

## CHAPTER 9

# The RiMaflow Project

### *A Laboratory to Study the New Cultural Meanings of Industrial Places*

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This chapter proposes an investigation on the socioeconomic and spatial transformations that followed the decommissioning of an automotive production plant in the southern outskirts of Milan. The production stoppage, due to a relocation policy, obviously had an impact on the workers, who (as often happens) found themselves at a crossroads: they could either follow the production plant abroad or remain in Italy without an income for their family. In this specific case, they chose a third way by occupying the empty factory and starting a completely original process of industrial regeneration.

This case study presents many elements of interest, which can be studied from economic, social and cultural points of view. The geographical perspective of this study focuses on its value for introducing a practice that is capable of activating a type of place making acting in tension with local government and with factory owners. In particular, the case study shows how an industrial site can assume a specific cultural value based on the creative performances of the actors that actually become performances of the place. Through qualitative interviews with local actors, factory workers and people who are involved in the process, this chapter aims at studying a peculiar postindustrial place in a performative sense by focusing on bottom-up practices for the refunctionalization of an automotive factory. The attempt is

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to understand the new meanings that this place is taking on in relation to the performances of the actors of a nonconventional refunctionalization process.

## **Theoretical Insights**

The idea that place making has both economic and cultural value is well established in social studies (Lash and Urry 1994; Molotch 2002; Rota and Salone 2014). From a geographical point of view, this awareness entails focusing research not only on objective data but also on the discursive practices that are activated by the actors who are engaged in spatial processes. It also means searching for space beyond space and endowing it with fundamental value from a sociopolitical point of view (Soja 1971; Massey 2005).

This theoretical and methodological approach finds its roots in a school of thought that dates back to the 1970s and that we can investigate starting from two main theoretical axes of reference: humanistic geography and the territorial approach. The former is focused on human experience, awareness and knowledge. Humanistic geography aims at exploring material, immaterial and representational dynamics of spatial construction of places (Tuan 1974, 1976; Buttimer 1990). The territorial approach stems from the numerous studies that have been carried out in Italy (Vallega 2004; Magnaghi 2009; Saquet 2012) and proposes a specific elaboration of the concept of territory, understood not only as basic spatial data on which human groups act, but also as the result of a process (referred to as territorialization) that is constantly reproduced. From this point of view, a territory is no longer just a portion of the earth's surface or a stage for action, but rather a place of internal and external relations (on a small and large scale), an open space that undergoes constant transformation (Muscarà 1967). The territorial approach is rooted in the thinking of Gottmann (1973) and Deleuze and Guattari (1972), and derives from the study of the problems of sustainable development by emphasizing the central value of local heritage (in its environmental, urban, cultural and social components) as a fundamental element for the sustainable production of wealth. Territory is conceived as the historical product of long lasting co-evolutionary processes involving human settlement and environment that have been enacted by subsequent and stratified cycles of civilization. These processes produce places that are highly complex living systems with their own specific identity, typological characteristics and strong individuality. The Italian geographical scientific community first elaborated this approach in an original way in the groundbreaking works of Raffestin (1981, 1984), Dematteis (1985) and Turco (1988).

These studies have particularly stressed the importance of the political dimension of the territory, that is, the result of a process of appropriation of

space through the use and control of its resources. Territory can therefore be the result of a collective resistance against the dynamics of power that aims at controlling space based on new practices of structuring and symbolization (Magnaghi 1976). All this is useful in order to investigate some specific developments that have taken place in cultural geography in recent years (Jackson 2016). They have placed landscapes at the centre of as a category of thought that enables us to read territorial dynamics that are in progress, as well as their opening up to the simultaneous interpretation of social, cultural and territorial dimensions (Cosgrove 1984). In this context, the metaphor of the theatre has taken on a key role according to which all actors in the territory interact by implementing creative practices that give meaning to places (Turri 1998; Turco 2012). This leads to the need to adopt a performative approach (Gregson and Rose 2000) aimed at studying how subjects (considered as social and cultural actors) activate spatial processes to construct places that increasingly overlap with dynamics of power.

