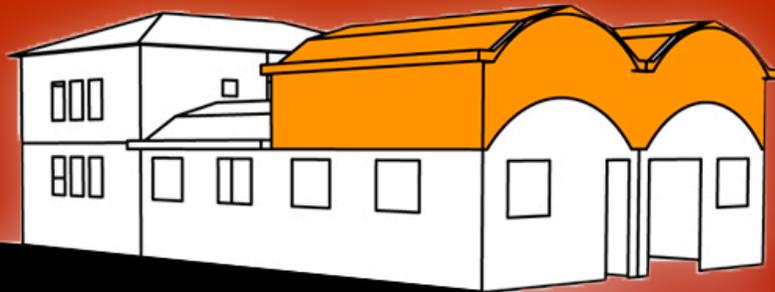




A story placed in Villaggio Artigiano - Modena (Italy)

Touriboost Project 2018-10TR01-KA203-058344

A story placed in
Villaggio Artigiano
- Modena (Italy)



1. The birth of Villaggio
Artigiano

2. Ponzoni Foundry

3. Ovestlab factory

4. Cesare Leonardi,
architect and designer

5. Massicciata

6. TricTrac centre



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external content



image gallery



image gallery

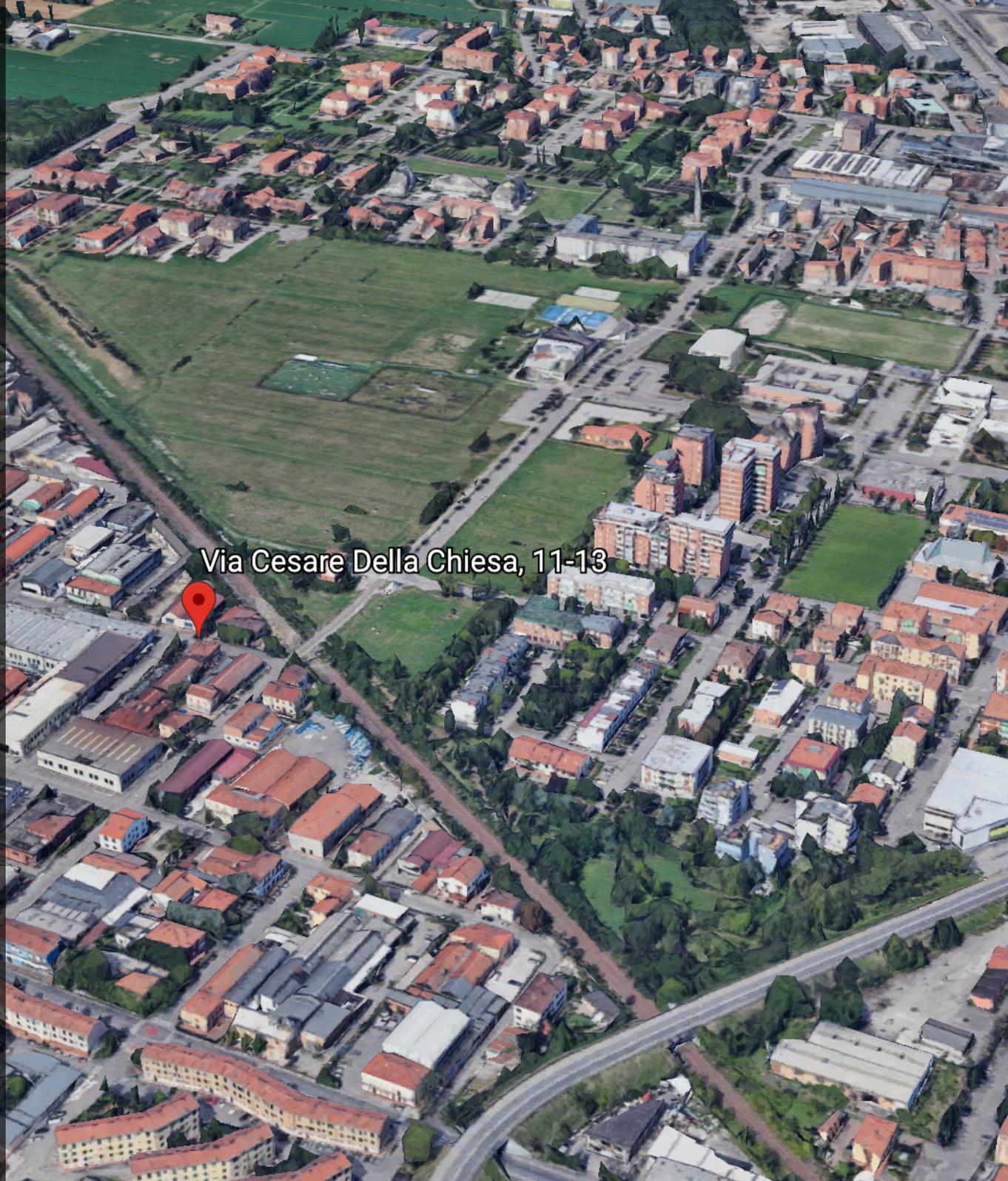
contents

Am I or am I not the local Priest?

Can you see the triangular shape of this place? This is the typical shape of Villaggio Artigiano. It marks the landscape and it can be seen from a distance. It has been in constant communication with the rest of the city, Modena, for decades. But at the same time, this particular triangle-shaped piece of land has been, for me and my friends, like a fortress. The Village has got a great character and has a marvellous story to tell. In fact, everybody comes to me and ask. If I'm in the mood and maybe over a good glass of red wine, I remember and tell the story with pleasure. Am I or am I not the local priest? After all, I know everyone's secrets!

..after the II WW....

All began just after the II World War. In that period, the whole country was under reconstruction and people came from the experience of the partisan liberation struggle by the Nazi-Fascists, particularly in the area of Modena and Emilia Romagna. At that time already, the province of Modena had a high level of population and production density and, in the post-war years, it experienced an impetuous economic development: ceramics, textiles and clothing, biomedical, metalworking – especially in Modena – and food industry. At the beginning of the 1940s, some very important companies such as FIAT, Maserati and Ferrari were already present in Modena.



1 The birth of
Villaggio
Artigiano

