

Corporate Archives and Corporate Museums in Italy

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A Subjective Perspective

This article aims to offer an overview of the world of corporate archives in Italy from a subjective perspective, grounded in over thirty years of professional experience in close contact – across different roles – with these realities. Presenting a personal development does not imply engaging in autobiography; rather, it means sharing a path that I believe is common to many Italian corporate archivists, who have often followed alternative training routes compared to those of classical archival education. Proposing the experience of an outsider – that is, a non-archivist – may provide an opportunity to reflect on the wide variety of possible approaches to the fascinating world of corporate archives.

An academic background with a degree in business history in the early 1990s, together with research experience in the history of firms, associations, and entrepreneurs, initially brought me closer to archives in the role of a user of sources. A few years later, in the late 1990s, I established in Buenos Aires the historical archive of the Techint Group, a global group operating in engineering, steel, energy, and healthcare. I also founded, in Dalmine, a foundation that preserves the archive of Tenaris, a company producing steel pipes in Italy. This experience transformed a business historian into a manager of archives and cultural foundations, serving a company undergoing globalization. Through a process that was, in many respects, one of learning by doing, I was able to experience first-hand the effects and challenges that this growth entailed for archives and their management.

In the early 2000s, Fondazione Dalmine joined Museimpresa, the Italian association of corporate archives and museums. From that moment, I became part of its board of directors and, in my second term, I have contributed to the association as Vice President. This experience has enabled me to become familiar with – and to promote – a network of approximately 160 Italian corporate archives and museums, and to raise awareness among companies of the value of their archival and museological heritage.

A decade-long collaboration with the University of Padua has brought me back into the academic sphere, as lecturer for the course *Corporate Archives and Industrial Heritage* within the Erasmus Mundus Master's programme *Techniques, Heritage, Territories of Industry*, organized in partnership with Paris

Sorbonne and the University of Évora. This has offered an opportunity to consider archives through a holistic approach, viewing them as an inseparable component of industrial heritage.

Thanks to these experiences, I have had the opportunity to closely observe the development of a number of archives, witnessing the stages in the evolution of a phenomenon that in Italy began to attract attention in the 1980s. I have observed the birth, growth, transformation, and hybridization of corporate archives with museums, as well as their transformation into corporate foundations. I have also experienced first-hand the progressive opening of corporate archives: first to historical research, then increasingly to the broader public involved in cultural and outreach initiatives, and finally to younger generations and schools.

As a synthesis of this path, in 2020 I had the privilege of working alongside two leading archivists – Lucia Nardi, Head of the ENI Historical Archive, the national energy company, and Giorgetta Bonfiglio Dosio, distinguished professor of archival science, professional archivist, and senior officer of ANAI (Associazione Nazionale Archivistica Italiana) – as co-editor of the volume *Corporate Archives. Archivists, Historians, Heritage Managers in the Face of Change*. The book, published by ANAI with the support of the ENI Historical Archive and Fondazione Dalmine, is the result of a collective effort by a community of curators, professional archivists, public officials, historians, and heritage managers. It offers a retrospective assessment, a picture of the current situation through a range of case studies and themes of debate, and an outline of future challenges.

This article follows the structure and contents of that volume and cites all the authors of the individual contributions, with the aim of providing a non-Italian audience with a general orientation map, including a “who’s who” of the field. The aim is to stimulate further exploration of specific themes, cases, institutions, and individuals who have shaped the history of corporate archives and museums in Italy, thereby reflecting the remarkable diversity and vitality of this landscape.²

From History to Archives

In 1993, I graduated in Industrial History at the University of Milan, the first university programme of its kind in Italy, created by Duccio Bigazzi, a distinguished historian of labour and enterprise who passed away in 1999. The Italian community of corporate archives owes much to Duccio Bigazzi, whose work as a scholar and teacher directed historians’ attention to corporate archives to be analysed in their entirety, and not only through the official records of boards of directors. Bigazzi also founded the journal *Archivi e imprese*, where historians and archivists engaged in dialogue on an equal footing and where many articles highlighted the great potential contained in corporate archives that were beginning to be made accessible. As a mentor, Bigazzi also trained a generation of young historians who today work in the field of corporate archives.

