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PUBLIC PALACES IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

25 JANUARY 2025

RIETI, TOWN HALL

PIAZZA VITTORIO EMANUELE II

conference

organised by Riattivati and the University of Rome Tor Vergata
curated by Maria Grazia D'Amelio, Lorenzo Grieco, Giacomo Nicolò

CALL FOR PAPERS

SYNOPSIS

The conference of studies *Public Palaces in the Interwar Period, 1918-1945*, curated by Maria Grazia D'Amelio, Lorenzo Grieco, and Giacomo Nicolò, is organized by the youth cultural association Riattivati and the Department of Industrial Engineering 'Mario Lucertini' of the University of Rome Tor Vergata. It is the first conference in the series *ADMIN: Architecture and Municipal Dynamics in Italy in the 20th Century*, coordinated by the University of Rome Tor Vergata's research team as part of the CIVICARC research project, which is dedicated to the architectural heritage of Italian municipalities.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the administrative unification promoted by the Kingdom of Italy, and formalized through various legislative interventions, led to a continuous modification of territorial structures, a process that extended until World War I, particularly affecting districts and regions, which were intermediate entities between provinces and municipalities. Following the war and with new territorial acquisitions, a process of reorganization and rationalization of internal borders emerged, driven by governmental reforms of that period. The provincial reorganization of the territory assigned new roles to cities, leading to significant transformations in civic architecture, which had to adapt to accommodate an expanding administrative body, requiring larger and more functional spaces.

The reform also required the construction and transformation of public buildings to reflect the new administrative organization: government buildings, provincial offices, prefectures, and municipal buildings, renamed *Palazzi del Podestà* (after the official who replaced mayors under the Fascist laws of 1926). The introduction of the *podestà*, a term evoking the medieval communal tradition, altered the relationship between local authorities and the state, eliminating democratic representation due to its non-elective nature. In line with the reform, the architecture housing the new municipal administration symbolically referenced the medieval era. Municipal buildings were built or expanded to include new elements, such as the civic tower and the *arengo*, the balcony for addressing the public.

Despite the uniformity of formal directives imposed by the regime, the construction of municipal and provincial palaces remained a fertile ground for architectural experimentation, reflecting a phenomenon characterized by the coexistence of various demands: stylistic, technical, functional, symbolic, and political. Government and municipal palaces were integrated into a complex urban scenography that emphasized symbols of power. However, in the city, the town hall and government palace were no longer the only center of civic life, which had historically opposed the church. Now, they had to contend with other architectural structures symbolic of power, such as the *Casa del Fascio* and the GIL (*Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*), which often replicated their forms (as seen in the competition between the civic tower and the *torre littoria* or tower of Fascist martyrs) and competed for visual and political dominance.

In this context, Rieti serves as a particularly emblematic case. The Town Hall, originally built in the 13th century and renovated by Jacopo Barozzi da Vignola in the 16th century and by Filippo Brioni in the mid-18th century, was damaged by an earthquake in 1898, leading to its reconstruction under Cesare Bazzani in 1909. In 1923, Rieti was transferred from the Province of Perugia to the Province of Rome, and in 1927, it was elevated to provincial status. This administrative shift, with its demand for more office space, led to an extension of the Town Hall designed by Giuseppe Battistrada, who began work on a large civic tower in 1939. Although completed in 1956, the tower blends medieval communal architecture with Rationalist elements, symbolizing the regime's attempt to historicize the municipal institution. With Rieti's elevation to a provincial capital, the offices of the new provincial entity and the Prefecture were initially housed in the historic Palazzo Vincentini, near the Town Hall, which was adapted and adorned with imagery tied to the history of Sabina. After World War II, these offices were relocated to a building beyond the Velino River, preserving the representative function of the structure, which had previously served as the headquarters of the GIL (*Gioventù Italiana del Littorio*).

TOPICS AND THEMES

Based on these considerations, the conference aims to analyze these characteristics through a selection of case studies from the Italian territory, with a specific focus on newly founded cities. Both municipal and government buildings constructed to house provincial offices and prefectures, or representative of the Fascist territorial organization, will be examined. By comparing various projects, the conference seeks to outline common features and typological innovations. Additionally, the conference will explore the relationship between administrative policies and the architecture of government buildings, redefined by ceremonial and propaganda needs, both in terms of internal layout and symbolic expression. Scholars are invited to submit contributions on the following topics, concerning the period between the two world wars:

- * Administrative reforms and their impact on territorial and urban governance
- * Transformations of historic public buildings and their functions
- * The role of communal tradition in shaping civic identity
- * Case studies of municipal, provincial, or prefectural buildings
- * Propaganda and political symbolism in public building decorations

SUBMISSION OF PROPOSALS

Interested parties must submit an abstract of no more than 2,500 characters (including spaces), a brief biography of the author(s), and an image related to the topic by **November 15, 2024**. Proposals should be submitted simultaneously to the following email addresses: riattivaticultura@gmail.com, damelio@uniroma2.it, lorenzo.grieco@uniroma2.it. The results of the selection will be communicated by November 29, 2024.

INFORMATION

Participation in the conference as a speaker is free and does not require registration fees. Please note that presentations will be held in person, except in exceptional cases. Participation as an attendee is free, subject to availability.

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