These interpretations of territorial processes allow the substantially unstable character of space (Thrift 2003) to be highlighted, thus demonstrating how the creativity of territorial actors sometimes exceeds the limits of representations, cognitions and discourses. This explains the increase in discussions about the need for a nonrepresentational or more-than-representational approach (Thrift 2008), whose overarching aim is to interpret the material dynamism of acted and performed interaction between humans and space, which are carried out through creative acts. Starting from this point, a further theoretical development is aimed at directing the research by opening up to a multisensorial approach for the interpretation of narratives (Lorimer 2005). The main point is to study territorial processes by analysing their evident manifestations within the surrounding landscape, trying to go beyond the representations themselves. As territorial theory has clearly explained in past years (Raffestin 2005), a strong bilateral relationship exists between landscape and territory because the former is the result of the territorial project, but at the same time, it is a specific idea of landscape, and this could be the reason why a specific territory is planned and eventually built. For this reason, landscape is no longer just an abstract concept or a representation, but rather a concrete object capable of inspiring and modifying the territorial project (Quaini 2006). Furthermore, approaching a landscape and trying to go beyond its meaning as the mere representation of territory implicates the consideration of its material dimension as a body that interacts with many other corporealities, thereby producing performances that can be directly attributed to places. By considering landscapes in this way, we can therefore study place performances that derive from a specific sense of place. When a landscape provides a sense of identity (Carolan 2008) in the local community, it becomes an

instrument for the appropriation of space because it transforms it into acted space and fosters its corporal embodiment.

Specific territorial-based place performances are therefore occasions to strengthen a bond with places themselves. By surpassing the idea of landscape as a mere representation, we can study how specific place performances can produce meanings that become parts of a territorial project because they are the effects of creative actions that disrupt consolidated schemes and propose new ways to create fondness for places (Waterton 2019).

All this is particularly significant in the case of postindustrial places because they are relevant examples of spaces that are involved in the Territorialization–Deterritorialization–Reterritorialization (TDR) process (Raffestin 1981). This is a prevalently economic phenomenon, but at the same time, it is a social and cultural opportunity to find new ways to relate to places through the creation of new methods of appropriation of space and to build affective relationships. From this perspective, a landscape assumes a specific role and becomes the expression of an affective relationship between local people and places that stems from a sense of belonging and the cultural appropriation of space resulting from concrete territorial actions and subjective feelings (Carolan 2008). Humanistic geography in this way becomes relevant again through a more-than-representational approach (Lorimer 2005) to study subjective and collective perceptions, performances and material practices (Anderson and Harrison 2010). The case study of RiMaflow offers an interesting point of discussion in relation to the creative actions and performances expressed by workers.

## **The Recovered Factories in the Italian Context**

The RiMaflow case study could be considered as a Workers' Buyout (WBO) experience. WBOs occur when a group of employees of a company undertake its buyout or even rescue it from difficulties (Borzaga 2015). This could result in a restructuring or in a conversion and in the transfer of the full or partial ownership of the company to the employees. WBOs emerge as the result of a bottom-up procedure intended to find solutions to processes of deindustrialization and to the issues of unemployment emerging with the end of the traditional industrial era and during economic crisis. Two aspects of WBOs are of greater interest: the attribution of new meanings to space through the reuse of the industrial sites, thanks to what was defined as a 're-territorialization of the economy' (Martini and Vasquez Pizzi 2015: 1996); and the emergence of new forms of social organization based on cooperatives of workers. WBOs did not emerge only in Italy, but it is quite common abroad. The most noteworthy movement is the *Empresas Recuperadas*

por sus Trabajadores (Companies Recovered by Their Workers) in Latin America (Vieta 2013), which started after the economic downturn in 2001 (Vigliarolo 2011).

After the economic crisis began in 2008, the number of WBOs increased in Southern European countries as a way to recover from job loss and company shutdowns, and in general to limit community degrowth (Azzellini 2014). Since 2010, France, Spain and Italy have thus witnessed a growth of startups and cooperatives of workers emerging from buyouts of firms in difficulty. In Italy, a large number of WBOs were implemented by the creation of cooperatives of workers, starting before the 2008 economic downturn. Some cases could be traced back to three decades ago after the 1985 Marcora Law<sup>1</sup> (L. 49/85) on the financing of cooperatives. Monni et al. (2017), in their research on WBOs in Italy, account for 250 cases from 1986 to 2016. After a first boost given by the Marcora Law, the phenomenon became less popular, particularly after pronouncements by the European Union that severely limited the effectiveness of public financing of cooperatives, in contrast to the rules of effective economic competition. After 2001, the number of cases rose again, caused by a revision of the Marcora law (l. 57/2001), which limited public funding of WBOs in accordance to European regulations.

