



WELFARE POLICY IN VERONA. FROM SANT'ANTONIO HOSPITAL TO NEW HOSPITAL COMPLEX*

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Abstract

The history of the Veronese hospitals constitutes one of the most important and interesting chapters of the urban events. St. Zeno in his sermon on the avarice, already praised the Veronese inhabitants for their great availability toward suffering and sick people, to the point that almost every monastery and parishes became a reception centre for pilgrims, distressed and sick people.

Population growth implied to improve the health initiatives. The events happened in Verona at the beginning of the twentieth century are a precious proof of the contribution which doctors and wise administrators offered to the Veronese health care system. It is a history intimately related to the munificent charity thanks to which the local protagonists sustained the birth and the development of the hospital complex (bequest of Alessandri, Cressotti Zorzi, Failoni, Roveda, only for quoting some of them). The hospital administration, together with doctors and inhabitants faced with burning and active debates, the transfer of the civil hospital from its seat, situated in the thin urban fabric of the city centre, to a suburb area: Borgo Trento.

Borgo Trento is the hospital which the Veronese feel like their own hospital, characterized by a system of pavilions, long tree-lined avenue and luxuriant gardens. A new hospital complex, Borgo Roma Policlinico, was born in the 1970s in the south suburb of the city, offering great town planning and charitable opportunities.

The integration of the two hospitals and the constitution of the *Azienda Ospedaliera Integrata Verona* are most recent history (2010), but seems follow the steps of the union between the Alessandri Children's Hospital and the Sant'Antonio Civil Hospital, as a prosecution of the troubled hospital history of fusions, transfers and divisions.

The Veronese hospital network and the legacy of Alessandri brothers

The history of the hospitals in Verona is linked with charitable institutions and constitutes one of the most important chapters of the city events which led Veronese inhabitants to perceive the Borgo Trento Hospital as the only Hospital of the Veronese: the long avenues with tall maritime pines, the obsolete pavilions by now alternated with enormous and recent buildings, the paths along the Adige river, belong to the memory of inhabitants.

The study has the aim to offer some interpretative guidelines of the strong relationship born, in Verona, between the hospital choices and town orientations, health care institutions and welfare policy, understanding the latter as public policy which looks to improve the performance of health services.

The research is based on the analysis of some board resolutions, kept from 1895 to 1932 (with some gaps) in the State Archive of Verona and from 1933 to 1945 kept in the Archive of the Civil Hospital of Verona, allowing the retrieval of useful and fundamental information to understand the socio-political dynamics of the city and the historical reconstruction of the hospital. Documents kept in the Maggiore Hospital, even if not catalogued, have played a fundamental role.

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Between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries Verona counted 34 lay and religious hospitals, which performed the dual purpose of offering assistance and hospitality. Although there had never been an official census of these charitable places, the widespread presence of them in the fabric of the city is documented by wills.

In 1750 the hospital network was reorganized with a clear distinction between welfare medical care and charitable support. All the hospitals were unified into a single structure, the Santa Casa della Misericordia, in Piazza Bra, whose sixteenth-century building was extended and restored by the chief engineer of the town hall, Antonio Pasetti¹⁷⁸. So, the first unified hospital should be in Piazza Bra, area inside the wall, but in that period not totally inserted in the active fabric of the city¹⁷⁹.

In 1812, ills and orphans accommodated in Santa Casa di Misericordia were transferred to the former monastery of Sant'Antonio al Corso, outside the city walls, unused after the suppression of religious orders¹⁸⁰. The hospital, in spite of the extensions done to house 360 beds, was restricted and surrounded by houses and civil buildings. From a town planning point of view, the choice of placing the hospital inside the fourteenth-century walls and outside the city walls, but in an area near the centre and, in particular, near Piazza Bra, proved inadequate compared to the twentieth-century increase of Verona. (Figure 1)

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¹⁷⁸ Lucia MAESTRELLO. *Sanità e assistenza a Verona fra Sette e Ottocento. La concentrazione ospedaliera*. In: Alessandro PASTORE- Gian Maria VARANINI-Paola MARINI-Giorgio MARINI (eds.), *L'ospedale e la città. Cinquecento anni d'arte a Verona*. Verona. 1996, p. 89-107 and bibliography quoted therein.

