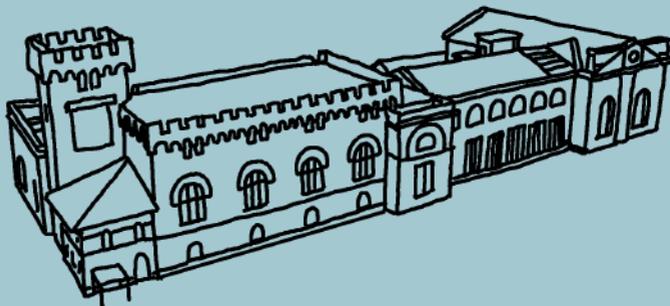


Centrale Fies

A power plant that produces culture
from 1999



Loc. Fies 1,
Dro (TN)
Italy

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Centrale Fies is an independent center for residencies and performing arts located inside a hydroelectric power plant that dates back to the early 1900s, still partially active, owned by Hydro Dolomiti Energia. Centrale Fies is the first Italian example of regeneration of an industrial archaeology site for artistic and cultural purposes in which experiments with practices, production methods and processes connected to artistic residencies and performing arts are innovated.

Launched in 1999 by the Il Gaviale cooperative as an experiential landing place of the Drosesera Festival (born in 1980), today Centrale Fies is an international artistic research center in connection with many artistic production centers and performing art festivals throughout Europe and worldwide. To its credit, it has numerous productions that have contributed to the creation and growth of a new generation of artists, as well as to the development of artistic practices such as dance and architecture, dance-theater, and socio-political theater.



WHERE

Centrale Fies is located in a Hapsburg hydroelectric power plant from 1911, still partially active and owned by Hydro Dolomiti Energia. In 1999, the Il Gaviale cooperative signed a loan for use agreement with ENEL, and obtained the permission to organize festivals and cultural events inside the power plant.

The method of restoration, through the use of reversible materials such as steel and wood, is an example of reuse of industrial archeology among the most virtuous in Italy, which has allowed for the preservation of the spirit of the place and to make its spaces flexible. What was originally the transformer gallery (Galleria Trasformatori) is now a space for exhibitions and public events such as meetings, workshops and presentations. The turbine hall (Sala Turbine) has been transformed into a large theater that can be divided into two rooms with 200 seats each. The Forge, Control and Crescent rooms (Forgia, Comando and Mezzelune) are used both as rehearsal rooms and as spaces for public presentations of performances.

Further renovations are planned that will expand the spaces related to the reception of artists, with guest houses and kitchens, and the accessibility of the entire complex.

CONTEXT

Centrale Fies is located in southwest Trentino, in the Autonomous Province of Trento, between the Sarca river and the Marocche di Dro natural reserve, on the site of a mighty landslide caused by the collapse and sliding of stone material, in the heart of the Valle dei Laghi in Trentino. It is an isolated but lively location, where evocative natural elements such as rocks, river, and woods become inspiration for artists and creatives.

LOCATION

Rural

TYPE OF SPACE

Building
Open space (green area)

ORIGINAL FUNCTION

Industrial (power plant)

YEAR OF CONSTRUCTION

1911

MAIN HISTORICAL FACTS

Early 1900s: the city council of Trento is granted the permission to build a power plant.

1906 - 1909: the power plant is built .

1911: electricity production starts, covering the energy needs of the municipality of Trento, the industries of the city and the nascent electric tramways designed to link Trento to the nearby valleys.

1920s: expansion of the plant, which is integrated with the new power station built a little further downstream, near Dro, dedicated to Prince Umberto di Savoia.

1960s: the activity of the Fies power plant is considerably reduced due to the construction of new plants

1970s: the power plant is decommissioned.

1980s: the Drodeseera Theater Festival is developed inside the houses and courtyards of Dro.

1999: the Il Gaviale cooperative signs a loan for use agreement with ENEL, and obtains permission to organize festivals and cultural events inside the power plant under the name Centrale Fies.

