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Minimum Documentation Fiche 2015

composed by national/regional working party of Italy/Campania

0.1 Picture of building/site



depicted item: *Mostra delle terre italiane d'Oltremare*. Piazza Impero.

source: Archivio Mostra d'Oltremare.

date: 1940

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db code

1.
Identity of building/group of buildings/urban scheme/landscape/garden

1.1
current name of building
MOSTRA D'OLTREMARE (Overseas Exhibition in Naples)

1.2
variant or former name
Mostra Triennale delle terre italiane d'Oltremare

1.3
number & name of street
viale J.F.Kennedy, 54
piazzale Tecchio, 1

1.4
Town
Napoli

1.5
Province/state
NA Napoli

1.6
zip code
80125

1.7
Country
Italy

1.8
national grid reference
40° 25' 25 N 14° 11' 18 E

1.9
classification/typology
REC (LND)
(exhibition area, meeting, sport, theatres, botanic gardens, zoo)

1.10
protection status & date
protection: Ministerial Decree , Administrative Note No. 8476 under Italian Law No. 1089, 1 June 1939
date: 26.11.2003

2

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History of building

2.1

original brief/purpose

The *Mostra delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare* (Exhibition of Italian Overseas Territories) was a complex constructed by the Italian fascist regime for promotion of commerce with the nation's colonies, and as a symbolic bridge between the modern state and its 'conquered territories'. The 'Mostra d'Oltremare' was created from the outset as a large, well-equipped exhibition park, with pavilions, theatres, restaurants, sport facilities, amusement and 'animal' parks.

2.2

dates:

Commission to completion: 1937-1940

Reconstruction: 1952

2.3

Architectural and other designers

Project architect: Marcello Canino

Landscape and garden architects: Luigi Piccinato, Carlo Cocchia

Architects of pavilions, major buildings and features: A. Calza Bini; M. Canino; C. Cocchia; G. De Luca; S. Filospesiale; B. Lapadula; L. Piccinato; V. Ventura; R. Pane; L. Racheli; M. Zanetti, P. Zelia Melillo; N. Berardi, G. Bosio; N. Barillà, V. Gentile, F. Mellia, G. Sambito; M. Capobianco, A. Sbriziolo, M. Nunziata; D. Maione, E. Mendia and others.

2.4

others associated with building

Project management: Luigi Tocchetti

Project Office: Adriano Galli

2.5

significant alterations with dates

1940-50: The site was closed in June 1940, just one month after the opening, due to the onset of World War II. Sixty per cent of the area was heavily damaged by allied bombing, the German and American occupations, and subsequent looting and vandalism.

Some of the structures, such as the north entrance and the Children's Theatre were completely destroyed and were not rebuilt. Others were restored by the original architects, such as the 'Restaurant at the Olympic Pool', by Carlo Cocchia, or rebuilt by younger architects: for example the Latin American Pavilion, in a new project of 1952 by M. Capobianco, M. Nunziata, A. Sbriziolo; and the Children's Theatre, also in 1952, by Delia Maione and Elena Mendia.

1960s to 1990s: From the early 1960s through the 1990s, the Mostra was used exclusively for exhibitions and fairs, with the progressive reduction of its appurtenant spaces. Many factors led to a situation of slow decay: inappropriate use of various buildings; long term leasing to external agencies; general lack of care and maintenance; damage due to use of the site for emergency 'container housing' following the 1980 earthquake. In the 1990s, costly buildings were added at public expense, rather than restoring the existing ones.

In the most recent decades the decay of the green spaces and main buildings reached its peak, including the following

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notable occurrences: i) near-total demolition of the Arena Flegrea (an open-air amphitheatre); ii) abandonment of vast landscapes and features including the Fontana dell'Esedra, the Avenue of Palms, the Antinian Way, the Fasilides

swimming area, and others; iii) total demolition of the glasshouses (*Serre botaniche* designed by Carlo Cocchia) and occupation of the gardens by container housing for earthquake victims; iv) transformation of the tiled pathways of the Fontana dell'Esedra into asphalt-covered go-kart tracks; v) use of vast areas for parking; vi) unregulated, unplanned exploitation of the entire area; vii) damage, theft and loss of original furniture, archival documents and artworks.

2.6

current use

The areas and structures of the exhibition park currently in use can be designated according to four functional categories:

- i) Exhibition areas;
- ii) Congress facilities;
- iii) Cultural and sports facilities;
- iv) Hotel and Restaurants;
- v) Natural park areas.