But in the years following the war many of the businesses that grew during Fascism went into crisis and the majority of those entrepreneurs reacted by unleashing a violent offensive against the working class. As a reaction process, starting in 1945, many dismissed workers decided to start their own business and some small companies arose in Modena, founded mainly by former factory workers of the city, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, carpenters and even peasants.

In this context, Alfeo Corassori, the first Mayor after the Liberation and the urban planner Mario Alberto Pucci, had a brilliant and audacious political intuition. They wanted to create a new neighbourhood that could tie together life and work, know-how and industry, production chain and local community. This was the Villaggio Artigiano (Artisanal Village), built in 1953 in the Madonnina neighbourhood. It is the first model of industrial area created in Italy: an equipped artisan district, developed on an area that sits in-between the city and the countryside, focused on the size of the small artisan entrepreneur for the economic revitalization of Modena. A real public ante-litteram social innovation intervention. Mayor Corassori believed very much in this bet on the future, to the point of organizing meetings with unemployed workers to convince them to take the risk, to accept the economic and personal sacrifice necessary to start a company. And he succeeded! The Villaggio Artigiano was built on an area of 15 hectares, from which 74 lots were obtained, in which as many businesses took up residence within three or four years.

Thanks to the brilliant idea of Mayor Corassori, all this people and their families naturally merged in a self-empowerment process that avoided possible social conflicts in the city due to these layoffs, creating a young and productive, fairly cohesive population founded on the work and on its ethical principles and system of values. The physical union of medium, small and very small businesses made their strength.



The Church of the Villaggio Artigiano.



[La Chiesa del Villaggio Artigiano](#)



The Church of the Villaggio Artigiano.

