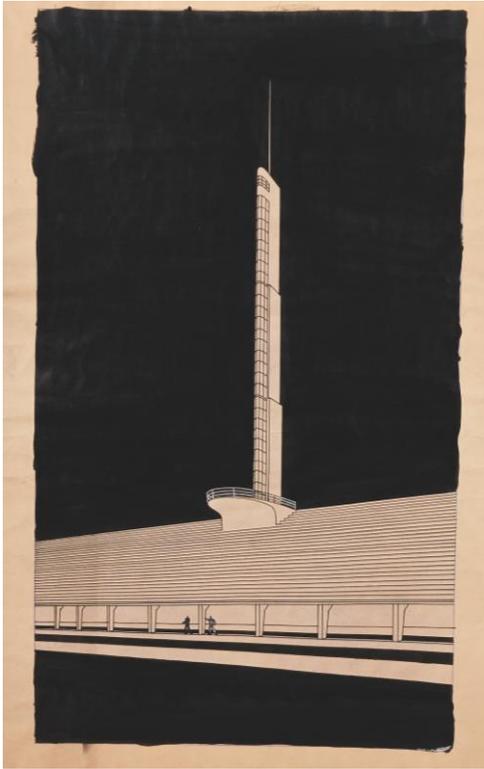


November 20, 2020

ICOMOS Heritage Alert for the *Stadio Artemio Franchi* (Pier Luigi Nervi, 1929-31) in Florence, Italy



Pier Luigi Nervi, *Drawing of the Marathon Tower, seen from the inside of the stadium, 1932. Parma, CSAC*

0.0 Executive Summary

The ICOMOS International Scientific Committee on 20th Century Heritage (ISC20C), in collaboration with the Pier Luigi Nervi Project Association, are issuing this Heritage Alert for the *Stadio Artemio Franchi* (Pier Luigi Nervi, 1929-31) in Florence, Italy. The *Stadio Artemio Franchi* is an early and important work of Italian engineer and builder Pier Luigi Nervi and is under imminent threat of destruction due to plans by the Municipality of Florence and the *Fiorentina* football club to build a new stadium on its site. Recent legislation by the Italian government that relax heritage and conservation requirements are enabling these plans to move forward. ICOMOS and the Pier Luigi Nervi Project Association are seeking an immediate halt to these plans and request that a full study be conducted to determine the existing stadium's actual condition and what change is necessary for its continued viability as a cultural and athletics venue.

1.0 Identity of Building/Artifact/Object/Place*

The *Stadio Artemio Franchi* (Original name: *Stadio Giovanni Berta*) is located on the Viale Manfredo Fanti, between the Viale Ferruccio Valcareggi and the Viale Manfredo Fanti in the *Campo di Marte* neighborhood in Florence, Italy. It is a 43,000-spectator capacity stadium, home of the *Fiorentina* football club.

Listing and current protection

In 2020 the Franchi stadium was declared of cultural interest pursuant to Article 10(1) of Legislative Decree No. 42 of 22 January 2004 as amended (*Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio* - Code of Cultural Heritage and Landscape, hereinafter “Cultural Heritage Code”) and declared of cultural and historical significance on May 22, 2020.

However, the recent “stadium unblocking” legislation passed by the Italian parliament earlier this year (Article 55-bis of Law Decree no. 76 of September 4, 2020) specifically exempts sporting facilities from the strict requirements of the Cultural Heritage Code and gives wide latitude to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities (“MiBACT”) to determine what constitutes “historical value” and provides far more relaxed standards—including the preservation of small fragments of the original, or even reproductions—for meeting any remaining requirements. This legislation threatens all sports facilities of historic value in Italy but appears to have been passed in concert with the city’s efforts to facilitate a new stadium on the *Stadio Franchi* site.

