

Industrial heritage between simple valorisation and local development. A case study: Terni (Umbria)

Introduction

This paper adopts the theoretical and methodological approach which is the basis of the national research entitled *The heritage of industrial history. The meaning, roles and functions of cultural assets in the competitive strategies of local production systems*, which belongs to the Special Project "Safeguard of Cultural Heritage" of the Italian National Research Council¹.

A geography of industrial heritage cannot be reduced to the analysis of objects separated from the analysis of the set of values that they assume in different territorial contexts and from the analysis of the social process of attribution of these values (Dematteis, 1998). The asset-building process thus, the process through which value is attributed to objects, directly relates the cultural heritage with current economic and social objectives, inserting it in territorial dynamics and assigning it a specific role in the competitive strategies of cities and regions (Governa, 1998).

In this perspective, the specific goals of this study are, firstly, to briefly present the theoretical and methodological assumptions of the research and, secondly, to reconstruct, in the case study of Terni (Umbria), the strategies that guide the processes of asset-building and to assess the differences between projects of simple territorial valorisation and local development projects.

The Theoretical and Methodological Assumptions of the Research

In a concept of the industrial remains as objects, the heritage of the past becomes an asset

when a limited circle of specialist technicians recognise it as such on the basis of a unique universal code, valid for all territorial contexts. On the other hand, when the attention is posed on territorial context the industrial heritage becomes an asset, non subsequent to a recognition act outside the territorial context, but only at a moment in which it becomes part of community projects.

In the first perspective, the objects which make up the heritage are defined on the basis of what happened in the past, independent from their use and their present value, in the second perspective they depend on their value and therefore on the projects that are built around them. In the latter the meaning of asset is born in the present space and is projected towards the future.

However, connecting the analysis of industrial heritage to the analysis of the processes of asset-building, through which present value is attributed to objects of the past, gives way to various problems. The gap between the notion of heritage as collective memory and process of asset-building, which is defined in the present, is a temporal one. While heritage, by its definition, looks to the past, the process of asset-building looks to the present and the expectations of the future. Industrial heritage becomes similar to a set of potential factors to be played in the development processes.

A first step to bridge these rifts is to think of heritage as a multidimensional and multitemporal concept. Its multi-faceted nature stems from the object that defines it and the multitude of values, of different kinds that it assumes in different social and territorial contexts. Its multitemporality depends on the simultaneous presence of long term processes of stratification and present day processes of asset-building (Dansero, Governa, 1999).



This multidimensional and multitemporal definition of heritage is summarised by Magnaghi in the concept of territorial heritage as a “local genetic code” (Magnaghi, 1998) that derives from processes of historical dynamics, but which has to be discovered and rediscovered, produced and reproduced by the action of local actors.

This starting point allows us to consider industrial heritage as a concept provided with two souls. An objective one, on the basis of which the heritage is a cultural asset localised in a certain place and specific to that place. When we speak of stratification we do not refer to a deposit. The thick of the sediments is not measurable through the sum of the stratified sediments, but according to the relationship connecting territorial objects and subjects and which make up the foundations of the identity of the place.

The other is subjective, on the basis of which it is acknowledged that the heritage has not an absolute value, but assumes different values in relation to the social and economic dynamics of the context in which it is inserted. In this way the heritage could be considered as a set of potentialities which must be recognised and activated by local actors in order to become spendable by the local system.

How to study the two heritage souls? To understand the process of stratification of industrial components a useful theoretical reference could be the Raffestin territorialisation – deterritorialisation – reterritorialisation model (Raffestin, 1984). Territorialisation coincides with the construction of the industrialisation heritage in the moment in which the area comes onto the scene of the industrial revolution. The phases of the deterritorialisation are phases of breakdown, of discontinuity like those triggered by area crisis of ancient industrial tradition in the passage from Fordism to Postfordism. Reterritorialisation coincides with the overcoming of the phase of crisis. The system changes, grows, evolves, reverses, forgets territorial components, attributes new meaning to old components.

Does each of these phases lean on material and immaterial remains that have been stratified as time gives by? What relationship of continuity, of redefinition or of marginalisation are found in this rapport? Today, how is the process of assets building depicted? Are the working class districts, the derelict industrial lands, the immaterial remains recognised in some way and valorised by the local community and outside world? It means seizing the self-representation of the territorial system, using the projects and programs of valorisation of territorial sediments.