This tribute offers an opportunity for a first reflection: in Italy, historians have played an essential role in creating and nurturing a cultural and scholarly awareness of corporate archives. The evolution of business history, historiography, methodology, and sources for the study of the firm has positively influ-

enced companies, institutions, and archivists, and has encouraged projects of rearrangement and opening. In many cases, historians directly initiated the first reorganization efforts of important archives and, in the most virtuous cases, paved the way for professional archivists. In less fortunate cases, they substituted for archivists, carrying out non-scientific rearrangements shaped by research strategies rather than by rigorous archival methodology.

In the volume *Archivi d'impresa*, historians Amedeo Lepore, Giorgio Bigatti, and Marco Doria reconstruct the phases of this process of discovery of corporate archives initiated by historians in the 1980s. In archives, business and labour historians also found a fertile terrain, as recalled in the essays by Stefano Musso, Valentina Fava, and Paolo Raspadori, as well as historians of entrepreneurial biographies, as noted by Luciano Segreto. From board minutes, research progressively extended to balance sheets, personnel files, advertising materials, technical drawings, as well as photographs, videos, oral sources, posters, and records of corporate communications.

Also on the initiative of historians, in the early 1990s research and study centres devoted to corporations emerged in Italy. A pioneering case was the Centro per la documentazione storica ed economica dell'impresa in Rome, created by the renowned historian Valerio Castronovo. From the late 1980s, the Centre – no longer active – reorganized many archives, particularly those of state-owned industries (steel, energy, telecommunications, etc.). Another important and still active case is the Centro per la cultura d'impresa in Milan, established in the early 1990s on the initiative of the Milan Chamber of Commerce in partnership with Fondazione ASSI, a national network of leading business, economic, and business history scholars. The Centre not only studies large and small firms but also provides archival services to member companies and, in this capacity, has acquired important corporate documents, rapidly becoming a territorial economic archive. The Centre also produces volumes and manuals on corporate archives and museums, positioning itself as an essential refer-

ence point for the Italian archival community. In *Corporate Archives*, the current Director, Antonella Bilotto, retraces the Centre's development, emphasizing the distinctive nature of its approach to archives: research, management, protection and safeguarding, and valorisation.

An Overview of Corporate Archives in Italy

The volume *Archivi d'impresa* offers three levels of analysis: general essays, presentations of concrete case studies, and an iconographic section curated by Augusto Cherchi. The first group includes theoretical and methodological contributions that provide insight into key issues of debate among Italian corporate archivists.



Archivi d'impresa ANAI 2020

Diana Toccafondi, former Director of State Archives, Superintendent of Archives in Tuscany, lecturer, and member of national and international commissions, opens the discussion by drawing attention to the major changes experienced by companies since the 1990s and their effects on the nature of the creator of records and, consequently, on the process of archival production. Giulia Barrera introduces the issue of the immateriality of data, in particular personal data preserved in corporate records. She illustrates the philosophy of the GDPR regulation, its applications, and its concrete implications for corporate life, and also reflects on authorship and intellectual property, brand and patent protection, and the delicate balance between the right to information and requirements of confidentiality.

Antonella Bilotto, Director of the Centro per la cultura d'impresa in Milan, raises a methodological issue by emphasizing the specificity of corporate archives and the presence of documentary typologies often different from traditional ones: photographs, videos, drawings, but above all objects, products, and material samples. These particular typologies have changed the ways in which archives are described and arranged and have encouraged archivists to open up to other disciplinary fields. Giorgetta Bonfiglio-Dosio, senior official in archival administration, professor of archival science, Vice President of the Technical-Scientific Committee for Archives, member of the Higher Council for Cultural Heritage, and Director of the journal *Archivi*, reiterates the need to adapt traditional methodologies and tools to the specificities and varieties of corporate records, to pay the utmost attention to corporate needs, and to develop project design and management skills.