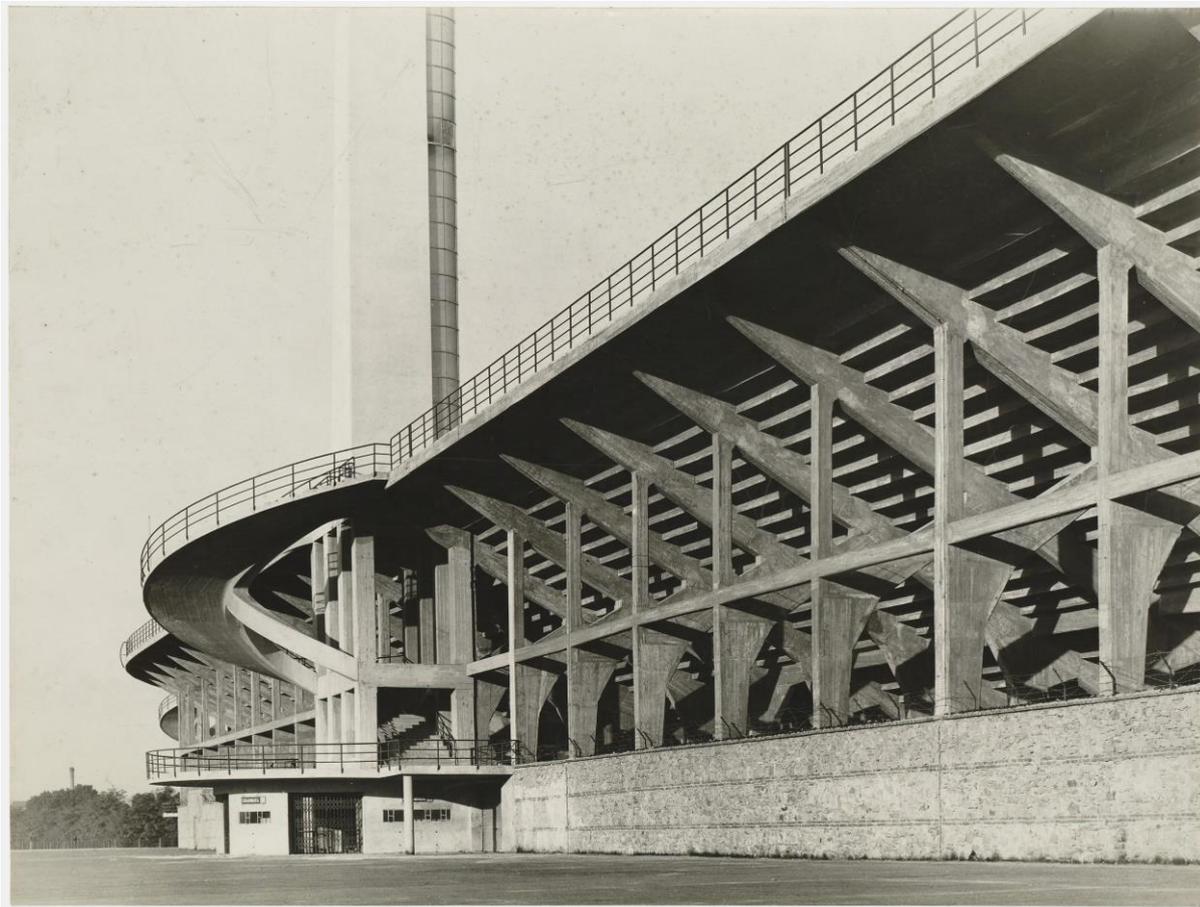


View of the Torre di Maratona from inside the Stadium, ©Matteo Cirenei, 2018

2.0 Statement of Significance and History

The *Stadio* was designed and constructed by Pier Luigi Nervi and his contracting firms Nervi & Nebbiosi (west grandstand) and Nervi & Bartoli (east stand) between 1929 and 1930. It was commissioned by the owner of the *Fiorentina* club at the time, the Florentine aristocrat and sports patron Luigi Ridolfi Vay da Verrazzano, in 1926. Ridolfi, a supporter of Mussolini, named the stadium after a fascist martyr, Giovanni Berta. It was designed to host athletic events in addition to football matches, and Nervi & Nebbiosi built the west grandstand, with a cantilevered concrete roof to shelter football and athletics spectators from rain and the afternoon sun, in 1930-31. *Fiorentina*’s rising fortunes demanded even greater capacity, however, and Nervi—with his new construction partner, Giovanni Bartoli, designed and built the east, north, and south grandstands in 1931-32. While these lacked the soaring roof of the original structure, Nervi solved a nagging circulation problem in the

