

# Back to the Future

## The Future in the Past



ICDHS 10<sup>th</sup>+1  
BARCELONA 2018

Conference Proceedings Book  
Oriol Moret (ed.)

*ICDHS 10<sup>th</sup>+1 Conference / Barcelona 2018*

## o Opening Pages



*In memory of Anna Calvera (1954–2018)*

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IN MEMORY OF ANNA CAROLINE NI  
(1924-2018)



*In memory of Anna Calvera*  
(1954–2018)



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# The Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe and its Cultural Legacy in the Industrial Cluster of Montebelluna (Treviso)

Design history / Italy / District and company museums / Regional identity / Manufacturing heritage

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Inaugurated in 1984 through the efforts of a local historian with the support of manufacturers who donated pieces important to a reconstruction of the history of this area of design, the Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe in Montebelluna became a depository of materials and observatory of the local situation. Changes in the global context, the delocalization of production, company re-organizations, led to a gradual marginalization of the Museum and its identity-building value for the cluster.

The first part of the paper reviews the history of the Montebelluna industrial cluster and the cluster museums within the Italian design system, highlighting the specificity of a region dedicated since the early nineteenth century to the design, production and marketing of technical equipment for sports and the mountains. The second part proposes a new role for the Museum, based on a joint academic study conducted in 2016 by Università Iuav di Venezia and Università Ca' Foscari.

Two propositions are developed: a methodology for a more focused enhancement of the existing legacy; and the development of a regional network that would expand the concept of museum to embrace the diffuse historical legacies of the cluster, manufacturing companies, outstanding landscapes and achievements in sports.

**The development of the Italian design and industrial cluster museum system.** Throughout the twentieth century, the development of the Italian design “system”—understood as an “organism” in which production is linked to a fitting context of technology, organization, management, distribution, marketing and culture—has been dependent on the characteristics of industrial growth in Italy which, though coming later than in much of the Western world, was essentially connoted by two phenomena.<sup>1</sup> The first was the expansion of large industry which, following several encouraging premises before the war and stimulated by the Olivetti model, began to define an Italian “style” recognized as both an industrial and aesthetic specificity of the product, which in the early 1970s however entered a phase of complex transformation. The second was the development of an industrial fabric of medium, small and micro manufacturing companies, concentrated in industrial clusters located in specific geographical areas with a crafting tradition and distinct historic and cultural identities. Hinging on hand-crafting expertise, scant task fragmentation, manufacturing flexibility and the transmission of knowledge and skills within the community, these companies gradually became mechanized and industrialised (BECATTINI, 1998; COLLI, 2002). The limited structure typical of this cluster “model”, up until the more complex phase of internationalization, not only allowed these manufacturers to be particularly flexible in their organization and production, but also created the close bonds between entrepreneurs, designers and factory technicians that would lead to the development of Italian design pieces recognized the world over.

Given their nature as an “ecosystem” linked to an area, the clusters also asserted their identity by founding and supporting local museums entrusted with the preservation and dissemination of their history. Among the more than 80 institutions that may be classified as “industrial cluster museums”

(BULEGATO, 2008: 81–83), there are experiences that date back to the mid-nineteenth century, such as the Glass Museum in Murano founded in 1861, along with other more recent examples which cropped up in the early 1970s as interest in the preservation of industry archives intensified, and the concepts of diffuse museum and eco-museum began to spread. While cluster museums have grown in number since the 1990s, often thanks to the support manufacturers or trade associations provided to public institutions, since the onset of the new millennium they have begun to suffer the consequences of transformations that are impacting not only the companies but Italian society as a whole. Globalization and technological change are just some of the factors leading to the transformation of knowledge systems, the delocalization of production and design, changes in production chains and methods, which are becoming more flexible and independent of specific locations, and new modalities for trade. These factors are weakening the dynamic transmission of knowledge, skills, intellectual capacities and practices accumulated in these regions over time (CORÒ and MICELLI, 2006; RULLANI, 2015: 76–80). Conversely, the growing interest in history and in the meaning of products, and attention to the specific characteristics of the communities that express them as factors of identity and distinction on the international scene, carries with it a possible new role for cluster museums and archives as centres that can coalesce the entities that have developed around them.