Later on, the decrease in the number of WBOs was also connected to the economic downturn that began in 2008. The evolution of this phenomenon in Italy is related to the increase in unemployment, which was particularly severe after 2008 (Vieta and Depedri 2015); the phenomenon of WBOs is not homogeneous in Italy for the typologies and the territorial distribution. Vieta and Depredi (2014) noted different types of WBOs in Italy according to the process of creation and the internal management more or less based on cooperative principles. Moreover, it is possible to point out a regional differentiation: a greater occurrence in the regions of the north and the centre (Monni et al. 2017) could be related to the peculiarities of an industrial context that was more permeable to grassroots innovations (Antonazzo 2018). Among the WBOs, it is possible to individuate many different models. While some are tending towards production, in order to respond to the danger of job losses, others are implementing new business models and participating in wider social movements (Azzellini 2016). In this respect, some cases are less focused on the idea of a recovered factory and instead on the concept of recovered social places. For de Nardis and Antonazzo, 'in these cases what counts is not the actual production of means, but much more the production of economic alternatives and the production of social and symbolic capital' (de Nardis and Antonazzo 2017: 119); therefore, WBOs take part in wider processes of social innovation and struggle. The case of RiMaflow in Trezzano sul Naviglio (Milan), due to its history and specificity, is one of the most representative examples of these aspects in Italy.

## The Case Study: RiMaflow

### *The Territorial Context*

RiMaflow represents a peculiar experience enclosed in a specific context. The territorial context is Lombardia, one of the most industrialized areas in Italy, which has been affected by the impact of industrial delocalization and by the economic downturn of the last few decades. According to Unioncamere Lombardia (the regional Chambers of Commerce), the number of active businesses in the traditional industries has been constantly decreasing for a decade, which has nowadays stabilized at a -1.2% annual decrease.<sup>2</sup> RiMaflow is located in Trezzano sul Naviglio, a municipality of the Metropolitan City of Milan located approximately nine kilometres southwest of the city centre, along the roads connecting Milan to Vigevano. The area of Trezzano sul Naviglio is a heavily industrialized one, characterized not only by a relevant permanence of productive industrial plants, but also by an increasing presence of service and commercial activities. The location significantly affects the ongoing processes of transformation. We could state that the geographical context has both positive and negative effects on the outcome of this experience. Trezzano sul Naviglio is part of the South Milan Agricultural Park, a natural park that preserves small rural areas within urbanized areas between the southwestern and the southeastern Milan metropolitan area (Ferraresi 2009). There is a high density of green areas and cultivated fields very close to the industrial area where the company is located. Finally, it is possible to take into account the role of the 'Ndrangheta (the Calabrian mafia), which is present in Lombardy and particularly in this area. The presence of the 'Ndrangheta has effects on political, economic, social and thus territorial activities (Meli 2015; Venturini and Branchi 2017).

### *The History of the Firm*

RiMaflow is the last phase of a forty-year-long transformation of an industrial plant established in Trezzano sul Naviglio in the beginning of the 1970s. In 1973, the Murray company was established by two partners (Giorgio Sommariva and Roberto Marchetti) who were active in the production of the automotive parts. Production experienced rapid growth and with some changes to the name and the ownership in 2004, the plant became part of Maflow. Maflow is a global leader in the production of tubes for air-conditioning systems. The Trezzano sul Naviglio plant was the head of a transnational company with twenty-three plants across the world. In 2009, however, a crisis began – a crisis that was not to be attributed to production, but to fraudulent bankruptcy and bad management. Since 2009, the plant had been gradually dismantled and relocated to Poland, which was necessary to maintain crucial production for the automotive sector for companies such



**Figure 9.1.** The entrance of the RiMaflow, Italy, 2017. © G. Zanolin

as BMW. In brief, after four years of trade union negotiations, the Italian plant was closed in 2013 and dismantled, with every removable part taken out. Our interviewees stated that they found the factory completely empty one day, and the location to which the material was taken to remains unknown. In 2013, the RiMaflow cooperative was established, gathering many former Maflow workers. The cooperative was born according to the strategy of the Marcora Law, but with a fundamental difference. According to the Marcora Law, the employees should become owners of the plant; in the case of RiMaflow, the workers instead occupied the premises, intentionally exceeding the scope foreseen by the Law.