second project, using dramatic, helical staircases to bring fans in from the top of the stands, allowing them to gradually fill the seats from the bottom up and eliminating the congestion that came with bringing them in from the bottom, where the most popular seats were taken by the first spectators to arrive.



External view of the Stadium shortly after its completion, © Ferdinando Barsotti, 1932

The stadium has served as the home of *Fiorentina* ever since, though it has also hosted the Italian national team for international matches, the national rugby team for internationals, and the FIFA World Cup in 1934 and 1990. It has also been the site of major rock concerts. Renovations for the 1990 World Cup included demolition of the original athletics track and the installation of additional seats; other work that has obscured, but not demolished, original fabric includes a metal ceiling under the cantilevered roof including two extensions that follow its profile to the north and south, and security fencing in the stands and around the perimeter. The stadium is in good condition, having been maintained and in use almost continuously since its opening, and Nervi's design intent is faithfully maintained throughout, although some elements are hidden from view by these additions. The stadium was renamed, for a former President of the Italian Football Federation, Artemio Franchi, in 1991.

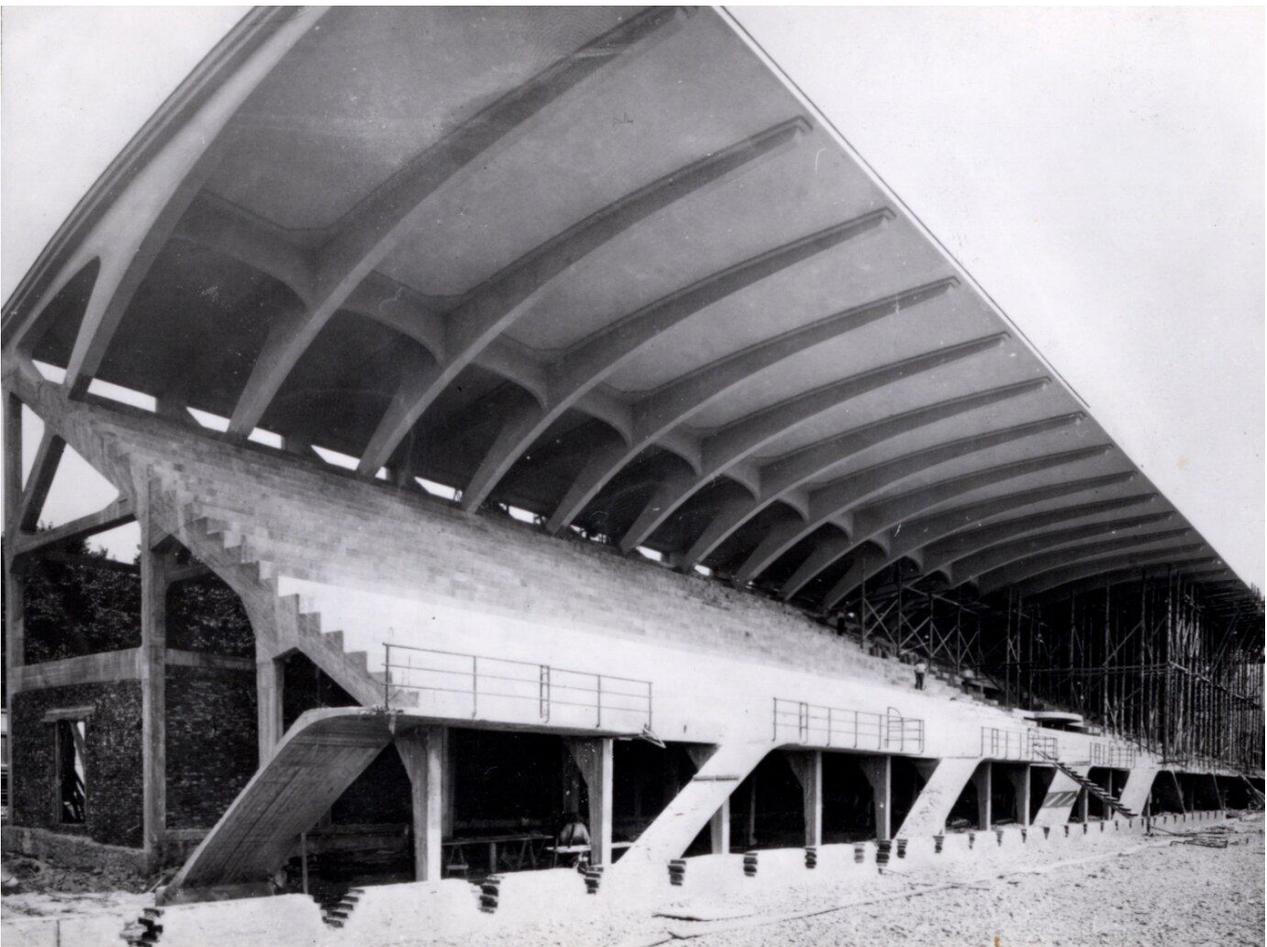
3.0 Description (History and Technology)

