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On the Wave of the Welfare State: Anglo-Italian Town Planning Strategies in the Post-war Years

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Original Citation:

On the Wave of the Welfare State: Anglo-Italian Town Planning Strategies in the Post-war Years / Lorenzo Ciccarelli. - STAMPA. - (2021), pp. 20-41.

Availability:

This version is available at: 2158/1245292 since: 2021-10-14T10:11:08Z

Publisher:

University College London Press

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25 November 2024

Post-war Architecture Between Italy and the UK

Exchanges and transcultural influences

Edited by Lorenzo Ciccarelli and Clare Melhuish

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First published in 2021 by
UCL Press
University College London
Gower Street
London WC1E 6BT

Available to download free: www.uclpress.co.uk

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A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from The British Library.

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Ciccarelli, L. and Melhuish, C. (eds). 2021. *Post-war Architecture between Italy and the UK: Exchanges and transcultural influences.* London: UCL Press. https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781800080836

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ISBN: 978-1-80008-085-0 (Hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-80008-084-3 (Pbk)
ISBN: 978-1-80008-083-6 (PDF)
ISBN: 978-1-80008-086-7 (epub)
ISBN: 978-1-80008-087-4 (mobi)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.14324/111.9781800080836

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3

On the wave of the welfare state: Anglo-Italian town-planning strategies in the post-war years

Lorenzo Ciccarelli

At the end of the Second World War few people in either Britain or Italy could have imagined the long period of economic expansion and social upheaval that their two countries would experience in the following decades. The need for reconstruction and massive public building projects catalysed the growth and success of many architects both in Italy and Britain who gained international recognition. In the post-war years, despite differences in geography, climate, social structure and the degree of economic and industrial development, the dialogue and exchange between Italian and British architects, urban planners and critics was intense and fruitful, as this book illustrates.[1]

By examining publications, journals, and discussions, it appears that the exchanges between the urban planning culture of Britain and Italy moved in both directions. However, Britain exerted an attraction and influence that was much more pervasive and long-lasting than that which Italy transmitted. And while, year after year until the late 1960s, the Italian urban planners were interested in what was proposed and experimented with across the Channel, their British colleagues looked mostly to the past of the Italian peninsula, to the immense historical and artistic heritage of the towns and cities of previous centuries.

To understand the reasons for this imbalance, it is necessary to look beyond the boundaries of the field. For the Italian intellectuals who were preparing to launch new republican institutions, Britain embodied the perfect model of civil life, of democratic secular institutions and firm judicial steadiness. It was the only European country that had emerged

victorious from the war, pushing back the Nazi invasion, and in the election of 1945, even elected a Labour Government. Clement Attlee, as Prime Minister, led the executive branch which, over just a few years, launched an extensive programme of social reforms, instituting the most ambitious welfare state system of the time in which urban planning and the construction of public housing had a major role. The enormous disparity between this political agenda and what the architects and urban planners of Italy struggled to achieve was a constant in the Anglo-Italian discourse of the 1950s and 1960s. And the lasting influence of British city planning was carried, therefore, on the shoulders of a more general admiration for the democratic institutions of the country and the reforms of the welfare state, which, despite the alternating Labour and Conservative governments, remained almost intact until the end of the 1970s. While British observers looked at architecture, at engineering structures, and at Italian cities untethered by the more general political situation of the country, the Italian architects, urban planners, and historians sought out British design culture because they were attracted above all by British political and social customs. In the following pages, I will examine some characters, events, and publishing initiatives that in the final stages of the war, and in the years immediately following, contributed to orienting the exchanges between British and Italian urban planning culture along quite precise trajectories, introducing the specific events that are the subjects of the next chapters.

The primacy of British urban planning

Bruno Zevi was the undisputed driving force for the penetration of Anglo-Saxon design in Italy in the 1940s and 1950s.[2] He tenaciously propagated British models through the publication of books of immediate and lasting fortune – from *Verso un'architettura organica* (1945) to *Saper vedere l'architettura* (1948) and *Storia dell'architettura moderna* (1950) – as well as writing articles for journals that he founded or encouraged like *Metron*, *Urbanistica* and *L'Architettura: Cronache e storia*, and participated in debates held by the Associazione per l'Architettura Organica (APAO), l'Istituto Nazionale di Urbanistica (INU) and l'Istituto Nazionale di Architettura (In/Arch).

Of less impact, though not negligible, was Zevi's presence in Britain. *Verso un'architettura organica* was translated in 1950 by the publishing house Faber and Faber and the diffusion of its texts and the relationships that he was able to establish in London earned him the

prestigious appointment of Honorary Corresponding Member of the RIBA for Italy.[3]

Looking through the blunt judgements Zevi issued on the British context, he seems unimpressed in comparison with what was happening in other countries. Unlike in the United States and in Scandinavian countries – which could boast architects of the calibre of Frank Lloyd Wright, Richard Neutra or Alvar Aalto – Britain did not have equally prominent figures. The buildings designed by Frederick Gibberd, Richard Sheppard, Gordon Taylor, Eric Lyons, Basil Spence and the firm Lyons Israel Ellis showed design composure and an excellent quality of execution (and were constantly published in Zevi's journals) but did not have that spark of biting genius that the Italian critic sought.[4] For Zevi, British excellence resided in the well-organized professional associations and in the solid tradition of urban planning, summed up in the 'triumphal example' of the County of London Plan (1943) of Patrick Abercrombie and John Henry Forshaw.[5]