Indeed, these structures can serve more diversified functions. They can reinforce their consolidated cultural responsibilities, such as the acquisition, conservation and display of historical artefacts, providing the advanced digital tools they need to create a network of collections physically preserved elsewhere.

And they can expand their educational thrust by anchoring their efforts to the transmission of the territory’s traditional

[1] Among the histories of industry with special attention to products see CREPAX, 2002.

design and production capabilities, with the aim of innovating logic and results, and serving as the conduits for operations geared to enhance the region's attractiveness for new businesses and tourism (GIRARDI, 2017).

**The SportSystem cluster of Montebelluna: a resource for design.** Inaugurated in 1984, the Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe was one of the first in Italy to exhibit the reality of an industrial cluster, Montebelluna in the province of Treviso, which had progressively become specialized in the design, production and marketing of technical equipment for sports and for the mountains (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 Exhibition dedicated to the diversified production of the 1980s–90s, Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe, Montebelluna, 2016 (courtesy Fiorella Bulegato).

Montebelluna developed as an urban centre in the 1870s, thanks to the combined effect of relocating the market to the flatlands outside the city walls, and the construction of new railway lines (DURANTE, 1997). The presence of the market, the strategic geographical position—between the locations that supplied raw materials (leather from Bassano and the Upper Vicentino area) and the basin of consumers for the finished products (based in the North-eastern Alps)—and the growing popularity of skiing and mountain sports, were the primary reasons for which, of all the hand-

crafting industries, it was the shoemakers who prevailed (Fig. 2).

The 1950s witnessed the early industrialization of the manufacturing companies, in response to the need for specific boots for skiing. An influential factor in triggering this transformation was no doubt the international world's attention to these products, especially the United States, following the Olympic Games held in Cortina d'Ampezzo in 1956. It was the following decade however, that brought the change in manufacturing and organizational techniques, as well as innovation in the design of the products. New concepts and products—often patented—included the flat sole, the double upper and the upper in plastic-covered leather, metal buckles, vulcanized soles, PVC injection-moulded soles, through the development in 1968 of the first ski boot made entirely out of injection-moulded plastic produced by Nordica (PEPE, 2008).

The use of plastics led to the complete industrialization of the manufacturing companies, determining a change in the scale of production, distribution and marketing, supported by the formation of supply chains of specialized sub-suppliers, complementary to the manufacturers of the finished products, and also located in nearby communities. The introduction in 1970 of the après-ski *Moon Boot*, a new product typology developed by Tecnica and still marketed today, bears witness to the creation of new market segments, corresponding to a capacity to differentiate models, as the criteria of function and performance progressively extended to other qualities deriving from their induction into the fashion system (Fig. 3).

This capacity to diversify production—from inline roller blades to snowboard boots, from trekking to city shoes—linked to the typical flexibility of the cluster organization, allowed manufacturing companies to weather the 1980s crisis, caused in part by strong international competition (Nike, Adidas, Salomon, to name the biggest). In the following decade, the largest companies, such as Benetton SportSystem, which by then had organized into groups, chose to delocalize production to countries with



Fig. 2 Page from the *Spini-Dolomite* catalogue for a leather ski boot, 1939 (courtesy Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe, Montebelluna).

lower labour costs, loosening their bonds with their native territories and opening a new phase of consideration on the value of roots.

It is not a coincidence that in 1957 the Compasso d'Oro, Italian design's most prized acknowledgment, was awarded to the *Slalom securit* ski boot, made of leather, designed by Cesarino Benso Priarollo and produced by La Dolomite, a company that won the award again in 1967 with the 4S model, also made out of leather and developed by its in-house technical department. This prize was also awarded in 1984 to the *AFS101* hiking boot designed by Vincenzo Di Dato, Paolo Zanotto with Nautilus Associati, and manufactured by Asolo.

