

ENVIRONING MODERNIZATION

**Exploring the photographic
collection of the European
Investment Bank**

A Virtual Exhibition

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Introduction

The European Investment Bank (EIB) carried out a large number of infrastructural development projects in EC member countries in the late 1950s throughout the 1960s. The project files are housed in the Historical Archives of the European Union. They include a large number of digitized photographs (around 300) that were produced at the time to document and advertise the work of the EIB. The pictures show the construction work and the newly built factories, hydroelectric dams, refineries, and chemical plants, in Belgium, France, West Germany, Italy, and Luxembourg. They are telling of the ways in which 'nature' at the time was perceived as a resource to be used freely and infinitely, mirroring the contemporary understanding that rural regions needed to be 'modernized' via industrialization. The ecological damage many of these interventions caused were not considered at the time, or not regarded as an obstacle. The visual images speak of the trust in the power of technology and the notion of the mastery of nature. As such, they present an important historical source that can help us to better understand current concerns with man-made environmental deterioration as they are captured in the notion of the Anthropocene.

Corinna Unger

The EIB and the Environment

The European Investment Bank (EIB) was founded by the 1957 Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community, and annexed Protocol, with the mandate to finance operations and projects contributing to European integration and social cohesion. In its early years, the Bank's investment strategy was geared towards promoting industrial modernization and infrastructure development in the European Communities' (EC) lesser-developed regions, with a view to reducing the disparities with more advanced areas. Although the projects financed by the EIB were indeed meant to change the European landscape, their potential impact on the environment was not specifically considered until the early 1970s, when the initiative of international organizations and the first steps towards an environmental policy taken by the EC placed the issue on the Bank's agenda.

In the decades that followed, the EIB started directing a growing share of its investments towards environmental protection, expanding the Bank's areas of intervention from air and water pollution control (which accounted for the main share of the loans) to reforestation, urban and industrial waste processing, enhancement of the urban environment, erosion and flood control, and protection of cultural heritage.

By the end of the 2010s, the EIB fully committed itself to climate action and environmental sustainability by endorsing both the long-term goals of the European Green Deal and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, rebranding itself in the process as the “EU Climate Bank”.

The history of the Bank’s “turn to the environment” can be assessed critically through historical sources, which may shed light on the gap between narrative and its implementation, as well as on the reasons behind this shift, which included the evolution of the EC/EU legislation, the institutional examples of other multilateral financial institutions, the pressure from social actors like environmental NGOs, and the proactive attitude of some of the Bank’s management and staff. Through the lens of one of the world’s largest financial institutions, we can address the evolving balance between economic growth, modernization and environmental protection that was one of the keys of the EC/EU policy-making and overall integration project.

Visual sources like the photographs presented in this exhibition are essential to the story, as they show the transformative impact of the Bank’s activities on the natural and human environment.

They stimulate us to reflect on the concepts of “environment” and “modernization”, and on the relationship between the two.

They also motivate us to take a deeper look into the role of economic and financial actors as proactive players in the history of human interaction with the natural world. Hence, this exhibition is organized around two main thematic areas: the environmental impact of modernisation and the history of industrial technology. The selection of the pictures held in the collection of the European Investment Bank (EIB) visually reflects these two thematic areas. Within these two thematic areas, pictures are also grouped into five subsection according to their main subject. However, these categories must be intended as permeable ones: some projects, due to their content, could fit in more than one, but we gave priority to their visual impact. A few maps complete the exhibition in order to help locate some of the place shown in the pictures.

Jacopo Cellini and Gilberto Mazzoli

The photographic collection of the EIB at the HAEU

The European Investment Bank's historical archives, deposited at the Historical Archives of the European Union, vividly illustrate the Bank's early activity from 1959 to 1971. The sub-fonds detail 134 projects across Europe and the Europe, Middle East, and Africa (EAMA) region. Each project is meticulously documented, its life cycle captured through a comprehensive selection of files. The photographic collection, featuring over 300 paper positives, was commissioned to record and communicate each project's impact, showcasing the Bank's early achievements. With diverse authorship, including specialists like Baranger & Cie and renowned photographers such as Dino Jarach, the collection offers a rich visual narrative. While predominantly in black and white, some photographs were produced in colour—a rarity in the 50s and 60s that adds an intriguing dimension. The imagery consistently portrays contextual elements of each project, from machinery and interiors to construction processes. Human figures, though present, assume a secondary role, immersed in project work. The deliberate invisibility of the photographer suggests a commitment to objective documentation, reminiscent of photo-journalistic practices.

The majority of outdoor daylight images were produced with classic 50mm or posterior focal lengths, maintaining superior clarity to images made with wide-angle lenses, generally avoided in this documentation. While aiming for objectivity, the photographers exhibit a profound respect for composition and demonstrate technical prowess. The collection's perfect compositions, playing with perspective, transcend mere documentation. The diverse representation of authors, styles and geographical areas, rich in context and coupled with links to documentary evidence, transforms this collection into a captivating visual record of European industrial development in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. It offers valuable insights about the history of industrial photography during this transformative period.

Juan Alonso Fernández

For more on the topic:

Fernandez Alonso, Juan (2021) "Image collections on finance and banking history at the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU)", eabh Bulletin: Finance and Photography vol. 1, pp. 82-91.

MASTERING WATERS

The building of large infrastructures like dams and hydroelectric power plants involves - besides enormous human efforts and technological engineering - a strong impact on the environment of the area chosen for the construction. During the decades after the Second World War, the EIB supported a few of such large projects in France, Luxembourg, and Italy. The pictures chosen for this section show at the same time the extent of the ecological impact of the construction process on the designated areas, the technological complexity necessary for these endeavours and, lastly, the hybrid environment (“damscapes”) these modernization projects created.

Gilberto Mazzoli

Mastering Waters # 1



Project ORAISON

Loan to Électricité de France (EDF) for the construction of a hydroelectric power plant in the south of the country, Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region. First project funded by the Bank in France.

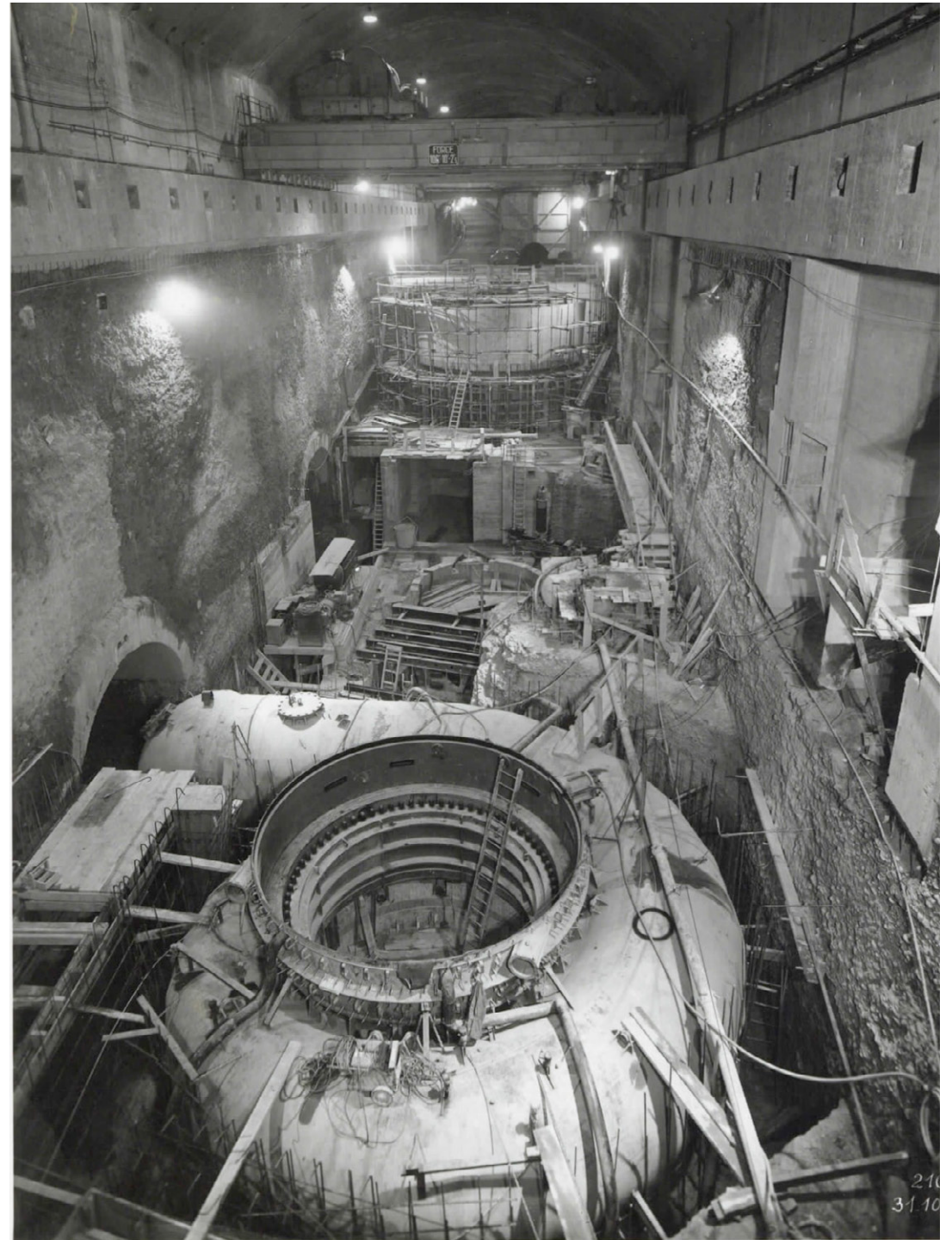
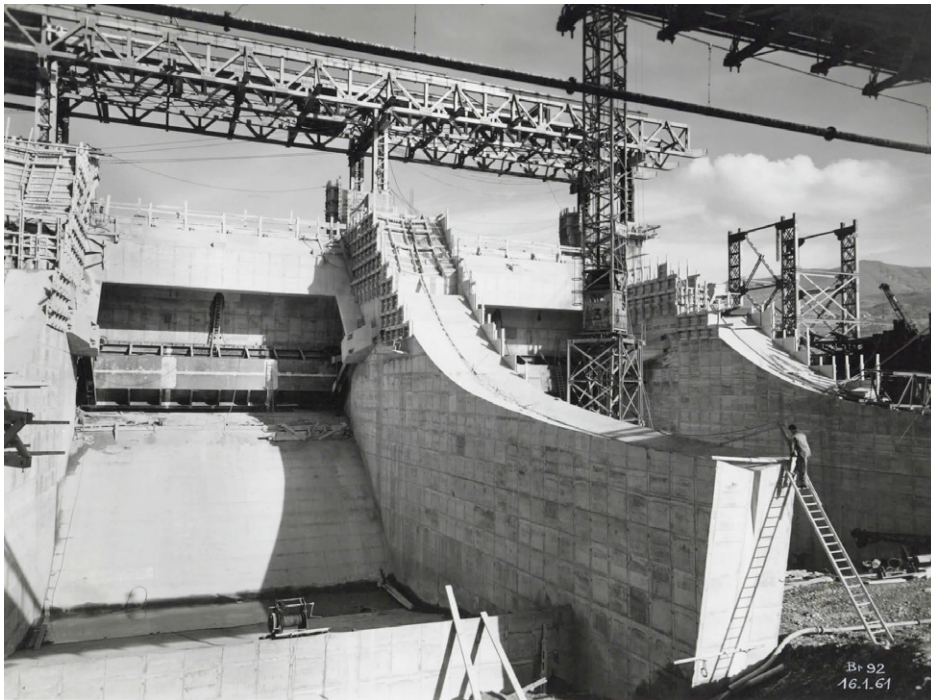
Dates: 28 November 1958 / 06 September 1973

