

ITALY  
TARAS  
by Valentina Spagnulo





The former Tosi Shipyard (Taranto, Italy). Two workers died in a similar way, using the same crane, seven years apart from each other. This was in Taranto's fourth harbour area, which was used by the Ilva steelworks.

## IN 60 YEARS, EUROPE'S LARGEST STEEL MILL HAS BROUGHT JOBS, POLLUTION AND DEATH

On April 10, 1965, Europe's largest steel mill opened in Taranto in southern Italy. At the time, the country was in the midst of an economic boom and in its southern regions, which had more traditional economies, there was finally enthusiasm and an air of progress. The Italsider company, which later became Ilva, represented modernity and industrial development, and nobody was worried about pollution. Some people even thought, that by absorbing the factory's poisons on a daily basis, they would gradually become immune. They were wrong: in its nearly 60 years of existence, the steel plant has contaminated soil, air and groundwater, brought sickness and death to workers and local residents, and forced farmers and animal breeders out of work as the dioxin levels in their products are too high. The history of the former Ilva site is long and complex, and

it is the subject of a trial that so far has seen 26 executives, managers and politicians receive sentences. Today, the "new" Ilva is run by Acciaierie d'Italia, a joint stock company that is partly public (38%) and partly owned by the giant ArcelorMittal (62%), and it produced 3.1 million tons of steel in 2022. With "Taras," young photographer Valentina Spagnulo wanted to chronicle the consequences and impact of the steel plant on the local population, area and economy. Valentina, who dedicated two years to this project, was born and raised in Grottaglie, a town 12 miles from the former Ilva site. Taras is the name of the Greek city-state that later became Taranto, "and just as in the third century B.C. the city was sold out by the Greeks to the Romans," Valentina explains, "so we have sold it out to an economy that has been damaging it for 60 years.



Taranto (Italy). Carla is the co-founder of the 'Giorgio Forever' organization. She lost her 15-year-old son Giorgio due to a tumor. The organization's goal is to build an oncological pediatric research center in Taranto.





Taranto (Italy). In 2008, approximately 1300 animals were put down because they were highly contaminated by dioxin. Since 2010, farmers have no longer been allowed to graze animals within 20 kilometers of the steelworks.





Taranto (Italy). Two specialists from the Apulia regional branch of the ARPA environmental protection agency at Masseria Carmine. They are taking samples that will be used for checking the air quality.



