

Pre-print of the chapter published as

FABRIS, Luca Maria Francesco; CAMERIN, Federico (2024): “Abandoned Army Barracks in Friuli Venezia Giulia (Italy) as a Potential for New Time-shaped Community Landscapes”. In Agnoletti, Mauro; Dobričić, Saša; Matteini, Tessa; Palerm, Juan Manuel -eds.-, *Cultivating Continuity of the European Landscape. Environmental History*, vol. 15. Cham: Springer, pp. 321-329. ISBN: 978-3-031-25713-1. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-25713-1_34

Authors

L. M. F. Fabris

DASTU, Politecnico di Milano, Milano, Italy

e-mail: lucamariafrancesco.fabris@polimi.it

Beijing University of Civil Engineering and Architecture, Beijing, China

F. Camerin

Departamento de Urbanística y Ordenación del Territorio-Grupo de Investigación en Arquitectura, Urbanismo y Sostenibilidad (GIAU+S), Universidad de Valladolid-Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

e-mail: federico.camerin@uva.es

ABSTRACT

The dismantling of the Italian Army Barracks in the Norther-East of Italy in the last 20 years has left a series of wide abandoned areas. In these places, nature has freely operated as a designer, creating new transitional landscapes in the places devoted to protect the Italian borders during the Cold War. We could talk about ‘auto-regenerative’ landscapes. This paper aims to illustrate briefly the process-making of this kind of unconventional landscape over the second half of the XX century in the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia through different scales of intervention that have activated multiple spatial relations over the time. This exceptional infrastructure-based landscape, sized-up by the Italian Army necessities, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 has been reconfigured and gradually abandoned, becoming almost completely unused from the year 2000. Authors propose a reading of these derelict spaces and formulate possible new scenarios of sustainable regeneration and inclusive reintegration that aspire to promote a kind of open project to return them, as a social pay-back after more than 100 years of militarization, to the Friuli Venezia Giulia communities.

Keywords: transition, post-military, open project

1. The Cold War Military Landscape Expansion in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

In the Italian Region Friuli Venezia Giulia, the militarisation historically shaped the territory. It was boosted during the first half of last century, throughout the WW1 (Pascoli and Vazzaz, 2005; Bernasconi and Muran, 2009) and reached its peak after the WW2, when the Region was considered by NATO as a “buffer” zone to deal with a possible conflict with the Soviet bloc (Baccichet, 2015). This led to the creation of a myriad of military infrastructures of various kinds where, for decades, a large part of the Italian Army concentrated and created inevitably a specific kind of military-landscaped territory, entirely excluded to the civil society. The so-called ‘Cold War Military Landscape’ was set up by various infrastructures, such as airports, barracks, armouries, deposits, training fields, and so on, plus a quantity of military easements. The army presence increased for more than four decades together with a regional economic development based more on the agricultural sector than the industrial one acted as a sort of “environmental restriction” preserving large portions from the post-WW2 massive urbanization that involved most of the Italian territory. In 2006, the Region Friuli Venezia Giulia counted 119.205 sq. km of military surface, which represented the 1.67% of its total territorial surface (Pinotti, 2006).

This exceptional infrastructure-based landscape, sized-up by the Italian Army necessities, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 had reconfigured and gradually abandoned, becoming almost completely unused since the year 2000. The amount of area released by the military in Friuli Venezia Giulia counted up to 9,811,245 sq. m., 3,716,371 sq. m. of which are barracks (38%), so being the biggest part of this military derelict territory. Nevertheless, the installations still belonging to the Ministry of Defence were not taken into account, even though they are nowadays underused, partially abandoned, or even entirely abandoned and ruined. Among them, we recognize the partially abandoned and ruined 23.5 hectares “Trieste” barracks in Casarsa della Delizia (Pordenone) as it stands out as one of the biggest barracks ever built in Italy (Fabris and Camerin, 2017).



Fig. 1: The Trieste Barracks area in Casarsa della Delizia. The historic urban centre of the town has the same surface of the former military compound. Table elaborated during the 2015 workshop.

2. “Deactivated” Army Barracks: How to Shift Them into “Active” Infrastructures?

