

## **Empowerment through knowledge**

### The *150-Hour* project within Italian architecture schools

The right to continuing education put in practice through the *150-Hour* law was a direct result of the Italian labor and education movements of the 1960's. Coming into effect in 1973, the law guaranteed workers the right to attend, on paid time, secondary and university courses for 150 hours a year. The project can be read in line with a series of pedagogical initiatives aimed at capsizing education's existing power structures to create new forms of empowerment through knowledge.

Within the *150-Hour* framework, Italian architecture schools organized courses that, in agreement with the objectives of the Federazione Lavoratori Metalmeccanici (Metalworkers' Union), were "connected to the specific realities of productive processes and socioeconomic territorial conditions."<sup>1</sup> Themes such as *Future development and perspectives for the metropolitan area of Turin* (1974), *Urban legislation and the problem of localization of factories within the Turin's urban area* (1974) or *Factory reformation and territorial reconfiguration* (1975) were part of the course offerings of the Politecnico di Torino. The same program in Genoa proposed a module titled *Study of the industrial situation in Genoa* in which particular attention was given to the reality of the port and the area of the Val Polcevera region.<sup>2</sup>

The *150-Hour*'s political aim was the creation of an alliance between students, workers and instructors. In the context of the student movement the relationship facilitated the shift from a phase of awareness and ideological solidarity to one of greater organization and efficiency. Discussions among students, architects and workers included themes like the creation of new tools for the discipline, the role of the architect in society or workers' views on their own position as urban consumers and allowed the different actors to confront, without mediation, the antagonistic positions that existed with regards to the living conditions of inhabitants. Connecting research and design to real the project promoted a concrete alliance between the university and the local community. Research on urban conditions consequentially originated in bottom-up approaches that avoided detached and rationalistic methods. The reciprocal exchange of information also allowed citizens to understand an appropriation of space different to that of the political rally. As Pietro de Rossi, an active participant in Turin, wrote at the time:

"The territory, the city, the neighborhood, the house are goods produced in sectors that have particular conflicts with regards phases of creation and consumption. The organized working class must measure itself on this field, in a process of appropriation of architecture understood as an instrument that must be assumed, modified and calibrated to its own objectives."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Le 150 ore e l'università*, (conference report), in Pietro De Rossi, *Architettura delle 150 ore*, "Casabella" n.409, January 1976, p.17.

<sup>2</sup> Anna Bianco (ed.), *150 ore per il diritto allo studio*, Il fondo Flm della Biblioteca Centrale Cisl, e-book available on-line at:

<sup>3</sup> De Rossi, op cit, p.22.

The experience of the 150 hours in architecture schools reached its apex in 1974-1975 and dissipated towards the end of the 1970's. Motives for its decline included the crisis in the student-worker alliance, developments in work organization and transformation of Italian factories, changes in political attitudes and growing individualization in Italian society.

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