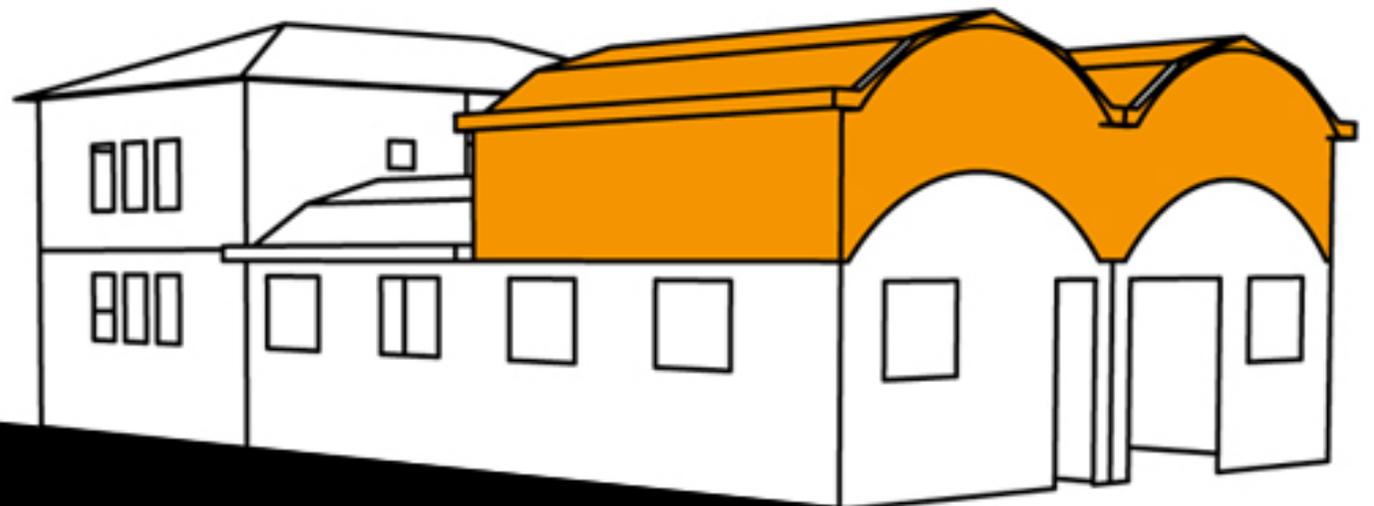


Mario Pucci. 1953. Picture of the Villaggio Artigiano.



Villaggio Artigiano seen from above.

[Il Villaggio Artigiano](#) 



Next to the production sector, in the Villaggio Artigiano a community of residents was born, which in the following decades consolidated. This was made by very similar characters and people, young people in their early twenties who had courage, skills and a dream, sort of artisans' conglomerate that knew and helped each other. Such a community couldn't miss a church, and not just any church!



Il Villaggio Artigiano - elaborated by Amigdala

Something really special was happening at the time. In France, the experience of the "working priests" developed after the War and was taking root also in Italy. Priests like me worked as workers in the factories and in addition officiated masses and carried out the ecclesiastical functions for which they were assigned to the parish. In fact, the Villaggio Artigiano church went to constitute one of the places in Italy where this experience flourished. And that's how I got here! It's for this reason that I know each inhabitant of the Village so closely. I shared with them not only spiritual life, but also everyday life. And that was great!

At that time, people were really counting on their own, helping out each other and sharing wealth and poverty. Everything was a "family business" and so was the building of the house-workshop, typical construction of the Villaggio Artigiano, that involved relatives and friends, all workers or craftsmen who were making their own way to get by, working at the building at night or on Sunday. The factory houses, emblem of an inseparable link between work and life, reflected the resourcefulness of the inhabitants and was the basic unit, the beating heart of the Village.

Amigdala. Map of Villaggio Artigiano.



2 Ponzoni Foundry

I helped out too, so many times! Especially in case of good friends, like Fulvio Ponzoni, who arrived with his family to establish their activity, the **Ponzoni Foundry**, a cast iron foundry that they've run for almost 70 years. We spent some cheerful time together, Fulvio, me and his three boys, Nando, Carlo and Franco, that were all working tirelessly in the foundry.