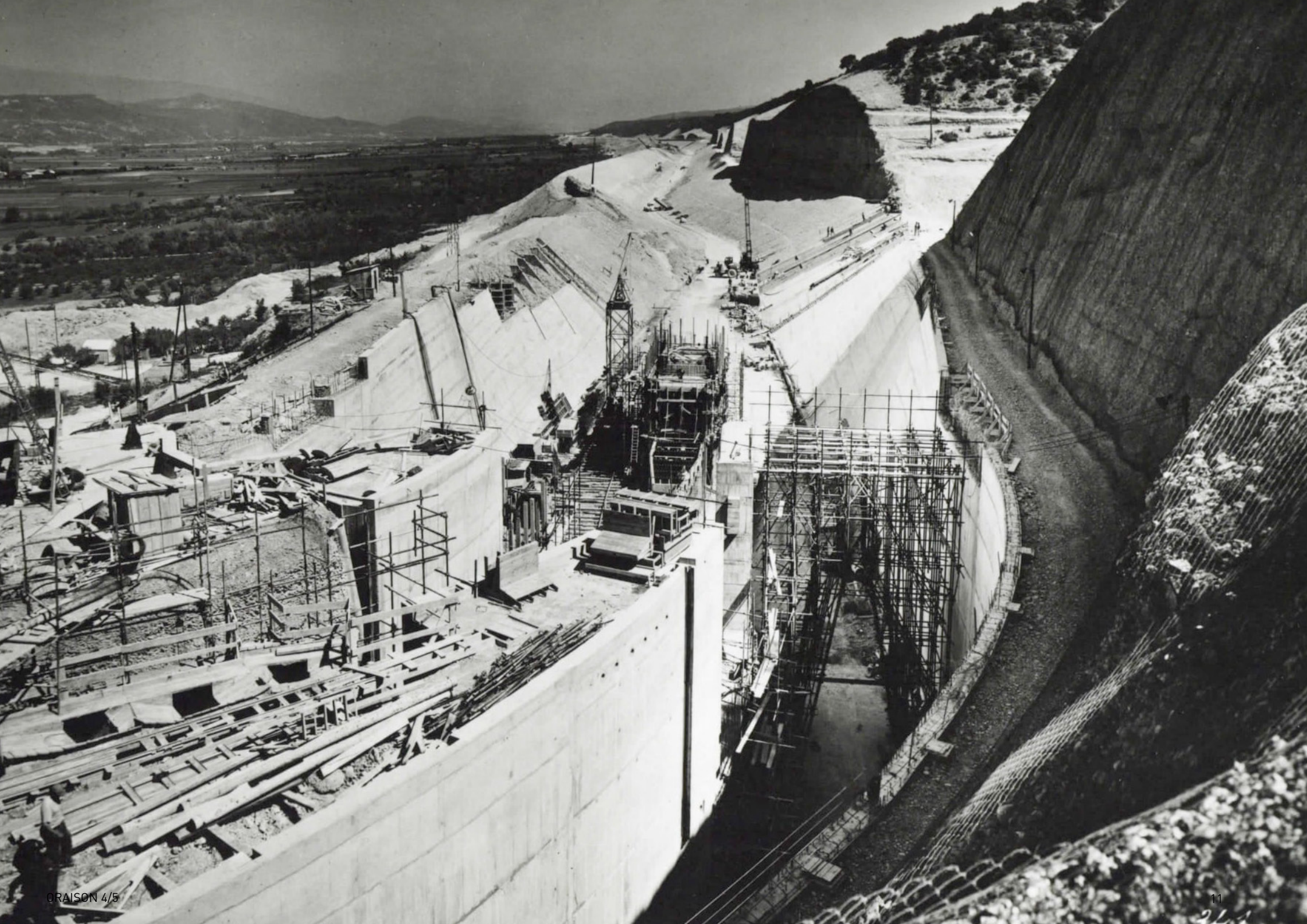
Photos: H. Baranger & Cie

Reference: BEI-2143











Mastering Waters # 2



Project Taloro

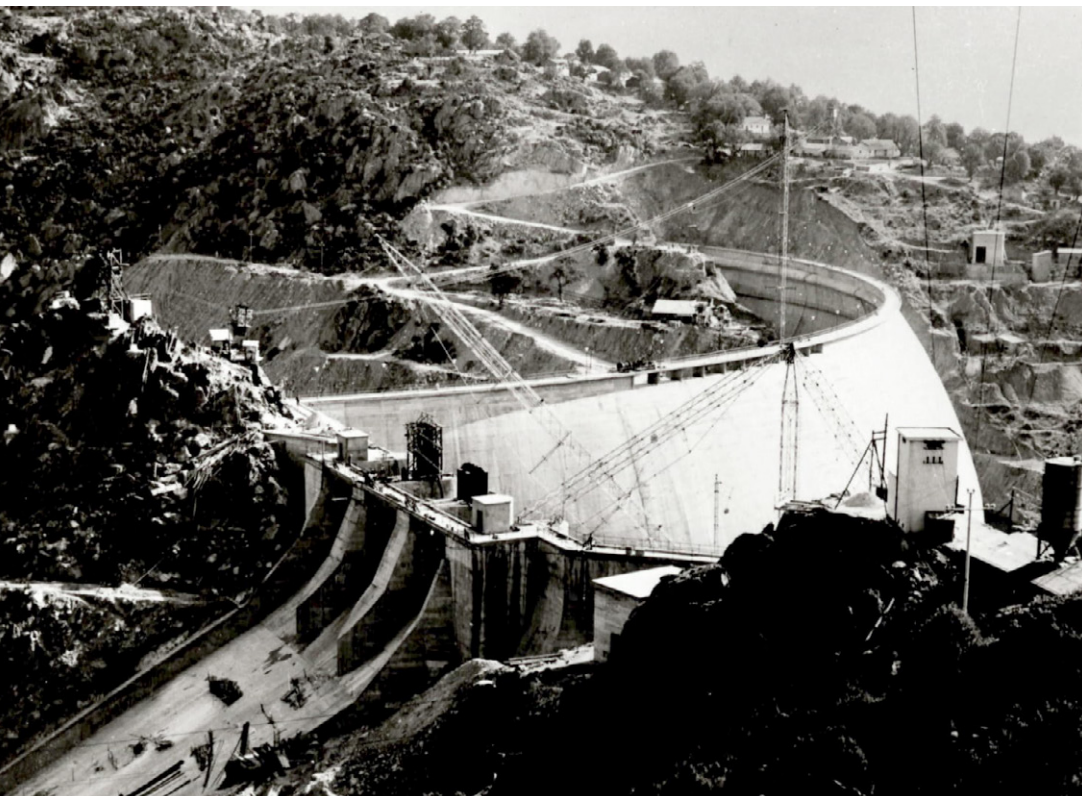
Loan to the construction of a hydroelectric power plant exploiting waters of the Taloro River in Sardinia, Italy.

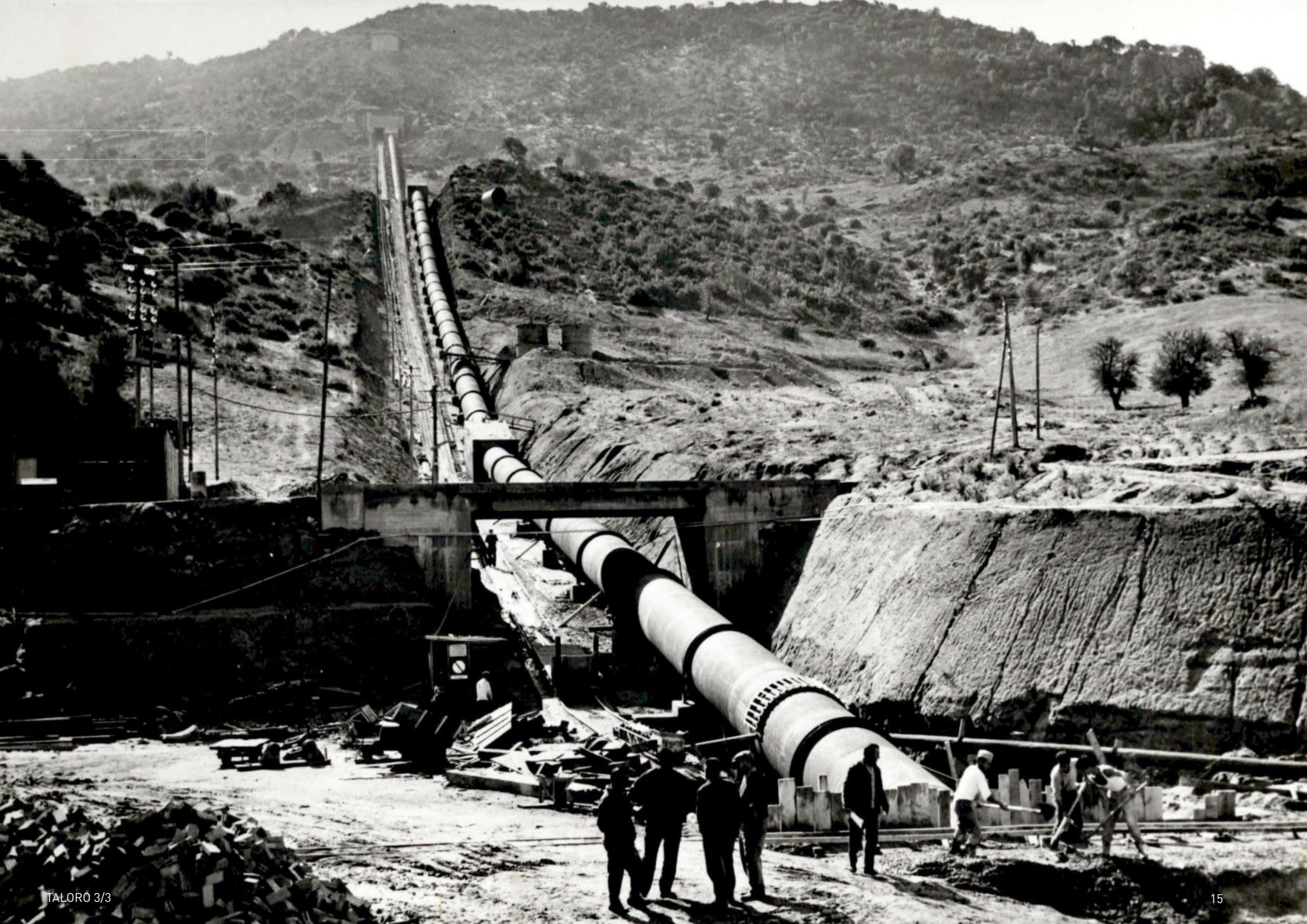
Dates: 19 November 1958 / 22 February 1974

