

# Images of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Photographic Fund of the Istituto di Arti Grafiche of Bergamo for "Emporium" magazine

*Federico Brunetti* <sup>(\*)</sup>, *Ilaria Alberici* <sup>(\*)</sup>, *Giuliana Ricci* <sup>(#)</sup>

<sup>(\*)</sup> Politecnico di Milano, III Faculty of Architecture- Design, Italia

<sup>(#)</sup> Politecnico di Milano, Department of Conservation of Architecture, Italia

E-mail: federico.brunetti@polimi.it

E-mail: giuliana.ricci@polimi.it

E-mail: ilaria.alberici@libero.it

## ABSTRACT

The Institute of Graphic Arts (I.A.G.B. Istituto di Arti Grafiche) in Bergamo was the first Italian publisher to equip itself with typographic apparatus for the printing of photographs on the same page as graphics and texts.

Financially supported by the Italian Ministry of Education (at that time also responsible for cultural activities), it was particularly notorious for the literary contributions of eminent members of the cultural society of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who through this publisher found new ways to communicate their own work.

Particularly, the monthly magazine "Emporium" became an extremely advanced place for cultural discussion and divulgation from art, architecture, geography and sciences, to the most varied and eclectic cultural news typical of that period.

Part of this archive consists in albums of photographs, which had been previously microfilmed at the Società Alinari in Florence. A second part is conserved in around 5000 glass negative plates.

The fragility of this part of the archive had till now allowed only a few consultations and an approximate indexing.

In the context of a research study carried out for a graduation thesis at the Faculty of Architecture of the Polytechnic in Milan, a research stage was stipulated, thanks to which it was possible to study these materials more thoroughly and digitally copy the fund of plates that had architectural themes. In this way it is possible to examine the entire fund, digitally made positive, allowing a safe, clear and extensive consultation.

This new digital recording technique allowed the extensive study on the section of the fund regarding architectural photography (about 10,000 images) in a relatively short time and permitted the highlighting of the most significant case studies, with the aim of defining certain materials as "guiding elements" to the whole archive.

The whole digitalised fund, mastered to CD-ROM, will soon be compiled in reference to the information concerning the images, according to the parameters

designated by SCHEDA F.

This fund is a very clear example of a early editorial photographic archive, where the accumulation of iconographic materials was not yet completely organized, (we could not find any general catalogue, many negative plates were not printed); but now digital technologies allows us to explore these delicate photographic memories with acceptable qualities for the aim to understand, in our present researches, the reason that moved these interesting reportages.

**KEYWORDS:** Twentieth century architecture, digital and analog photographic archives, classification methods, history of architecture, Editorial private funds

### INTRODUCTION

This investigation originates from the arising opportunity to deepen our knowledge of a historic photographic background characterized by marked interest in architectural and landscape themes, which was traced during a recent Doctorate of Research<sup>1</sup>. With this information it has been possible to explore, catalogue and analyze the photographic "fund" of the Institute of Graphic Arts in Bergamo. proceedings a single, high quality appearance, ICHIM'01 requires final submissions of accepted papers to be in "camera-ready" format. Both for short and long papers, authors must follow some simple guidelines described in the

<sup>1</sup> Federico Brunetti, *"L'archivio delle immagini nell'insegnamento dell'architettura. La fototeca storica dell'accademia di Brera"*, Genoa, 1997. Doctorate Thesis in "Problemi di metodo della Progettazione Architettónica". Faculty of Architecture, University of Genoa

rest of this document. In essence, we ask you *to make your paper look exactly like this document*. The easiest way to do this is to simply remove the "instructional" content in one of the templates and add your own text.

The object of this research shows us a consolidated experience in the use of photography and, particularly for the first time in Italy, photography intended for reproduction in typography and acquired by large editorial organisations.

The media event that these materials signify is a new possibility, representing works and architectonic objects through photography, exemplifying and distributing the possibilities of visual acquaintance through printed reproductions in the pages of a widely circulated magazine.