Italian design historiography recognizes the innovative reach of the products from the early 1980s (GRASSI and



Fig. 3 Ambrosiano and Giancarlo Zanatta, *Moon Boot* après-ski, Tecnica, designed in 1970, Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe, Montebelluna, 2016 (courtesy Fiorella Bulegato).

PANSERA, 1980: 258) and has only recently taken up documenting them again, though not in great detail, as studies extend their reach towards other areas of Italian design beyond the more closely scrutinized sectors of furniture, housewares and means of transportation (DURANTE V., 2004; BASSI, 2007: 200–201; MORTEO, 2008: 326; RICCINI, 2018: 469, 481–482).

### The Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe in Montebelluna

The gaps in the historiography on this theme may also be the result of how the Museum was planned. Inaugurated on 4 November 1984 at Villa Zuccareda Binetti, the Museum grew out of an intuition by Aldo Durante, a professor of literature and local historian who served as director through 2013. He was involved at that time in local government, and found a venue for the collection that he himself had begun by collecting pieces from private citizens, former employees, manufacturing companies and retail stores.<sup>2</sup> This initiative remained primarily an amateur effort though worthy on two counts, because it saved many historical legacies that might otherwise have been destroyed, and was able to operationally involve the economic activities of the territory. Two years later, when the companies in the cluster constituted the eponymous Association which became a Foundation in 1992, they began to promote the Museum, and between 1996 and 2001, the renovation of the museum spaces were funded by a large group of businesses—including the Benetton Group, Diadora, Dolomite, Geox, Lotto Sport Italia, Rossignol Lange, Adidas–Salomon, Stonefly, Tecnica, Vibram—with the support of other local entities.<sup>3</sup> This is one of the few Italian cluster museums largely supported by private business.

The Museum reopened in 2001, exhibiting over 2000 pieces displayed in chronological order along a path that begins on the second floor with the seventeenth-century postilion's boot made in Venice, and ends with the sports shoes manufactured within the cluster in the early 2000s. It thus became the primary depository of the cluster's history, gathering a variety of materials—such as models, prototypes, patents, moulds, individual components, samples of materials and finishes, equipment and photographs—relevant to the products' design, production and communication processes, or user experience. It is also the seat of a thematic library, a photo library and a collection of patents (Fig. 4).

In 2003, the regional law<sup>4</sup> officially recognized the SportSystem Cluster of Montebelluna, and the Museum officially became its operational centre. In the following years, it became a driving force for the territory, serving as an Observatory for its activities. However, the crisis in this area which began in the mid-1990s, and led in the following decade to an initial contraction of the industry, crystallised the work of the Museum which soon began to decline, as did the number of visitors.

**A new project for the Museum and the cluster's network of historic legacies.** The results of the analysis<sup>5</sup> made it possible not only to comprehend the current situation and structure of the museum, but also to discern a new course for the Museum based on a project to cultivate the



Fig. 4 Moulds and models, Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe, Montebelluna, 2016 (courtesy Antonella Ligios).

network of historic (and contemporary) legacies existing in the territory.

It should be noted that while the Museum has played an unparalleled role in preserving this legacy, it has yet to constitute a scientific organization, and consequently has yet to begin cataloguing the pieces; nor has it addressed the problem of their physical conservation (some have sustained damage). It thus remains a hybrid model, balanced between a museum of the city and an ethno-anthropological museum, choosing an exhibition method limited to showing pieces in display cases, with a rather ineffective system of captions. The concentration in the same spaces of the collections acquired over time has made the interpretation of its contents even less comprehensible to visitors.

