

Federico Camerin e Francesco Gastaldi (Eds.)

Rigenerare le aree militari dismesse

Prospettive, dibattiti e riconversioni in Italia,
Spagna e in contesti internazionali



politecnica


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Descrizione dell'opera

Il libro raccoglie 70 contributi derivanti da una riflessione a posteriori rispetto alla conferenza “Rigenerare le aree militari dismesse. Prospettive, dibattiti e riconversioni in Italia, Spagna e in contesti internazionali” che ha avuto luogo presso l'Università Iuav di Venezia (23-24 settembre 2021) a cura di Federico Camerin e Francesco Gastaldi in cui si è proposta una riflessione aperta al mondo accademico, istituzionale e professionale sulla questione degli insediamenti militari dismessi in ambito nazionale e internazionale. Le questioni che si sono evidenziate coinvolgono le amministrazioni interessate (Ministero della difesa, dei beni culturali, dell'economia e delle finanze, Agenzia del demanio, enti pubblici e territoriali in Spagna e all'estero). I testi, suddivisi in cinque sezioni, propongono un approccio multidisciplinare al tema per favorire un dialogo costruttivo e virtuoso sulle questioni di riuso di aree e immobili in termini normativi, approcci partecipativi e implicazioni economico-procedurali, progetti su immobili con elevato valore storico-artistico.

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Federico Camerin, Francesco Gastaldi (Eds.)

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Federico Camerin e Francesco Gastaldi (Eds.)

Rigenerare le aree militari dismesse

**Prospettive, dibattiti e riconversioni in Italia,
Spagna e in contesti internazionali**

Struttura della conferenza internazionale “Rigenerare le aree militari dismesse. Prospettive, dibattiti e riconversioni in Italia, Spagna e in contesti internazionali”

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17. The decommissioning of the Cold War military sites in Italy: the case of the Nike missile complexes (1958-1997)

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Abstract: The paper presents the current research on decommissioned military sites and artefacts built during the Cold War in Italy. The aims are the identification and knowledge of the military complexes built from 1947 to 1989. Most of the sites studied are part of peculiar systems that have become obsolete and decommissioned after short use, in some cases, before the period of contention between the two blocks. These include missile sites (Jupiter, Nike, Hawk, Cruise), telecommunications sites (Ace High Tropo Scatter) research and communications sites (test sites, NATO headquarters). The analysis of the buildings highlights the strict connection between military strategy, architecture and technology they had to host. The research focuses only on the decommissioned military sites: the artefacts become available as assets valuable for their possible use by the communities. In addition to the historical and architectural studies, the timing and modalities of the decommissioning process have been investigated. This process is exemplified in the paper by the Nike missile sites in the north-eastern part of Italy. This situation opens a compelling reflection on how to preserve, reuse, or notify these material testimonies, which used to contain the most dangerous weapons in circulation at the time.

Keywords: Cold War; Military Heritage; Identification

1. Introduction

The Cold War is a vast concept covering different conceptual sphere and several aspects of the life of more than 30 years of the Twentieth Century. It may be generally exemplified as “the state of strong tension between the United States and the Soviet Union in the decades after the Second World War” (Zingarelli, 2021). In more detail, Cocroft has defined it as “the stand-off between the opposed economic systems of capitalism and communism, and their principal protagonists the United States and the Soviet Union. [...] The political and economic divisions of the Cold War were accompanied by a massive arms race. The militarism this

stand-off engendered quickly spread into the civilian world and was reflected in state-funded science and technology programs, utopian visions that were played out in public housing schemes, and many other aspects of culture, including architecture, art, film, and literature” (Cocroft, 2018, 1).

Finally, the Cold War ended when one or both the superpowers recognised the sinister absurdity of the nuclear arms race and when one or both accepted the other’s sincerity in wishing to end it (Hobsbawm, 1994, 249). Demilitarisation has taken different times in different countries. Data analysed from the SIPRI archive (SIPRI 2021) shows how the countries have very different speeds of demilitarization, despite belonging to the same alliance. In the case of Italy, the military expenditure reduction is very cautious and reflect how the military sites have been decommissioned relatively later than other countries.

