GHOSTS OF FUNCTION REGENERATIVE PRACTICES BETWEEN INDUSTRIAL MEMORY AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS /

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Abstract. In the volatile aftermath of pandemics and wars, architecture is increasingly defined by urgency. It becomes not only the art of building, but the practice of repair—of lives, spaces, and systems under strain. This paper investigates how abandoned industrial buildings might be reclaimed as strategic anchors for emergency architecture. Far from being inert relics, many disused industrial structures retain spatial, material, and symbolic value that speaks directly to the challenges of the present. Across Europe, conflict, climate, and economic instability push people into transience, while emergency architecture—designed to be temporary—often becomes a permanent condition. Simultaneously, vast industrial sites lie derelict, awaiting demolition or speculative reinvention. But what if these two urgencies could intersect?

Both industrial and emergency architectures disrupt fixed categories. Industrial heritage hovers between ruin and reuse; emergency structures between the provisional and the permanent. Refugee camps or flood shelters are often designed for temporariness, yet persist for years, becoming spaces of survival without true belonging. These hybrid conditions challenge conventional notions of duration, purpose, and identity. They compel us to rethink architectural time—not as linear, but layered, recursive, and affective.

This paper argues for adaptive reuse not as nostalgic preservation, but as a form of spatial resilience: aligning material reactivation with social need, ecological responsibility, and cultural memory. The question becomes not what to preserve, but how to transform—how design can mediate between loss and possibility.

By combining phenomenological analysis with architectural case studies, the paper explores how industrial structures—valued for their durability, spatial generosity, and embeddedness in the central urban fabric—can host forms of emergency inhabitation that are both functional and meaningful. In reactivating these voids as sites of care and repair, we glimpse a regenerative ethic—one that refuses to choose between memory and utility, between shelter and significance.

Introduction. Architecture in a State of Urgency. Emergency responses typically rely on structures conceived as temporary: provisional hospitals, modular shelters, refugee accommodations, or rapidly deployable support facilities. Yet these architectures of urgency, intended as stopgaps, routinely become long-term environments. Camps persist for decades, and ad-hoc communal infrastructures become embedded in the urban fabric. The central problem is thus not simply the scarcity of emergency space, but the mismatch between the temporary logic of emergency design and the permanent realities of human displacement. When architectures meant for weeks endure for years, they fail both spatially and ethically, forcing their occupants to depend solely on the basic necessities of life (Filion, Sands & Skidmore, 2016).

This contradiction exposes a deeper challenge: architecture continues to operate within linear timelines of planning, while crises unfold cyclically, unpredictably, and with prolonged aftermaths. The pandemic demonstrated how quickly everyday spaces must shift functions; the war has shown how violently permanence can be undone. Both contexts highlight the need for a new architectural temporality, one that is capable of navigating transitions between emergency and long-term inhabitation.

Meanwhile, European cities, including many in Romania, host expansive landscapes of abandoned industrial buildings. These former engines of production now exist in a suspended state between ruin and potential. Their generous spatial typologies, robust materials, and central locations make them uniquely suited to support flexible, layered uses. Yet in many regions, they remain simply unclaimed voids, victims of inertia and ignorance on the part of owners, the community, and the authorities (Crișan, 2023).

This article proposes that the unresolved temporality of emergency architecture and the liminal status of industrial heritage are not separate crises but interdependent opportunities. By rethinking adaptive reuse as a regenerative, socially responsive practice, abandoned industrial sites can become durable hosts for forms of emergency inhabitation that move beyond mere shelter.

Between Memory, Materiality, and Latent Potential. Industrial architecture endures as a material witness to the economic, social, and cultural ruptures that shaped modernity. It carries the layered memory of the Industrial Revolution and the scars of deindustrialization, while remaining deeply persistent in meaning. David Lowenthal's reflections in The Past Is a Foreign Country help clarify this paradox: the past offers *"benefits and burdens"*, providing reassurance, identity, guidance, and even forms of escape (Lowenthal, 2015).

