Towards a new industrial memory: strategies for the conservation and the enhancement of the Madrid Delicias railway station and its urban landscape

arch. Gian Marco Prisco
Scuola di Specializzazione in Beni architettonici e del Paesaggio, Università degli Studi di Napoli Federico II (Italy)

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Abstract
Within a landscape, industrial archaeology is interested in the latest stratification, buildings and newest remains that dwell in a void between past and present. The research on the Madrid Delicias Railway Station aims at recognizing the building and its constructive evolution as a source of enrichment not only from an historical viewpoint but also as essential premise for the project. This iron and glass architecture should be seen in the overall context of the social, cultural and economic transformations of the Spanish capital in the second half of the 19th century: a motive force for the urban development which left indelible traces on its present configuration. These signs, highlighted by the analysis carried out both on the building and its context, represent a complex map of relations to enhance and to defend.

Over the last few decades, architectural and industrial archaeology studies have developed considerably, as can be seen by publications and an increasingly consistent bibliography. According to Nizhny Tagil's 2003 Charter, in the study of historical industrial sites it is possible to use approaches of the archaeological research, by obtaining information from the material remains of architectural artefacts, understood not only as constructive but also as social expressions of the civilization that produced them. In this way the same “railway station” typology represent one of the most innovative contributions of the 19th century architecture to the construction of the new idea of “urbanity”. The urban scenery represents a place where to live and work in proximity, being part of something together. In spite of it, during the last months we have become acutely aware of the strengths and weaknesses of these systems. We revalue streets, public spaces, parks and gardens, recognizing our dependence on the underappreciated technological and human infrastructure.

The presence of experimental constructive solutions and remarkable artistic elements makes desirable a restoration project for the Madrid Station, which preserves the palimpsest and that sets itself as a further distinguishable “intentional layer” to add on the previous ones. A compatible and detectable addition which will reacquire the quality of the original inner spatial concept. It is necessary not just to remove degradation traces but to hamper their causes, avoiding homogenizing interventions to respect features acquired by the architecture throughout the time.

The restoration and the disclosure of the complex make sense in the urban landscape, seen as a system of relations to be developed, enhanced, and rebuilt. Industrial culture has produced its own landscape vision, which through artisan areas, suburbs and residential construction, is imposed, especially in times of crisis, through the idea of emptiness and "absence": the absence of knowledge and memory processing of a large part of the territory and thus of a part of our everyday life. These architectures remain caught in a limbo, awaiting to be understood and repositioned into the current urban fabric.

The methodological approach has been interpreted also by considering the current debate in the intervention on heritage through the cases of Italy and Spain. Despite the influence that the Italian restoration theory has had on the Spanish school, the latter has always approached the issue through pragmatism and the contemporary architectural gesture. Nevertheless, in both countries the most successful interventions were the result of a balance between theoretical requirements and design practice. In this panorama, industrial architecture has represented a fertile field for experimentation and to reconcile restoration and contemporary design: in their materials, finishes and concepts, these artefacts present ample coincidences with the language of our time, opening up ever-changing scenarios in the case of dialogue with it.

In this study, starting from the specific case of the former railway station of Delicias, we tried to analyze the broader theme of the urban voids and the question of a real landscape category: the post-industrial one, identifying problems and possibilities, intercepted with specific strategies to reconnect the urban fabric and give citizenry this part of heritage too often forgotten and neglected.