

Whirlpool's farewell to Comerio opens the way to an important challenge

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Silvio Aimetti, the Mayor of **Comerio**, talked explicitly of “**processing the grief**”. And it is no exaggeration, because the decision by **Whirlpool** to leave **Ignis's** historic headquarters, to move to the heart of Milan, is a loss that will mark the cultural identity of this province. Indeed, it was in Comerio that **Giovanni Borghi** wrote an essential chapter in the **Italian industrial novel**, giving an important role to the industrial district of Varese in the economic miracle of the country. (photo, from the left: the Dean of Insubria University, **Alberto Porisini Coen**, the Chairwoman of Whirlpool EMEA, **Esther Berrozpe Galindo**, the Mayor of Comerio, **Silvio Aimetti**, and the Dean of Castellanza's LIUC University, **Federico Visconti**).

Rethinking the future of Comerio and the surrounding area – Today, it is important to think about what should be done with that 45,000 m² area (of which, at least 15,000 m² is covered), which looks out over Lake Varese. And this should be done rather quickly, because there are only six months left before the American multinational's definitive move to Milan. The signing of the **agreement protocol**, to carry out a feasibility study of the site's redevelopment, by **Comerio council**, **Whirlpool** and the two universities in the province, **LIUC and Insubria**, should give a boost to the process of **redeveloping** the historic headquarters of the electrical appliance company. “We met a number of times after Whirlpool's announcement of their decision to leave, for company reasons,” Aimetti continued. “The signing of the agreement is an opportunity for everyone. I'm convinced the area should remain an industrial site, benefitting young people, and serving the needs of the large area.”

Whirlpool is also looking forward – The collaboration between the company, council and universities will help to give a coherent future to the area of Comerio. “After more than 25 years, the time has come for us to move away,” **Esther Berrozpe Galindo**, the Chairwoman of Whirlpool EMEA, pointed out. “This is a strategic decision, and so is the idea to continue producing in Cassinetta di Biandronno, where more than 2000 people work. I'm very glad about this collaboration, continuing to give a future to the area in Comerio, which I hope will maintain its entrepreneurial, sporting and research character.” The Americans are moving at the end of April, and by that date, it will be necessary to have a reasonably well-defined idea of the fate of the site. Whirlpool's top management are already making an economic assessment of the area, and by the middle of **December**, a workshop will take place, extended to authority representatives, to judge a number of ideas and options to include in the feasibility plan.

Values and skills for a new challenge – An important role in the feasibility study will be played by the two universities, Insubria and LIUC, who have signed the agreement protocol. “It's a time of great change,” said **Alberto Coen Porisini**, “and it's important for the university to be there, because now is the beginning of the real challenge, to take advantage of this decision by Whirlpool and to do good for the local community, by redesigning the area and everything around it. The collaboration between public and private is essential, and we must find a synergy, for a sustainable future. It's an important challenge that we want to win.”

There was a time when Giovanni Borghi's company **Ignis** was synonymous with so many values, not only economic. “On seeing the **television series** about Mr Ignis, I remembered the 1-0 score when

Varese played Inter,” **Federico Visconti**, the Dean of Castellanza’s **LIUC** University, said, “a sign of the strength of this area at the time. Varese and its industrial district have always been appreciated and respected around the world. The challenge that is now beginning is to understand what skills might be useful to generate new ideas and values that the universities have. When we think of a redevelopment like this, we need ideas and resources, which we must look for, and which we will find if the project is valid. It’s a historic challenge for Comerio, for the whole area and for our economic model.”

di [Translated by Mattia Levato](#) (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)