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Giuliano De Felice*

Novecento. Apulia at war. A project of archaeology of the contemporary past between research, education and participation

1. The setting

If there is something to which archaeology has accustomed us, it is the great skill it possesses in being able to reflect on itself, on its own methodologies, on its relation to other disciplines, as well as on stimuli for change. The mindset of archaeology (Manacorda 2018, p. 43) is open to listening and to broadening its fields of interest, which often takes shape as an experience of deeper influences, rather than through a simple and univocal acquisition of techniques and methods from other disciplines. In recent decades, this increasingly open and creative field has not been afraid to face various challenges, for example, those introduced by technological innovations – especially digital – or by the constant expansion of its range of action, both from a methodological and a chronological standpoint. Nevertheless, archaeology has always managed to preserve its soul, comprised of data and abstraction, of analysis and synthesis, within a rigorous but constantly updated methodology. Among the most interesting data today there are some fascinating novelties, destined to influence profoundly the archaeology of the near future.

First of all, there is a marked and growing interest in the participatory dimension of archaeology, as the only field able to coalesce all the specificities of a complex scenario – from research to protection to enhancement – in a perspective of participation (Chavarría Arnau 2019), but also of professionalism, employment and sustainability. That is the great hope of public archaeology, which, from its grassroots, is rapidly spreading throughout Italy as well, multiplying the experiences of participation, enhancement, professionalism and volunteering, as well as kindling reflections that involve the academic world too, from research to skills acquisition[1].

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[1] For an analytical discussion of the state of public archaeology in Italy, see Volpe 2020.

New dimensions of the practice, introduced by the Faro Convention[2], promise another important innovation that will permeate the world of cultural heritage and, as a result, archaeology too. Indeed, here, in the participatory vocation promoted by the Convention, public archaeology finds a safe place to attempt to overcome the barriers between research and society, while at the same time transforming the roles of research and education. The latter are no longer compelled to be the mere starting point for a narrow process that begins with study, proceeds with protection, and ends with enhancement. Instead, they become part of a more articulated mechanism, in which entire heritage communities can actively participate in the phases of *identification, study, interpretation, protection, conservation, presentation* that the Convention identifies as the necessary steps to begin any project touching on cultural heritage.

A third, and remarkable, element is the growing attention, in Italy as well, for the archaeology of the contemporary past[3]: it is a real challenge for archaeology to take an interest in the recent past and its material traces from a perspective that is not translated into a mere chronological expansion, but instead into an approach to the present that relativises the very meaning of 'past'. Thus archaeology is compelled to revaluate the significance of its data systems, the behaviour of its methodologies and techniques, and the deformations that can arise from comparison with the material dimension of a quite recent past.

Against the backdrop of these basic premises, we can add the unresolved relation of archaeology to digital technology, bearer of great changes and innovative approaches[4], but not always fully absorbed into archaeological methodology. Rebutting the expectations of a few years ago, which seemed to herald a real revolution for archaeology (Valenti 2014), the potential of digital is still often delineated in an inconsistent way: widely – but perhaps somewhat chaotically – utilised in research processes, marginalised and reduced to 'applications' in university curricula, and banally omnipresent in the communication and dissemination of archaeological heritage. How all this can influence archaeology, not only in research, but also in university education, and in its relation to society, is the great challenge for the coming years.

[2] For the most recent papers on the Convention and on the prospects that would lead to an enhancement of cultural heritage, see Montella *et al.* 2016; Manacorda 2017a. See also De Felice 2020, pp. 122-139 and Volpe 2020, pp. 111-114.

[3] Among the most interesting contributions, we can cite Buchli, Lucas 2001; Harrison, Schofield 2010; Blaising *et al.* 2017; González-Ruibal 2016, 2019; for the situation in Italy: Milanese 1997a, 1997b, 2010; Manacorda 2017b.

[4] For an historical profile of the evolution of the relation between archaeology and digital technology, see Lock 2003, especially pp. 1-13, Lock 2009, and Moscati 2019.

Fig. 1. Location of the contexts analysed.

2. Novecento: Apulia at war

The idea of an archaeology project focussed on the recent past in the territory of the Apulian Murgia arose from a confluence of factors, starting with teaching and subsequently extending to research and participation. The unifying element of the project has always been the Apulian landscape, which has acquired unprecedented fame in recent years, thanks to the growth of tourism, but also to the creation of an important land-use plan (Barbanente *et al.* 2010; Magnaghi 2016). A model that is nevertheless not immune, in its cultural narration, to the usual stereotypes that seek to depict it as unspoilt, and in which the traces of human intervention risk being classified on the basis of superficial aesthetic criteria, showcasing some, while considering others as elements of degradation.

