

Carmen M. Enss, Luigi Monzo (eds.)

# TOWNSCAPES IN TRANSITION

Transformation and Reorganization  
of Italian Cities and Their Architecture  
in the Interwar Period



[transcript] Urban Studies

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Townscapes in Transition

**Urban Studies**

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CARMEN M. ENSS, LUIGI MONZO (EDS.)

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and Their Architecture in the Interwar Period**

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# **‘Terms and Conditions’ of Interwar Architecture and Urbanism in Italy**

## A Tentative Glossary

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*Carmen M. Enss and Luigi Monzo*

### ***Ambientismo***

*Ambientismo* refers to an approach of urban design developed by Gustavo Giovannoni in which the urban environment, or the context of structural interventions, are regarded as the criteria for design. By carefully thinning out and arranging interventions in the historical building substance (→*Diradamento*), a structural and creative modernization that harmonizes with the environment is to be initiated. The urban fabric should not be fragmentarily deformed by individual and independently conceived large-scale buildings, but should rather be understood as an ensemble to be considered as a whole, on which further work can only be carried out when appropriately taking into account the existing conditions. Architectural and urban heritage will not be negated, but recognized as a substrate of its own design activity. Giovannoni thus represents a standpoint that, in contrast to the international avant-garde’s urban development trend, asserts the approach of a conservative renewal of the old town in Italian urban development. His influence continues to make itself felt in individual cases in which the effects of radically changing or contrasting urban planning are softened or even prevented; through the garden city projects in Rome that he shaped, his ideas also influence the development of an architectural language of site-related, reflective and historically informed urban planning. The idea of *Ambientismo* stands at the beginning of a modern Italian urban planning theory. As such, it also finds its way into the reform of architectural education strongly influenced by Giovannoni. The first Scuola Superiore di Architettura, founded by Giovannoni in Rome in 1919/20, taught a discipline of urban planning (*Edilizia cittadina*, later *Urbanistica*) for the first time in Italy.

### ***Antichità e Belle Arti***

*Antichità e Belle Arti* was the denomination which subsumed the Superintendence for Antiquities and Fine Arts related to the Ministry of Public Education before the establishment of the Ministry for Cultural and Environmental Heritage in 1975. The institution was responsible for the public surveillance and protection of the cultural heritage in all its forms of expression.

### ***Architect (profession)***

Before the legal protection of the professional titles of architect and engineer in 1923 in Italy, there was a typical confusion which can be resolved by looking at the educational curricula: previously, building professionals were organised according to their education in the *Federazione Architetti Italiani* (for graduates of art schools) and in the *Società degli Ingegneri e degli Architetti Italiani* (for graduates of engineering schools and polytechnics). The situation changed only through a process of educational reform and reorganization of the professions which saw for the first time in Europe the legal protection of the professional titles ‘architect’ and ‘engineer’ (24 June 1923). Furthermore, in 1925 the transition from studies to professional life was linked to a state examination, which is still required today, for the ability to exercise the profession.

### ***Architetti dell’Urbe***

→ *La Barbera*.

### ***Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura***

The *Associazione Artistica fra i Cultori di Architettura* (AACAr) was founded in 1890 and existed until 1935. It was an influential association of architects and artists with an overarching national organization and subordinate local sections that were founded and led by local cultural professionals depending on their own initiative. The most important section was the Roman one, led by important protagonists such as Gustavo Giovannoni, Marcello Piacentini and Arnaldo Foschini. The organization’s multifaceted work focused primarily on an integral approach to architecture that went beyond structural issues and treated architecture as an object of social responsibility. The *Associazione’s* main objective was to promote the development of architecture as an object of social responsibility. Therefore, its main mission focused on education and appreciation of architecture through the protection, preservation and communication of its built heritage, and to promote its further development through prizes, competitions, publications, conferences, etc.

***Blackshirts***

The Blackshirts (*Squadristi*) were originally the paramilitary wing of the National Fascist Party (PNF) and, after 1923, an all-volunteer militia of the Kingdom of Italy.

