

## 20. Opening the barrier of military immured spaces in Italy: is their regeneration going beyond the threshold of boundaries?

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter engages with a specific type of activity in the territory, that is, Ministry of Defence real estate assets, and its changeable meaning during its life cycle. A growing literature on the phases of construction, disposal and redevelopment processes of military settlements has been recently released (Bagaeeen, 2016; Gastaldi and Camerin, 2019; Camerin, 2020), but there has not yet been discussion on the role as immured space. This research sheds important light on the role military settlements play in the contemporary city while in use, disuse and redeveloped (or under redevelopment).

Section 2 analyses the meaning of the military presence in the territory as ‘spaces immured’. Military settlements are public-owned enclosures in which free access or movement is denied and forbidden to civilians, strictly monitored by specific groups or individuals for the so-called “military secrets”. This is why the perimeters of these sites are provided with barriers and walls with clear and discrete characteristics, such as the no-trespassing sign. Walls and barriers are physical and conceptual as the ‘dominant’ military authority overcomes the civil society for defence reasons.

Section 3 deals with the phase of abandonment. When the military presence comes to a halt, this new situation may consequently generate a shift on the meaning of the Defence assets as immured spaces. The abandonment is halfway to the ‘opening’ of the military barrier as it signifies the potential change of function, thus generating different dynamics, perceptions, attitudes and expectations to reshape the military enclosure and its surroundings. This phase can be claimed as just the ‘beginning of the end’ of the immured military space as such.

Section 4 reflects on the dualities that lie in the redevelopment of former military sites though the categorisation of two former military compounds located in the municipality of Verona, namely the compound Santa Marta-Passalacqua barracks and the compound comprising Santa Caterina barracks and fortress. The choice of two case studies lies in the possibility they present to be compared through ten dualities that help to build specific urban narratives of the sites. This analysis shows us the way the military ‘border thresholds’ break and consequently produce new functions for the society, or still remain abandoned.

## 2. MILITARY SETTLEMENTS AND THEIR MEANING AS SPACES IMMURED

This first part focuses on the way military presence in the city is related to the civil society and how the military create physical and conceptual barriers. Military settlements are off limits for the local community in order to meet the need of military activities and functions, being also large land-consuming activities. However, the Defence assets are much more than the physical space where the military occupies land. Military space transcends ideas of boundaries, and should be conceptualised rather as a complex system of social interactions constantly changing as the result of the spatial practices of the military and of civil society (Woodward, 2004).

The quartering of soldiers started within the more general territorial organisation of the European states during the 19th century. For instance, the military compulsory service was introduced in Italy after the 1861 Unification, then the quartering started (Bravi, 1891). The Armed Forces’ presence in the territory is the consequence of ‘complex, changeable and cumulative interplay of planning and decision-making, land availability and chance’ (Bagaen, 2016, p. 6) and of an international debate at the European level on national defence systems as well as quartering criteria and innovations over the decades (Turri, Zamperini and Cappelletti, 2009; Turri and Zamperini, 2012). The building of a myriad of installations have characterised the development of the society from cultural, economic, geographic, institutional, political, public health, social, and urban points of view (Savorra and Zucconi, 2009). Hence, military sites are not just a constant physical space and cannot only be measured and understood solely in terms of physical structures. In this sense, fundamentals are the considerations of Italo Insolera (1989) during the 1988 conference ‘The Army and cities from Unification to the 1930s’ – *Esercito e città dall’Unità agli anni Trenta* in Italian – held in the city of Spoleto. The Italian architect, urban planner, and historian identified six different arguments, understood by the same author as ‘problems’, on which the building of military settlements is related to the urban transformation during the second half of the 19th and the first half of 20th centuries in all Europe. After more than 30 years from this

statement, we may claim that these six issues comprise the main features of military sites perceived as immured spaces. In particular, each of these problems corresponds to a sort of physical and conceptual barrier that separate the military from civil society.

