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The Gothic Line between heritage and memory of places

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It was on December 2008 the resolution approved by the Presidency Cabinet Office of Rimini Province (n°70, 29/12/2008) which gives to local Historic Institute of Resistance and Italian Contemporary History the assignment of a research on mupping the historical and cultural heritage which has been inherited during the Second World War. The project, called "Preliminary census related to a territorial network system of the Gothic Line", will fall within a larger one, which was supposed more than a decade ago by Emilia-Romagna Region. In fact, it was in 1997 that Vito Patichia spoke to the mountain communities close to Bologna on the need of a "census and an improvement concerning our memory" for getting back and preserving our heritage¹.

After more than a decade that proposal has been materialized and nowadays it is used as an important touristic tool as well as an information and pedagogic one too which has a very efficient logistic and IT support headed by the Artistic Cultural and Natural Heritage Institute of Emilia Romagna (IBC)². We also have many recent monographs dedicated to some very interesting itineraries over the main Second World War sites that have been recovered by our region in order to create a cultural thematic park about the Gothic Line.

According to such work, from January to March 2009, Dr. Marco Caligari³ and me worked on a similar census for the 19 municipalities of Rimini Province⁴ and San Marino Republic as

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¹ Cfr. V. Patichia, *La Linea Gotica. Censimento e valorizzazione di un patrimonio della memoria*, in "IBC- Informazioni, n. 4, 1997.

² To get a better idea about census results of historical and cultural heritage in 2007 and 2008 which involved mountain communities close to Bologna, please see: <http://templatecms.regione.emilia-romagna.it/templatecms/down.asp?id=3915356&state=notlive>

³ Marco Caligari is PhD in Social European History from Middle Ages to Contemporary History at Ca 'Foscari University in Venice.

⁴ Bellaria, Cattolica, Coriano, Gemmano, Misano Adriatico, Monte Colombo, Montefiore Conca, Montegridolfo Montescudo, Morciano, Poggio Berni, Riccione, Rimini, Saludecio, San Clemente, Santarcangelo di Romagna, San Giovanni in Marignano, Torriana, Verucchio. It is necessary to remark that our census has not involved some municipalities such as Casteldelci, Maiolo, Novafeltria, Pennabilli, San Leo, Sant'Agata Feltria and Talamello which have been part of Rimini Province since the 29th July 2009 (Act 117 / 2009). The exclusion was therefore dictated by the fact that the work had already been commissioned and carried out many months before that legislation came into force.

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well. It is therefore a very wide area (a total of 920 km²) which was on summer 1944 background of a bloody passage of the front that involved local residents themselves.

The purpose of our survey has been therefore at the same time the mapping of potential "tangible" and potential "intangible" one. Given that, the census has been structured into seven sections (Material testimonials; Preservation Institutions, Events, Touristic services, Human Resources, Hospitality, Projects) and each of them has been divided into several subchapters. The work has not been focused just in recognition of monuments, headstones, memorial stones, historic buildings, shelters and war cemeteries but it also aims to offer tools to anyone who wants to make a deep study on it and find unpublished archival material on that historical period and on the other hand to draw a more general framework to understand if in this area there is another network headed by local institutions and private citizens to enhance our heritage.

It is with no doubt that the first two points are crucial in our research. We can say that our survey has revealed a deep sensitivity of this area in creating a sort of "places of memory" (like e.g. war cemeteries and monuments which recall the horror of war and stones where there had been massacres). However, the same interest has not been shown for the preservation of heritage which is directly connected to the passage of the front.

The necessary reconstruction and the legitimate attempt in erasing the past have removed many traces of historic buildings devastated by bombing of military posts and refuges⁵. Many fortifications have been converted for private use (such as basements); it is recently that many municipalities have try to enhance the latest discoveries such as casemates (in Rimini) and shelters (in Gemmano). We know that the refuges were built by the citizens to defend themselves by bombing. As we can see in our census we find out that many sites which are not yet exploited, could be rehabilitated by the help of the elderly population who knows the correct location.

Of great interest is the second point which is about the Institutions for the preservation of Heritage: the research has identified an inventory and a classification of documents and photographic material in each one of the reviewed 22 files and in the main local libraries and inventory of three thematic museums about the Gothic Line (the multimedia and multipurpose Museum in Gemmano; the Gothic Line Museum 1943-1944 in Montegrifolfo, The Eastern Gothic Line Museum and the Church of Peace in Trarivi, Montescudo) and on another one, the Thematic Park and Aviation Museum.