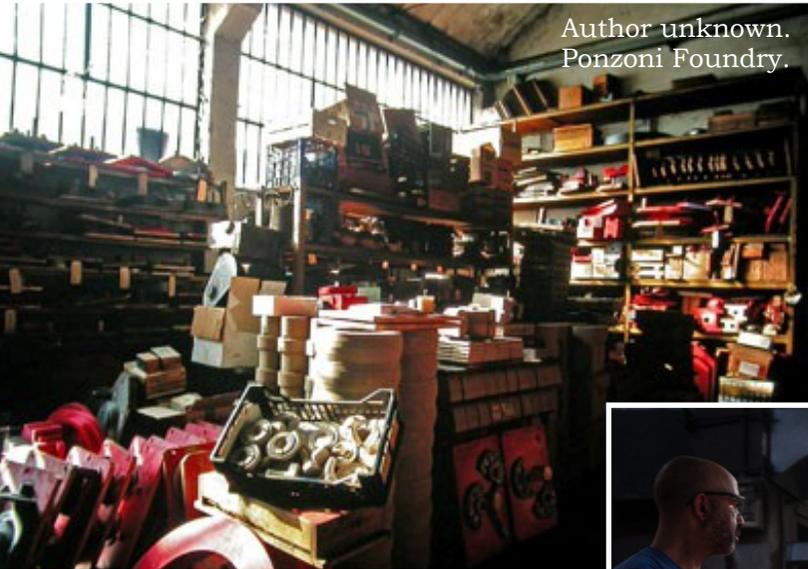
I remember when on Sunday the house upstairs was full of relatives and cousins and their children were playing among the machinery of the workshop and casting molds still hot, with burns and scrapes on the feet and clothes. For many years, actually three generations of Ponzoni family moved with agility and dexterity between the fire, the fumes, the red-hot 'stirrups'. With smoked goggles, noise-cancelling headphones, a large protective helmet and a black pinafore, they looked like Martians or gods of the underworld, tormenting the souls of the afterlife. Fulvio, born in 1888, had started the activity just after the War, before moving in the Village, settling down in the old ruins of the Bastion of the Citadel. The equipment was built with makeshift means. At the beginning they cast only bronze and aluminium that did not need high temperatures. The furnace was made from military gasoline drums lined with refractory (fire-resistant) earth inside. The access coal was invigorated by a bellows driven by their sisters.

When they arrived here, the foundry and the house were built working with great sacrifices and they started the activity with such willpower. Here I remember a funny story that will let you know what I mean. They had bought a remnant of war in '48, an old German BMW motorcycle with sidecar, they had removed the shuttle and built a wooden platform on which everything was transported. The vehicle was used for the move and then became the 'truck of the company'. But already in the '70s were working effectively for FIAT tractors production, providing key elements for these powerful machines. Then production changed in the 1980s: parts for earth moving machines, prototypes, small series of other objects (parts for fireplaces, parts for pumps, etc.), until a new generation of Ponzoni arose in the 2000s, who have carried on the legacy of advanced technical know-how, combining it with the artistic soul of artisan production. In fact, while in a factory you have to continuously make the same piece, in their foundry they are always asked for different interventions. You have to know how to adapt, and this makes the job original and creative. Unfortunately, the Fonderia shut down a few years ago and is nowadays a dismissed shed. But the inside space of the foundry, with its melting furnaces, piles of raw material and moulds for cast iron, creates a special and evocative environment. And today it's experimenting an 'afterlife', miraculous process!

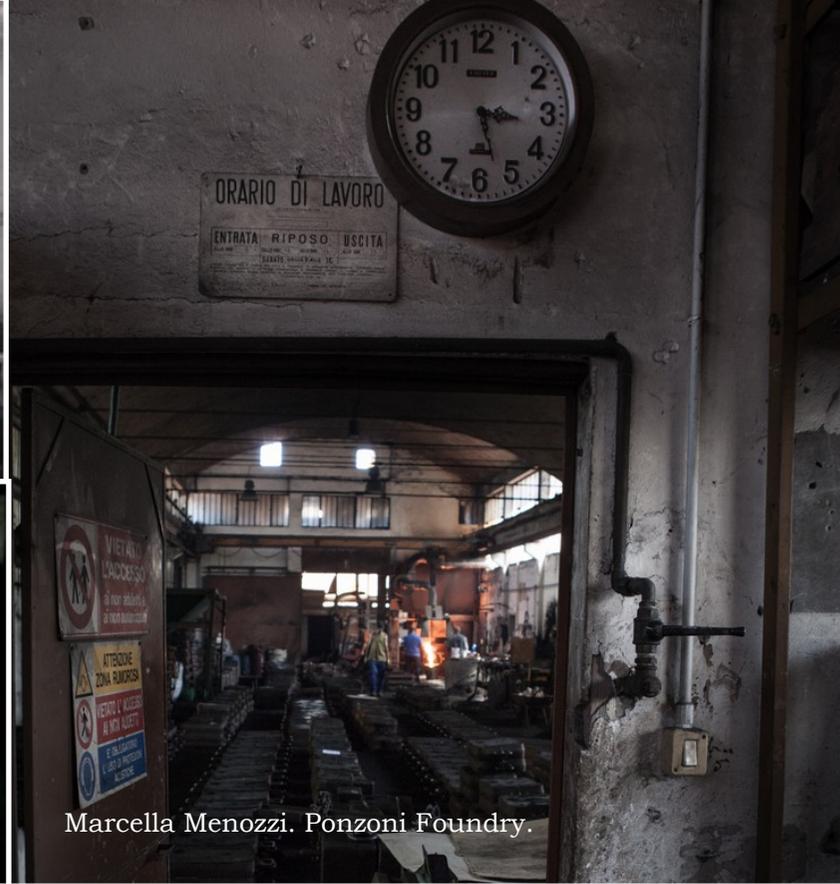
Author unknown. Picture of the ancient Ponzoni Foundry.



