



CITTA' DI TORINO

Porta Palazzo

History and future of the heart of Torino



Progetto theGate
PortaPalazzo

Porta Palazzo's market has been returned to the city completely upgraded, after an extensive overhaul involving the square and the whole market.

The local administration body prides itself on having completed the works long before the set deadline, with the least amount of inconvenience possible. It is an operation which has brought successful changes to technical, logistic and functional aspects and a reorganisation of the activities and the trades offered.

Not only has Porta Palazzo become one of the most interesting and complete markets in Europe (and perhaps the largest open air), but it has also become one of the most efficient and better structured markets.

This is an operation that has been accomplished thanks to the consensus and almost unanimous collaboration of the operators and their representatives.

No small feat at all, considering the fact that over 5000 workers fill the square every day.

All of the people involved coped with the inconveniences, aware that reclamation and improvements to the organisation of the layout of the entire square were necessary.

Thanks to the constant commitment of engineers and workers, the square finally appeared in its new form during the Winter Olympics, without having to decentralise or move the market and its functions.

It was an excellent example of expertise and efficiency!

It was a brave act, which has allowed the upgrading and deep transformation of the square, while preserving its ethnic and multi-hued character; treating with respect the hundred-year stratification of stories, habits and life paces of the extraordinary world represented by the market.

Now, we can give back to the citizens a charming and unique place, a hub of goods and stories that is among the most exceptional and loved in Torino.

Porta Palazzo market is now a modern, functional and completely upgraded market.

Thank you all.

ELDA TESSORE
Town Councillor of Commerce

" ... how many different views are there on Porta Palazzo?
Or – the same question – how many Porta Palazzos are there? [...] The past and the present of Porta Palazzo are wrapped up in a weave teeming on the verge of the unspeakable.
A melting pot, to use a politically correct language;
or ciadel as possibly uttered by a frequent haunter of the market."

DARIO BUZZOLAN



The square, the market, the smell of fish, mint, oregano and wild fennel. “Cerèa Mabruçh” thus a Moroccan could be addressed in the Turinese greeting, “Today only, two euros for kiwis from Saluzzo, olives from Cerignola and Timisoara style smoked sausages”.

Floods of people walking, rummaging, bumping into each other, asking pardon, replying unnerved. The sound of cars hooting, the chatter amid the stalls, children sneaking through the grownups’ legs. Buggies pushed through hastily, carts stumbling, elderly people hauling their shopping trolleys.

At Porta Palazzo everybody makes fun of everybody else in all possible languages. Occasional rows and daily commentary on the facts of the day give way to debates and hollers.

Until disarmament time, when vans back up towards lowering brollies and the goods are stored away on the vans. Then, a new life starts. A life of silence, interrupted only by the sound of brooms, sweepers heaping up the fruit cases, cloths, tomato leftovers too ripe to be of any use to anybody. The smell of disinfectant and trickles of lathery water stream into the square’s manholes.





In the evening. People rush about, while ribs and quarters of beef are unpacked from the vans, the noise of carts swarming back to their usual spot on the square. People waiting at tram stops with tired eyes. Getting on and off. The market is everywhere, the trade and haggle continuing, “Two euros! I want to ruin myself. Just for today!”

At any time of the day and on any day of the week, crowds of women, men and street vendors chat, while children run round, contributing to create the spirit of Porta Palazzo. The exchange and trade of news and bargains. All in the same spot, wrote Calvino. All in the same spot to share the space, even though everyone is at different ends of that same spot. For some time, now, newcomers have started haunting the square: boys and girls hang out until late in the *dehors*, *i.e.*, at the bars’ outside tables. People on their bikes with their children perched in their bike seats. Geraniums blossoming in pots on balconies, lace curtains at the windows and repainted façades set against peeling-off walls. New smiling coloured shops, open till late at night. Germs of relations working in silence, trying to establish the fact that in Porta Palazzo everyone knows each other’s names. And when one knows someone by their name, it is easier to greet the next person in the street, is it not? Boundaries broaden, stories are told because everyone has a story to tell.

Struggle, anger, solitude, fear, and decay, and yet again passion, desire to stay, the eagerness to bet that something will change, that the change has started already. And it has indeed. In Porta Palazzo people participate, discuss and argue. The conventional mould is no longer followed, gives way to a buzzing and mobile systems of relationships which are outmoded the moment they are fixed.