Our survey has shown that, although many municipalities have invested in cataloguing and inventory, the classification and conservation work of such material has been done very late. The problem caused in part by the passage of the front that has devastated many places and from the subsequent attempt to get rid of compromising traces⁶ and by the most recent negligence.

Except for the human resources section (composed of experts, collectors, research associations, veterans' associations) the remaining part of our census has indeed shown a significant delay. The reference point is especially about tourist services and accommodation capacity. At the moment there are no catering or accommodation activities settled along the passage of the front which promote or sponsor the main war sites: the consequence is that in the whole area there are not either tour guides or thematic itineraries and – in some cases – in a lot of places we have no signposting and information planks (which are essential to give places' visibility). In this regard, in order to form the first category and try to highlight the "places of memory", it should be opportune to involve experts and historical associations (as

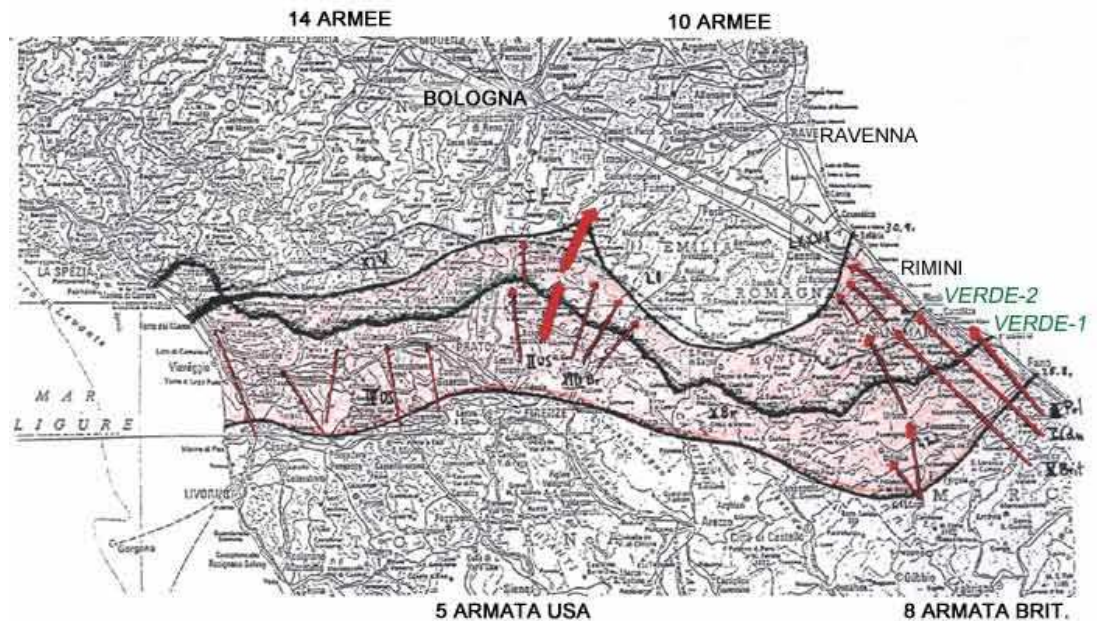
⁵ Basically this point can be interpreted as the front passed close to small towns (or villages) that were in expansion for decades and it was not like in the Appennino Bolognese and Alta Valmarecchia which were uninhabited mountain areas where we had a great number of witnesses.

⁶ It is important to highlight that all that material contains sensitive data, lists and special notifications which many political leaders had interest to get rid of.

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we have in our province) whose contribution is essential for a correct interpretation on war sites and for creating didactic and tourist tours. Following the identification of historical heritage of that area - the first and the essential step - thanks to the interest of our Province and our consequent census (briefly summarized here), close to the 25th April we will show a report to the municipality and citizens with the purpose to highlight the potential opportunities in managing the assets and limitations and delays encountered till now. Presented and reported the above-mentioned census and once the authority is aware of heritage inherited from the Second World War, it is desirable that the provincial government invests to preserve that area and take action for its protection (or conservation) for its restoration and development (or enhancement) for its interpretation and design (conservation, accessibility, education and promotion of tourist tours). In the direction of a network among different municipalities we could have a significant help for the final implementation of the project and its marketability then it will have to follow a territorial plan which it will include other provincial and regional administrations (war witnesses) as well as Rimini.

The Gothic Line



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