

Risignificare il patrimonio eterotopico degli ex orfanotrofi: il caso studio dell'Istituto Provinciale per l'Infanzia a Torino

Repurposing the heterotopic heritage of former orphanages: the case study of the Istituto Provinciale per l'Infanzia in Turin

DANIELE DABBENE

Daniele Dabbene, PhD in Architectural and Landscape Heritage at Politecnico di Torino
daniele.dabbene@polito.it

Nel corso degli ultimi anni il tema degli spazi eterotopici, nell'accezione foucaultiana di "luoghi altri", è oggetto di crescente attenzione da parte delle discipline della conservazione. Tali beni non si configurano spesso come eredità neutra ma si presentano gravati da memorie difficili; ne consegue la necessità di definire, nella riconversione a nuovi usi, approcci in grado di ribaltare tali componenti respingenti. Il presente paper intende riflettere sulle prospettive di risignificazione di tale patrimonio, concentrandosi sul progetto per l'Istituto Provinciale per l'Infanzia a Torino. Attraverso la disamina del caso studio viene evidenziato un orientamento progettuale che è in grado di valorizzare le memorie del luogo, garantendo la conservazione del valore tangibile e intangibile.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the concept of heterotopic spaces, defined as "other places" in the Foucaultian sense, within conservation disciplines. These sites are not often seen as neutral inheritances but carry difficult memories. This highlights the importance of developing approaches for repurposing these spaces by overturning their negative aspects. This paper explores the potential for repurposing this kind of heritage, focusing on converting the Istituto Provinciale per l'Infanzia in Turin. By examining this case study, the paper emphasises a design approach that can enhance the site's memories while preserving its tangible and intangible value.

Introduction

In Foucault's well-known definition, heterotopias are «counter-places [...] a sort of utopia actually realised in which real places are simultaneously represented, contested and subverted»¹. Unlike utopias, which offer solace, heterotopias are disruptive, operating within society but outside conventional norms². There are two main categories: crisis heterotopias, designed for individuals experiencing a crisis related to society or their environment (such as boarding schools or orphanages), and deviation heterotopias, intended for individuals whose behaviour deviates from societal norms (such as psychiatric hospitals or prisons). These historical complexes are becoming increasingly important in conservation, drawing attention to their uncomfortable past³ and the associated pain⁴. Rather than being viewed as neutral inheritances, these assets are burdened with memories that often clash with the current communities that use them. As a result, these properties present numerous challenges. They risk abandonment and gradual deterioration following the loss of their original functions and rejection from today's communities. There is also a risk of overly drastic transformations that alter their physical characteristics and erase their historical significance. This trend is evident internationally, particularly in English-speaking countries, where efforts are being made to strategically forget and selectively remember⁵. According to this approach, the interpretation of the existing structures is seen as a means of transforming and negotiating their past while erasing uncomfortable memories, offering a more reassuring narrative.

The concept of heterotopia is a significant area of interest for Carla Bartolozzi. This interest is evident in her research endeavours, with the publication of essays on the topic⁶ and her involvement in the Rhea (Centre for Research on Heterotopia and Architecture) inter-university research centre. It is also reflected in her role as the academic director of the "Risk of Oblivion" excellence course in the context of the PhD program in Architectural and Landscape Heritage at the Politecnico di Torino for the academic year 2022-2023. The insights gained from these research experiences highlight the potential for heterotopic spaces, once freed from the associated stigma, to accommodate new uses in the modern world through a perspective of adaptive reuse. Rather than seeking to establish "new places", the focus is on preserving the tangible and intangible memory of these complexes in alignment with an ethical approach to working with existing structures⁷. However, this can only be achieved through an «unconventional reading, which does not derive from regulatory instructions that do not take into account the identity of places or fall under the allure of dark tourism and the commodification of pain, but which looks instead at these architectures with a view to their civil repurposing»⁸.

The act of repurposing plays a crucial role in dismantling the heterotopic nature of spaces. This approach involves addressing the elements of closure, exclusion, and depersonalisation in favour of an act of "desecration" as conceived by Agamben, essentially removing the sacredness from the space, which entails exclusion from the community to restore it to everyday use⁹. However, this leads to further considerations: given that the uncomfortable legacy of heterotopias is tied to both the physical features of the structures designed for enclosure and segregation, as well as the historical use of these spaces, it is vital to contemplate how to alter the essential elements of the space without negating its identity. Simultaneously, finding ways to repurpose these structures while neutralising their negative past is crucial.

1 Michel Foucault, *Spazi altri: i luoghi delle eterotopie*, edited by S. Vaccaro, Mimesis, Milan 2011, p. 23 (translation by the author).

