and private actors working in this field, the «Associazione per Torino

Capitale Europea» (Association for Turin as a European Capital), was established to that end in 1995. Actions on the museums system were not limited to institutional strategies but involved interventions on urban spaces and, in some cases, produced alternative visions of the historic city. An important role in these policies was played by the idea that a relatively restricted area (the so-called «cultural district») existed in Turin's center, where the concentration of cultural institutions was especially high (Demarie and Durbiano 2008). The cultural district, it was argued, required specific policies, aimed not only at linking and coordinating the institutions, but at transforming the space connecting them. This vision differed from the traditional idea of «historic center», since it focused on a small area that could be distinguished from the surrounding parts of the city on strategic grounds, rather than on morphological grounds. The cultural district was the result of a spatial concentration of collections and cultural materials that ranged from the Egyptian Museum to the Cinema Museum (relocated in 2000 in the Mole Antonelliana). Its heterogeneous nature in terms of cultural content did not prevent its promotion – it was, in many respects, the premise for it.

Something similar happened to the historical interpretations of the connections between Turin and its region. Historical studies carried out in the late 1970s and 1980s had insisted on the link between the design of Turin as a regional baroque capital and the construction, out of the city, of a group of castles, palaces and hunting lodges for the court of the House of Savoy. The protection of this group of residences, taken as a whole, was invoked in order to elicit an adequate appreciation of their historical meaning. Such a representation of Piedmont as a regional space reshaped by the Savoy dynasty inspired several strategies for an overall appreciation of these buildings and led, in 1997, to the inclusion on the Unesco World Heritage List of the «Residences of the Royal House of Savoy». Nevertheless, choices made for some of these sites occasionally countered this idea of a balanced preservation. Such was the case with the Rivoli Castle, restored and opened in 1984 as a Museum of contemporary art, or with the Reggia di Venaria, a site for the restoration of which relevant funding was obtained from the European Union (1999-2007) and that was opened as a museum,

exhibition site and restoration training center of international importance. While never explicitly in conflict with the notion of a «system» of interconnected sites, these operations put a much stronger accent on the need to seize specific funding opportunities and to concentrate the resources and the attention on a few sites that were more likely to boost the region's tourism potential.

The visible results of the ongoing restoration of many buildings and spaces of the city center also pushed the local elites of the 1990s and early 2000s to increasingly consider these buildings and spaces as a background that could help promote the circulation of a new representation of the city. A relevant example is provided by «Luci d'artista», an annual, open-air exhibition of Christmas lights designed by a group of international artists since 1998. Another case in point is provided by the activity of the Turin Film Commission, an agency created in 1995 in order to support film-making activities in the city. Many cultural and music festivals were also encouraged to stage their shows in the *piazze* of Turin or in other historic settings.

The 2006 Winter Olympic Games had an even more pivotal role in fostering the international promotion of Turin's image. The Games took advantage of the heritage policies of the previous years and used the historic city as the background for many of their communication campaigns and as a scenario for many of their rituals and ceremonies, as with the medal award ceremonies held in the «Medals Plaza» (Piazza Castello). Furthermore, they contributed to strengthening Turin's tourism infrastructure and were instrumental in helping visitors to the city's museums rise from 1,8 million in 2001 to 3,5 million in 2008 (Osservatorio culturale del Piemonte 2008: 6).

However, the 2006 Olympic Games did not seem to bring any new elements to discussion about the nature of Turin's heritage and the strategies for its preservation. While the Olympic dossier had been centered on such themes as the historic connection between Turin and its mountains, or the tradition of sport culture in the city, no specific historical research was promoted on these subjects before or during the event, as if the 2006 Olympics did not feel the need to seek legitimation in any kind of historical discourse about the city or its region.

3. HERITAGE IN THE AGE OF OPPORTUNITIES

Heritage has played a major role in the policies and strategies for urban regeneration of the last two decades and it is highly likely that it will continue to do so in the next few years, since the «economy of culture» is today widely acknowledged as an important factor of urban change – even more so, in Turin, after the positive impact of the Olympic event. Turin offers, in this respect, an interesting sample of the opportunities and the risks that go with the increasing role played by urban heritage as a competitive resource in the context of globalization. Historic images are today widely used in city marketing campaigns to convey the sense of the quality of Turin's environment and the abundance of opportunities the city has to offer. Yet these images are often treated very superficially and – more interestingly – almost seen as interchangeable. Turin can be presented as a city of museums, as a former Baroque capital, as an automobile city, but also as a city of cafés or as a center of food culture, in a manipulation of any material potentially related to a «tradition» that reveals an overtly opportunistic attitude.

In spite of the insistence of so many recent policies upon the need to maximize consensus around a few shared representations of the city, Turin has elaborated in recent times a plurality of competing – even conflicting – images of its historic past. Discourses upon its urban heritage have been singularly unfocused. Such a plurality has partly played a positive role, helping to implicitly question the relevance of some oversimplified representations of the city's heritage elaborated during the previous years. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of historic images that can be found in recent discourses about the city also betrays a lack of reflection about the role that history can play in the construction and negotiation of local identities and a serious underevaluation of the influence that shared representations of the past can have on urban change (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge 2007; Swoboda and Wiersma 2009).

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RIASSUNTO

Il patrimonio ha svolto un ruolo cruciale nelle politiche di rigenerazione urbana perseguite a Torino negli ultimi vent'anni, spesso in relazione al tentativo di rafforzare il peso dell'economia della cultura nel sistema locale. I racconti legati al recupero del patrimonio storico hanno permesso alla comunità locale di rappresentare Torino come una città in grado di combattere lo spettro del declino industriale, reinventando se stessa attraverso un accorto equilibrio di innovazione e tradizione. Tuttavia, le rappresentazioni del patrimonio architettonico e urbano sono rimaste singolarmente fuori fuoco e l'enfasi posta da diversi attori sui temi della competizione internazionale e del marketing urbano ha favorito un uso troppo opportunistico di un'importante risorsa simbolica.