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ADAPTIVE CITIES THROUGH THE POST PANDEMIC LENS

Ripensare tempi e sfide della città flessibile nella storia urbana
Times and Challenges in Urban History

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CONTRIBUTO ALLA CURA E REVISIONE TESTI / EDITORIAL ASSISTANT AND TEXT REVISION

Pelin Bolca

PROGETTO GRAFICO / GRAPHIC DESIGN

Luisa Montobbio

IMPAGINAZIONE TESTI / LAYOUT

Luisa Montobbio

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DIRETTORE EDITORIALE / EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Rosa Tamborrino



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Rosa Tamborrino
Cristina Cuneo
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BETWEEN DESIGN AND CRISIS: THE REPRESENTATIONS OF BOLOGNA'S FIERA DISTRICT THROUGH THE POSTPANDEMIC LENS

FRA CRISI E PROGETTO. LE RAPPRESENTAZIONI DEL FIERA DISTRICT ATTRAVERSO LALENTE POSTPANDEMICA

Il paper propone un confronto fra le rappresentazioni del Fiera District di Bologna prodotte durante la pandemia con altre realizzate dagli anni Settanta ad oggi avvalendosi del mezzo espressivo-analitico della fotografia. L'obiettivo è quello di indagare quali narrazioni ruotano attorno all'iconico complesso per interrogarsi sul se e sul come queste abbiano contribuito a plasmare le recenti politiche messe in campo per il Fiera District dal suo più illustre inquilino: la Regione Emilia Romagna.

Parole chiave

Fiera District, Bologna, fotografia di architettura, rappresentare lo spazio urbano, codici e convenzioni di rappresentazione, lente postpandemica

Keywords

Fiera District, Bologna, architecture photography, representing urban space, codes and conventions, post-pandemic lens

Designed by Kenzo Tange between the 1970s and the 2010s, the Fiera District continues to occupy a prominent position in Bologna's iconography. Its white towers, which identify the district in the urban skyline, host almost exclusively offices, with the exception of a few cafés on the ground floor and the Geological Garden Museum named after Sandra Forni. Over the years, the complex has proven to have fulfilled the purpose for which it was conceived: to relieve tertiary pressure on the city centre by creating an office area to the north, and to be an expression of a modern concept of work. Today, of the various buildings that make up the complex, three are occupied by the Executive Board of the Emilia Romagna Region and the rest by private operators. More than 60% of the regional employees work in these offices, i.e. just over 2,000 people who use the district and its spaces on a daily basis.

Like many areas with a predominantly tertiary vocation, the Fiera District endured a prolonged and forced abandonment during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. From March 2020 to today, workers who used to occupy these spaces on a daily basis, including employees of the Region, have mostly done their work from home, thus helping to contain the spread of the disease. There is no doubt that the SARS-CoV-2 infection

can be considered a catastrophe and its urban reverberations are also clear. However, unlike other man-made disasters such as wars, or natural calamities like earthquakes, the pandemic has left almost no mark on the architecture of the Fiera District. The only traces of the traumatic event that we are slowly leaving behind can be found in the photos taken during the lockdown: the absence of people seems to tell the story of the exceptional nature of the last two years, but is this really the case?

In order to answer this question we will not limit ourselves to the present, but instead by taking a historical and critical approach this contribution intends to focus on a selection of representations produced in the period between the date when the cornerstone was laid, 19 October 1978, and the present day. The visual excursion identifies photographs as an expressive and analytical medium whether they are used for topical photographic essays or for reportage accompanying critical texts in Italian and foreign magazines. For example, Enrico Pasquali's aerial images documenting the construction of the towers will also be taken into consideration, as well as Olivo Barbieri's shots of the imposing, almost completed complex. These will be joined by Luigi Ghirri's intimate views and Riccardo Vlahov's details of construction, as well as more recent interpretations by Luciano Leonotti and Guido De Vincentis. The photographs used for this paper deliberately belong to different moments, thus allowing us to identify the key elements of the visual narrative regarding the Fiera District to the present day and to the impact of the pandemic.

The paper has several objectives. First, and in keeping with the orientation of the session, the role of photography as a tool for representing urban space in times of crisis is assessed. Second, the paper investigates the codes and conventions emerging from the representations of the Fiera District by comparing them with more recent images of the pandemic period. And considering precisely the way in which the spaces are used, we will reflect on whether and how the representations of the Fiera District have contributed to shaping the development policies implemented by the Emilia Romagna Region for its headquarters and the complex it is a part of.