



## Hangar Ticinum – a Creative Hub on the River

*Design for recovery of the disused hydroplane base in Pavia, Italy.*

**Register:** DEC/10/2021, **Submit:** DEC/10/2021, **Eligibility:** Students, architects, designers, urbanists, engineers, artists, activists and anyone interested in the fields of design and architecture; individually, teams with an unlimited number of members, **Fee:** 59 EUR (SEP/10 – OCT/17/2021) – note: 15% discount until SEP/20/2021, 89 EUR (OCT/18 – NOV/28/2021), 109 EUR (NOV/29 – DEC/10/2021), +22% VAT, **Awards:** 1st Prize: 4,000 EUR, 2nd Prize: 2,500 EUR, 3rd Prize: 1,500 EUR, 4 Gold Mentions: 500 EUR each, 10 Honorable Mentions, 30 Finalists

Pavia is a charming Italian city of around 70.000 inhabitants, located along the banks of the Ticino River and just 30 km away from Milan. Known throughout the country for its famous university, for the food and wine excellences of the area, for the richness of the cultural offer and the extraordinary artistic heritage, Pavia has undoubtedly one of the most fascinating historical centres in Northern Italy.

Yet contrary to what one might naively think, the city has not always lived exclusively on culture. During the twentieth century, like many other towns in the north of Italy, it experienced various moments of great economic prosperity, enriching its urban fabric with a large number of industrial activities and strategic infrastructural facilities.

The traces of that modern past are in most cases still visible today. The monumental character of these majestic abandoned structures, though of a less noble nature than that of the architectural gems of the medieval era, makes them equally unique and intriguing in their own way.

And it is precisely in a scenic and privileged position, perched on the riverside at the gates of the historical centre that certainly the most fascinating Pavese ruin stands: “The Idroscalo”.

## AN AIRPORT ON THE RIVER

The visionary project for “The Idroscalo” of Pavia was designed by the young Italian architect Giuseppe Pagano, who had just graduated from the Polytechnic of Turin in 1924.

The large hydroplane hangar, strategically overlooking a bend in the Ticino River, was planned for a very specific location two steps away from the confluence where the Blue River meets the Naviglio (artificial canal built in the Napoleonic period between Pavia and Milan).

The Italian Air Service Society (SISA), promoter responsible for the construction of the work, included it within an ambitious Infrastructure plan aimed at consolidating a proper network of “aquatic” airports throughout the country. Specifically, Pagano’s building was designed to complete the connection route between Turin-Pavia-Venice-Trieste.

The project is framed in a period of great development for the aeronautics sector, both in the civil and military spheres. The grand opening of 1926, presided over by Mussolini himself, can be interpreted as proof of the logistical importance attributed at the time to this innovative river airport.

Following a first phase of great prosperity, with the arrival of the mid-thirties the air transport activities of SISA went into crisis, giving rise to a slow and inexorable decline that led to the decommissioning of the building.



## THE BUILDING

The hangar represents an extraordinary example of synthesis between two different styles: the first still Secessionist, the second almost fully Modern.

The connection with an aesthetic still strongly linked to the decorativism of the early 20th century is particularly evident in the elevations, in the geometric engravings on the exterior walls, in the articulated treatment of shelves and cornices and in the stylization of the ornamental elements.

However, although Pagano is not yet mature enough to definitively abandon that expressive language, a strong and decisive rationalist imprint is evident in his project for “The Idroscalo”, easily recognizable in the massive use of concrete, in the refined geometrization of the elements and in the modular scanning of the facades.

Other factors that contributed in a decisive way to the definition of the building are linked to the particular function that it had to host, and to the specificities that were somehow required by it.

The elevated position on the river bed, the rotation of the building axis respect to the direction of the road, the heaviness of the load-bearing structures and the large frame for the access of hydroplanes on the east elevation, are just some of the many peculiarities imposed by the program itself.