2.7

current condition

The Mostra d'Oltremare still maintains the original layout and structural fabric of the 1940s, and has remained constant to its planned uses and functions in spite of the various damages. A conservation-restoration program for a significant part of the Mostra was begun in 1999, and in 2006 the City of Naples (*Comune di Napoli*) approved an Urban Implementation Plan (*Piano Urbanistico Attuativo*) with further provisions for the Exhibition park. The restoration and renovation of the Arena Flegrea, becoming a 6000-spectator open-air amphitheatre, was directed Giulio de Luca, Architect, signatory to the original project. The superintendencies of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities directed the restoration of a number of other important buildings: the Latin American Pavilion, the Cabot Pavilion, the Theatre Mediterraneo, the Olympic Pool Restaurant, the spectacular Fontana dell'Esedra, and the former Palazzo degli Uffici (Administration Building). These structures are now in good condition, including the adjacent landscaping features, grounds and pavements. However in the western part of the Exhibition park, the grounds and some of the buildings are in a state of extreme degradation, including the Torre delle Nazioni, which has been unused for many years.

At present, eight of the pavilions are used for trade and media fairs, but these require modifications in the engineering and technical systems to meet current norms.

Finally the Naples Zoo and an amusement park (originally *Parco Faunistico* and *Parco Giochi*), are now under separate management from Mostra d'Oltremare S.p.A., but are experiencing severe administrative and economic difficulties.

3

Description

3.1

General description

The total area of the exhibition park is over 720,000 square meters. The original project included 36 pavilions and extensive greenspaces, which were planted in part with species imported from overseas colonies, in recreation of their original habitats

3.2

Construction

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The Mostra is a vast, walled area containing a complex of structures and green spaces: a sort of walled village, communicating to the surrounding city by gates. The park features an organic system of relations among its parts: the core buildings, landscape and technical features, urban furnishings, greenspaces and perimeter areas, united in the overall system through their uses and functions.

The botanic species imported from overseas were planted in recreation of their original habitats, corresponding to the themes and functions of their related buildings, including the pavilions dedicated to Italy's specific colonies. These plantings still exist. The feature of the Fontana dell'Esedra is particularly important to the whole, with its spectacular water systems, lighting and dramatic landscape setting.

3.3

Context

The Mostra d'Oltremare was originally intended as a developmental nucleus for the degraded Fuorigrotta district, a suburban area west of central Naples rising to the hill of Posillipo and descending to the coastline below. Although it was contained within an enclosed park, it was at the same time integrated with the city. The park continued as a fundamental reference point in the post-war reconstruction of Naples, particularly for the north-western areas. One of the major aims of the 1950s reconstruction was to achieve further integration with the urban context. The new project remained faithful to the essence of the original 1940s plans, however the park never achieve the level of urban importance that was originally envisioned. Moreover, the cable-car service that connected the area with Posillipo hill was closed, contributing to the further isolation of the park from the city.

4

Evaluation

4.1

Technical

One of the most noteworthy aspects of the original concept was the employment of a range of architectural and construction typologies, distinguished in part according to the permanent, semi-permanent or temporary purposes of the buildings. The 1950s reconstructions instead aimed for durability, and abandoned this division. This revision in the approach in fact proved fundamental to the preservation of important modernist aspects. The reconstruction adapted the structures to new uses, interpreting them in a still more modern key, while maintaining the original architectural and technical characteristics.

The Mostra thus provides an exceptional example of a technological ensemble, illustrating important periods and significant stages in the history of construction. The park complex is of great interest in terms of the relations between the structural and architectural features and the use of materials for each building, including the various pavilions. Along with the most modern systems and materials of the period, there is also a full representation of traditional technologies linked with the local culture. The park thus presents a mix of systems and materials including: prefabricated buildings, prefabricated structural elements, concrete framing, glass brick, stone walls, iron-framed windows, travertine, mosaics, wall paintings, Neapolitan majolica.

4.2

Social

Naples was viewed as southern Italy's most important city, and was chosen by the Fascist regime to promote trade with Italy's 'overseas territories'. The new Exhibition park was also intended as an urban development project, and was expected to function as an optimal stimulus in local development and growth. Its use for exhibitions, for leisure time activities and for artistic and cultural events would also make it accessible to the wider population, so making it a focal point for in the city's social development.

As it was in 1940, the Mostra d'Oltremare is still a completely equipped, multifunctional urban park for the city of Naples. It is an integrated system serving in numerous crucial roles: as important architectural and historical patrimony, still in active use; as a park for its neighbourhood and the entire city; as an ecologically oasis for leisure activities; as a centre for cultural activities of different dimensions and aims; and for the promotion of tourism and the high-technology economy.