First, Italo Insolera refers to the fact that the organisational logic within military complexes responds mainly to technological issues in relation to the instruments of war. The changes within the military walls, as a consequence, almost never occur in the dialogue with the city (Insolera, 1989, p. 667). This is why the military enclosure can modify its morphology over time by adding new buildings and technologies. The second consideration is strictly related to the first one, since the Ministry of Defence properties are areas excluded from the dialectic of urban transformation. Military settlements are generally high-consuming-land assets excluded from the dynamics of the real estate market. This is the reason why these pieces of land can be considered as drivers of urbanisation (*ibid.*, p. 668). Third, the building of military settlements can be understood as a sudden break in a series of relationships based on which the city is shaped and consolidated over time. The construction of military settlements generates a barrier between the land for defence purposes and its surroundings. In addition, the Ministry of Defence is a large landowner using a rather low percentage of its assets. Although the military may underuse their properties and generate hope to open the doors for their reuse, releasing land from military to civil society is cumbersome and almost always linked with geopolitics and state budget issues. In other words, the Ministry of Defence shows a certain propensity to leave abandoned some of its properties but, at the same time, to maintain them as its own assets in order to face the future Armed Forces' needs (*ibid.*, pp. 669–670). Fourth, differences exist between the military domain and the (local) public domain. Both domains have accumulated large amounts of land over time through enormous public investment and their management is strongly conditioned by speculative interests and changing strategies by both the Armed Forces and the City Councils. Despite this, the military domain benefits from specific regulation that made their disposal more complex (and long-lasting) in comparison with the public domain (*ibid.*, p. 670). Fifth, many military buildings are listed as 'cultural heritage', so it is difficult to carry out restorations and reconversions without affecting the structures classified as heritage (*ibid.*, pp. 671–672). As a last point, Insolera stresses the relationship between the military settlements and the city life. The Defence assets are not only topographical locations in the city, but the military presence implies an interaction with the local population, even though the latter is usually forbidden to enter into the military enclosure (*ibid.*, pp. 672–673).

### 3. THE ABANDONMENT: THE BEGINNING OF THE END OF MILITARY SETTLEMENTS PERCEIVED AS IMMURED SPACES

This section deals with the factors causing the abandonment of the Defence assets in the late 20th century based on geopolitical, military, public finance, and urban development logics, and how the abandoned is conceptualised in the fields of study of architecture and urban planning. This phase can be conceived as the ‘beginning of the end’ of military immured spaces as such, to shift them from impermeable to permeable and to result in the opening of military barriers.

The end of the Cold War constituted a benchmark in the military presence in many countries along with other factors that led from a military and state restructuring to urban restructuring (Adisson, 2018). First, a significant quantity of national defence sites has been closed by virtue of the reorganisation of the Armed Forces following geopolitical changes and spending review policies (Doak, 1999; Artioli, 2016). Second, the neoliberal approach to public policies and urban governance promoted privatisation policies of the public land, including military real estate assets (Adisson and Artioli, 2020). Third, according to Fiorino (2015), many military settlements failed to meet the updated constructive architectural, energy, and technological standards. Not being in line with the requirements of the national defence towards the 21st century, military architecture do not often present an acceptable state of conservation for the maintenance of military activities. Fourth, the abandonment was triggered by the pressing urban demands, dynamics and the growing centrality of urban real estate. The aim was to provide the city with new space for functions and equipment whose implementation was curbed by the restrictions naturally attached to military premises. In relation to this, the Ministry of Defence shows its own interest in making profit of the sale of such properties to conduct further investments for military purposes (Commissione IV Difesa, 1999).

The abandonment generated proper voids which resembled a transitory form in the new way of re-shaping the former military immured spaces. The study of this phenomenon can be approached from various angles. First, after the dispossession of the military, civil society should take possession of the land. As the boundaries of immured military space started to be fragile after the abandonment, the civil society required these settlements to satisfy their needs. The abandonment constitutes the ‘middle ground’ between these steps. Second, the military abandonment not only left the void understood exclusively as an ‘architectural-urban form’ without content, but rather as the expression of a process of opening its boundaries. Third, military settlements, as well as other types of voids, are part of the history of the city, not being

a mere support for a reuse project once they have been abandoned (Doron, 2000, p. 256). Eventually, the physical barriers, that is, the perimetral wall, remain typically as remnants of their previous role, and can be intended as historical elements, as part of the military cultural tradition, and as a threshold to impede the access.