Photos: Unknown

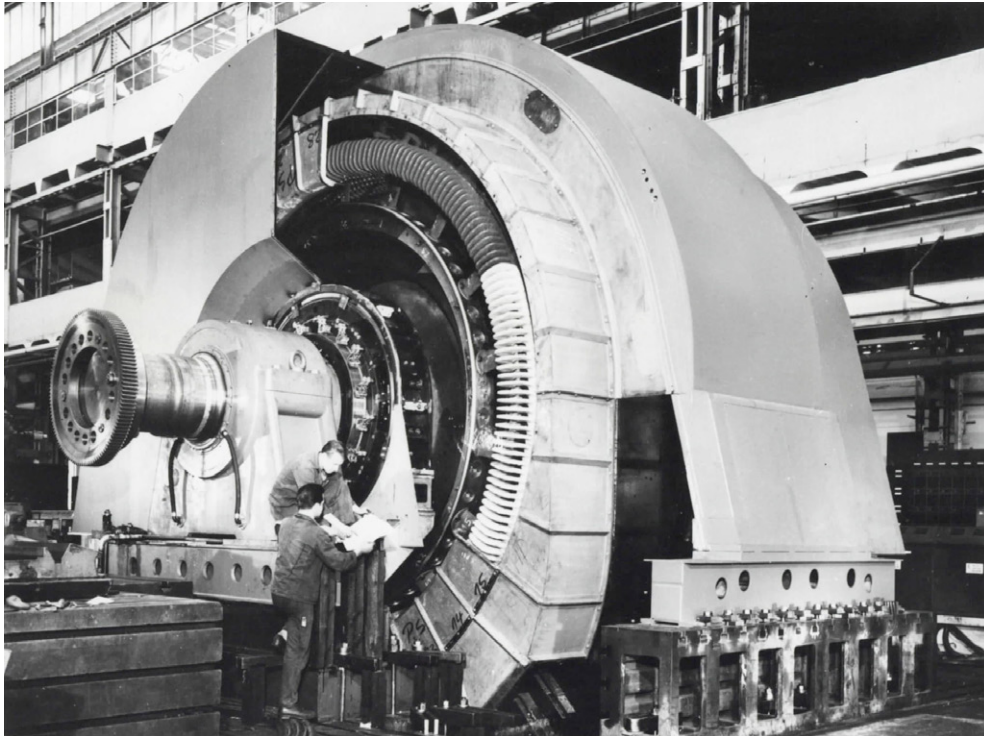
Reference: BEI-2154







Mastering Waters # 3



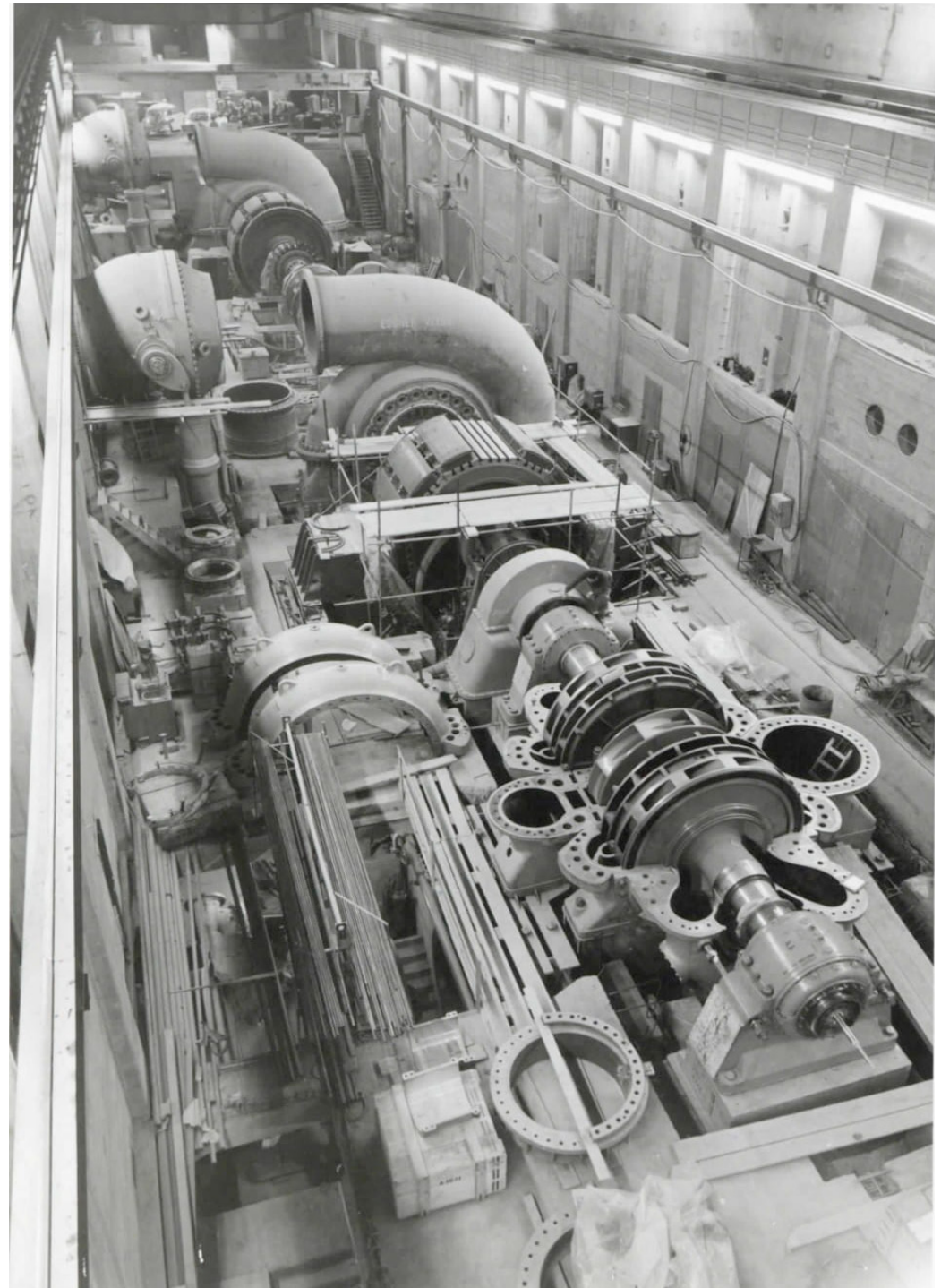
Project OUR

Loan for a construction of a hydroelectric power plant by the river Our in Vianden, Northern Luxembourg. First project funded in Luxembourg.

Dates: 07 March 1957 / 21 August 1978

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2163

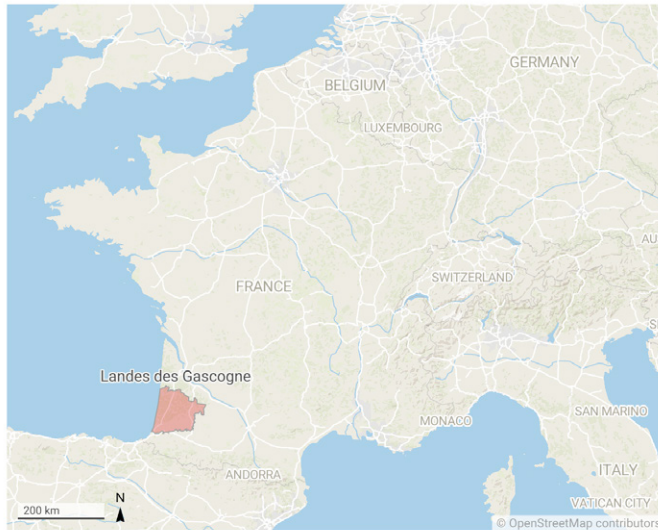


MODERNIZING AGRICULTURE

The EIB supported various project of “rural development” in European countries and beyond. Such projects involved the creation of irrigation canals and water reservoirs to improve the conditions of agriculture, the management of waste and the exploitation of potash fields to produce fertilizers. The environmental impact of such EIB projects, which aimed to develop agriculture, is shown in these pictures which recalls the stories of EIB projects in France, Italy, and Senegal.

Gilberto Mazzoli

Modernizing Agriculture # 1



Project Landes de Gascogne

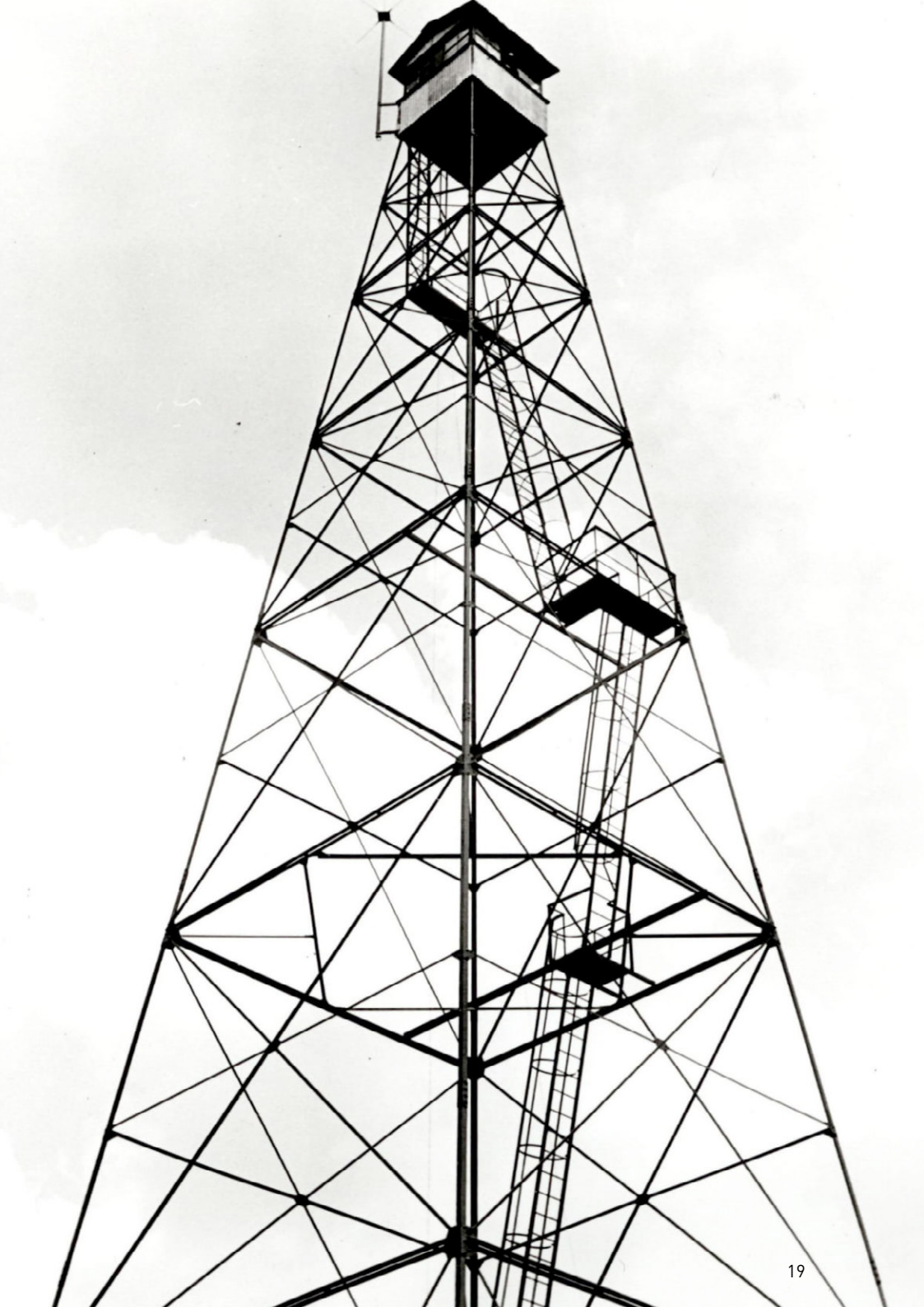
Financing of agricultural schemes and improvement of waste management in the forest areas of South-West France.