2 Michel Foucault, *Le parole e le cose*, Rizzoli, Milan 1967. See also: Marco Dezzi Bardeschi, *Eterotopie ed effetto Foucault: dal post-industriale al post-consumismo*, in «Ananke», n. 72, 2014, pages 2-8.

3 John Pendlebury, Yi-Wen Wang, Andrew Law, *Re-using 'uncomfortable heritage': the case of the 1933 building, Shanghai*, in «International Journal of Heritage Studies», n. 24.3, 2017, pages 211-229.

4 William Stewart Logan, Keir Reeves (eds.), *Places of pain and shame*, Routledge, London and New York 2011.

5 Alun Joseph, Robin Kearns, Graham Moon, *Re-imagining psychiatric asylum spaces through residential redevelopment: Strategic forgetting and selective remembrance*, in «Housing Studies», n. 28.1, 2013, pages 135-153.

6 Among the essays on the subject, see: Carla Bartolozzi, *XIX century memories and landmarks on Roosevelt Island*, in Francesco Novelli, Francesco Leoni, *Smallpox Hospital & Roosevelt Island. Preservation, reconfiguration and adaptive reuse. Studies and projects for enhancement*, Politecnico di Torino, Turin 2020, pages 24-37. Carla Bartolozzi, *Lo storico complesso carcerario Le Nuove di Torino: tra processi di riuso e conservazione della memoria*, in Rosa Tamborrino, Cristina Cuneo, Andrea Longhi (eds.), *Adaptive cities through the post pandemic lens*, proceedings of the X AISU Congress (Turin, 6-10 September 2022), AISU International, Torino 2023, pages 531-532.

7 Caterina Giannattasio, *Memoria e psiche. I valori invisibili dell'architettura storica e lo sguardo avanguardista di Roberto Pane*, in Anna Anzani, Eugenio Guglielmi (eds.), *Memoria, bellezza e transdisciplinarietà. Riflessioni sull'attualità di Roberto Pane*, Maggioli, Santarcangelo di Romagna 2017, pages 139-163.

8 Caterina Giannattasio, *The false antagonism between matter and memory*, in Rodica Crişan, Donatella Fiorani, Giovanna Franco, Loughlin Kealy, Stefano Francesco Musso, Petr Vorlík (eds.), *Conservation/demolition*, EAAE, Prague 2020, pages 258-269.

9 Giorgio Agamben, *Profanazioni*, nottetempo, Rome 2005, pages 83-106.

- 10** Umberto Eco, *La struttura assente. La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale*, Bompiani, Milano 1968.
- 11** Lucina Napoleone, *Come conosciamo l'oggetto del nostro conservare. Spazio geometrico e spazio vissuto*, in *Restauro: Conoscenza, Progetto, Cantiere, Gestione*, coordinated by Stefano Francesco Musso, Marco Pretelli, Sezione 1.1, *Conoscenza Previa (Preventiva) e Puntuale (Mirata). Metodologie*, edited by Anna Boato, Susanna Caccia Gherardini, Quasar, Rome 2020, pages 110-117.
- 12** Bartolozzi, *XIX century memories* cit., p. 30.
- 13** Claudia Pintor, *Architetture inquiete. Interpretazioni e strumenti per il progetto dei complessi manicomiali storici*, PhD thesis in Civil Engineering and Architecture, Università degli Studi di Cagliari, XXXIV cycle (2022), tutors Caterina Giannattasio, Giovanni Battista Cocco, p. 314 (translation by the author).
- 14** Cettina Lenza, *I manicomi tra memoria e futuro: esempi europei*, in «FAMagazine», n. 41, 2017, pages 82-89.
- 15** Giannattasio, *The false antagonism* cit., pages 258-269.
- 16** Cettina Lenza, *La dissoluzione dell'eterotopia. Il ruolo delle comunità nel futuro del patrimonio manicomiale*, in Tamborrino, Cuneo, Longhi (eds.), *Adaptive cities* cit., p. 551 (translation by the author).
- 17** Nino Sulfaro, *Il tema dell'uso nel progetto di conservazione. Note su una questione ancora aperta*, in RICerca/REStauo, coordinated by Donatella Fiorani, Sezione 3A, *Progetto e cantiere: orizzonti operativi*, a edited by Stefano Della Torre, Quasar, Rome 2017, pages 628 (translation by the author). See also: Nino Sulfaro, *L'architettura come opera aperta. Il tema dell'uso nel progetto di conservazione*, in «ArcHistoR Extra», n. 2, 2018.
- 18** Annunziata Maria Oteri, *Presentazione*, in «ArcHistoR Extra», n. 2, 2018, pages 4-7.
- 19** Pintor, *Architetture inquiete* cit.
- 20** Andrew Ballantyne, *Remaking the Self in Heterotopia*, in Catherine M. Soussloff (ed.), *Foucault on the Arts and Letters: Perspectives for the 21st Century*, Rowman & Littlefield International, London 2016, pages 181-197.
- 21** Pendlebury, Wang, Law, *Re-using 'uncomfortable heritage'* cit., p. 226.
- 22** Paola Gregory, *Per un'architettura empatica. Prospettive, concetti, questioni*, Carocci, Rome 2023, p. 195 (translation by the author).