2002: the Drodeseera Festival moves permanently inside the Fies hydroelectric power plant.

2010: the first phase of renovation begins.

2022: the second phase of renovation is planned to create residences on the upper floor.

SURFACE AREA

6,000 sqm

OWNERSHIP

Private

CONCESSION

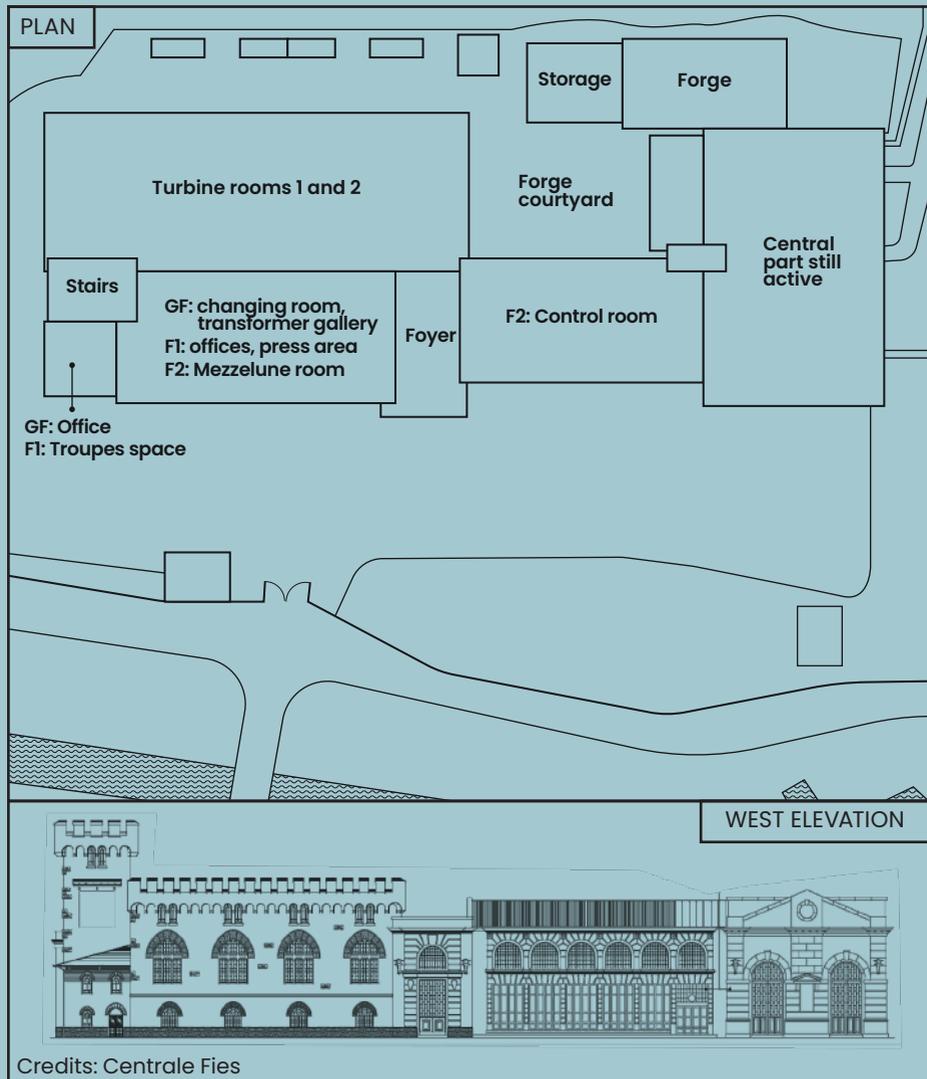
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CONDITION BEFORE ACTIVATION

Underused

COMPOSITION OF THE SPACE

- Coworking space
- Foyer
- Park
- Guest house
- Galleria trasformatori (Transformer gallery)
- Sala turbine (Turbine hall)
- Mezzelune (Crescent room)
- Forgia (Forge room)
- Sala comando (Control room)