Antonella Bilotto and Maria Guercio – professor of archival science and digital archiving, expert in the management and preservation of digital records, and member of the ICA Programme Committee – highlight the challenges that digital archives pose for the production, sedimentation, and long-term preservation of records, recalling that the apparent ease of access to digital tools often leads to underestimating the fragility of digital documents. Daniele Pozzi, professor of Business Heritage and Economics of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises and Director of the Archive of Industrial Film and

Corporate Communication at Università Cattaneo-LIUC Castellanza, challenges the field to go beyond history, making extensive reference to international experiences and literature on the relationship between business and archives, and between business and history.

Museimpresa Member (Credit: Museimpresa)



Beyond theory and methodology, the volume presents a broad and articulated overview of concrete case studies, with examples relating to the different ways in which archives are used by different publics and audiences.

In the case of the national energy company ENI, presented by Lucia Nardi – Head of the Business Culture Unit and of the Historical Archive, and member of Confindustria’s Culture Technical Group – the archive plays an identity-building role for internal communications and serves as a repository of Italy’s historical memory for external communications. A similar strategy is adopted by the Pirelli Historical Archive, which Deputy Director Laura Riboldi describes while highlighting another central issue in the relationship between business and history: the need to link past, present, and future through a narrative thread, to convey a modern and innovative image of products, and to adopt innovative tools of representation.

A different case is that of the archive-museum of Banco di Napoli, presented by Concetta Damiani, archivist and lecturer in Cultural Heritage Sciences, who describes the project *Il Cartastorie*, a highly successful experiment in the use of archival sources to narrate, through performative and staged interpretation, a collective identity that is no longer exclusively corporate.

Francesca Appiani, curator of the Alessi Museum, shifts the focus to a company of excellence in the world of design and to its extraordinary archive of projects and products, where objects function as narrative documents, containers of information, stories, and memories. Daniela Brignone, curator of the Historical Archive and Museum of Birra Peroni, illustrates the case of a company that uses its past as a showcase of reliability and reputation, drawing on the archive to give form and substance to successful advertising campaigns and to cultural partnerships in exhibitions and events where objects from the collection are displayed.

The great potential of corporate archives as tools for educational projects aimed at schools is presented by Primo Ferrari and Monica Di Barbora of Fondazione ISEC in Sesto San Giovanni, an important collective archive that has rescued from dispersion vast holdings of industries no longer active in what was once known as the “city of factories.” Martina De Petris and Viola Maria Mazza of Fondazione Pirelli likewise emphasize the value of the archive as an instrument of knowledge for students. Manuel Tonolini, Director of Fondazione Dalmine, illustrates the rich educational programmes that range from history to industrial culture and robotics.

The role and value of corporate archives for territorial memory and promotion are highlighted by Danilo Craveia, Director of the Centro di documentazione dell’industria tessile della Fabbrica della Ruota (DocBi Centro Studi Biellesi) and coordinator of archival-cultural initiatives in the textile sector. He recounts the experience of a network involving archives, institutions, and schools in a collaborative territorial aggregation process. In another essay, the same author examines the mechanisms of formation of a corporate archive and shows how textile entrepreneurs in the Biella area have learned to recognize, appreciate, and use their records effectively for communication purposes.



Museimpresa Member (Credit: Museimpresa)

Marco Montemaggi, professor and consultant to numerous Made in Italy companies on brand identity and heritage marketing, stresses the relationship between territorial identity and industrial identity, attributing to archives and, more generally, to corporate culture, a connective-tissue role capable of exerting a centripetal force on entire communities. Examples include the Emilia-Romagna “Motor Valley,” linking historic automobile and motorcycle brands, Milan and parts of Lombardy as icons of design and Made in Italy, the Veneto tradition of footwear and wine, and high-end leather craftsmanship turned into industry in Tuscany.