***Conciliazione***

→*Lateran Treaty*.

***Corporatism***

Fascist corporatism as authoritarian dictatorial (classical) corporatism is part of an economic model in which a limited number of associations with compulsory membership are separated from each other according to functional aspects and do not compete with each other in any way. The open structure of trade unions and employers is thus replaced by unitary associations that absorb both sides. Fascist Italy explicitly referred to itself as a corporate state.

***Diradamento***

Carefully thinning out and arranging interventions in the historical building fabric of towns and cities.

***Duce***

*Duce* is a word derived from Latin *dux* which translated means ‘military leader’ or ‘guide’. *Duce* was the appellative assumed by Benito Mussolini as the leader of Fascism. The term was already in the Italian courtly language use to indicate the *condottiere*. Casts of it can be found in other languages in the appellative of various dictators, such as Adolf Hitler (*Führer*), Francisco Franco (*caudillo*), Nicolae Ceaușescu (*conducator*).

***Engineer (profession)***

→*Architect (profession)*.

***Federazione Architetti Italiani***

The *Federazione Architetti Italiani* (Federation of Italian Architects) was founded in 1905 by Giovanni Rosadi as a corporate association that brought together the so-called professors of architectural design, graduates who had studied architectural drawing (*disegno architettonico*).

***Genio civile***

The *Genio civile* is an Italian statutory corporation with the task of controlling, monitoring and supervising public works at peripheral and local levels.

***Gioventù Italiana del Littorio (GIL)***

The *Gioventù italiana del littorio* (GIL) was created in 1937 and existed until 1944 as the consolidated youth movement of the National Fascist Party of Italy. In 1937 it replaced the *Opera Nazionale Balilla*.

***Gruppo Urbanisti Romani (GUR)***

The *Gruppo Urbanisti Romani* (GUR) was a group of Roman architects active between the 1920s and 1930s. The GUR, which included former students of Marcello Piacentini and now renowned architects like Luigi Piccinato, Gino Cancellotti, Giuseppe Nicolosi, Cesare Valle and to which was added as group leader Marcello Piacentini, proposed in 1929, on the occasion of the Congress of the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning, an important design for the urban plan of the city of Rome (*Piano Regolatore Generale di Roma*). The group's proposal picked up on Piacentini's work on the variant for substituting the still valid *Piano Regolatore* of 1909 and developed it into a clear functionalist plan. In Piacentini's logic, the core component of the city's reorganization is the relocation of the Termini railway station and the use of the space freed up for a new city center that relieves the historic city. In addition, the previously arbitrary expansion of the city is to be stopped and directed into a single-directional expansion towards the Alban Hills. Further members of the group were Luigi Lenzi, Roberto Lavagnino, Eugenio Fuselli, Mario Dabbeni, Eugenio Montuori and Alfredo Scalpelli.

***International Federation for Housing and Town Planning (IFHTP)***

The *International Federation for Housing and Town Planning*, a the network of professionals founded 1913 by Ebenezer Howard, held a conference in Rome in 1929.

***Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari (IACP)***

→ *Istituto Case Popolari* (ICP).

***Istituto Case Popolari (ICP)***

The *Istituto Case Popolari* (ICP) or *Istituto Autonomo Case Popolari* (IACP), literally (Autonomous) Institute for Subsidized housing, was created in 1903 by the legislative initiative of Luigi Luzzatti and is a type of Italian statutory corporation,

with the aim of promoting, implementing and managing public buildings aimed at allocating housing to the less well-off, especially with low rents.