In the fields of study of architecture and urban planning, the state of abandonment, disuse and emptiness can be expressed as 'derelict area' (Kivell and Hatfield, 1998), 'vacant land' (Northam, 1971), 'void' (Secchi et al., 1984), and 'wasteland' (Lynch, 1990), all of them being conceptualised according to different nuances in the planning jargon. Among the conceptualisations of the state of abandonment, the terms useful for understanding the transitory phase of the military settlements intended as immured spaces can be the following:

1. '*Terrain vague*'. This concept is associated with expectant urban spaces where the absence of functional use gives them an evocative power, a strangeness, which could be read as a critical alternative to the productive rationality of common urbanisation (de Solà-Morales Rubió, 1996) and as an opportunity to the practice of commoning. This is the case of several ancient military settlements claimed by the local residents to respond to their social needs.
2. 'Third landscape'. The production and perpetuation of the abandonment over time in a specific area such as a military settlement may create a new type of landscape, defined by Gilles Clément (2004) as 'third landscape'. Following the slow but inexorably re-appropriation by nature, former military sites would become eccentric and exotic spaces, a mixture between military ruins and wild nature.
3. 'Dead zone' and 'transgressive zone'. In strict connection to the fact that nature reconstructs the 'ruined' environment, Doron (2000) claimed that most of the abandoned urban spaces show a dichotomy of what an observer perceive as city and nature, of what is dead and alive. The recognition of former military sites as a type of transgressive zone means that the condition of abandonment 'transgresses' many of the boundaries that were imposed on the built environment at the time they were plenty of military activities. Military settlements become dead because they are temporarily (hours, days, months or years) not in use, so the suspension of military use marks within the boundary a space. The boundary, consequently, starts to crumble and with it, the immured space does so. The suspension, to sum up, *opens inside the boundary of 'the time of planning' a new time-space* (Doron, 2000, p. 261) where a new use can take place, transgressing the military physical barriers.

#### 4. THE REDEVELOPMENT: DUALITIES IN OPENING THE BARRIERS

The inquiry on the regeneration of two former military compounds located in Verona (Figures 20.1 and 20.2) was carried with the attempt to compare the management of the ‘opening’ of the military barriers based on a number of dualities. The methodology relied on the following steps. First, the search for international scientific literature using the bibliographic databases Scopus and JSTOR along with the grey literature (i.e., press articles, government’s legislative documents, and local administrations’ urban and territorial planning sources) was performed. Second, a specific fieldwork in 2021 conducted in Verona, that is, on-site visits and interviews with actors and stakeholders involved. Third, this study was conducted on the basis of a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The data collection includes a review of the existing literature on the case studies and the interpretation of official documents released by the actors involved in the management of former military settlements (mostly Ministry of Defence, State Property Agency, and City Councils). In addition, each case study analysis comprises the morphological analysis of the site and the context through a military settlements-centred walkable catchment (400-m scaled map). By doing so, the inquiry exemplified the current state of the regeneration projects, allowing to decipher common elements and differences of the proposed dualities (Table 20.1).

1. The location on urban areas (a) and countryside areas (b) in Table 20.1: The Santa Marta and Ugo Passalacqua barracks are located on Verona’s eastern urban centre in the lower-social-class Veronetta neighbourhood, and lies on the Adige River left side. The compound is surrounded by numerous features, that is, social housing provided with commercial shops, the Università degli Studi di Verona offices and the Faculty of Economics, the monumental cemetery, and Verona’s Porta Vescovo railway yards and facilities. Pedestrian-oriented mobility is not well guaranteed as bike lines and sidewalks are severely deteriorated, and this area is affected by rush-hour traffic congestion. On the contrary, the Santa Caterina compound is located on the Verona southern rural area in Borgo Roma neighbourhood and lies between the river banks of the Adige River and the Milani canal. The presence of fields is significant in its surroundings, with the exception of the Pestrino horse racing company, a Monastery – *Monastero di Clausura Serve di Maria Oblate Sacerdotali* in Italian – and a 30,000-m<sup>2</sup>-shaped residential settlement belonging to the private society Gruppo Bertoli SpA, which is nowadays under construction.<sup>1</sup>