Dates: 04 July 1960 / 07 August 1981

Photos: Unknown

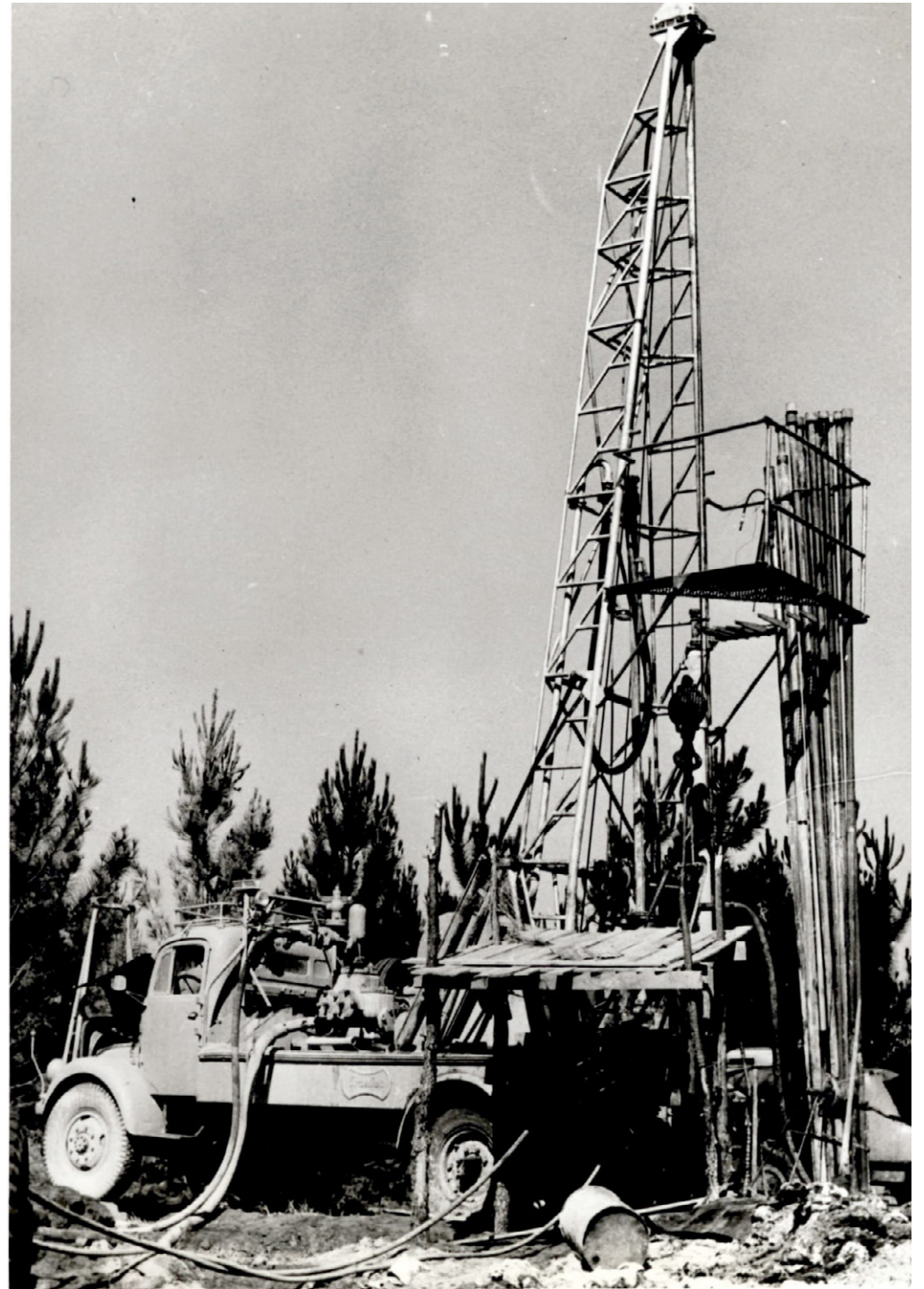
Reference: BEI-2148



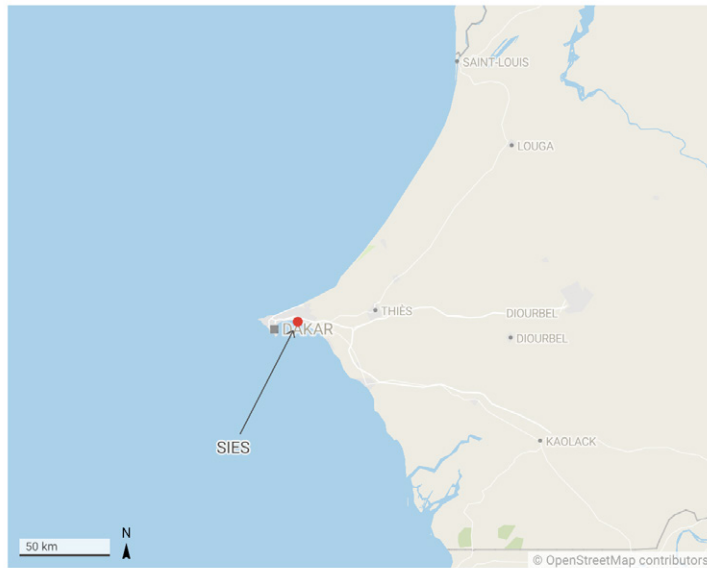




GASCOIGNE 3/3



Modernizing Agriculture # 2



Project SIES

Construction of a fertilizer factory in M'BAO in Senegal.

Dates: 1965 -1966

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-1699







Modernizing Agriculture # 3

Project Trinacria

Loan to the exploitation of a potash field for the production of fertilizers in Central Sicily.

Dates: 14 November 1960 / 14 February 1962

Photos: Fototecnica Morelli

Reference: BEI-2157



TRINACRIA 1/2





Modernizing Agriculture # 4

Project Bas-Rhone-Languedoc

Loan for the works necessary for the development by irrigation of territories located in three departments of the South of France, Gare, Hérault and Aude.

Dates: 14 November 1960 / 14 February 1962

Photos: Photo C.N.A.B.R.L. Serriere-Renoux

Reference: BEI-2146



BAS-RHONE 1/1



EVOLVING CHEMICAL

Research and development in chemical industries characterized much of the 20th century. Many European countries, with the financial support of the EIB, put effort into the construction of large petrochemical complexes and on the exploitation of certain minerals. Nevertheless, the ecological impact of such projects does not stop when the construction of these industrial complexes ends: as we can see in the pictures, such petrochemical modernization impacts the environment for decades, reshaping the ecology of soils, waters, and air in the surrounding areas, and also affecting the bodies of those who work there or live nearby.

Gilberto Mazzoli

Evolving Chemical # 1



Project Progil-Bayer

Loan to the construction of a chemical factory in Pont-de-Claix, France, resulting from a Franco-German cooperation.

Dates: 25 December 1959 / 06 July 1970

Photos: Studio Piccardy, L.Guelfo and M.Auffray

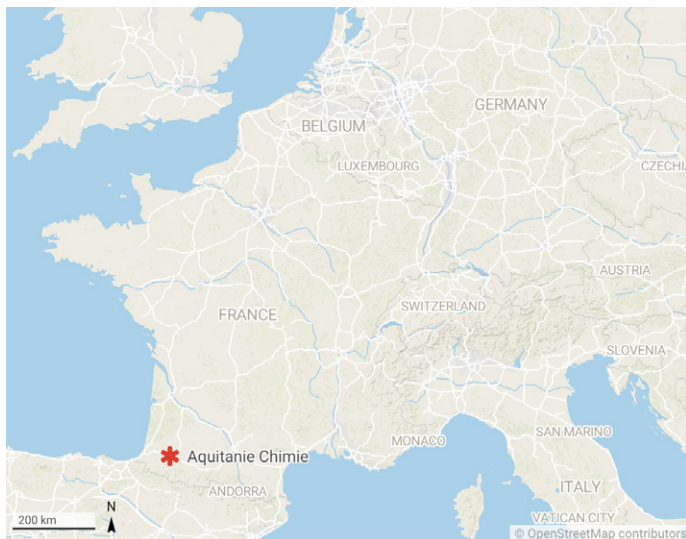
Reference: BEI-2145







Evolving Chemical # 2



Project Aquitaine-Chimie

Loan to Société Aquitaine-Chimie for the construction of an acetylene, a chemical compound, factory in the Basses-Pyrénées department, today known as Pyrénées-Atlantiques, South-West France.

Dates: 13 November 1959 / 06 September 1971

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2144







Evolving Chemical # 3



Project Mercure

Exploitation of a lignite field for the construction of a thermoelectric power plant in Lucania (Calabria), Southern Italy. One of the three projects beneficiary of the first-ever approved EIB loan.

Dates: 18 June 1958 / 22 February 1974

Photos: Giulio and Fabrizio Parisio and unknown autorship

Reference: BEI-2153





Evolving Chemical # 4



Projects Sincat

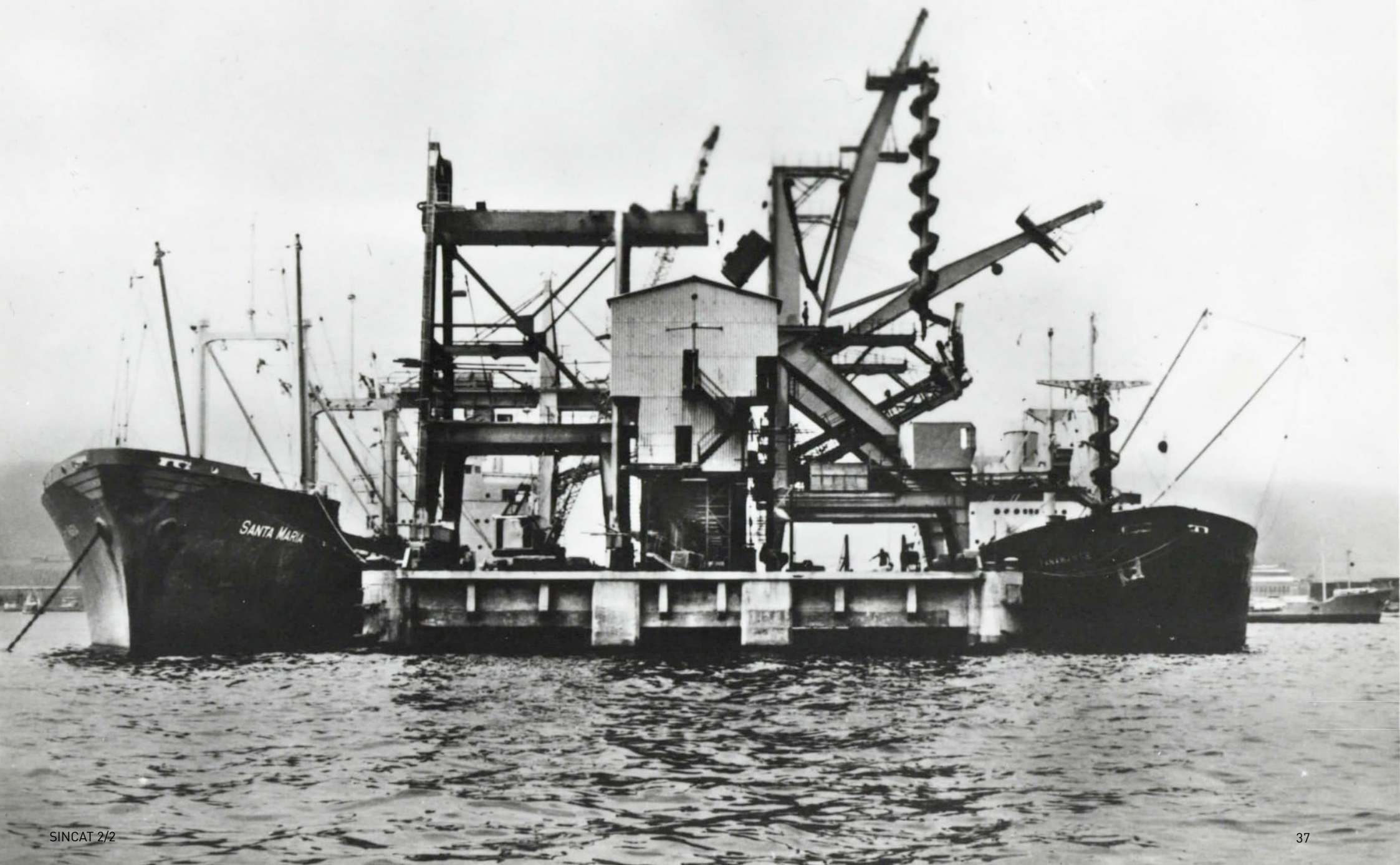
Loan to a company producing ethylene and chemical derivatives within the petrochemical complex of Augusta-Priolo, Sicily. One of the three projects beneficiary of the first-ever approved EIB loan.