Since the very beginning, RiMaflow has appeared as an innovative experience in the Italian context. More than 100 workers created a project that differed from the traditional labour struggles and was not led by the unions (Coscia and Perbellini 2014). In this case, it was the workers who started the process, with a bottom-up initiative, in contrast and in opposition to the owner and the government. This resulted in a legitimate organization illegally managing activities inside the industrial building. After the failure of the company, the buildings that were home to the plant were acquired by Unicredit Bank and by a leasing society as part of the company liquidation. The bank ultimately filed a lawsuit against the workers' cooperative for their

occupancy of the properties, starting a dispute that is still ongoing, although in November 2018, the two parties reached an agreement, with the workers moving their activities to a location in agreement with the owner. The new building is not far from the original one: this means that the territorial context might remain the same.

The RiMaflow workers foster a project that, compared with other experiences in Italy, is not restricted to the rehabilitation of the former production, but is also intended for the creation of new activities in the plant area. Thus, the focus is on the reutilization of the industrial area in Trezzano sul Naviglio and its opening as a new place for socialization. As a matter of fact, RiMaflow is a WBO experience devoted 'to join forces with other sectors, such as the solidarity economy and social movements, in building non-capitalist relations' (Azzellini 2016: 11).

### *The Activities in RiMaflow*

From the very beginning, the project expressed a specific vocation and an evident political intent to refunctionalize a manufacturing plant in an ecological way: on the one hand, by giving value to the workers' knowhow; and, on the other hand, by opening up to new activities which might generate revenue for the families, while at the same time, engaging the territory in ecological and social activities. The old plants of Maflow in Trezzano include three main buildings hosting different kinds of activities (Balduzzi 2018). The first building hosts the Cittadella dell'Altra Economia (Citadel of the Alternative Economy), offering spaces to artisan workshops that cannot afford other locations. Artisans are not asked to pay rent, but are expected to contribute to the general expenses. Users of the Cittadella, while sharing spaces in the building, also have the opportunity to exchange ideas and competences: the space emerges as a bottom-up business incubator, implementing the models of cooperation and mutual help. The second building is currently a garage for caravans, an activity intended to generate extra income to support the activities of the cooperative. The third building is devoted to the continuation of the mainstream activity of the former business, the recycling and reuse of waste material, such as paper, plastic and aluminium. This activity, as will be explained below, is currently on hold. Some areas of the RiMaflow plant are devoted to socialization and include a cafeteria and a small canteen for the workers. These areas frequently host cultural activities, performances, conferences and plays, which are very popular with the residents of the area and interested audiences from other cultural and social contexts.

The progressive opening of RiMaflow as an open and inclusive space, oriented towards socialization, allowed the cooperative to join the Fuorimercato project.<sup>3</sup> Fuorimercato is a network of agricultural producers (mainly



producers of citrus fruits) who guarantee mutual support for activities aiming to resist the pervasiveness of the large-scale retail trade. The network tries to shorten the food production chain and guarantee a fair income for producers and farm workers, while keeping the commercial competitiveness of the products at market levels. The creation of the Fuorimercato network has projected RiMaflow's activities in the food sector onto a national scale.

Furthermore, in collaboration with associations led by Libera,<sup>4</sup> a project has been set up to reuse the fields reclaimed from criminal organizations in order to grow organic hop plants. This project addresses the growing need for artisanal breweries, a burgeoning sector in the Italian market. What is evident is the quest of the producers for niches in production that they may occupy, in a modest but not necessarily ineffectual way. In the same field, there is the construction of an organic malt house, the only one in northern Italy apart from those in the valleys surrounding Bologna. These activities open this industrial plant to the territory in a multiscale dimension, stimulating relations and collaborations with nearby areas, but at the same time aiming at the national and global contexts. What is even more interesting is the impact on the local territory of collateral activities performed within the Cittadella dell'Altra Economia. Though they may seem marginal at first glance, they are actually fundamental in establishing RiMaflow as an active territorial actor that is both multifunctional and multilevel.

