

# REVIVING CRAFTSMANSHIP AND CRAFTS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we attempt to redefine the heritage of craftsmanship and to find out how and where it can exist alongside mass-production within our industrialized and digitalized society and within the setup of our industrial architectural heritage. This theoretical background is grounded through a design intervention that injects an urban/architectural program, with interactive public and craftsmen/designers' spaces, within an urban hiatus that is dominated by an industrial environment of an abandoned early 20th century train station in the vicinity of the seaport of Tripoli, Lebanon. The paper starts by explaining the process of transformation of the notion of craftsmanship and its relationship with manufacturing and mass production since the industrial revolution. It then articulates the recent attempts at reviving craftsmanship through the paradigm of individuation through consumption where craftsmanship becomes not only a means of expressing individuality, but also a communal experience based on technology and digital expertise, and on the role of the designer. Then the paper moves into the design intervention in Tripoli where the revival of craftsmanship is projected onto the domain of revitalization of industrial and architectural heritage, in a place where different historical and architectural eras collapse into a number of abandoned sites and buildings, reconnected and regenerated in a new urban/architectural scheme, in an attempt at rescuing the district from the destined obsolescence it is heading towards. Finally, the paper concludes with highlighting the importance of salvaging potential socioeconomic patterns, especially in the domain of craftsmanship, through a smarter and more sustainable reclaiming of parts of the city that are belittled under the tag of "abandoned industrial sites" or "deserted industrial buildings".

*Keywords: craftsmanship, crafts, industrial heritage, industrial archaeology, architectural heritage, cultural heritage, urban gap, abandoned site, deserted building.*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The setting of this paper is the revival of crafts and craftsmanship within the context of industrial architectural and urban heritage. The hypothesis of the paper is that the historical leaps within the chain of development of our inherited crafts that occurred as a result of the industrial revolution, and which were manifested in a complex process of transformation leading ultimately to a paradigm shift, has indirectly led to the spread of gaps within the life of the city, its socioeconomic patterns, and ultimately its inherited physical and urban forms and patterns. And if there is anything to be done about reviving our heritage of crafts into the contemporary model of production it is shifting towards, then it is probably important to exploit and salvage the same city gaps with the aim of healing of our urban and architectural industrial heritage.

Through the portrayal of a design intervention within a specific industrial setting, the paper will illustrate an attempt at reviving of endangered crafts in the context of Tripoli, Lebanon, superimposed upon a restorative endeavour of an urban gap, rich in industrial architectural heritage, within the same city.

## 2 RESEARCH GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Our research aims at a better understanding of the relationship between the process of socioeconomic rejuvenation and the intrinsic transformation within the sector of crafts on one hand, and, on the other hand, the process of urban reintegration of city gaps and



architectural recycling of industrial buildings. In order to achieve this goal, we will work along two parallel dimensions: understanding the historical transformation of the notion of craftsmanship since the industrial revolution and its recent manifestation into new digitally based and designer-centred models that are in need of new infrastructures and urban setups; and parallel to that, exploring of urban gaps that are rich in industrial architectural heritage, and that are characteristic of many of our cities today, in terms of their potential as appropriate setups for the regeneration of local crafts and manufacturing enterprises set within a context of digitalized industrialism.

### 3 TRANSFORMATION OF THE NOTION OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

“Craftsmanship is a basic human impulse. With that comes pride in one’s work, a sense of purpose, a distinction that has more to do with the motivation that informed the production than the production itself” (Sennett, [1]).

Craftsmanship, per definition, is the notion of measuring the skilfulness and accuracy of one’s manual work in a barefaced economic framework of individualized wages, and a candid social framework of producer and consumer. However, craftsmanship, per significance, and especially in the typical case of a middle eastern traditional city like our case of Tripoli, Lebanon, has held a very clear role in shaping both the cultural and architectural facets of the city’s earliest developed markets or souks, such as: coppersmiths’ souk, herbalists souk, khan of the sewers, khan of the soaps, etc., each of which dedicated to a particular type of craft, structured around a network of alleys, and stretched alongside the city’s main arteries.

Since the last couple of decades, such markets, or souks have been suffering tremendously both in economic and physical manners. Due to the shift of interest, from the traditional, meaningful, and sincerely made goods, to the cheap and mass-produced, imported products, and due to the lack of the much-needed developments by the public sector, the souks grew into a weak case of coarse display arenas, unable of nurturing themselves nor serving the consumption needs of end-users in the globalized world we live in.

