

The “Memory Project” for Piombino’s Iron and Steel Industry *By Angelo Nesti*

On 8th April 2008 at the Ansaldo Foundation, a meeting was held between Aipai (Italian Association for Italian Archeological Industrial Patrimony) and Lucchini S.p.A. to delineate a program to preserve the historical memory of Piombino’s blast furnace following its demolition. The razing of the last of the four blast furnaces was deemed to be unavoidable for the development projects of the company; especially to clear the current slag dump, which is to be relocated in an area next to the steel plant with the introduction of less polluting technology to reduce smoke emission. The company also pointed out that the industrial development project was supported by Piombino’s city administration as well as most of the trade unions.

The company asked Aipai to manage all actions considered necessary to safeguard the industrial memory of the site. This step demonstrated a significant change of direction in corporate policy and Lucchini’s relationship with the territory, given that previous demolitions had taken place with no discussion of alternative solutions, nor the possibility of setting up research for the purpose of documenting the demolition of historical industrial sites.

Following the discussions held at the Ansaldo Foundation, Aipai prepared the guidelines for a research project, organizing them into a series of points and introducing them with a premise to clarify the responsibilities of such an important action as the demolition of a blast furnace.

The salient points of the project include:

1) The construction of a records repository, considered a prerequisite of the Park Iron Museum already envisaged in the past by the city council. The repository is intended to promote the preservation, usage and communication of all material that the project is able to collect. Participation in its creation includes the company, the municipality, the University of Tuscany, the trade unions, the Tuscany region and Aipai.

2) The documenting of the current situation is carried out through an architectonic survey, the compiling of a catalogue schedule and a photographic and film campaign in order to accurately evaluate if the demolition could be avoided and to have a precise picture of what can be retrieved and if demolition is deemed necessary.

3) The identification, collection and inventory of historical records present on the site and in other places and their placement in appropriate locations.

4) The identification of the above mentioned locations, suitable for preservation as well as the use of collected material.

5) A feasibility plan for the records center to provide a model of utilization of the center itself, the contents and its research instruments.

6) A historical research study of the Ilva plants in Piombino.

7) The collection of oral sources.

For each point, the project specified time periods, the participants in its creation, the responsibilities and, of course, the costs. Once the tasks and the responsibilities were clarified, the Association confirmed the need to carry out field investigations to evaluate the current condition of the blast furnace, even if the company considered the demolition urgent,. The opportunity arose on 21st April 2008, when Aipai met with Lucchini's delegates, the mayor and the city councilor for cultural affairs of the Piombino Municipality to define the research and the memory preservation projects with the management. On that occasion, Aipai reiterated its criticism of the management and the company whose neglect had led to the dilapidated condition of the blast furnace. Of course, the company and the municipality reasserted their pressing reasons for requesting the demolition.

Subsequently, they inspected the location. After a brief first inspection, it became clear that the blast furnace and the cowpers were indeed seriously dilapidated and damaged by corrosion.

On June 10th, 2008, Piombino's Municipality, Lucchini, Ansaldo Foundation and Aipai signed an agreement to start the necessary actions to complete the project within the next two years.

From 10th June up to now, the survey has been completed. It was carried out with 3D laser scanner which enabled the collection of metrical information on a vast range of points. In the meanwhile, the other activities to document the location, to implement the feasibility plan and the records center, to locate and collect the historical records were started. Towards the end of the year the historical research and the collection of the oral testimonies are likely to begin.