Diego Robotti, former State Archivist with experience in industrial, banking, and insurance archives, concludes by reaffirming the need for protection: corporate archives and museums should not nostalgically celebrate the past or engage in corporate self-celebration, but should help to design the future as tools of collective knowledge and as resources that compa-

nies can use to innovate creative processes. With new policies and incentives, archives and museums can become laboratories for industrial and cultural renewal.

The volume also presents four major Italian archives that, over the course of their developments, have successfully evolved, carrying decades of history and experience through the challenges of the present and the future. Claudia Cerioli, Head of the Historical Archives and Library of Fondazione Ansaldo, presents the case of the first Italian corporate archive, now with over forty years of activity. Evolution has meant expanding the archival holdings, transforming from a corporate department into a participation foundation, and becoming a territorial economic archive for the Liguria region.

Barbara Costa, Head of the Intesa Sanpaolo Historical Archive, which concentrates the holdings of numerous Italian banks with very long histories, reflects on future challenges: the archiving of contemporary, born-digital records; the use of digital tools to manage complex archival galaxies resulting from mergers and acquisitions; and access models increasingly oriented toward users accustomed to search engines rather than traditional inventories, supported by open formats and Linked Open Data.

Another case of evolution is the Associazione Archivio Storico Olivetti, presented by Marcella Turchetti, which manages the valorisation of design, art, architecture, and photography collections and coordinates editorial and research projects.

The archive was established in 1998 with the aim of preserving and transmitting the cultural heritage of one of Italy's oldest and most dynamic companies, Olivetti, through the initiative of company executives, family members, and leading figures from the cultural sector. The history of the Association represents an exemplary case of a project founded on a fundamental relationship with public institutions, which has helped to balance the progressive loosening of the direct institutional link with the company itself.

Finally, the evolution of a family archive and family history into a corporate museum is narrated in the first person by entrepreneur Pina Amarelli, *Cavaliere del Lavoro* and member of several committees connected with business and cultural activities. Together with other members of the family, Pina Amarelli founded the "Giorgio Amarelli" Liquorice Museum, which intertwines family history, territorial history, product history, and the history of the enterprise.

Public Institutions and Private Associations: Protection, Promotion, and Training

The volume *Archivi d'impresa* also examines the evolution of the role of the state and public institutions. From the late 1980s onwards, public administration and heritage protection bodies began involving historians and research centers specialized in business history to map a reality that was emerging. The regions of Lombardy, Tuscany, and Lazio were the first to produce comprehensive territorial surveys, followed by sector-specific censuses. Antonella Mulé, a State Archivist at the General Directorate of Archives and at the Central Institute for Archives, outlines the Ministry's initiatives. The first is the Unified Information System of Archival Superintendencies, established in 2000, which provides quantitative and qualitative data to understand the emergence and development of business archives and the trends in declarations of historical interest. The second is the creation of the Business Archives Portal, an ambitious and significant project that consolidates information on archival collections, company histories, and entrepreneurial activities into a single database. In this way, business archives acquire formal recognition, visibility, and accessibility, becoming an integral part of the national archival system.

Public protection operates in dialogue with a broad network of associations and entities that, for nearly thirty years, have been engaged in the promotion and valorization of business archives and museums in various ways. The volume highlights three of these, each operating in distinct but complementary areas: safeguarding



Museimpresa Annual Seminary
(Credit: Museimpresa)

and studying industrial heritage through research, publications, conferences, and university programs; representing and training the professional category of archivists and related practitioners in business archives; and representing the network of archives and museums created and managed by Italian companies. These associations differ widely in origin, identity, nature, mission, and evolution but share remarkable dynamism, openness, and interdisciplinary exchange among academics, scholars, archivists, curators, and professionals. In practice, these associations and actors have, often irrespective of formal recognition of historical interest, rescued, recovered, described, and thus protected important private archival holdings, making them accessible first to specialists and later to an increasingly broad public.

