

The Heritage of Sport in Rome and Its Conservation: Some Examples

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With this article we wish to draw attention to some interesting Olympic architecture in Rome, its values and its physical state of conservation. A lot of these buildings gained international reputation as they are the image of the Olympic Games around the world. But for various reasons, some of them were forgotten after the Olympic Games. As many other monuments in history, they have suffered a lot of changes that probably have destroyed their more important values because of the increasing requirements of use.

As Alois Riegl stated in his “theory of values”, if functional values contradict others, such as historic, artistic or documentary ones, these functional values must not be dominant. And the same applies to the nowadays medialised and business-oriented sport.

And so, if these architectures are placed across the city area, carefully situated, they provide facilities for expansion stages and modernisation measures. Therefore, we want to draw attention to some buildings of the Olympic Games in Rome in 1960, some of them projected and built before by important and recognised architects.

Luigi Moretti planned the extension of the “Piano Regolatore”(1936–37) that stretched from Tor di Quinto in the north–east of Ponte Milvio Square to the last “Piano di En-

rico Del Debbio”, with an interesting solution for the small hill with the greenery, but with some small new buildings north of the Stadio Olimpico and taking into account the landscape. This relationship between new architecture, nature and open space was founded on the “spirit of place”.¹

In the old interesting urbanistic solution, the so-called Piazzale dell’Impero (1936–37) was designed as an axis at the entrance to the Foro and integrates elements such as the Sfera fountain or the Mussolini monolith with a representative function (Fig. 1).

On both sides of the axis, at the entrance from the Duca d’Aosta bridge, there are two buildings in red colour and white marble with green as symbols of the Italian flag; they support the representative spaces and sport activities as swimming pools.

In a proper rational way, with Monte Mario in view, “l’Accademia di Scherma” was divided into two elements with different functions and very accurate details. In this context, a few years later Pier Luigi Nervi designed the Palazzetto dello Sport for the 1960 Olympic Games in Rome in the Flaminio district; and the Flaminia Stadium and then the “Olympic Village”, a modern and successful example that has lived on after the Olympics.²



Fig. 1 Aerial view of the urban area where the Olympic Games were situated



Fig. 2 The Academy of Physical Education nowadays

A new axis, the “Via Olimpica”, was created to join with the EUR, where the Palazzo dello Sport, the Velodromo, and the small lake were projected³ – probably because of the continuity of use, but new requirements in sport have changed the most important values of some of the Olympic architectures in Rome and even the surroundings. Thus, the most important values of all these architectures and surroundings must be protected. They can and must be used, but in a compatible way.

The Olympic Games in 1960

For the Olympic Games in Rome in 1960, many of the buildings constructed before, during the 1930s, were used.



Fig. 3 The new insertion in the Olympic Stadium; the difference between the old and the new part is visible

The Foro Italico complex was designed and built from 1928 by Enrico Del Debbio and inaugurated in 1932 as Foro Mussolini (at that time). Afterwards, from 1937 Luigi Moretti began to work there.

The “Stadio dei Marmi” (Stadium of the Marbles) is a sports stadium designed to complement the Academy of Physical Education (now seat of CONI, the Italian Olympic Committee) to be used by its students for training.⁴ Originally designed by Enrico Del Debbio, the construction was completed in 1928 and inaugurated in 1932. It is made up of Carrara marble steps, lined by 60 marble statues, symbols of the Italian provinces (Fig. 2). During the Rome Olympics of 1960, this stadium was used for the athletic competition; nowadays it is open to all citizens for sport and health. It is well preserved due to its heritage-compatible use.

The Olympic Stadium is (now) the main and largest sports facility in Rome. Used primarily for association football, it is now the home stadium of Lazio and Rome. At first, it was called “Stadio dei Cipressi”. It was projected by architect Enrico Del Debbio and engineer Angelo Frisa. In 1932, it was completed with some changes to the masonry, but works were interrupted in 1940 by the Second World War. Finally, in 1953 the stadium was reopened as the “Stadio dei Centomila”. The project was entrusted to engineer Carlo Roccatelli and after his death to architect Annibale Vitellozzi. In 1960, during the Summer Olympics the stadium hosted the field hockey preliminaries.⁵ From 1987 to 1990, “restructuring” and roofing works were carried out, for which reinforced concrete was used. The restyling of the stadium took place for the Football Cup in 1990 (Fig. 3). However, this was not really a restyling, as nearly the whole stadium was destroyed. The principal facade is the only element that has remained – probably due to the increased requirements of use.