The truth of the matter is that, as the engine of industrialization thundered through the Western world, it left in its wake a number of new social, economic and political developments that have shaped the manufacturing world we know today. Since the onset of the modern era and the industrial revolution of the 18th century, craftsmanship has functioned as an upright concept opposing industrialism or mass manufacture. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, products were either crafted – high quality and expensive or mass-manufactured and low quality and cheap.

In reference to such a critique, one might mention the communist ideas of Karl Marx that has become one of the most significant arguments against industrialism ever written. For Marx, modern industrial capitalism dehumanized labourers and made them tools of the upper classes (Marx and Engels [2]). Another response was the aesthetic reaction of the Arts and Crafts movement, which also derided the effects of modern mass production – adopting many of Marx’s ideas in the process. According to the Arts and Crafts movement, industry forced a separation of the craftsman from his craft and the artist from his art (Crook [3]). Both movements, then, were particular responses to the problems of industrialization. Marxism and the Arts and Crafts movement both used radical ideas to support their responses, and in their opposition to industrialism and their consensus that it is a dehumanizing force, these two ideologies were quite similar.

However, one cannot deny the fact that industrial methods of production stood as straight up forces of change that were able to facilitate a better correspondent relation between the two acts of consumption and production, regarding both time and cost effectiveness, and has therefore projected our ability to produce more conveniently. “The world of manufacturing



has always been a hotbed for innovation and experimentation, often veering towards extremes, from the industrial revolution's steam punk mess and hierarchical layouts, to modernism's clinical tidiness and utopian dreams" (Dowdy [4]).

#### 4 A NEW PARADIGM OF CRAFTSMANSHIP

Recently, craftsmanship has been undergoing several attempts aiming at its revival that are quite promising. The rise of a new paradigm of individuation through consumption offers many new possibilities to craftsmanship as a concept. It means that craftsmanship, though a means to expressing individuality, it can really be re-defined as a communal experience.

Since the Digital Age, our manufacturing, production processes, and consumption needs have completely changed. As manufacturing techniques evolved, machines became quite capable of making beautiful, high quality objects, and Design with a capital D replaced mass production in the quality vs. quantity debate. The designer became master of production, able to dictate his designs to the market through the impact of digital technology. Makers design products that get modified via crowd sourcing or redesigned by their end-users; crowd funding and direct, small-scale investments make this financially possible.

Interestingly, what we are describing here is a quite similar system to what production appeared as through the Pre-Industrialization era – a period of workshops and division of labour – where the notions of makers and users become one and the same. How can we then, re-examine crafts and small-scale manufacture within our histories of industrialization? And how can we reflect on the long survival and adaptation of artisanal works within our globalized world of production and consumption? And, last but not least, how can we incorporate our new models of crafts and craftsmanship within our plans of revitalization of industrial and architectural heritage?

#### 5 REVITALIZATION OF INDUSTRIAL ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The notion of industrial architectural heritage covers the essential, and side characteristics of sites, buildings, structures and even materials that embody a certain industrial presence. To attempt to revitalize an industrially categorized site requires a selective study of its industrial past, with the aim of understanding the nature and correlation between all of the collective architectural, urban, construction and engineering elements unveiled.

Many surveys undertaken over the years in different cities around the world revealed that the number of industrial buildings at risk of demolition is on a much greater scale than other types of buildings at risk. While the theories of industrial heritage are still gradually gaining significance, and where cities are starting to catch on the potential in transforming many of its wasted, abandoned sites into a rather cultural, touristic destination quite distinct from the rest of the city, the appreciation of the importance of industrial heritage by the general public is still very much lacking in many places.

This is much the case in our example of the Mediterranean city of Tripoli, Lebanon, which as of the middle half of the 20th century has started to catch on with the rise of a new factorial troposphere that have completely wiped out a certain era, and opened doors to a new one. New typologies of industrial buildings for modern transportation and manufacturing started to flourish and developed into more complex industrial sites around the city. And due to the unplanned sprawl of the city in many cases, those peripheral industrial sites became parts of the city proper. But because of recurrent cycles of economic recessions, many of the above setups were mismanaged, unmaintained and became unable to sustain themselves, and were often abandoned and deserted leaving urban gaps that quickly transformed into slums.