Unlike the other Italian architects and urban planners of the post-war period, Zevi had lived in Britain during the conflict. Fleeing Rome, he reached London on 22 March 1939 and remained until early in 1940, working in the office of the Finnish architect Cyril Sjöstrom and attending courses at the Architectural Association School.[6] After a period in the United States, Zevi again stopped in London in 1943 where, while waiting to return to Italy on 31 July 1944, he diligently worked in the library of the RIBA to complete drafting *Verso un'architettura organica*.[7] The months spent in the British capital allowed him to master the English language in a period in which the language of culture in Italy was French. He also established relationships with British architects and politicians and participated in the animated debate on reconstruction.[8]

Following the German bombardment in the summer of 1940, an intense discussion was triggered in Britain over reconstruction. Accustomed to the rigid strictures of Fascist propaganda, Zevi was particularly struck by how the topics of architecture and urban planning were subjects of public interest with wide participation. Citizens were encouraged to weigh in on how the country should be rebuilt after the war, through opinion pieces in the pages of the *Herald* and the *Mirror*, educational exhibitions like 'Living in Cities' (1940) and 'Rebuilding Britain' (1943), and the series of broadcasts, *Making Plans* (1941), by BBC Radio.[9]

The strategic guidance that British architects and urban planners exercised both in public discussions and in parliamentary actions was favoured by proven institutions like the Town and Country Planning

Association and the RIBA, which fuelled discussion through the promotion of meetings, conferences, debates and exhibitions. In particular the RIBA institute at Portland Place offered a model to Zevi of a free and independent association of architects that supported a rich library, the publication of a journal (the *RIBA Journal*), the promotion of competitions and legislative proposals, the organization of prizes (the RIBA Gold Medal) and mediation with political powers, the organization of exhibitions and the promotion of public debates, the expansion of academic-level courses and examination for professional qualification.[10] And there were countless conferences on foreign experiences, debates, meetings with members of the government, exhibitions of prefabricated components, and competitions for housing like those organized between 1941 and 1945.[11] These were occasions that Zevi, as seen from his diaries, was able to take advantage of in the months that he spent in London, often visiting the RIBA and its valuable library.[12]

Back in Italy, Zevi worked to set up similar institutions that could concentrate the efforts of anti-Fascist architects and urban planners and make their voices heard in the debate on reconstruction. On 28 March 1945, as evidence of Zevi's co-ordinated efforts, the Scuola di Architettura Organica opened, which merged in the following July with the Associazione per l'Architettura Organica. Contemporaneously, the journal *Metron* was launched promoting the association's activities.[13] If the Architectural Association of London was the model for the Scuola di Architettura Organica – an association independent of ministerial direction and financed solely by student fees – the RIBA remained the lodestar for Zevi in his subsequent role as Secretary General of the INU from 1951 to 1958 and founder of In/Arch in 1959. Not infrequently *Metron* published texts from conferences held at the London institute. Editorials that opened the issues of *L'Architettura: Cronache e storia* documented the debates, the exhibitions, and the meetings that took place there.[14] During the months in which Zevi was planning the organizational structure and the aims of In/Arch, he claimed peremptorily that 'the RIBA was the best organization of architects that exists today in the world'.[15] And like the British institution, the mission of In/Arch, which was soon mostly disregarded, was to 'establish a bridge between producers and consumers of architecture' and spread knowledge of architecture among institutions and the general public through the promotion of national and regional prizes, exhibitions, conferences, and professional development meetings.[16]

Even British superiority in the field of 'democratic' urban planning was regularly reaffirmed by Zevi. On the cover of *Verso un'architettura*

organica above Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, Zevi inserted Abercrombie and Forshaw's map of the County of London Plan, tellingly clarifying the models that he proposed for Italian architects and urban planners. Again in *Storia dell'architettura moderna* he reiterated how 'the sector in which the English have originally made their mark is that of urban planning', and that the London plan had 'triumphally inaugurated beyond the existing tentative attempts, a new phase of modern urban planning'.[17]

Zevi was in London when the County of London Plan was published in a luxurious volume by Macmillan and he probably saw the exhibition of the plan organized at County Hall in London, visited by over 75,000 in a few months, including King George VI and Queen Elizabeth.[18] With the material he collected, as soon as he returned to Italy Zevi wrote a detailed article for the journal *Urbanistica* in which he promoted Abercrombie and Forshaw's plan as the model for a new 'organic urban planning'.[19]

What were the radical, new elements identified by Zevi? And how could the methodological proposal of the County of London Plan be better suited to the problems of the Italian reconstruction with respect to other contemporary prefigurations like Le Corbusier's plan for Saint-Dié?

If for Zevi, the hygienic or functionalist plans considered the fabric of the city subordinate to the hand of the architect, ready to be sliced and gutted to open monumental avenues and build large-scale buildings, the plan of Abercrombie and Forshaw proposed a radically different approach. Weighing the financial difficulties that the country would have to face post-war, the two urban planners set out to scrupulously respect the existing road network and private property rights, and use their resources, not for expensive expropriations, but for a series of limited changes that would allow them to 'retain the old structure, where discernible, and make it workable under modern conditions'.[20] The emphasis on the plan was thus shifted from the design vision to the enormous undertaking of preliminary analysis to determine which parts of the urban fabric were to be saved, which parts partially changed and which replaced. This series of preliminary analyses allowed Abercrombie and Forshaw to discover that the urban fabric of London still retained a series of 'living and organic communities' that had survived through the rapid industrial development of the previous two centuries. A series of communities, of cohesive territorial and social units, inherited from the old villages that the city absorbed over the course of its expansion, which had resisted homogenization, each maintaining its specific social character, grouped around symbolic buildings like factories, neighbourhood markets, or civic buildings.[21] Once the cellular structure of the city was unveiled, the