This reproductive typographic technology gave rise to new potential in social fruition and the divulgation of knowledge, in the methodologies already defined in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and based on indications from the most expert cultural consultants of the State. These had begun to construct a catalogue of the artistic-monumental heritage.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

During the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a clearly positivistic initiative developed in this way, aimed at building a catalogue of news and images of objects and situations considered to be of historic value.

In Italy, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, following the first phase mentioned, a debate opened and an attitude for research developed in the fields of historic and geographic studies. This shows a new attention for the value of cultural material: an approach that is not only linked to the archetypical exceptionality of certain classic works,

or to the epochs that were stylistically canonised by the academies, but which is also aimed at the study of all the anthropic levels that shape the territorial, urban and architectural forms.

These are read as signs of sedimentation and are interpreted by a new sensitivity promoted by the studies of the forms of cultural material.

In this way, within the findings from the past, the quality of the minor objects is studied - the cultural traces present in the usual forms in everyday life, the fragments spread around environments modified by man and even the smallest social organisations: those aspects which were normally ignored during the reading of historic phenomena tied to the great periodic divisions of the typical history books.

It is in this context of studies on cultural forms (expressed as material sedimentations in locations marked by anthropic activity) that the minor centres are brought to light, better understood and given more value, as depositing grounds for the socialised forms of knowledge.

Through the theoretic discussions conducted by personalities such as Corrado Ricci and subsequently Gustavo Giovannoni, the knowledge of historic-artistic resources and the organisation of monuments on the territory become part of a synergy in which monuments and works of art are not any longer studied as objects of single and absolute significance, but on the other hand are studied in the context of the entire environment that contains them and forms their background.

In this period at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the State proceeds with the systematic and extensive construction of the entities and cultural institutions born with the foundation of the National State (not only infrastructures, railways

and bridges, but also schools, museums, hospitals and theatres).

The homologation within the newly unified National State originates not only from the building of a national language (imposed on local dialects) but also from the construction and standardisation of divulgative systems that are increasingly accessible and common to an ever-growing section of the people.

The experience of "Emporium" is situated in this era of multiplication and reproducibility, not so much for the divulgation and reproduction of places and objects present in historic-artistic literature, but more for the presentation of the characteristics of minor centres of the Italian regions and other places that were the object of the last colonial explorations of the world. A kind of cross between the exposure and exclusiveness of artistic heritage (that scientific divulgation was able to disseminate), and the common man's curious desire to know the world and be an iconographic participant.

Most of the materials in the I.I.A.G.B. fund, images which were created for an editorial archive and whose importance was related to publishing, are actually unpublished: they have a specific value because they were never issued. They therefore are of more current interest than the images that were selected, published and distributed in their time.

The Institute of Graphic Arts (Istituto di Arti Grafiche) in Bergamo was the first Italian publisher to equip itself with typographic apparatus for the printing of photographs on the same page as graphics and texts.

Financially supported by the Italian Ministry of Education (at that time also responsible for cultural activities), it was particularly notorious for the literary contributions of eminent members of the cultural society of the

early 20<sup>th</sup> century, who through this publisher found new ways to communicate their own work.

Particularly, the monthly magazine "Emporium" became an extremely advanced place for cultural discussion and divulgation from art, architecture, geography and sciences, to the most varied and eclectic cultural news typical of that period.

The contextual presence of photographs in a page enhanced the visual impact of the message, allowing an immediate interaction between the graphic text and the photographic image.

This new digital recording technique allowed the extensive study on the section of the fund regarding architectural photography (about 10,000 images) in a relatively short time and permitted the highlighting of the most significant case studies, with the aim of defining certain materials as "guiding elements" to the whole archive.

The whole digitalised fund, mastered to CD-ROM, will soon be compiled in reference to the information concerning the images, according to the parameters designated by SCHEDA F.