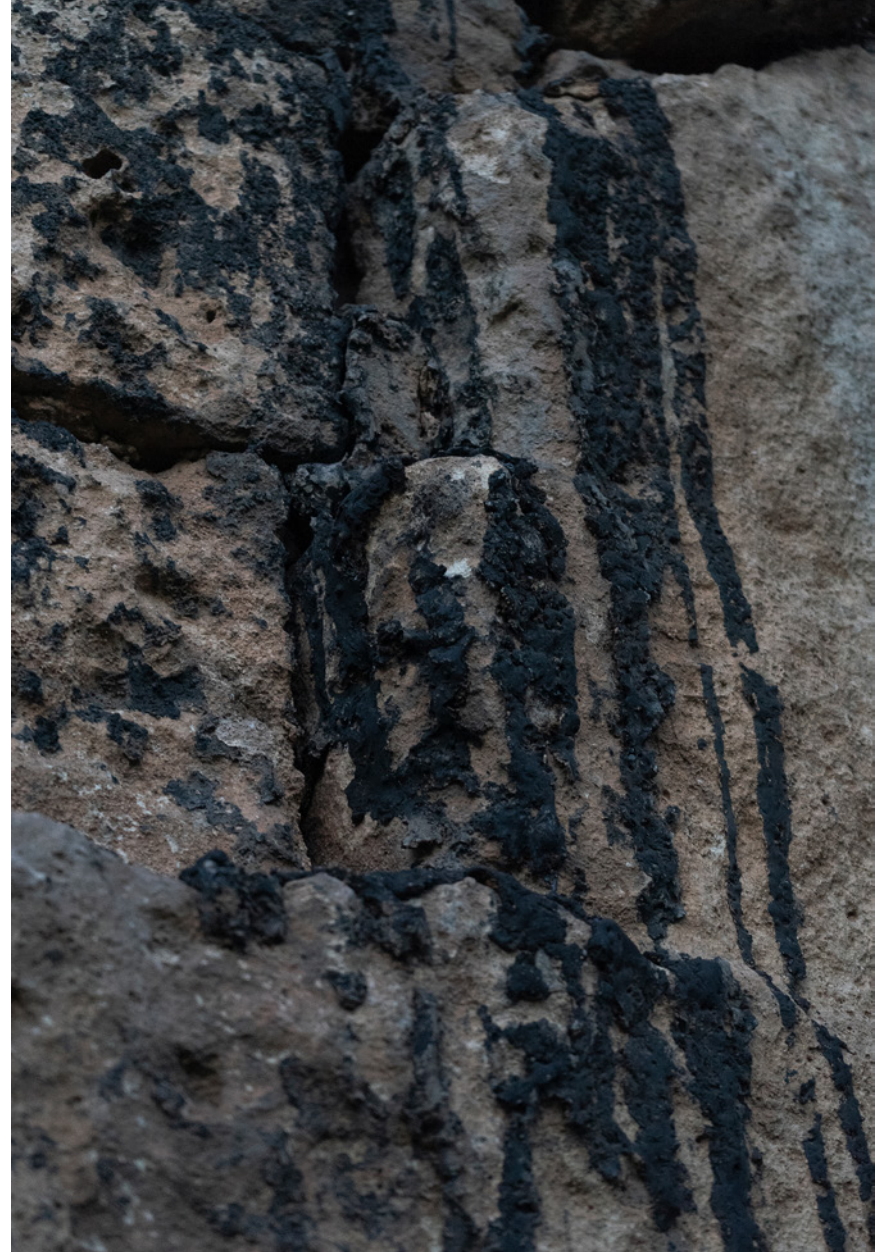


Taranto (Italy). The erosion on a piece of material. It was found at the edge of the former Ilva 'Mater Gratie' landfill.





Grottaglie (Italy). Marco is a former Ilva employee, having worked there for 15 years. He chiefly remembers the non-compliance regarding environmental standards. He accepted a voluntary redundancy package and now owns a bicycle workshop with a cafe.



Taranto (Italy). In 2013, it was discovered that a few meters from the northern edge of the former Ilva "Mater Gratie" landfill, a tar-like substance was surfacing from the soil and continuously renewing itself. This phenomenon is still occurring today.





Taranto (Italy). Masseria Carmine is a farmhouse that existed before the Ilva steelworks were built. It was deeply damaged when dioxin was found in its food products. Masseria Carmine, because of the ban on farming, is currently an educational farmhouse.





Bari (Italy). A soil sample from the former Cimino-Manganeccchia area. Bio-assisted Phytoremediation is an experimental application by Dr. Ancona at the Bari office of the CNR (National Research Council). This experiment aims to lower the presence of some pollutants in the area by planting Monviso poplars.





The former Tosi Shipyard (Taranto, Italy). One of the reasons why the city of Taranto was chosen as the location for the construction of the Ilva steelworks was the pre-existence of an industrial mentality, thanks to the presence of this shipyard.





Grottaglie (Italy). In 2008, the 'Peacelink' organization took a piece of Pecorino cheese to a lab for analysis. The results confirmed that it was highly contaminated by dioxin. Through wind-selective analysis it was found out that the dioxin and PCBs (Polychlorinated biphenyls) mostly came from the industrial area.



Grottaglie (Italy). In 2011, analyses carried out by the 'Antidioxin Fund' association on Taranto mussels showed the presence of dioxin and PCBs (Polychlorinated biphenyls) above legal limits. Since then there has been a ban on the harvesting and marketing of mussels in the first bay of the Mar Piccolo ('Small Sea').