3.1 Physical Description

The *Stadio* is a reinforced concrete frame with a single story of stepped concrete seating in four major parts: the 1930 grandstand with cantilevered roof and a façade, not by Nervi but important for historic reasons, designed in a fascist style by the city architects of Florence contemporaneous with the Nervi structure; two *curva* structures that make the 90° transitions to the end zone seating, and the 1931 grandstand structure that wraps around both end zones and along the stadium's eastern edge. This latter structure includes three original, helicoidal staircases and the 70-meter *Torre Maratona*.

3.2 Construction System Used

The stadium is of reinforced *in situ* concrete construction throughout, using moment connections for lateral stability and heavy steel reinforcing to achieve the relatively light forms of the cantilevered roof and helical staircases.



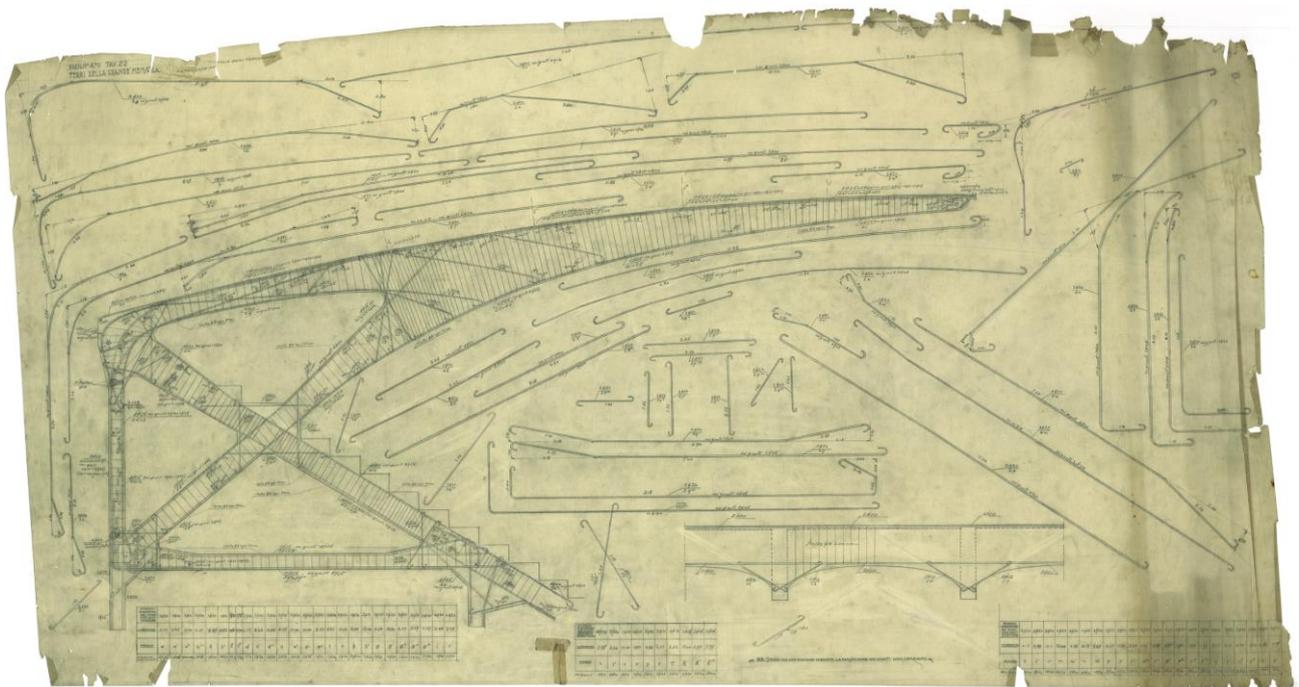
The grandstand under construction, unknown photographer, 1930