I. Dissolving heterotopias

To contemplate these issues, it is valuable to revisit Eco's insights on the architectural object, particularly regarding the differentiation between "denotation" – the fundamental meaning conveyed by a sign – and "connotation" – the potentially endless array of additional meanings taken on by the sign. Eco refers to the denoted architectural meaning as the "first function" and the connotated meanings as "second functions". Faced with change and the potential obsolescence of the architectural object, the architect's responsibility is to devise adaptable first functions and open-ended second functions. In this interplay between object and subject, the context plays a crucial role in shaping the connotative meaning, following rules that evolve with the changing social groups that adhere to them¹⁰.

The work of architecture is never truly complete or definitively interpreted. Instead, it invites users to experience and interpret it continually over time. When translating theoretical reflections into actual projects involving historical structures, the metaphor of the sign takes on a dual significance of both material trace and meaning¹¹. Consequently, repurposing processes have the potential to impact not only the physical aspect of the structure but also its content.

When dealing with uncomfortable heritage, traditional approaches may not fully capture the complex relationships with architectural pre-existence. As highlighted by Bartolozzi, simply preserving the material is not always enough to ensure the transmission of the sense of the place¹². There is a risk of engaging in «mediocre conservation»¹³ or recovery without remembrance¹⁴. Paradoxically, demolition can sometimes be necessary to facilitate the community's re-interpretation and re-appropriation of the assets¹⁵. Similarly, Lenza emphasises that

the objective of overcoming heterotopia by preserving cultural heritage does not require an integral musealisation action, but an approach in terms of a living historical cultural landscape, which, through critical choices, allows different degrees of compatible transformation¹⁶.

An exclusive focus on integral conservation alone is not enough to preserve the diverse values embodied in these architectures. On the other hand, reuse can be crucial in redefining meaning. By taking a semiotic approach, Sulfaro emphasises how

the functions of an architecture, denoted and connoted [...] are, in fact, subject to loss, recovery, replacement and, above all, overlapping, due to the succession of activities carried out within them. It follows that the change of use of an architecture significantly affects the perception of the original meanings of the artefact¹⁷.

If we consider reuse as a methodologically grounded relationship between the building and its users¹⁸, it becomes crucial to consider the emotional and psychological connection established with places as a key element influencing the project's new interpretations¹⁹. In this context, design proposals may introduce new social functions that prompt visitors «to reflect upon the uncomfortable social and physical spaces that exist within societies»²⁰. Pendlebury also suggests that the project's outcome should be a place deliberately designed «to make people feel uncomfortable through affective and thought-provoking encounters in which they participate rather than visit»²¹. This implies a shift in the project «from the object to real or mental action»²², developing the intervention based on a narrative dimension that engages the user. Like Calvino's depiction of the city of Zora, the user «will be able to establish a connection of affinity or contrast between

each concept and each point of the itinerary, serving as an immediate prompt to memory»²³.

Finally, as mentioned in the introduction, the characteristic of heterotopic spaces is their ability to suspend, neutralise or invert the social relations they represent. This leads us to consider whether the dissolving of heterotopias should focus solely on the material dimensions and content of the project or if attention must also be paid to the construction of a broader, shared process from a social perspective. This notion is supported by current intervention guidelines for architectural heritage, including the principles of the recent New European Bauhaus (NEB) movement²⁴. The NEB movement's essential values, such as togetherness (a «positive, open and non-discriminatory approach that goes beyond the exercise of listing or categorising social groups based on their differences»), participatory processes (involvement of the communities affected by the project in the design, decision-making and implementation phases), and transdisciplinarity (involvement of knowledge and professionals from different disciplinary sectors), are essential²⁵. When applied to heterotopias, these values contribute to a process-oriented approach that aims to counter the potential rejection of such spaces. The goal is to transcend the conflict between different narratives and the bias of stakeholders, thereby fostering a more equitable and inclusive heritage discourse²⁶.

2. Orphanages as heterotopias

Orphanages share many characteristics described by Foucault as heterotopias, providing a valuable framework for analysing social and cultural practices and policies related to the care of orphaned or abandoned children²⁷. They can be seen as crisis heterotopias²⁸ because they accommodate children in emergencies, such as when they lose their parents or are abandoned. For many children, the orphanage symbolises a place of transition, serving as a bridge between their previous family life and the possibility of a new adoption. This gives the orphanage a ritual dimension, where children undergo stages of adaptation and transformation.