The ‘military landscape’ issue has been tackled under various points of view in the frame of the relationship military-civil society (very well analysed by Woodward, 2014): Here the Authors focus on the fact that the dismantling of the Italian Army Barracks and other infrastructures in the North-East of Italy in the last 20 years has left a series of wide abandoned areas. In these areas, nature has freely operated as a designer, creating new transitional landscapes in places formerly devoted to protect the Italian borders during the Cold War. We could talk about ‘auto-regenerative’ landscapes as they are still preserved intact and are characterised by a strong historical/anthropic identity as well as an important process of botanical and faunal restoration. Moreover, their intrinsic military characteristics offer us a reading of these derelict spaces and formulate possible new scenarios of sustainable regeneration and inclusive reintegration that aspire to promote a kind of open project to return them to the Friuli Venezia Giulia communities as a social pay-back after more than 100 years of militarisation.



Fig. 2: A view of the unused spaces in the former Trieste Barracks (photo by Luca MF Fabris, 2015)

The characteristics and the possibilities for barracks reuse are the following: large-scale surface, usually around 100,000 sq. m or more, provided with both built and unbuilt spaces organised on military scheme-basis; a relevant building presence provided with valuable architectural style; strategic localisation within the edge of the existing urban landscape; their status of public property; a considerable public interest for individual and collective memory aspects; aesthetic value as natural areas. All these features could be the foundations to define a peculiar kind of military memory landscape with a unique characteristic within the application of the Landscape European Convention. In fact in the last 20 years no landscape policy has taken these ‘auto-regenerative’ landscapes into consideration, nor as a value for the communities. So, we propose an original approach

to the Army barracks and their regeneration on the ground of more than a 5 year-experience in developing new proposals for the abandoned area of the Trieste barracks in Casarsa della Delizia.

3. The Trieste Barracks in Casarsa della Delizia as a Sample for a New Time-Shaped Community Landscape

Most of the barracks located in Friuli Venezia Giulia's municipalities housed hundreds of soldiers usually followed by their families, being a relevant presence in the local communities. Trieste barracks reached more than 4,000 soldiers plus their families during the 1970s, thus remarkably influencing social, economic and urban aspects of the small municipality of Casarsa. However, the gradual abandonment meant the loss of a relevant vitality and the local administrations have dramatically lacked of concrete ideas and policies to re-integrate the Cold War military landscapes into the urban fabric.

Given the long-standing economic crisis challenges, which have meant significant budgetary deficits, scarcity of public resources and difficulties in the real estate market in the last decade, Authors proposed a new approach based on landscape architecture-project solutions. The 2015 international design workshop "Restarting from Bacchus and Dionysus, with the help of Oyamatsumi" (Fabris and Camerin, 2017), plus further elaborations in the frame of the Master of Science in Architecture of the School AUIC of the Politecnico di Milano (Italy), promoted and proposed project ideas to create a new infrastructural landscape based on three key-projects missing in Friuli Region. They are a Cold-War museum, a wine museum, and a pilot vineyard which would recreate a typical Friulian country-side landscape promoting organic farming and the local cooperative social winery history. The goal has been merging the citizenship's and stakeholders' desiderata to integrate sustainability within a public park as a new active infrastructure. Maintenance of place and its historic value as a memory; attraction of wine tasting in tourism; new cultural events based on the preminent figure of Casarsa's poet Pier Paolo Pasolini were the key elements. Such project-based principles can be also exported in other former military barracks in Friuli to feed coordinated actions for the local communities' transformation.



Fig. 3: Adaptive reuse of the open spaces present in the former Trieste Barracks according to citizens' requests. Table elaborated during the 2015 workshop.

4. The post-Covid-19 landscape twenty years after the Landscape European Convention. Inertia and opportunities for the Army barracks.

The Covid-19 pandemic will have wide-ranging effects on the practice of public landscape. Whilst most of the state-provided proposals for the redevelopment of abandoned Army barracks have relied on real estate solutions to extrapolate the maximum financial benefit (Gastaldi and Camerin, 2019), nowadays public-owned assets should guarantee the ‘right to the city’ (Lefebvre, 1968).

The 5-year experience on the Trieste barracks have shown us that the creation of an infra-structural landscape would guarantee the care of abandoned places, the configuration of new sustainable realities, and the enhancement of local resources and production systems in a progressive adaptation to the continuously changing conditions. The most recent example of such (unexpected) changing situation are the challenging and long-lasting repercussions across the society due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many of which will surely influencing the way we approach the design of landscape. In this framework, the Army barracks conceived in their status as public properties belonging to the community should endorse the creation of an articulated system capable of being inclusive. On the one hand, people are likely to become more involved in their communities and decision-making process of the future interventions. On the other hand, the post-Covid-19 landscapes should guarantee open spaces for physical and mental health benefits and the environmental benefits to respond to the citizens’ needs.