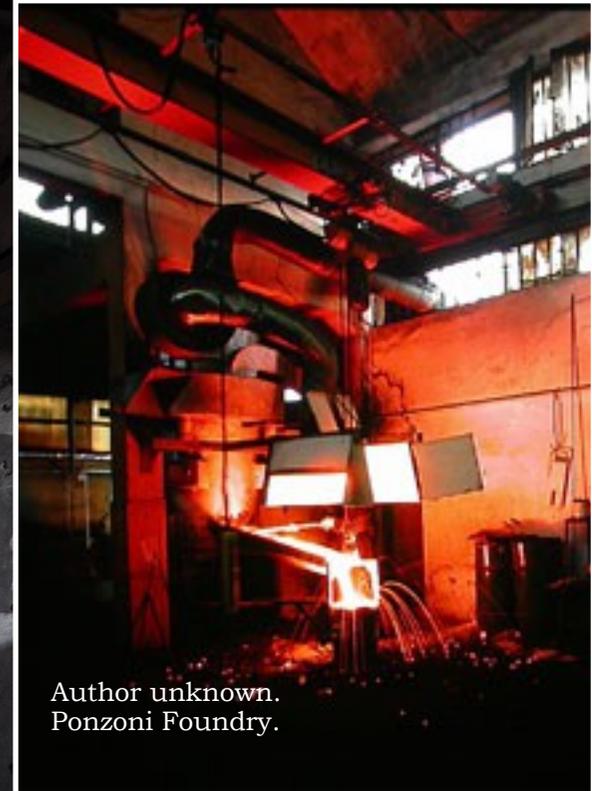
Author unknown. Ponzoni Foundry.



Marcella Menozzi. Ponzoni Foundry.



Author unknown. Ponzoni Foundry.



Author unknown. Ponzoni Foundry.



Marcella Menozzi. Ponzoni Foundry



Author unknown. Ponzoni Foundry.





[Intervista al fonditore Claudio Ponzoni a cura di Amigdala](#)

3 Ovestlab factory



Thanks to these guys of Amigdala Association, that settled down here in the Village a few years ago, the foundry and many other dismissed places are hosting great cultural events that bring them to new life. Particularly once a year, in spring, Amigdala organizes the Periferico Festival that brings in our place artists, public, visitors, music, theatre, art and fun! This really makes me remember of the old good times, when so many people flowed through the streets of the Village, like pulsating blood in its veins. Amigdala Association crew renewed an abandoned carpentry workshop and transformed it in their headquarter, Ovestlab factory, where, all along the year, artistic residences, workshops and other events are held. They really matured an idea of "widespread culture" that pays attention not only to the city center but also to its suburbs. In fact, Periferico takes place in non-theatrical places, inhabiting the chosen places with site-specific performances, specifically to enhance the space and its meaning. These are unpublished spaces, where the public cannot normally freely access: factories, archives, deposits, industrial spaces. Four editions of the festival have been held at the Artisan Village: Futuro Antenato (2016), Alto, fragile, urgente (2017), Insolente (2018), Latitudine e longitudine di un granello di sabbia (2019). In 2017 Periferico was reported to the Critical Network Award. #OvestLab follows the red thread of "know-how" - declined in the various areas of action - to enhance the memory of the Artisan Village as a territory where ingenuity and the community have been able to

Roberto Brancolini. 2018.
Periferico Festival at Ovestlab

coexist, and at the same time produce new imaginaries for the future of this former industrial area. They try to connect different disciplinary fields, from performance art to carpentry, from urban redevelopment to publishing, by reconciling vigilant attention towards the themes of civic innovation.