¹⁷⁹ Vincenzo PAVAN. *Le opere del regime*. In: Pierpaolo BRUGNOLI (ed.), *Urbanistica a Verona (1880-1960)*. Verona. 1996, p. 169-172 and bibliography quoted therein.

¹⁸⁰The Sant'Antonio Hospital is discernible in the cadastral surveys 4274 and 4277 Sheet 21 of the Austrian Land Register, corresponding to Via Valverde (ex via Sant'Antonio) 34-38, 40-42. State Archive of Verona (hereafter ASVr), *Catasto Austriaco*, figure 21.

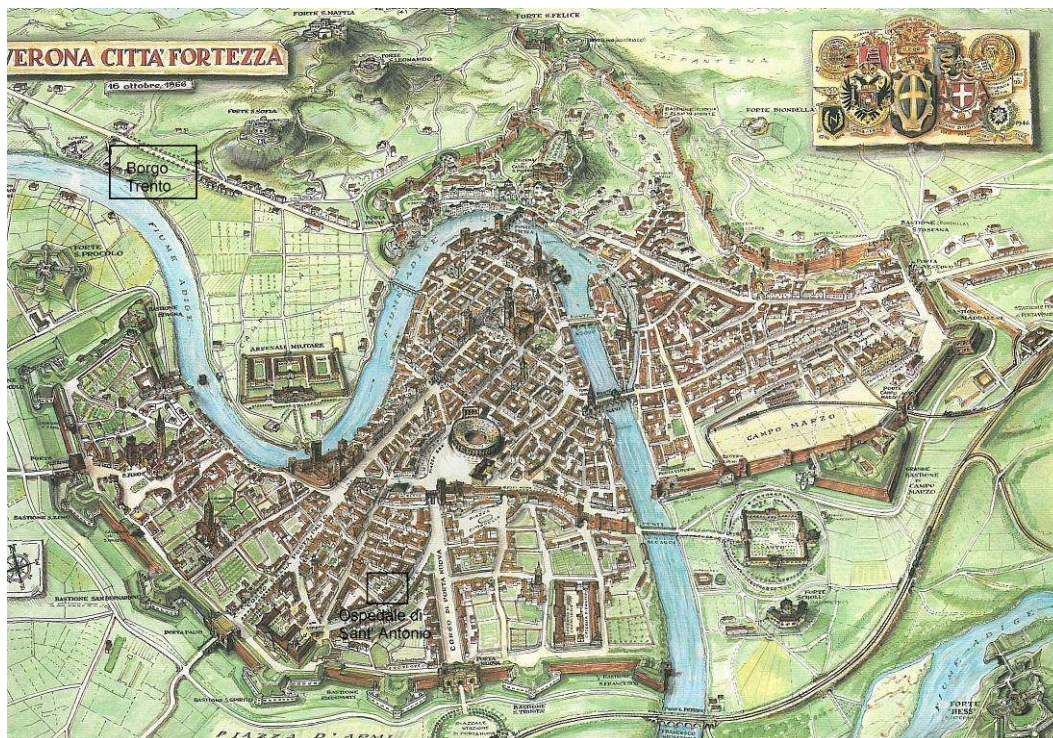


Figure 3: Plant of Verona in 1866. See highlighted the area of the Sant'Antonio Hospital and the area of Borgo Trento (from Gianni Ainardi. *Verona nei secoli. Album storico-artistico*. Verona, 1989)

One of the most significant institution which accompanied the evolution of Veronese hospitals in the history is the bequest. The Veronese inhabitants contributed enthusiastically to the fate of their hospital, which grew together with the city thanks to the munificent generosity of the population. The Alessandri's bequest was fundamental for the events linked with the Veronese hospital. Carlo (1808-1894) and Alessandro Alessandri (1808-1895), well-known in the artistic and cultural Veronese circles of half nineteenth century, allocated their conspicuous wealth¹⁸¹ to build a Children's Hospital, which had to become independent and autonomous with respect to the Sant'Antonio Hospital¹⁸².