### ***La Burbera***

The grouping of the *Architetti dell'Urbe (La Burbera)* was an assembly of Roman architects active between the 1920s and 1930s. It competed especially with the *Gruppo Urbanisti Romani (GUR)* in proposing a more academic approach for solving the task for the new *Piano Regolatore Generale* of Rome. The plan propounded a clear cut that would have been radical for the baroque part of the historical centre, in order to implement a schematic Cardo-Decumanus system, which saw the Milvian Bridge connected in a straight axis with the Lateran Basilica and St. Peter's Church connected with the Termini station. *La Burbera*, which included renowned architects like Pietro Aschieri, Enrico Del Debbio and Vincenzo Fasolo, was lead by Gustavo Giovannoni and Arnaldo Foschini. Further members were Giuseppe Boni, Giacomo Giobbe, Alessandro Limongelli, Felice Nori and Ghino Venturi. Its ideas were inspired by earlier urban plans of Armando Brasini.

### ***Lateran Treaty***

The *Lateran Treaty (Patti Lateranensi)* is the name that was established for the mutual recognitions agreements between the Kingdom of Italy and the Holy See signed on February 11, 1929, with which for the first time since the Unification of Italy (1861) and the Capture of Rome (1871) regular bilateral relations were established between Italy and the Holy See. It consists of three parts: a treaty of recognition, a financial convention and a concordat. The Lateran Treaty was also subsumed under the Italian word for conciliation: *Conciliazione*. To commemorate the successful conclusion of the negotiations, Mussolini commissioned the Road of the Conciliation (*Via della Conciliazione*, 1936-50), which would symbolically link the Vatican City to the heart of Rome. Another important symbol of commemoration was the setting up of a new diocese in La Spezia, the first in unified Italy, and the corresponding project for a new cathedral which was initiated through a nationwide architectural competition in 1929 and whose subsequent realization was supported by Mussolini himself.

### ***Littorio style***

→ *Stile Littorio*.

### ***Matteotti Murder***

The socialist politician Giacomo Matteotti (1885-1924) gave a passionate speech in parliament on May 30, 1924, in which he contested the parliamentary elections

of April 6, 1924, blaming the fascists for the electoral forgeries and finally addressing Mussolini directly. On June 10, he was kidnapped and murdered by six *Squadristi* (Blackshirts). The “Matteotti crisis” was a turning point in Mussolini’s politics. After having tried to cooperate to a certain extent with parliamentary institutions, he then relied on a consistent suppression of the opposition, restrictions on freedom of the press and the establishment of the secret police (OVRA).

### ***Movimento Italiano per l’Architettura Razionale (MIAR)***

The *Movimento Italiano per l’Architettura Razionale* (MIAR) was a group of mostly young Italian architects devoted to the fight for a clearly modern if not radical modern architecture. The founding nucleus was formed and inspired by the Gruppo 7, a group of avant-garde architects and art theoreticians from Como lead by Carlo Enrico Rava. The MIAR held two significant exhibitions of modern architecture in Italy (1930, 1931), which brought to light the Italian discourse on architecture and urbanism, before being dissolved on behest of the Fascist Architectural Corporation by the absorption of some of its leading members (Adalberto Libera, Sebastiano Larco, Carlo Enrico Rava) into the newly formed *Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani* (RAMI) controlled by Marcello Piacentini and Alberto Calza Bini.

### ***Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB)***

The Opera Nazionale Balilla (ONB) from 1926 to 1937 was the Italian Fascist youth organization which provided youth from the age of six to seventeen with paramilitary, physical, cultural and professional education. In 1937 it was merged into the Gioventù italiana del littorio (GIL). The name Balilla derives from the nickname Giovan Battista Perassos (1735-81), a young Genoese who, according to tradition, started the revolt against the Austrian occupiers in 1746. Seen as an exemplary national hero, the young boy’s nickname became the synonym for youngsters during the Fascist regime.

### ***Opera Nazionale Combattenti (ONC)***

The Opera Nazionale Combattenti (ONC) from 1917 to 1977 was an Italian charitable organization set up to provide assistance to veterans of the First World War.

### ***Podestà***

The institutional figure of the *podestà* was established by the regime in 1926 and was maintained until 1945. By suppressing the democratic principle through the mechanism of the state nomination, the *podestà* replaced the mayor at the head of the local administrations.