Porta Palazzo’s preservation, transformation and change involves much listening, decision making, and the ability to be permeated by the subtle and complicated dynamics of a square in constant change.

ILDA CURTI
Director of Progetto Porta Palazzo - The Gate





The History

Porta Palazzo belongs to the historic centre of the city, yet it preserves a character of its own (the urban shape, the history, the settled people, the economic activities) which connotes it as a “popular” district, by all means, with a strong identity and a deep sense of belonging. Throughout the last few years the district has undergone deep social changes, which have made social relationships and life within the district rather delicate and fragile.

However, from an administrative point of view, Porta Palazzo is not a district in itself, but it is an area which is perceived as such due to a crucially important phenomenon for the community: the market in piazza della Repubblica.

From a city planning point of view, the history of this area is extremely convoluted, different and heterogeneous.

Porta Palazzo owes its name to one of the gates of the city, the old *postierla*, San Michele, which connected the suburban districts with the market located in what once was called piazza delle Erbe, now piazza Palazzo di Città.

Throughout the centuries the *postierla* was replaced with a stone gate, and in the 17th century it took over the





Porte Palatine as the main northern access in a definite way.

King Vittorio Amedeo II, who wished to recreate Torino as a city with the stature of a 1700s modern capital, promoted a series of works on the city's access gates which, as well as the usual defensive role, took on the symbolism of grandeur.

Works started in 1699, and by 1701 Porta Palazzo was opened. The first plan of piazza della Repubblica, however, was conceived within the so called "old city's" city plan reform, according to a project by architect Filippo Juvarra.

Later, under the Napoleonic heel, Porta Palazzo was pulled down as part of a project envisaging the demolition of all cities' fortification walls.

The debate which followed over the redesign of the square within the city plan and the city's new north bound expansion came to an end in 1817, with Gaetano Lombardi's project, which encompassed a great octagonal square named after Emanuele Filiberto, now piazza della Repubblica, as the crowning achievement of Juvarra's exedra.

Since the 19th century, efforts to embellish and shape the square have been manifold.

In 1825 architect Luigi Formento designed a project for the southern area, in particular in the butchery block, between the square and Porta Palatina.

The finishing touches of the square's contours were completed in 1830, thanks to the intervention of private concerns, simultaneous with the extension works at the Ospedale Mauriziano, which were carried out by engineer Mosca.

The markets in Porta Palazzo settled once and for all in 29th August 1835, after a "Vicarial Manifesto" which, due to a cholera epidemic, prohibited trade in the piazzas of Palazzo di Città (once piazza delle Erbe) and Corpus

Domini. After that bylaw, the city decided to build the canopies for the food market in the first two sections of what was known then as piazza Emanuele Filiberto, today's piazza della Repubblica.

The remaining part of the market consisted of several rows of shacks housing fabrics, earthenware and miscellaneous goods. Meanwhile four levels underground, big *ghiacciaie*, ice-houses, were built for storing goods.

Elycoydal-shaped ramps descended, allowing the carts to go down to the bottom where the goods were stored amid the ice, formed naturally from the snow collected in nearby fields during the cold months of the year, or transported from the Moncenisio during milder winters.

Since those days a number of changes to the buildings housing the market have followed in succession: the first of which regarded the two canopies - removed and replaced in 1836 by more modern constructions still currently in use and covering markets II, the fish market, and V, the food market; market IV, nestled under the elegant metal structure known today as the *tettoia dell'Orologio*, the clock roof, was built in 1916, whereas market III, the clothes market, was built in 1963 and demolished in 2005 to leave room for architect Massimiliano Fuksas' new building.





The Market

The market is the mirror of the social changes, outlining the evolution of the history of man.

Before being a place for exchanges, markets were gatherings, a place for collective assemblies and social reference points.

Torino's market square, piazza della Repubblica, has always been a place for public confrontation, gatherings and exchanges, also and above all, of culture and folklore. And there was plenty of folklore: circuses and tents, artists and charlatans of all sorts with plenty of honeyed words, and true athletes "no tricks or deceit!", cries that resounded like the sales pitch of street vendors, all in a strict Torinese dialect. These were characteristic traits; as much as the second hand book sale at the Balón occurred in terms of "knowledge sold by the pound".

