

Constructed (Dis)Continuity: Materials, Building Techniques and their Transformations in Shaping Urban Identity — Via XX Settembre, Genoa

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Via XX Settembre in Genoa, constructed between the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, emerges within a phase of social transition linked to industrial revolutions. The street can be understood as a site of experimentation, where new materials and construction techniques were introduced into the urban fabric. The resulting ensemble represents a major urban intervention and a deliberate act of discontinuity with the pre-existing city architecture, expressing the cultural aspirations of an emerging bourgeois society.

Today, this identity remains unchanged, and Via XX Settembre continues to serve as a primary axis in the city centre. Yet, this apparent continuity conceals a more complex condition: the built fabric has undergone multiple phases of intervention, linked to significant historical events and incremental modifications over time.

During the Second World War, a large part of Genoa's urban fabric suffered severe damage, including Via XX Settembre. Nevertheless, this axis has not become a focus within collective memory, resulting in a gap in its knowledge and perception. Its present material condition appears intact, with no perceptible signs of war damage. This apparent integrity makes archival investigation essential, revealing transformations far more substantial than those suggested by the buildings today. This discrepancy raises questions about the material continuity of the buildings along the street, as well as the structural implications of the damage and the reconstruction methods adopted in the post-war period.

Furthermore, such transformations are not limited to traumatic events. Continuous maintenance and minor interventions, carried out throughout the twentieth century to the present, have also played a significant role in shaping its identity.

The paper aims to analyse these processes through the reconstruction of building histories and the study of materials and construction techniques, revealing the paradox between perceived continuity and actual transformation as observed in the urban scenography of the modern heritage.