

**The Museoweb of the Economy of Varese**  
**www.museoweb.it**  
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**The Project**

Since its founding, The Centro per la Cultura d'Impresa has dedicated its activity to the study and analysis of business archives and to the promotion of initiatives for their valorization. Among its accomplishments, the Census of Business Archives of the Lombardy Region has focused on the creation of a regional database giving general information on the typologies, the dimensions and the chronological references of the records preserved by the Lombardy Region's historical companies. The sample was chosen through an analysis of the Companies' Register of the Chambers of Commerce (all the active companies registered before 1945) as well as the suggestions of cultural institutions, professional associations and the Chambers themselves. At the same time, a census was conducted on the archives of now defunct companies that once played a relevant role in the territory. A short historical profile allows the reader to trace the evolution of each company and understand some of the closures and their influence on the creation of the archives. However, the Census – addressed mainly to the scientific community of archivists and researchers – on the one hand, was inadequate to valorize the patrimony preserved by the companies and on the other hand, wasn't recognized as an instrument of value by these same companies.

At a meeting with the people in charge of the Chamber of Commerce of Varese, the Centro was requested to adapt the census to the web, developing a project where it was possible to recognize the companies through their records, the personalities and images of those who took part in their establishment in the territory. In this way, the Varese Chamber of Commerce is also able to provide a valuable service to the companies themselves. Indeed, the Museoweb highlights the history of the company in their corporate websites, where frequently the link "About us" leads to only a few lines, overshadowed by the communications of immediate interest for potential clients.

The project of Museoweb of the economy of Varese began modestly, but soon evolved through a process of analysis and reflection aiming at communicating complex company histories in a direct and simple way.

The turning point of the project was the first survey in which the entrepreneur wished to recount the history of his company intertwined with his personal memories. Many themes emerged: the link between home and company, the relationship with the workers, the generational succession, the internship with more skilled workers, the periods of great expansion and those marked by crisis, the relationship with trade associations, and the participation in the social and political life of the

territory. At this point, the main source for research was no longer simply the archives, but the oral source, which implies a series of quite different methodological problems.

These are no longer company histories, but outlines originating from an entrepreneur's personal account and are confirmed by the records of the Chamber of Commerce of Varese and by bibliographic research. The outlines set the themes to be studied in greater depth. This leads us to analyze the structure of the website and some methodological features of the Museoweb.

### **The Gallery of Enduring Companies**

Museoweb's pivotal point is the Gallery of the enduring companies. It is supported by an analytical framework of those factors that are decisive to maintaining a core of enduring companies in the territory. In constructing the biographies, a first methodological choice was to single out each company's chronological gaps, which corresponded to significant periods of their individual histories, yet could not be directly linked to the events that marked the economic, political and social life of the country.

A second methodological choice was the adoption of precise but plain language, suitable for a public of non-experts. In this way, it is possible to familiarize students and young people with the history and activities of local companies.

A side menu leads visitors to investigate themes linked to the companies; for example, a parallel analysis of the genealogy of the companies and their owners' families is particularly valuable to understanding the evolution of enterprise in Varese.

A third methodological choice was to interweave the text with clips from filmed interviews as well as images collected by the companies. A mixed media approach lend impact to the account, and the images from business and family archives communicate directly to explain some facts which cannot be expressed only through the text. For example, to catch the expression on the face of the interviewees leads to greater understanding of their declarations about work, which arose from "life choices". At the same time, images and photographs from business and families' archives are useful to explain significant changes in the organization of work, the transformation of the territory, but also the graphic evolution of business iconography and other forms of self representation.

### **System Network of Businesses in Varese**

Along with the Gallery of Enduring Companies, Museoweb provides in-depth analysis which moves the observation point from the perspective of a single company to that of a system extended throughout the territory.

First of all, there is a section dedicated to the Companies Register of the Chamber of Commerce of Varese providing information on the commercial register as source for historic research as well as a database including a list of longstanding companies according to the abovementioned criteria. This instrument, continuously updated, has a double function: to maintain the trace of enduring companies that are now defunct (at least under their original names) and indicating those entities that for different reasons (mergers, amalgamations, transfers to another province, and so on) do not appear in the commercial register of the chamber among the companies set up before 1945. A series of charts make some data immediately clear, such as the trend of density of longstanding companies per inhabitant in each municipality.

## **Fidelity Prize for Work and Economic Progress**

The section Fidelity Prize for Work and Economic Progress reconstructs the method that the Chamber of Commerce used to recognize and valorize the presence of longstanding companies on the territory, and the ties they established with their workers.

## **Culture and Territory**

The Varese province encompasses a high concentration of museums and collections created with the aim of preserving and handing down the memory of its local economic system. These are initiatives linked to public institutions (for example the Municipalities and the Universities), privates and companies.

This section reconstructs the development of the territorial economic system and identifies the individuals and organizations that has safeguarded the preservation and the valorization of the Varese province's historical legacy.

## **Website Layout**

A last observation regards the criteria for development of the website layout. The solutions that have been chosen are always linked to the content rather than to esthetic or practical motives. For example, the map of the province that gives access to the Gallery of the enduring companies, allows the visitor to highlight the presence of the companies in the territory according to their seniority; thus illustrating the reasoning adopted in the section dedicated to the companies' register.

Museoweb is a constantly changing portal that welcomes new companies, but also updates the files already published through visitors' notifications of new paper records, photographs or other material and visiting the companies to verify the changes happened during the time.

Another development regards the possibility of extending the research to other provinces of the Lombardy region.