Afterwards and for a long time after, the square was the meeting place of countrymen, at first for the immigrants from the south of Italy and then for those from the rest of the world. Porta Palazzo has become the place where one felt closer to home. This was as much because on those stalls you could find the goods that came from home, wherever it might be.





Porta Palazzo has been referred as “the Harrod’s of Torino” where one can find the fairies’ needle’s silk remnants, the *tome*, cheese from the Valli di Lanzo and *caciocavalli* cheeses from the Sila, tapioca and cherry tomatoes from Pachino, Timisoara style smoked meat, Pantelleria capers and Sambucan lambs from Stura di Demonte...

Each counter tells a story by the variety of the produce, the alternation of colour, the signage, the word mangling and mispronunciation. Stalls like showcases that stage the most eloquent show of all, so as to lure the passers-by and induce them to stop, look and be talked into buying something.

Why piazza della Repubblica? The historical reasons for the high trade concentration in Porta Palazzo are owed to city planning reasons. The markets used to be located near the city’s main accesses, therefore, as soon as the Juvarra exedra was completed, a spontaneous market sprung up, because of its favourable location in correspondence to the Milan axis.

Today Porta Palazzo is the largest open air market in Europe; it is a true and proper “trade system”, which remains a good alternative to the offer of shopping malls.

Not only does it afford a wide range of choices but also a spectrum of services, such as banks, social and community services, post offices, doctor’s offices, chemists, which contribute to making it a more complete resort than shopping centres.

Porta Palazzo is, as poet Lamsuni puts it, a small planet to itself: “You cannot possibly understand what happens on this planet Porta Palazzo. You just cannot know! You are far away, and Casablanca is a city, whereas our planet is nothing but a square. It is our republic where we make rain or shine. The biggest market in Europe is ours, our suk. We sell everything, even dignity, religion, the country ...”

(From “Porta Palazzo Mon Amour”, Mohammed Lamsuni - Avicenna Editrice, San Mauro Torinese 2003).





The Market in figures

Currently Porta Palazzo, which extends over a 51.300 sq m. area, houses a market which has a sale surface equal to 4.991 sq m. and over a thousand street vendors. The whole market area is visited by over 100.000 people, weekly.

Porta Palazzo encompasses:

- the covered food market IV, a.k.a. “mercato dell’Orologio”, (The clock market, trans.) with 88 dealers;
- the covered food market V, with 53 dealers, temporarily located in piazza Don Albera;
- the covered fish market II with 18 dealers. As well as these outlets, every day, 756 street vendors, 796 on Saturdays, set out their goods on traditional market carts in the street.

The majority of these outlets, namely 366 stalls, (100 of which are run by the actual producers) sell fruit and vegetables, 14 are open-air food product stalls, 350 sell various goods such as clothes, flowers and dry goods; 34 sell home-wares and 32 sell shoes.

As well as these, Porta Palazzo daily hosts 24 on-rotation-operators’ stalls.



Licensed Trading

In the area encompassing Porta Palazzo and Borgo Dora there has been a general readjustment of the goods over the last ten years.

The upgrade of the square has triggered the trade of vendors who have settled in the market square, who in turn, have undergone deep changes, adjusting to the new consumers’ demand. The licensed trade has expanded, offering more services such as restaurants, bars, phone centres and hotels.

From on-location surveys gathered by Cicsene in 2004, in the Porta Palazzo-Borgo Dora area there are in all 740 licensed trade activity outlets, among which are:

- 206 food,
- 73 clothes,
- 200 other,
- 46 furniture,
- 14 warehouse,
- 47 general services,
- 42 restaurants,
- 80 bars,
- 28 phone centers,
- 4 hotels/rent-a-room.

In addition, Galleria Umberto I, which has nestled under its arcades every kind of trade activity from time immemorial, is currently under reconstruction in an upgrade project aimed at recovering its historical heritage and bringing back the bustling trade of its heyday.

" ... to view it in all its beauty, one should take a stroll there, one winter Saturday morning, when the market is in its full force. A local Zola could easily use it to set a novel entitled *The belly of Torino...*"

EDMONDO DE AMICIS

Le tre capitali - Torino, Firenze, Roma
(The Three Capitals: Torino, Florence,
Rome, trans.)