### ***Piano Regolatore***

The most important urban planning instrument in Italy is the *Piano Regolatore* (PR) or *Piano Regolatore Generale* (PRG), introduced by law in 1865. It is an urban development plan or regulatory plan, which approximately corresponds to a plan for the urban division (zoning) and use of land (land-use plan/urban development plan) and should not be confused with the much more detailed *Piano Particolareggiato*, which fulfils the function of a larger-scale development plan.

### ***Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani (RAMI)***

The *Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani* (RAMI) was the result of an initiative of the Fascist Architects' Corporation to direct the various Italian architectural currents into a dynamic complex of creative homogenization. By the absorption of some of the leading representatives of the avant-garde (MIAR), especially Adalberto Libera and Carlo Enrico Rava, into the newly formed *Raggruppamento Architetti Moderni Italiani*, the Corporation strove to dissolve the inhibiting contest between differing architectural tendencies by forcing an identifiable fascist architectural language. The appeasement was realized by formal mediation and by organizational subjugation to Mussolini's architectural stakeholders Marcello Piacentini and Alberto Calza Bini. The most prominent showcases of this appeasement policy were the Milanese Triennale exhibitions of 1933 and 1936 and the Florentine exhibition of modern architecture organized by Giovanni Michelucci in 1933, which originally should have been the third MIAR exhibition on rationalist architecture.

### ***Scuola Romana***

*Scuola Romana* (literally Roman school) refers to the loose aggregation of a Roman architectural class formed at the Scuola Superiore di Architettura di Roma or by previous institutions like the Istituto di Belle Arti di Roma. The architectural language of its protagonists' designs was inspired by historicist and eclectic references to the Italian and especially Roman art and architectural heritage (*romanità*).

### ***Sindacato Nazionale Architetti Fascisti***

The *Sindacato Nazionale Architetti Fascisti* (National Fascist Architects' Corporation), also written *Sindacato Nazionale Fascista Architetti*, was the fascist professional representation of architects founded in April 1923 by Alberto Calza Bini who will take over the leadership until its dissolution. The architects Ghino Venturi and Vinceso Fasolo were also members of the first directorate. At first, the *Sindacato* did not succeed in winning over the older architects' association

(*Federazione Architetti Italiani*, founded in 1905 by Giovanni Rosadi). It was only in the course of the authoritarian and corporative reorganization of the State (1926) that the *Sindacato* gained its primacy as a professional organization of Italian architects until the end of fascist rule in Italy.

### ***Stile Littorio***

The appearance of buildings and urban spaces designed and built in Fascist Italy which refer to a striped down Classical architecture in mostly simplified rhetorical and monumental forms, are subsumed by architectural historians under the expression *Littorio style*. This style or rather formal tendency was named after the Roman *fasci littori* (bundles of wooden sticks tied by leather straps, used as a symbol of Fascism) as one of the emblems of the Fascist Party. As an expression of creative homogenization and state architecture it merged monumentality and classicism to rationalism, searching for a unitary, nationally connoted and recognizable style in service of a new built image of the Fascist State. The first use of the term came with Saverio Palozzi's publication of the results of the first competition for the national headquarters of the Fascist Party of 1934 (Palazzo del Littorio).

### ***Squadristi***

→ *Blackshirts*.

### ***Sventramento***

Urban redevelopment strategy based on a profit-oriented radical rearrangement of the roads and building masses in the city center and a very dense and rigid road network in the outer areas of the city, which does not provide for any zoning or qualitative structuring (urban development plans) and, in addition, gives free rein to land speculation over the resulting areas.

### ***Ventennio***

In Italian, *Ventennio* (literally twenty years) or *Ventennio fascista* generally refers to the rule of the fascist party that lasted more than two decades from 1922 to 1943 in the whole of Italy (Kingdom of Italy) and then from 1943 to 1945 in a northern fraction of the country (Italian Social Republic).