Table 20.1 Data from the case studies

Assets	Plot Size and Gross Floor Area (m <sup>2</sup> )/ Volume (m <sup>3</sup> )/ Buildings	Year of Construction/ Underuse- Abandonment/ Disposal/ Redevelopment Works	Owner	Current use	Future Projects Expected	Dichotomies										
						1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Santa Marta barracks	27,500 (16,680)/ 127,000 / 16	1863–1865 / 1997–2000 / 2011–2015	Università degli Studi di Verona	Reused and partial abandoned	University headquarters	a	c	e	h	i	k	n	o	p	q	u
Ugo Passalacqua barracks	176,823 (0)/ 218,271 / 64	1950s / 2001–2007 / 2007 / 2011– currently ongoing	Verona City Council	Ongoing works	Mix of functions (housing, green spaces)	a	d	e	h	i	k	n	p	r	t	u
Santa Caterina fortress	100,000 (2,700) / - / 2	1850–1852 / 1970s–1997 / 1998–2005	Verona City Council	Reused and partial abandoned	Conservative reuse	b	c	e	h	i	k	m	o	q	t	u
Santa Caterina barracks	123,000 (19,480)/ 77,920 / 30	1950s / 1997 / 2012 / -	Verona City Council	Abandoned	Storehouse of culture, private housing, public park	b	d	e	h	i	k	m	p	r	u	

Source: Camerin (2021).

2. Époque of building, before 1900 (c) or after 1900 (d). The Santa Marta barracks and Santa Caterina fortress were built in the mid-19th century, while the Ugo Passalacqua and Santa Caterina barracks dated back to the Cold War period, being realised during the 1950s.
3. Public ownership (e) vs private ownership (f). Both compounds are public as they are owned by the City Council. Both the Santa Marta and Ugo Passalacqua barracks were acquired by the City Council respectively in 2003<sup>2</sup> and 2007 with an expenditure of 9,860,000<sup>3</sup> and 42,349,470 euros (Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Verona Vicenza Belluno e Ancona, 2002: pp. 102–103). The Santa Caterina compound was transferred without any charge to the City Council through the so-called ‘federalism state property’<sup>4</sup> between 2013 and 2015.
4. A comprehensive vision of the new use of the former military settlements within the Urban General Plan (g) or single urban projects based on a masterplan that modify/integrate the land-use planning tool (h). Both former military compounds have been regarded as large urban projects to create new areas of centrality that modify the local Urban General Plan. While the 2009 masterplan for the Santa Marta and Passalacqua barracks was modified three times (in 2010, 2013 and 2017), being integrated to the 1975 Urban General Plan – *Piano Regolatore Generale* in Italian – (Comune di Verona, 2009), the 2021 masterplan for the Santa Caterina compound was just launched in January 2021 (Comune di Verona, 2021) and will be successively integrated to the Urban General Plan.
5. Top-down decisions (i) or community involvement (j) in the decision-making process. None of the masterplans involved bottom-up decision-making, but top-down. Although the City Council was to provide a university campus in 1997, the Santa Marta and Ugo Passalacqua barracks were required by NATO in 1999 within the frame of the international reorganisation of the Armed Forces after the 1990s Balkan wars. The local association ‘Passalacqua and Santa Marta for Verona’ protests prevented the transfer of the American soldiers in the compound (Camera dei Deputati, 1999: pp. 26243–26244) so the City Council could freely proceed with its planning. As for the Santa Caterina compound, the masterplan did not contemplate any community involvement in the decision-making, but it probably will inform the community about the masterplan’s contents.
6. The long-lasting abandonment (k) vs immediate reuse, also temporary (l). The long period between the underuse–abandonment by the military and the disposal and redevelopment works of the Ugo Passalacqua and Santa Caterina barracks resulted in the poor maintenance of the buildings and their unavoidable degradation that led to their demolition. No matter if also Santa Marta barracks suffered from a long-lasting abandonment (approximately 15 years), but the presence of listed buildings to preserve