Credits: Centrale Fies

WHEN

TIME OF DAY USED

Morning 7am - 1pm 35%
Afternoon ... 1pm - 7pm 35%
Evening 7pm - 1am 25%
Night 1am - 7am 5%

Workdays: 80%
Weekends: 20%

Winter: 25%
Spring: 25%
Summer: 25%
Autumn: 25%

OPENING HOURS

Always open for people working in the spaces and the artists hosted
Open to the public by appointment or during specific events

AVERAGE USERS PER DAY

Around 25

WHAT

Centrale Fies is an artistic production center visited every year by dozens of artists and creatives from all over the world, whom it supports in every aspect: from curatorial and productive support (offering residencies, equipped rooms and technical assistance, and coworking areas) to practical support (management assistance, organization, fundraising and administrative support, production and national/international networking).

Thanks to its multidisciplinary capacity, it attracts and contributes to the growth of entrepreneurial entities and hybrid projects with a strong experimental nature. It has developed close relationships with many centers of artistic production and performing art festivals in Europe and around the world, and contributed to more than 150 productions and co-productions that have helped to create and grow a new generation of artists, creatives, technicians.

SURFACE IN USE

6,000 sqm

THEMATIC AREAS

Coworking and work space
Culture and arts
Design, crafts and production
Education and training

CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Public art
Performative arts
Visual arts

USER DEMOGRAPHIC

Artists and creatives
Children
Local community
Professionals and companies
Young people
Under-represented people: migrants

COLLABORATIONS

Artists and creatives
Associations and collectives
Citizens and local community
Companies
Other commons
Professionals and freelancers
Public administrations and public authorities
Universities and schools

NETWORK

Local: local associations

Regional: Passo Nord, a regional center for artistic residencies

National: Residenze Artistiche, the national network of centers for artistic residencies officially recognized by the Italian Ministry of Culture

International: APAP (Advancing Performing Arts Project), Europe's oldest performing arts network

Live Works, international platform for performing arts

WHO

The Il Gaviale cooperative, born as a volunteer association, has consolidated over the years as a cultural enterprise specializing in the conception, design and management of cultural projects. Over time, the original cooperative for the management of different projects has been joined by the Fies Project association for theater projects with schools and the Fies Core cooperative society for the creative hub.

MANAGING ORGANIZATION(S)

1. Il Gaviale (cooperative, 1990)
2. Fies Project (association, n.a.)
3. Fies Core (cooperative, 2014)

PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE MANAGEMENT

8 full-time employees
4–5 freelance collaborators
30–45 people hired during festivals

HOW

NATURE OF THE INITIATIVE

Bottom-up

TYPE OF MANAGEMENT

Horizontal

ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

50% Commercial activities
50% Regular public funding

TYPE OF ACTIVITIES

50% Free
50% Paid

Focus on the cultural production

Enfant Terrible

An educational program dedicated to primary school students in the area, Enfant Terrible aims to educate the public of tomorrow. Every year, curators, pedagogues, visual and performing artists, and creative artists (architects, illustrators, photographers, etc.) guide the children through a series of practical itineraries to approach and discover the languages of contemporary art and interpretation of artistic research. Enfant Terrible aims to establish a direct relationship between artists and children, counting on the ability of the artists themselves, together with their students, to build a common ground on which to meet, communicate and surprise each other. Since 2010, numerous artists, curators and operators have extended their experience and research to children. In 2017, the format featured Perform!, a team game conceived by the artist Hannes Egger, in which children compete in re-enactments of various historical performances. From Yoko Ono to Jiri Kovanda, from Marina Abramovic to Alighiero Boetti, the young participants stage actions, gaining awareness of the expressive potential of the body as a tool for symbolic communication, and of the rules and syntax of performative language. Only at the end, through video content and images, do the children discover the original works and rediscover the meaning of their actions.



How did your story begin?