Our project was aimed specifically at the latter, initiating an historical, but above all archaeological, interpretation of some contexts in the landscape that were scattered over the Murgia plateau in the Apulian hinterland; a plateau which seems, at first glance, to be motionless in the magnificent desolation of its vistas and in the rarefaction of its human settlements, while in actual fact it retains nu-

Fig. 2. IGM aerial photograph (1947) of Casale camp near Altamura.

merous material traces, which, beyond their superficial consideration as degraded ruins, testify to a long and articulate history.

The idea of the project was to use archaeology, with its investigative methods and techniques, to identify and study some of the contexts present on the Murgia plateau, datable to various moments in 20th century history, and linked, in their genesis at least, to the conflicts of the "age of extremes". At the present moment, a series of sites are being studied that represent examples in many ways complementary in their chronological and morphological features (De Felice 2020) (fig. 1).

The first site to be analysed was the First World War prison camp located in Casale di Altamura, a few kilometres from the town (fig. 2). The camp, created for the detention of Austro-Hungarian prisoners, remained in operation even during the post-war period, and went through at least three distinct phases: after being a prison camp, it was later used for military manoeuvres, and then, during the Fascist era, was involved in a project that transformed it into a rural hamlet, before being cleared once and for all (Incampo 1996; Dambrosio, Falagario, Galati 2015; Chiaffarata 2016; De Felice 2018). Of the large camp, originally comprising more than 60 buildings over an area of about 14 hectares, only a few ruins are visible today, almost unrecognisable or even reduced to rubble (fig. 3).

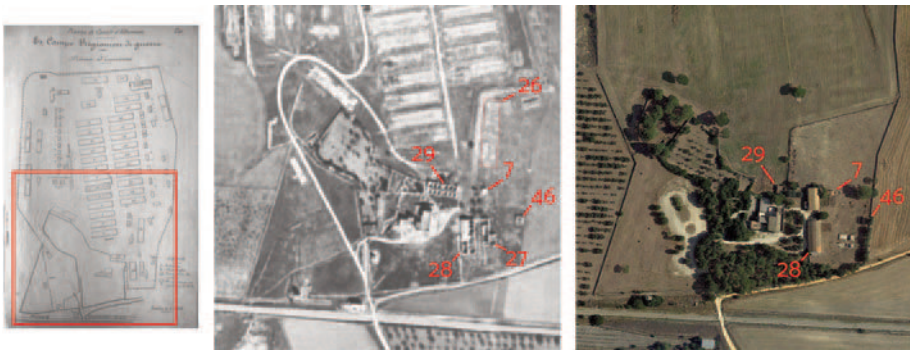

Fig. 3. Comparison between archival documentation (1926), aerial photography (1947) and satellite view (2019) with indication of residual buildings.

The second site to be analysed was the prisoner of war camp no. 65, dating to the Second World War, located halfway between Altamura and Gravina (fig. 4). In this case, too, the site had a longer life than the war: after 8 September 1943, it was transformed into a training camp for Yugoslav partisans, and survived until the 1960s as a refugee camp for those who converged on Italy as a result of the complex international issues that exploded at the end of the Second World War and continued in the following decades (Gervasio 2006; Leuzzi, Esposito 2000; Martocchia 2011; Chiaffarata 2016, p. 145).

The archaeological interpretations of the vestiges and residual traces have made it possible to retrieve information on the military exercises and manoeuvres that lasted until the early 1990s. Of all these phases, a dozen buildings remained, which survived the reclamation of the entire area carried out in 1987–88, involving widespread demolition and the reuse of salvaged material in the construction of road embankments. Of the 100 buildings in the camp, today only a few remain, scattered over more than 30 hectares (fig. 5).

Finally, the last sites taken into consideration were the ten Jupiter missile bases built during the Cold War in various locations around the Murgia between Apulia and Basilicata (fig. 6). Indeed, scattered across the Murgia are the traces of these late 1950s military bases, now almost invisible, built on the basis of agreements between Italy and the United States. Thirty Jupiter atomic missiles were installed on the Murgia for anti-Soviet purposes (Castoro 2008; Chiaffarata 2016), while another five identical bases were installed in the territory of Izmir in Turkey. Unlike the prison camps, the bases had a very short life, which ended with the accord between Kennedy and Khrushchev following the Cuban Missile Crisis in late October 1962 (Karlsson, Diez Acosta 2019). The bases were quickly dismantled, and by mid 1963 there were only a few structures left, which are still visible today, but are so immersed in the natural landscape that they can barely be seen (fig. 7).