In all areas of early industrialisation, we can see various processes that recognise the industrial heritage: eco-museums, industrial archaeology museums, derelict lands rehabilitation etc. In some areas, these processes of cultural valorisation of the industrial heritage and the relaunch of territorial competitiveness are not closely related, while in others they may be closer and, on the one hand, can range from operations like territorial marketing, understood in the reductive sense of simple territorial valorisation and, on the other, can lead to local development processes, understood as a process which evolves within local systems with self-organising and self-reproductive capacities.

Simple territorial valorisation is modelled on externalities deriving from given local territorial conditions, like, for example, the local heritage recognised externally as cultural assets. It's a reversible process, which reverses due to the disapproval of the conditions that produced it, for example: lack of demand, changes in general culture and other changes at a global level. Territorial valorisation does not require the presence of local systems with self-organising and self-reproductive capacities. On the contrary it is required in the case of local development, in which decisive local conditions are not those given but those produced in the self-organising process of the territorial system (Dematteis, 1994). Self-organisation allows the system to adapt external stimuli to its internal demands and respond to the perturbation coming from the outside world in an original manner. The network of local subjects has, indeed, two functions. Acts within the local system as an element of cohesion in the interaction with the milieu. Acts as a linking element with the outside.

Industrial Heritage and asset-building in a case study: Terni (Umbria)

The image of Terni as a “steel town” dates back to the middle of the 19th century when the urban tecnocentric elites formulated the idea of industrial take-off on the basis of the favourable conditions for industrial installations (water wealth and strategic-military position) and began a territorial marketing operation to attract external investors. The external recognition of Terni's potentiality was achieved when, within Italy debate concerning “State Defence”, it was decided to allocate an Arms Factory to Terni. This began production in 1881 and initiated the industrialisation process, launched in the previous decades by local actors.



In a short time an industrial agglomeration of large dimensions was formed which involved various actors: steel, chemical, mechanical, hydraulic, textile and graphics (fig. 1).

The exogenous and public nature of the industrial territorialisation protagonists, capitals, technicians and machinery were all external to the area. The role of the governing classes was exhausted in the effort made to launch the industrial process, after which they were emarginated and lost their influence on the city forever.

The Fordist model of production organisation has repercussion on the town too, setting the basis for its character: a *company town* that develops in the shadow of the steel and chemical industries, a town endowed with scarce management, with small industries closely dependent on the large, with a narrow range of job possibilities and a prevalently working class society.

The physical superimposition of the factory on the city is achieved through the construction of large plants, canals, dams, power lines, but also in working class districts, houses for officeworkers, technical schools, sports centres, libraries, doctor's surgeries, cinemas and theatres, as a result of the factory's social policy.

In the '70's, Terni's industrial system began a phase of decline, characterised by the closing down of companies, reduction in productivity, and job losses, in which the crisis of the Fordist model, based on the large industrial concentration and scaled economy, played a decisive role.

The deterritorialisation phase triggered by the crisis is expressed through a process of a breakdown between industry and city and is accompanied by an evident phenomena of derelict lands. Towards the middle of the 90's the industrial voids occupied 1 million 325 thousand cubic metres.

The riterritorialisation phase coincides with the process of valorisation of the industrial heritage and is articulated in two phases, each of them characterised by different actors, which at times assume the capacity to incise and direct the change. The first phase took place between the end of the 70's and the middle of the 80's and is characterised by its recognition as a state of crisis on behalf of the local system and by its balance of a hundred years of lessons on large industries. In this story the intellectual environment plays an important role; research institutes, journals and local experts denounce the crisis and at the same time give a critical account of the model of industrial development followed up to that time and at some time fight against the withdrawal of the city

to its past. The crucial points on which everyone is unanimous are: the reclaiming by the city of its projects and decisions and persistence of the large industries in which to insert or accompany with new productive opportunities. The industrial past is not rejected, therefore the heterodirect industrialisation methods experimented are refused and the local right to autonomously project the city are claimed.

However, the territorial system still appears to be uncertain in planning changes, incapable in the cultural elaboration effort necessary to change from the heterodirect model to a competitive and self-propulsive model. In this phase the derelict lands are not yet recognised as an asset by local subjects. The local economies even ignore their consistency, private subjects do not adventure into salvage operations which would require the decontamination of the lands.