Their identity value emerges from their figurability: the sawtooth roof, the water tower, the chimney, all represent typologies that have long structured the mental maps of communities. Christian Norberg-Schulz situates such anchors within the existential space of a place, where landmarks stabilize collective orientation and grant a sense of continuity (Caciuc, 2023). This recognisability is not merely aesthetic; it is affective. When industrial buildings disappear, the loss is spatial and emotional, eroding the tacit sense of belonging that these structures quietly maintain.

Laurajane Smith's understanding of heritage as a process rather than a product further grounds this viewpoint. Industrial sites matter not solely because of their materials, but because of the attachments, memories, and negotiations that surround them (Smith, 2006). The emotional dimension is measurable: research conducted by the Universities of Cambridge, Surrey, and Southampton during the COVID-19 pandemic showed that heritage spaces improved well-being and reduced anxiety, confirming that such environments support autonomy, purpose, and connectedness (Sofaer et.al., 2021).

These qualities become amplified in moments of crisis. From Lefebvre's notion of the monumental building as a *"collective mirror"* (Lefebvre, 1991) to contemporary risk-management theories, it becomes clear that industrial heritage fosters social resilience by offering symbolic stability. When these structures are adaptively reused for emergency purposes, they accumulate yet another layer of meaning. Their memory value intersects with a salvaging, protective role, making them unlikely yet powerful mediators between the temporary logic of emergency architecture and the long-term needs of communities seeking continuity amidst disruption.

The opportunity offered by abandoned industrial buildings lies in the convergence of three fundamental qualities: their embeddedness in the urban fabric, their spatial generosity, and their structural resilience. Once peripheral, these sites have become central landmarks, easily accessible and deeply woven into the mental maps of their communities; their proximity to main roads, transit nodes, and existing utilities makes them strategically positioned for rapid emergency deployment, allowing large numbers of people and critical services to reach them with minimal delay. Their expansive interiors, shaped by the functionalist logic of industrial production, provide flexible, high-clearance volumes that can be rapidly reorganized into shelters, medical stations, logistical hubs, or multi-purpose care spaces, while the unbuilt areas around them offer room for extensions, outdoor refuges, and essential auxiliary systems. Underpinning all this is their characteristic material robustness: thick walls, durable frames, and solid foundations that not only withstand time and weathering but also tolerate new loads, new partitions, and new functions with minimal intervention. Together, these attributes transform disused industrial sites into inherently adaptable architectures, making them uniquely suited for emergency inhabitation while preserving continuity, identity, and the capacity for long-term regeneration.

From Provisional Structures to Prolonged Conditions. Emergency architecture is, above all, a spatial problem: the way territory is arranged at the moment of a crisis determines both the scale of impact and the speed of recovery. Urban areas, dense and infrastructurally entangled, are particularly vulnerable; the physical distribution of buildings, the robustness and quantity of the built stock, and the placement of critical networks (roads, bridges, utilities) shape long-term resilience. A well-designed spatial plan integrated into territorial emergency management becomes a preventive tool, enabling strategic placement of key functions, so that the community can respond rapidly. Conversely, poorly planned regions, with fragile infrastructure and limited preparedness, face prolonged disruption and uneven recovery, while antifragile urban layouts bounce back faster, demonstrating the moral and practical urgency of spatial foresight.

Against this backdrop, abandoned industrial spaces emerge as an underused but potent spatial reserve. As shown in Chapter II, their intrinsic qualities form a typological backbone that lends itself to rapid emergency deployment. Their large, open interiors can be reconfigured as shelters, medical units, distribution centers or psychosocial support spaces; their strategic positioning near transport nodes accelerates evacuation, logistics and staff mobility; and their structural resilience allows them to withstand influx, equipment loads, and the operational *"stress tests"* of crises.