For me OvestLab is the natural continuation of the old 'Civic Center', with its public library and some spaces where cultural activities took place. This was the first real place of social gathering and membership, after the church with its oratory and sections of the union and was implanted after moving the elementary school that at that time, because of the growing of the Village's population, needed a bigger space. Thanks to the initiative of some inhabitants, in the Civic Centre an artistic group was formed, sort of collective theatre. The first initiatives were associated to social struggles, to problems of air pollution in the neighbourhood due to harmful emissions



InEuropa srl. November 2019. Ovestlab



Roberto Brancolini. 2018. Periferico Festival at Ovestlab

from factories, to protest against the war in Vietnam, and to the fight against layoffs, by animating the Village to raise people's awareness.

Anyway, OvestLab is one of my favourite places in the Villaggio also because it makes me remember of our old and happy house near the church, where I spent so many marvellous years. This was a special place. Somebody called us 'weirds' but we were all so happy to be there and share a living! The church had an adjoining house where we priests lived and, on the upper floors, some artists and teachers of Fine Arts. This connivance over time generated a sort of small artistic collective where cultural and spiritual activity merged and revealed the social function we unrolled. Because arts help people to feel at ease, just like spiritual work, and society benefits from both.

As a result, outside the church on Sundays there were many people who did not attend mass but found themselves in that convivial moment, as proof of this. You betcha!



The architect
and designer
Cesare
Leonardi, a
good balance
of talent and
temper

4



Cesar Leonardi at his studio

<https://www.architetti.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/CESARE-SCRIVANIA-e1505469813164-696x445.jpg>



But out of all of us, a real artist stood out most of all. This was Cesare Leonardi, the famous architect and designer. Perhaps because visionary men are always a bit 'misunderstood' by the crowd or maybe because too busy doing something else to worry about how the world goes, the fact is that Caesar had, in addition to talent, also a good temper! Some people said he was gruff, but only because he was sincere and didn't use half words when it came to work. He was very demanding, even with himself. But I know him well and I know that behind this facade lies a great industriousness and love for things well done. His path proves it. He became a real star among us.

He was attending University in Florence when, in the 60s, he met the architect Franca Stagi and with her founded the Leonardi-Stagi Studio in Modena. Since then they worked in the Villaggio Artigiano where many of their masterpieces saw the light. In 20 years, the Studio realized many important projects in architecture, urban design and industrial design. They gave particular importance to the research on fiberglass as a material and on trees and their function as architectural elements. It is thanks to the collaboration with an expert artisan and some industries inside the Village that the famous "Dondolo" and "Nastro" chairs were born, that will bring architects to worldwide fame. Today, their works belong to the permanent collections of



Joseph Nemeth. Cesare Leonardi Archive.

the most important museums in the world such as the MOMA in New York, the Center Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin. Cesare Leonardi in particular has interpreted in a unique and singular way the role of architect in contemporary culture. He experimented in different fields like design, photography, sculpture, painting, architectural projects...that's really the result of an uncommon ability and talent and expression of a tireless design research. In this sense his activity is a rare example of dedication to the craft: Cesare has always privileged work on the project rather than its diffusion and publication. Still today all his work, mostly unpublished, is contained in his archive: architectural drawings, models, design prototypes, sculptures, paintings, photographs, the vast personal library. It's for this reason that in 2010 the Cesare Leonardi Archive Association was founded by some of his ex-collaborators, with the aim of preserving, protecting and disseminating Cesare's work, making it accessible through the cataloguing of materials in the archive and in the private library and the organisation of exhibitions and seminars. Since 2016 the association has co-managed the OvestLab spaces together with Associazione Amigdala. In these spaces are also hosted the project 'School Archivio Leonardi'.