Figure 3.1 The London 'living and organic communities' as shown in Forshaw, John Henry and Patrick Abercrombie. *County of London Plan*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1943

purpose of the plan was to preserve the qualities of each community – Camden Town, Islington, Hackney, Battersea, Peckham, Greenwich, and so on – encouraging their independent and separate natures, inserting barriers like railways, green spaces and waterways, and preventing new roads from breaking them up.[22]

Even the expansion of the city toward the outer London region had to be accomplished through the design of analogous 'separate and definitive entities' or *unità organiche compatte* as Zevi translated it. These were self-sufficient zones, further structured to provide the basic requirements of a neighbourhood unit – that is a population sufficient to furnish the right number of children for a primary school without them having to cross roads with fast traffic. Experiments with organized neighbourhoods and *neighbourhood units* appeared, as is known, in Scandinavian countries and in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. However, the County of London Plan collected these instances and applied them in the design of a large European capital, furnishing a reconstruction model on a large scale for those, like Zevi, who were in search of an urban design model for the new democratic Italy that was an alternative to functionalist proposals.

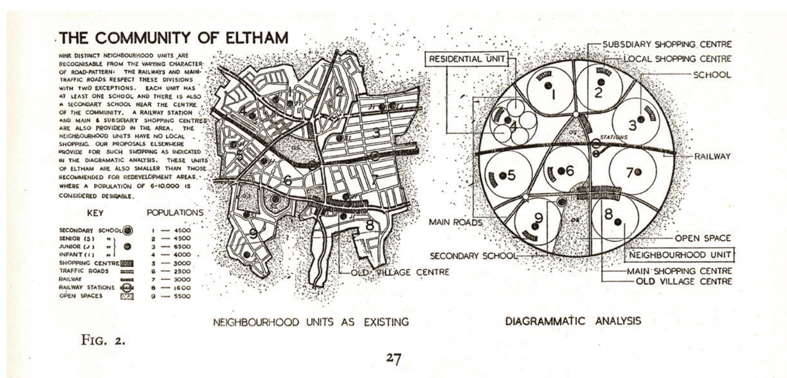

Figure 3.2 The neighbourhood unit of Eltham as shown in Forshaw, John Henry and Patrick Abercrombie. *County of London Plan*. London: Macmillan and Co., 1943

The myth of the self-sufficient neighbourhood – fed by the spread of the British New Towns and Scandinavian neighbourhoods – fed urban planning culture in Italy until the mid-1950s, leaving its mark on the first generation of INA-Casa neighbourhoods. However, to appreciate the considerable influence of Abercrombie and Forshaw's plan it is enough to look at the early projects of Italian urban planners in the immediate post-war period: especially the regulatory plan of Turin (1948) by Giovanni Astengo, Nello Renacco and Aldo Rizzotti.[23] It was a particularly meaningful proposal because it was based on the broader Piedmontese regional plan (1944–6) drawn up a few years earlier by the same planners with the help of Mario Bianco; because it was widely published in the first issue of the new series of *Urbanistica* and because two of its drafters – Astengo and Renacco – played a major role in the development of Italian urban planning in the 1950s and 1960s.[24]

The Piedmontese regional plan foresaw the formation from scratch of 'new organic civic units perfectly equipped and economically active' which, on the one hand, could instil an order in the countryside and small towns, on the other, could 'enliven the large existing centres', in particular Turin.[25] The influence of the model of the County of London Plan is evident even in the first lines of the text of the regulatory plan, where Astengo, Renacco and Rizzotti declare to have 'abandoned the purely geometric and spatial conception of the old regulatory plans', to embrace an 'organic, elastic and positive approach'.[26] The urban fabric was taken on as the subject of analysis and interpreted as 'sum and association of elements proportionate to the community life of the inhabitants'.[27] The

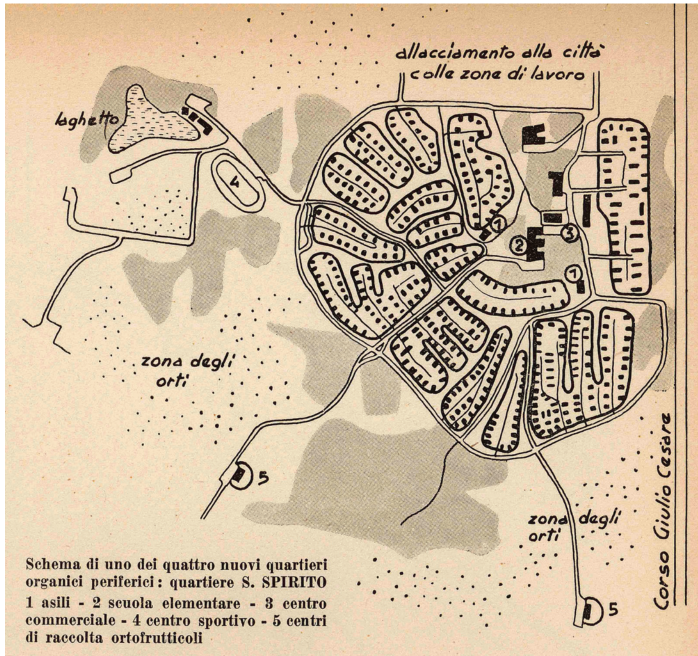

Figure 3.3 A suburban organic district as designed in the Turin master plan by Giovanni Astengo, Nello Renacco and Aldo Rizzotti. Published in 'Concorso per il piano regolatore di Torino', *Urbanistica*, 1 (1949)