Dates: 14 November 1958 / 01 February 1970

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2151





Projects Celene

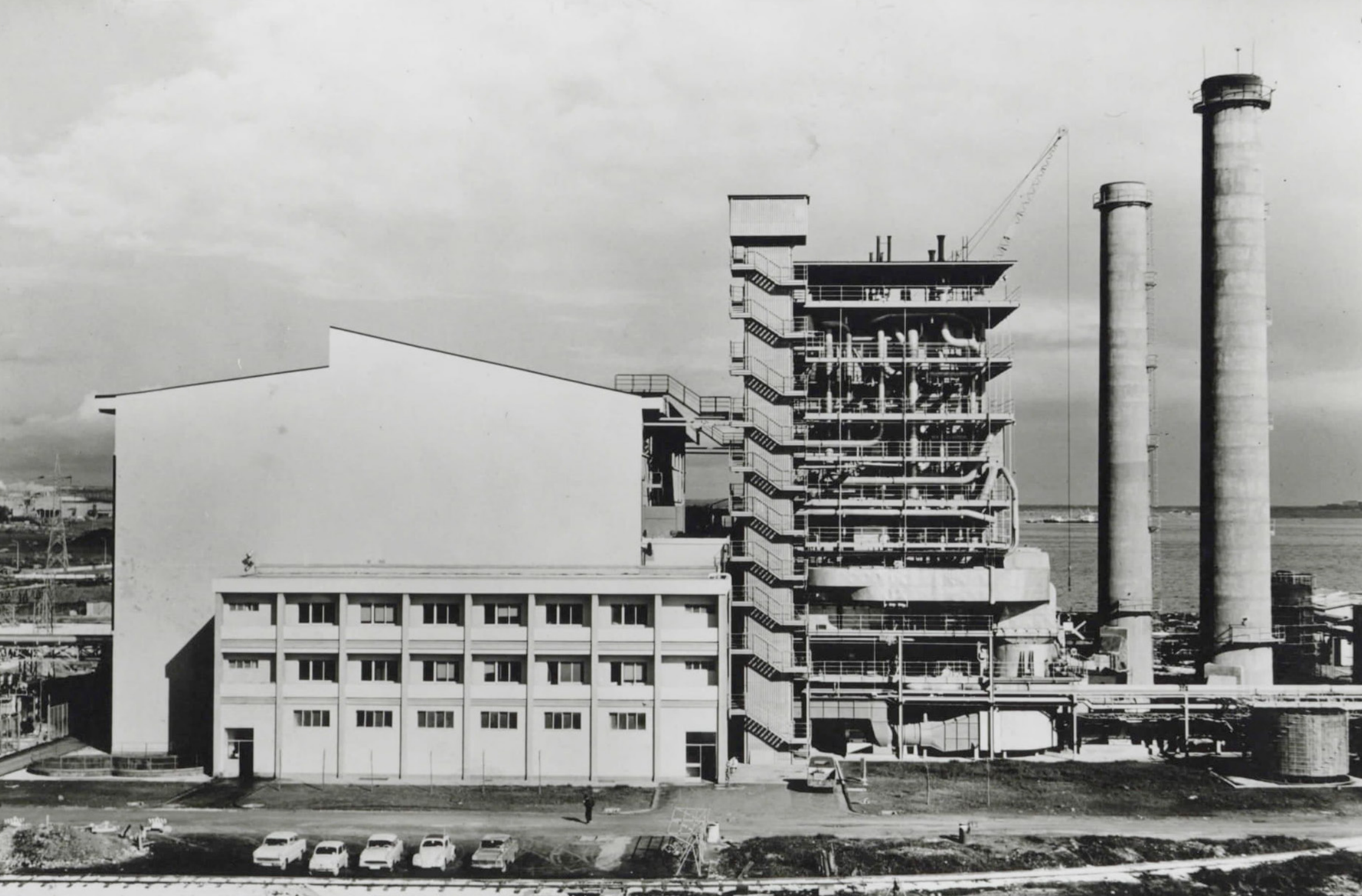
Loan to a company producing ethylene and chemical derivatives within the petrochemical complex of Augusta-Priolo, Sicily. One of the three projects beneficiary of the first-ever approved EIB loan.

Dates: 14 November 1958 / 01 February 1970

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2155



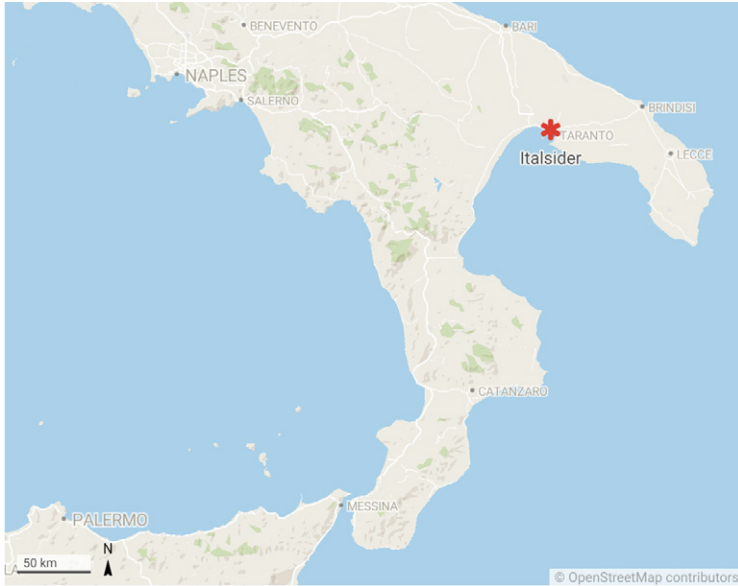


MANUFACTURING INDUSTRIALIZATION

Among the projects financed by the EIB we find some dedicated to the production and technological improvement of mechanical machineries. The pictures in this category, which explores projects in West Germany and Southern Italy, partially describes the ecological impact of modernization while focusing mostly on what occurred inside the workplaces, thus revealing how such modernity was imagined by institutions and consequently presented to the public. We find working environments like neat offices and futuristic control rooms, and workers dealing with complex machineries and assembly lines.

Gilberto Mazzoli

Manufacturing Industrialization # 1



Project Tarente

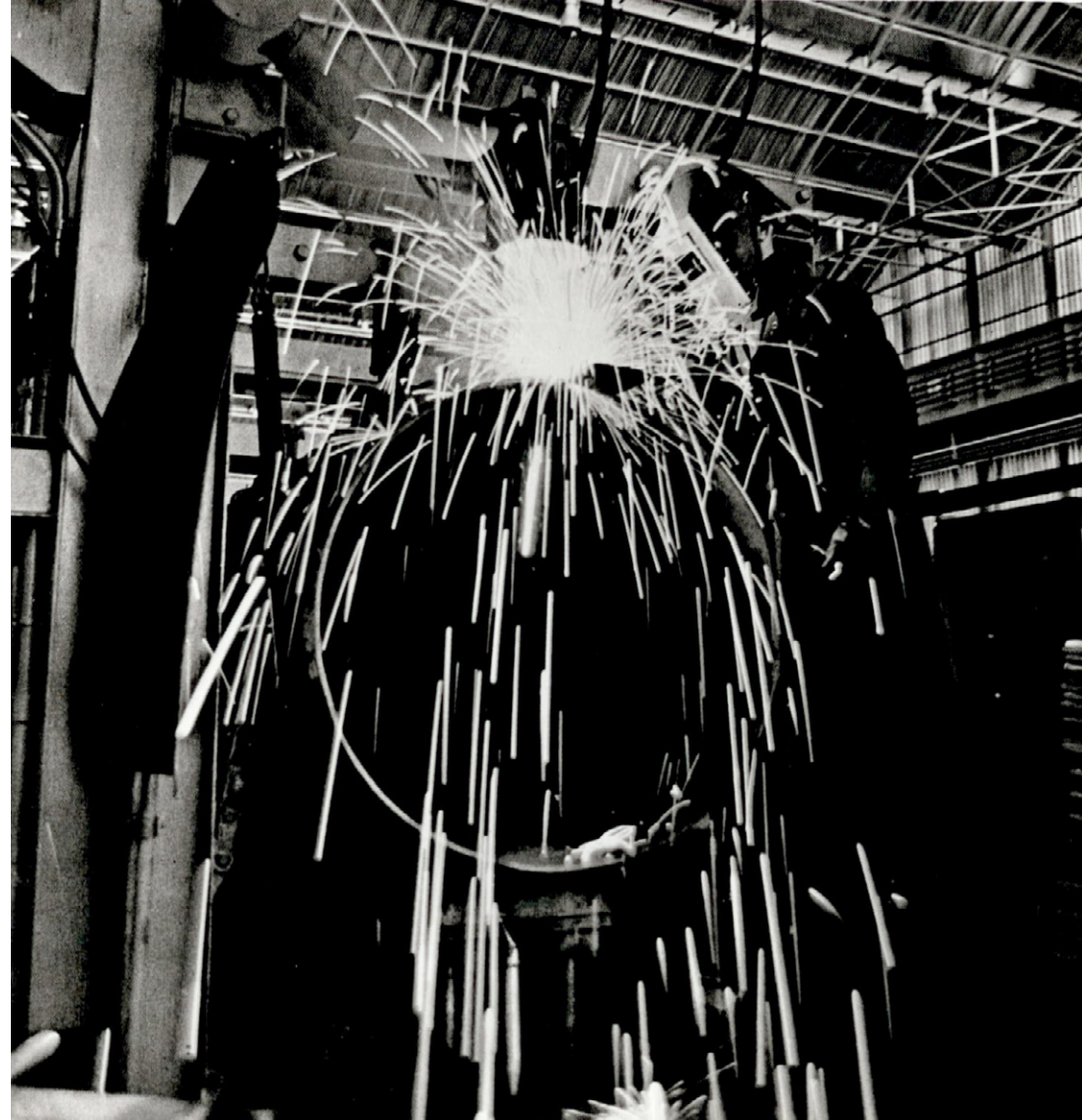
Loan to Finsider (later known as Italsider) for the construction of a steel factory in Taranto, Apulia, Southern Italy. The fourth complex of this type has contributed to the industrialisation of this region in Italy.