The Alessandri's bequest, amounting of 67.237,424 £ was actually enough to build a small hospital, not too much expensive, so it was believed that the proximity to the Civil Hospital

¹⁸¹Archivio Ospedale Civile di Verona (hereafter ArOCVr), *Verbale di consegna delle sostanze Alessandri al Consiglio Ospitaliero di Verona 1901-1903*, unnumbered envelope; Notary Francesco Burzio, *Copia autentica dell'inventario della sostanza abbandonata dal fu Alessandro Alessandri*, Verona 7th March 1896.

¹⁸²For the future building contributed even other Veronese people. Among them we could find Giulia Cressotti Zorzi and Augusto Failoni; there were many contribution offered to the hospital even after the inauguration, including the donation of the doctor Ludovico Corazza, head of the surgery department of the Civil Hospital. ASVr, *Pubblicazione di testamento olografo di Giulia Cressotti Zorzi*, acts of the notary Francesco Burzio, 28th November 1905, prot. n. 13481-13491; ASVr, f. Civil Hospital, Meeting of 24th April 1909, meeting of 26th June 1909; Vittorio FAINELLI. *La beneficenza ospitaliera in Verona dai tempi dei romani ad oggi*. Verona. 1937, p. 198.

would guarantee a saving on surveillance and on services offered to patients. On 18th April 1902 the hospital board decided, in this regard, to build the new Alessandri Children's Hospital in an area called ex Maboni, previously estimated for a possible extension of the hospital¹⁸³. In this way, the wishes of the deceased Alessandro Alessandri were not being respected: one of the points in which the will had clearly insisted was the distinction between the Children's Hospital, which was being built, from any other hospital. Public opinion was also against the building of another hospital, thinking that there were institutions deserving financial aid, and the Civil Hospital, in the need to extend and adapt the seat, seemed to want to find an *éscamotage* in order to benefit of Alessandri's wealth.

On June 1904 the hospital board identified an area considered to be more suitable for this purpose than the ex Maboni area: the Weill Weiss area, in Corso Vittorio Emanuele, large, well-oriented, suitable to meet the needs of the future Children's Hospital¹⁸⁴.

In 1904, after choosing the area, the Hospital Board announced a competition for "A Plan for a Children's Hospital in Verona", organized into a main building for common medical and surgical diseases, two isolation units, a morgue, a medicine department, a surgery department, spaces for ambulances, doctors rooms and a gym.

The final decision for the Alessandri Children's Hospital: Borgo Trento

The choice of the Weill Weiss area did not satisfied all: *Verona Fedele* already in 1903 had considered it inappropriate to build a hospital in a flat but little area, situated between the main hospital, an old people's home, a military hospital, prisons and houses. The same opinion was shared by some experts and by 40 doctors who signed a letter addressed to the Prefetto di Verona, in which they denounced the inadequacy of Weill Weiss area¹⁸⁵.

After some assumptions not realizable, the councillor Eugenio Gallizioli found three adjacent plots of land, situated in Borgo Trento, along the road toward Parona, buyable at a fair price¹⁸⁶. The local medical association, supported by Giovanni Tempioni's opinion¹⁸⁷, winner of the competition held in 1904, judged the "area free, comfortable, well-oriented and of the right surface for a national development of a Children's Hospital"¹⁸⁸. It was part of the area called *Campagnola*, situated in the west of Verona and object of the large levelling of 1518, after the well-known events of the League of Cambrai. Over time, the area had maintained a defensive character, with a predominantly agricultural use, without houses, isolated on three sides by the Adige river and bounded to the North by the road to Tyrol. The hospital would also have benefited from the services offered by the electrical tram and the railway line Verona-Capriano-Garda, opened in 1883 with a stop in the gardens behind the bulwark of San Giorgio.