INU Edizioni, Rome

large changes included in the plan – setting out a 'belt of green areas' and laying out an outer ring road and artery of high speed, north–south transit – were clearly inspired by the *Greenbelt* and the traffic axes that Abercrombie and Forshaw had imagined for London. And the problems to be addressed – evacuating residences, redesigning urban neighbourhoods, co-ordinating urban expansion, rationalizing connecting and communicating roads for new industrial areas – were no longer separately addressed with zoning as in the plans of functionalist inspiration, but integrated and resolved with the tools of the 'organic unit' clearly modelled on the communities of the County of London Plan. These units were sized to accommodate between five and ten thousand people – and not by chance the same population that Abercrombie and Forshaw had determined for the London communities – and served both to organize the growth of the first peripheral ring, and to fertilize the surrounding region by integrating industrial sites, residential areas and services for primary needs through the tool of the neighbourhood unit.

The competition for the Turin regulatory plan of 1948 came to nothing, and the formulations so clearly inspired by the London example were not fully included into the plan for Turin that Astengo and Giorgio Rigotti drafted in 1953 and 1956, mainly because of indiscriminate development of key areas around the periphery that happened in the meantime.[28] However, the principle of organizing the growth of the city through the establishment of compact and self-sufficient communities – that Zevi knew from the County of London Plan – heavily influenced many urban experiments in Italy in the 1950s.

Monuments Men

When Zevi was in exile in London from 1943 to 1945, a generation of young British specialists crossed Italy, from Sicily to the Alps, following the Eighth Army led by General Montgomery.[29] Together with the soldiers, there was also a group of architects, archaeologists, art historians and archivists engaged in the Italian campaign, earning experience and knowledge that later they did not hesitate to share at home. In this sense, the war became an important opportunity through which British architects and art historians could see in person the most important cities and monuments of the Italian peninsula.

Since 1941, some archaeologists had been called by the Civil Department of the War Office in London to consult on safeguarding archaeological sites that the British military encountered during their advance in North Africa.[30] In 1943, following the landing in Sicily, the requests became more and more pressing, and involved not just archaeologists but also art historians and archivists. In October of 1943, these informal opinions were given an official framework with the establishment of the Monuments and Fine Art Sub-Commission, under the Department of Civil Affairs of the War Office.[31]

What was the work of the members of the Sub-Commission? For library collections and artworks, in large part already moved to safety by Italian cultural ministry superintendents early in the conflict, their security and preservation had to be ensured. Furthermore, it was necessary to draw up lists of artworks destroyed or stolen by the Germans so that when the conflict was over, it would be possible to ask for their return.[32] As for the monuments, the main work was to make lists, working with the local superintendents, of the most important structures in the region, annotating the damage and the condition, and initiating urgent remedial actions, such as repairing roofs or shoring up unstable sections.[33]

Thomas Brooke, Edward Croft-Murray, and Roger Ellis were some of the officers of the Monuments and Fine Art Sub-Commission engaged in Italy.[34] In the context of this work, though, Colonel Leonard Woolley and Captain Roderick Enthoven were particularly important. Unlike some of their colleagues mentioned, once they returned to Britain they wrote articles, published books, held conferences on the months spent in Italy, spreading a particular *image* of Italy in which the monumental heritage was of pre-eminent interest compared to that of the contemporary, and where the walled towns of the central regions – Lazio, Umbria, the Marches, Tuscany – embodied the archetype of Italian landscape and art.

Between September 1944 and February 1945 the *RIBA Journal* published three detailed reports 'from the Civil Affairs Department of the War Office' detailing with minute description the damage and the condition of the most important buildings and monuments of the cities of central and north Italy.[35] These articles were published unsigned but from research in the files of the War Office at the National Archives of London, it emerges that they were written by Leonard Woolley.[36]

Woolley was, in the 1930s, probably the most famous British archaeologist thanks to his extensive excavation campaigns in Turkey, Syria, Egypt and Iraq where, beginning in 1922, he brought to light the remains of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur.[37] In June of 1943, Woolley was called to head the Archaeological Advisory Branch of the Department of Civil Affairs.[38] He was sent to Algeria and in December of the same year, Sicily, to supervise the archaeological division of the Monuments and Fine Art Sub-Commission, and spend the first months of 1944 at the Allied Command, first in Naples and then Rome, during the Italian campaign.

Although the work of the commission concerned practically the whole peninsula, the three articles only covered the central Italian regions: Lazio, Abruzzo, Umbria, the Marches and Tuscany. Though the reason for the choice is not known, it was fraught with consequences for British design culture, which even in the 1950s and 1960s devoted particular interest to the cities of central Italy, to the detriment of those in the north and south of the peninsula. The telegraphic notes on the damage to the monuments was supported by a series of photographs, taken directly by members of the Sub-Commission during their inspections. Besides the main cities, a myriad of little towns and tiny villages were documented, and sometimes photographed, with their churches, palaces, as well as views of the historic centres. The material included churches of Bolsena, Chiusi, Terni, Cortona, Gubbio, Volterra, Loreto and Pistoia besides a 'great number of smaller towns and isolated

buildings visited by the officers' like Avezzano, Ferentino, Sutri, Veroli, Foligno, Acquapendente, Alatri, San Quirico d'Orcia, Pienza, Gradara, Fano, Fossombrone and many others.[39]