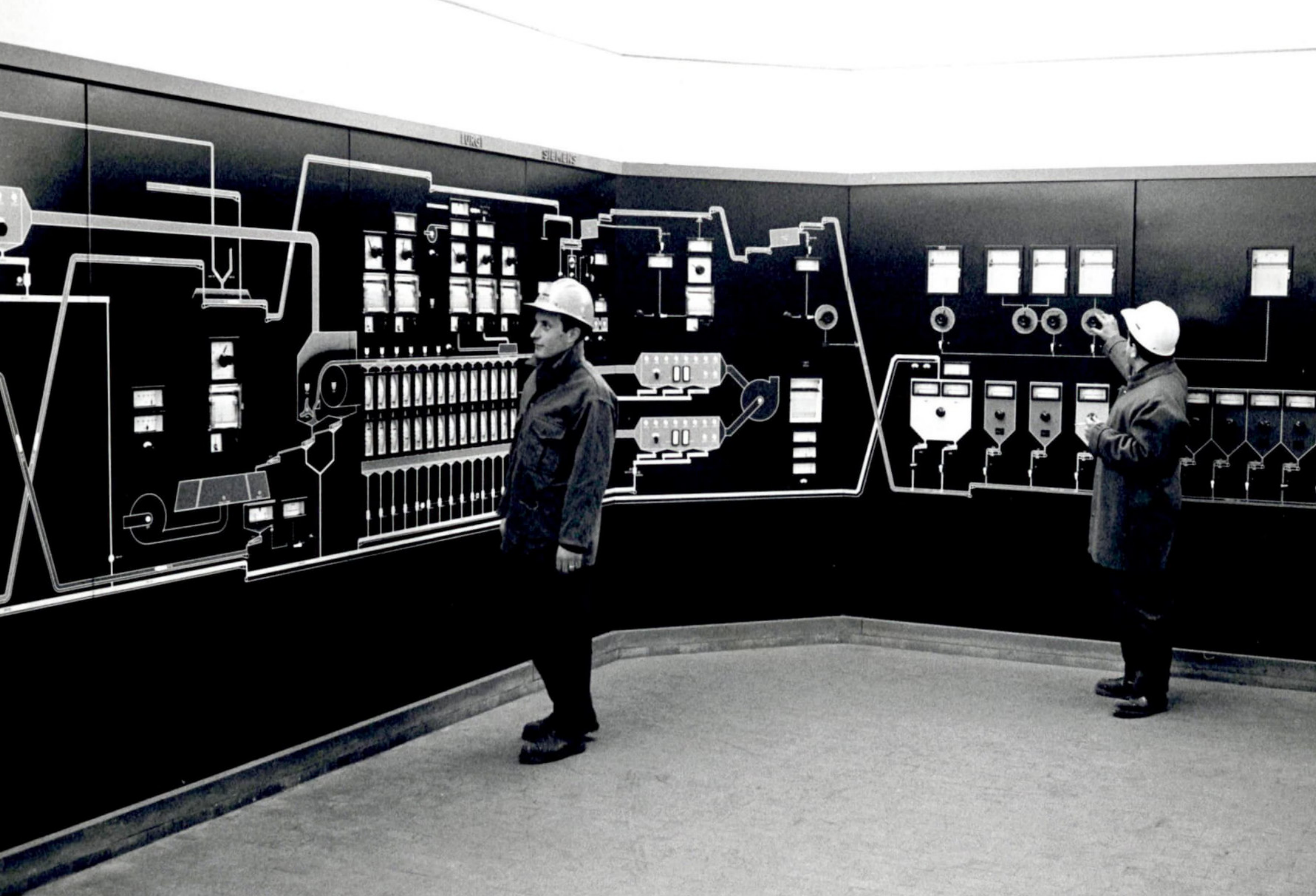
Dates: 16 June 1959 / 10 July 1975

Photos: Unkown

Reference: BEI-2156







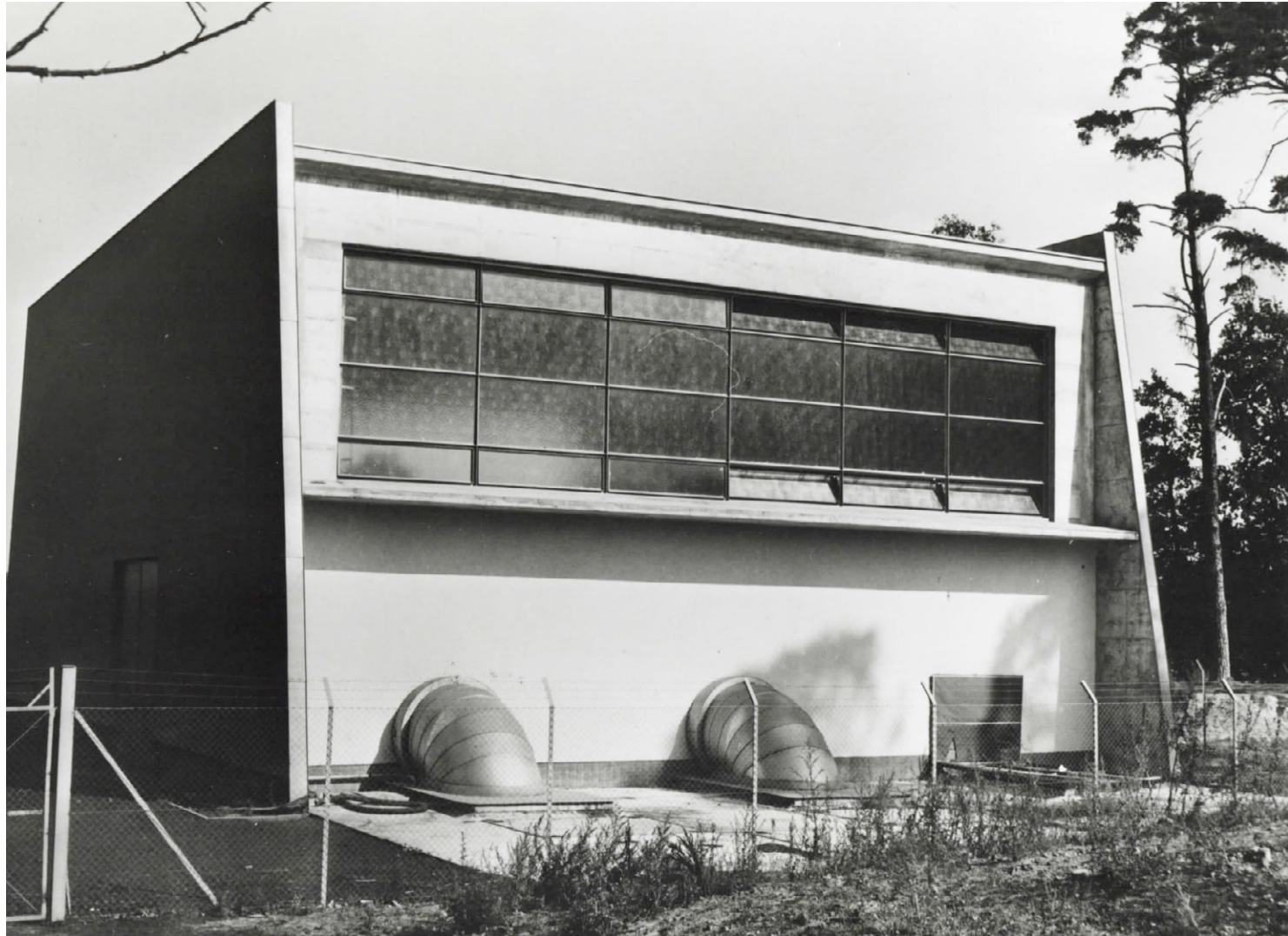
Project BEWAG 1

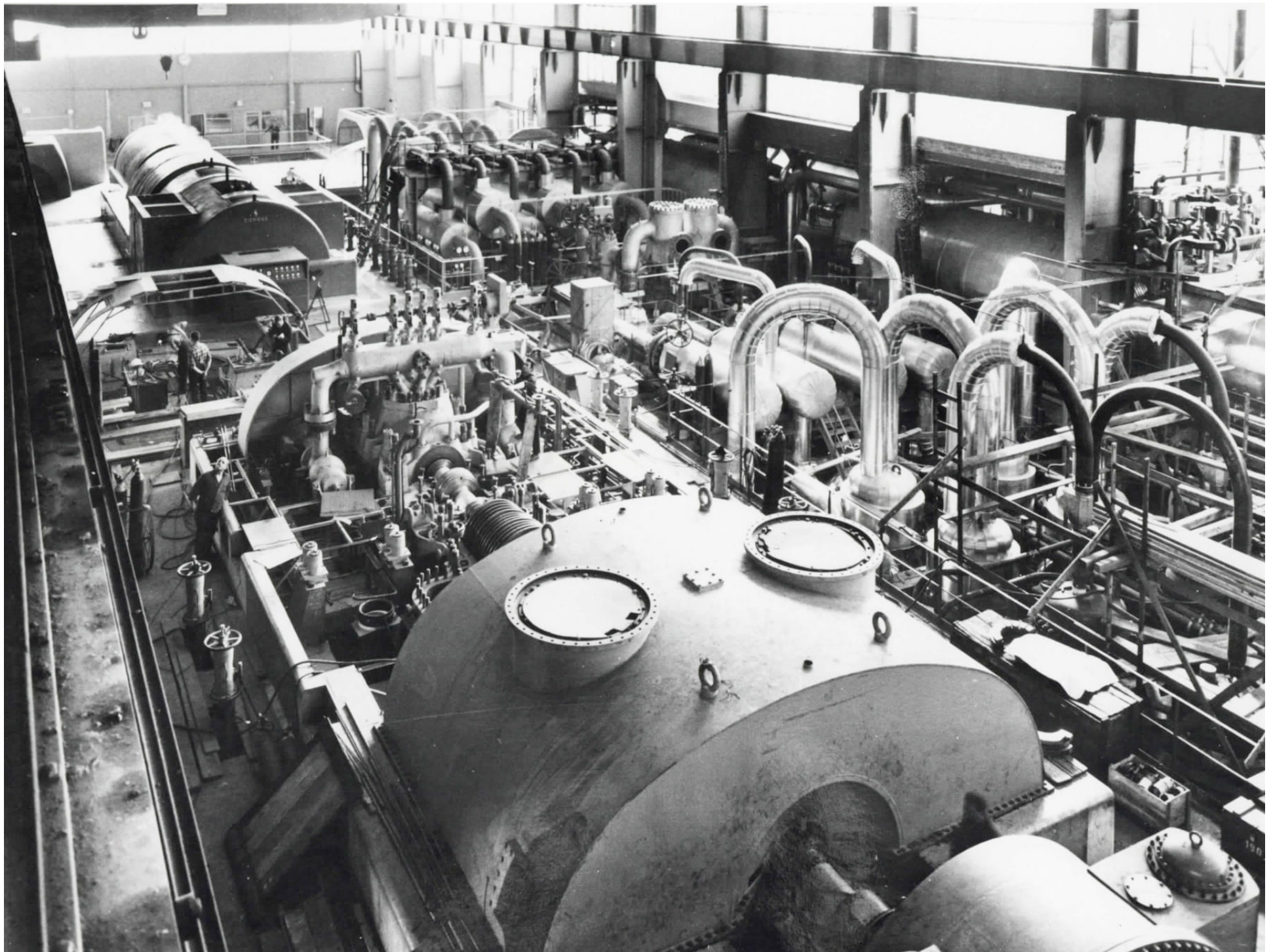
Loan for a construction of a thermal power station in West Berlin. First project funded in West Germany.