The situation changes from the middle of the 80's. A new phase evolves in which the recognition on a European and national level of the situation of industrial decline plays a determining role in the creation of moves towards change. Large public finances are concentrated on the area, to the sum of 140 Mecu (63 Meuro between 1989 and 1993, 77 Meuro between 1994 and 1996) which in part fall upon the European structural Funds (Obiettivo 2, Resider and Stride), in part provided by the state, regions and local councils.

In answer to the stimuli internal and external to the city, the system plans the change, without however refusing its own identity. The process of adapting that develops foresees a city that is different from the previous one but not a substitutive. The image of the steel city is accompanied by new representations as capital of industrial archaeology, the multimedial city, theme park polo.

A process of transformation which redefines the relations that link the area to the global network and those that link the subjects to the local patrimony is initiated. Plans and projects attribute to the industrial material and immaterial sediments, value of resources usable in the competitive strategies of the city. Industrial assets become a target, meeting point of several interests, around which the network of local subjects is structured.

The projects prefigure two scenes: the first, that of local development, which accentuates the particular territorial characteristics of the Terni area and uses these to effectuate possible paths, the second is that of passive valorisation that tends to absorb the demands of the Roman metropolis, with strong dynamics and evident demographical pressures.



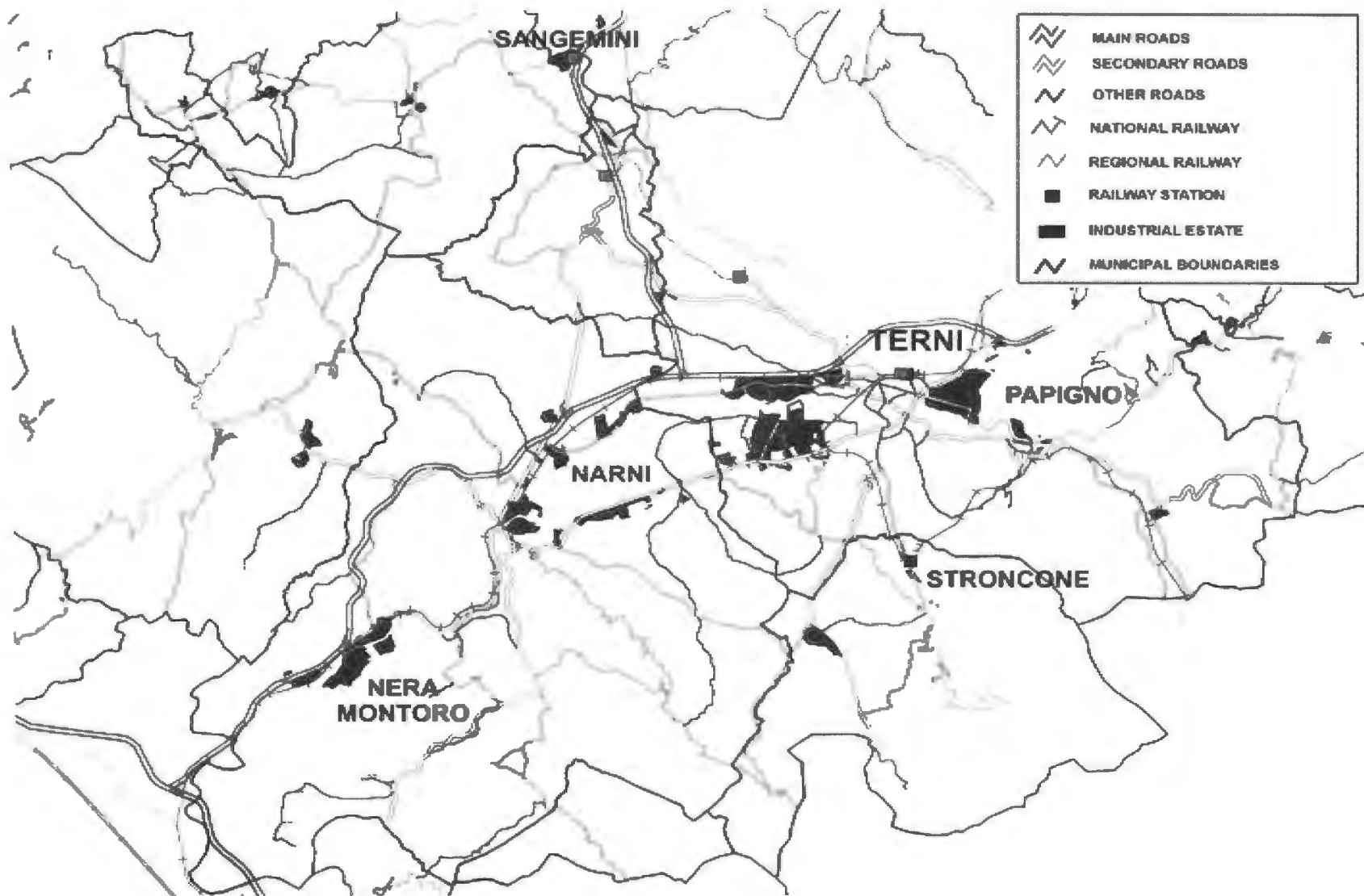


Fig. 1 - Terni (Umbria): industrial territorial system.

The activation of local development is achieved by means of projects that respond to the modification of the exogenous and endogenous situation through the organisation of local subjects around a determinate representation of the city. In this perspective the task that is awarded to industrial archaeological projects is that of valorising the memory and industrial identity with reference to the future. The Open Air Museum, the reutilisation of voids and industrial machinery, collocated in strategic points of the city are aimed at building a conscience of the industrial heritage, a knowledge of the assets the city has available to depart towards new objectives. In other words, the industrial heritage is intended to be an asset for internal destination, available to local culture and education, rather than a free time resource, mainly for external destination. Around the image of Terni as the Italian capital of industrial archaeology the network of local and outside subjects are organised and interactions of various nature, at time conflicting, at time complementary, very often cooperative are woven. Since 1995, the co-operation has been made easier by the pivot role assumed by the Franco Momigliano Institute, which by aggregating local and external actors (the province and local councils of Terni and Perugia, the Associazione Studi Storia d'Impresa di Milano, the Istituto per la storia dell'Umbria contemporanea and the Fondazione Adriano Olivetti), is placed as transversal subject able to conjugate the cultural potentialities of the Terni system with the outside.