## 6 THE URBAN HIATUS

In actuality, the pith of the mess starts right at the northern borders of Tripoli, in a district that has gone through its highest and lowest peaks of economical and physical shapes, in the shortest period possible. A hidden shelter on the outskirts of the city has made of this district a favourable destination for civil wars to outburst, resulting in its quick transformation from an outgrown fruitful region to a hiatus of architectural, industrial remnants that are destined for obsolescence (Fig. 1).

The appeal to this district lies in the diversified historical and architectural epochs it has gone through and that have physically manifested into a number of sites and buildings, each with its own character and significance, despite their current unfortunate state.



Figure 1: Industrial, commercial, residential and farming zones in northern Tripoli.

### 6.1 The harbour

Settling right at the northern side of the district, the seaport (Fig. 2) was one of the two major transportation methods used in importing foreign products to supply the local markets and souks, which had its severe drawbacks on the production of locally made goods. The imported products consisted of ranges of construction to furnishing materials as in woods, metals, and clothing lines along the different sorts of fabrics, textiles, etc. A notice to mention is that back in 1952, the quantity of products brought from abroad across the same port has reached about a hundred thousand tons, which is around the same period of the rise of the industrial movement in the region.



(a)



(b)

Figure 2: The seaport of Tripoli in (a) 1920; and (b) 2017.

## 6.2 The train station

One of the most astonishing elements around is the “l’Orient Express” railway station that takes up to 57,000 m<sup>2</sup> of the total area of the district, as in more than 50% of it. Built in 1908, with the financial assessment of local families, the railway was planned on connecting the city of Tripoli with Europe, Paris through the lands of Homos and Istanbul. It indeed arrived at Homos for the first time back in 1911 (Fig. 3(a)). The authority of the station was handed down to the Lebanese government as off the Independence Day, dating back to 1943, after the French had their full control over it.

In 1975, the station had suffered tremendously during the backlashes of the civil war and had completely stopped working ever since. Its devastating state is worsened as time went by, and what remains of it can still be witnessed today: The cracked walls, broken windows and shattered roofs, barely hanging in place, due to the lack or complete absence of maintenance efforts and renovation strategies (Fig. 3(b)).

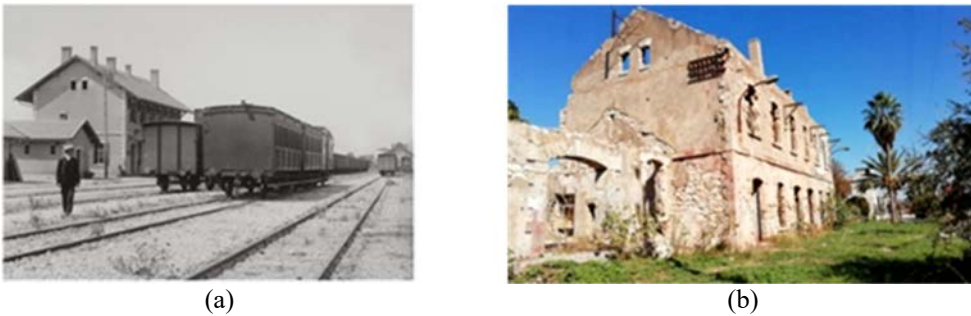


Figure 3: The train station in (a) 1920; and (b) 2018.

The historical stone structures of the train station (Fig. 4) are now often used as shelters for cultural events, where different artists of different ages settle their small handmade merchandise on some tables under the crippled brick roofs, poking through the segmented arched openings, trying to appreciate this historical site with high sensitivity.



Figure 4: Recent photos for buildings in the train station. (a) Main building; (b) Administration building.

### 6.3 The Lions' Tower

A few meters down the railway station, and facing the north, lies the Lions Tower, aka “Burj al Sibaa”. Built around the Mamluk era, about seven hundred years ago, it was one of seven different towers that were constructed on the city shoreline to protect against military invasions. Henceforth, the city proper grew separately from the seaport and its surroundings. The medina (now the old town) with its souks and narrow alleys was planned out inland with a fortified and introverted configuration to withstand nearby wars.

The tower is a three-level high, bulky looking building made out of sturdy sandstone vaults, walls and columns. Entry is through a 4 meters high, recessed portal. Other openings around the building are rather narrow and limited in number (Fig. 5). The Lion's Tower is one of the only two towers that remain standing to this day. As for its current usage, folk musical events are sometimes held within.

