



# Italian military real estate assets re-use issues and opportunities in three capital cities<sup>☆</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

The article, through a number of case studies, aims at exploring difficulties and opportunities affecting Italian military real estate assets re-use and, also, at developing an analysis of 1990s and 2000s military assets management. After an introduction of the theme, it will critically analyze the connection between legislative framework (divide it into two periods, firstly, between 1989 and 2013 and, secondly, starting from 2014) and re-use procedures, delineating the relationship between the actors involved in the process, such as Ministry of Defense, State Property Agency, and local authorities. Afterwards, it will focus the attention on three case studies of military installations re-use processes in the Italian capital cities of Milan, Rome, and Turin, investigating a “new” actor task in the procedures, real estate fund “Investment facility for the enhancement of public assets - Extra Fund (F.I.V.)”, belonging to Investment Management Company “Cassa Depositi e Prestiti”. The paper demonstrates, on one hand, Italian public policies inertia to link military properties alienation and urban regeneration issues and, on the other hand, opportunities in a context of public financial crisis.

## 1. Objective and methodology

This work, through various case studies, aims to give a contribution in the field of “urban studies” regarding the difficulties and opportunities affecting the Italian military real estate assets re-use and, also, to propose an analysis of their recent history management.

The methodology is the following: starting from the few researches carried out in Italy in the field of “urban studies”, it has been introduced the theme with the current international and national literature review. Then, an analysis has been carried out on the connection between legislative framework (divide it into two periods, 1989–2013 and since 2014) and procedures introduced in order to re-use military assets: this phase of the article delineates the relationship between the actors involved in the process, such as Ministry of Defense, State Property Agency, and local authorities. After that, it focuses on the case studies, analyzing three projects entrusted to a “new” actor in the procedures, the Investment Management Company “Cassa Depositi e Prestiti”. The society, through its real estate fund named “Investment facility for the enhancement of public assets - Extra Fund (F.I.V.)”, is acting as a private stakeholders in the attempt to unlock the planning, design, economic and even social inertia related to urban regeneration projects of

former military assets in several Italian cities. In order to demonstrate difficulties and opportunities of the ongoing procedures of military real estate assets re-use, among the most significant experiences there have been selected the cases of Mameli barracks in Milan, Guido Reni barracks in Rome and Alessandro La Marmora barracks in Turin.

## 2. Introduction

After the end of the Cold War in 1989 and in the context of the crisis that shook the Western countries capitalistic systems (with a grave budgetary deficit), in the last decades of the twentieth century, the alienation of military properties and their transition to civilian uses began to take place (Markusen and Judken, 1992; Jauhiainen, 2002; Strange and Walley, 2007). Former military and defense sites (including all the assets built up for national defense, including arsenals, barracks, casemates, hangars, bunkers, training grounds, and so on), were being sold to wipe the public debt. Moreover, in many cases military properties no longer meet the army’s current needs. Further, they are often located in areas that over time have become marginal in the changed international strategic and logistical framework, as well as being outdated compared to a modern defensive system (or it would require

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substantial resources for adapting it to new technologies, legislation, and standards).

Consequently, since 1989, based on geo-political, military, and public finance logic, American and European Ministries of Defense have increasingly encouraged the military sites' and buildings' dismantling, such as the national programs "Base Realignment and Closure" in the USA (BRAC, since 1988) (Warf, 1997) and the French "Mission pour la Réalisation des Actifs Immobiliers" (MRAI, since 1989) (Dubois-Maury, 1998). Currently, in Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, the military property management is entrusted respectively to the Federal Property Agency ("Bundesanstalt für Immobilienaufgaben"), the "Instituto de Vivienda, Infraestructura y Equipamiento de la Defensa", and the "Defense Estate".

This "new" kind of abandonment has to be added to other abandoned areas, including former railways, warehouses, hospitals, general markets, slaughterhouses, and energy plants (Carter, 2016). As well as these urban voids, abandoned military installations are a blot on the urban environment. However, even more than other derelict zones, the inherent characteristics of former military premises make their re-use rather difficult. Some of the difficulties are the following: the lack of relations between a military zone and its context, the problems of soil and subsoil contamination and their evaluation cost of environmental rehabilitation, the very conservative attitude of the Italian Superintendence of Cultural Heritage on constraints buildings (which often leaves no space for action nor for creativity in re-use projects), and a lack of information about the maintenance status of the areas. In Italy, the process of military closures has raised new problematic issues for territorial management. It has also stimulated new design challenges not only in provincial capitals historically characterized by the Armed Forces' presence (such as La Spezia, Piacenza, Rome, and Turin), but also, in small and medium-sized cities (especially in the Northeast Italy), where public resources and functional requirements are significantly different to larger urban entities, and where "urban voids" are exposed to the greater public and private interests (Russo, 1998).