¹⁸³ASVr, f. Civil Hospital, Meeting of 18th April 1902; Valeria RAINOLDI. *L'Ospedale dei Veronesi da Sant'Antonio in Valverde a Borgo Trento*. In: *Il Fracastoro*, n. 1, anno CIII, January-June 2010, p. 15-99.

¹⁸⁴ ASVr, f. Civil Hospital, Meeting of 21st June 1904.

¹⁸⁵ *Verona Fedele*, 6th August 1903, p. 2, *Verona Fedele*, 9th September 1903, p. 2, *L'Arena*, 16th-17th October 1906, p. 2-3.

¹⁸⁶The three plots can be found in the Italian Land Register by the following assets: Town Council of Verona, section B, S. Stefano, sheet VIII, maps n. 23, 46, 48.

¹⁸⁷Giovanni Tempioni was born in Ravenna in 1858. He took a degree in architecture in Bologna and dedicated himself to plan hospitals and health facilities, including the Hospital of Forlì (1906-1915), the Hospital of Camerlata (Como). Valeria RAINOLDI. *Da destra a sinistra Adige. Il trasferimento degli Istituti Ospitalieri veronesi e la loro modernizzazione (1899-1945)*. Thesis, University of Verona, Department of Philosophy and Letters, a. a. 2009-2010, supervisor prof. D. Zumiani, p. 53-66.

¹⁸⁸ASVr, f. Civil Hospital, Meeting of 25th June 1908.

The contract of purchase was then signed on 22nd November 1908¹⁸⁹ and the beginning of the works was expected within the next 6 months.

The Alessandri Children's Hospital was inaugurated on 7th June 1914. The plan drawn up by Giovanni Tempioni, winner designer of the competition of 1904 was published in the journal *L'edilizia moderna* on February 1915, illustrated by plants and photos of the pavilions¹⁹⁰, and provides a valuable testimony of the urban structure¹⁹¹. The hospital was constituted of a first pavilion destined as entrance and Admitting department, a following pavilion of two floors reserved for General Services, a pavilion opposite the entrance equipped for outpatient clinics and gym, and a 130 metres long main pavilion for common ills formed by 4 avant-corps for the wards and the rooms for patients. Two pavilions closed the building, in the west, reserved for infectious and contagious diseases. The whole complex, built in local stone from Avesa, was connected by underground passages. (Figure 2)