Fig. 4. Camp 65 (November 2019).

Fig. 5. Overlap of the field structures and the photogrammetric survey from the drone.

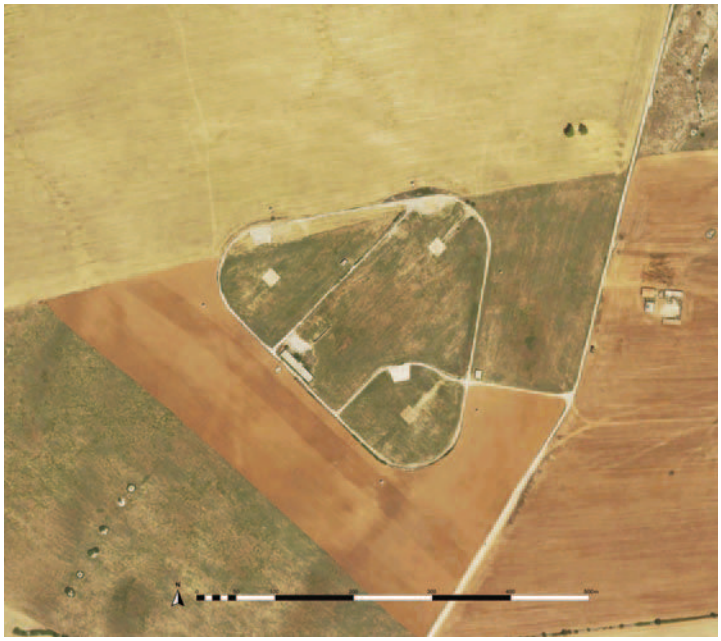

Fig. 6. Jupiter Base in Murgia del Ceraso (Apple Maps 2019).

Fig. 7. One of the surveillance towers of the Jupiter Base in Murgia del Ceraso (November 2019).

3. Research and teaching: identification, study and presentation of the contemporary archaeological heritage

As we have already mentioned, the *Novecento Project* began as a university teaching experience, with the decision to select two of the contexts mentioned above (Casale Camp and Camp no. 65) as themes for the degree courses in *Computer Applications to Cultural Heritage* (BA in Literature and Cultural Heritage, University of Foggia) and the postgraduate course in *Digital Archaeology* (MA in Archaeology, University of Bari Aldo Moro), both of which ran during the 2018-2019 academic year.

The purpose of creating a virtual reconstruction of the two camps, as a project shared with students, thus became an opportunity to train two whole classes of university students (a total of about 40 in all), who consequently learned how to use established archaeological methods, such as the survey and the analysis of material remains, together with various sources which are not encountered very often, even though archaeologists themselves are accustomed to using such tools in the reconstruction process (photos, films, oral reports). There is certainly no need to explain that the availability of architectural projects is more unique than rare for the archaeology of ancient times, but it is also one of the most obvious (and problematic) features of archaeology of more recent periods, and the contemporary age is no exception.

Fig. 8. Students of the digital archaeology course during a workshop (April 2019).

The teaching workshop thus became not only a privileged space for experimentation, but also a place in which a small heritage community came into being (fig. 8). The community, formed with the almost provocative intention of applying techniques normally 'reserved' for ancient sites and monuments to contemporary contexts, has raised a series of important questions on the significance of archaeological data, the relation between sources and degradation, and the aims themselves of virtual archaeology and its languages (De Felice 2020, ch. 3).

The continuous dialogue with the sources, the challenges of interpretation, the need to choose a cultural message and an adequate visual style to support it,

Fig. 9. 3D reconstructive model of Camp 65.

were all topics of constant debate during the teaching activities: the great value of virtual archaeology is, in fact, to be found in its ability to simulate, to give three-dimensional shape to objects, in the innumerable hidden problems of interpretation, whenever one seeks to put into practice the reconstructive power of archaeology itself (Barceló 2000 and 2001; De Felice 2012).

It is from these discussions that reflections arose which quickly led to the realisation of a more wide-ranging project. Beginning with the initial field research, with the scouting out and surveying of the remaining buildings, the problem of identifying and presenting contemporary archaeological heritage was easily posed, together with that of including archaeology in a project, already begun, involving the participation and establishment of a heritage community able to give meaning and value to the whole ongoing process (fig. 9).