In contrast to traditional family environments, orphanages embody an alternative reality that is reflected both physically, through their architecture and layout, and symbolically, through the significance attributed to these spaces and the experiences of their inhabitants. These establishments are not just places of residence; they serve a wide array of functions, including the provision of education, healthcare, vocational training and socialisation. This multifaceted nature makes them intricate and multi-layered spaces, encompassing diverse functions within the location (the third principle of the heterotopia). A well-defined temporal structure complements their spatial organisation, as orphanages mark various stages in children's lives, from education to recreation and rest. This meticulously organised temporal framework establishes a controlled environment that contrasts starkly with the perceived freedom and flexibility of life beyond their walls²⁹.

Following the fifth principle of heterotopia, access to orphanages is carefully regulated, with strict limitations on entry and controlled external visits. This regulation establishes a clear divide between the internal and external worlds, emphasising the heterotopic nature of the space.

The themes of closure and segregation are coupled with a sense of depersonalisation that stems from an educational approach favouring

²³ Italo Calvino, *Le città invisibili*, Einaudi, Turin 1972, p. 7 (translation by the author).

²⁴ https://new-european-bauhaus.europa.eu/index_en.

²⁵ New European Bauhaus Compass (https://www.urban-initiative.eu/sites/default/files/2022-12/NEB_Compass_V1.pdf).

²⁶ Lisanne Gibson, John Pendlebury, *Introduction*, in Id. (eds.), *Valuing Historic Environments*, Farnham, Ashgate 2009, pages 1-16.

²⁷ Hugh Cunningham, *Children and childhood in western society since 1500*, Routledge, London 2020.

²⁸ Foucault, *Spazi altri* cit.

²⁹ Sarah Hayes, Steven Cooke, Antony Catrice, Edwina Kay, *Places of trauma and healing?: Managing the heritage of orphanages and children's homes*, in «Historic Environment» n. 32, 2020, pages 4-7.

30 Kim MacLean, *The impact of institutionalization on child development*, in «Development and psychopathology», n. 15.4, 2003, pages 853-884.

31 Lieselot De Wilde, Bruno Vanobbergen, *Between a contaminated past and a compromised future: the case of the Ghent Orphanages (1945-1984)*, in «Paedagogica Historica», n. 51.5, 2015, pages 631-643.

32 William Stewart Logan, Keir Reeves, *Introduction. Remembering places of pain and shame*, in William Stewart Logan, Keir Reeves (eds.), *Places of Pain and Shame: Dealing with 'Difficult Heritage'*, Routledge, London and New York 2011, pages 1-14.

33 On the process of de-institutionalisation of minors, see: «Rassegna bibliografia infanzia e adolescenza», n. 3, 2008.

34 Alfonsina Esposito, *Il complesso "ex Sanatrix": rifunzionalizzazione tra storia e progetto*, thesis in Architecture I, Politecnico di Torino, tutors Eugenia Monzeglio, Guido Montanari, a.y. 2003-2004, pages 11-21.

35 Antonio Sibilla, *La Clinica "Sanatrix". Torino*, in «L'architettura italiana. Periodico mensile dell'architettura tecnica», n. 5, 1934, pages 170-171.

36 Esposito, *Il complesso "ex Sanatrix" cit.*, pages 22-86.

37 Cesare Bellocchio Brambilla, *Nascere senza venire alla luce. Storia dell'Istituto per l'infanzia abbandonata della Provincia di Torino, 1867-1981*, FrancoAngeli, Milan 2008.

the plural dimension over the singular, rules over exceptions, and transience over rootedness. These dynamics can potentially have adverse effects on the children's development, including loss of individual identity, lack of attachment, and emotional insecurity, as noted in psychological studies³⁰.

These negative aspects collectively shape the legacy of former orphanages as an uneasy inheritance. Yet these sites also hold collective and personal memories, representing a significant part of the individual experiences of the children who lived there and the broader social history of their communities³¹. This emphasises the need to consciously address these challenging memories while repurposing these spaces, transforming sites of suffering and pain into places of healing and reconciliation, and fostering their re-appropriation by the communities³².

3. The case study of the Istituto Provinciale per l'Infanzia (IPI) in Turin

3.1. From the construction to the abandonment of the site (1892-2013)

The closure of orphanages and the shift towards care systems centred on foster care and family homes in Italy has been a gradual process since the 1970s. A significant milestone in this de-institutionalisation journey was the passing of Law 184/1983, which recognised the child's right to be raised in a family. Additionally, Law 149/2001 further emphasised the importance of foster care and mandated the complete closure of orphanages by 2006. Following 2006, most orphanages in Italy were either shut down or repurposed into alternative facilities, such as family homes and foster communities, to provide children with a more personalised and nurturing environment³³.

