

DOCOMOMO Italia is deeply concerned by the decision taken by the central management of Burgo Group, to cease the production process at the Mantova plant starting from the 9th of February.

One of the late works of Pier Luigi Nervi, the paper mill, whose elegant bridge-like silhouette hovers over the Mantuan lake, is one of the most important industrial buildings of the twentieth century.

An *unicum* in the design career of the great Italian architect and engineer, the Burgo Paper mill in Mantua is an icon of modern industrial Architecture because of its unique static functionality, compositional clarity and inventiveness: a unique structure able to fully address functional requirements expressed by the client with a compositional result of great expressive power.

The building designed by Pier Luigi Nervi in collaboration with Gino Covre for the piedmontese paper producer Burgo between 1961 and 1964 is an design icon for its resolution of a functional complex problem. Nervi's challenge was to have a single space, 250 meters long, characterized by a free facade of 160 meters, in which to place the machine for the production of paper constructed by Beloit, for many years one of the largest in the world of that kind.

The building is, in its final shape, composed by a main structure with metal roof (designed by Gino Covre with the company Badoni of Lecco) supported by two monumental frames in reinforced concrete 50 meters high, made by the company Nervi and Bartoli with the usual system of formwork prefabricated at ground. Each "Y" shaped frame is characterized by an element of the upper transverse 35.6 meters long that contains the anchorages for the suspension chains of the roof slab, made using flat irons assembled and articulated that connect the structure to the two frames.

The project included, besides the building for the paper producing machine, also a warehouse built with the characteristic isostatic ceiling crafted in ferrocement using formwork and assembled with a mobile scaffold, a construction technique patented by Nervi in 1949, Some unique formwork specimens have recently been found on the site of the Burgo plan, and after restoration have been on display in occasion of the exhibition "Pier Luigi Nervi. Architecture as Challenge" at Palazzo Te in Mantua. The mega-structure of the Burgo factory will be a unique design in Nervi's long-lasting career. If the final image is the result of a formal experiment which remained an isolated case in the architectural production of the Italian engineer, the process for its construction rather sums up his career as a builder: fabrication to the ground of

the prefabricated elements, the use of formworks for the creation of the isostatic ceilings with the help of a mobile scaffold are the result of a constructive thought characterized by rationality, practicality and organizational intelligence.

Nervi's desire to design each element of the production process is also reflected in the monumental settling basins located in a symbolic location at the entrance of the factory and that, in addition to being made with the above mentioned prefabricated system typical for Nervi, they masterfully evoke the paper production system through the use of water in a real monumentalization of the industrial process.

A fire occurred in April 1974 and damaged beyond repair the frame of the factory building and the glass panels, smashed by the great heat generated inside, were replaced with less expensive metal plates that still are in use today despite having taken away the formal characteristics of the building designed by Pier Luigi Nervi and Gino Covre.

The present condition is quite good especially thanks to the continuous maintenance implemented by the technical office of the factory. Lacking this continuous monitoring, degradation is likely to occur rapidly. There is some desegregation of concrete from the structure of the trestles and an oxidation of the concrete surface of the same subjected to acid fumes. Inside the metal plates are strongly deteriorated due to acidity of the fumes originated during the processing of cellulose.

If perhaps unique in the world, in this design by Pier Luigi Nervi the building and the production process are inextricably linked, from a functional point of view but also in the aesthetic conception. We pledge therefore for a fast reactivation or, if in no other way possible, for a necessary conversion of the building in order not to allow the degradation of the structure, but to take the opportunity to perform a careful restoration and enhancement of the factory site.

The Burgo group is planning to abandon and sell also the headquarters in Turin designed by Oscar Niemeyer between 1978 and 1981.

This petition is supported by:

- AAA-Italia. Associazione nazionale Archivi Architettura contemporanea
- Associazione Pier Luigi Nervi Project
- Consiglio Nazionale degli Architetti, Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori
- Consiglio Nazionale degli Ingegneri
- Italia Nostra, Mantova. Associazione nazionale per la tutela del patrimonio storico artistico e naturale della Nazione