3.3 Context/Setting

The *Campo di Marte* is now a large complex of sports facilities about 1.75km northeast of Florence's historic center. It was the city's primary military grounds in the 19th and early 20th century, and Ridolfi gained permission to build on it only after political agitation by local militants—an important aspect of the stadium's development, as Nervi's dynamic forms were clever in their abstract appeal; they were interpreted as metaphors for the Fascist government's emphasis on strength and action (in particular by architectural critic Pietro Maria Bardi), and as neutral, engineering forms that required elaboration from more conservative architects to match the government's program of stripped-down classical architecture (the east façade). Several other athletics facilities have been added in the vicinity of the stadium, strengthening the district's character as Florence's sports center; these are all low-rise structures and have not altered the experience of seeing the stadium emerge from the dense fabric of residential buildings surrounding it. The *Torre Maratona* is also readily visible from one of Italy's main rail lines, which passes through the *Firenze Campo di Marte* station 500m to the southwest.

3.4 Social and Cultural Context

The *Stadio Franchi* has been an important socio-cultural element of Florence's daily life since its construction. As the home of the historic *Florentina*, it sees a regular influx of fans (the *Viola*), and it is one of the oldest football stadia still in regular use by a top tier team in Italy. As the largest concert venue in the city, it has hosted important festivals and pop concerts, and it is the anchor for the structures and facilities in the *Campo di Marte* that have played similar, if subsidiary, roles in the city's sporting and entertainment lives.