The current research pursues to identify the Cold War military sites built from 1947 to 1989 and then decommissioned, fallen into disuse or reused for other purposes. The identification process of Italian military sites of the Cold War has considered other projects started in other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Sweden. The transnational perspective is chosen for this research, relying on positive outcomes such as a more substantial understanding of this controversial historical period. The analysis of the buildings highlights the strict connection between military strategy, architecture, and technology they had to host, which used to create a concise cycle of use, after which the sites became obsolete. This process is exemplified by the sites hosting the Jupiter missiles (from 1960 to 1963) and Cruise missiles (from 1983 to 1991). The peculiarity of these systems is that once the technology changed, the site was considered unusable, and in most cases, the solution was to abandon them. This situation opens an interesting reflection now on how to preserve, reuse or at least notify

these material testimonies, which used to contain the most dangerous weapons at the time.

To what extent are the remains of the Cold War represented by former military sites and reflect issues beyond their bellicose functions? They are, without doubt, one of the vital components of the memory of this period. Other signs of such memory are embedded into the present politics and culture and represent the division of the Western world into two blocks separated by tangible and intangible barriers. Decommissioned military sites, with their materiality, may drag into a distancing discussion on such a recent conflict, raising knowledge and awareness.

2. The decommissioning process

The process of decommissioning in the context of Italian legislation is less smooth than in other countries. One of the consequences is that Italy is one of the slowest nations to demilitarise its territory. In comparison to other countries, it has one of the lowest percentages to the present day (in 2019, Italy decreased only 33% of their military expenditures, compared to 1989, almost half of the cut in the United Kingdom – 59% – and Sweden – 60%). Decommissioning military sites in Italy is very complex, especially when it concerns sites used by heterogeneous forces, such as NATO and United States forces.

At the origin of these operations is the need for use by different military forces in past decades. When a piece of land is needed, it is transferred to the State Property Agency (Demanio), who owns it, and can be managed by different military forces. In the case of the sites built between 1947 and 1989, the management of one site could also be shifted to NATO or United States forces, regulated by bilateral agreements. The construction of infrastructures and buildings could be carried out both by Italian or foreign agencies. In the case of NATO military sites, Italian forces were usually in charge of the buildings' erection. If the United States forces managed the restricted areas, the construction

could be in the hands of Italian forces, which would often follow design coming from overseas.

After the construction and the actual use of the site, which could last from a few years to a few decades, the land rebecomes available for other uses. Before making it accessible to civilians, the military general staff assess the possibility of other military forces using the area. After evaluating this possibility, they can take the official decision to make the site dismissible. The Demanio now is again responsible for addressing the future of the former military site. The process can be stopped at different steps: before the Military General Staff make it dismissible, if the site is considered a possible future resource, or before or after the Demanio decision to convey the management or the direct property to other entities.

One of the difficulties of the process is the legislative difference between “*beni patrimoniali*” and “*beni demaniali*”, that cannot be used for productivity. Another distinction which complicates even more is between “*beni demaniali disponibili*” and “*beni demaniali indisponibili*”. In this difference resides a problem concerning the actual possibility to use the former military sites. When a site is reused can be managed by a public institution or sold to a private owner. A third option is to partly sell the property to private that would use the buildings for profit, taking care of the maintenance costs. This case can only happen when the site is “*bene demaniale disponibile*”. The process of decommissioning often stops right before this step because the missing purpose or function makes it impossible for Demanio to understand which path to take. In most cases, this situation is stalled because the “*Demanio*” has the decision power, which cannot always manage since a significant number of properties are under its control. In collaboration with local authorities, the ability to make a plan for the future could accelerate the process since being aware of the prospect function is necessary for Demanio to take decisions.

In 2007, after a period in which the possibility to securitise (*cartolarizzare*) or alienate (*alienare*) was tested, the Demanio changed the aim in the valorisation of the former military sites. The current legislation around decommissioning is the “*Codice 66/2010*” with the following modifications and integrations. However, the fragmented regulations and financial instruments feed the uncertainty and complexity of the procedures. The centralised feature of this institution is another negative impact on the possibility of local authorities to manage the former sites. Few attempts of simplifying these policies were unsuccessful. Connecting the management of the former military sites more with the regional and municipality level would help the requalification projects, which are often delayed or obstructed by the very long bureaucratic procedures.

The tardiness in decommissioning military sites and the lack of resources and investments cause the non-use of the buildings and structures, worsening their preservation conditions. Each military force and system of sites have a different manner of dealing with this phase. Reuse or preservation processes cannot prescind from the awareness of the complexity of decommissioning processes and their consequences, which strongly influence the future of the artefacts.