It all began in 1979 when, together with a group of friends, we organized Drodeseera, an open-air festival of live arts in the courtyards and houses of the town of Dro. In the 1980s, an open-air festival with shows and performances was an original way to break away from the ordinary structure of the village, constructing a different “time” and “place”: the square became a theater, the villagers were the audience. Dro was transformed and became Drodeseera with a spirit of innovation and the idea of welcoming the artists who came to the village. It worked because it was a time when cultural centers in big cities had lost their centrality to research and creativity, which were instead beginning to emerge in suburban areas. Then the emergence of the internet definitely made it possible to be relevant even in the most isolated suburban areas, allowing for connections with the biggest cultural centers in Berlin or New York. Over the years the festival expanded: every evening there were 5 shows that took place in squares, courtyards, cellars, woods, rivers, and these same places generated energy and enthusiasm. At some point we needed a space to host a workshop; the private courtyards were not fit for the purpose and so we thought of the power plant, which, despite being an important place, did not “belong” to the community, as it was owned by ENEL, the national electricity company. Between 1992 and 1993 we used the external area of the power plant as a location, and immediately saw its potential. A few years later, ENEL changed its policies, opening up to the territories and launching the national initiative “Centrali Aperte,” with shows inside power plants. This new policy allowed us to enter the power plant in 2000 and use parts of it for some shows. We therefore decided to move the Drodeseera festival entirely to the power plant: the costs of setting up the Festival in Dro were invested in fixed installations inside the Power Plant, whose floors and rooms were used as the town squares. Thus began a process of reuse and rebirth of the power plant and its spaces, which for us means living in them, understanding how they work and how they interact. This phase of experimentation allowed us, once we secured the economic resources we needed, to minimize errors and use the resources to build what is now Centrale Fies: a place for creation, for work, for thought, for artist residencies and hospitality.

“Culture is not an area nor a sector, but rather a tool to be applied to every situation to open up imaginations.”

Is there a practice or value that represents you and you think may be an inspiration to others?

Culture is not an area nor a sector, but rather a tool to be applied to every situation to open up imaginations. From this intuition, the Fies Core cultural hub was created in order to support, guide, accompany and launch innovative cultural enterprises, and today works toward the intersection of culture with other sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, design and education. Fies Core has worked with farmers to save and promote the “Susina di Dro” PDO (a type of plum cultivated in Dro) and together with artists and designers, it created “fake” products in order to produce new imagery. Through “Trentino Brand New”, an out-of-the-ordinary training program that revisits the clichés related to tourism communication in Trentino, Fies Core worked along-

side experts in social media, tourism, storytelling, visual identity, and photographers, anthropologists, architects, and other professionals to retell the story of a territory that otherwise risks losing a part of its identity to alternative visions, to analyze the constantly-changing present, and to experiment with unusual media and tools to forge new communication possibilities.

What is the secret ingredient that makes your story unique?

We are constantly asking ourselves questions about what we are doing, and questioning what we have accomplished, constantly searching and reinventing ourselves. Our work will come to an end if we can't make constant strides forward. We too are researching. We started by organizing a widespread festival in the city of Dro, then we worked with many young theater companies and we helped them to grow and structure themselves by financially supporting them, providing them with services and finding them networks in which to distribute their shows in Europe. Once we entered the power plant, we asked ourselves if being a center where artistic works are produced and shown to the public was enough. We needed to find a new identity.

We realized that, more and more, we wanted to "quit" the performative phase, the festival format, the show, to work on research in a broad sense. For us, artistic research must meet and intersect with sociological, philosophical and anthropological research. Because if art is not able to relate to what is around it, perhaps it does not have a decent output. So, after 40 years, we have decided not to renew the Drodese festival, but to end the experience definitively. Centrale Fies would like to be a research center that extends its gaze to other fields, including non-artistic ones, through numerous projects, residencies and moments of reflection.

Interview with: Dino Sommadossi, Barbara Boninsegna, Marco Burchini



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Centrale Fies
archive