The first of these is the *Associazione Italiana per il Patrimonio Archeologico Industriale* (AIPAI), reconstructed from the words of two past presidents and founders, Giovanni Fontana and Renato Covino, as well as the current president Edoardo Currà. The pioneering commitment of what was then termed industrial archaeology, particularly concerning the safeguarding of archives of decommissioned enterprises, is recalled through its key milestones: from the early 1970s, to the Association's founding in 1997, to the establishment in 2002 of the first Italian postgraduate master's program in industrial heritage conservation. The association's work encompassed research, studies, university-level training, and, above all, memoranda of understanding, collaborative initiatives, and concrete safeguarding and project interventions, including on archival holdings.

The second is analyzed by Francesca Pino, historian and archivist, who created and directed the Historical Archive of Banca Commerciale Italiana (later Intesa Sanpaolo) from 1984 to the early 2000s and served on the International Council on Archives – Business Archives Section, as well as the European Association for Banking History. Pino reconstructs the founding and development of ANAI, the national association of archivists, which, from the early 1990s, began hosting debates, conferences, and training courses that brought together public archivists and the emerging community of business archivists. Notably, in 2001, under Pino's initiative, the GIAI – Italian Group of Business Archivists – was established within ANAI, creating a space, open even to non-members, for dialogue and the exchange of knowledge and best practices within Italian businesses.

But who are business archivists? Together with Lucia Nardi, we have analyzed the evolution of the professional figures who have operated, directed, and managed business archives. Historians, academics, corporate executives, communication staff, and consultants were initially responsible for launching projects for the creation of business archives and museums in Italy. Only later did professional archivists emerge, often having to distinguish themselves from traditional archivist roles by developing a distinct professional identity.

A Network of Archives and Museums: Museimpresa³

Among Italy's dynamic associations is Museimpresa, founded in Milan 25 years ago, under the initiative of Assolombarda and Confindustria – the associations representing entrepreneurs in Lombardy and nationwide – and several founding companies such as Barilla, Birra Peroni, Salvatore Ferragamo,

Kartell, and Piaggio, which already maintained archives. The association was established to support companies intending to enhance the value of their archival and museum holdings. Membership criteria were – and still are – precise and stringent: companies must have created and organized a museum and/or an archive open to the public. This requirement signals recognition of the cultural value inherent in the collections of objects, products, machinery, artifacts, or archival records. Documents, images, drawings, patents, employment contracts, products, machines, production technologies, house organs, and promotional materials become cultural assets. These tangible and intangible heritage items express not only the company itself but also the collective memory of a community and should, therefore, be publicly accessible to the greatest extent possible. Business archives and museums also adopt specialized organizational structures, approaching heritage management more from the perspective of culture than business. They are increasingly managed by professionals from diverse backgrounds and roles, who share a vision of corporate heritage as a cultural asset. On this basis, companies can – indeed must – collaborate in the common interest of curating these collections according to high standards, promoting knowledge exchange, and broadening public access.

Since 2001, Museimpresa has gradually brought together around 160 member companies, including large, medium, small, local, and global businesses from various sectors, located in metropolitan areas, industrial districts, provincial towns, and villages. Members include well-known consumer brands, public or former public enterprises, energy companies, as well as institutional members such as archives of inactive companies deposited in foundations, consolidation archives, and regional economic archives. Within the corporate context, the rigid distinction between archives and museums is often blurred. Offerings range from classical museums displaying collections of products and objects, to exhibition spaces presenting both artifacts and documents, experiential installations, and other forms of cultural interpretation beyond the purely corporate. Corporate archives vary in scope and completeness. While collections of objects communicate the “what,” archives provide insights into the “how” and “why,” offering an informational heritage that contextualizes and complements the understanding of products and objects displayed in museums.