3. Nike missile sites (Italian Air Force, 1958-1997)

In parallel to nuclear deterrence, considered very important in the very first period of the Cold War during the ‘massive retaliation’, the air defence was the primary ‘weapon’ developed for security purposes. The organisation of the Air Defence during the ‘First Cold War’ (1947-1962) was developed by a combination of NATO, the Italian Air Force and the Italian Army. In compliance with Italy’s duty in the NATO context, the Italian Air Force was equipped with anti-aircraft guided surface to air missiles. The sites’ deployment was chosen in the north-eastern area, defending the aerial space from where the probability of attacks from the Warsaw Pact was considered higher. Here, the Nike missile sites (used

from 1958-1997) and the Hawk missile site (used from 1964-2011) constituted the Surface to Air Missile (SAM) Restricted Area, active throughout the period of ‘Sustained Deterrence’ (1963-1979) and the ‘Second Cold War’ (1980-1989).

The force in charge of the Nike Herkules missile system was called “1^a Aerobrigata Intercettori Teleguidati”, formed by a command in Padova and three groups. Starting from 1957, the United States provided the tools and the trained personnel to transfer the knowledge of the Nike system to the Italian Air Force, officially delivered in 1958. From 1964 to 1988, the Nike Hercules system was provided with low-power nuclear bombs provided by the United States, called “theatrical” or “tactical”, under the control of the 559th United States Army Artillery Group under the command of SETAF (Southern European Task Force), acting as guardian of the special warheads assembled on the Nike missiles (Carnevale et al., 2016).

In the archive of “*Direzione generale lavori, Demanio, Materiali, Genio, Divisione Seconda: Genio Difesa, Ministero della Difesa*” few drawings of the initial project of the Nike missile sites are documented. The found folder is called “Armi Speciali. Postazioni Nike (Radar)”. The caption of one of the structural drawings declares: “Copiato dal disegno n. 85 of 173. Headquarters US Conservation Us Army”, confirming how the layout of these missile systems was imported by the United States forces used by the Italian forces for the construction. The folder also contains the prototype of constructive drawings of several buildings to place in the Nike sites and a blank sheet for the ban of “*fornitura in opera di n°12 prefabbricati per uffici e magazzini - prezzo di offerta in lire*” (supply of 12 prefabricated buildings for offices and warehouses - offer price in lire). From the drawings preserved in the mentioned archive, it is clear how the sites were designed following the United States Forces guidelines, selecting the area for launch, control and logistics areas and calculating the distance between them (Figure 1). The archive retains drawings of the

initial projects of the following sites: Bagnoli di Sopra, Bovolone, Ca' Tron, Ceggia, Chioggia, Cordovado, Monte Calvarina, Montichiari, Vigodarzere, Zelo.

