

Varese (IT), Palestra XXV Aprile [extant] - 1929

PEOPLE

[Unknown]

THEMES/GENRES

Youth New Man Education

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | <i>Hic salus, hic virtus, hic robur.</i> | Here health, here virtue, here strength. |
| 2 | <i>Juventae ludis, urbis decori.</i> | To the youth's games, to the city's decorum. |

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The inscriptions (1929) are visible on the façade of the current Palestra XXV (over the entrance at Via Guido Morselli 24) and on the left side (along Viale XXV Aprile) of the gymnasium at a school complex in Varese, a town in north-western Lombardy, northern Italy, near the Swiss border. They are engraved in stone and painted red. The author is unknown.

During the *ventennio fascista*, the building was known as ‘Palestra della Gioventù del Littorio’ (Gymnasium of the Youth of the Lictor). The gym was designed by architect Edoardo Flumiani (1879–1960) in 1928, intended to serve both as a fire station and as a gymnasium for Varese’s Society of Gymnastics and Fencing. According to the *Cronaca Prealpina*, the local regime newspaper, the gym had to be the largest in Italy, built to celebrate the foundation of the Varese province (see also Giuntini 2002).

The gym opened in 1929. From 1931, it was used as the headquarters of the Opera Nazionale Balilla and was occasionally used for basketball games. In 1945, the fire department was moved, and the lower floor was used for municipal offices, while the upper floor was occupied by Basketball Varese until 1964. Currently, the building is used by two high-schools.

The building has a rectangular plan with four floors in two levels. It is clad in stone and plaster. The two levels are divided by a porch with columns, overlooked by a balcony. On the long side, there are two groups of three half-columns at each end and a central group of four, with large windows in between. On the short side, six semi-columns frame three rows of rectangular windows. At the rear, there is an athletic field. Inside, on the first level, there was the former fire station, large enough to accommodate 10 vehicles, a car repair shop, a dormitory, and various service rooms. On the second level is the central hall, which is 40 meters long and 17 meters high. It includes a balustrade where the public can sit, and various rooms used as changing rooms and offices. The roof is supported by reinforced concrete trusses.

The inscriptions highlight the importance of sport and gymnastic activities for shaping the Fascist citizen. Physical fitness and a strong constitution gained relevance when Fascism adopted racist doctrines. The first inscription, divided into three columns corresponding to the divisions of the façade on Viale XXV Aprile (formerly, Viale delle Vittorie), emphasizes the three pillars of Fascist gymnastic education: physical health, courage (in sport and then in war), and strength. The second inscription reveals the

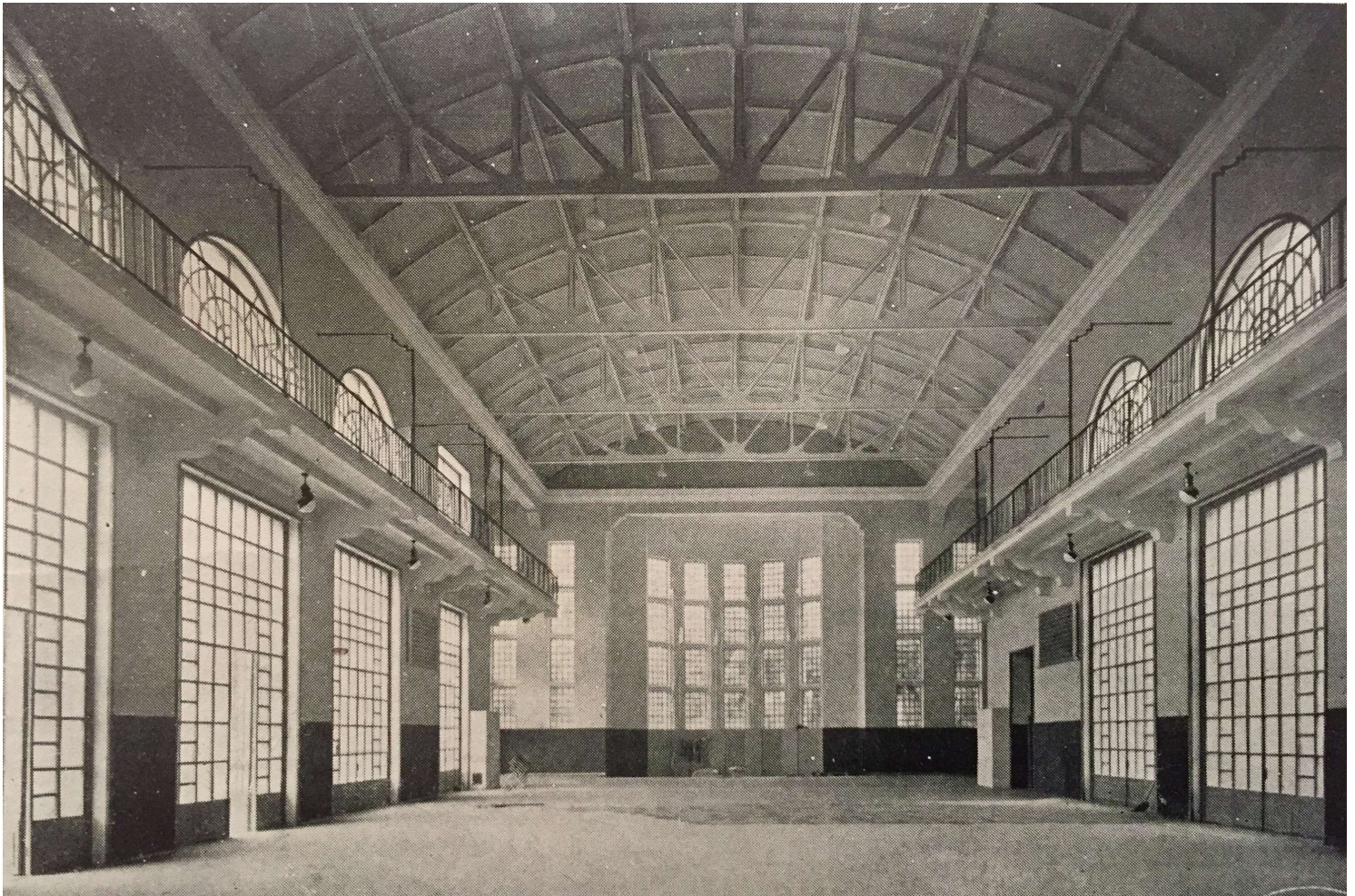
dual purpose of the building as it was intended both to host youth sports (*juventae ludis*) and to enhance the urban landscape of Varese (*urbis decori*).

Bibliography

Anonymous. 1928. 'Una grande opera per l'Educazione fisica. La più grande palestra italiana – Il campo sportivo di Varese'. *Cronaca Prealpina*, 18 January 1928.

Giuntini, Sergio. 2002. 'Sport e fascismo a Varese negli anni del consenso'. In *La provincia di Varese negli anni Trenta. Istituzioni, società civile, economia (Atti di convegno 21-22 gennaio 1999)*, edited by Renzo Paolo Corritore and Enzo Rosario Laforgia, 289–311. Milan: Franco Angeli.

Marcello Zeni



Interior of the gym of the Palestra XXV Aprile. (1930)



Palestra XXV Aprile (1930)



Eastern façade of the Palestra XXV Aprile, facing Via Guido Morselli



The southeastern corner of the Palestra XXV Aprile, taken from Via XXV Aprile.