The transformations

Torino's urban scene is recovering and reinventing its very own strong identity, in which the historical memory, materialising in the form of urban environments, assumes more and more the value of resource.

The review program of the “most modern, welcoming, outfitted” city, allows us nowadays to envision cultural strategies hardly conjecturable until not so long ago.

In this perspective, over the last decade, Porta Palazzo is the seat of intense works of physical, economical and environmental upgrade which set out to prove that the transformation of a district, improving its lay out, without depriving it of its character, atmosphere and vitality and maintaining its history and memory, is a possibility.

The most important works that have helped to redesign the public realm, improving the quality of the services and of life, have been the construction of the underpass in corso Regina Margherita, the repair works on the Cortile del Maglio, the construction of the multi-storey car park located in corso XI Febbraio, the redesignation of the buildings on the Canale dei Molassi, up to the recent reorganisation of piazza della Repubblica and the Archeological park.





The last years' effort undertaken to renew the historic centre has come to its full completion by now, aimed at giving a new radiance and functionality to this historic square, making it more welcoming also after market hours.

The objectives of the great renewal project started in January 2005 focused on the adjustment of the systems according to health laws in force, the rationalisation of car parks and viability, the renewal of the stalls to improve pedestrian movement and the quality of the goods displays.

Piazza della Repubblica

The project encompassed:

- the rebuilding of the stallage in Luserna stone, entailing the repaving of some 33.000 sq m.
- the connection to the power and water mains via connections underneath the stallage, in place of those hanging in the air above the square;
- the square's new illumination system, differentiated according to the areas, and which will have the task of marking the architectural features of the buildings: outside illumination for the fish market's front and inside illumination to create a "lantern" effect over the Mercato dell'Orologio and PalaFuksas;
- The restoration of the façades of the facing pavilions: the Fish Market, Mercato dell'Orologio and the food market, still underway;
- the restoration of the roofs above the household articles market and the one above the Coltivatori Diretti, the farmers market;
- the construction of the recent building by architect Massimiliano Fuksas, in place of the ex clothes market;
- the upgrading of sanitation and the placement of new benches.

CLIENT DESIGNERS

Città di Torino, city council
Città di Torino - Technical services department and building trade for cultural, social and commercial services

City council appointed project manager Design assignment

engineer Barbirato
R.T.P.: engineers V. Cappato Società d'Ingegneria - STS Servizi Tecnologie Sistemi S.p.A.: architects E. Arbizzani and G. Dell'Aquila, engineers G. Gramoni, C. La Montagna, from STUDIO TECNICO ITALIANO, S.T.I. srl, and engineer V. Procopio and architect C. Roluti.

Amount for the works over the market area 15.000.000,00 euro
Food market V works total costs 6.870.000,00 euro



Amid the area's improvement works, the construction of the glass building designed by architect Massimiliano Fuksas, where the clothing market once used to stand, is undoubtedly one of the most remarkable, especially for the definition given to the building by Fuksas himself, who sees it as a "great corkscrew" or an "Aladdin's lamp".

Former director of the Biennale di Venezia, he based the project on the 19th century plan of the square, a tree-lined octagonal perimeter with lateral exedras, attempting to propose a new harmonic structure that is flexible at the same time.

The pavilion rises on a 5.000 sq m. pentagonal area, developed on a total height of 12,5 m; it is a two-storey building with a basement car park.

Inside the new pavilion, a ramp system connects all the levels, including the one recently recovered from the two old hypogean ice-houses, viewable from each floor.

The front is a double translucent glass surface, interrupted by full bricks and bronzed brass lines and is illuminated by an inside gap housing the emergency stairs and air-conditioning systems.

A panoramic terrace lies at the top of the building and offers a view of the square, Filippo Juvarra's buildings lined up in via Milano, the Chapel of the Shroud and the towering Mole Antonelliana.