The study also highlighted two possible situations for future development. The first is the agreement reached in 2016 between the Foundation of the Museum of the Ski Boot and Sports Shoe and the City of Montebelluna, which made the local Museum of Natural History and Archaeology responsible for the management, promotion and cultivation of the Museum's legacy.<sup>6</sup> Iuav was instrumental in the outcome of the early results, proposing a methodological approach to the arrangement and reorganization of the display for the exhibition *The Shoes of Champions*, inaugurated on 25 March 2017.<sup>7</sup> The shoes used by athletes to set records and win important sports challenges were repositioned along the museum itinerary and supplemented with materials from the archives that highlighted the manufacturing companies and the designers who conceived them, as well as the technology, the materials they used, the design and the ways they were advertised.<sup>8</sup>

[2] The entire process was reconstructed in DURANTE, 1997 and 2004; CHARANS, 2017a.

[3] The venue was leased by the City to the Foundation for 35 years in exchange for the renovation.

[4] Regional law n.8, 4 April 2003, that regulates the aggregations of supply chains, industrial clusters and projects for local industrial and manufacturing development.

[5] The FSE Project *Innovare il marketing territoriale dello Sportssystem: Museo reti, multimedialità, design*, 2015–16 (Iuav: E. Bonini Lessing, A. Bassi, F. Bulegato; Ca' Foscari: F. Panozzo; researchers: E. Charans (Iuav); E. Canel, M. Montagner, A. Stocco (Ca' Foscari) (PANAZZO, 2017)).

[6] Protocol of understanding, 4 May 2016.

[7] The concept for the exhibition was developed in a workshop involving university professors, museum executives, young designers and architects from the area and beyond.

[8] See [http://www.museodelloscarpone.it/la\\_mostra/](http://www.museodelloscarpone.it/la_mostra/) (last access 14.12.17).



[9] Telephone conversation between Sara Bertoldo, a luav research scholar, and Gloria Mazzarolo, daughter of the founder, 7 May 2018.

[10] Telephone conversation with Sara Bertoldo, 8 May 2018.

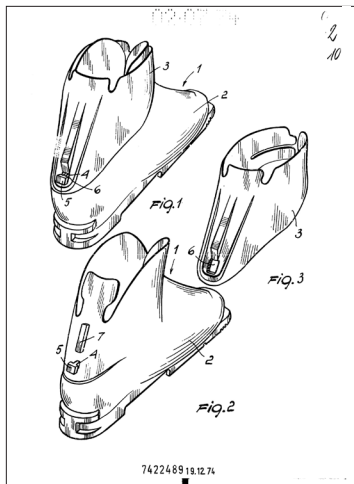


Fig. 5 Nordica di Franco Vaccari & C., Montebelluna, Plastic ski boot with connecting device, patent n. DE7422489, 19.12.1974 (courtesy private collection).

[11] In the territory of the Cluster, there are at least 32 sites of cultural interest, including 6 museums and 12 sites of natural significance. Furthermore, in the year 2016 there were 37 bicycle races, 4 mountain bike competitions and 30 running races, in addition to skating and golfing events.

The second situation resulted from the process of mapping historic legacies conducted by the research group, which discovered the loss of some significant sources but also came across several encouraging initiatives. On the one hand, they confirmed the validity of finding living witnesses who constitute valid oral sources, on the other they discovered other “depositories” of historic materials (CHARANS, 2017b), such as the archives being constituted by important manufacturing companies, for example, Lotto. In July 2014, this company began to build an archive of shoes to be used in-house, proceeding with a photographic campaign that served to inventory the circa 1700 models preserved at the company, dating from 1987 onwards but with some even earlier prototypes. Alpinestar is also collecting materials to build its own in-house Archives.<sup>9</sup> Other sources have been found in former employees and configure a network of personal and spontaneous micro-archives. Mariano Sartor or Giorgio Baggio, for example, who formerly worked in the product development offices at Nordica, are not only living witnesses, but have conserved a great deal of material, including patents, catalogues, press books, ski boot prototypes and components. Bruno Canel, a former technical director at Asolo, has kept the prototypes of the ski boot that won the Compasso d’Oro<sup>10</sup> (Fig. 5).