Cesare still lives in his house-archive, a beautiful glass and wood house surrounded by trees, hidden from view like a patch of greenery in the heart of the Village, and, when I've got some spare time, it's a pleasure for me to pay him a visit.



Joseph Nemeth. Cesare Leonardi Archive.



Depositi - Intervista a Cesare Leonardi



Cesare Leonardi
Architetto



5

Massicciata

In these occasions we remember some old funny stories about our adventures out of the Village. In fact, it was thanks to him that I took for the first time a ride on the railway that, like a gentle iron giant, would go up and down the plain skirting the village and leaving us all ashore dreaming of distant horizons. We didn't have time to wander around, but seeing the convoys running along the **Massicciata** every day left us with that dreamy feeling. I remember that once with Cesare we had a race, when the train passed we started running and we had to be able to get on the wagon on the fly. At that time the freight trains were slow eheheh, or maybe we were young and fast. The fact is that that evening, we got on the last train of the night, it was already dark, and then as we had got on, we decided to get off, in the middle of the Emilian plain, and return to the Village on foot. It was a magnificent walk, under the stars.

Everybody in the Village has got memories linked to the **Massicciata**. Young couples used to set their appointments there, under the moonlight, and tons and tons of goods and raw materials passed by and made the fortune of Village inhabitants.

Massicciata (dismissed embankment) is the old railway line that connected Modena to Reggio Emilia, and it concretely represented the division between the Craftsman Village and the close neighbourhood of the Madonnina. Nowadays railway tracks have been removed, but the rubble of the railway ballast remains in memory of the original function of this path. Spontaneous vegetation appeared isolating the path from the nearby buildings and making of **Massicciata** a “secret place”, where the eye sweeps towards the horizon, following the perspective of this ghostly straight line. **Massicciata** is inscribed in the ground like the footprint left on the sand before the wave passes to cancel it, like the shape of a body on the pillow. It gives us the opportunity, for a moment, to connect with the immensity of the plain on which the city lies, reminding us that we are at the centre of a network of paths and moving bodies.

After the removal of the tracks, the inhabitants of the area have begun to use this passage as a link between the two districts, inventing pedestrian crossings and car cycle paths. In 2018 the Municipality regulated the access to the site by closing these paths and forbidding the crossing of the embankment. The redevelopment of this fascinating piece of the city has been at the center of a wide debate in the city in recent years, and indeed this place of transition represents a challenge for the transformation of this piece of the city, an opportunity to start designing public space again. A challenge that passes first and foremost through the re-appropriation of this long strip of city by the citizens. Some artistic and cultural actions have been staged on this abandoned embankment, in order to support the idea of a new public space and to make citizens participate in the rediscovery of this evocative journey, showing at the same time how a single gesture can be amplified if repeated by many people.



Chiara Ferrin. Dismissed Embankment.

Chiara Ferrin. OvestLab project, Dismissed Embankment.



6

TricTrac centre

tric

As you may have understood by now, during the Village golden age this place was like a living organism, with all its limbs. Like all organisms, it also produced waste.

But the culture of the time and the reduced presence of non-recyclable materials in products and production processes made their disposal quite sustainable. Above all, our community of workers was certainly not made up of people willing to throw things away just to buy new ones! but then society changed and so did consumption habits. Modena itself, like many other cities, found itself with a problem: throw away or recycle? Once again, its inhabitants found a solution. Thus, the TRIC TRAC reuse centre was born in 2000. Inspired by the peasant culture, so deeply rooted in our parts, the founder Eugenio Ronchetti decided one day that if even all those things in good condition that ended up in the garbage were not needed to the old owners, it might not be the same for other people.

And he decided to put them back into circulation. As he can tell you if you have the pleasure to meet him, this philosophy comes from an ancient tradition linked to the butchering of the pig, a typical processing of these parts. Don't pretend nothing, Parma ham doesn't tell you anything? Well, know that, as the farmers used to say, "nothing is thrown away about the pig". Ask Eugenio about the things that end up in his TRIC TRAC Centre. He'll tell you the same thing. Circular economy at the basis.

Tric Trac is a recycling and creative reuse laboratory for the sustainable city next to the ecological island Leonardo, in via Nobili 380. It is an area of 310 square meters, fenced and paved, which is managed by volunteers and from the NGO "Insieme nel Quartiere per la Città (Together in the Neighborhood for the City)" with the support and collaboration of Municipality of Modena.