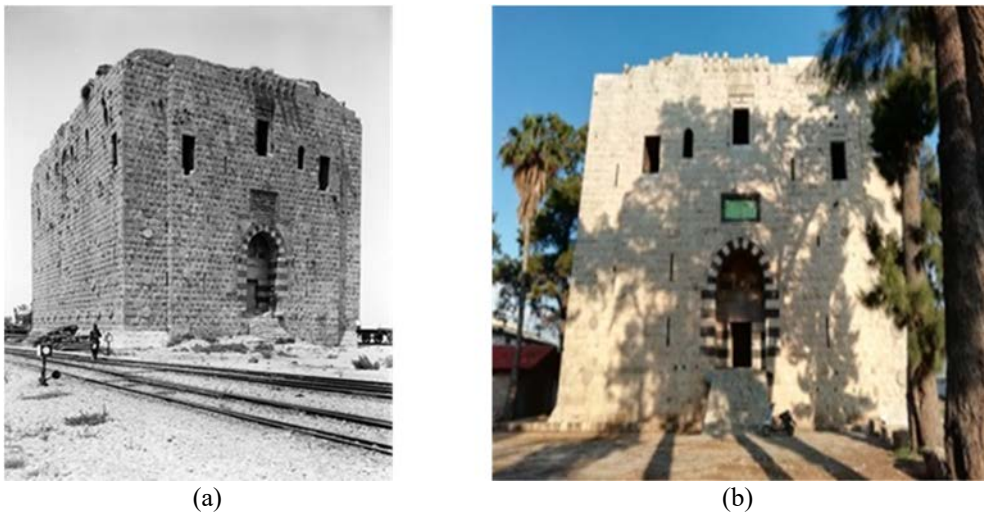


Figure 5: The Lions' Tower. (a) Early 20th century; (b) In 2018.

### 6.4 The concrete and steel structures

Settling on both verges of the district's main vehicular street are the industrial factories (Fig. 6(a)). Some are active, while others remain dysfunctional ever since the year of 1975, the onset of the civil war, when the district was shot down and stripped of almost all of its precious belongings. The factories were dedicated to the production of logwoods, aluminium, tiles and other construction related materials. The abandoned factories were mostly concrete structures while active factories were made out of steel skeletons clad in plain metal sheets.

One particular industrial building to highlight here is a concrete “giant” structure, which rises three levels high with a total elevation of approximately seventeen meters (Fig. 6(b)). The three levelled building is basically two strands of concrete structures incorporating, on each floor, a series of workshops for furniture manufacturers with an attic ring sitting on top of the workshops beneath.





Figure 6: Industrial buildings within the site:(a) Timber factory; (b) The concrete “giant”.

An appeal to this building would be the inner circulation that is shaped by two bridges connecting the two strands with each other, one resting flat while the other is basically a ramp looping over the open space in the heart of the building. These bridges were designed to carry out vehicular circulation allowing access for service trucks to reach the top of the building, besides on foot access. Additionally, one staircase is found inside each of the two structures, essentially leading the workers upward to their different stationeries while shortening the loopy distance.

Unfortunately, as is the case with almost all buildings in this hiatus, this particular structure is in a dreadful state, to the point where one might see the reinforcements of steel bars hanging out of many of its columns as well as floors. However, there is an undeniable potential of transformation, found in the physical entity and the space within, that might produce an outstanding experience for both visitors and workers. This will lead this structure to play a central role in our proposed intervention.

### 6.5 The junkyards

And lastly, in the narrower portion of the site, we can find a re-usable materials’ outdoor market, where a number of humble businessmen sell various building components ranging from glazed doors to bathroom fixtures that are previously used or found in abandoned buildings, but for cheaper prices (Fig. 7). The components are either sold as is or crushed and recycled into other products. This business takes up almost the majority of the site and takes away from its appeal, as there would be mountains of junk accumulating all over.