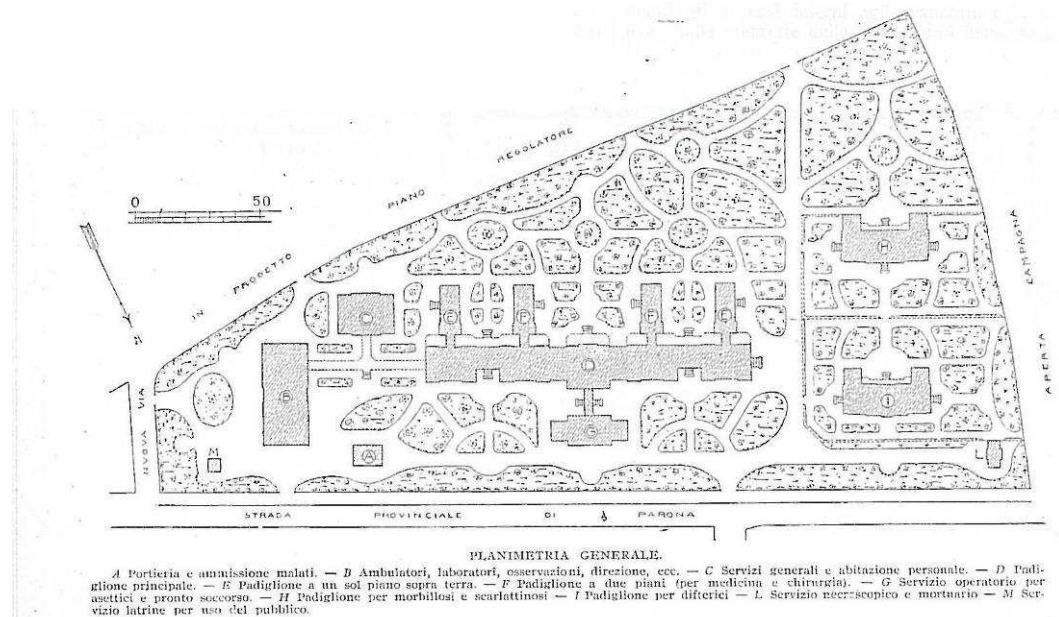


Figure 4: Architect Giovanni Tempioni, The Alessandri Children's Hospital, Planimetry (from *L'Edilizia moderna*, year XXIV, February 1915). This is the only planimetry of the plan still available.

Two years after the inauguration, on 11th August 1916, the Alessandri Children's Hospital was entirely requisitioned by the military authority¹⁹²; patients and instruments were welcomed, not without some reluctances, by the Sant'Antonio Civil Hospital.

In 1923, when it was not decided yet the re-opening and the start-up of the Children's Hospital, the resigning president, Giulio Ottolenghi, in a moral passage of delivery to the new municipal and hospital administration, suggested to link, through appropriate transfers and new

¹⁸⁹ASVr, *Atto di compravendita del notaio Attilio Mosconi 22 novembre 1908*, n. 1200 of repertoire, registered in Verona on 22nd November, volume 126 n. 970.

¹⁹⁰*L'Ospedale infantile Alessandri in Verona*. In: *L'Edilizia moderna*, 1915, p. 9-14.

¹⁹¹Up to now, there have not been discovered the plans of the architect Tempioni and in the Hospital archive is kept the unique planimetry dated 4th July 1911.

¹⁹²ASVr, f. Civil Hospital, Meeting of 22nd December 1916.

constructions, the Alessandri Hospital to the Sant'Antonio Hospital, moving the latter nearest the first¹⁹³. The Civil Hospital, in fact, no longer responded to the modern scientific and hygienic needs. For the first time, it was proposed, therefore, to unify the two hospitals, no more on Adige right, but on its left, in that area of extension which was characterized, in the Thirties and Forties for the strong connotation of the new middle-upper Veronese class.

By resolution dated 7th November 1924, the Hospital Board voted unanimously the union of the two hospitals, believing that the common use of doctors and services could make a benefit for both the institutions. Some members of the board invited the engineer Pio Beccherle, renowned Veronese expert, who was dedicated to drawing up a plan, unofficially, using the existing pavilions of the Alessandri Children's Hospital, to attend the meeting¹⁹⁴. The new hospital, with pavilions and centralized general services inside, would be built in the area pertaining to the Alessandri Hospital and partly in an area to be acquired for this purpose¹⁹⁵.

The new building would have allowed to accommodate a greater number of patients (from 570 to 875), regarding to growing population. Beccherle claimed that a future urban expansion would have not changed the area conditions, already naturally isolated and protected. The surface of 150,000 square meters appeared widely enough for population needs and allowed any extensions.

The distribution of the different buildings was studied with the aim to respect hygienic conditions for the patients and was distinguished into three areas: a central area reserved for patients, a frontal one reserved for outpatient clinics and with a its own entrance and an ending area reserved for financial general services, kitchen, pharmacy, laundry and a heating plant. The anatomo-pathology department was thought in a strategic position in order to facilitate the funeral processions. Pavilions faced north north-east and south south-west in order to allow the best conditions of ventilation and exposure of sunlight¹⁹⁶.