A wide range of activities shows the ability of this project to give space to the performances of different actors that find room in the spaces once occupied by the production line for the automotive sector. As mentioned above, inside the Cittadella, there are many handicraft laboratories dealing with the reuse of disused tools (such as electrical appliances or pieces of furniture), but also rehearsal and recording studios for musicians, as well as a dog area for a local association called Agility. These examples show how RiMaflow applies the idea of mutualism through workers in practical terms; in fact, it strives to be an example of a no-owner factory, self-managed by the workers' cooperative and able to involve local actors in its activities: not just a productive place, but also a social place. In comparison with the recycling activity, this is obviously marginal, but it highlights the ability of RiMaflow to be a benchmark for local development and, as a consequence, for all the bottom-up activities facing economic problems due to the speculative mechanisms driven by globalization and the concentration of the economic and political power in the hands of just a few of big world companies. The productive space is redefining itself, starting from resilient practices promoted by concerned actors aware of their role in a socioeconomic and territorial context that is quickly redefining itself. In this way, what is taking shape is a social place that is of use to local communities but is also open to regional, national and global processes.



**Figure 9.2.** An example of the creative reuse of productive spaces in RiMaflow.  
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### *The Current Crisis*

RiMaflow is an innovative project, which gives new life to an area stripped of its original functions, configuring itself as a true process of reterritorialization. This process took place thanks to the creation of a heterogeneous set of economic activities, which found a location in RiMaflow, while they are mostly marginalised by traditional production cycles. This is the case for the experimental activity in recycling of raw materials, the artisans' workshops in the Cittadella dell'Altra Economia and the participation in anti-capitalist networks such as Fuorimercato; a set of activities that hardly fit the rules of standardized production systems and established labour law regulations. It must also be noted that the occupation of the plant, which is currently owned by Unicredit Bank, is per se an illegal act.

As noted above, after the failure of Maflow in 2013, the buildings in which the plant was located were acquired by Unicredit Bank, one of the most important investment banks in Italy, and by a leasing society as part of the company liquidation. The bank, from the very beginning, opposed the workers' occupancy by filling a lawsuit against the cooperative. Besides the legal action, the bank made several attempts to force the occupants to leave the RiMaflow premises. In fact, the set of activities carried out by RiMa-

flow's workers are performed without any authorization by the owners of the buildings. The formal actor, in order to carry out the workers' activities, is legally constituted and registered as a workers' cooperative. There are twenty members of the cooperative, but more than a hundred people are involved in its activities. It is thus a blurred context: it exists in a formally and legally recognized framework for commercial and entrepreneurial activities, but it is localized in an illegal context because of the conflict over the property. We are not able to know in depth the details of the ongoing contracts or business relations between the cooperative and larger number of workers, collaborators, volunteers, supporters and customers involved. However, as RiMaFlow is a legally constituted cooperative its members are the bodies responsible for every activity, including the contested appropriation of the building.

Notwithstanding its limitations, the RiMaflow project has been increasingly supported by citizens and institutional actors who appreciate its innovativeness and its importance as an experiment,<sup>5</sup> as well as for its impact on the local territory and for its symbolic aspects. Despite this widespread support, so far there has been no solution to the question of the ownership of the plant and the RiMaflow activities were threatened by eviction from the legal owner. In early November 2018, while resisting an eviction attempt, workers tried to negotiate a settlement with the bank. The event received significant attention from RiMaflow supporters and the press, and so in order to avoid the situation having a negative impact on its public image, the bank stopped the eviction. As this step involved the police authorities, they were able to organize talks between the bank and the cooperative, which resulted in an agreement. The bank finally proposed that the cooperative could purchase another industrial building in the area. The building into which RiMaflow will be moving into is being bought thanks to the financial support of different community organizations, foundations and individual supporters. Nevertheless, we might envisage a positive outcome with the continuation of the RiMaflow experience in a formally coherent and definitive framework.