The historical events linked to the property at number 75 corso Lanza in Turin are deeply rooted in the history of the Istituto Provinciale per l'Infanzia (IPI), which was based there from 1958 to 1983. The original core of the complex, commissioned by Luigi Marsaglia and built for residential purposes starting in 1892, comprised a manor house (now Pavilion C), a porter's lodge, and a building that served as stables³⁴.

In 1929, the Società Anonima Sanatrix acquired the estate owned by the Marsaglia family to transform it into a private healthcare facility for wealthy families. The construction of the clinic, inaugurated in 1932, as documented in the contemporary magazine «L'architettura italiana»³⁵, involved modifying and expanding the existing residential structure based on the design by Antonio Sibilla. The former stables were repurposed into a service building, and the villa was converted into a maternity unit. Two new pavilions were also built: the first (now Pavilion B) served as an in-patient unit between the maternity and service buildings. At the same time, the second (now Pavilion D) housed all the care and research facilities³⁶.

The clinic experienced a decline after the Second World War and closed in 1952. During that time, poverty in the city and surrounding areas led to an increase in the number of abandoned children, including war orphans and those born out of wedlock. Turin Provincial Council built a new centre to care for abandoned or endangered babies to address this issue. They chose the former Sanatrix clinic as the location for the new centre due to its suitable building, location, exposure and capacity³⁷.

Upon changing ownership, the buildings underwent alterations in size and use. In 1954, the Provincial Council requested the construction of a new pavilion to relocate the maternity ward. Architect Natale Reviglio designed the new building (now Pavilion A) on the site of the former stables, which was used for both offices and observation³⁸ (Figures 1-2). The official opening of the new complex occurred in 1958. While the Sanatrix clinic served as a facility for childbirth for the wealthier classes, the IPI primarily catered to young mothers abandoned by their families and subjected to the societal stigma of illegitimate pregnancy. The IPI accommodated about three hundred children annually, many born within the complex and subsequently adopted. The institute followed progressive educational models for its time. Still, it was characterised by the adverse effects of segregation, depersonalisation, and detachment experienced by the children, which are no longer acceptable by modern standards³⁹ (Figures 3-6). The institute ceased its operations in 1983 as mandated by the legislation enacted in the same year. Following its closure, the Province repurposed the pavilions, with Pavilion A being used as a residential community for expectant mothers, Pavilion C as a socio-therapeutic

- 38 Esposito, *Il complesso "ex Sanatrix" cit.*, pages 87-117.
- 39 Bellocchio Brambilla, *Nascere senza venire alla luce cit.*

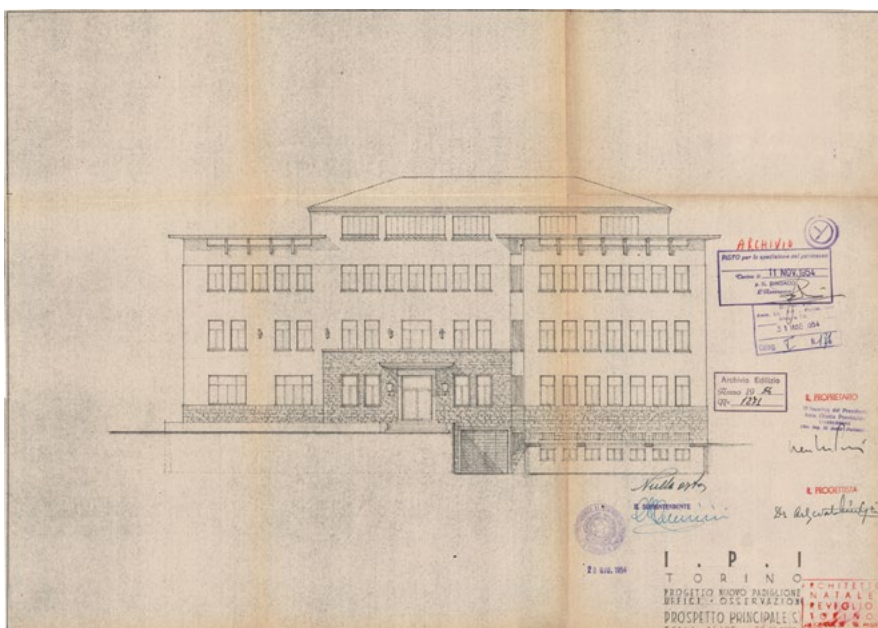
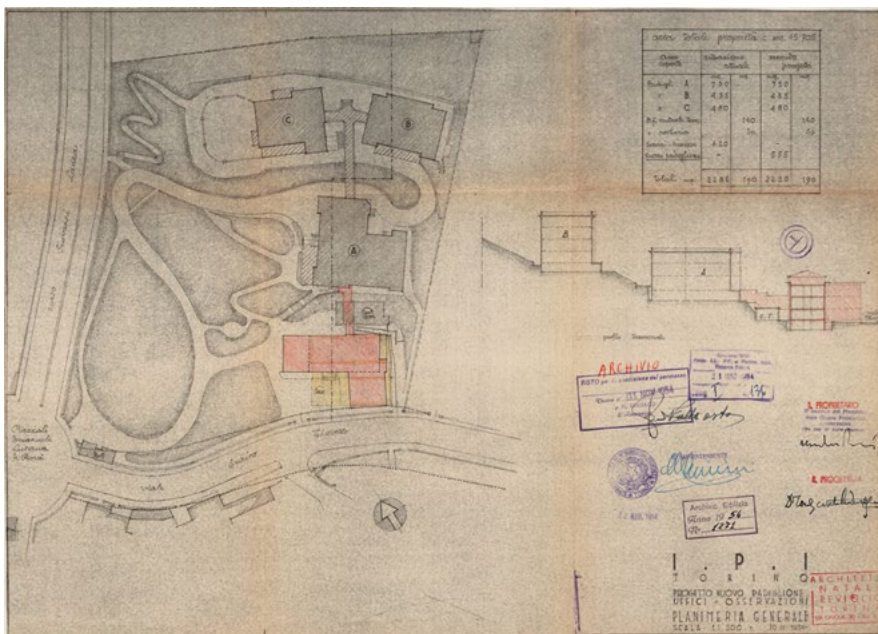