After the war, between 1945 and 1947, Woolley wrote detailed articles and also published a book on his experiences in Italy.[40] Besides describing the formation of the Sub-Commission and its aims, he records the activities in North Africa, Austria and Germany, the monuments visited and the urgent preservation repairs carried out. Much of the text and photography focused on Italy, and in particular, again emphasizing the central regions, contributing to reinforce the interest of British architects toward these perhaps less well-known centres.[41]

The information that Woolley conveyed in his publications came from the reports that the different teams of experts of the Sub-Commission compiled each month, on a regional basis.[42] In fact, teams were formed made up of art historians, architects, archaeologists and archivists, assigned to the areas of 'Sardinia and Sicily; Apulia, Campania, Calabria, Lucania; Abruzzi and Lazio; Le Marche, Toscana, Umbria; Liguria and Piedmont; Emilia and Lombardia; Le tre Venezie'.[43]

From the reports with his signature, it is also possible to reconstruct the places Captain Roderick Enthoven visited in Italy.[44] He studied at the Architectural Association School of London from 1919 to 1924 where he then taught, alternating with work in the Pakington Enthoven and Gray studio, which, in the 1930s, designed several commercial and residential buildings.[45] In 1940 Enthoven became a Civil Camouflage Officer in the Air Ministry, then enlisted in the Monuments and Fine Art Sub-Commission and was sent to Italy in August 1944, to Florence, where he worked as the Monuments Officer for Tuscany and Umbria. Afterwards, from 5 May to 15 October of 1945, he was assigned to the Piedmont and Liguria regions and finally, from 30 October to 1 December, to the Veneto and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. Shortly thereafter – 8 December 1945 – he was released from service and was able to return to London.[46]

From the mid-1950s, Enthoven dedicated himself mainly to his independent professional work, but in the early post-war years he held top positions, first at the Architectural Association School, which he directed in 1948–9, then at RIBA as vice president from 1951–3 and director of the Education Board from 1956–8.[47] Here he became, in fact, the sought-after expert for dealing with issues related to Italian artistic and historic heritage. It was Enthoven who, during the 1950s, reviewed the books of Italian authors or wrote on Italian subjects for the *RIBA Journal*, and it was again Enthoven who curated the extensive and detailed *Exhibition on Italian Architecture,* the first after the war.[48]

The exhibition was open from 7–29 October of 1949 in rooms of the Portland Place headquarters where a selection of more than 500 photographs taken in the 1930s by Ralph Deakin, foreign correspondent of *The Times* in Italy was displayed.[49] It was Enthoven who made the selection and organized the exhibition layout, with the aim of showing, not just masterpieces of Italian heritage, but also the many 'little known gems of Italian architecture' that he had discovered during the war.[50] It was not possible to find images of the exhibition itself, nor does there seem to have been a catalogue. However, in the article published in the *RIBA Journal* that described the opening of the exhibition, some of the photographs chosen by Enthoven were published. Almost exclusively, they show the regions he visited during the conflict: Tuscany, Umbria, and the Veneto. Enthoven chose photographs in which the cathedrals of Prato, Lucca, Perugia, the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi, and San Marco in Venice were seen in the widest possible urban context. The piazzas, the winding streets – the stairways of Perugia – the historic centres descending harmoniously into the landscape like at San Gimignano and Assisi, were for Enthoven the essence of the Italian lesson. This was a lesson that he still considered relevant for British architects and urban planners, so much so that the exhibition was simply called *Exhibition on Italian Architecture*. It implicitly suggested that the Italian architecture to see was not the contemporary, though this was admired, but that of the historic patrimony, that of the town centres of the art cities that grew over time, in which it was difficult to separate monument from the urban context.

Italian lessons in townscape

In a famous 1950 editorial, the editor-in-chief of the *Architectural Review* James Maude Richards asked what the next steps were for British design.[51] Though the long road to establish modern architecture seemed to have ended, 'the way forward is not clear'.[52] And since the 'pioneers of modern design' had opened 'a brave new world', it was the moment to contaminate the functionalist lexicon with the national traditions of each different country.

As the magazine's directing editor since 1935, Richards had spent time disseminating functionalist architecture in Britain, publishing extensively the white-rendered buildings of European masters and of the MARS group, and at the same time watching with growing interest the peculiar character of the British territories and traditional constructions.[53] The search for 'cultural continuity' – and the difficult balance between the

requirements of modernity and the legacy of spatial and construction solutions inherited from the past – became the load-bearing beam of the critical production of Richards during the 1950s and 1960s, to which the editorial lines of the *Architectural Review* also conformed.[54] The fine-tuning of the Townscape discipline was instrumental to this critical operation: a long-lasting editorial campaign that deeply engaged the magazine and its leading experts: Richards, the publisher Hubert de Cronin Hastings, and the editors Nikolaus Pevsner, Gordon Cullen and Kenneth Browne.[55]

Despite the emphasis placed on the purely British origin of the new discipline, the medieval city and the Italian renaissance acted as a constant point of reference for the development of Townscape. And that, not by chance, the growing interest in the *Architectural Review* and of the publisher, The Architectural Press, (both of which were headed by Hubert de Cronin Hastings) toward the historical, artistic and urban patrimony of Italy coincided with the ever sharper criticism that James Maude Richards and Ian Nairn directed toward the first generation of new towns.