#### CONCLUSIONS: IMAGES FOR MEMORY

This fund is a very clear example of a early editorial photographic archive, where the accumulation of iconographic materials was not yet completely organized, (we could not find any general catalogue, many negative plates were not printed); but now digital technologies allows us to explore these delicate photographic memories with acceptable qualities for the aim to understand, in our present researches, the reason that moved these interesting reportages.

The existence and survival of these materials, rejects of topicality, make us ask ourselves about the way the Present

transforms itself into discards and rejects of topicality. On the other hand they make us aware of the importance of representing a time that so rapidly became the past, with the fast speed of utilization that the media has imposed on every object and method of memory storage.

We can therefore affirm that these are images, memories, and glances of objects, works of art, cities and landscapes. They are treated as documents of the objects but can also be reread as the introduction of one epoch to another.

#### PAESAGGI DEI CENTRI MINORI



FIG.16 Via Claudia Bieda  
Neg. Su Lastra  
21X27 cm.; 0772

#### APPENDIX: THE NEW "SCHEDA F" OF THE CENTRAL SYSTEM FOR NATIONAL CATALOGUING

*(with technical support of Ilaria Alberici)*

The scheda F (Form F) surfaces in the context of the search for methods linked to the cataloguing of photographs, which are considered as a heritage of historic and artistic value, therefore being endowed with an autonomous, expressive and creative language whose cultural importance cannot only be measured by the subjects they represent.

The acceptance of semantic values connected to the photographic image has led to the creation of a cataloguing process that accounts for all typologies of photographs, preserved and collected in different contexts.

The essential elements for the description of photographic works and the transmission of their relevant data have been defined in a mode that is independent from the cataloguing traditions of the various Institutions in which these pieces are kept.

The cataloguing task was carried out with the participation of many expert researchers and Institutions such as the *I.C.C.D.* (Istituto Centrale del Catalogo for the Sole Catalogue of Italian libraries and bibliographic data), the *Istituto Nazionale per la Grafica* (National Graphic Institute) and the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* (Central Archive of the State).

Parallel to Scheda F, in order to allow the exchange of data between official boards and various institutions, the plan for the transmission of data in UNIMARC format was laid out:

The UNIMARC codes, internationally stipulated for the structuring of bibliographic records (a specific result of the ISO 2709 rule), allowed the creation of an unequivocal format for the transmission of catalogue data concerning photographic material.

#### **Identification criteria in photographic images**

The identification of a photographic image requires the fine-tuning of a language that allows it to be read correctly and as objectively as possible, beyond the purely connotative aspects that may be attributed to it.

Lists of GENRES and families of CONTENTS were elaborated as

references for the initial codifying of photographic documents.

The genres defined for photography (since its beginnings) are traditionally similar to those of painting, which is an analogous art form.

Several other types of photographic representation follow, such as the landscape, intended not only as recording of monuments, but also as a document of exploratory journeys to known and less-known lands; photographs of architecture; the picture story as a testimony of real facts and events; photography in fiction, related to specially created scenes; photography of Art; artistic photography, formulating and studying its own languages; scientific photography, with fields of application mostly regarding biology, astronomy and medicine; industrial photography, born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the intent to document all the aspects of production; and finally reproductive photography, intended as a clear and precise recording of other images and documents.

#### **Structuring of data in the catalogue files**

Scheda F is divided into paragraphs composed of simple fields and/or fields organised in sub-fields, according to the scheme already used for the collection of data during the cataloguing of other historic-artistic movables (OA-D-N, S-MI, etc.).

As listed the following reference table, a different graphical figure was used to indicate paragraphs, simple or structured fields and sub-fields corresponding to the structural data scheme of the catalogue file:

AA – PARAGRAPH

BBB – STRUCTURED FIELD

BBBC – Sub-field

DDD – Simple field

The presence of an asterisk next to the paragraphs, fields or sub-fields shows the need for their completion, so that the file may be considered as valid. An asterisk in brackets indicates the compulsoriness “in context”, i.e. the particular cases in which under certain conditions it is necessary to compile a field, or one or the other of the sub-fields making up a specific field.