Around the Male Academy of Physical Education (now CONI) an aquatic centre, the “Stadio del Nuoto” was built. In 1960, around it the swimming stadium and the tennis centre (eleven clay surface tennis courts), and also the “Supertennis Arena” or “Stadio Pietrangeli” were built, which were used for the Summer Olympics.⁶

With the construction of the “Stadio del Nuoto” (1958–60) by Enrico Del Debbio and Annibale Vitellozzi, the sports complex of the Foro Italico was completed after 30 years. Del Debbio designed the general plan. There was an Olympic swimming pool of 25 x 50 metres, a diving platform, and a grandstand for 7000 people. On three levels, there were places for gymnastics which could be used by ordinary people.⁷

For the European Championship in 1983, the stadium was modernised with lighting etc. Even nowadays this swimming complex can be used by all citizens. Therefore, it is well preserved with correct maintenance and heritage-compatible use (Fig. 4). This does not apply to the Supertennis Arena.

The “Palestra del Duce” was inside the Male Academy of Physical Education, close to the swimming pool zone. It was designed in 1936 by Luigi Moretti as Mussolini’s personal gym in the fascist era. It follows the lineal idea of space in one direction, which goes from atrium to stairs, with pieces of marble organising the rhythm, walls in Pavonazetto marble, and accompanying statues with symbolic meaning.⁸ Today, it is a conference hall of CONI. On the walls you can see the passing of time (Fig. 5).

In front of the entrance from the bridge, the second building in red and white is now the CONI. Designed in a symmetric way, inside there is the historic Congress Hall with the structure in reinforced concrete and two magnificent stairs one in front of the other. This space is well preserved and used in a heritage-compatible way.

On the opposite side of the Foro, towards Monte Mario, we can find two white buildings at the south entrance of Foro Italico (before Foro Mussolini). At the beginning, the older one was designed as a “hostel” for young sports students. During the Olympics, it was used for journalists and guests; now it contains administrative offices. The other one, called “Casa delle Armi” or “Accademia di Scherma”, is a “masterpiece”, a “modern classic”, created in a futuristic way and associated with contemporary rationalist architecture. It was designed and built in 1933–36 by Luigi Moretti. The interesting structure is of reinforced concrete and the simple spaces are covered with Carrara “luneux” marble chosen by Moretti (Fig. 6).⁹ In the 1960s, it was used as administrative space. It fell into oblivion for many years, and in the 1980s was adapted as a courthouse (an improper adaptation). After all these improper adaptations, CONI has now done work to conserve the “Casa delle Armi” (Fig. 7).

Not far away, in via Flaminia, we were surprised by the Palazzetto dello Sport.¹⁰ Pier Luigi Nervi (together with Vitellozzi) developed ideas for innovative uses. During the 1940s, he worked with reinforced concrete, which helped in the rebuilding of many factories in Western Europe. The Palazzetto with 5000 seats was built from 1956–58 to host boxing, basketball and other events at the 1960 Summer Olympics.



Fig. 4 The interior of the “Stadio del Nuoto”: the swimming pool with additions made by P. L. Nervi

The structure is a ribbed concrete shell dome, 61 metres in diameter, braced by concrete flying buttresses. The flute-edged roof shell is of prefabricated, diamond-shaped sections joined by poured-in-place concrete connecting ribs creating a webbed ceiling network similar to a flower. (It was calculated as a membrane.) A compression ring in the centre forms a cupola, providing a central source of natural light. The dome was erected in 40 days. Nervi designed the 16,000 seats version for the Palazzetto (1958–59) together with the 50,000 seats of the Flaminio Stadium (1957–59) for the Rome Olympics (Fig. 8).

For some years, the municipality of Rome has been using it for temporary events, but it is not well preserved. It’s a pity, because there are problems of decay and deterioration of the structure, materials and space.

In 1957, the Stadio Flaminio was projected and built by Pierluigi and Antonio Nervi with engineer Bruno Magrelli. The inauguration was on March 12, 1959.

It was designed for football, but with other structures under the stairs. The structure of the “mensole” (14 m) is very interesting; it is divided into two parts, one supported by iron pillars.¹¹ It has the same problems as the Palazzetto dello Sport.



Fig. 5 The “Palestra del Duce” today



Fig. 8 The “Palazzetto dello Sport” today



Fig. 6 The “Casa delle Armi” or “Accademia di Scherma” today



Fig. 9 The Olympic village today



Fig. 7 The interior of the “Casa delle Armi” or “Accademia di Scherma” today

In the surroundings of Villa Glori, via Flaminia and via Pilsudski, there have always been a lot of sports constructions. In the early 1900s, in Piazza d’Armi, Campo Parioli, the “Hipodromo” was built; in 1911 the Stadio Nazi-

onale was opened; in 1925 the “Hipodromo Villa Glori”. The urban planning in 1931 designed a public park in this area, but in 1950 the destination was changed after Claudio Longo won the competition. Therefore, it was decided to build instead residential blocks for the athletics and ten types of flats, and also the church of S. Valentino. The architects sponsored by INCIS were Cafiero, Libera, Moretti, Monaco and Luccichenti. Construction was from 1958–60 (Fig. 9).¹²

There is a very good ratio between green spaces and the number of inhabitants. Due to the continuity in use for many years, the structures are in good condition. In this area the Renzo Piano Auditorium was built as an interesting continuity.