Temporary emergency shelters remain the most immediate architectural necessity. Industrial spaces, thanks to their wide spans and structural stamina, can host large groups while offering subdivisible zones for privacy, hygiene and medical needs. They can protect against primary and secondary hazards and preserve communal identity in moments of rupture. When reconstruction is slow, however, temporary shelters risk becoming permanent; industrial buildings can mitigate this by allowing more dignified, adaptable living conditions, supported by existing or easily retrofitted sanitary infrastructure.

Medical care facilities form the second essential typology. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the value of large, scalable interiors: in mass triage, vaccination and acute care. Industrial halls' generous heights enable controlled environmental conditions, while their flexibility allows for dynamic expansion or contraction of units as emergency intensity fluctuates. Food and water distribution centers also benefit from industrial typologies. Their structural grids accommodate palletized storage, robust flooring, and clear technological flows (receiving–storage–dispatch). Proximity to transport infrastructure ensures efficient supply movement and secure delivery of humanitarian goods to both displaced populations and residents sheltering in place.

Finally, psychosocial support spaces—an often neglected yet fundamental right—can be carved into industrial interiors to host counselling rooms, quiet zones, community meeting areas, recreational spaces and children's play areas. Exterior interstitial spaces between buildings provide safe outdoor areas, essential for emotional regulation after trauma.

Emergency architecture is born from urgency, but must ultimately answer to dignity (Nappi & Souza, 2017). The first instinct in a crisis is to provide *"bare-minimum shelter"* like a roof or a perimeter of safety, but such reductive solutions risk reducing people to logistical units rather than human beings in need of grounding, privacy, and symbolic recognition. The tension lies in the temporal paradox of emergency itself: what is designed to be temporary often becomes, in practice, an extended condition, and the austere logic of speed cannot sustain the emotional and social needs that emerge over time. Minimal shelters may keep bodies alive, but they seldom offer a sense of place, with no anchors for identity, no spatial cues for belonging, no atmospheres that support healing. Meaningful place, by contrast, provides more than enclosure; it offers comfort, familiarity, and the possibility of reconstituting community even in displacement. Industrial buildings, with their recognisable forms and material gravity, can moderate this tension: they allow immediate occupation while carrying enough spatial and symbolic depth to accommodate rituals of daily life, negotiation, and care. They show that urgency and dignity need not be opposites, and that the speed of response can coexist with an architecture that acknowledges loss and restores the fundamental human right to inhabit.

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Recent crises—from the COVID-19 pandemic to the war in Ukraine, the destruction in Gaza, and the earthquakes in Turkey—have revealed a spatial paradox at the heart of contemporary resilience: emergency architecture is designed as temporary but often becomes permanent, while industrial heritage, built for endurance, is routinely left to decay. This inversion exposes a deeper tension between urgency and dignity, between the minimal shelter of survival and the meaningful place needed for psychological continuity. The principle of resilience, understood as the capacity of a multi-hazard-exposed system to resist and adapt (Hyogo Framework for Action, 2005-2015), clarifies this contradiction. A resilient city thrives on spatial and functional diversity, social adaptability, and scalar modularity; it depends on reflexivity, robustness, and flexibility, qualities directly relevant to the latent potential of abandoned industrial spaces.

The pandemic acted as a global rehearsal in spatial improvisation: sports halls and warehouses became field hospitals, cities reorganized themselves overnight, and the built environment shaped the emotional experience of collective uncertainty. COVID-19 destabilized the industrial heritage sector, yet simultaneously strengthened local awareness of identity and cultural stewardship. Reflexivity, here, meant the ability of urban systems to learn from disruption, assess vulnerabilities, and reorganize toward long-term improvement. Applied to industrial spaces, it implies transdisciplinary management, adaptive policies, and participatory governance capable of transforming dormant assets into crisis-responsive infrastructures.

