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Upcycling Architecture in Italy (Politecnico di Torino, 30 Oct 25)

Politecnico di Torino – Castello del Valentino, Torino, Italy, Oct 30, 2025
Deadline: May 15, 2025

Upcycling Architecture in Italy

The team of the PRIN research project "Upcycling Architecture in Italy" is glad to announce that the call for papers for the Upcycling Architecture International Conference is now open. The event will be held at Politecnico di Torino on October 30th, 2025.

Organized within the framework of the Research Project of National Relevance (PRIN) "Upcycling Architecture in Italy: Forging and Promoting a Renewed Building Culture," this International Conference aims to bring together new insights and perspectives on the history, theory, and practice of Upcycling architecture and Design for Disassembly (DfD).

The main goal of the conference is to advance knowledge of European construction culture over the past seven decades, examining it through the specific lens of Upcycling and DfD. To achieve this, the development of a historical and theoretical framework is complemented by an extensive survey of best practices across the continent, bringing in a wide range of perspectives. Moreover, by fostering dialogue between construction history and contemporary design, the conference seeks to explore and promote innovative methodologies for incorporating Upcycling practices in the regeneration of Europe's post-WWII built heritage. More broadly, it seeks to contribute to a global renewal of contemporary European construction culture.

The October 2025 International Conference in Turin also strives to contribute to the public debate on these critical themes, which are particularly relevant during a time of major technological and energy transition. The research framework is shaped in response to several pressing contemporary challenges, many of which stem from the ongoing energy and environmental crises, exacerbated by the current geopolitical climate.

Key considerations, such as EU policies on the rational use of building materials, the aging of Italy's built heritage, and the rising costs of construction materials, have further focused this research. From this perspective, the conference aims to make a targeted and meaningful contribution to the strategies of the European Green Deal and related initiatives.

Upcycling Architecture: framing the field
While the concept of Upcycling is inherently multifaceted and open to various interpretations, this International Conference seeks to focus on a specific range of its meanings and applications. Rather than covering the full spectrum of reuse, recycling, and other circular economy practices, Upcycling is understood as a distinct design category with a specific set of principles and fea-

tures.

In this context, Upcycling – along with the related principle of Design for Disassembly (DfD) – is examined at the architectural scale, emphasizing the critical reuse of building materials in ways that prevent their reintegration into the industrial production cycle.

Within this theoretical framework, we invite papers that explore the history (A), theory (B), and practice (C) of Upcycling Architecture and DfD, with a particular focus on Europe between 1945 and 2025. These interconnected yet distinct areas of inquiry will structure the three main sessions of the conference, as follows:

A) History of Upcycling Architecture, 1945-2000. From war rubble to modern heritage

The reuse of building materials has been a recurring practice in the European history of construction for organizational, economic, and cultural reasons. This spans from the ancient concept of spolia, which combined practical and symbolic concerns, up to the very pragmatic reuse of components and materials from demolished buildings during 19th-century urban renewal operations. However, during the 20th century, and particularly after WWII, the massive wave of industrialization throughout the continent largely overshadowed this previously paramount practice, promoting an ideology of Modernity based on a continuous cycle of production, industrialization, consumption, and new production. Despite this, a culture of reuse and circularity persisted through these decades, and sometimes powerfully resurfaced as an alternative to the mainstream tendencies of the architectural discourse and construction market. For the 1945-2000 period, we are particularly interested in papers addressing the following research questions:

- Are there pioneering case studies that enhanced or revived both traditional or innovative practices that may relate to the current theory and practice of Upcycling and DfD at the architectural scale? How did European architectural historiography address or track these alternative building practices in the second half of the 20th century?

- Have economic, energetic, political, and social crises, as well as natural disasters (i.e. earthquakes, etc.) encouraged the retrieval of both traditional or innovative practices that may relate to the current theory and practice of Upcycling and DfD at the architectural scale?

- Have Upcycling and DfD offered alternative and broader perspectives for understanding post-WWII European architectural history, in terms of actors and players involved in the design and building process, and related construction techniques, regulations, business, and more?

B) Theory of Upcycling Architecture, 1945-2025. What is Upcycling?

In recent years, the theoretical and design focus on the topic of Upcycling has expanded significantly, as evidenced by numerous exhibitions, publications, and events. From this range of perspectives, several interpretations of the concept have emerged, often diverging from one another. By analyzing the differences – whether subtle or substantial – between the various definitions of Upcycling, we can gain insight into a constantly evolving theoretical and design landscape, addressing questions such as:

- When did the concept of Upcycling, distinct from reuse, first emerge as a specific theme of the

architectural theoretical framework?

- How has the concept of Upcycling evolved and how does it keep evolving in the field of contemporary design and construction, both in theory and practice?

- How do the theory and practice of Upcycling relate to other approaches to building shaping the current debate, such as those focused on energy sustainability, environmental history, and more?

- What are the potential ambiguities surrounding the concept of Upcycling in contemporary architectural practice and discourse, particularly in an era increasingly influenced by greenwashing tactics in both design and communication?

C) Design Practice, 2000-present. What are the new horizons and challenges for Upcycling in Europe?

For its pioneering character, this conference aims to become a milestone in the ever more thriving debate on Upcycling in Europe, both academically and among practitioners. In this regard, key questions include:

- What are the current challenges of Upcycling? How can reclaimed building elements be adapted to meet contemporary safety regulations and energy performance standards? What are the challenges of integrating reclaimed materials into existing building codes and certification frameworks? How can regulatory updates and the development of assessment protocols ensure recovered materials meet all necessary technical and structural requirements?

- How have material recovery and transformation led to innovative design methodologies? What case studies illustrate these approaches in practice? How can we consider buildings not only as adaptable structures but also as repositories of construction resources for the future? What role do strategies like DfD, adaptability, and responsible sourcing play in this context?

- How can the challenges of Upcycling contribute to the preservation and enhancement of post-WWII built heritage? How can the principles of disassembly and Upcycling evolve and be adapted to meet the current challenges of heritage preservation?

Submission guidelines:
Submissions must be sent no later than May 15th, 2025, to the following e-mail address:
info@upcyclingarchitecture.it

Each submission must include:
(1) Full name, surname, affiliation and e-mail address of the paper's main author. The conference organizers will address all communications to the paper's main author.

(2) Full name, surname and affiliation of the paper's other authors (if any)

(3) A title of maximum 70 characters

(4) Specification of the chosen area of inquiry: history (A), theory (B), or practice (C)

(5) A 300-word abstract

Abstracts should define the subject and summarize the argument to be presented in the proposed paper. The content of that paper should be the product of well-documented original research that is primarily analytical and interpretive, rather than descriptive in nature. Papers cannot have been previously published or presented in public except to a small, local audience. All abstracts will be held in confidence during the review and selection process. N.b.

(6) 5 key-words

(7) A 100-word author's biography

Submission and conference language: English

Key Dates and practical informations:
May 15th, 2025 / Abstract submission deadline
June 30th, 2025 / Deadline for the notification of paper's acceptance or rejection
October 30th, 2025 / International conference

Conference venue:
Politecnico di Torino – Castello del Valentino
Viale Pier Andrea Mattioli, 39
Torino, Italy

The conference is open to the public.
No registration fees are required.

Please find the full call for papers here: https://www.upcyclingarchitecture.it/items/upcycling-architecture-international-conference.

Contact:
For more information, please write to:
info@upcyclingarchitecture.it

The International Conference is organized in the frame of the research project
"Upcycling Architecture in Italy. Forging and Promoting a Renewed Building Culture".
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