Reasoning from the perspective of the practices suggested by the Faro Convention, we could say that the work of the *Novecento Project* took its cue from the last element of that complex mechanism cited at the beginning of our paper: the presentation of a specific case, using the techniques of virtual archaeology to reconstruct and narrate a particular cultural heritage.

It might seem like a stretch, yet having put the presentation of heritage at the centre of a university curriculum has made it possible to achieve some important goals, which go well beyond the acquisition of techniques and methodologies for the production of digital contents and assets. Indeed, it has meant pursuing the whole process indicated by the Convention, up to the identification of a given context as part of contemporary archaeological heritage, something which was far from obvious at first, when we consider the current state of ruin and decay to which the vestiges of these places have been reduced.

Indeed, the real challenge of digital archaeology for the future is to use technologies not only to build a future for research and knowledge, in terms of in-

creasing our skills in how to analyse, preserve, share and be cognisant of data, but also to contribute actively to the processes of participation; for example, by knowing how to generate interest in one's own results (Volpe, De Felice 2014). It is in such a light that the true clear-sightedness of the Faro Convention can be claimed – from a digital perspective as well – as the basis for an open, innovative and sustainable cultural economy.

Along with the workshops in digital reconstruction, we began analytical study and interpretation of the contexts, while expanding research in the archives, since the latter had been limited until then to retrieving documentary material needed for the reconstruction of virtual models[5]. Field activities consisted in a series of inspections (at Casale and some Jupiter bases) in order to identify and conduct a survey on the surviving structures. At Camp 65, however, an initial survey had already been piloted, with the collaboration of digital archaeology students, for the purpose of a virtual reconstruction of those buildings, the remains of which were still preserved. Moreover, it was possible to conduct a photogrammetric survey by drone[6], which made it possible to create a digital model of the state of conservation of the whole area in high resolution.

These field activities were accompanied by the presentation of contemporary archaeological heritage in a participatory dimension, as the focus of a digital content production activity involving local communities, in order to raise awareness amongst the general public of the themes of the *Novecento Project*. Beginning with the assumption that digital communication for cultural heritage is often identified, in an unquestioning way, with the transmission of aesthetic concepts, and that, as we have seen, the Apulian landscape is no exception, a multi- or rather cross-media communication project was created (based on interactive apps and a printed book), thanks to regional funding for the promotion of the areas near Matera, European Capital of Culture in 2019. The communication project was designed along a different trajectory, focussing not on the beauties of the landscape, nor on the masterpieces of art and architecture – such as well known castles, cathedrals and archaeological sites – but rather on the contemporary contexts we have described above.

With these prerequisites in mind, a story-telling app with three narrative episodes was created through the use of the *swipe story* format. The app con-

[5] The research has led to the retrieval, in various collections in Bari (State Archive and Military Engineering Archive) and Altamura (Masseria Casale), of a huge amount of documents, which have allowed the analytical reconstruction of the history of each individual context. For a detailed analysis, see De Felice 2020.

[6] The drone survey was completed with the collaboration of Bari Polytechnic (prof. Paolo Perfido, architect Remo Pavone). Operations were performed with a DJI Mavic 2 Pro remotely piloted system (APR) equipped with a 35mm 20 megapixel Hasselblad L1D – 20c camera and integrated GPS + GLONASS system with a vertical accuracy range of +/- 0.1 m horizontal of +/– 0.3 m; data processing was carried out with Photoscan software.

Fig. 10. Home page of the Novecento story app.

sists of a homepage from which to access the three episodes: the first episode ("Love and War") is dedicated to the First World War and part of it is set at the Casale Camp. The second episode ("The Great Illusion") is set at Camp 65 and links the camp with events in Apulia and its cities during the Second World War. Finally, the third episode ("Strange Game") is dedicated to the Cold War and to the central role – perhaps unwitting – of the region in resolving some of the most dangerous moments of a war that was never fought. The story is set in the territories of the Murgia hinterland and on a Jupiter base.

Fig. 11. Cover of the Novecento swipebook.

Each episode has been enriched with in-depth content in the form of cards, illustrations, short films, and educational games, created with the schools' involvement (fig. 10). According to a cross-media logic, the concept and contents of the three episodes were used to create an illustrated comic book (in the format of a *swipe book*), which was distributed to the local schools (fig. 11).

With the publication of the multimedia app in *swipe story* format in the main stores, together with the printing and distribution of the first edition of the *swipe book*, the aim was not only to increase awareness in the local community of the existence of these historic sites, but effectively to expand the territorial *brand* of the region in a sustainable way, by promoting, along with themes and destinations now of international interest, even lesser known topics, which have been equally effective in augmenting knowledge for both citizens and tourists.