Conflict zones intensified this dynamic. In Ukraine, bombardments damaged or obliterated buildings with architectural and identity value, including numerous industrial structures woven into the country's economic and cultural memory. Specialists mobilized to digitally scan and document threatened sites at unprecedented speed, echoing Wilhelmus Elskamp's Architecture through Conflict, where architects in Jerusalem navigate layered political pressures while defending built heritage and civil rights (Elskamp, 2021). Similar patterns unfold in Gaza and its wider region, where industrial buildings have suffered severe collateral damage. Their loss erases industrial identity and spatial continuity, further destabilizing already fragile urban systems.

Across these contexts, a common insight emerges: industrial buildings possess qualities that emergency architectures lack. Their structural resilience, open plans, layered histories, and embeddedness in urban networks allow them to reconcile provisional response with long-term coherence. Their adjacent outdoor spaces support triage, logistics, circulation, and mental well-being. Accessibility, visibility, and familiarity turn them into anchors of continuity rather than anonymous refuges.

Industrial Structures Reactivated for Emergency Inhabitation. Emergency architecture is rapidly becoming a central concern as humanity recovers from the compounded effects of the pandemic and ongoing armed conflicts. While historically associated with war-related displacement, post-flood reconstruction, or temporary disaster camps, it increasingly addresses disease mitigation and complex natural hazards. Sustainability has become integral to architectural responses, and future projects will likely be more autonomous and more attuned to the reuse of existing, underutilised structures. In a global economy weakened by crisis, adaptive reuse becomes critical for rapid intervention, allowing cities to mobilise dormant industrial spaces at high speed and low cost.

A defining example from the United Kingdom demonstrates the strategic value of industrial heritage in emergency management. Manchester Central Station, one of the city's major 19th-century rail terminals, with its monumental glass vault, carried by a spectacular single-span iron structure, embodied the ambition of Victorian industrial architecture. After its original function became obsolete, the building was listed in 1963 and repurposed as a major venue for cultural and commercial events. Yet its most consequential transformation occurred in March 2020, when the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic struck. Within just 13 days, the former railway hall was converted into a 750-bed modular hospital for non-critical COVID-19 patients, relieving overwhelmed regional hospitals. The site's main hall, which was once the bustling platform, was subdivided into 18 open wards under the historic wrought-iron vault, using lightweight panel systems for bedheads and service corridors. The existing electrical infrastructure was expanded, and a large-scale medical gas system was installed to supply oxygen (I Love Manchester, 2020).

This example demonstrates how the spatial amplitude, structural clarity, centrality, and ease of maintenance typical of industrial buildings can sustain regional emergency response at scale. The project's success depended on a transdisciplinary coalition, implicating NGOs, the local council, military and police units, volunteers, local businesses, private owners, construction teams, and medical specialists. It revealed how public–private collaboration can unlock extraordinary functional, economic, and community benefits (Manchester Central, 2020). More importantly, it showed that heritage preservation is truly compatible with crisis response.

Italy provides a parallel and equally compelling case. The Officine Grandi Riparazioni (OGR) in Turin served its industrial role until the 1970s, later becoming a storage facility before being fully abandoned in the early 1990s. Acquired in 2013, the complex underwent a major rehabilitation that restored more than 35,000 m² of brick halls, steel trusses, and monumental volumes. Reopened in 2017 as a centre for arts, technology, and innovation, OGR quickly became a flagship of Turin's cultural revitalisation (Mariani, 2021). During the COVID-19 crisis, this "third life" took on an urgent dimension: the renovated building was transformed into a temporary

hospital for sub-intensive COVID patients, hosting up to 100 people and relieving pressure on the regional healthcare system (Ronchi, 2020). The temporary healthcare zone was conceived for full post-crisis reuse. The adaptive reuse project converted 8,900 m² into 92 monitored beds arranged in 12 rooms, all completed in 12 days with a total budget of €3 million (Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo, 2020). A striking feature of the intervention was the deployment of shipping-container intensive-care units inside the historic halls. These autonomous modules could be installed as easily as tents, providing controlled medical environments while minimising invasive alterations to the heritage fabric. Their simple placement on the existing floor reduced the need for complex equipment, partitions, and storage, protecting both the patients and the historic building.