The plan was officially approved on 15th March 1929¹⁹⁷; the newspaper *L'Arena* referred enthusiastically of the plan to the citizenship: "Now the plan is perfect. It isn't, as you can see, a hospital, but rather a "hospital city". Fifteen new pavilions are to be built, a great work"¹⁹⁸. (Figure 3)

193 ASVr, f. Civil Hospital, Meeting of 14th April 1923.

194 Pio Beccherle (1884-1963), born in Caprino, took a degree in Civil Engineering in Padua in 1907. From 1928 to 1935 was nominated technical advisor of the bank Cassa di Risparmio di Verona, Vicenza, Belluno, for which he oversaw the restoration of Palazzo Sparavieri of Via Garibaldi. He took over the management of the works of Magazzini Generali, planning some stores and the Cooling Station. Daniela ZUMIANI. *Persistenze antiche ed edifici moderni nell'isolato formato dalle vie Emilei, Sant'Egidio, San Mamaso e Garibaldi*. In: Andrea BRUGNOLI- Gian Maria VARANINI (eds.), *Magna Verona Vale. Studi in onore di Pierpaolo Brugnoli*. Verona, 2008, p. 549-576, in particular p. 554 -559. ISBN: 9788895149127; Vasco Senatore GONDOLA. *Cenni storici sulla famiglia Beccherle*, paper presented in Accademia di Agricoltura Scienze Lettere Arti. Verona, 2009, p. 66-68.

195 ArOCVr, *Progetto per la costruzione del Nuovo Centro Ospedaliero della città di Verona*, 14th October 1928, unnumbered envelop.

196 Very important is the *Capitolato Generale tecnico di appalto delle opere* by the engineer Beccherle and dated 14th October 1928 because it permits to understand the attentions on choosing the materials used for building the New Hospital Complex. ArOCVr, *Capitolato generale tecnico di appalto delle opere che si eseguiranno per il Consiglio Ospitaliero di Verona*, unnumbered envelope, 14th October 1928.

197 ArOCVr, *Processo verbale seduta del 15 marzo 1929*, unnumbered envelop.

198 *L'Arena*, 5th May 1929, p. 2.

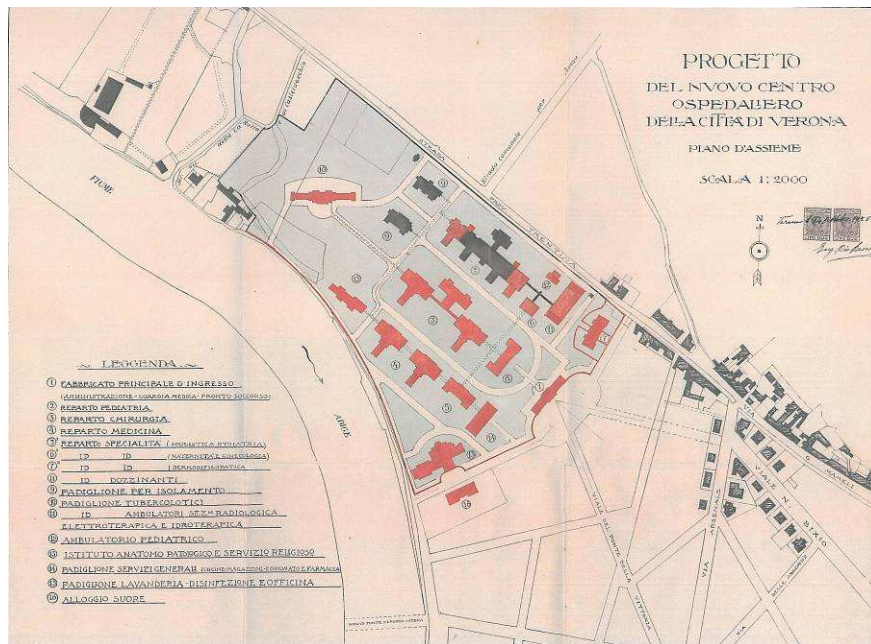


Figure 5: Pio Beccherle, General view of the New Hospital Complex, 1928 (ArOCVr, unnumbered envelop)