From such a perspective, cross-media production activities are now fully part of the pathway mapped out by the Faro Convention, recommending ways of participation that can facilitate learning and involvement, and that aim to construct a dynamic relation between heritage and consumers. Indeed, in the spirit of the Convention, a digital storytelling project must contribute not only to an emotional spectacle, but also to the creation of an active and participatory relationship between general public and heritage.

Contemporary archaeological heritage, of which Camp 65 is an emblematic example, suffers from an *identification* problem: classification as a wreck, a ruin, an element of degradation, or, in any case, failure to recognise the historical value of the material traces of the camp have been the determining factors in its lack of protection and in its swift and unimpeded destruction in the last decade of the 20th century.

Despite archaeological research still being in its early stages, both a survey of the remaining structures and an initial analysis of the wall stratigraphy have been carried out, together with the collection of relics on the surface and the logging of graffiti on the walls. Though merely preliminary and preparatory to the launch of more in-depth research campaigns, these operations have nevertheless highlighted the extraordinary continuity of archaeological data between ancient and modern, and have raised more than one question about their true significance, both in the present and in the past[7].

The material dimension delivered by archaeology adds further value to the acts of memory preservation: words and feelings are revealed here and now, in the things that have come down to us (fig. 12). The small community that was formed around the university courses and the presentation-identification process has found itself part of much larger participatory activities; and thus it has been possible to create a true heritage community, interacting with other experiences happening concurrently, with other actors within a much broader setting than Camp 65.

[7] For a broader and more detailed discussion of the initial results of the archaeological interpretation of the vestiges analysed, and a reflection on the problem of the significance of material data in the archaeology of the contemporary past, see De Felice 2020.

Fig. 12. An unprotected heritage: the destruction of Camp 65 over the course of fifty years.

4. Participation and enhancement: Camp 65 and the inception of a heritage community

Archaeological research at Camp 65 began by chance from a post that appeared on Facebook in November 2017 about a book written by a former prisoner of war (Avey/Broomby 2011) who passed through Camp 65 before being employed in the IG Farben factory near Auschwitz. Domenico Bolognese, intrigued by the few pages dedicated to the camp, passionate about contemporary history, and the son of an Italian officer interned in Germany, began, on his own, to track down and contact the children and grandchildren of prisoners, collecting, in a few months, a sizeable amount of documents, diaries, and unpublished testimonies, and thus lighting a fuse which, through the progressive involvement of scholars, professors, students, and ordinary citizens, led to the establishment of the *Campo 65 Association* in March 2019[8].

One of the pivotal moments that contributed to the multifaceted heritage community was the creation of the Facebook page of the Association itself (fig. 13), around which different types of stakeholders gathered, linked in various ways to the history of the prison camp. Though there are no known former prisoners still living, it was the subsequent generations of children and grandchildren, who, on

[8] "44 relatives, children and grandchildren of the prisoners found, 21 relatives of prisoners who visited the camp between 2018 and 2019, 12 nations involved in the searches, 1300 pages and photos of unpublished documents recovered in 12 archives scattered around the world, 34 direct and indirect testimonies collected: diaries, photos, postcards, letters, objects, self–produced publications, about 120 students, teachers, historians, archaeologists, artists, public administrators, Italian and British military, enthusiasts, sympathisers and ordinary citizens who contributed to the research in progress, 400 the estimated number of participants in the first guided tour in June 2019" (introductory note to the publication now in the press "Campo Prigionieri di Guerra 65 Gravina – Altamura (1942–43)" by the Campo 65 Association).

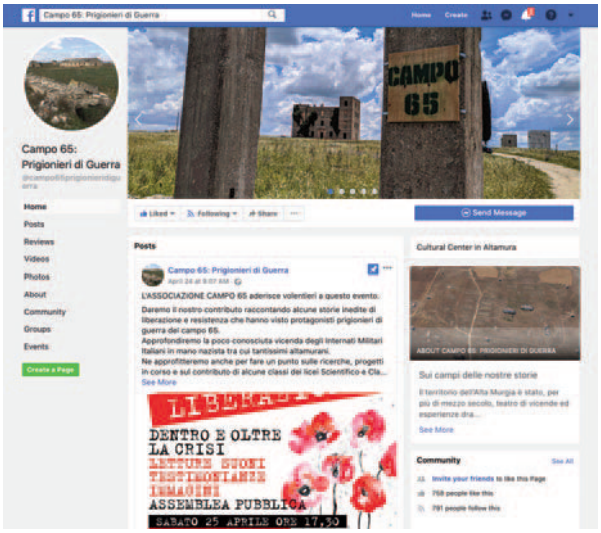

Fig. 13. Facebook page of the Camp 65 Association.

the social network, immediately showed their enthusiasm for reconstructing the lives of their ancestors, sending to the Association a remarkable quantity of material: letters, photographs, and documents of all kinds.