## THE RUIN

Besieged on several fronts by dense spontaneous arboreal vegetation, today “The Idroscalo” presents itself as a sort of enchanted ruin.

The massive concrete pillars that keep it anchored to the ground disappear devoured by the greenery, giving the clear impression that the building is literally levitating on the water. More than a hydroplanes’ station from the early 1900s, there is the perception that the hangar seems like a sort of strange alien spaceship that landed there by mistake, damaged and unable to leave.

However, the scenic location on the river, the panoramic view of Bargo Ticino and the proximity to the historical centre, would suggest one of the liveliest and most popular places for the local community. Curiously this is not the case, and for reasons that are difficult to understand, over time the city has gradually turned its back on it, even forgetting its own existence.

Abandoned to itself, mutilated and orphan of the only walkway that once connected it to the mainland, “The Idroscalo” still stands firm in all its monumentality as a sort of ancestral guardian of the river. Nevertheless, it is clear to everyone that its survival hangs by a thread. The deterioration of the facades and the roof are becoming more critical every year, and the point of no return seems ever closer.

## HANGAR TICINUM

The unquestionable historical and artistic value of the building, the uniqueness of the architectural typology and the worrying state of decay in which the structure has been for decades, are just some of the numerous reasons that would urgently require its recovery.

Respecting on the strategic role that the hangar played for the city of Pavia during the first half of the XX century, both locally and nationally, the question arises of how to rehabilitate it in the best way to restore its well-deserved dignity.

Furthermore, the rare and valid testimony of such an interesting architectural style, which is that of the transition period between the Secessionism and the Modern Movement of the following decades, is in itself a sufficient reason to motivate its conservation.

The hope is that Hangar Ticinum can represent the very first step on a path that, as part of the ambitious riverfront redevelopment project promoted by the local administration, can lead over time to the long-awaited restitution of the hydroplane base to the citizens of Pavia.

Hangar Ticinum encourages participants to submit creative design proposals and high quality graphics, challenging them to imagine a full recovery of the disused hydroplane base with the ambition of restoring the importance and centrality it once had.

Fortunately, the most difficult part of the work has already been done in the 1920s by Giuseppe Pagano: despite the long decades of abandonment and the worrying current conditions, the majestic hangar has survived keeping intact its monumental character and providing a vast range of ideas for an unusual and intriguing project theme.

The competition explicitly requires full attention to the social and cultural aspects of the project, encouraging competitors to work on a program linked to an everyday use, open particularly to the youngest generations and generally to the entire local community. How would it be possible to transform “The Idroscalo” into a community hub lived 7 days a week? What kind of uses could be successful in obtaining the long-awaited rebirth?

The definition of the program is therefore left to the complete decision of the designers, deliberately avoiding limitations and restrictions. The intent is to give them full freedom in order to provide a personal and autonomous interpretation of the proposal. Architects are thus invited to experiment openly without any fear of the existing building, testing an infinite number of possible innovative design solutions.

## THE PROJECT

The level of “impact” expected from the recovery of the building will also be up to the competitors. Both the more conservative proposals, characterized by a more discreet and respectful approach to Pagano’s original project, and the more ambitious and visionary ones, defined by more radical interventions, will be equally accepted.

The project does not necessarily have to be limited only to the redevelopment of the interior spaces: in fact, changes and additions are also allowed on the envelope and on the external areas (both at the street and the river level).

However, it is important to point out that we are dealing with the work of one of the most important exponents of the Italian Rationalism, so any solution must be sensitively justified by the project itself and by the relationships it will be able to establish with the context.

Another important subject is undoubtedly that of accessibility: the only walkway that originally connected the building to the road has been demolished several years ago, and the building is currently completely isolated and unreachable.

Finally, the panoramic position of the complex should not be ignored. The axis rotated in the direction of the river, the large opening designed to allow access to hydroplanes and the refined rhythm of the windows can represent interesting starting points in the definition of the concept.