TRAC



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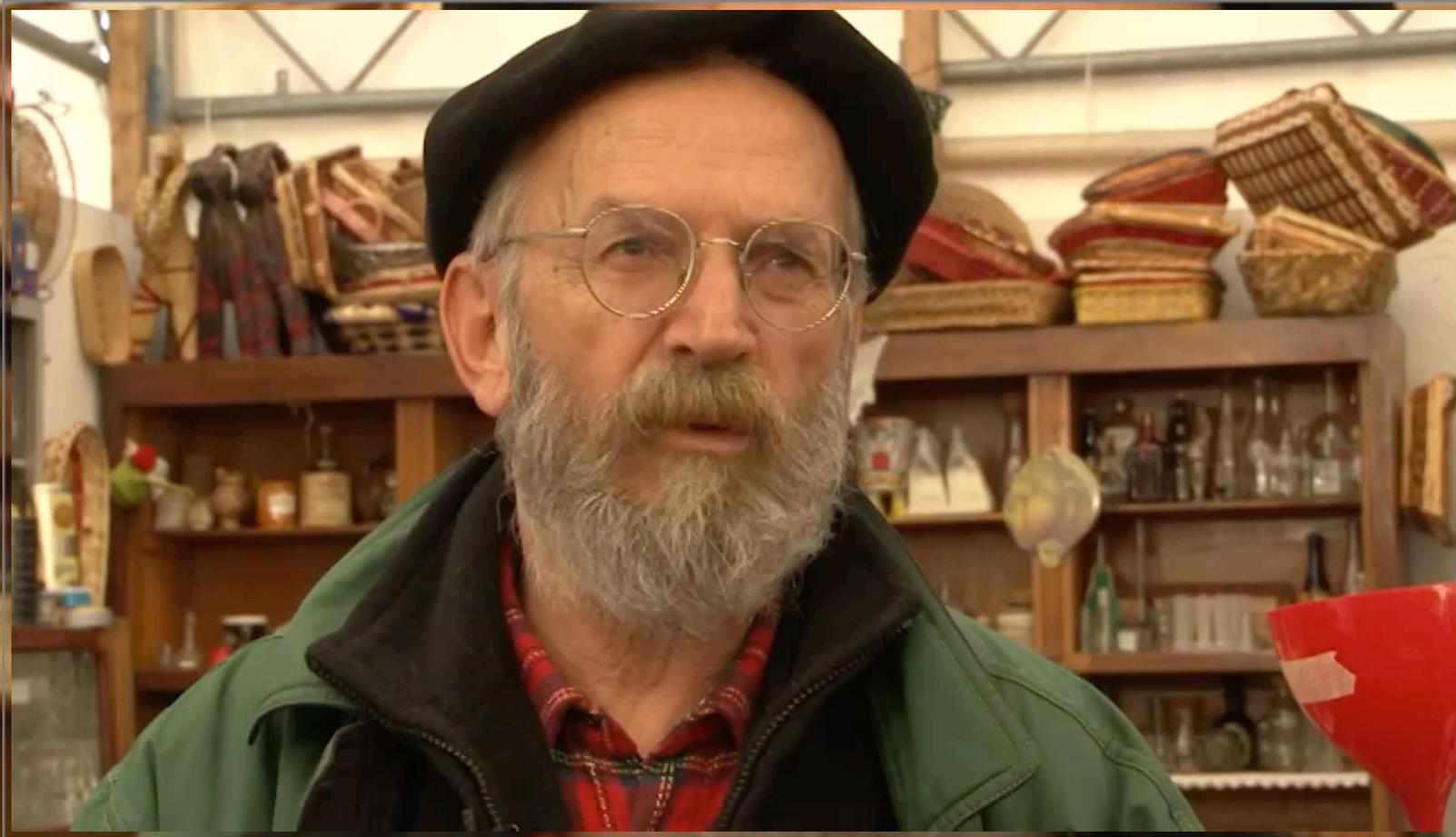
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Cambia il finale, Tric e Trac - Associazione Insieme in Quartiere
x la città di Modena



IMAGE REFERENCE:

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