Current academic works describe the closure process, yet there is extremely little information about what happens after bases close in Western and Eastern European States (Cidell, 2003; Kriszta Kádár, 2014; Bagaen and Clark, 2016). It is assumed the former military and defense installation redevelopment involves a great range of disciplines, from geopolitics to geography (Woodward, 2014), from planning and urban studies to heritage and conservation (Brebba and Clark, 2012, 2014; Brebba et al., 2016), including agents involved in the process (many more than in ordinary land-use change) and their interaction. Indeed, the available literature on the military installations' redevelopment and rehabilitation have been relatively scant compared to the amount of redundant military sites to redevelop in Europe.

For the last two decades international literature, has dealt with the debate on dismantled military areas by exploring a wide range of issues, often including in the broader concept of "brownfields" (European Court of Auditors, 2012; Hercik et al., 2014). Among the various analysis and studies, researchers have focused their attention on the military real estate re-use in terms of participatory approaches and inclusive citizenship processes to improve the transformation processes efficiency (Hill, 2000; Van Driesche and Lane, 2002), of soil contamination problems and evaluation (Fonnum et al., 1997; Hansen, 2004), of socio-economic effects and impacts of the closure (Andersson et al., 2007; Paloyo et al., 2010; Hultquist and Petras, 2012), restoration of ecological systems opportunities and the creation of green spaces creation for collective use (Hourdequin and Havlick, 2010; Havlick, 2014).

In Italy, military real estate assets are dealt with within the more general questions regarding the public real estate properties management (IBL, 2011; Gaeta and Savoldi, 2013), and as a type of commons (Rodotà, 2013; Settis, 2014; Montanari, 2015), as demonstrated by a special section of the national conference "Commons/Comune. Geographies, Places, Areas, Cities" (Aa.Vv., 2016). In general, the literature

has dealt with the decommissioning and exploitation procedures implemented by the Italian government in the 1990s and in the first decade of 2000s (Romeo, 1995; Parlato and Vaciago, 2002; Paglia, 2004; Vaciago, 2007; Antoniol, 2010; Screpanti, 2012; Amato et al., 2013). In the field of Italian "urban studies" literature, the work carried out by Ponzini and Vani (2012) should be reported, which explores a number of Italian and European military re-use experiences. The study coordinated by Storelli and Turri (2014) focuses on the construction and re-use processes of a wide range of military barracks in Italy. Baccichet (2015) and Santarossa and Scirè Risichella (2016) focus their attention on the military base closure process in Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region after the end of the Cold War. Yet, some very recent publications (Gastaldi and Camerin, 2017a) claim that despite the fact that the strategic dismissal of a number of military bases has been affecting contemporary urban and rural areas, little attention has been paid to this complex topic at an international level. For these reasons this topic is becoming a new challenge for city planning and policy-making.

In the strategy of urban development, public local authorities have been trying to establish new uses to former military sites in their urban planning instruments as "areas to be regenerated". Nevertheless, as the role that governance has played in the planning and redeveloping of such areas, following issues have been checked both at state and local level. First, land management regarding the redevelopment of ancient military installations has to do with the role that governance at the state level has played in the planning/redeveloping of such derelict areas, which have been conceived as assets which generate financial income. Regarding the allocation of title and rights to land, the State promotes gradually by legislation the privatization of military assets, which are effectively a public land ownership. This dynamic is a symptom of a decline in state property regimes, such as economic liberalization, and privatization of land delivery channels, the accelerated disappearance of the land of open access regimes, and the public bureaucratic inefficiency. In fact, the different strategies carried out by the State have created a legislation overlapping without an intervention on the military premises' new use in urban planning instruments. Consequently, for private developers it has not been easy to make an arrangement with public administrations. This is mostly due to the difficulties of modifying and integrating the land use plan and to the doubts on juridical security on land tenure (moreover, military assets are not subjected to land registration, in contrast from the normal procedures due to the military secret). Second, the limitation of local administrations is the lack of real project capacity, necessary to imagine possible new uses of spaces and places within a general vision of transformation. In addition, the municipalities neither have economic resources, nor the human resources and skills necessary to follow such complex procedures. The absence of explicit territorial development strategies clearly fixed in programmatic and strategic documents hinder the entrepreneurial initiative and the interaction between the different actors involved. Moreover, the purely speculative and opportunistic tendency of many real estate operators, their inability to propose innovative ideas, and the absence of a real analysis of the territorial demand, lead to the failure of the military reuse operations. To sum up, the governance created uncertainty that therefore produced strategies of non-intervention on the military areas for several years. This situation was further complicated by the 2007–2008 economic and real-estate crisis.

Since 1989, Italian public debate regarding military real estate assets has been characterized by two factors. On one hand, there has been no serious or in-depth reflection on the role that military real estate re-use could play as an opportunity to trigger urban regeneration processes and territorial reorganization. Moreover, it is an opportunity to reconstruct symbolic high-value central areas. Besides, it is a possibility to minimize further soil consumption processes. On the other hand, as regards public policy analysis, there has also been no reflection on the difficulties faced by local governments in making virtuous processes of military real estate assets' re-use and enhancement. As a result, with the exception of some limited analysis in the field of urban planning, there

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