Fig. 1 – The general plan of the area and design for the new pavilion by the architect Reviglio (Archivio Edilizio del Comune di Torino, n. prot. 1954-1-10085).

Fig. 2 – The main elevation of the new pavilion, 1954 (Archivio Edilizio del Comune di Torino, n. prot. 1954-1-10085).



Fig. 3 – A general view of the complex in the second half of the twentieth century (Archivio Provincia di Torino).

Fig. 4 – A view of the outdoor spaces in the second half of the twentieth century (Archivio Provincia di Torino).

Fig. 5 – A view of the internal corridor of the new pavilion by the architect Reviglio in the second half of the twentieth century (Archivio Provincia di Torino).

Fig. 6 – The use of the interior in the second half of the twentieth century (Archivio Provincia di Torino).

centre, and Pavilion D partly as a residential community for the disabled. Pavilion B was transformed into provincial offices. In 2013, the entire complex was officially decommissioned.

3.2. A new project after decommissioning (2022)

After about a decade of neglect and lack of maintenance, in 2022, the complex was given on free loan by the Cassa Depositi e Prestiti Group, the current owner of the building, to the Flashback Association⁴⁰ after years of unsuccessful attempts to sell it to private bodies. This operation was made possible thanks to the urban planning tool of temporary reuse; this tool, resolved by the municipality of Turin in 2022, allows the immediate and temporary use of privately owned areas and buildings awaiting transformation, also putting them to uses different from those initially envisaged by the urban planning tool in force⁴¹. In this specific case, the intervention implemented made it possible to change the intended use of the complex initially planned (residences and private services), creating an independent art centre dedicated to contemporary cultures and naming it Flashback Habitat; the contract entered into allows the use of the spaces for three years, renewable until 2027. The project encompassed the renovation of four historic buildings, totalling 20,000 square meters, with a vision to accommodate various functions while preserving the unified nature of the complex, including an expansive park spanning approximately 11,000 square meters (Figure 7). The project has been progressing on schedule, introducing new uses with an incremental approach to gradually re-activate the

⁴⁰ <https://www.flashback.to.it/>. I thank Alessandro Bulgini and Ginevra Pucci for the information provided.

⁴¹ http://www.comune.torino.it/ucstampa/2022/article_386.shtml.



Fig. 7 – The general area plan. 1: entrance; 2: ticket office; A-B-C-D: the current designations of the pavilions (D. Dabbene, 2023).

Fig. 8 – Pavilion Building B, exhibition halls (D. Dabbene, 2023).

Fig. 9 – Pavilion C, bar/bistro (D. Dabbene, 2023).

spaces. The former gatehouse now serves as a reception and ticket office, as the gateway between the former orphanage and the outside world. Pavilion A hosts local artists and associations, while Pavilion B is dedicated to exhibitions. Pavilion C is a space for social gatherings, discussions, screenings, with a bistro and a project room. Pavilion D is dedicated to contemporary artistic experimentation.