Museimpresa’s institutional activities pursue multiple directions, fostering multidisciplinary strategic partnerships. In 2017, the association signed a collaboration agreement with the Ministry of Culture, integrating business museums and archives into the National Museum System. Internationally, the partnership with ICOM – International Council of Museums – was consolidated through membership in ICOM Italy as an institutional member and participation in the Working Group on Business Museums to promote knowledge and expertise exchange among museum and cultural heritage professionals. Museimpresa also participates in International Museum Day. Locally, it has long been involved in MuseoCity Milan, a thematic week promoted by the Municipality of Milan and the MuseoCity Association, offering associated museums the opportunity to participate in open days, guided tours, workshops, and labs.



Museimpresa Annual Seminary 2024 (Credit: Museimpresa)

On the archival front, Museimpresa is an ordinary member of ICA – International Council on Archives and participates in annual conferences. Its collaboration with ANAI – Italian National Archival Association – began in 2018 with a memorandum of understanding to jointly organize training and specialized initiatives on business archives, engaging specific professional expertise in corporate heritage management and valorization. This collaboration has been consolidated through courses and seminars, attracting broad participation from members of both organizations. Museimpresa is regularly represented by its members at Archivissima, Italy’s festival dedicated to promoting archival heritage; the *Notte degli Archivi*, featuring special

openings and activities; the European Heritage Days, Europe’s largest cultural event, promoted by the Ministry of Culture; and *Archivi Aperti*, promoted by Rete Fotografia. In all these cases, member archives and museums organize guided tours and special openings, providing the public with opportunities to deepen their knowledge of Italian corporate heritage.

Interdisciplinary initiatives include the 2024 webinar with *Valore Italia* focused on the valorization and restoration of Italian industrial heritage, offering a significant forum for dialogue among sector experts, companies, and cultural institutions. Additionally, a working group initiated in 2020 with the Politecnico di Milano’s Digital Innovation Observatory in Cultural Heritage aimed to demonstrate the contribution of business museums and archives to companies by mapping their impact and measuring potential value. This research formed the basis of a scientific publication in *Museum Management & Curatorship*.

Business museums and archives populate industrial heritage landscapes, allowing the creation of specialized corporate tourism itineraries in which museums and archives serve as key destinations. Following initial industrial tourism guides produced with the Touring Club Italiano in 2002, and a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry and Federturismo in 2004, 62 itineraries have now been developed with the involvement of 100 members. Museimpresa has also promoted studies on industrial tourism, culminating in 2023 in collaboration with Nomisma through the Industrial Tourism Observatory,

mapping and analyzing Italy's industrial tourism infrastructure, assessing its potential for domestic and international visitors, and measuring its socio-economic impact. In 2024, Museimpresa participated in the third edition of TIPO Festival, dedicated to industrial tourism, featuring factory shows, industrial itineraries, corporate visits, exhibitions, textile workshops, and conferences, engaging both enthusiasts and professionals.

Public engagement activities include the *Week of Business Culture*, a national event in November during which over 160 member archives and museums coordinate open days and activities, including meetings, conferences, book presentations, film screenings, theatrical performances, and guided tours of archives and collections. This initiative consistently attracts large audiences, demonstrating the growing public interest in business archives and museums.

For many members, corporate heritage equates to design. The ADI Design Museum in Milan serves as a key venue to explore the finest works by Italy's leading designers. Collaboration between Museimpresa and the museum has produced a permanent digital installation displaying images of objects and documents from the association's 160+ members every minute. Since 2023, selections of objects and documents from member archives and museums are also featured on Google Arts & Culture, providing a digital showcase of Italy's business culture.

Since 2023, Museimpresa has also developed stronger connections with high schools, increasingly seeking hands-on experiences. The association supports companies in establishing agreements with local schools to engage students in learning pathways related to the history and contemporary reality of business, while connecting universities with experts in history, corporate archives and museums, and their collections.

Local and Global Archives: Fondazione Dalmine and Techint Group Archive Center

Concluding the overview of Italian business archives, I would like to share my direct experience in managing a corporate archive. In 1997, as a young historian of Italian industry, I was contacted by a global enterprise, the Techint Group, controlled by an Italian entrepreneurial dynasty, the Rocca family, and active in engineering, steel, energy, and healthcare sectors.