Also indicated is the possible presence of a closed or open vocabulary, i.e. a list of terms used to complete certain fields and sub-fields.

Also specified is that cataloguing Boards can make use of this vocabulary (in keeping with the ICCD rules concerning the transfer of data 1998).

The symbol # is used to indicate data which, through the Unimarc format, can possibly be used in information exchange between different catalogue formats.

#### **Method of acquisition and digitalising of the images**

Digital images are acquired using particular instruments known as *scanners*.

The type of scanner to be used varies according to the format and quality desired in the digitalising process.

For photographic plates and prints flat scanners are recommended, while film scanners are suitable for negatives (35mm).

Commercial software such as Paint Shop Pro and Photoshop are available for the successive treatment of the

images.

#### **Parameters for the digitalisation of images**

Are recommended a minimum of 1536X1024 pixels for an original measuring 24X36mm: this format creates a 4.5-megabyte file if in colour or a 1.5-megabyte file if in black and white. For most images, if a stable original photograph or the original subject is still available, this resolution can be considered as sufficient.

For valued images where one does not have access to a stable original (for example colour prints or slides) we recommend a resolution of 3072X2048 pixels for negatives or slides measuring 24X36mm: this creates an 18-megabyte file.

For extremely valuable images, for which it may be necessary to create a computerised matrix suitable for professional printing, we advise a resolution of 4096X6144 pixels, giving rise to a 72-megabyte file.

#### **Digital file formats**

According to the quality of the digitalised image there are three categories: Category A (High resolution), Category B (Medium resolution) and Category C (Low resolution). Each category can include various types (extensions) of file.

***For Category A .PNG, .TIF, .PCD KODAK (base 16) files are recommended. For Category B .PNG, .TIF, .PCD KODAK (base 4), .JPG files are recommended. For Category C the .JPG format is suitable.***

It is to be pointed out that the formats used in high resolutions maintain the image information thanks to the use of memory and therefore do not destructively alter the acquired data. The .JPG format, used at low resolutions for network transmission, is

a compressed format: this guarantees a lower use of memory but the compression process eliminates some of the original data. The resulting information loss causes the lowering of image quality, especially during the printing phase.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Federico Brunetti**, *Architect. PHD*, Doctor of Research: Faculty of Architecture in Genoa: *The Image Archive in the Teaching of Architecture*. Research about the origin of the photographic representation of architecture in unedited institutional

funds of the 19th century. Since 1996 Lecturer of Design and coordinator of the *Laboratory of Design* in the III Faculty of Architecture-Design, Department of Technology Politecnico di Milano, where has been assistant from 1986.

E-mail: [federico.brunetti@polimi.it](mailto:federico.brunetti@polimi.it) or [fedbrune@tin.it](mailto:fedbrune@tin.it)

Dipartimento Di.Tec; Via Durando 38/a  
20133 Milano (ITALY) Fax. +39.02  
2399.5977/7282

**Ilaria Alberici** Graduated in Architecture, Politecnico di Milano, Milano, Italy. Her first studies, starting from Graduation Thesis mentioned in XI International Competition ISAL/Lions Club Cenacolo, regard methods for indexing, cataloguing and digital recording technique for photographic funds. She followed several courses about preservation of historic photograph. Actually she is working for Associazione Jacqueline Vodot e Bruno Danese di Milano  
E-mail: [ilaria.alberici@libero.it](mailto:ilaria.alberici@libero.it)

**Giuliana Ricci** Politecnico di Milano, Departement of Conservation of Architecture; Ordinary Professor in History of Architecture. Her first studies regard theatre design and construction and stage designs, especially for sets based on the 18th century.

Much of her work concerns the analysis of the architectonic culture from the second half of the 18th century till the first decades of the 20th, dealing with institutional and theoretical aspects and the creation of buildings and urban locations of that period.

E-mail: [giuliana.ricci@polimi.it](mailto:giuliana.ricci@polimi.it)