

Corporate Urbanism: The Past, Present, and Future of Company Towns and Public Space Governance

Corporate investments in building and managing towns around the production sites could be considered one of the biggest legacies of the Industrial Revolution for shaping productive habitats, and company towns are one of the most accomplished forms of this trend. Reaching their zenith during the 19th and 20th centuries and often adhering to utopian, paternalistic, and colonialist models, this model has resurfaced today in various, albeit more intricate, sophisticated, and inconspicuous manifestations, maintaining the centrality of corporate welfare as the strategy around which to shape the urban spaces. The presentation will explore how company towns ownership, biopower, and governance have shaped their public space usage. The case of Dalmine in Italy, a company town with a century-long association with a giant multinational steel pipe manufacturing, will illustrate the transition from total corporate dominance to more democratic public space governance. This transition has engendered novel forms of public spaces, representing a nuanced private-public interplay. Despite this shift, the company's influence remains tangible and decisive in shaping its urban fabric and industrial heritage. Parallely, the presentation will explore emerging forms of company towns and their privately managed public spaces, offering insights into the potential future trajectories of these corporate urban domains.

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