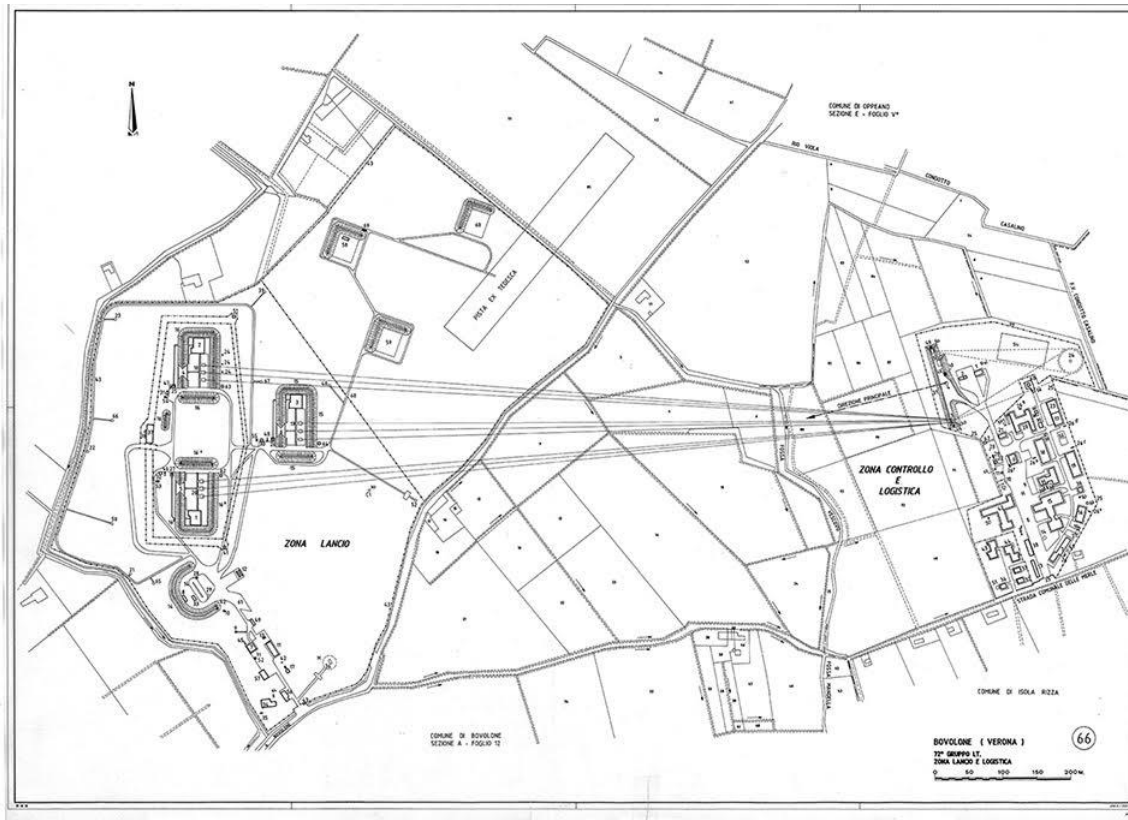


Figure 1. 72° Gruppo Lt. Zona Lancio e Logistico. Comune di Bovolone (Verona), Sezione A – Foglio A. Source: Direzione generale lavori, Demanio, Materiali, Genio, Divisione Seconda: Genio Difesa, Ministero della Difesa. Source: personal elaboration by S. Bravaglieri (2021)

Denomination	Location	Use / Decommissioning	Current use
1° Aerobrigada IT	Padova PD	1959- / in use	Military purposes
6° Gruppo IT	Campoformido UD	1959-1963 / 2008	Civil airport
56° Squadriglia IT	Ca' Tron VE	1960-1977 / 2008	Disuse / Deposit
57° Squadriglia IT	Ceggia VE	1959-1998 / 2007	Disuse
58° Squadriglia IT	Cordovado PN	1959-2009 / 2020	Disuse
59° Squadriglia IT	Monte Pizzoc TV	1968-1998 / 2007(?)	Park / restoration
7° Gruppo IT	Vicenza VI	1959-1975 / 2008(?)	?
65° Squadriglia IT	Montichiari BS	1959-1975 / 2007	Civil airport
64° Squadriglia IT	Monte Grappa TV	1959-1975 / 1992	Disuse
66° Squadriglia IT	Monte Toraro VI	1959-1975 / 2007(?)	Museum
67° Squadriglia IT	Monte Calvarina VR	1959-1995 / 2008	Photovoltaic Park
17° Gruppo IT	Padova PD	1959-2007 / 2008(?)	?
72° Squadriglia IT	Bovolone VR	1959-2007 / 2018	Occasional outdoor activities
79° Squadriglia IT	Zelo RO	1959-1998 / 2008	Photovoltaic Park
80° Squadriglia IT	Conselve PD	1959-2007 / 2008	Disuse
81° Squadriglia IT	Chioggia VE	1959-1995 / 2008	Disuse

Table 1. Italian Air Defence during the Cold War. Surface to air - Nike missile sites. In 1968, after a reorganization of the Italian Air Force, the “Squadriglie” (squadrons) changed denomination in “Gruppi” (groups). IT stands for “Intercettori Teleguidati” (remote-controlled interceptors). Source: personal elaboration by S. Bravaglieri (2021)



Figure 2. Orthophotos from 2006, 2012 and 2021 of three former Nike missile sites (Bovolone, Base Tuono and Zelo). The images show the similar initial layout, with three launch areas and logistic buildings, and the different evolution of the areas' uses: Bovolone is unused (except for a building at the entrance and the road used by a cyclist association); Base Tuono is now a museum and naturalistic area with an artificial lake; Zelo is a photovoltaic plant.

After many changes and resizing, the system was officially decommissioned in 2006, even if already from 1998 it was operational only to be prepared for the following technology. After the decommissioning of the surface to air

Nike missile system, officially happened in 2007, several military areas with the function to operate it became disused and obsolescent. The official decommissioning of the sites took place at different times and outcomes (see Table 1 and Figure 2). Several were identified in the decree of 25th July 2007, then decommissioned between 2007 and 2008. Vigodarzere, Bovolone and Cordovago were decommissioned respectively in 2015, 2019 and 2020. An exception concerns the complexes considered of some use by the military forces, such as the Command of the “1^a Aerobrigata Intercettatori Guidati” in Padova and other areas, all to be dismissed soon. The areas around Montichiari and Campofornido were all included in the corresponding civil airport zones.