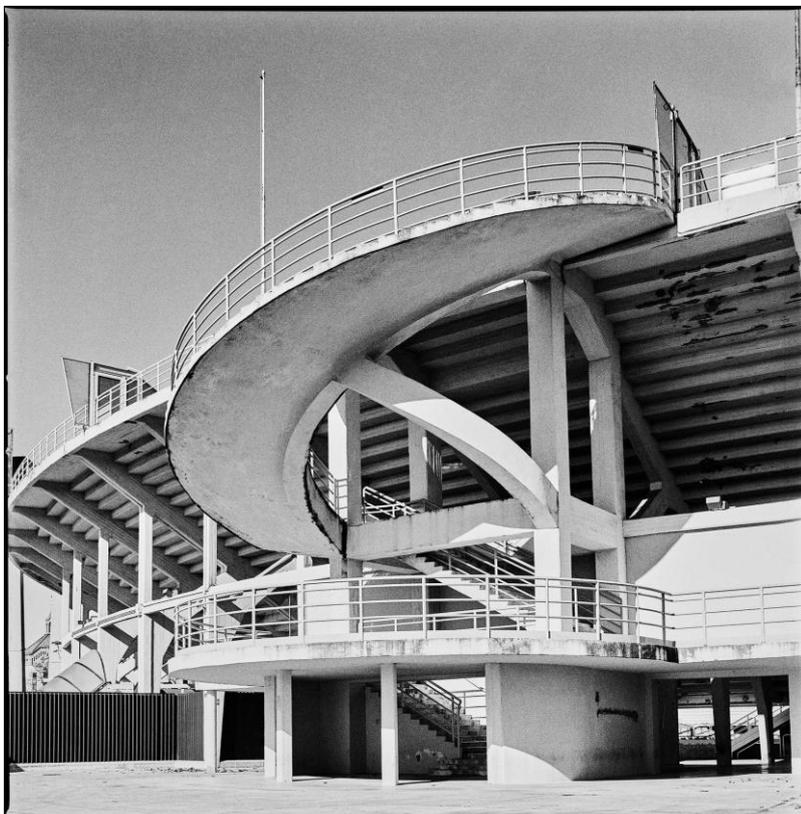


Pier Luigi Nervi, drawing of the covered stand, section of the heading part, undated (1931). Private Archive of Pier Luigi Nervi, Rome

The stadium is also evidence of the difficult cultural moment in which it was built. Florence was an industrial and political center as well as a cultural one, and the region's architecture of the era shows the influence of both industrial development (factories in Florence and Prato by Attilio Muggia, with whom Nervi apprenticed and eventually partnered) and the developing Fascist style of stripped classicism (the *Stazione Santa Maria Novella* and adjacent *Palazzina Reale di Santa Maria Novella*, both built in the early 1930s and designed by Giovanni Michelucci). Nervi's concrete structure shows the clear influence of his time with Muggia, while the cladding of the main stand on the street facade show the requisite tropes of the Fascist style; inside the main grandstand, an interior staircase by Nervi blends the two, combining a helical shape only achievable in concrete with the formal qualities--symmetry, simplified detail, sharp contours, and a monumental presence.

3.5 Materials/Fabric/Form/Function

Nervi's designs for the grandstands, the grandstand roof, and the helicoidal staircases are among the most poetic concrete structures of the era; they show his emerging confidence in his abilities as a designer and a *constructeur*, and their publication globally proved to be inspiring to engineers and architects throughout the world. The grandstand roof is an essay in cantilevered form, its tapering, curved profile a constructed diagram of a 'correct' bending moment profile. Even more lyrical are the three functionally-driven staircases on the east stand, which Nervi stabilized with a second helical support that intersects the stair spiral at its center. The daring shape and thin profiles are evidence of his experimental approach and the liberating effect that his new partnership with Bartoli had on his creative instinct.



One of the helical staircases, ©Marco Menghi, 2018

These graceful moments are matched, however, by a thorough approach to structural form and detailing throughout the grandstands, where frames and moment connections are shaped to reveal and to model ideal static forms throughout. While less celebrated, these details and elements deserve preservation as evidence of Nervi's encyclopedic knowledge of static form and constructive grammar; collectively they form a rhythmic backdrop for the more dramatic moments of the roof, stairs, and tower.



Exterior of one of the curva structures, ©Matteo Cirenei, 2018

The seating tiers have proven functional for the entire life of the stadium; Nervi calculated sight lines carefully, and the grandstands in particular maintain an intimate relationship with the field. The inclusion of the 500-meter track in the original scheme necessarily placed the end zone seating at some distance from the playing field, an issue rectified by the addition of new seating at field level in the 1990 renovation.

3.6 Aesthetic Value

Photographs and drawings of *Stadio Franchi* appeared in architectural journals throughout Europe and North America on its completion. Its disciplined but evocative forms have been imitated by stadium designers ever since, and Nervi's ability to combine static principles with expressive shapes would become his greatest trademark—there are direct developments from the *Stadio Franchi* in his other stadium work (notably the *Stadio Flaminio* in Rome, completed for the 1960 Olympic Games) and throughout his *oeuvre*.



Detail of one of the helical staircases, ©Marco Menghi, 2018

Conservation Problems

The stadium has been reasonably well-maintained and has been occupied continuously since its construction. There are weathering issues typical of exposed concrete structures throughout, but the operations of *Fiorentina* have assured its day-to-day maintenance.