Taranto (Italy). A mosaic at the Gesù Divin Lavoratore (Jesus the Divine Worker) Church in the Tamburi district. The mosaic was created and installed in this church in 1967, two years after the building of the Ilva steelworks.





Acquaviva delle Fonti (Italy). Antonio worked at the steelworks for 15 years, during which time he experienced a hostile working environment and he worried about his health. He left his job after accepting a voluntary redundancy package. Today he is the owner of a steakhouse.



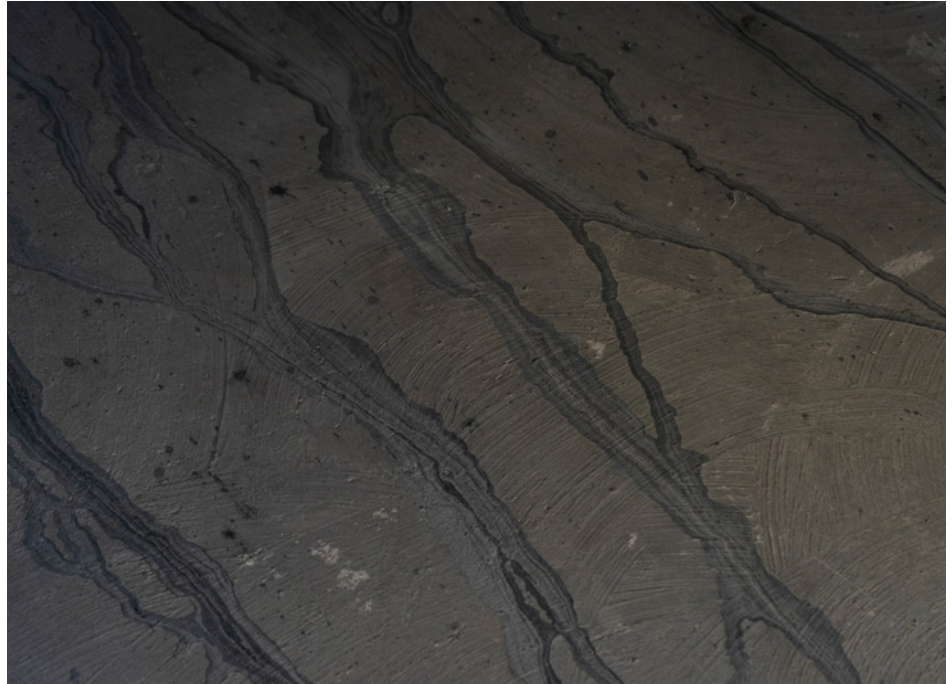


The Tamburi district (Taranto, Italy). The local cemetery.





Grottaglie (Italy). Accidents are a frequent occurrence at the factory, thanks to poor machinery maintenance and the pressure to reach production targets, which are often considered more important than safety standards.



Grottaglie (Italy). The floor of a former Ilva worker's shop. Since 2018 some employees have accepted voluntary redundancy packages. This has enabled them to invest the money in their new businesses.



The Tamburi district (Taranto, Italy). The 'collinette ecologiche' ('ecological hills') separate the Tamburi district from the former Ilva site. They were specially built in order to protect the district from pollution. In 2019, nine hectares of these hills, which were deeply contaminated by industrial waste, were seized by the authorities.







Tamburi district (Taranto, Italy). A medical center for pulmonary disease prevention in the Tamburi district. Once in a while, some volunteer doctors do medical check-ups for local residents.





The Tamburi district (Taranto, Italy). This district, which is older than the factory, is only 200 meters from it. It is the closest neighborhood to the factory, and therefore the most polluted.





Grottaglie (Italy). A handkerchief covered in iron ore stone powder. The powder was taken from a house facade in the Tamburi district. It comes from some of the former Ilva's eight mineral parks and its dispersion is more evident on windy days, especially in Tamburi.



Grottaglie (Italy). A coal tar-like substance found a few meters from the northern edge of the former Ilva 'Mater Gratie' landfill.





Taranto (Italy). Plastic containers at the former Tosi Shipyard.



parallel zero