Conclusion. Across pandemics, conflicts, and cascading environmental shocks, emergency architecture reveals its central paradox: conceived as temporary, it often becomes the spatial backdrop of prolonged uncertainty, while industrial heritage is left suspended between ruin and reinvention. This paper has argued that these two urgencies can productively intersect. By reading industrial buildings not as obsolete shells but as spatial reservoirs of robustness, reflexivity, and cultural meaning, adaptive reuse emerges as a strategy of resilience rather than nostalgia.

The case studies from Manchester and Turin show that abandoned industrial halls can be reactivated with remarkable speed, precision, and dignity, supporting both medical logistics and emotional continuity when cities are under strain. Their structural generosity, material honesty, and embedded urban presence allow them to function simultaneously as emergency infrastructures and places of belonging: spaces where the minimal requirements of survival can coexist with the atmospheres needed for care, memory, and collective grounding, like a civic gesture.

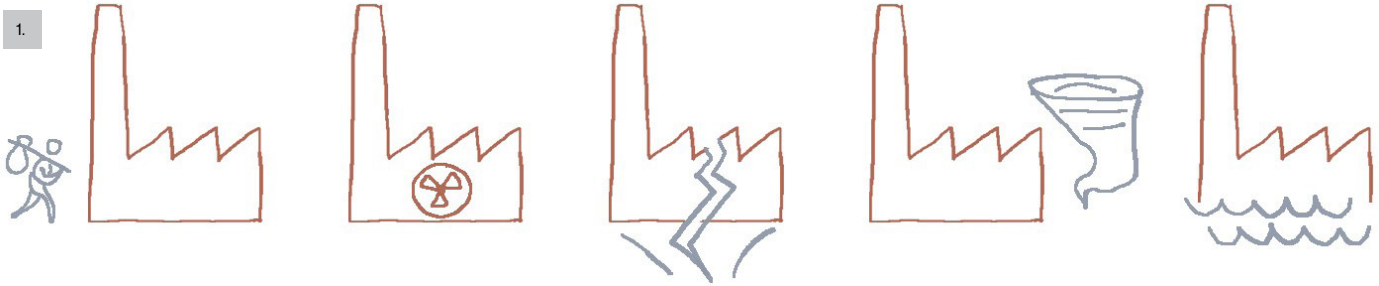
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Figures.

FIGURE 1 – Emergency situations that industrial buildings can accomodate. Credits: personal work.
FIGURE 2 – The interior of Manchester Central transformed into a temporary COVID hospital. Credits: thisisjude.uk, source: https://flic.kr/p/VTGKYp
FIGURE 3 – Main access to OGR Torino during the COVID pandemic. Credits: Bbicienz, source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:OGR_Covid_Hospital_Turin.jpg

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DESIGNING RESILIENCE: TRANSFORMING RESIDUAL SPACES WITHIN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS /

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Abstract. Informal settlements emerge in contexts of rapid urbanisation, rural-to-urban migration, socioeconomic inequality, and environmental and political vulnerabilities and are characterised by spatial segregation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited access to services. Addressing these challenges requires innovative approaches that go beyond conventional urban planning, emphasising strategies that integrate ecological, social, and cultural dimensions of the built environment. This paper explores regenerative design strategies for built environments and urban voids within informal settlements, with a particular attention to contexts marked by high social and ecological vulnerability. Drawing on a case study conducted in a hillside informal settlement in Cali, Colombia, the research examines how residual and interstitial spaces—often overlooked or underutilised—can become catalysts for urban transformation. The case study, developed by two graduate students under the co-supervision of the authors, investigates the fragmented urban structure of a settlement that has been systematically excluded from strategic municipal projects, resulting in limited access to basic services, infrastructure, and urban opportunities. Through field analysis and design exploration, the study identifies vacant and residual spaces within the dense informal settlement as viable locations for intervention, proposing a series of integrated strategies that address multiple dimensions of sustainability. These potential project spaces include community-managed urban gardens, decentralised water collection and treatment systems, modular sanitation infrastructure, and mobility solutions adapted to difficult topographies. Beyond physical infrastructure, the proposed interventions aim to strengthen the social fabric, foster collective appropriation of public space, and enhance emergency response capacity in a context exposed to landslides, flooding, and climate-related risks. The paper argues that residual spaces in informal settlements are latent opportunities for transformative interventions through regenerative design approaches. It further suggests that such strategies can simultaneously meet immediate material needs while fostering long-term inclusion, environmental restoration, and community empowerment, offering replicable insights for similar contexts.