## Discussion

This chapter presents fieldwork that was carried out with the aim of analysing the peculiarities of an industrial location due to the creative actions of local actors following a surprising factory closure. Following a more-than-representational approach (Lorimer 2005), this chapter has concentrated on the bodily, material and discursive performances that were activated by local actors. Although the workers had been excluded from territorial processes

due to the closure of the factory, they were able to reappropriate the territory's industrial spaces and transform them into areas that were not only productive spaces but also social and cultural places (Jackson 2016). The workers transformed RiMaflow into a place with a specific identity not only for the workers themselves, but also for other people in different territories. This is therefore an example of a multiscale effect because the RiMaflow model is spreading at the regional, national and international levels as an alternative way to refunctionalize a postindustrial place. All this has been accomplished despite political actions aiming to expel the workers and closing the factory for good. For this reason, RiMaflow may be described as a singular experience of territory transformation (reterritorialization, as seen above) in spite of the dynamics of power at work within the territory (Raffestin 1981).

What we have presented is the first step of a study devoted to investigating the performances of a group of workers who were involved in the transformation of a factory into a new kind of productive and social place that is connected to the territory in which it is located (Lash and Urry 1994; Molotch 2002). After a few years of activity, the performances of the local actors are assuming a wider meaning, pervading the landscape and endowing the place with a role of a subject with a specific identity (Azzellini 2016). Therefore, we can claim that RiMaflow is becoming a place that is capable of activating subjective and social performances, and is now considered an active part that contributes to the complexity of the territory thanks to the activities of its actors. We studied the RiMaflow project and focused on the practices that were performed by the various actors who were involved in an original refunctionalization process that is taking on an increasingly symbolic and socioeconomic importance within the Italian and international contexts. The results in this chapter refer specifically to this case study, which presents unique elements, at least within the Italian context. Nevertheless, some general remarks may be drawn from this study based on the theoretical framework presented above.

As it has come to define itself throughout the last two centuries, industrialization is the result of a reterritorialization process that is not limited to manifestations in the morphological features of the landscape (Raffestin 2005). Indeed, it has promoted a redefinition of technical, economic, social and cultural aspects that define the current meaning that is attributed (often in a nostalgic way) to industrial landscapes (Rota and Salone 2014). The decline of industries in Western countries has complicated the interpretation of those landscapes because it has redefined an entire value system that has constructed a narration that was so effective for decades as to defend the entire self-representational system of the local communities of workers and the nations' so-called industrial countries and self-promoted as leaders in the globalized market (Rossi and Vanolo 2010). As a result, the

industrial decline has led to a redefinition of industrial spaces both in relation to their structures and the connotations that are attributed to factories and industrial employment. Such transformations interact with the complex system of immaterial values that define the significant narrative structure of deindustrialized or postindustrialized landscapes. Raffestin (2006) stated that landscapes are the instrument that triggers the shift from reality to representation, as well as being an instrument of knowledge that is necessary to understand reality. However, when analysing postindustrial spaces today, limiting oneself to studying the representations and material and immaterial features of a landscape is no longer sufficient. This case study could be read as a laboratory for studying postindustrial landscapes from a more-than-representational perspective (Waterton 2019). The aim is to understand how specific and concrete practices can contribute to giving new meanings to a place by projecting it into a new dimension as an actor of the territory. From this perspective, the place assumes a specific corporeality by virtue of its ability to activate emotions and affect not only the people who are directly involved in the process (the former workers in the case of RiMaflow), but also a large number of people who find opportunities to look at the world in different ways. This case also produces a wider effect, because single and specific experiences like that of RiMaflow may represent an opportunity to adopt a divergent viewpoint. We are aware that RiMaflow is just a case study, but we think that it demonstrates that reterritorialization can happen through bottom-up creative acts and not only through plans imposed in a top-down manner.