3. The case of Bovolone (VR)

The Nike missile site of Bovolone (VR) in Veneto Region was managed by the “1^o Aerobrigata Intercettatori Teleguidati Padova - 17^o Gruppo - 72^o Squadriglia” of the Italian Air Force, together with the 559th United States Army Artillery Group. It was in use from 1959 to 2007 but was one of the last Nike missile sites to be decommissioned in 2019. Since then, the site’s management has been in the municipality’s hands, which has started some construction work on one of the 30 buildings. All the others are abandoned, and no short-term reuse is foreseen. Between 2019 and 2021, the road surface of the path that runs alongside the external fence was reconstructed for cycling training purposes.

The site is constituted of a logistic part, and three launch areas conformed with the same scheme. The area is bordered by two fences, with an internal road and ten watchtowers that runs beside them. The complex consists of 31 buildings and four embankments. The site is equipped with access, currently reserved to the association that is using it, which leads to the logistic area with buildings that had the function of storing vehicles, accommodation and services for the staff, entrance control. The main road conducts to launch areas A, B and C, where the missiles were deployed. The core of the

former military complex is the launch area formed by a storage building enclosed by an embankment; a double fenced area with launch areas A and B, accessible through a service building for the personnel, including a checkpoint area. Two square watchtowers in metal painted in green stand between the two fences. Launch area C and ten round watchtowers in concrete painted in green reside outside the double fenced area. No technical equipment or removable machinery is left in the area: only water and fuel tanks are present.

The buildings are in a good state of conservation since they are still protected by undamaged roofs and still in place windows and doors. The major damages are caused by the absence of appropriate closures elements, where the vegetation could find a place to grow and create biological patina and presence. Other damaged parts are walls where the plaster has detached, leaving the masonry without covering. The green paint on the masonry buildings is peeling off in a significant part of their surface.

The two-storage construction built-in metal is in a worse condition because of the oxidation process on the material. The launch areas A and B, inside the double fenced area, are less maintained than launch area C since they are not crossed by the recently restored road used by the sports association. Here, in the buildings with unclosed openings, the presence of different kinds of animals and excrements is favoured. The watchtowers are intact; their ladders have been removed for security reasons. The fences are also in an optimal state of conservation. Some graffiti stands inside the buildings next to the gate, where unauthorised people could access after the decommissioning of the site. The vegetation is left growing with no control, especially in the part not used by the sports association, causing damages in the most vulnerable buildings.