Complementing the article of Hastings – 'Townscape' – published in 1949, Gordon Cullen contributed the first of a long series of 'Casebook' essays, expanding on all the perceptual effects that were seen in the design of 'urban scenes'.[56] The photographs and quick sketches Cullen made showing foreshortened views of British roads and squares, enlargements of the Houses of Parliament and Westminster, aerial views of Bath's crescents, and details of Kent cottages reinforced the idea that it was just these specific features of British cities and landscapes that shaped the new discipline.[57]

However, two months later, the *Architectural Review* published a detailed report on the city of Rome by the American critic Henry Hope Reed; this was especially important in that for the first time the Townscape principles were applied to a non-British city.[58]

The choice was not by chance. In the opening note, by the editorial staff, Rome was presented as 'the most perfect example in Europe of a capital that carries out its capital functions without loss of historic continuity'.[59] Despite the 'series of disasters after 1870 culminating in Mussolini's grandiose devastation' the Eternal City still embodied, for the editors of the *Architectural Review*, the model of a 'reconciliation of the ancient and modern'.[60] In particular, it was the historic centre of the city that we wanted to look at as 'the place in which to show how the historic centre of a capital city can serve modern needs without loss of character'.[61]

These judgements were framed in the ongoing bitter debate on the reconstruction of London and other British cities. The bombings of 1940–1 had destroyed large portions of the eastern neighbourhoods of London and areas of many of the main cities in the south of the country, sparking extensive debate on what to preserve in the ruins, how to do it, and what to demolish and rebuild; in particular regarding the churches of the City of London and Coventry Cathedral.[62] Richards, Hastings and Cullen also weighed in on how to reconstruct parts of London that were particularly delicate from a historical and monumental point of view – like the area behind Saint Paul's Cathedral and that of Covent Garden market – proposing on several occasions to fashion an urban fabric different from that proposed by functionalist inspiration, seeking instead the visual strategies *enclosure-exposure*, *truncation*, *change of level*, *building as sculpture* characteristic of the nascent Townscape.[63]

Rome could offer, in this sense, a series of valuable lessons. The American critic took into account the neighbourhoods of Spina of Borgo, Santa Maria Maggiore, Piazza di Spagna, Piazza del Popolo, Via del Corso, Via del Tritone, Piazza Venezia and Via dei Fori Imperiali – eight junctions in the urban fabric of Rome that showed how it was possible to shape a vibrant public place, or instead, through the wrong choices, destroy it completely. The latter category includes the demolition of the Spina of Borgo, which broke 'the whole effect of St Peter's that depends upon a sudden entrance into the sunlit piazza from the gloomy street', and the reorganization of the Piazza Venezia and Via dei Fori Imperiali, which, due to the heavy demolition and the construction of new buildings completely out of scale like the Altare della Patria, betrayed the character of 'secretive and intricate planning' that characterized the urban fabric of baroque Rome.[64]

If 'in French Baroque planning there are no surprises', said Henry Hope Reed, 'the unexpected transition from obscurity to magnificence is Roman' and the urban planning and architecture choices were attributed to respect for character.[65] Virtuous examples were the Piazza di Spagna and Piazza del Popolo which, changed into elliptical and trapezoidal forms allowed quick glimpses and changing views, and could also be admired from above from stairs and the belvederes that overlooked them. Despite being positioned at crucial junctions in the city, inside them, 'little boys can play games, the little girls can walk and the tourist can study his guide book without fear of the roadsters'.[66] The close connection between the street and the care for the buildings that faced onto it, with shops on the ground floor, opening out, were evident walking along Via del Tritone. Meanwhile, as an example of the unexpected

change of scale between a street and the piazza where it opens up, Reed identified the junction between Via del Corso and Piazza Colonna; but there were many others so that 'practically every yard of the old city of Rome has a lesson relevant to the practice of townscape today'.[67]

Reed's text inaugurated a long series of historical essays, articles, travel reports and reviews that the *Architectural Review* dedicated in the 1950s to Italian heritage.[68] This interest in Italian monumental and urban heritage coincided with the publication, again in the pages of the *Architectural Review*, of the ruthless critical analysis of the first New Towns and residential neighbourhoods of the London County Council, which also ironically inspired Zevi and Italian post-war planners as an 'organic' model for the post-war reorganization of Italian towns during the same period.

As is well known, the initial enthusiasm for the urban design of the Labour Government of Attlee gave way to disenchantment. The failure that Richards encountered in 1953 in the New Towns of Harlow and Stevenage was attributable to low residential density and the dispersal of houses in the country; this worked against the formation of a compact city, and instead became 'groups of housing estates separated by empty spaces'.[69] The lack of a recognizable shape, of clearly defined full and empty spaces, of buildings and places in which citizens could recognize each other and identify themselves, prevented these aggregates of buildings from becoming real cities, regressing to places of transit and dormitory neighbourhoods. Two years later, again in the pages of the *Architectural Review*, Ian Nairn applied the same criticism to the whole British territory, where building speculation, low-density new housing, and uncontrolled growth of the suburbs had created a new type of characterless landscape, identified with the neologism of 'Subtopia'.[70] Both Richards and Nairn prioritized inverting the tendency for de-urbanization typical of the first generation of New Towns, instead designing neighbourhoods and pieces of city that were 'high-density and small area'.[71] And more than the American suburbs and the co-ordinated Scandinavian and Dutch neighbourhoods, the Italian historic centres were those that provided British design culture with unsurpassed models of recognizable urban forms, contained within a circle of walls that identified a discrete separation between city and country, and examples of a suitable urban density punctuated by quality public spaces. Not by chance, one such working interpretation of the historic patrimony of the Italian cities in the light of the studies on British Townscape would be pursued a few years later by Hubert de Cronin Hastings in *The Italian Townscape* (1963).[72]

Epilogue

The examination of publications and articles in Italian and British journals allows for the appreciation of the points that Zevi on the one hand, and Woolley, Enthoven and the circle of the *Architectural Review* on the other, impressed on the Anglo-Italian debate that lasted until at least the end of the 1960s. Although there was no lack of appreciation for individual architects – James Stirling and Denys Lasdun in particular – Italian design continued to dedicate attention to urban planning across the Channel and the New Towns. British design, meanwhile, was interested in the contemporary resonance with the vast historical, artistic, and urban patrimony of the Italian peninsula rather more than in what was actually happening there.