Introduction. In recent decades, rapid and often unregulated urbanisation has profoundly reshaped the territorial structure of major cities worldwide, leaving lasting marks on their physical fabric and giving rise to informal settlements characterised not only by disorder and inequality but also by deep socio-spatial segregation (Carvalho & Netto, 2023). These settlements often face environmental vulnerabilities (Hussainzad & Gou, 2024) and are situated far from main urban corridors, collective infrastructure, basic services, and the opportunities provided by the planned city (UN, 2025). Moreover, the phenomenon of informal urban sprawl is far from uncommon or temporary (Atkinson, 2024), especially in Global South contexts (Dovey et al., 2020). In Latin America, for instance, this form of urbanisation is expected to become the predominant living environment for the urban population and the principal mode of city expansion in the coming years (Gouverneur, 2015; Baratta et al., 2016; Tessari, 2020). However, viewing informal settlements solely through the lens of deficit and pathology overlooks their latent potentiality, one *"that can become resources"* (Max-Neef et al, 1986, p.34). In this sense, they may be interpreted as "not yet" territories, spaces charged with "on the one hand, capacity (potency) and, on the other, possibility (potentiality)" (De Sousa Santos, 2010, p. 25).

As Perriccioli further notes, these marginalised areas:

> (...) *have become areas of exclusion, of minorities, poverty and immigration, but also of refuge and expectation where hopes and projects can be cultivated. In these "grey areas" where citizens constitute the masses but do not become communities, the social groups excluded from the immediate exercise of power begin to acquire self-awareness and design skills, creating community spaces* (...) (2017, *p. 26*).

The challenge of improving informal settlements requires moving beyond simplistic and limited upgrading programs focused on social housing construction, which converts inhabitants into *"mere dwelling consumers"* (Muñoz Veloza, 2022, p. 100). On the contrary, a holistic analytical framework is required to consider all the project spheres—environmental, social, economic, and cultural—as well as the *"kinetic"* nature (Mehrotra, 2010) and capacity for continuous adaptation and transformation of informal settlements. This understanding shifts the focus from an imposing tabula rasa approach (Certeau, 1984) to a context-sensitive one, based on strategies that *"prioritise social networks, pedestrian accessibility, and the capacity for incremental adaptation"* (Nezhadmasoum & Vehbi, 2025, p.10) Considering the points outlined above, this paper argues that residual and interstitial spaces within these settlements—often overlooked or underutilised—can become catalysts for urban transformation. when approached through regenerative design strategies. It focuses on a case study developed by two graduate students under the co-supervision of the authors. The case study is situated in a hillside area of Cali, Colombia, which faces significant physical, environmental, and social challenges. The research question guiding the regenerative design strategies was: *"How to transform the public space with the aim of meeting satisfied basic needs in order to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in informal settlements?"* (Montero Correa & Roldán Becerra, 2024, p. 13). Based on field documentation and the analysis of several best practices, the proposed interventions are embedded within a broader vision that recognises the "social aesthetics" (Arango Escobar, 2004) of informal settlements, their capacity for collective action, spatial flexibility, and community self-organisation.