The new Trieste barracks scenario as public open space would create an attractive memorial landscape giving to residents a quality of life upgrading merging with the promotion of slow tourism along with the local products (wine). The proposals define a specific way of making landscape, thus still valid for the building of the post-pandemic landscape, based on a constant evaluation of its value for the community. This approach has meant a complex understanding of places, resources, spaces, natural conditions, built constructions conditions, physical and cultural relationships in order to harmonise multidisciplinary skills to set a shared vision of the future. Architecture, engineering, and urban planning contributed among others discipline in the definition of this specific open auto-regenerative landscape.



Fig. 4. Productive landscape as connection between Casarsa’s urban area and the abandoned former military area. Table elaborated during the 2015 workshop.

5. Conclusions

Working on the redevelopment of 'auto-regenerative' landscapes, such as Army barracks, implies the recognition of the values of a specific community. The size and historical characteristic of former military sites could become the trigger of public environmental regeneration and landscape design integrated with local sustainable development. The experiment conducted elaborating scenarios for the Trieste barracks provided original landscape-based solutions not related to a mere real estate approach (Camerin and Fabris, 2020). Results show that the regeneration of former Army barracks combine different scales: at local scale enhancing socio-economic features; at territorial scale as it can be replied following the same patterns to find new solutions for the well-being of another community. Also, as 'common' public-owned property should promote, the transition from military to civil society could solve the new urban and landscape design issues after the Covid-19 pandemic. Open projects for open spaces along with the involvement of people would definitely improve the way keep alive the application of the Landscape European Convention.



Fig. 5. Landscape Masterplan table from the Master in Architecture Thesis by Edoardo Del Conte and Erica Nonis, supervisor Luca Maria Francesco Fabris, Politecnico di Milano, AUIC School, 2018.

References

Baccichet, M. (Ed.) (2015). *Fortezza FGV. Dalla guerra fredda alle aree militari dismesse*. Monfalcone (Go): Edicom Edizioni,

- Bernasconi, A. and Muran, G. (2009). *Il testimone di cemento. Le fortificazioni del «Vallo Alpino Littorio» in Cadore Carnia e Tarvisio*, Udine: La Nuova Base.
- Camerin, F. and Fabris, L.M.F. (2020). *Conflict Landscape: Memory and Future. The Casarsa della Delizia Case*. In Dalzero S. et al. (Eds.), *Boundary Landscapes* (pp. 343-351). Roma: Tab Edizioni.
- Fabris, L.M.F. and Camerin, F. (Eds.) (2017). *Ripartire da Bacco e Dioniso con l'aiuto di Oyamatsumi. Proposte sostenibili per la riqualificazione dell'ex caserma Trieste di Casarsa/Restarting from Bacchus and Dionysus, with the help of Oyamatsumi. Sustainable proposals for the renewal of former Trieste Barracks in Casarsa*. Fossalta di Portogruaro: Lions Club Sesto al Reghena in Sylvis.
- Gastaldi, F. and Camerin, F. (2019). *Aree militari dismesse e rigenerazione urbana. Innovazioni urbane, potenzialità di valorizzazione del territorio, inerzialità legislative e di processo*. Siracusa: Lettera Ventidue.
- Lefebvre, H. (1968). *Le droit à la ville*. Paris: Éditions Anthropos.
- Pascoli, M. and Vazzaz, A. (2005). *I forti e il sistema difensivo del Friuli: itinerari sconosciuti nel più grande campo di battaglia italiano della Grande Guerra*. Udine: Gaspari.
- Pinotti, R. (2006). *Indagine conoscitiva*. Rome: IV Commissione Difesa. http://www.camera.it/_dati/leg15/lavori/stencomm/04/indag/militari/2006/1025/s000r.htm
- Woodward, R. (2014). Military landscapes: Agendas and approaches for future research. *Progress in Human Geography*, 38(1) 40-61.

NOTE

This paper was set up and carried out in collaboration with the two authors. In this context, the paragraphs 3 and 4 are attributed to Luca Maria Francesco Fabris, and the paragraphs 1 and 2 to Federico Camerin. The conclusions are common.

Federico Camerin has participated as co-author within the research project “La Regeneración Urbana como una nueva versión de los Programas de Renovación Urbana. Logros y fracasos”. This project is co-funded by the Spanish Ministry of Universities in the framework of the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan, by the European Union – NextGenerationEU and by the Universidad de Valladolid. This work was carried out at the Grupo de Investigación en Arquitectura, Urbanismo y Sostenibilidad (GIAU+S).