The works of the New Hospital Complex (1930-1942)

Works started in 1930 and were organized into five plots; in 1932 the new Chief of the Hospital Board, Bruno Bresciani, after many concerns expressed by medical staff and the director of the hospital Ferdinando Soprana made some changes to the plan; some pavilions not yet built (including a unit for people affected by tuberculosis) were suppressed and the church was reduced to more modest proportions¹⁹⁹.

On February 1933 works of II and III plot started, confirming the direction of works to Pio Beccherle²⁰⁰. On May 1933 two inspectors of the Ministry of the Interior examined the whole plan and evaluated that the Alessandri Children's Hospital should be damaged in his autonomy. So, they imposed some changes. Works proceeded briskly and on October 1934 the III plot was almost completed and was assigned the IV plot. The V plot, concerning the Isolation Unit, was approved on November 1936 to be finished in three months. On October 1936 the entire New Hospital Complex could now be considered arrived at a good point, and Beccherle thought that the whole hospital could become operative by the second half of 1938, thus replacing the old Sant'Antonio which was at the limits of viability.

A ministerial inspection conducted in 1937 by General Stroppolati and by doctor Scalfati came, however, to very strict assessments of the entire hospital complex, considering the changes made excessively expensive and characterized by exaggerated size²⁰¹.

Less than a year after the award of the works of the V area, the New Hospital Complex faced new difficulties: the Recchia firm, assignee of the works, after financial difficulties and wage

¹⁹⁹ ArOCVr, Resolution of 7th October 1932, unnumbered envelop.

²⁰⁰ ArOCVr, Resolution n. 50 of 23rd February 1933.

²⁰¹ ArOCVr, *Relazione di inchiesta sugli Istituti Ospedalieri di Verona*, signed by Stroppolati e Scalfati, dated 12nd November 1937, unnumbered envelop, p. 7-8.

increases imposed by the Great Depression, asked to the hospital administration a fair increase of the contractual prices, justifying the delay of the installation of the heating and electrical systems and the sanitary fixtures, with the difficulties of finding ferrous materials. The administration agreed, recognizing that from August 1938 considerable increases in the costs of materials and labour had altered the contractual conditions²⁰².

On 10th June 1940 Italy entered the war and began the works of shoring structures and construction of air-raid shelters. The V plot of works was declared finished on 30th April 1942, although there were some buildings still to be completed (Department of Medical Specialties, Women's Department of Dermatology, Admitting Department and Radiology) and the heating to be connected.

Patients were transferred to the New Hospital Complex at the end of August 1942, with the definite abandon of the old Sant'Antonio Hospital; the inauguration was scheduled on 13th September 1942, with the participation of Guido Buffarini, secretary of the Ministry of Interior and Representative of the Fascist Government. (Figures 4 and 5)



Figure 6: 13th September 1942: Inauguration of the New Hospital Complex. Main entrance.

(ArOCVr, Photograph album)



Figure 7: 13th September 1942: Inauguration of the New Hospital Complex. Gardens and hospital pavilions facing west (ArOCVr, Photograph album)

On 21st September 1943 some officers communicated to the Hospital Board their intention to occupy the hospital to house a command of generals, clerks and at least 250-300 soldiers. The chairman of the board, Gildo Dorizzi, tried in vain to oppose. After a partial coexistence between the two hospitals, which assured the working of the main pavilion of the Alessandri Hospital, the requisition was completed on 27th July 1944.

On 9th March 1945 the New Hospital Complex was bombed, damaging only the building for Sisters Accommodation, then demolished²⁰³.