CLIENT DESIGNERS CONTRACTOR DEVELOPER

Città di Torino, city council
Architect Massimiliano Fuksas, Roma - A.I. Engineering, Torino
Consorzio Emiliano Romagnolo amid the companies of 'Produzione and Lavoro

WORKS' TECHNICAL DATA

BUILT SURFACE: 13.680 sq m.
GLA SURFACE: 3.720 sq m.
TRADE SPACES: 50
CUBAGE EXCLUDING SOIL: 40.000 cu m.
UNDERGROUND CUBAGE: 10.350 cu m.

PalaFuksas



The reuse of the Archaeological Area between piazza San Giovanni, Porte Palatine and corso Regina Margherita, completely redefines this side of the city, recuperating the old Roman buildings and courses.

The plan sets out the advancement of the extraordinary complex of palaces and galleries, historically called the *zona di comando*, the headquarters, placing it within one great museum system that starts in piazza Castello and stretches to the Archaeological Area.

Archaeological Area

The works envisage the redesigning of the area through the creation of a garden from which soar traces of the old Roman city, enclosed on the corso Regina Margherita side by a building that follows the design of the old bastion, demolished in the 1800s, which will serve as a depot for the market hand carts of the adjoining piazza della Repubblica.

The Park is enclosed by a natural fence made by rows of trees alternating with a system of gates and columns of different heights.

To reinstate Porta Palatina to its original role, and therefore to give the pedestrians a new access point to the city, the plan encompasses:

- the repaving of piazza San Giovanni and the removal of the car park;
- the completion of via XX Settembre's pedestrian sections;
- the construction of a connecting pedestrian underpass, in via XX Settembre, between the Roman Theatre and the Archaeological Park;
- the pedestrianisation of via della Basilica down to Porta Palatina through a paved path;
- the redesign and advancement of piazza IV Marzo and the nearby streets.

CLIENT
DESIGNERS

Città di Torino, city council
Architect Aimaro Isola, Torino - architect Giovanni Durbiano, Torino
architect Luca Reinerio, Torino





People from Porta Palazzo

Their stories

It makes me smile to think how in the years immediately after the war and up until the 60s, some parts of Porta Palazzo harboured makeshift markets made of cardboard boxes and suitcases with barely saleable goods, which would eventually become “indispensable”, thanks to an art of selling that I don’t remember having seen again. I sense that, back then, the majority of people haunting the market experienced it as though it were a massive daily event. You could stroke a live prairie-dog through the bars of a cage and be charmed by a vendor praising the therapeutic infallibility of its fat. You could buy a set of plates, bearing in mind that just minutes earlier those very plates had been juggled in the air thanks to the dexterity of a Tuscan vendor-meets-juggler who had been welcomed in Porta Palazzo after having lost everything in the disastrous flood in Florence. You could take home a polish to shine your furniture until it gleamed, after a very friendly blind man had given an example by polishing lovingly and devotedly some wooden models of the most common pieces of household furniture. I couldn’t vouch for the quality of any of the products sold by these personages, but one thing I know - that whoever bought these goods still carries a pleasant memory with them.

BRUNO DI TOMMASO
President of UBAT





The adventure in Porta Palazzo started with my grandfather, in 1916, when the Royal Guards informed us that in piazza Barcellona, where my family had a market stall, it was no longer possible to “park” the horse-cart.

Since then, none of us has been able to come away from that square.

I was the only one of the family to have been tempted to leave it at all, at the end of the 60s, when I achieved a nice accountant’s diploma attained through sacrifice, starting work at four o’clock in the morning and going to school at eight.

The “secure” office job came to hand, but in the end I chose to follow my true passion and my family’s tradition. I don’t regret any of my choices, not even the one that made me famous around the square, when I kept my twelve-day-old baby son for a week under the stall... besides, I kept him well covered up!

ROSANGELA LO CONTE
Fruit and vegetable

From the 50s, in my view, Porta Palazzo was a true and proper open air theatre until the advent of mass television.

As soon as the stalls of the market were dismantled, the square would thrive with curious passers-by who would put up some kind of show followed by amazed crowds of people.

Apart from the classics, the fire-eater, the acrobats and the story-teller, there were two really special figures that struck me: Limon Limonero and Maciste.

The former, who probably owes his name to an Argentinean song, his “pièce de resistance”, was a legless man circulating on a motorcycle with sidecar, singing songs on request; voicing over, or often even just miming,

the original played on his portable record player, perhaps producing a kind of playback prototype.