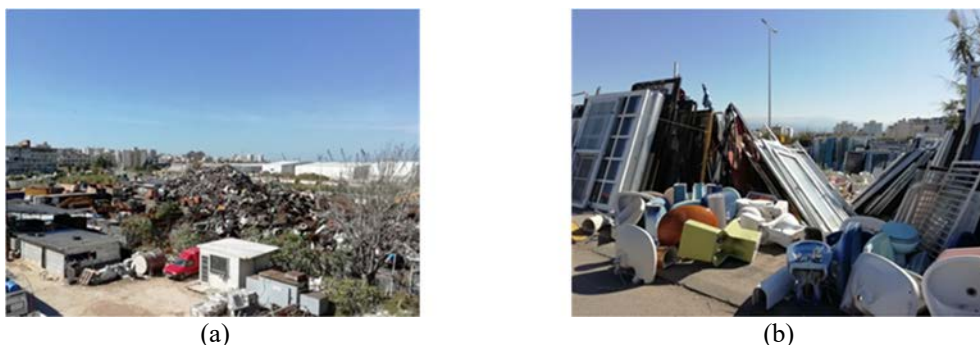


Figure 7: The junkyards. (a) The recycling arena; (b) The market.

## 7 THE DESIGN INTERVENTION: HEALING OF THE URBAN HIATUS

The coexistence of all the above elements, including overlooked historical monuments, abused or abandoned industrial buildings, and wasted potential spaces, give our seaport neighbouring district an immensely distinguished and dominant industrial atmosphere saturated with the aroma of historical buildings, and standing in high contrast with the residential and commercial districts around. This northern hiatus, like other similarly neglected sites, is heading to a state of being almost entirely erased out of the map; historical buildings left to vanish, and surrounding properties turned into slums. A salvaging strategy of intervention is desperately asked for in such sites in order to stop the increasing deterioration and exploit inherent potentials of reuse and development with the aim of ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for the city and its people as a whole.

### 7.1 Scope and objectives of intervention

The main target of our proposed intervention within this urban gap is to generate a catalyst for the growth of local manufacturing enterprises by creating a context where craftsmanship is showcased within an envelope of industrialism. The richness of both the district and craftsmanship are to be highlighted and brought to the people, whether artisans or simple visitors, in a new creative, interactive environment, while paying full admiration to the monumental components of the district that have long been neglected.

On the socioeconomic level, the intervention attempts to accommodate some of Tripoli's most commonly known crafts (furniture making, fabric and textile related crafts, and soup and fragrances production), making use of the convenient locality of regional sources of goods, the harbour and factories in this case, and pumping a business-focused program that is able to offer craftsmen, as well as designers, an opportunity to gain both public exposure, and a steady income.

### 7.2 Design methodology

With the intention of re-establishing a rich connection between our urban gap and its surroundings, and with the aim of re-purposing of its identity through the creation of an innovation hub for digitalized craftsmanship, that is relatively new to the city of Tripoli, the idea is to highlight the passage of time that this district has gone through by shedding focus on its abandoned and looked-down upon buildings, and linking them together, and with other new structures, within an overall scheme of urban landscape.

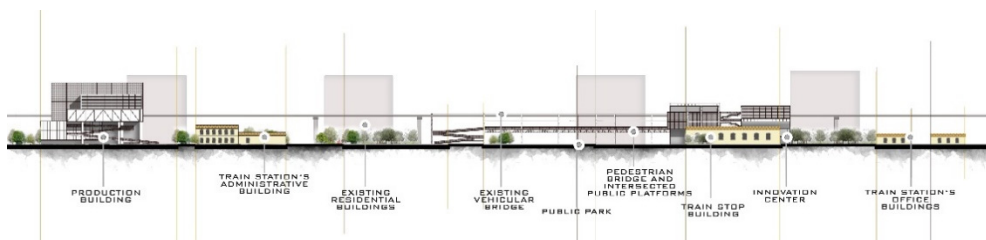


Figure 8: Sectional diagram through the site showing the superimposition of the existing and proposed structures and programs within the setting of a comprehensive park.



On the urban/architectural level, therefore, the intervention involves a phased transformation of the area, including the abandoned train station and the surrounding industrial structures and sites, into a public park that reconnects the deserted structures after transforming them into public buildings with cultural programs (Fig. 8). In this way, the intervention reclaims potential structures and spaces that are dissected by vehicular circulation, reconnects them by pedestrian paths and bridges, and transforms them into interactive public places where craftsmanship, though a means of expressing individuality, can really be re-defined as a communal experience.

### 7.3 Mechanisms of intervention

“The essential meaning of craft in architecture lies in the nature of the connections a building or space creates – both internally, between its constituent parts, and externally, through its relationship to its place. These connections can be physical, temporal, or even spiritual. Ideally, all three are integrated into one effort” (Sofield [5]).