4.3 Cultural & Aesthetic

The Mostra d'Oltremare is an integral part of the overall spectrum of 'Modern Naples' architecture and urban planning. In the context of contemporary works of similar scope at the national and international level, it provides an example of the celebratory character of fascist-era projects, nonetheless distinguished from other Italian cases such as the E42 Exhibition in Rome.

The monumental character of the buildings is the result of architectural developments close to the rationalist style, filtered through the 'Mediterranean' temperament of Neapolitan cultural tradition. According to Marcello Canino, signatory architect for the plan and volumetric drawings for the Mostra, the Mediterranean inclination was a 'deliberate transgression' of pure rationalism. Canino himself designed several of the buildings, including the *Palazzo degli Uffici*. Other eminent representatives of Italian architecture contributed works that fuelled the ongoing cultural debate between two generations of designers, as well as between 'academics' and 'rationalists'. Luigi Piccinato, assisted by Carlo Cocchia, planned the botanical gardens and landscapes, the *Parco Faunico* and *Parco Giochi*, as well as the interiors of Teatro Mediterraneo. Roberto Pane, a 'philosophical' architect following in the steps of Benedetto Croce, designed the pavilion for 'Christian Civilization in Africa'. For several of the permanent structures with a strong symbolic content, such as the Tower of the Fascist National Party (later 'Torre delle Nazioni'), the Italian East Africa Pavilion ('the Golden Cube') and the *Palazzo delle Arti*, commissions were assigned through national competitions, won respectively by Venturino Ventura, by the Zanetti-Racheli-Zella Milillo group and by the Barilla-Gentile-Mellia-Sambito group. There were also works by a new generation of architects closer to the rationalist school, for which this was a fundamental experience: Carlo Cocchia, earlier a Futurist painter (the Conservatory, the Aquarium, the 'Forest Restaurant', Restaurant at the Pool); Giulio De Luca (Arena Flegrea amphitheatre); also Filo Speziale (the Northern Entrance and several pavilions).

4.4 Historical.

The 'Mostra delle Terre Italiane d'Oltremare' was inaugurated on 9 May 1940. Barely one month later, with the entry of Italy in World War II, the site was closed. The park subsequently suffered heavy damage from allied bombing and the German and allied occupations, after which it was abandoned to looting and vandalism.

In 1948, the newly-formed Republic of Italy reorganized the administration under the 'Ente Autonomo Mostra d'Oltremare' (Independent Agency for Overseas Exhibitions and of Italian Labor Around the World), which it charged with rebuilding and managing the exhibition facilities. The 'Mostra' had from the outset symbolized urban and national development and expansion, and with the 1952 restyling gained new status as an emblem of the cultural and economic rebirth then under way.

The new Mostra expressed Italy's desire to reassume its due presence on the international cultural scene, and to send a new image abroad. The choice of name for the new organization is significant: no longer the Exposition of 'Overseas Italian Territories', to be conquered by fascist expansionism, the new structure was for 'Overseas Exhibitions and Italian Labor Around the World': it now became a testimony to the industriousness of a civilized nation, and a member of the global community.

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4.5 general assessment.

The Mostra is a complex of great architectural and historical value, richly reported in the literature. It is a significant urban and architectural component of 20th century Naples. At the international level, it is an excellent example of the multi-service urban park, conceived as an organic whole integrating urban design, buildings, landscapes and ancillary features. The most original aspects are the many buildings and features by different authors, each with aesthetic and symbolic meaning, expressed in a variety of artistic languages and functions. The structures are celebratory, exotic, at times representative of rationalistic issues reinterpreted in a 'Mediterranean key'. The park and its buildings have been the subject matter for historic analyses focusing on different aspects, including interpretations of the 1940s stage and the post-war reconstruction from different historiographic outlooks. Recent studies have provided the basis for a new agreement between Mostra d'Oltremare S.p.A. and the University of Naples 'Federico II'. A strategic upgrading program is presently underway, including modifications to accord with the latest norms on environmental safety and sustainability.

5 Documentation

5.1 principal references

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5.2 visual material attached (by Archivio Mostra d'Oltremare):

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01. Impero Square. Theatre and Tower. 1940
02. Plan. 1940
03. Plan. 1952
04. The building of the Mostra at the construction stage, 1939
05. Pavilion Libya, 1940
06. Fountain Esedra, 1940
07. Tower of the Fascist National Party, 1940
08. Latin American Pavilion designed by B. La Padula, 1940
09. Latin American Pavilion, renovation in 1952 by M. Capobianco et al. , 2015
10. overview, 1958
11. Aerial Photo

5.3
rapporteur/date
Paola Ascione
20.01.2015

6. Fiche report examination by ISC/R

name of examining ISC member:

date of examination:

approval:

Wp/ref. no:

comments:

NAI ref. no:

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