

Ex Casa del Fascio e dell'Ospitalità di Predappio
(Former local Fascist Party headquarters and hospitality house of Predappio)
L'Italia totalitaria. Stato e società in epoca fascista. Un'esposizione permanente.
(Totalitarian Italy. State and Society during the Fascist era. A permanent exhibition)

Project overview

The project developed by the Scientific Committee is based on the belief that totalitarianism and fascism, which is an integral part of it, is a historical phenomenon of Italy and of contemporary Europe. It can and must be told, above all to the younger generations who are separated from those tragic events by almost a century.

Totalitarianism must be told above all to dispel the widespread belief according to which only *damnatio memoriae* of a regime based on political and “racial” violence, on political oppression, on the negation of every individual and collective right, which has caused so much mourning in our continent, may not only compensate victims, but dry up the water in which it could be resurrected.

Therefore, narrating fascism is a need, which can be pursued without falling into apologia, into “afascism”, divulgative superficiality, rhetoric:

we have the historiographic knowledge to restore the complexity of those two decades of totalitarian dictatorship, to penetrate its mechanisms of power and the keys of its mass consensus without risking to confuse the historical and ethical-political judgement, without degenerating into an alleged neutral objectivity. We live in a stable democratic society which has the power to freely and knowingly confront itself with the past, albeit tragic, not only to know where we come from, but also to produce necessary cultural antibodies to prevent the past, though in new forms, from returning.

In short, the most ambitious intent of the project is to deliver fascism to history, basing this passage on the recognition of the effective historical dimension of a phenomenon which has, like communism, deeply and dramatically marked the entire 20th century, but which is over and, as such, can no longer return.

War is the originator of a new kind of “revolution”, which is placed outside of the ideal perimeter defined by the idea of progress and emancipation and which finds its model of reference in the ‘89 revolution, but which cannot be hastily dismissed, for the Italian case, as simple counterrevolution. Our narrative route must start from this original event where we find the “origins” of fascism. Alongside the process of seizing power, which has interlaced unlawful and lawful parliamentary actions, and the analysis of the transformation of the regime into open and totalitarian dictatorship, we want to fully analyse the relationship between regime and Italian society, the mass consensus to dictatorship, above all of the middle classes, the ideology, the nature and functions of the single party, the leadership role of Mussolini, the nature of modernisation generated by totalitarian, interventionist and corporative policies. It must be crystal clear that this “journey through Italy” is not made to sweeten the ruthless hardship of the dictatorship – it will suffice to refer to colonial domination to have an exemplary manifestation – into a sort of good-natured remembrance of a common “the way we were”, but rather to penetrate the deep mechanisms of the creeping fascism of the Italian society, which should be neither hidden nor underestimated, above all to understand how much they would have survived the regime which had set it in motion.

Italian fascism fully belonged to the political family of totalitarianism. Italian historiography, instead, has been reluctant to abandon the belief that fascism was a sort of “Italian style” reactionary regime not comparable to Stalinism or Nazism. This is above all, because internally it did not live the experience of the concentration and extermination camp, and because it was not a pure terror regime.

The documentation on fascism is huge and distributed in an outstanding quantity of archives and libraries, but most are known deposits, registered and perfectly ordered for consultation. To realise the Documentation and interpretation centre the group of researchers must, therefore, based on the project, do a considerable work of excavation selecting several privileged places.

The study of the flows and routes, based on concepts of simplification, recognition and accessibility, and analysed for single visits and group visits, has led to the suggestion of placing the entrance at basement level, with access at a height from the rear where the ticket desk, the cloakroom and the toilets will be located. It will then occupy three levels, starting the visit from the last floor of the building from where it will slowly re-descend the central eye-catching staircase with a spectacular and theatrical look and distribute sheets to the various levels according to the different historical and cultural themes, in an overwhelming climax of narration. Having re-descended through the various exhibition rooms to the entrance on the basement floor, the visitors can then be directed to the first ramp of the central staircase on the ground floor to access the bookshop and the exit onto piazza Marconi.

The choice of the Technical and Scientific Committee to reduce the quantity of objects to put on show and re-conduct the exhibition primarily to the narration of historical facts and moments through videos, images, words and original documents, directs the fit-out project towards a multimedia approach with a high-tech component.