Regenerating the site will therefore work along four interconnected, urban/architectural dimensions: first, conceiving the place as an all-inclusive public park, second, the provision of communal and interactive spaces, third, the superimposition of a pedestrian network over the vehicular one, and fourth, interfacing with reused and new structures through programs that are dedicated to the crafts revival and public service (Fig. 9).

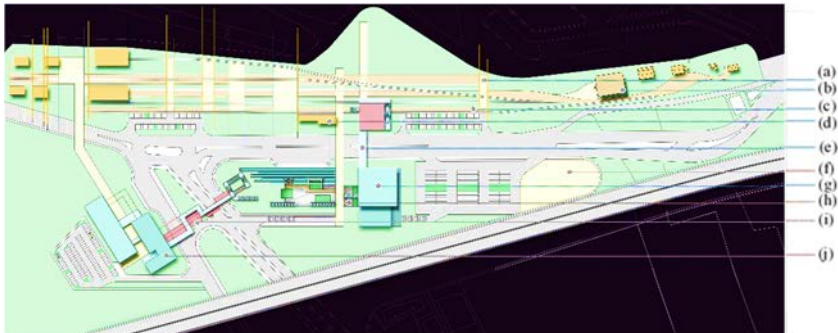


Figure 9: Diagram representing the design layers applied over the targeted district. (a) Transversal pedestrian paths; (b) Lion's Tower; (c) Longitudinal pedestrian paths; (d) Train station buildings; (e) Pedestrian bridges; (f) Loading bay area, (g) Production center; (h) Sunken plaza; (i) Public facilities; and (j) Innovation center.

#### 7.3.1 The communal public park

The district under consideration will assume as its base layer a comprehensive park upon which the other layers of paths, interactive spaces, and functioning buildings will be superimposed. The acute lack of green and public spaces in Tripoli naturally drives towards such an approach. The train station site on the northern side will consume the bigger part of the park which will be lined up with prolonged promenades, along the lines of the historical railway roads, connecting the old structures of the station after transforming them into exhibit spaces and follies. The green scape in the southern part of the site submerges with the buildings at times, and surrounds them at others, creating thereby a potential environment for interaction with the industrial and public services within the buildings (Fig. 10).

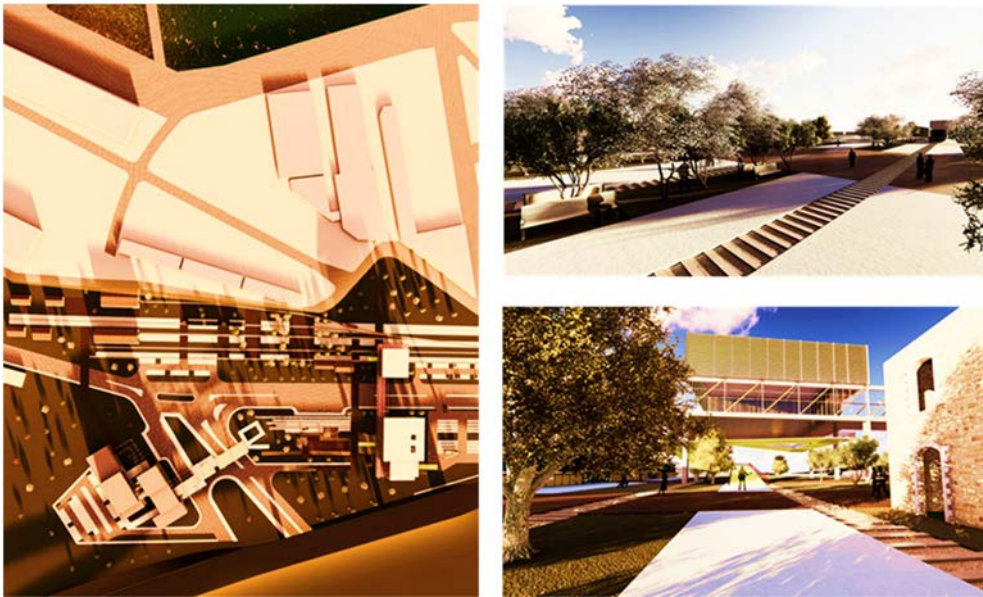


Figure 10: The conception of a park with layers of green areas, pedestrian paths and bridges, and buildings for crafts innovation and production.

### 7.3.2 The public space

Industrialized craftsmanship entails elements of skill, workmanship, and design, but also participation, community, and the merging of maker and user. This has led us to think of public or semi-public spaces that invite people to communicate and collaborate, but also allows for individual consumerism.