In such a setting, the archaeological analysis of the camp, the identification of the vestiges of the buildings and the interpretation of the 'traces of usage' still visible have had the welcome task of bringing back to life the places in which these lives unfolded, through the study of the material dimension, but above all through their reconstruction, both virtual and historical. How much archaeology can enhance participation and facilitate the reconstruction and preservation of memory was evident in some symbolic moments in which the community, a brain-child of virtual technology, took on a physical form of participation. The symbolic moment of that universal, trans-generational, complex, and multifaceted community was on 2 June 2019, when a guided tour of the camp was organised on Republic Day (fig. 14).

The event, which was attended by descendants of former prisoners, attracted a large crowd: people were able to visit the area and, thanks to the virtual reconstruction completed by the students, understand how the camp was organised. An unexpected result, particularly when we consider how the memory of the camp is almost non-existent among local communities, who have always identified the place as a centre for refugees, having removed from the collective memory its function as a prison camp. Indeed, it's important to point out that, while the existence of Camp 65 was well known to specialists, the handful of citizens who knew about events in the camp ignored the historical relevance of what

Fig. 14. After the wars, the Republic: public history and public archaeology at Camp 65 (2 June 2019).

turned out to be, from the numbers, the largest Italian prison camp of the Second World War[9].

The immense value of such an active and proactive community, with a wealth of stimuli by dint of its complex nature, is evident in the series of initiatives that took place in tandem with these activities and that involved other stakeholders, thereby expanding the range of action and the repercussions on the missing parts of the process: protection and conservation. Here, too, archaeology has made an essential contribution in deciding the priorities to follow in planning the activities to protect the site.

The most solid result of the community work to date has been the establishment, in July 2019 in the Municipality of Altamura, of the "Technical committee for the conservation, restoration, enhancement and enjoyment of the former refugee camp, called [Camp] 65", which sees the participation of numerous institutional actors (Municipality of Altamura, Alta Murgia Park, regional councillors and parliamentary deputies elected in the district), conservation and stewardship (Bari Superintendence of Archaeology, Fine Arts and Landscape), research (Universities of Foggia and Bari, Apulian Institute for the History of anti-Fascism and Contemporary Italy), and associations (Cultural Association Campo 65).

[9] The camp was designed with an expected capacity of 12,000, but that number was never reached. As of 31 March 1943 there were 8539 prisoners in the camp, the highest number among those reported in the summary tables of the prison camps drawn up in 1943 by the Ministry of War. See http://campifascisti.it/documento_doc.php?n=736

The camp was recently nominated for a 2019 regional budget measure on "Places and Archives of the Memory of Apulia" as part of the program of cultural initiatives entitled "La Cultura si fa Strada", later converted into a regional law approved in February 2020 by the Apulian Regional Council[10]; and it received an initial loan thanks to which the first activities on the site are currently underway (2021). In particular, the first interventions concern the safety and conservation of the remaining structures, the creation of a web portal for the management of historical documents, and the publication of an informative volume and a travelling exhibition (fig. 15).

Fig. 15. Cover of the popular volume.

The Association believes that documentation, research and its dissemination are necessary, and even propaedeutic, to any attempt at reviving the memory, and it is with such an end in mind that it has taken its first steps, involving, not by chance, teachers and students, with the awareness that a school in touch with the world is where the most fertile soil produces the new shoots. The collaborative relation between school and territory, between teachers and pupils, has stimulated curiosity and passion for the object of research and, above all, has involved a different, fresher, and more imaginative approach. It was unfortunately interrupted in February 2020 with the forced closure of schools due to the pandemic. Nonetheless, the activities tried and tested so far have led us to consider the school, at all levels, as a privileged environment in which to implement the specific educational activities of training and processing of data and contents on the history of Camp 65.

Another goal is to help raise awareness in institutions and communities in order to promote activities for the essential protection and enhancement of the area, as well as other abandoned war garrisons (like Casale prison camp, former Jupiter bases, etc.), within which similar individual and collective experiences were intertwined in twentieth century history.

