

The MUSE, Le Albere district and the new university library
Trento, Italy
2002-2016

The project recovered an industrial site, long abandoned, close to the city's historic center, by installing an eco-sustainable neighborhood wedged between two new public buildings: the MUSE – the science museum – and the central university library.

The site, hemmed in between the railroad and the River Adige, was chosen in the late 1920s by the Michelin company to establish a series of factories. When, in 1998, after years of relocations, the factory halted its assembly lines, the municipal administration began to reflect on the fate of these eleven hectares of land. The brief given in 2002 to the Renzo Piano Building Workshop pointed to a comprehensive rethinking of the area that would include redevelopment of the riverfront strip and repairing the ties with the city, compromised by the railroad barrier.

The district of Le Albere clusters the buildings towards the east, along the railway line and in continuity with the historic city center. On the other side, towards the Adige, a five-hectare urban park has been laid out. The linear buildings that line the railroad are intended to house offices and executive suites, while the courtyard buildings towards the park and the river are earmarked for residences. A series of pedestrian and vehicle underpasses breaks up the railway barrier, allowing the roads of the old quarters to ramify through the new settlement. Parallel to the river, a broad tree-lined avenue 300 meters long runs through the site, connecting the science museum to the north with the university library to the south. A functional mix characterizes both individual buildings – shops and accommodation facilities on the ground floors, with the availability of large porticoes, residences and offices on the upper floors – and the neighborhood, thanks to the museum and library: elements that counterpoint the regular urban layout.

The avenue leads to the entrance of the science museum, which incorporates and extends the city's previous collection. The building is inflected by a succession of solid and glazed volumes, which sink into and emerge from the body of water on which they seem to float. Starting from the east with the railroad, the first block houses administrative and research offices. In continuity, on the ground floor, there is the large entrance square enclosed to form a glazed atrium. From here it is possible to go to the bookshop or cafeteria, housed on the ground floor of the first volume, or to the west, entering the museum. A large part of the exhibition is laid out in this third block, laid out around a large central void connecting all the levels.

A tropical greenhouse closes the building towards the Adige: an entirely glazed, partially buried prism. Each floor of the museum overlooks both the entrance lobby and the central void, poetically thronged with a cascade of stuffed animals and prehistoric skeletons.

The sharp inclined roofs characterize and unify the entire intervention, characterizing the residential buildings, the museum and the new library. It consists of a six-story building divided into three bodies separated from the central, glazed atrium and open towards the mountains. Next to the multimedia rooms, offices and laboratories and more private study spaces, the main reading room opens out: a cube lined with over 300,000 volumes with open shelves around a large void illuminated from above. The buildings of Le Albere district have earned the most stringent energy certifications, thanks to the geothermal probe system, the solar cells, the choice of local and eco-sustainable building materials, the centralized power plant and the integral rainwater recovery systems.

L. Ciccarelli