The interventions restored the functionality of the space after a decade of neglect. This involved replacing degraded or missing elements, renewing the wiring, heating and plumbing systems, and carrying out extraordinary maintenance on the surface finishes, all without altering

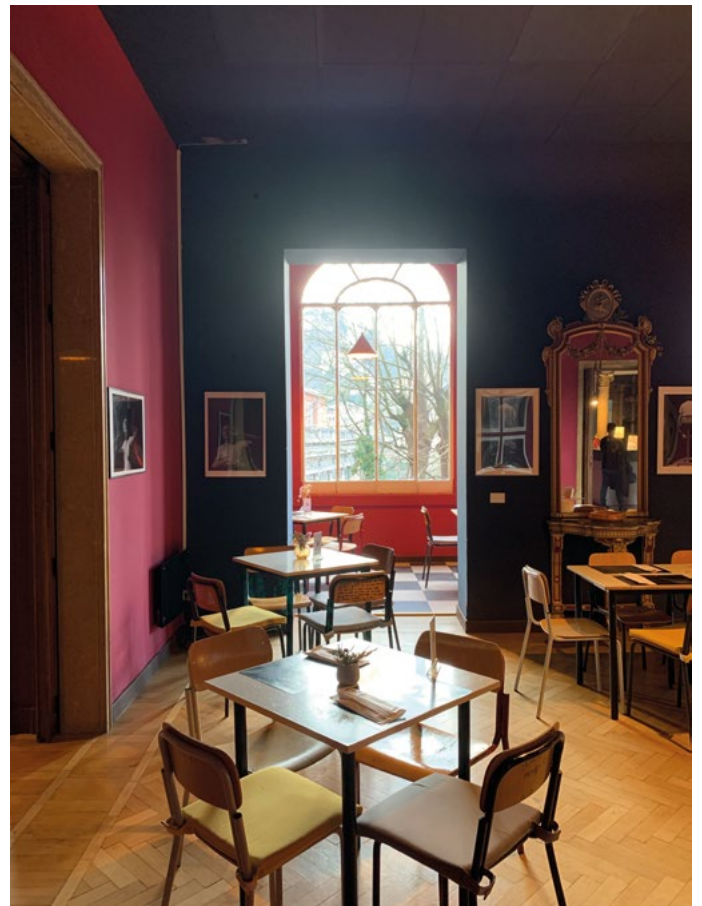




Fig. 10 – “Living Rooms”, a work by the artist Sarah Bowyer entitled “Cradle Brothers” (D. Dabbene, 2023).

Fig. 11 – An art installation in the park on the topic of roots (D. Dabbene, 2023).

Fig. 12 – An art installation on the roof of Pavilion C on the topic of motherhood (D. Dabbene, 2023).

the spatial layout. In addition to this conservative approach, the project aimed to change the perception of the space, which had previously been seen as merely transitional. This was achieved by making minimal changes to the materials, including contemporary art, and by creating a strong connection between use, emotion and narration.

The desire to alleviate the depersonalising nature of the former facility is evident, as seen in the vibrant and distinctive colour schemes used to characterise the rooms in buildings B and C (Figures 8-9). Similarly, Pavilion A took centre stage in the “Living Rooms” project, which involved collaborating with artists to infuse each room with their creative input, drawing inspiration from the history of the complex, those who grew up in corso Lanza, and the future residents (Figures 10). The open spaces, integral to the former brefotrophy, were also seamlessly incorporated into the project by including art installations metaphorically referencing themes of roots and motherhood to provide a multi-sensory, emotional experience (Figures 11-12).

The narrative and emotional bond of the collective memories of the community are now acknowledged in the opening of the exhibition “A Better Life: Fragments of Stories from the Istituto per l’Infanzia della Provincia di Torino”. The exhibition is located on the third floor of Pavilion B and



brings together the firsthand experiences of the residents, along with documents and oral testimonies (Figure 13).

The intervention’s fundamental aspect involves activating a participatory process. The process was conducted with the authorisation of the institutional bodies responsible for the protection and in agreement with the individuals who were once children in the facility during the years when IPI operated (referred to by the association as the “natives”). This process initially focused on a knowledge project, integrating formal and non-formal knowledge related to the personal experiences of the “natives”. The widened scope allowed for the co-creation of knowledge inspired by a more inclusive logic rather than exclusively relying on specialised skills. The participatory process also extended to reuse choices, encompassing a broad consultation of stakeholders, including the “natives” themselves recognised as legitimate owners of the place. Their input on planned interventions fostered a stronger sense of belonging and renewed rootedness akin to “closing the circle”. Additionally, participation extended to co-creation and self-governance phases, demonstrated by the refurbishment of rooms in Pavilion A, which were then entrusted to local associations through specific agreements.