This emerges with clarity both in the fundamental book of 1959 of Giuseppe Samonà, *L'urbanistica e l'avvenire della città negli Stati europei*, and in the monographic 1968 issue of *Zodiac* dedicated to Great Britain. In both publications, it is British planning that plays a leading role in the development of Italian design, which especially admired the experiment of the New Towns defined as the 'most spectacular operation of planning from above that took place after the war'.[73]

In particular, the new town centre of Cumbernauld was extensively published in Italian journals, from the first announcements to its inauguration in 1967.[74] It abandoned the restricted dimension, the small-scale buildings, the rural temptation and de-urbanization of the first generation of the New Towns, to embrace large-scale territorial problems and the urban phenomenon of road traffic. The principle of neighbourhood unity was completely abandoned and the city was planned as 'a compact town set upon a hilltop', suggestive of central Italy, characterized by a high population density and residential areas collected and connected to an impressive public centre.[75]

Although this public centre was never entirely completed, it had a wide influence in Italy – where for the first time the major questions of the expanding city and automobile circulation were being faced – and it became a common undertaking for Italian architects and urban planners travelling by car as far as Scotland to see with their own eyes the mighty civic centre raised in the countryside.[76]

However, despite its fame, the Cumbernauld town centre was the last remnant of the British myth in Italy: the myth of an architectonic urban design capable of absorbing and rebalancing economic, social and residential dynamics over a vast area. The failure of the town centre, the altered economic and social panorama that 1968 brought to Italy as well

as to Great Britain, sparked a decisive change of course to the British–Italian exchange.

The disasters of the Agrigento landslide, the Arno flood, and the high water in Venice in 1966 and the large general strike for housing in November 1969 showed how the aspirations of the Italian urban planners after the war toward the creation of a more equal city, better planned, and in which there was housing for everyone, remained unfinished.[77] In the same months, in Britain, the tough editorial campaign 'Manplan' launched by the *Architectural Review* harshly criticized the living conditions of residents in post-war residential estates and neighbourhoods, suggesting implicitly the failure of those state bodies and those architects that had shaped the old and new post-war cities.[78]

The energy crisis of 1973 and the following years of economic stagnation put a rapid end to that era of growth, social reform and optimism about the future that will be embedded in the definition of the 'trente glorieuses'.[79] Increasingly in crisis, even the machinery of the British Welfare State began to be under attack by the 1970s and would be progressively dismantled by the end of the decade.

Radically changed by this economic and social context, the contours of Italian–British exchanges were also affected in terms of architecture and urban planning. While the myth of British urban design persists in Italy at least up to the second half of the 1970s, British observers, occupied with the problem of towns and historic centres devastated by the massive residential neighbourhoods of the post-war era – as symbolized by the uproar of the publication of *The Rape of Britain* in 1975 – began to determine in the Italian architectonic debate that particular quality of insertion in the urban context that they were seeking.[80] This perhaps explains the growing interest of British journals and architects in the work of Giancarlo De Carlo in Urbino and Carlo Scarpa in the countryside and cities of the Veneto – interest in two architects, that is, who had made the search for a refined insertion of contemporary architecture in consolidated urban and natural contexts the hallmark of their work.[81] And in the other direction, the disruptive new language proposed by James Stirling made him the standard bearer of British architecture in Italy.[82] This renewed pathway of exchange seems intertwined though only at the level of architectural research, going beyond the political, economic context and the social aspirations that mix urban British culture with that of Italy in the early post-war period, and is therefore not covered here. However, the research pathways left open by these pages should lead to other fertile ground, suggesting how, despite the many differences, architects, urban planners and historians in Italy and Britain have

continued to see themselves as interlocutors with mutual interests in the last decades of the twentieth century.