- and enhance was the key factor to enable their conservative reuse. The underuse of the Santa Caterina fortress began in the 1970s, being used as a motocross track during two decades, with enormous damages to the existing open spaces around the existing buildings. From 1998 to 2005 the local cooperative '*Cooperativa Sociale Verona Territorio*' restored the area through cleaning, removal of incongruous materials, and disinfection of spontaneous vegetation.<sup>5</sup> Nowadays just a portion of the Santa Marta has been reconverted into university uses; the Ugo Passalacqua barracks was demolished and the redevelopment works are still ongoing; the Santa Caterina fortress is open to the public but needs an intervention for its conservative reuse; and the Santa Caterina barracks is still abandoned.
7. Use values (m) vs exchange values (n). The first concept refers to the satisfaction of social needs in order to redevelop former military sites into 'social anchors', for instance by the provision of new public spaces (gardens, parks, public equipment, etc.). The exchange value is, on the contrary, the real estate market value acquired by the settlements over time, which makes them an interchangeable commodity for the owner (i.e., the Ministry of Defence) and redevelop the voids in new profit-driven spaces. The 2009 masterplan for the Santa Marta Ugo Passalacqua barracks will result in a total of 152,740 m<sup>3</sup> of new volume divided into: 93,000 m<sup>3</sup> for 3- to 6-storey residential buildings (corresponding to 25,597 m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor area), of which only 8,480–30,000 m<sup>3</sup> is for public housing; 31,200 m<sup>3</sup> for 4- to 5-floor tertiary activities corresponding to a gross floor area of 5,594 m<sup>2</sup>; 3,224–10,000 m<sup>3</sup> for university residences; and 4,645–18,540 m<sup>3</sup> of 2-floor buildings for neighbourhood services. In addition, 323 car parking spaces (including 188 underground) and a 4-km cycle lane will be built. To date, only the Santa Marta barracks has been redeveloped into Università degli Studi di Verona headquarters, while the rest of the project is currently underway. The 2021 masterplan for the Santa Caterina compound foresees the annihilation of the existing built environment within the barracks and the conservative reuse of the fortress, all of them surrounded by a public park. The barracks will be provided with one L-shaped building for storehouses (for archives belonging to the Verona City Council, the local foundations and the civic museums) and three residential buildings of respectively a total of 16,000 m<sup>2</sup> and 2,600 m<sup>2</sup> of gross floor area.
  8. The management of the existing morphology through listed buildings to protect and enhance (o) vs ordinary buildings to demolish (p). The conservative reuse corresponds to the listed buildings located within the Santa Marta barracks (although with a number of degraded buildings will be demolish, for a total of 18,480 m<sup>3</sup>) and the Santa Caterina fortress,

while no buildings were deemed worth preserving in the cases of the Ugo Passalacqua and Santa Caterina barracks due to their poor conditions.

9. Enhancement and preservation (q) or erasure (r) of tangible and intangible values. The tangible values of former military settlements are the inherited buildings within the enclosure from the local population. Intangible values are mostly geared towards the socio-spatial context of the site and are strictly linked to what degree the redevelopment focuses on the local culture, character, and history (i.e., to the oral traditions and expressions, performing arts and social practices, rituals, and festive events) and consequently enhanced through tourism. Only the tangible values of the Santa Caterina fortress would be entirely preserved, while the Santa Marta barracks would suffer from minor demolitions, with both the 1950s barracks being subjected to complete demolitions. The 2009 masterplan for the Santa Marta barracks and the 2021 masterplan for the Santa Caterina compound seems to preserve and enhance intangible values, on the contrary of what have already occurred in the case of the Ugo Passalacqua barracks.
10. The valorisation of nature and biodiversity (t) vs the provision of anthropic functions (u). The 2009 and 2021 masterplans provide the former military settlements with a mix of functions with abundant public green spaces apart from the case of the Santa Marta barracks. In the case of the Ugo Passalacqua barracks, 180 among 500 existing trees were eradicated in 2011 according to the future morphology of the area (Italia Nostra, 2011), with the vision of planting 2,000 trees, but this is still to be carried out.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

