

Ex-Mercati Generali in Turin and the Sustainable Afterlife of Post-Industrial Heritage

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Ex-Mercati Generali in Turin is a place shaped by several lives. Built in the early twentieth century as a wholesale market, later transformed for the 2006 Winter Olympics, and today marked by uncertain uses and unfinished regeneration, the complex raises a question that is central to sustainable architecture: how can existing buildings be adapted without erasing the material, spatial, and historical value they already contain?

This paper examines Ex-Mercati Generali as a case of adaptive reuse understood as “fitting.” Rather than treating sustainability as a matter of adding new technologies to an old structure, the paper considers reuse as a more careful process of working with what remains. Building on a master’s thesis developed at Politecnico di Torino, it compares three moments in the site’s history: the original 1933 market, the Olympic transformation, and a proposed future reuse.

Through this comparison, the paper discusses how changes in function, envelope, materials, and spatial organization affect both the environmental performance of the building and its capacity to support new civic uses. The proposed reading argues that the value of Ex-Mercati Generali lies not only in its architectural form but also in its ability to absorb change. Its large spans, recognizable concrete arches, urban position, and layered history make it a useful site for testing how reduced intervention, energy-conscious renovation, and public-oriented programs can work together. Internal insulation, improved envelope performance, photovoltaic systems, and the reuse of existing spaces are considered not isolated technical solutions but part of a broader strategy of recovery. Seen in this way, Ex-Mercati Generali contributes to the theme of UN-build by showing how reuse, reduction, and careful adaptation can turn post-industrial heritage into a resource for vulnerable and changing urban contexts.