4. Conclusions

Managing the challenging legacy of heterotopic heritage poses a significant conservation challenge today. As indicated by the analysis, the process of repurposing is crucial, requiring action not only at the level of material and content but also regarding process. Moving from theory to practice, there is also a need to find exemplary cases to serve as models for future projects.

Considering the heterotopic legacy of the former orphanages, the decision to repurpose the former IPI represents a departure from the initial focus on maximising profitability through real estate investment. Instead, it highlights the potential to explore a new approach that prioritises creating a positive social impact on the community within the framework of a public-private partnership⁴².

The project, situated in temporal dimension zero, is a commendable example of the adaptive reuse of a space with uncomfortable memories. It adheres to the compatibility and proportionality principles outlined by Icomos⁴³, respecting the original architectural and spatial layout while introducing minimal interventions to accommodate new uses⁴⁴. These interventions play a crucial role in reinterpreting the space, helping to diminish its heterotopic nature and alleviate the isolating and dehumanising effects often associated with orphanages. This highlights the importance of engaging with the physical aspects and the unseen, perceived, and remembered elements of the space⁴⁵. From this perspective, the project’s narrative dimension has successfully brought out the place’s memory without overshadowing its painful history, presenting it instead as a catalyst for participatory planning. Drawing on Luna’s classifications⁴⁶, this project can be categorised as symbiotic reuse, wherein the new uses intricately intertwine with the place’s memories, each mutually reinforcing the other.

The case investigation confirms the strategic importance of adaptive reuse when incorporated into a conservation project that pays attention to both tangible and intangible aspects. In this sense, it can enhance the value of the asset, both independently and in connection with the community as an active participant in the process⁴⁷.

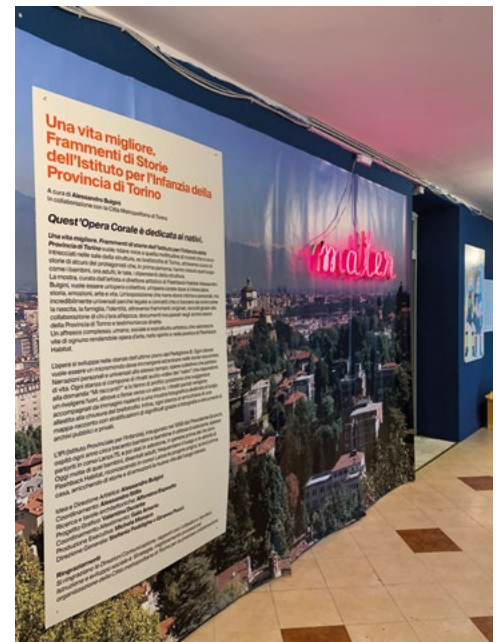


Fig. 13 – Exhibition layouts dedicated to the memories of the former brefotrophy (D. Dabbene, 2023).

⁴² An evaluation of the quality of the project through a dashboard model can be found in: Daniele Dabbene, Carla Bartolozzi, Cristina Coscia, *Evaluating the Quality of Architectural Heritage Reuse Projects Using a Well-Being and NEB Approach: The Case Study of IPIM in Turin (Italy)*, in «Heritage», n. 7.6, 2024, pages 2834-2865.

⁴³ Elena Dimitrova, et al., *Principi europei di qualità per gli interventi finanziati dall'Unione Europea con un impatto potenziale sul patrimonio culturale*, International Council on Monuments and Sites (Icomos), Charenton-le-Pont 2020, pages 61-65.

⁴⁴ On the topic of the minimum project, see: Carla Bartolozzi, *Il Castello di Masino. Micro progetti di restauro per un'offerta rinnovata di turismo culturale*, in Carla Bartolozzi, Francesco Novelli (eds.), *Castelli canavesani. Temi di restauro e valorizzazione*, Aracne, Rome 2014, pages 28-52.

⁴⁵ Maurizio Memoli, Ester Cois, Andrea Manca, *Memorie del vuoto apparente: ambiente dal carcere di Buoncammino a Cagliari*, in «ArcHistoR EXTRA», n. 16, 2018, pages 218-237.

⁴⁶ Rafael Luna, *Life of a Shell and the Collective Memory of a City*, in «Int|AR: Interventions Adaptive Reuse», vol. 4, 2013, pages 30-35.

⁴⁷ Maria Beatrice Bellè, *Iniziativa bottom-up e riuso temporaneo. Quale valore aggiunto per la valorizzazione di beni immobili pubblici?*, in «CRIOS», n. 11, 2023, pages 35-44.