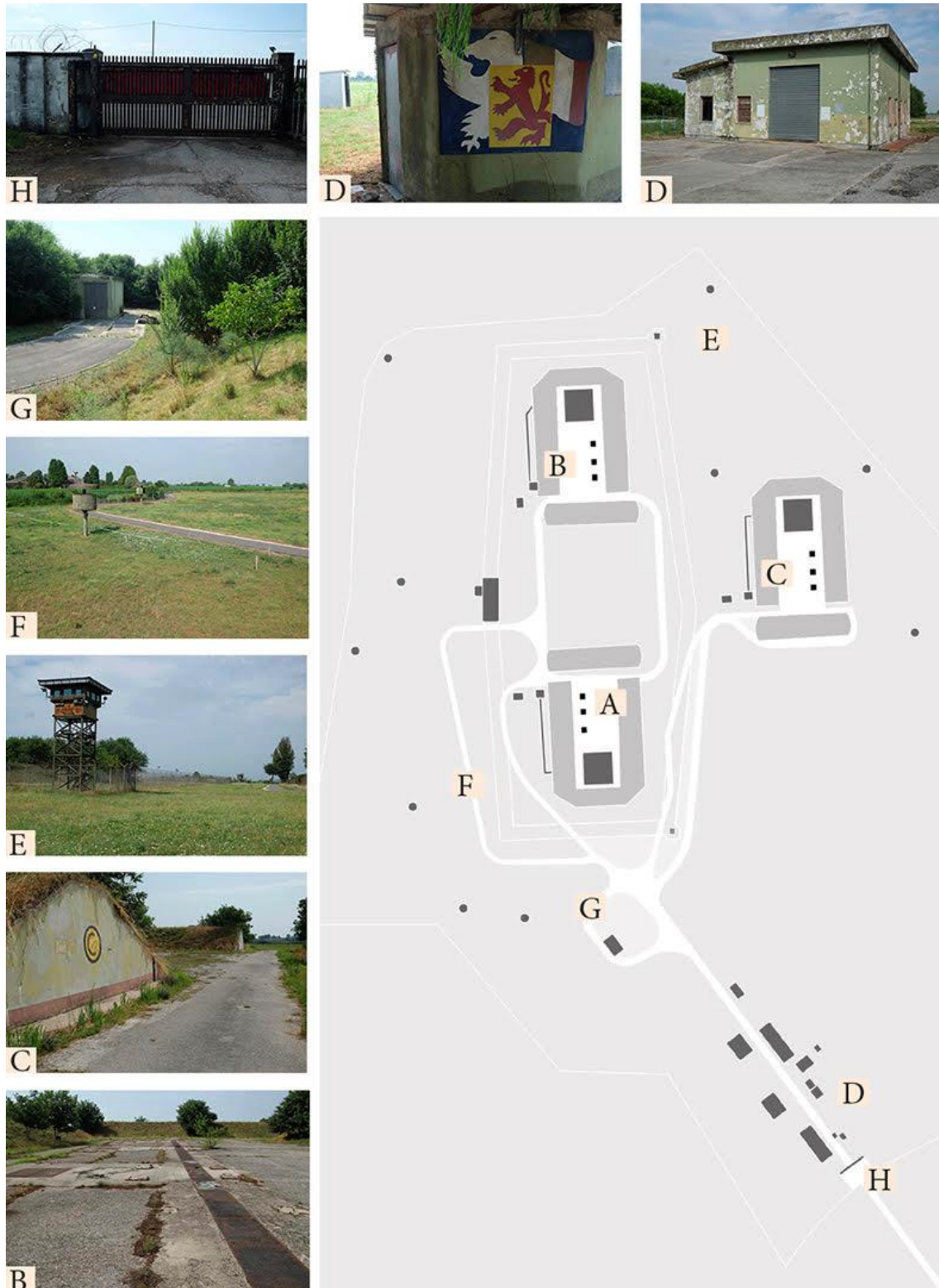


Figure 3. Functional scheme: A) launch area A; B) launch area B; C) launch area C; D) service buildings; E) square watchtower and internal double fence; F) round watchtowers and external fence; G) embankment; H) entrance gate. Source: personal elaboration by S. Bravaglieri (2021)

The municipality is willing to develop the site and has even attempted to protect it through the local urban regulation tools. The Intervention Plan of the Operational

Technical Standards approved in 2019 foresees the “reconversion and landscape enhancement of the area”, devoting it to “a park for leisure, sports and outdoor activities”. According to the legislation applied to “open spaces with a dominant vegetation”, the primary intervention for this area should be implemented with the “creation of wooden areas”.

The priority on the urban level is to give pedestrian and cycle accessibility to the site and foresee new parking lots. “The municipality must check every specific project according to the law. [...] The functional reconversion interventions of the area will have to preserve evidence of the previous military destination, recovering the most significant of the existing artefacts (e.g. turrets, soil modelling, etc.), and integrating them into the new landscape and functional structure envisaged for the area”. The service buildings next to the gate are defined as “lacking in quality or ruins”; in the project, these will be “dedicated to supporting activities to the functional program to establish”. The wooden areas are used to mitigate noise pollution while “ensuring visual relationships between the area of the former base and the landscape and environment”. [...] “The construction of large parking areas must be avoided” (Comune di Bovolone, 2019).

5. Conclusions

Bovolone Nike missile site is an example of a common situation for decommissioned Cold War military complexes. They are more and more of interest for local authorities, which often cannot find resources to reuse the buildings. The use of the external spaces is a short-time answer to the problem that does not help stop the structures' degradation. The decay is caused both by the time passing and the possibility of reusing them for inappropriate purposes. Figure 2 clearly shows the development in time of three examples of Nike missile sites. One of the causes of the situation is the complexity of the decommissioning process, analysed previously, which determines such different outcomes for sites initially used for the same purposes.

At the municipal level, the urban tools in Bovolone have been used to protect part of the buildings, probably without specifically assessing the value of the artefacts. In the context of the Italian legislation, it is not possible to preserve these complexes since they are considered too recent. The consequence is the loss of material traces, gone even before knowing more about them.

Data Availability Statement

Data from the municipality of Bovolone and the archive “Direzione generale lavori, Demanio, Materiali, Genio, Divisione Seconda: Genio Difesa, Ministero della Difesa” has supported the research.

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