A recent structural study has suggested that the structure may be vulnerable to seismic events, but the PLNP Foundation questioned the methodology of the report, which does not take into account the monolithic behavior of the stadium as a whole. The study also points out issues with stair slopes and seating distances in the *curva* sections that do not meet contemporary standards for new stadium construction, however these have not prevented the stadium from hosting top-level football matches and, in fall of 2020, an international



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match. Finally, several additions to the stadium have been carried out that conceal original fabric, notably the extension of the cantilevered roof on the west stand, constructed in metal for the 2000 World Cup, however these appear to be entirely reversible and have done little damage to the existing concrete.

The *Stadio* should be considered holistically, as Nervi intended--both in terms of its structural and seismic performance, which must be understood monolithically, not as isolated sections, and in terms of conservation, as the complex was designed as an integrated whole. This is in line with the resolution and the requirements of national conservation law.

While it is necessary to provide for contemporary comfort and safety standards, this should be done with interventions that satisfy the latest requirements while preserving the stadium's heritage values including revealing the *Stadio's* existing structure; through additions of limited structural and/or formal consequences involving minimal loss of an existing material, leaving largely intact this world symbol of the architectural heritage of the 20th Century.

4.0 Source of Alert – Document prepared by Professor Thomas Leslie, AIA

4.1 References, Contacts*

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4.2 Groups Supporting Alert and/or Nomination, Contacts*

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- DO.CO.MO.MO. Italia:
President: Ugo Carughi



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- Italia Nostra:
President: Ebe Giacometti
President Florence Chapter: Leonardo Rombai
- Consiglio Nazionale degli Architetti Pianificatori, Paesaggisti e Conservatori:
President: Giuseppe Cappochin
- Ordine e Fondazione degli Architetti di Firenze
President: Pier Matteo Fagnoni

4.3 Groups Potentially Against Alert Action*

- ACF Fiorentina S.p.A.
President: Rocco Commisso
- Municipality of Florence
Mayor Dario Nardella

4.4 Local, Regional, International Significance Citations*

Declaration of cultural and historical significance issued on the 22nd of May, 2020, see Annex 1

4.5 Letters of Support, Newspaper Articles, etc.

See Folder Annex 2

4.6 Publications that describe the Work/Place, Bibliography, etc.

See Annex 3

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4.7 Time Constraints for Advocacy (immediate action/delayed action)*

Immediate

5.0 Recommended action*

5.1 Heritage Alert: International/National Distribution via ICOMOS?

International Distribution via ICOMOS

5.2 Letter (s) to? (Provide Names and Full Contact Information)

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5.3 ICOMOS National or Scientific Committee, or International Website Upload?

ICOMOS International Scientific Committee

5.4 Affiliated Distribution? (such as UIA/Docomomo/TICCIH)

UIA and Docomomo.

5.5 Other Actions Recommended?

To be discussed



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6.0 Desired Outcomes*

The Foundation seeks three outcomes:

- 1) Most urgently, halting the demolition—whole or partial—of the existing stadium and a stop to the planning process while the historic nature of the structure is considered. Revocation or denial of any demolition permits.
- 2) A full study of the structure’s stability and viability, including a seismic study that takes into account the structure’s monolithic nature.
- 3) Restoration of the protections originally given to the stadium by its designation in in May, 2020, either through EU legislation negating the recent Italian laws, a parliamentary amendment to the “stadium unblocking” laws, or by other specifically protecting legislation.

Ultimately, we believe that a full study of the stadium’s potential would confirm that it could remain a viable venue for top-level football by implementing changes that respect entirely Nervi’s original design and the stadium’s fabric—indeed, a similar study is occurring, with great promise, for Nervi’s *Stadio Flaminio* in Rome.

7.0 Annexes

Annex 1: Listing Document of the Artemio Franchi Stadium

Annex 2: Letters of Support, Newspaper Articles, etc.

Annex 3: Visual Documentation and Publications