Agostino Rocca was a prominent Italian public manager active between the 1920s and 1940s. He led major steel companies such as Ansaldo in Genoa and Dalmine in Lombardy and played a central role in the state-controlled steel industry. In 1945, Rocca left his public management career, became an entrepreneur, and together with his son Roberto founded a company in Milan called Techint. In 1946 he moved to Argentina, where he established and developed an industrial group operating in multiple sectors: engineering and construction projects from Argentina to worldwide markets; steel pipes in Argentina and Mexico, and later globally; flat steel products from Argentina, subsequently expanding to the Americas; the oil industry in Argentina; and hospitals and medical universities in Italy. From the 1990s onwards, under the leadership of the second and third generation, Techint expanded from Argentina to the rest of the world through various acquisitions. In 1997, the Group acquired a historic



Fondazione Dalmine Headquarter (Credit: Fondazione Dalmine)

Italian company that had been producing steel pipes in Dalmine, Lombardy, since 1906 – the very company where Agostino Rocca had begun his distinguished career as a steel industry manager.

In 1997, my skills as a historian and biographer were considered by the company as a starting point for designing a project to create a foundation in Italy, in Dalmine, aimed at valorizing the archive and establishing a connecting thread between the company’s 1920s–1940 s history – then public

and “national” – and the new private, global ownership. Archives thus became strategic assets for transmitting corporate culture and values, both internally, within a company entering a global context, and externally, to the public.

The foundation was established in 1999, adjacent to the historic pipe factory now called Tenaris. The project emerged during a period in which Italian business archives, as noted in previous paragraphs, were experiencing significant developments providing a favorable context. Since its inception, the Fondazione Dalmine archive has served – and continues to serve – as the heart of industrial memory for both the company and the local territory: a collection spanning 2,300 linear meters, comprising 140,000 folders, 100,000 photographs, 5,800 drawings and sketches, 900 objects and audiovisual materials, 2,000 volumes from the company’s technical library, and 6,000 volumes on industrial history and culture. This archival heritage documents not only the company’s productive, organizational, and social evolution but also the histories of the people involved and of the industrial city – a true company town – developed around the factory starting in the 1920s, including housing, services, spaces, and buildings for employees and their families, which shaped and transmitted a distinctive culture and way of life.

From this archive, far more than a mere corporate repository, activities promoting industrial history and research have been developed, alongside dissemination of industrial culture through exhibitions, events, and seminars. Knowledge of the industrial city of Dalmine has also been shared through outreach activities, visits, and industrial tourism – often in collaboration with local delegations of the Touring Club Italiano and FAI – progressively fostering awareness among local residents as well as visitors from surrounding towns and regions about the history of industrial urban spaces.

Today, Fondazione Dalmine is in its second phase of development. Since 2023, it has relocated to a historic guesthouse dating back to 1924, restored and refurbished to LEED Gold certification standards, housing the corporate archive, a specialized library in industrial history and culture, and spaces for

exhibitions and conferences. The archival holdings continue to underpin public history activities and the preservation of collective memory for a territory with a longstanding industrial vocation. However, the foundation's mission extends far beyond conserving and enhancing the archive. Under the guidance of the second-generation management, Manuel Tonolini, Fondazione Dalmine disseminates industrial culture within the community where the company operates and among younger generations. Over the years, educational programs of increasing scope and quality have aimed not only to reconstruct historical knowledge but also to explore the transformations of the industrial city. The archive has thus become a key instrument for linking historical heritage with the city and its inhabitants through memory, participation, and community engagement. Central to this mission are educational programs spanning history, robotics, mechatronics, FESTO installations, and STEM disciplines, reaching over 20,000 students from preschool, primary, and secondary schools in the province.

