

INDUSTRIAL TOURISM IN ITALY

Industrial tourism is an almost unknown sector in terms of its overall scale, its social composition, and the forms in which it is manifested. And nothing leads one to suppose that this lack of information can be bridged in the near future.

This shortage of data becomes all the more serious when one considers that numbers of tourists, and positive variations in these numbers, represent a raw indicator, but a meaningful one, for evaluating the effects of policies aimed at defending and promoting the industrial heritage. The difficulty in estimating visitor numbers deprives us of a crucial parameter for assessing the effectiveness of the investments made.

The considerations that follow regarding industrial tourism in Italy must necessarily restrict themselves to analytically identifying their main components, and to documenting the general trends that can be reconstructed in summary form by the few data available.

In a very schematic form, we can identify four *products* referring to industrial tourism: museums, businesses, the disused industrial legacy, and the post-industrial landscape.

The first target relates to science and technology museums, and industrial museums devoted to a specific manufacturing sector (mining museums, iron and steel museums, museums of energy etc) or to a specific product (automobile museums, naval museums, textile museums etc). Together, these represent a very distinguishable sector of the panorama of museums in Italy: the Italian Touring Club guide book on *Industrial Tourism in Italy* (2nd ed., 2008) offers a wide-ranging survey of existing museums and company archives, but does not provide any aggregate figures for visitor numbers. A *Eurispes* study of Italy's museums (2010) suggests that the economic crisis between 2008 and 2009 led to a marked decline both in terms of revenue (tickets down 7.5%) and visitors. However, there are also reassuring signs of a movement bucking this trend as regards industrial museums: in 2009 the *Città della Scienza*, in Naples, saw a 17.5% increase in visitors compared with the previous year. The Montemartini former thermo-electric power station (Rome), which boldly exhibits, side by side, turbines and archeological finds from Rome's collections, has seen a steady increase in visitor numbers year after year (24,800 in 2008, 32,500 in 2009, and 15,500 in the first four months of this year). Visitors to the *Centro Italiano della Cultura del Carbone* (CICC, the Italian Center for Coal Culture), which opened in 2006 in buildings at the Serbariu Mine in Carbonia, rose from 11,800 to 14,400 between 2007 and 2009. From these few, sporadic examples, it would seem that science and industry museums are less badly-hit by the difficulties currently faced by traditional museums.

Tourism *geared toward businesses* is a recent phenomenon in Italy. It first came into being at the instigation of individual firms, which decided to periodically open their plants to the public, in the belief that their company image could benefit greatly from showing those production processes and products which are the pride of the firm, and clear proof of their competitiveness. Later on, the initiative spread from individual firms to the industrial district which the firm belonged to. Accordingly, business tourism became a powerful local marketing tool, used by Chambers of Commerce and local authorities to promote the local economy, advancing awareness of their system of businesses. The most significant initiatives are found in parts of northern Italy:

- the *Industrial Tourism in Turin* project, sponsored by the Chamber of

Commerce, with the participation of auto-makers to promote the sector of autos and car design; also, Turin has won the right to host the third edition of the European Congress on Industrial Tourism, an event devised by France's Union of Chambers of Commerce (ACFCI) to make a major contribution to the professionalization of this new tourism product;

- the *Nuove Vie di Porto Marghera* organized by VEGA (Venice Gateway for Science and Technology): this project offers visitors no fewer than 14 guided routes along an original assemblage covering research and innovative technologies, the industrial heritage, and urban transformations, with the aim of introducing participants to the history and future of one of Europe's largest industrial areas (over 4,000 visitors in 2009, half of them students);
- *Fabbriche aperte* is an initiative sponsored by Vicenza Province allowing tourists to visit 42 firms in 13 different manufacturing sectors, across 19 municipal areas in the province of Vicenza.

The target of *industrial heritage tourism* is different from that of the previous tourism sector. The destinations of these visitors are industrial sites which have ceased production. The overall size of this tourism remains hard to determine: numbers of visitors can only be estimated at individual sites on the occasion of temporary events such as shows, exhibitions etc. During 2008, Turin's Officine Grandi Riparazioni (OGR) hosted a major exhibition entitled *Torino 011 Biografia di una città* (Turin 011, Biography of a City) which, timed to coincide with the World Architects' Congress, offered a panoramic view of the urban transformations in the previous 25 years (scoring great success with the public). Venice's Arsenale never fails to attract large crowds of visitors with its Biennale show, housed inside its buildings. In these two cases, the appeal of the sites is determined by temporary reuse of the spaces, and public accessibility is strictly connected to the duration of the event. By contrast, when part of the built heritage is restored and adapted for a new, permanent end use, tourist numbers are diluted among a broader, general public, in which it is hard to distinguish industrial tourists. Indeed, how could we identify these in the crowds of people who enter the Lingotto (Turin) every day, or among the consumers who throng to the nearby fine food store (*Eataly*) inside the old Carpano vermouth distillery?

Finally, we have to consider the tourism interested in the post-industrial landscape, involving a category of visitors with a variety of motivations: the disused industrial heritage as well as the environment, productive systems, and infrastructure networks (canals, railways etc), factories and also workers' housing. Destinations in Italy for this kind of tourism are abandoned mine-workings, especially in Sardinia and Tuscany, for the protection and promotion of which new types of "parks" have been set up (although, unfortunately, owing to the squeeze in state funding, they are at serious risk of closure). In this case, too, it is very hard to estimate visitor numbers. The *Amiata Mining Park* boasts exceptional sites in terms of the variety of metal-working sites surviving above-ground (some already decontaminated), but at present there is no organized form of tourist access. The *Colline Metallifere Mining Park* offers very many remains of previous mine-working and metal production (more than 80 sites listed), but very few can be visited at present (the Ravi Marchi mine, the former Ilva plant in Follonica). In the *Geomining Park of Sardinia*, there are as many as 8 mining areas, but only the Montevecchio mine organizes visits, by prior booking. Finally, the *Archeomining Park*

of *S. Silvestro*, opened in 1996, is the only such park to offer an efficient service for visitors: between 2005 and 2008 visitors rose from 17,300 to 27,400.

A few, brief conclusions. Overall, industrial tourism is highly heterogeneous, and its progress varies depending on the various kinds of product. *Industrial museums* are consolidating their target public, and seem to be performing better under the economic recession than traditional museums. *Company tourism* is a very promising sector, and so far has given encouraging signs of growth. The *industrial heritage* will be increasingly less able to rely on industrial tourists with a one-dimensional profile. In order to attract visitors, it will increasingly have to come to terms with individuals motivated by composite interests: a tourist to Venice's Arsenale is not only looking for industrial heritage but also "contemporary art", a tourist visiting the Montemartini power station (Rome) is also interested in "archeology", and visitors to Eataly (Turin) also want "fine food". Whereas an evaluation of mining parks and industrial parks appears more complex. First, there are very real obstacles to the influx of tourists, owing to the preliminary legal requirements of removing harmful materials and making sites safe: current legislation, devised for mines still in operation, must be brought up to date at all costs, so as to promote accessibility for tourism. Another source of difficulty is the fact that, while local authorities, which have often taken on responsibility for developing sites, have shown an ability to locate funding and carry out projects, they have not revealed a comparable ability to promote and manage actual tourism. Finally, we must not forget that, while tourists are very willing to make repeat visits to an art gallery or a Renaissance church, this is less true in the case of an open-air mining museum which only continues to put itself on display in a somewhat static way. Careful scheduling of performances and events, and an ever-changing range of cultural initiatives, is an essential condition for encouraging visitors to return.

(Massimo Preite)