Notes

1 Ciccarelli 2019.
2 Dulio 2008; Ciorra and Cohen 2018; Bello 2019.
3 Bruno Zevi Foundation (Rome), Sottoserie 02 Onorificenze, busta 2, 02/08.
4 James 1957; Anichini and Grima 1960; A. Gentili 1960; G. Gentili 1960; Pedio 1962.
5 Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943.
6 Bruno Zevi Foundation (Rome), Serie 01, busta 1, 01/03 The Architectural Association School di Londra, and Serie 04, sottoserie 01, busta 5, 04.01/01 Studio Cyril Sjöstrom di Londra.
7 Dulio 2008, 30.
8 Zevi 1993, 34–5; Dulio 2008, 9–13.
9 Bullock 2002, 3–22. See also Mack and Humphries 1985.
10 Mace 1986; Richardson 2004.
11 The RIBA Journal issues report the monthly appointments and the full transcript of the conferences and debates.
12 Bruno Zevi Foundation (Rome), busta 75, 11/02 Agendine e rubriche di Zevi, agendine 1943–4.
13 Dulio 2008, 52–9.
14 Chitty 1946; Zevi 1957.
15 Zevi 1959.
16 Zevi 1993, 79. See also Dulio 2008, 114–19.
17 Zevi 1950: 316 and 325.
18 Amati and Freestone 2016.
19 Zevi 1944.
20 Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943, 2.
21 Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943, 21 and 28–9.
22 Forshaw and Abercrombie 1943, Plate xxxvi.
23 *Concorso* 1949. See also Scrivano 2000.
24 *Piano* 1947.
25 *Piano* 1947, 28–9.
26 *Concorso* 1949, 36.
27 *Concorso* 1949, 36.
28 Astengo 1955; Rigotti 1955.
29 Lamb 1995.
30 Woolley 1947, 5.
31 National Archives (London), T209/1, Proposals to set up a committee on the protection of cultural monuments and works of art.
32 National Archives (London), War Office 204/2986 and WO 204/2987, Italy: Preservation of historic monuments and fine art: Directives, reports lists and correspondence.
33 National Archives (London), War Office 204/1077, Protection of historic monuments in Italy.
34 The biographies are available on the Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art website. After the war those men assumed leading roles in the British cultural institutions: Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Brooke was appointed deputy director of the Tate Gallery in 1948, Major Edward Croft-Murray was hired to the print room of the British Museum while Major Roger Ellis was enrolled as a professor at University College London.
35 *The Monuments* 1944; *The Monuments* 1945.
36 The typescripts of the three reports can be found in National Archives (London), T 209/17/1, Reports on damage to monuments. Incorporated in works of art in Italy Part I. Woolley sent the reports to the War Office in London on 4 July, 28 October and 11 November 1944.
37 Woolley 1939.
38 Woolley 1947, 5.
39 *The Monuments* 1944.
40 Woolley 1945.

41 Woolley inserted 27 full-page photographs in his book. Twenty of them related to Italian monuments, buildings and cities, while only two reported North African monuments, three Austrian monuments and individual images of France and Austria. Even in the text, Italy is the only country to which two entire chapters are dedicated.
42 National Archives (London), War Office 220/636: Record of war damage to monuments in Italy; War Office 220/600: List of protected monuments in Italy; and the monthly field reports kept in War Office 220/624, 220/625, 220/626, 220/627, 220/628, 220/629, 220/630, 220/631.
43 Woolley 1947, 69.
44 National Archives (London), War Office 220/638, Italy: Final reports.
45 This biographical information is contained in a Curriculum Vitae written by Enthoven himself, and in newspaper clippings referable to him, contained in three volumes kept at the RIBA Archive (London), ENR/1–3, Three albums of texts, cuttings and illustrations compiled by R.E. Enthoven, Architect and Designer, between 1919 and 1976.
46 National Archives (London), War Office 220/638, Italy: Final reports.
47 RIBA Archives (London), RIBA/MEM, Naturalisation subcommittee papers, 1946–7.
48 *Exhibition* 1949; *Italian* 1949.
49 Deakin's photographs are kept in the homonymous collection at the Robert Elwall photographs collection at the RIBA British Architectural Library.
50 *Exhibition* 1949, 470.
51 Richards 1950.
52 Richards 1950, 166.
53 Rosso 2001; Higgott 2007, 33–56.
54 Erten 2004.
55 'Townscape Revised' 2012.
56 Since this article, and in all subsequent ones, Hubert de Cronin Hastings assumed the pseudonym of Ivor de Wolfe. So De Wolfe 1949; Cullen 1949. See also Goslin 1996.
57 Richards 1958.
58 Hope Reed 1950.
59 Hope Reed 1950, 91.
60 Hope Reed 1950, 91.
61 Hope Reed 1950, 91.
62 Campbell 2018; Pane 2018.
63 Browne 1964.
64 Hope Reed 1950, 103 and 108.
65 Hope Reed 1950, 103.
66 Hope Reed 1950, 104.
67 Hope Reed 1950, 103.
68 As an example, see Mortimer 1950; Masson 1951; Giedion 1952; Whiffen 1953; Masson 1954; Powell 1954; Tomlison 1954; Masson 1955; Masson 1956a; Masson 1956b; Lang 1957.
69 Richards 1953a; Richards 1953b. See also Aldridge 1979.
70 Nairn edited two monographic issues of *The Architectural Review*: the first (702, 1955) entitled *Outrage*; the second (719, 1956) *Counter Attack*. See Darley and McKie 2014.
71 See in particular *Summing Up* at the end of the monographic issue *Outrage*, 451–4.
72 Erten and Powers 2013.
73 Marsoni 1968, 189.
74 Marsoni 1968, 191–4. See also Sacchetti and Zaffangini 1960; 'La nuova' 1963; Lewis and Stead 1963.
75 Copcutt 1963.
76 As an example, Aymonino 1965, 62. For the travels of Italian architects and town planners to Cumbernauld see Ferrari 1977; Imbesi 2004.
77 Dal Co 1997, 11–12.
78 The editorial campaign consisted of eight monographic issues, published from September 1969 to September 1970, and dedicated to the following themes: frustration, transport, industry, education, religion, health and welfare, local government, housing. See Erten 2012.
79 Fourastié 1979.
80 Amery and Cruickshank 1975.
81 'Italy' 1966; 'Urbino' 1972; Loach 1979; 'Carlo' 1973.
82 As an example, Izzo 1979; Nicolin 1979.

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