Both situations make it possible to conceive of a new central role for the Museum. The first as a place in which to test a new museological approach for exhibiting industrial products. By focusing on the reconstruction of the “stories” that revolve around the design of the product, it could facilitate the reconstruction of the context in which it was conceived, developed and used. Design can therefore become a key to the interpretation of the territory as a whole. The second would consider it as a venue in which to gather other historic and contemporary materials (the documentation for the past 15 years is currently missing) and above all, as a “manager” that could guarantee the scientific value of the activities of a network of entities distributed across the territory. It could overview the adequacy of the venues, the selection, conservation or cataloguing of the pieces, the presence of personnel specialized in this kind of work, and the use of the proper tools both to integrate the archiving processes into the everyday work of the manufacturing company, and to open these legacies for public consultation. The purpose is to offer a heritage organized for scholars and for a wider audience of enthusiasts, but mainly useful to the work of the participating company organizations, even as “inspiration” for new designs. This is a project that must necessarily involve design historians, archivists, IT experts and interaction designers, in light of the experiences that are advancing in the field of digital humanities.

### The SportSystem network

The renovation of the Museum would therefore be part of a new cultural strategy centred on a virtuous system of regional relationships, constituted by industry—in the twin role of manufacturers and guardians of their historical legacies—citizens and institutions—the Foundation, the City. But a comprehensive revitalization of the territory should also extend to local associations and be considered within the context of a natural environment that offers areas of interest for recreational activities, competitive sports, cultural events and tourism.

The study has also mapped the variety and density of the attractions in the area, considered in an ample perspective, all currently unrelated and incapable of establishing a relationship with the Museum:<sup>11</sup> from the historic city centres of Asolo and Possagno to the villa by Andrea Palladio at Maser, to the Brion tomb by Carlo Scarpa at San Vito di Altivole or the Tipoteca Fondazione Italiana at Cornuda, to name just a few. At the same time, the area is renowned for the practice of a wide variety of sports, running and cycling in particular, with routes departing from the Montello, and extending all the way to Monte Grappa.

In this context, design could play a strategic role in fostering a regional-scale intervention (FRANZATO, 2009) that would embrace and coordinate both top-down and bottom-up initiatives involving residents in different ways with different responsibilities. The question is not whether to design coherent visual identity projects, but rather to equip the territory with a diversified identity conceived as a system, gathering subjects of various natures (industrial, cultural and social), and potentially open to new additions over time. An identity that would not only celebrate its own past, but be dynamic and inclusive, ensuring the

recognisability of the network and attracting potential outside subjects and users, both cultural and commercial (BONINI LESSING, 2007).

This project, which places the Museum of the Ski Boot at the centre of the process, should also include design actions that improve physical and cultural accessibility to the region's heritage—contemplating projects that range from environmental wayfinding signage (at the urban scale or in confined spaces) to the realisation of new exhibition spaces and the constitution of online digital archives, as mentioned above—and opening these resources to an amateur public that has had few opportunities to enjoy them.

The combined effect of these efforts would help to heal the cognitive fracture that has characterised this territory to this day and which, thanks to the most recent initiatives, has finally witnessed a change in behaviour (ANCESCHI, 2010) embodied in the candidacy of the City of Montebelluna to be named Italian Capital of Culture 2018, making the short list of ten finalists.

### Conclusion

The studies, analyses and activities conducted for this research study re-focused attention on an industrial and cultural cluster system, the success of which was determined by a combination of favourable historical conditions, such as its strategic geographical position and the growing popularity of skiing and excursion sports. The methodology for the historical research developed from the observation of the Museum's legacy, reconstructing the events that led to its foundation and turned it into a depository for finished products, moulds and various typologies of documents, and subsequently reconstructing the production system that made it possible to develop these products, highlighting their importance to design since the 1950s.

Against a background of changing statutes and recent agreements between the institutions of the territory, this study made it possible to highlight new approaches to the cultivation of historical and contemporary legacies: by intervening in the criteria for classifying and exhibiting the material collected in the Museum, which will undoubtedly increase, and by extending the very concept of legacy, so that the collection, which should develop as a regional network, might also include personal and company archives, outstanding architectural and natural attractions, and locations for the practice of sports.

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