It has been tried to set the complexity of the exhibition theme against a schematisation of the narration based on chronological clearness and a division into thematic areas: each level of the exhibition route, each theme, though articulated using different devices, will be characterised by the presence of the critical contribution of a historian (using hologram technology) who gives the visitor the historiographic judgement on the facts, and by a story of the facts and of the characters through reproduction of photos, videos and historical documents with multimedia tools and different supports. The holograms are made using the "Pepper ghost" technique, in which images and texts are projected through a monitor or a pico-projector onto a transparent screen. The holographic effect realises images "in suspension" which, though projected onto a two-dimensional plane, appear to the visitor as evanescent and "three-dimensional".

Entering the large room of the first floor, the panelling covers the perimeter walls of all floors telling a chronological story that represents the society of the 20s and how it lived the first decade of the regime's life, from the Great War to colonialism, through the indirect testimony of characters, documents and historical facts.

At the end of the route of the first floor, the room welcomes a mezzanine floor of self-supporting furnishings, a special section of the exhibition that narrates arts and culture under the Fascist period. Introduced by the comment of historians, the route of the mezzanine floor winds through *themed islands* that refer to literature, science, university, theatre, architecture and painting. At the end of the mezzanine floor, the gear extrusion pin creates a closed volume, to host immersive screenings and videos able to bear witness to the cinema art of the Fascist period, from the cinema of white phones to those of propaganda.

On the ground floor, after a comparison between the Fascist inspired movements which spread internationally, we enter the section which tells of the construction of the social control machine, through an immersive room in which the visitor has direct experience of the sense of anguish and frustration connected to the themes of censorship, of the repressive machine connected to the creation of the OVRA (Organisation for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism) and of the special Court of the Miniculpop. The room presents itself as a dark environment, with a chair at the centre, illuminated by a cone of light. The chair represents the place of questioning. Approaching the chair, the visitor enters a sound cone from where he/she can listen to the audio of a real questioning. During the listening, on the walls opposite the chair, the images relating to the contents of the questioning light up in turn. The system allows infinite possibilities of combinations of images, videos and sounds, making the concept flexible and incremental in the contents. The route continues with two rooms in which the perimeter walls represent the theory of the internal wall fit-outs with the presence of the holograms of historians that tell the social and imperial history, and arrives into the semi-circular prow of the room, with the story of the Empire and the Race, from the

conquest of Ethiopia to the Spanish civil war, anticipating the World War introduced by the audio of the speech of Palazzo Venezia with the 1940 declaration of war.

In the basement, the visitor enters directly into the horror of the Second World War, followed in its chronological and geographical progress, in a continuous sense of oppression that is also given by the low effective height of the floor.

To conclude the historical story, an immersive room with the eye and the voice of the crowd goes back over several salient moments of the historical route, which is the object of the exhibition, from the birth to the fall of the regime, in an alienating experience through the perspective of the crowd which the visitor feels part of.

In the last room, two multimedia walls are set against each other describing the post-war period: the ruins and the destruction of the landscape and of the conscience caused by fascism and the resurgence of freedom and democracy.

The estimated cost of the complete fit-out amounts to €1,917,000.00

Scientific Committee

Prof. Marcello Flores (coordinator)

Dr. Patrizia Asproni

Prof. Claudia Baldoli,

Prof. Roberto Balzani

Prof. Ruth Ben Ghiat

Prof. Lorenzo Bertucelli

Prof. Gustavo Corni

Prof. Alberto De Bernardi

Dr. Carlo Giunchi

Prof. Giovanni Gozzini

Dr. Daniele Jalla

Prof. Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci

Prof. Enrico Menduni

Prof. Serge Noiret

Prof. Maurizio Ridolfi

Prof. Javier Rodrigo Sanchez

Work group

Prof. Alberto De Bernardi

Prof. Marcello Flores

p.i. Massimo Gardini

Prof. Giovanni Gozzini

Dr. Carlo Greppi

Prof. Patrizia Marti

Arch. Andrea Milani

Secretary

Dr. Elena Bignami