The latter was a massive man from Catania who, according to him, following an enviable career as an actor in a film with battling and wrestling centurions and gladiators, created his own set in Porta Palazzo.

He would charm the spectators for some time praising his own unrivalled force; marking in words the difficulty of the bravery he would have given proof of any minute then. After this he would powerfully challenge people standing in the audience, in truth accomplices of his, to raise the tension, and therefore the stakes of the occasional wager, and then... it would normally resolve in the lifting of a stone, undoubtedly very big, that Maciste, as soon as the show was over, would carefully place in a recess in the wall opposite the fish market so as to prevent, in his words, someone from stealing it..

NINO CASTALDO
Damarco Company

We have been dressing the *Torinesi* for four generations, and the tradition will continue with my niece, Rossella. [...]

I would have liked to have become an accountant, but that career was never to start...

I have no regrets, however; the choices I made allowed me to experience the most wonderful years of trade, when people were well off and could afford the luxury of spending money.

It has always been our main feature: to have nice stuff at a fair price; in one of the corners of piazza della Repubblica, the popular centre of Torino, where one can find good bargains.

GIUSEPPE NEGRO
Gianduja Company



There's more...

"My kitchen is Porta Palazzo. [...]"

Trams clanging and cars tooting and tires screeching and ROLL UP MISSUS, TOMATOES AND AUBERGINES ONE EURO A KILO! A BARGAIN! and excavators excavating and hammer drills drilling and front doors squeaking and doors slamming and heels tapping and lorries rumbling and FRESH FISH GALORE FOLKS! SEA-BASS SIX EUROS HURRY UP LUV! and televisions peeling and buses breaking and radios yelling and shouting and the fire-fighters whistling and motorbike tyres squealing and bicycles zooming along and bells ringing and yet again MOZZARELLA DI BUFALA FRESH FROM PUGLIA FANTASTIC, MISSUS! COME AND TRY SOME OF THIS GRANA CHEESE! and workers yelling and cranes and chisels chiselling and floats floating and glass quivering and sirens squealing and dogs barking and punch machines punching and lowered rolling shutters and manholes gulping and mobile phones ringing and COME MISSUS SICILIAN ORANGES JUST ARRIVED EXPRESS FROM BAGHERIA, A CORKER!

This is Porta Palazzo."

GIUSEPPE CULICCHIA
Torino è casa mia
(Torino is my home, trans.)

"...Porta Palazzo is the most *Turin*ese of places, the oldest and to some extent, also the most futuristic of Torino. I like everything about Porta Palazzo; the untidiness; the scenography of Juarra's buildings tarnished by specimens of buildings from the 60s (that insane yellow and brown "skyscraper", closing in the northern perimeter of the square); the iron roofs of the food market, with a preference for area called the "*contadin*"; the farmers, where one can listen to a blend of the genuine dialects of the Monferrato and slang from Maghreb, Asia, central Africa, and naturally, some surviving form of a third generation Neapolitan tilt.[...]"

Some mornings one can also sense a smell of must sneaking out of the dark courtyards, a dampish odour of countryside cellar. Then I like the milliner's stall, where pernickety *madamine*, the "missus", wrapped up in layers of shawls and fingerless gloves potter around quick and playful among hundred-year boxes containing zips, multi-hued buttons and skeins of old braiding.

An unchanged 1800s world, partly cloistered (behind the Cottolengo, Consolata and Ausiliatrice as it is), and partly enigmatic, like an unknown south. It is an exotic and amazing "elsewhere".

I like it at night as well. Deserted and elusive, small groups of people standing in front of cafés, the prickling scent of caraway seeds wafting out of the houses, its *trattorias* with tables outside in summer. Perhaps alarming, yet if beauty is in the eye of the beholder, even safety has its codes, therefore, if one is streetwise ... You would rarely take a visitor round this end (as it happens, guests are normally shown into the living room not into the kitchen), still Porta Palazzo is one of the keys to the mystery of Torino, indomitable, archaic, a busy sea port ... if only there was the sea in Torino, alas! And just like the sea, it is scented, remote, romantic and mocking.

Unfathomable and sometimes black, like this city.

GIANNI FARINETTI
Torino 2006 - La chiave del mistero
(The Key of Mystery, trans.)

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