



n **→** **t**
SNIA VISCOSA

A2 History and development of the area
by Eleonora Ortensi and Mattia Mei

At the beginning of the XX century, following the industrial process that had begun around the middle of XIX century, Italy had to face a sweeping economic change: from agriculture to industry.

In 1857 Giuseppe Milesi, the Ministry of Commerce and Public Works, promoted a campaign for the growth in silk production; many silk spinning mills were built in the most industrialized cities, in the north of the country. In an attempt to fill the growing gap between the industrialized northern and the agricultural central and southern parts of the country, a campaign for the production of fibers in Central Italy was started, aimed at bringing to this part of the country the economic prosperity and welfare that had already reached many provinces in Veneto, Lombardy and Emilia-Romagna. Many cities in northern Lazio and Abruzzo applied for the building of a silk spinning mill; Alberto Mario Marcucci, mayor of Rieti, and the Prince Ludovico Spada Potenziani did everything they could in order for Rieti to be chosen over Viterbo and Sulmona by Baron Alberto Fassini, president of the Società Generale Italiana Viscosa, as the location of a new mill. The negotiations went on through the months of October and November 1924, eventually leading to the signing of the final agreement on **January 14th, 1925**.

Despite a serious lack of resources, the Municipality of Rieti promised to provide financial and logistical support for the creation of the new industrial site. On the basis of this agreement, the “Supertessile” was exempt from paying municipal and electricity taxes. Moreover, the Municipality agreed to the free provision of 150 liters of water per second, granted the mill the permission to catch the water from the Cantaro trench and provided free drinking water for 20 years. On top of this, the Municipality agreed not to provide similar support to other competitor mills working on artificial textile products.

The Rieti mill was allocated to the **manufacturing of rayon** (originally called “artificial silk”) a transparent fiber made from cellulose; the company took on the demanding duty of designing and developing an hazardous industrial plan, because of the lack of connection roads and a working class without any experience in the industrial field.

The new mill was built on Viale Maraini (the main axis in the Rieti industrial area), close to the preexisting sugar factory (originally connected to the railway station through a secondary rail line); the choice was determined by the presence of a waterway, a critical element for the process of rayon production.

The project was entrusted to the engineer Arturo Hoerner, while the company Boellinger from Milan took care of the building project. The structure included the working site and the building of the **first working class district in Rieti**, Madonna del Cuore: the whole area, which was around 20 hectares, featured toilets for 10000 workers and apartments for up to 2000 workers, like a real village. The complex was composed of various buildings: the canteen, the workmen's club, the infirmary, the administrative offices, the management office and the depots that hosted motorized vehicles and the many bicycles belonging to the workers (the bicycle was the most used means of transportation in Rieti).

Many technical innovations were applied during the construction of the silk spinning mill: thanks to the use of reinforced concrete, the old building techniques from the XIX century became obsolete.

Moreover, the company agreed to move skilled workers from Veneto to the newborn site in order to train new workers who could increase the production and improve the quality of the finished product (during the production cycle between 1929 and 1930, around 4.000 workers were employed). Given the lack of a competitive ruling class, a number of managers were employed from all around Italy; they were allocated the small houses located in the present-day XXIII Settembre square. The inauguration was held on October 3rd, 1928, in the presence of Massimo Rinaldi, then bishop of Rieti, and the production was launched right after, on October 12th.

In **1937**, the “Società Generale per l’Industria Mineraria ed Agricola” from Milan funded the construction of the last plant for the production of sulfuric acid (Montecatini). This specific chemical compound was crucial in the processing of rayon: the cotton and wood pulp were treated with carbon disulphide and transformed into viscose, then they were forced through the spinneret and then immersed in a sulfuric acid bath, creating filaments of pure cellulose.

With the construction of the Supertessile (1928) and the Montecatini (1937) on its north side, plus the preexisting sugar factory (1874), viale Maraini changed from a promenade into a main industrial axis.

In 1934 the machinery for the production of staple fibers was installed in the SNIA Viscosa; the machinery was enhanced between 1939 and 1940; in November 1943, the operation was suspended due to the war; it was resumed in 1946. The operation was suspended again in 1980 and resumed in 1985, only to be permanently stopped soon after.

The area has been totally abandoned since 2007.