As observed by Ashley and Touchton (2015, p. 1) ‘current scholarship describes this process and provides snapshots of transition, yet there is very little systematic knowledge of what follows base closure’. It is in this sense that this chapter traces a methodology that help to partially fill the gap on ‘what follows military settlements closures’. Based on a number of dualities, the work provides the in-depth understanding of the very nature of military immured spaces, as well as the processes of their abandonment and redevelopment. As former military settlements are in highly lucrative and desirable locations, their redevelopment is subjected to real estate pressures. Nevertheless, public ownership by City Councils, such as in the case of Verona, can guarantee a relative balance between profit-driven spaces and social anchors. This duality is seen in the case studies in the attempt to create both new areas of centrality and new public equipment to deal with the lack of public green areas and new cultural spaces. While the Santa Marta and Ugo Passalacqua barracks’ new future is already defined, the transformation of the Santa Caterina compound may contribute to establish new partnerships between public institutions and local



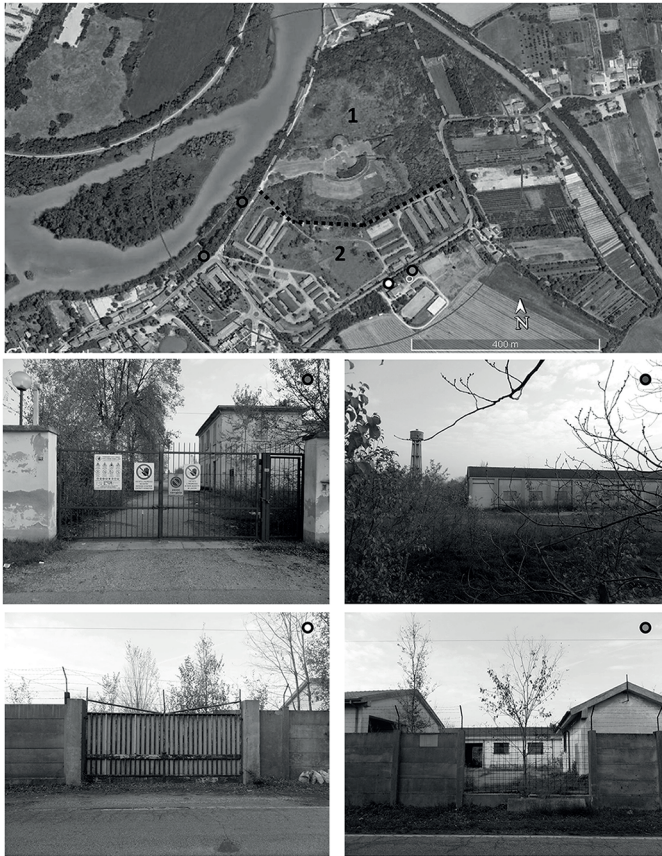
Source: Elaboration by F. Camerin (2021) and photos by F. Camerin.

Figure 20.1 The Santa Marta (1) and Ugo Passalacqua barracks (2)

communities and set forth new models of governance of these former military spaces based on care, economic and environmental sustainability inclusion, solidarity and participation.

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Source: Elaboration by F. Camerin (2021) and photos by F. Camerin.

Figure 20.2 The Santa Caterina fortress (1) and barracks (2)

territories', financed by the GoforIT programme of Fondazione CRUI (The Conference of Italian University Rectors).

## NOTES

1. <http://www.viveresantacaterina.it/>.
2. In 2004 the Università degli Studi di Verona was given the concession of a portion of the Santa Marta barracks for 99 years.
3. Approximately 1,550,000 euros of which was financed by the Veneto Region authority (Regione del Veneto, 1998, p. 3).



4. It regards the state-owned properties (including military ones) transfer to local authorities according to the Italian fiscal federalism (Scuto, 2010).
5. <http://www.ifortiassociazione.com/index8.html>.

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