[10] Regional Law 27 March 2020 n. 10, on the subject of the "Promotion and Support for the Enhancement of the Places of Memory of the Twentieth Century and the Historical Archives of Apulia", published in the Official Bulletin of the Apulia Region n. 44 on 30 March 2020, proposed and drafted by the Regional Councillor, Enzo Colonna.

Without presuming to give a comprehensive overview of the project, it is nonetheless possible to outline some methods of approach and intervention. First and foremost, the site would have to be cleaned up and made safe for visitors. Then, efforts should be made to set up as wide–ranging as possible a network of communities, which could smooth the way to fostering the commitment to and development of a participatory and shared project, one which could guarantee the environmental and economic sustainability of the area.

Thus there are many things that could be proposed, along with the restoration and/or reconstruction of the barracks and buildings using bio–sustainable techniques. Some of the buildings could be rendered functional in order to host an archive of the memory, where research and teaching activities could be managed in collaboration with institutes for documentation, international archives, and universities. In the surrounding area, of about 30 hectares, it would be possible to create cycle paths and set up equipment for sports activities, art installations, exhibitions and cultural performances. Moreover, some barracks could be used for low–cost tourist accommodation, others for rehabilitation and support activities related to essential social services and managed by small companies in the tertiary sector.

In any case, beyond all that we could add to the list, an essential synergy between the public and private sectors remains of fundamental importance, favouring, above all, social enterprises, cooperatives, and grassroots youth associations for the management of multifunctional activities.

Only if we are able to animate and advance our project idea in practice, will it be possible to transform an area abandoned to degradation into a symbolic space of the memory that invites us to build from the past new spaces of culture, work and social relations, both for us and for those to come.

5. Digital, participatory, close at hand: ideas for contemporary archaeology

The experience of the *Novecento Project* helps demonstrate how doing archaeology in the age of participation and from the perspective of the Faro Convention means facing a very complex challenge, which requires a profound revision of the themes and tools normally used in research as well as in training. A challenge that is directly in line with the need to create a new, widespread awareness of cultural heritage in society using all available tools. In the *Novecento Project*, archaeology has given a great deal in terms of creating cultural value. Especially in the case of Camp 65, in which a community had become aware of its heritage, contemporary archaeology added its knowledge to the range of tools available to a cultural project. Indeed, while it may not itself have signalled the inception of the Camp 65 community, archaeology has undoubtedly contributed a great deal to the rediscovery of the memory and history of the place. I

would like to think, moreover, that it has also received a lot, from several points of view: this awareness constitutes a certainty and a starting point for the continuation of contemporary archaeological activities, in the Murgia and beyond, but also food for thought that may be useful for archaeology in general.

1. DIGITAL – Digital has proved to be a fundamental element in the unfolding research, in supporting the surveys, as well as study and analysis in general, but above all as a conveyer of knowledge; revealing itself, moreover, to be a fine tool in contributing to the identification of a little known heritage and in disclosing its material component. In short, digital has been the basis for the process of giving value to these contexts in their archaeological dimension and of showing how every ruin, even a contemporary one, is the trace of a human activity and a history, which cannot be erased from the landscape or forgotten in its cultural dimension.

It is here, perhaps, that we might identify a real weakness in the Faro Convention, which assigns such a marginal role to digital, due, no doubt, to the long gestation of the Convention text, which is now anachronistic, not only from a technical point of view, but more especially from a perspective of participation in and creation of cultural value. We are indeed aware of the limitations demonstrated by more than a quarter of a century of digital and virtual archaeology, but the subordinate role of digital in the Convention itself, since it is scarcely mentioned, viewed with caution, and moreover, seen as a mere tool, risks steering archaeology toward an unprecedented conflict with digital technology, just at a time when community perspectives define digital itself, not only as a service *for* cultural heritage, but as an integral part *of* that heritage.

We hope our project clearly demonstrates how crucial it is to include digital technology in cultural heritage, in its (critical) teaching *and* in its (critical) usage, the attainment of its centrality, not only in data management, but also in its skill in helping to create awareness, value, and even participation. When envisioned not only as a management tool, but also as a language for the creation of assets in the presentation of heritage, digital technology thus becomes a powerful and visionary medium. In particular, the case of Campo 65 clearly shows how the unprecedented mix of virtual and contemporary archaeology has woven a fascinating web between history and memory, and transformed a place of oblivion into a symbol of history and participatory archaeology.