The Via Olimpica was thought at the time of Olympics as a fast communication with EUR. In the EUR quarter, at the end of the axis of Cristoforo Colombo, a building with a great scenographic effect was planned, which was the Palazzo dello Sport, built in 1956–60 for 16,000 people. It was projected by Pier Luigi Nervi and Marcello Piacentini. It is a modern “amphitheatre” adapted to boxing, basketball, tennis, fencing, etc. This is a very modern structure with an interesting dome of 100 metres in diameter, which leads into



Fig. 10 The “Palazzo dello Sport” in EUR today

the foundations across 48 piles.¹³ Because of its good acoustics, nowadays it is often used for music spectacles and other kind of large events. It is well preserved, probably because of its flexible capacity of use and its interesting situation, close to the lake in EUR (Fig. 10).

The Velodromo has disappeared, after it was closed in 1968. The main grandstands were built of reinforced concrete.

General Conclusion

The rediscovery and the conservation of values must be one of the main concerns of our society; one should endeavour not only to indulge in commercialisation, but to instill in young people a passion and respect for memory and the past, so that our heritage can be passed on to posterity.

The demands of a major stadium do not stop in front of the building, and understanding the needs of spectators extends to the wider surroundings and the transport facilities that bring them to the competition sites. Given such a wide pattern of usage and commercialisation, modern stadiums now face a diverse range of threats.

Therefore, it is necessary to remember the documents written by our cultural parents and grandparents, for instance the Venice Charter, in particular article 5: “The conservation of monuments is always facilitated by making use of them for some socially useful purpose.” Neither should we forget article 9: “The process of restoration is a highly specialized operation. Its aim is to preserve and reveal the aesthetic and

historic value of the monument and is based on respect for original material and authentic documents.”

From the Amsterdam Declaration (1975) we learn that these cultural heritage elements show that “Integrated conservation involves the responsibility of local authorities and calls for citizens’ participation”.

The Nara Document on Authenticity (1994), Appendix II, contains the following definition: “Conservation: all efforts designed to understand cultural heritage, know its history and meaning, ensure its material safeguard and, as required, its presentation, restoration and enhancement.”

In the chapter on “Identity, Diversity and Pluralism” the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity speaks in Article 1 of “Cultural diversity: the common heritage of humanity”. Why? Because all these architectures are included in the “Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape”.

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Abstract

Mit diesem Beitrag wollen wir auf einige interessante olympische Bauten und Anlagen in Rom, ihre Werte und ihren physischen Erhaltungszustand aufmerksam machen. Viele dieser Gebäude erlangten internationales Ansehen, da sie das Abbild der Olympischen Spiele in der ganzen Welt waren. Aber aus verschiedenen Gründen sind einige von ihnen, die von namhaften Architekten entworfen worden waren,

nach Abschluss der Olympischen Spiele in Vergessenheit geraten. Wie viele andere Denkmäler haben auch diese im Laufe der Geschichte viele Veränderungen erfahren, die aufgrund der steigenden Nutzungsanforderungen wahrscheinlich ihre wichtigeren Werte zerstört haben.

Wie Alois Riegl in seiner „Theorie der Werte“ sagte, dürfen, wenn die funktionalen Werte in Widerspruch zu anderen, wie den historischen, künstlerischen oder dokumentarischen, geraten, diese funktionalen Werte nicht vorherrschend sein. Und dasselbe gilt für den heute medialisierten und wirtschaftsorientierten Sport.

So wurden diese Bauten und Anlagen über das gesamte Stadtgebiet verteilt, sorgfältig platziert, und ermöglichen heute Ausbaustufen und Modernisierungsmaßnahmen.

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 The archive of Del Debbio's projects is kept at the MAXXI in Rome.

Credits

- Fig. 1 googlemaps.com
 Figs. 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10 Calogero Bellanca, 9/2019
 Fig. 6 Susana Mora, 9/2019

¹ P. O. ROSSI, Roma. Guida all'architettura moderna, 1909–2000, Roma-Bari 2005, p. 44.

² Ibid., p. 206.

³ Ibid., p. 214.

⁴ A. MUNTONI, Roma tra le due guerre, 1919–1944, Roma 2010, p. 346.

⁵ ROSSI, Roma, 2005, p. 351.

⁶ MUNTONI, Roma, 2010, p. 348.

⁷ ROSSI, Roma, 2005, p. 213.

⁸ P. CIMBOLLI SPAGNESI, Luigi Moretti al Foro Mussolini. La palestra del Duce e altre inedite, Roma 2009, p. 331.

⁹ MUNTONI, Roma, 2010, p. 330.

¹⁰ ROSSI, Roma, 2005, p. 206.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 207.

¹² Ibid., p. 209.

¹³ Ibid., p. 217.