The case of RiMaflow is peculiar because workers have found a specific strategy to cooperate and find a valid source of support in organized civil society (trade unions, associations, etc.). This effect is based on a performance involving traditional values connected to industrial landscapes (and referred to as nostalgic performance) and current values deriving from postindustrial landscapes (and referred to as creative performance). More specifically, because the promoters of the project are former industrial workers, they were able to become actors in a performance that was inspired by the industrial age by involving social actors who were historically bound to the labour movement (e.g. trade unionists, active citizens in popular movements and political actors). They are currently supporting a form of nonviolent resistance movement to consolidated subjects in positions of power (e.g. the local conservative political party, organized criminal associations with economic interests in these places and the owners of the former factory buildings) that are trying to shut down the RiMaflow project. At the same time, these former workers' actions are not simply past-oriented, for they have become creative actors who are aware of the social and territorial processes of contemporaneity and are capable of activating new performances that are

inspired by the postindustrial model through the various projects described above. This virtuous process was driven by the workers' essential needs or rather by the pressing need to invent a job in order to support their families. Thanks to a network of international contacts and therefore to the example of other similar experiences around the world,<sup>6</sup> they have reinvented the sense of place (Tuan 1974) through the reorganization of their work. In this way, they promote their specific role as protagonists of an experience that may be presented as an experiment for a potentially innovative way of developing the industrial sector in the twenty-first century not merely as a productive space, but also as a place that is open to territorial activities and the social and cultural needs of the resident population.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter, we proposed RiMaflow as a case study to understand how and why we should study creative processes of refunctionalization by expanding our point of view beyond productive aspects. RiMaflow is a unique example of a place acted upon by creative actors, whose relationship with local governments and factory owners has endowed it with a specific role within the industrial landscape of the southern suburbs of Milan. The former workers are not only proposing an alternative way to produce earnings for themselves,<sup>7</sup> but are also enacting an idea. In fact, after confirming a deal in November 2018 (see above), the RiMaflow project is moving from its original location to a new building not far from the original one to continue its economic, social and cultural activities. The project is expanding and becoming stronger; as we have seen, it was initially the place (the factory) itself that gave meaning to the project, but in its new location, RiMaflow (i.e. the actors and the ideas they promote) is giving meaning to the new place (the new building). This case study is also exceptional because it is a hybrid subject that is generated from the performances of creative actors in a concrete territory and with concrete needs in terms of wages. It represents a greater meaning and, as such, is an opportunity for the reconfiguration of postindustrial places by endowing them with new productive and affective meanings.

The territorialization–deterritorialization–reterritorialization process (Deleuze and Guattari 1972) is complete, not only because of its economic activities, but also because of the cultural and social processes that have been activated. RiMaflow is now part of the landscape of the southern suburbs of Milan and a place with a specific identity that stems from the performances of local actors and from their subjective emotions (Tuan 1976). Actors' performances and concrete practices (Anderson and Harrison 2010) therefore take on a specific role in the territory as the result of an alternative collective ef-

fort, aimed at controlling space to resist to the dynamics of power (Magnaghi 1976).

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## Notes

1. The Marcora Law promoted the creation of cooperatives by the laid-off workers of companies in crisis. The cooperatives were supported by special funds for the financing of projects for the recovery of firms, provided a share of co-financing by workers on a ratio of 3:1 between the amounts provided by the government and the funds provided by workers.

2. Retrieved 12 April 2021 from

[http://www.unioncamerelombardia.it/images/file/OE%20Imprese/DEMO\\_TOT\\_1\\_2018.pdf](http://www.unioncamerelombardia.it/images/file/OE%20Imprese/DEMO_TOT_1_2018.pdf).

3. See [www.fuorimercato.com](http://www.fuorimercato.com).

4. Libera is a national association committed to the issues of legality, promoting projects against organized crime; see [www.libera.it](http://www.libera.it).

5. For example, the support given to RiMaflow by the local church and by the Archbishop of Milan Delpini, who visited the factory in May 2018, can be mentioned here (see <http://giornaledeinavigli.it/attualita/arcivescovo-delpini-alla-RiMaflow-non-soluzioni-sos-tegno>, retrieved 12 April 2021).

6. RiMaflow is drawn from the workers' mutual aid societies and many different experiences that occurred at the beginning of the workers' movement. It is related to similar

experiences of self-management at an international level, ranging from the Argentinean *fbricas recuperadas* to the Association pour l'autogestion francese (see, for example, [www.autogestion.asso.fr](http://www.autogestion.asso.fr)).

7. They are still working in the factory and earning sufficient wages thanks to the activities that are promoted in and by the factory, and through a solidarity network connecting them with all the actors who are involved in the RiMaflow project. The activities that are promoted within the factory generate a small income for the cooperative, which is distributed among the workers.

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