The reconstructing projects of the productive system (Parco Scientifico e Tecnologico, Centro Multimediale, Istituto di ricerca e formazione sui materiali speciali) are made plausible by a long tradition of research in the steel and chemical industry, by an ingrained technical culture, by an institutional setting conscious of the rules of industrial development and of the presence of steel and chemical multinationals. The projects involve a vast set of public and private actors linked by the pivot action of the Parco Scientifico e Tecnologico.

The attempt by the Terni system to withdraw from industrial monolithism and achieve turistic competitiveness, is formed by the projects of valorisation of the River Nera and Marmore Waterfalls. These environmental components which up to now have been considered economical resources are now being reinterpreted as environmental and cultural assets and represent the main stay of turistic offers. Many projects are built around them: the Fluvial Park of the Nera and Theme Parks, as a World Space Camp and Mirabilandia.

The turistic valorisation tends to absorb the Roman demand. It is a reversible process that disappears with changes in Roman demand.

Conclusion

The perspective outlined in this paper considers cultural assets as material and immaterial components of industrial heritage to be recognised and enhanced in the competitive strategies of cities and regions. Attention is focused on the strategies that guide the processes of asset-building and on the differences between projects of simple territorial valorisation (e.g. turistic valorisation in Terni) and local development projects. It is a perspective that shows how, in different territorial contexts, certain territorial objects are associated with certain meanings and values: what intentions lie behind these values, to what interests they respond, what social relations they establish. In conclusion, this interpretation shows the importance of a critical geography of cultural assets.

Note

¹ The research is coordinated by Sergio Conti and Giuseppe Dematteis of the Dipartimento Interateneo Territorio, Politecnico-Università di Torino and is based on the comparison of some case studies, representative of different asset-building processes: Cusio (Piemonte) an engineering industrial district, Biella (Piemonte), a textile district, Ivrea (Piemonte), area specialised in computers, West Genova (Liguria) where are steel and chemical plants, Sulcis-Iglesiente (Sardegna), characterised by minings, Montebelluna (Veneto), specialised in sports footwear, Terni (Umbria), a steel town and Pontedera (Toscana), the "vespa town".

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