The creation of Fondazione Dalmine coincided with my appointment to establish the Techint Group Archive Center in Buenos Aires, which I have directed since its inception. This group archive reflects the entrepreneurial trajectory of Agostino Rocca from 1946 onwards, following his establishment in Argentina as the head of an industrial group progressively involved with multiple enterprises in engineering and construction with global reach (Techint Engineering & Construction); steel pipes (Tenaris), globalized from Argentina since the 1990s; flat steel products (Ternium), expanding across Latin America from the 2000s; oil and gas extraction (Tecpetrol), launched in Argentina in the 1980s; metalworking machinery and systems (Tenova); and hospitals, research centers, and universities (Humanitas) in Italy since 1996. The Techint Group Archive Center serves internal corporate purposes, providing information and training on the founders' history and values to the communication department, human resources, and community relations. The archive functions as a vehicle of corporate identity and values.

This experience – intersecting family dynasties, local and global enterprises, and multiple objectives of internal, external, and institutional communication – allows me to offer some general reflections on business archives in Italy.

Firstly, many companies – regardless of size – have family origins, and the founder's history (and biography) often drives the initial creation of a corporate archive. For this reason, alongside the corporate archive, the family archive is always highly relevant, though it is not always managed in integration with the corporate collection. From the 1990s onwards, many historic companies rooted in Italian territories for over a century have been absorbed by global enterprises, with significant consequences for their archives. In the worst cases, new ownership did not recognize the value of the prior history, resulting in the loss of archives or their transfer to public institutions or regional economic archives. Such disruptions have caused discontinuities and dispersion, sometimes irrecoverable. In the best cases, archives have become part of a strategy adopted by new owners to consolidate corporate image, reputation, or market presence: the archive is preserved as the custodian of a brand, tradition of excellence, and connection with territory and people.

Another point concerns the public/private relationship. In the 1990s, many Italian public enterprises were privatized. Archives previously protected – albeit without formal declarations of historical interest – lost safeguards and faced risks of fragmentation. In positive cases, their status changed, with clear consequences for preservation. It should also be noted that many private companies invested in their archives, implementing comprehensive conservation and digitization programs, and opening their archives to the public far more effectively than public management, often constrained by chronic budget cuts. Since the late 1990s, many Italian companies, prompted also by legislative changes, established private law foundations to care for and valorize their archives. The management of cultural heritage shifted from direct oversight by marketing or communications departments to a semi-independent area still linked to the enterprise but with greater autonomy.

Notes

- 1 Business historian, she has studied the careers of managers and entrepreneurs, as well as the development of enterprises and industrial associations. For the Centro per la Cultura d'Impresa (Milan), she conducted research in oral history and small business studies. Previously, she served as Assistant in Industrial History at LIUC University in Castellanza (Varese) and in Economic History and Business History at the University of Bergamo. She is currently a faculty member at the University of Padua within the Erasmus Mundus Master's program, teaching the course on Business Archives and Industrial Heritage. A member of the Academy of Sciences, Letters and Arts of Bergamo, she serves on the board of AIPAI – the Italian Association for Industrial Archaeological Heritage – and is Vice President of Museimpresa, which brings together Italian corporate archives and museums.
Since 1997, she has initiated the project that led to the establishment of Fondazione Dalmine, which she directed from its founding and currently serves as Vice President. From the same year, she established the Techint Group Archive Center in Buenos Aires, where she is now the Historical Archive Director of the Techint Group.
- 2 Archivi d'impresa. Archivisti, storici, heritage manager di fronte al cambiamento, Rome 2020. The volume can be requested via the ANAI website: <https://anai.org/>. This article also draws on the reviews of the volume published in *Imprese e Storia. Rivista dell'Associazione per gli studi storici d'impresa*, no. 43, 2021, pp. 139–164, by Giorgetta Bonfiglio-Dosio, Carolina Lussana, and Lucia Nardi (*Presentation of the volume*); Stefania Licini (*Comment*); Federico Valacchi (*Comment*).
- 3 See www.museimpresa.com and the contribution of President Antonio Calabrò in the volume *Archivi d'impresa*.