Dates: 21 July 1958 / 08 March 1977

Photos: Werkfoto BEWAG Berlin

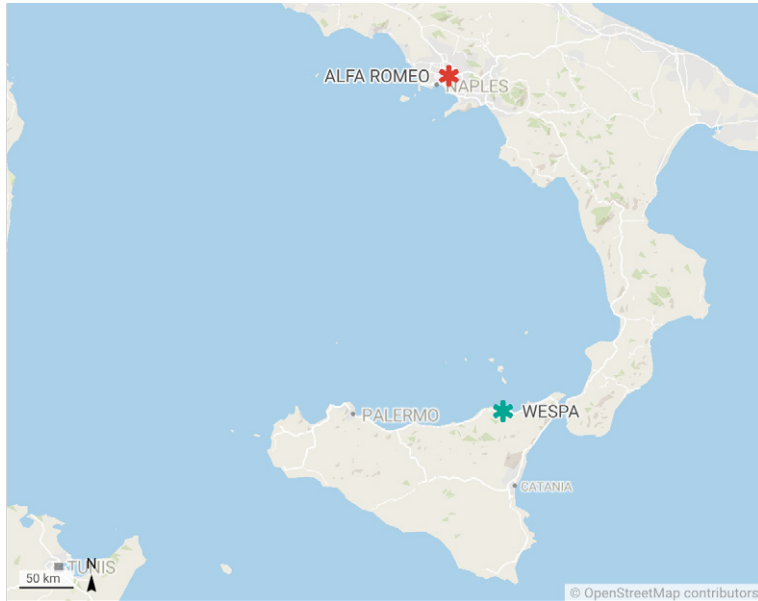
Reference: BEI-2164







Manufacturing Industrialization # 3



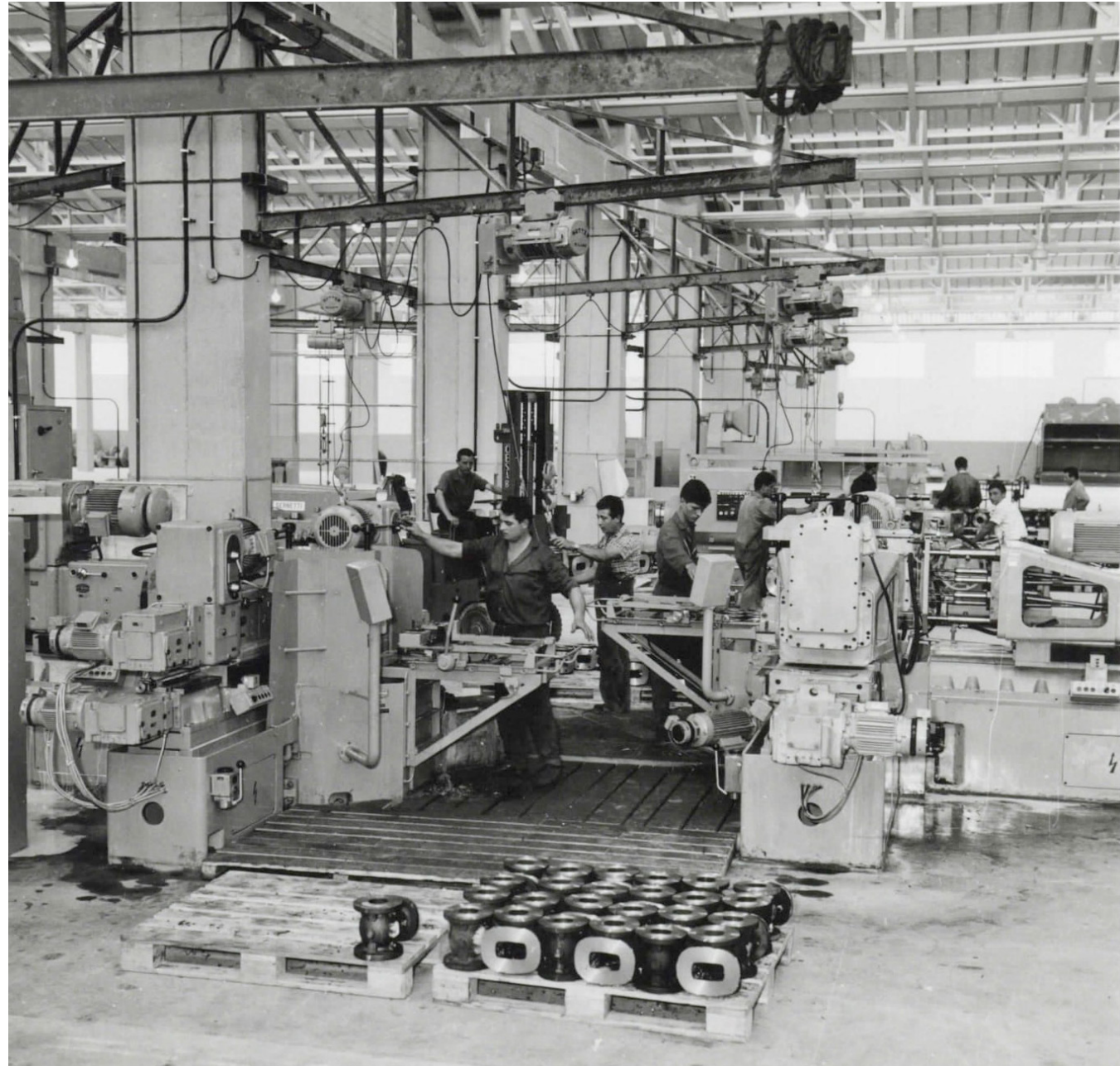
Project WESPA

Loan to Walworth Europa S.p.A. for the construction of a factory producing steel valves for industrial use in Patti, Sicily.

Dates: 30 August 1961 / 23 November 1973

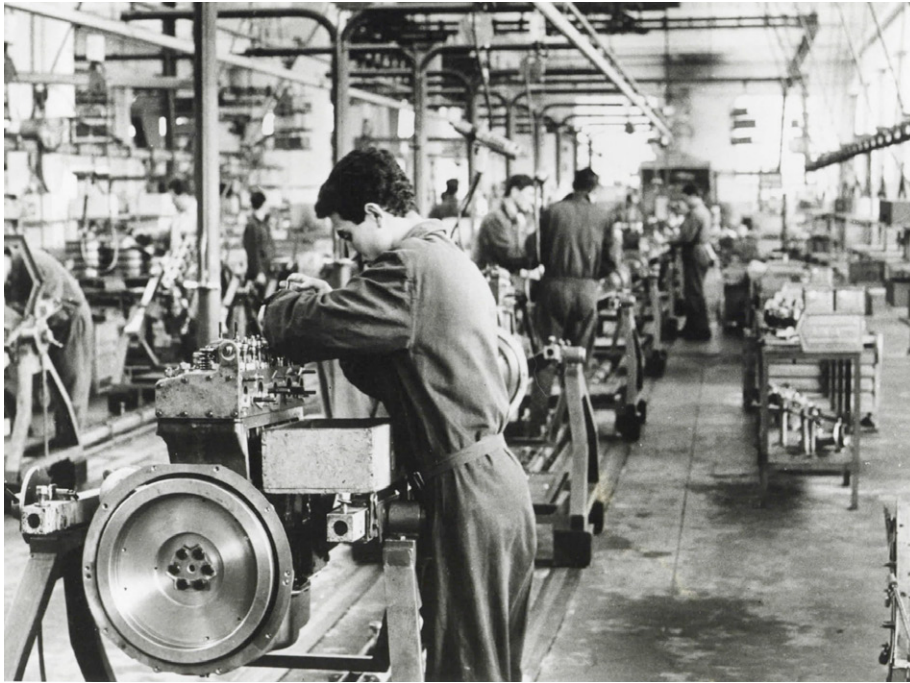
Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2160