In our intervention, communal spaces are not limited to public outdoor space but can be part of the buildings themselves, either piercing a building through a public galleria, or overlapping with the interior space proper. Public communal spaces can be sunken (Fig. 11), can bridge over vehicular streets as floating platforms, or can be part of a bridging building itself. All these different combinations are expected to provide a varied and rich palette of spatial and urban experiences within the overall setting of a public park.

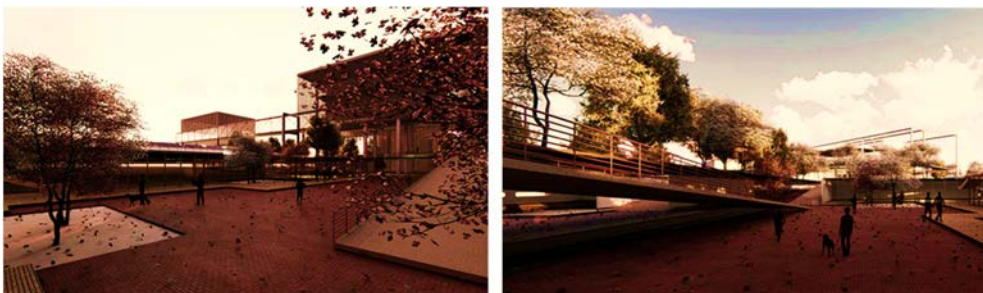


Figure 11: The sunken plaza.

### 7.3.3 The pedestrian path

The old train station and the surrounding industrial sites and buildings, which are separated by vehicular streets, are now connected through a continuous promenade and network of paths generating the concept of a public park where the design and production of crafted objects are experienced within a diversified setting of industrial heritage.

The pedestrian pathways knit together the building and spatial components, bridging sometimes over vehicular streets, and passing through architectural structures at other times. What results is a continuous looping promenade manifesting itself through a sequence of paved paths within the landscape, ramping platforms, and floating linear spaces (Fig. 12).

Within the old train station itself, a grid of longitudinal and transversal pedestrian pathways stretches across the entirety of the linear region, along the existing lines of the historical railway roads, and connecting the Lion's Tower on one side and the different old buildings of the railway station on the other.



Figure 12: Variety of pedestrian paths.

### 7.3.4 The semi-public building

The notion of monolith building blocks that house a number of functions to satisfy an envisaged program is transformed into a typology of dynamic forms and spaces that propagate through the park in an attempt to break down the scale of some monumental structures and to integrate the public experience within the spaces of designers and makers.

The old stone buildings of the train station are either transformed into small galleries and exhibition spaces, or into a number of follies that enrich the experience of the public park. From the railway station, pedestrians cross towards the concrete 'giant' building which previously housed workshops and work yards but is now transformed into an Innovation Centre for product design, receiving designers, craftsmen, as well as public visitors. The

monolith of the building itself is stripped out of its massiveness and traversed by a galleria in addition to its internal atrium (Fig. 13). The building then breaks into different public platforms that bridge over another vehicular street, unto a sunken public plaza that provides access to a couple of showrooms. Through the open-air sunken plaza, the journey continues up into the semi-public circulation and exhibition spaces within the new Production Centre bridging again across the main vehicular street, and then ramping down back into the railway station. This loop is expected to assure maximum interaction between the designers, the makers and the consumer public, and is meant to dramatize the urban/architectural experience and ground it in the spirit of heritage and history.



Figure 13: The redesigned concrete “giant” building.

## 8 CONCLUSION

The paper touched on the subject of regeneration of a city’s inner gaps, abandoned buildings and deserted sites, endorsing it as a vital strategy for enabling people of achieving a more live-able, sustainable city through the awakening, restoration and revitalization of historic fabrics, in order to meet contemporary needs.

The design intervention aimed at promoting the rise of new ecological approaches towards an urban context that is vividly on the verge of disappearance, and rejuvenating a number of professional skills and trades that are highly underrated but still stand as the main source of living for many artisans that are quite good at what they do, but lack the ability of keeping up with the quickly advancing digital timeline.

A healthy rehabilitation plan and program, on both urban and cultural scales, can ultimately improve the sense of belonging and attachment of people to their communities and cities on one hand, and open up a new scape of opportunities for many sectors to rise and develop on the other.

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