

Minor architecture, difficult memory: the GIL of Piacenza between heritage and transformation

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The network of youth buildings during the Fascist era constitutes a layered heritage of “minor architecture” that shaped the identity of Italian provinces. Not monumental, these structures operated at an intermediate scale: compact to integrate into the urban fabric, yet incisive to define public space. Today, many survive through adaptive reuse, raising questions about how “difficult memory” persists beyond original ideological programs. This contribution examines the Casa del Balilla (GIL) in Piacenza, designed by Luigi Moretti in 1932–33 as a public school. The building is a palimpsest where ideological memory, architectural language, and functional transformation intersect. Elements of the past (the memorial shrine or inscriptions) coexist within a modern spatial framework characterized by articulated volumes. The conversion has rendered their coexistence operational within daily life.

Moretti’s project constitutes a case of architectural fitting: its compositional logic responds to a precise functional program and clear strategy of urban insertion. This spatial coherence has allowed the building to adapt, demonstrating how high architectural quality can transcend its initial ideological framework to establish itself as a latent civic and pedagogical resource.

The specificity of Moretti’s approach is explored through an analytical comparison with the contemporary GIL in Arborea. While sharing the same institutional program, the two interventions offer different avenues of investigation: while the Sardinian complex, closely linked to land reclamation and the regime’s “new towns”, operates primarily as territorial infrastructure and a direct vessel for propaganda, the Piacenza building distinguishes itself through a greater degree of autonomy, translating functional requirements into a complex architectural expression rooted in its context. In this regard, the Piacenza GIL demonstrates how transformation can become an operational condition for the heritage of “minor architecture,” redefining the relationship between form, memory, and the urban context.