Manufacturing Industrialization # 4



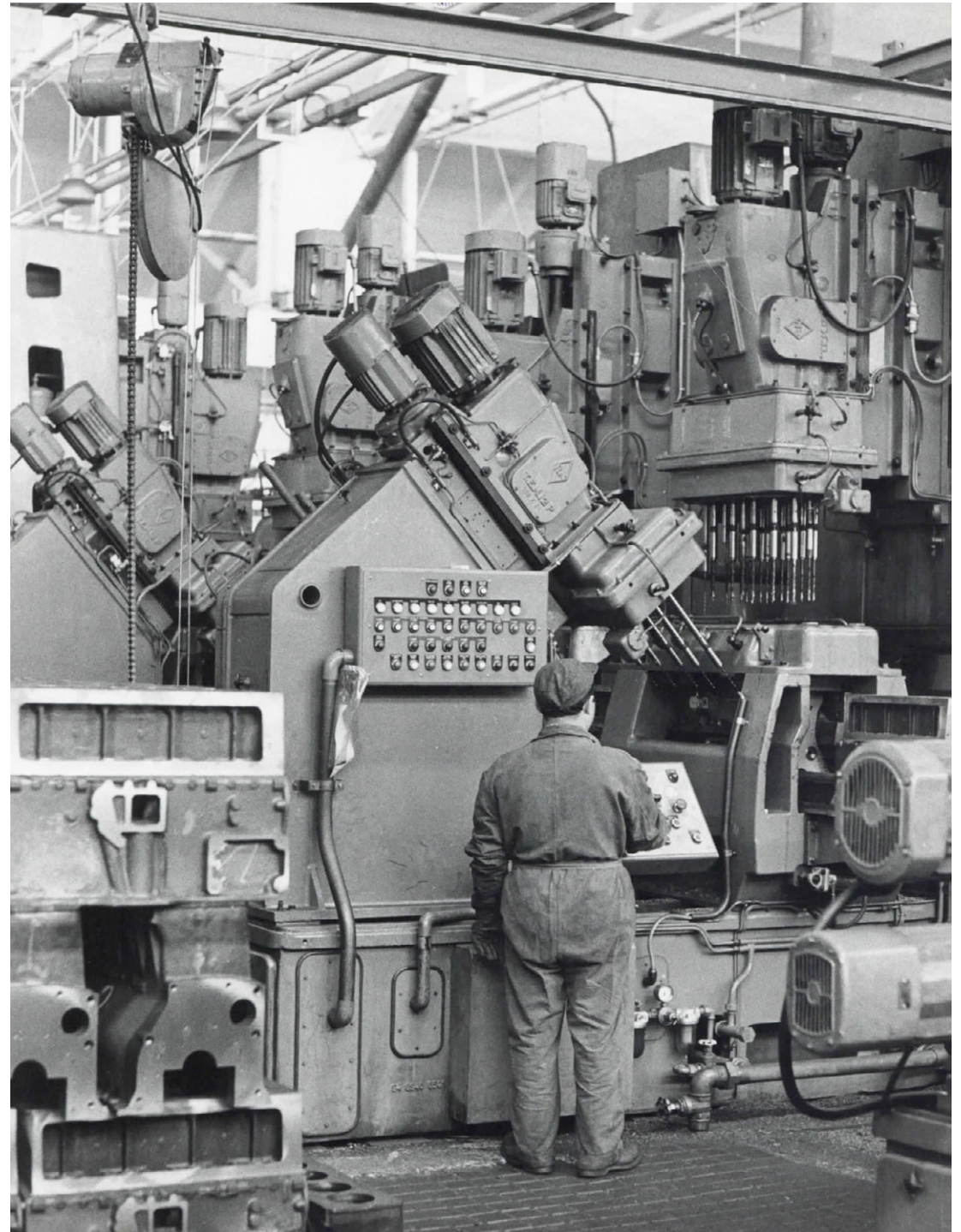
Project ALFA ROMEO

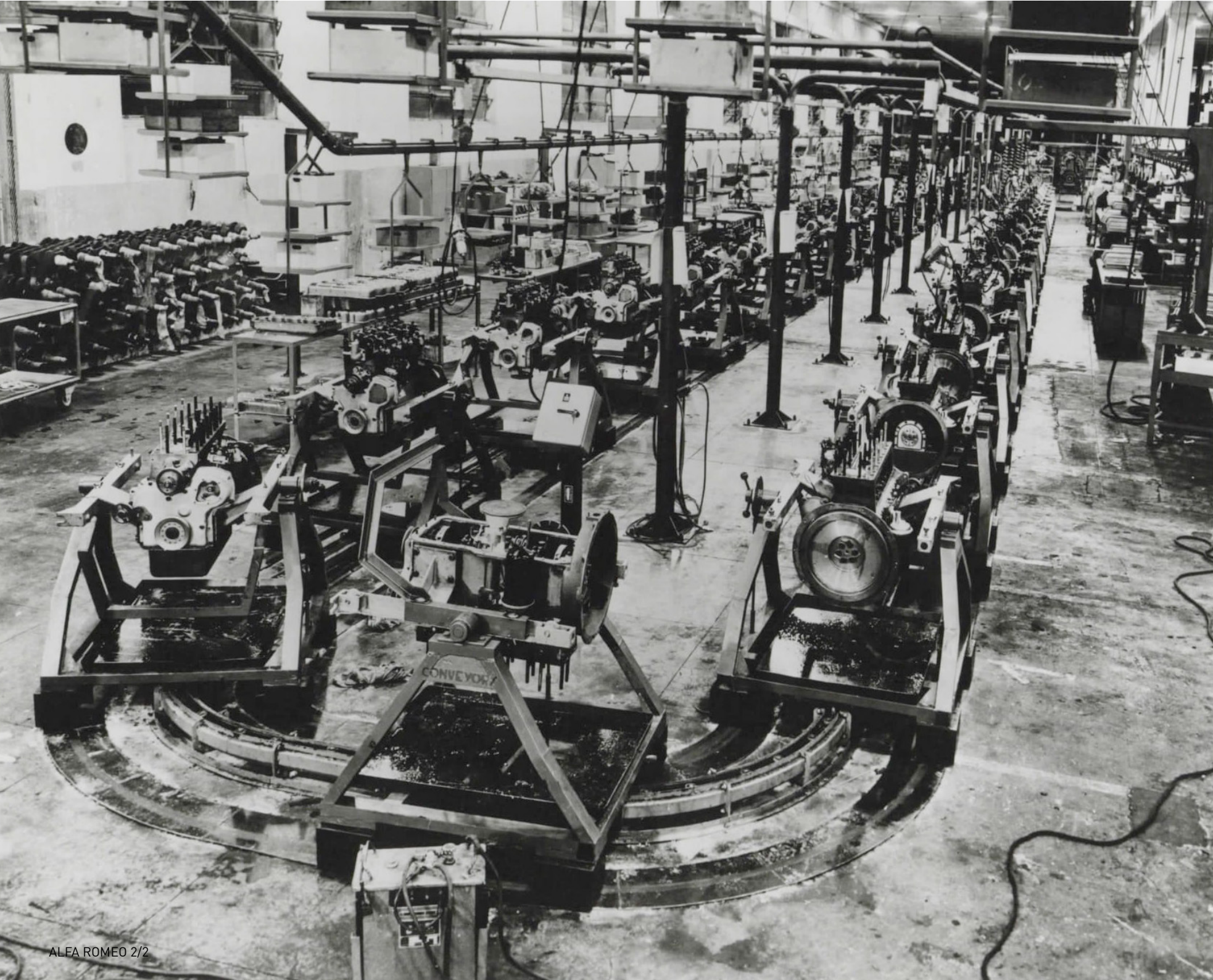
Loan to Alfa Romeo for the construction of a factory in Pomigliano d'Arco, Naples, producing diesel engines.

Dates: 03 March 1959 / 30 September 1966

Photos: Dino Jarach and unknown authorship

Reference: BEI-2155





INFRASTRUCTURING MOBILITIES

Infrastructures are the place where technology and the environment meet. The building of infrastructures to improve mobilities for both trains and cars characterized the political agenda of many European countries throughout the whole 20th century, in particular in its second half. Such infrastructures aimed to reshape the image of European countries, promoting modernization with faster and more scenic connections between cities and the countries' most important touristic and industrial areas. The EIB supported many transnational projects for the construction of train tunnels and highways in border areas where such construction implied the overcoming of large natural barriers like the Alps between France and Italy.

Gilberto Mazzoli

Project Deutsche Bundesbahn IN-S STR

Loan to the Deutsche Bundesbahn (West Germany) for the electrification of the North-South axis' rail, strategic infrastructure linking the northern ports with the south of the country.

Dates: 05 May 1960 / 07 July 1961

Photos: Helmut Forst and unknown autorship

Reference: BEI-2165

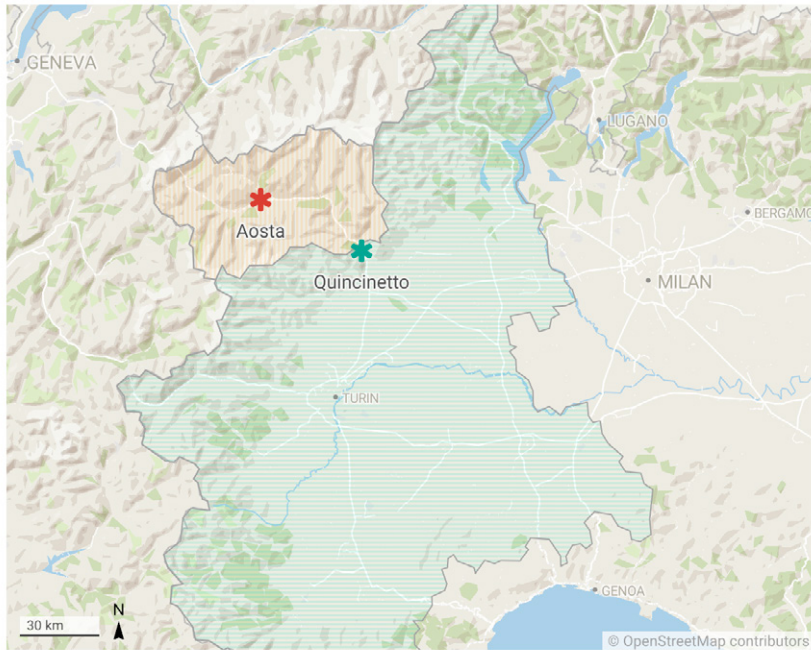








Infrastructuring Mobilities # 2



Project Autostrada della Val D'Aosta

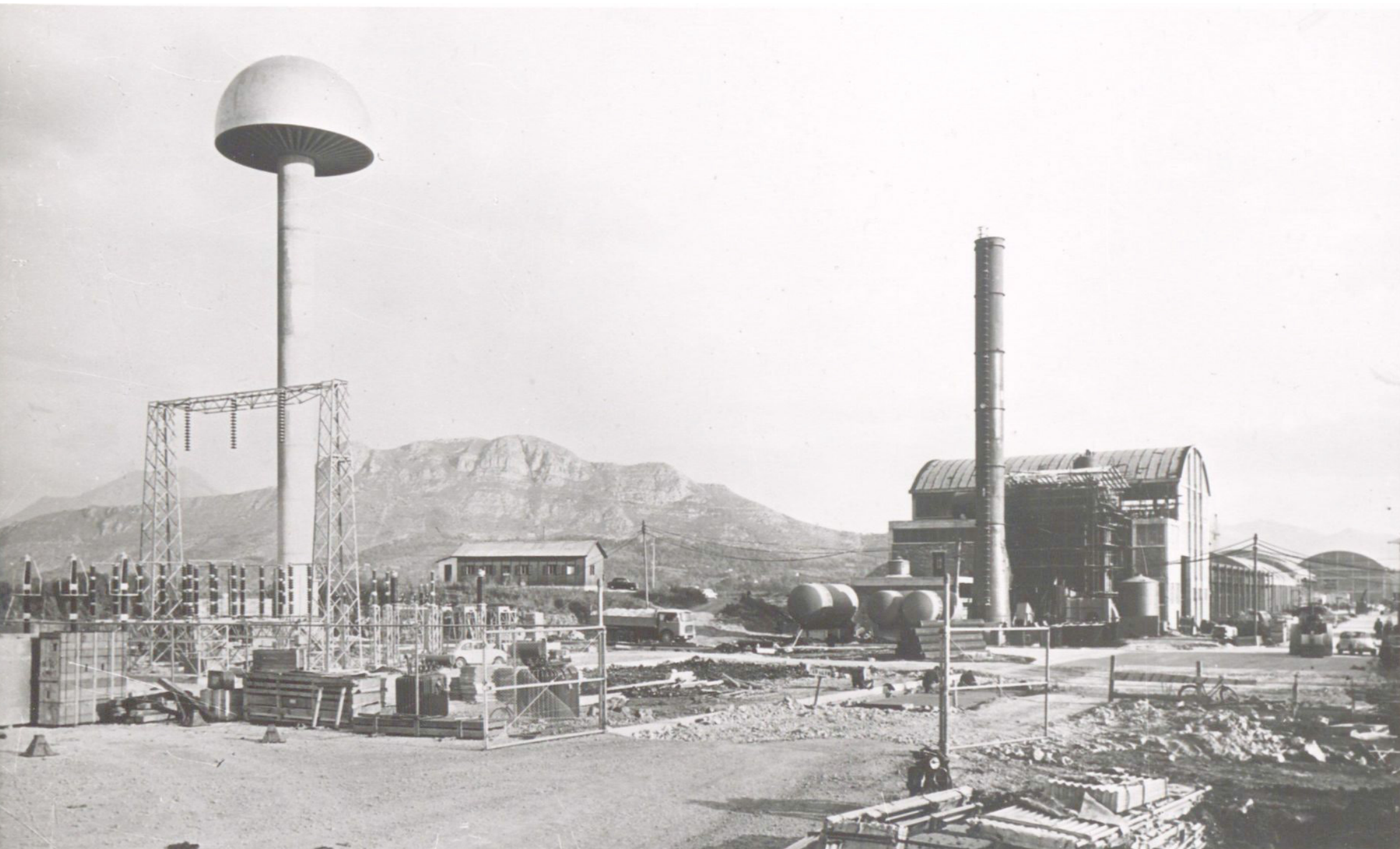
Autostrada della Val D'Aosta project for the construction of a motorway between Quincinetto (Piedmont) and Aosta (Val d'Aosta), Italy.

Dates: 1964 / 1965

Photos: G. Chiolini & C

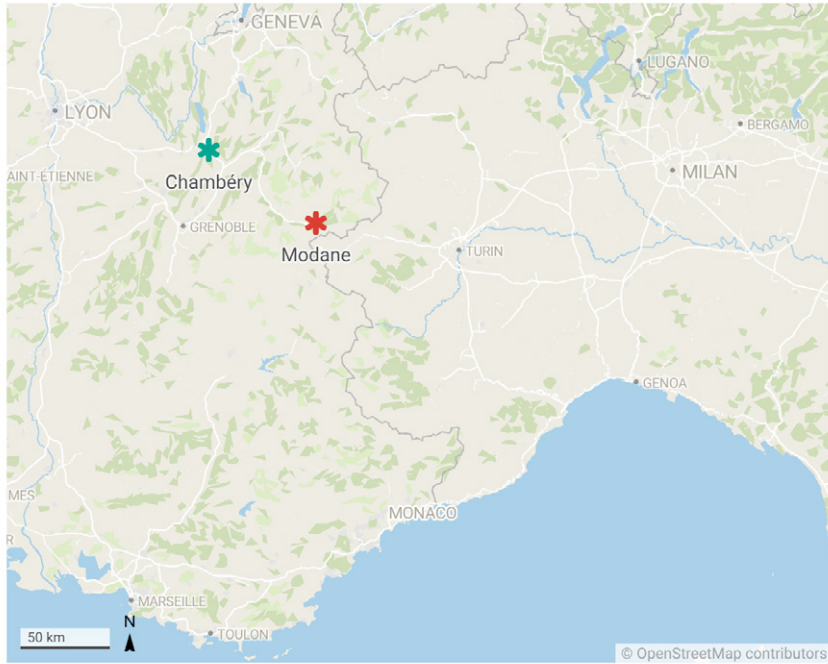
Reference: BEI-1625







Infrastructuring Mobilities # 3



Project SNCF Modane Chambéry

Loan to SNCF (French national railway company) for the development of the Modane-Chambéry railway line with increased capacity at the border station, Savoie region, France.

Dates: 01 July 1960 / 11 January 1967

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2147





Project SNCF Bretagne

Loan to the Société nationale des chemins de fer français (SNCF) for the rail electrification in Brittany (France) and for the conversion to diesel on other lines.

Dates: 01 September 1961 / 15 February 1977

Photos: Unknown

Reference: BEI-2150





Credits

Exhibition Project

Corinna Unger

Gilberto Mazzoli

Valérie Mathevon

Juan Alonso Fernández

Graphic Design

Gilberto Mazzoli

Essays and Texts

Corinna Unger

Juan Alonso Fernández

Jacopo Cellini

Gilberto Mazzoli

Virtual Exhibition

Petru-Ioan Pandrea

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