The return of the Veronese hospital to the city and welfare policies in the post-war period

On 23rd April 1945 the withdrawing German army abandoned the hospital. The prefectorial commissioner planned a security service for the buildings to prevent looting and vandalism:

²⁰² ArOCVr, Resolution n. 90 of 6th March 1940.

²⁰³ ArOCVr, Resolution n. 180 of 20th April 1945.

many employees gathered voluntarily to maintained control even at night. The building was made available for the American Red Cross since the early days of May. The works of clearance of debris and restoration of the pavilions began, despite the difficulties of finding workers and labourers with the guarantee that the hospital would remain available to the city. The engineer Pio Beccherle was recalled to work out plans and quotations and by the end of August 1945 the hospital became operative again, at first only with the best preserved pavilions, but then with the whole complex²⁰⁴.

After the end of the Second War World the events of the Veronese hospital were intertwined much more closely than in the past with the development of the city, whose the hospital became a socio-urban central point. The city was absorbed by the works of reconstruction, but in the 1960s, the demographic increase in population highlighted more and more the hospital deficiencies. Giambattista Rossi²⁰⁵, chief of the new administrative hospital board since September 1962, had to face a chronic shortage of beds, the daily admissions exceeded two thousand attendances, when pavilions could house a maximum of one thousand one hundred patients, and it was why beds and ills were placed in corridors and halls. The new beds could be obtained raising the pavilions already existing, linking them together, or building a new block from the ground. A new decision shared between Renato Gozzi (President of the Province) and Giorgio Zanotto (Mayor of Verona), rather than to raise and to extend Borgo Trento Hospital, led to build a second hospital in the south of the city. The chosen area was the orchard adjoined to San Giacomo alla Tomba Psychiatric Hospital, given by the Province to the hospitals. At first thought as a satellite hospital of Borgo Trento, the new hospital complex started on January 1963 by a Ettore Rossi's plan, despite the hostility of the doctors of Borgo Trento.

The Hospital dear to the Veronese was, however, from the beginning of the twenty-first century, in the collective, that of Borgo Trento, that at the time of providing the Veronese health system of some new spaces equipped in a modern manner, they opted for a strengthening of the hospital, despite the negative opinion of the town planners. The New Polo Confortini was inaugurated on November 2011. One of the declared aim of the planner, Volkwin Marg, is the insertion of the hospital in the social context of the city, promoting the integration of the public gardens, a wide use of spaces for meetings and cultural activities, practically opening the hospital to the neighbourhood. The descriptions and perspectives of efficiency achieved with the New Surgery Polo Confortini recalls the technical descriptions which Pio Beccherle used to illustrate his plans for the new hospital²⁰⁶.

The hospital in Borgo Roma, seat of the Policlinico, is felt, despite its efficiency, as a modern complex situated in the suburban area of the city, far from the historical centre, an aseptic block depersonalized.

The integration between the two hospital is most recent history: in 2010 the two hospitals, commonly identified by the names of the neighbourhood in which they are, Borgo Trento and Borgo Roma, have been merged in the *Azienda Ospedaliera Integrata Verona*.

204 ArOCVr, Resolution n. 473 of 24th September 1945, Resolution n. 675 of 31st December 1945; *L'Arena*, 1st June 1945, p. 1-2.

205 Rossi Giambattista (1928-1998) was a civil lawyer from Isola della Scala. He promoted the establishment of the Department of Medicine in Verona, first as a dissociation of Padua and then as an autonomy department. After his death, was dedicated to him the Policlinico of Borgo Roma. Giulio OLIVI. *Rossi Giambattista*. In: Giuseppe Franco VIVIANI (ed.), *Dizionario biografico dei Veronesi (secolo XX)*. Verona, 2006, p. 712-714.

206 Francesco MURAROLLI. *Le principali tappe per la ristrutturazione e riorganizzazione dell'Ospedale Civile Maggiore*. In: *L'Ospedale e la città*, n. 4, V year, December 2001, p. 6-8.