2. PARTICIPATORY – The heritage community that revolves around Camp 65 was shaped in the virtual world, as we have seen, in what are today the main socialisation and participation channels: social networks. In that regard, the experience of Camp 65 allows us to glimpse how useful and profound the role of these tools for cultural heritage could become, for their potential goes far beyond the ephemeral dimension to which they are often relegated. The creation of a community extending over the whole planet was unthinkable until a few years ago,

but today social networks have been able to create that reality and keep it alive.

The activities on both site and territory, undertaken in recent months, would not have begun at all, if the virtual community had not started to consolidate a broad and shared interest and to transform into a true heritage community, in which archaeology has played a decisive role in the material identification of a little known patrimony destined for destruction. Archaeological analysis and research, interpretation of the remains, historical and virtual reconstruction, have all contributed to the assessment of the material coordinates of a virtual heritage that has found a symbolic and suggestive place in the Camp, transforming a potential memory site into a veritable archaeological one.

3. CLOSE AT HAND – The contexts explored in the *Novecento Project* have the common feature of preserving, in seeming contradiction, traces of a very recent past, fossilised in a landscape that appears unchanged over centuries, almost as if waiting for the complexity of its historical dimension to unfold. That is the task of archaeology, always and everywhere: to analyse the material traces of something in order to grasp its historical value, beyond its apparent degradation. The study of chronologically 'compressed' places, rich in an incredible number of traces, the difficulty of proceeding with a single interpretation, the problematic nature of the sources, increasing with their quantity, the effort of perceiving the conditions of life through the study of material remains, and the problems linked to the significance of such numerous traces are just some of the themes that emerged during our research, but I believe they are sufficient to indicate a possible trajectory for archaeology as a whole, in any epoch and latitude.

Archaeology has known how to respond to a real challenge, that of maintaining its own methodology of investigation and reconstruction (historical and virtual), and it has seen its skill recognised in producing effective analysis and synthesis. What it has learned from the *Novecento Project*, moreover, is how to imagine what its many objectives may be in terms of creating authentic cultural value, which does not necessarily respond to aesthetic standards, nor to identity standards, nor to a mere increase in knowledge. Identifying that value, studying it, contributing to making it known, protecting it through the creation of a sense of participation: the archaeological interpretation of a contemporary context brings with it what we could define as a form of secularisation of the archaeological method, since in this case a predetermined heritage does not exist, and so it is impossible to gauge the importance of a site or a context on the basis of a pre-existing category (such as antiquity or the specific features of the remains).

The archaeology in the *Novecento Project* showcases the tangible reality – the vestiges – of recent history, and can truly make the men appear behind the things, but also the meaning of their existence, so close to us that we can have their images and in some cases even their possessions; and it can make these lives, with their stories and their sufferings, an inestimable heritage, the deep and

shared meaning of which, beyond the oft pernicious logic of identity that seeks to appropriate cultural heritage, now as ours, now as unique, now as extraordinary, must be sought in a Europe free from conflict, one with perhaps shallow, yet far–spreading roots, which grow deeper thanks to those who have contributed to creating its peace.

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Abstract

The landscape of the Murgia, apparently unchanging in the desolation of its vistas and in the sparseness of its human settlements, hides important material traces, which, when analysed with the tools and methods of archaeology, tell of the conflicts of the "age of extremes": vestiges of prison camps, training camps for partisans, refugee shelters, and Cold War missile bases. Today these places are the subject of an archaeological exploration of the contemporary past, aimed at reconstruction, education, and making a contribution to the creation of a multifaceted heritage community, able to unite, in a truly global manner, distant places and peoples.
Keywords: archaeology of the contemporary past, public archaeology, participatory archaeology, digital archaeology, Faro Convention

Il paesaggio della Murgia, apparentemente immobile nella desolazione dei suoi panorami e nella rarefazione degli insediamenti umani, nasconde importanti tracce materiali che, se analizzate con gli strumenti e i metodi dell'archeologia, raccontano dei conflitti dell'"età degli estremi": resti di campi di prigionia, campi di addestramento di partigiani, rifugi, basi missilistiche della Guerra Fredda. Oggi questi luoghi sono oggetto di un'indagine archeologica del passato contemporaneo, volta a ricostruire, educare e contribuire alla creazione di una sfaccettata comunità di patrimonio, capace di unire, in maniera veramente globale, luoghi e persone distanti.
Parole chiave: *archeologia del passato contemporaneo, archeologia pubblica, archeologia partecipativa, archeologia digitale, Convenzione di Faro*

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