

The 7 Most Endangered 2014

Project Fact Sheet

<u>Project Title</u>	Citadel of Alessandria, ITALY
<u>Location</u>	Alessandria, Italy
<u>Initial input date</u>	15.08.2017
<u>Current status</u>	Follow-up
<u>Latest update</u>	09.10.2018

Summary, status, prognosis

The rehabilitation of an extensive 18th Century fortified defensive structure and military base, strategically located on a bend in a river, just outside a major city.

The structure was at risk from general decay, lack of maintenance and a virtual absence of funding. However, it was also at specific risk from an invasive, non-native plant: *ailanthus altissima*. The Italian army was responsible for the site until it withdrew in 2007, at which point ownership and responsibility was transferred to the city authorities. However, the city itself was in financial difficulties and did not have the resources to either restore, or even adequately maintain the site. The most active partner in promoting the site was the local group of the Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI), which had developed a small visitor centre and was active in seeking third parties, including the prison service, to help control the infestation.

In February 2016, responsibility for the site was taken over by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism and included in a list of 25 priority projects. Funding of EUR 25 million has been discussed, but as yet there does not appear to be a global redevelopment plan. However, projects have been proposed, including cycle paths and turning the fosse into an area of linked parks. Physical safety and personal security on the site has been significantly improved, although this has meant that the area available to the public has been reduced.

In late 2017 package of funding was agreed, based on national and ERDF funding, with a contribution from the city council. This would have made a substantial contribution towards the costs of restoring and redeveloping the site. However, the city then expressed a desire for part of the funding to be diverted to fund historic sites in the city centre. This situation seems to have changed with the announcement of how these funds will be allocated. There are also reports that the main access to the site may be structurally unsound which, if confirmed, would have major impact on any redevelopment works. However, by September 2018 external reinforcements and buttressing had been installed on the bridge's piers. This has been sufficient to allow the bridge to meet structural standards and regulations, permitting a major event, with 30.000 visitors, to take place in safety.

Further monitoring suggested.

Classification: C Progress, but Structures Remain at Risk.

Basic data**Nominator:**

Angelo Maramai, Legal Representative, Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI).

Brief description:

18th Century fortifications, barracks and associated military buildings.

Owner:

Agenzia del Demanio (State Property Agency) – endorsed the submission.

Administrator:

Previously the City of Alessandria, probably now the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism

Context, description

The Cittadella is strategically located across the river from Alessandria city centre, facing the direction of perceived threats. The site covers an area of 54 Hectares, with a built area of circa 121,000 square metres, spread across 42 buildings.

It was built during the 18th Century and most of the buildings date from this period. These are surrounded by a defensive wall incorporating six substantial bastions, which in turn are surrounded by a wide fosse, itself incorporating defensive structures. Finally, the fosse is itself surrounded by further walls and defensive earthworks.

The site was an Italian army base up until 2007, although large areas of the site were unused and, at least latterly, there was minimal long-term maintenance and repair, with many of the structures unsafe. Responsibility for the site transferred to the City of Alessandria after the army left. However, unlike neighbouring Milan and Turin, Alessandria's economy was in decline, with high unemployment, low average wages, and very limited local investment. Ultimately, the city was effectively bankrupt and placed in special measures, with no significant resources available to maintain the Cittadella. The City Administration did try to develop PPP initiatives, but the constraints placed on developers were too strict, and the market opportunities too limited to attract any serious investors.

Issues, problems, threats

There were, and are, two main threats to the Cittadella. Firstly, there was the simple lack of available funding to carry out any maintenance and repairs, quite apart from funding for redevelopment of the site. The Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism has published a figure of EUR 25 million as an investment budget, with possibly a further EUR 7 million from the regional government. This would be at the bottom end of the EN7EIB Institute estimate for the stabilisation and recovery of the site. The second threat is from the invasive species. Eradicating this threat will take some time, as the tree is very difficult to kill and has already spread across Northern Italy.

Status pre-mission

Apart from a tentative bid to attract private sector funding via a PPP, and the efforts made by FAI to stabilise the site to the extent possible with limited resources, very little work had been carried out on the site following the army's departure. There was a strong support from the local community, but the scale of the site means that even well-developed organisations like the FAI could only stabilise some areas of the site.

Summary EN/EIBI mission recommendations, action programme:

The Technical report, final version, was issued in January 2015 (available on EN website). It found that the scale of the needs of the site went beyond what could be provided by the city alone, even allowing for FAI's determined efforts.

At that time, there was no suggestion that the site could be divorced from the city in terms of organisation and control, and the recommendations were all based on how the city could integrate the Cittadella into the city's economy. Now, with the transfer of control and responsibility to the national level, there may even be the possibility that the Cittadella could be the basis of some economic recovery within the region, rather than being a drain on the local budget.

Progress on recommendations and latest status

Although the original recommendations are no longer relevant, the considerations which led to their development are still pertinent. It is important that any developments proposed for the Cittadella should be mainly additional to the local economy, and not simply draw economic activity out of the city. The position taken by the new city administration in 2017, by proposing to transfer some of the agreed national funding for the Citadel towards the city centre, would suggest that this risk has been identified and understood.

At the time of the 2018 update, the situation shows signs of slow progress.

Impact of EIBI/EN intervention

Nominator's Comments:

Awaited

Appraisal Team's Comments:

With the transfer of responsibility to the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, the announcement of a budget and outline ideas of the potential future shape of the site, the future looks much more positive.

The improvements in signage, on-site security, and wider use of the site for local and regional events is positive. However the scale of the site should not be underestimated. Neither, should the logistical problems of opening up a defensive structure to give easy access to the general public. Finally, there is the question of how to supply modern infrastructure to an 18th Century defensive structure, without having an impact on the essence of the Cittadella.

Lessons learned:

- The stability of the site was largely down to a small group of dedicated individuals and groups who managed to pull in support and resources from such diverse groups as the local prison and collectors of military vehicles.
- While the Ministry is obviously an independent organ of the state, they were open to recognising the importance of the site, and obviously listened to the strong arguments presented both by FAI and the EN representatives during an open press conference at the end of the mission. This meeting, and a similar event in Briançon, for the Vauban Fortifications project, demonstrates the importance of a public wrap-up event to gain a wider exposure of sites at risk.
- The EN/EIBI mission's conclusions were made clear during the mission itself and immediately afterwards with the recommendations being transferred in writing to the parties, well before the issuing of the Technical Report. This timely feed-back was effective and important for progress.

Data on inputs & timing	Dates, Participants
Appraisal:	
Nomination form submitted	30 October 2013
Project selected as 7 ME:	June 2014
Questionnaire from EIBI	June 2014
Response to questionnaire	August 2014
Appraisal mission	20 -21 October 2014
Participants:- EN EIB Institute	Rossana Bettinelli, Fani Tufano. Campbell Thomson
Feedback letter post mission	n/a
Response to further questions	n/a
Technical report issued	January 2015

Follow-up:

Request for progress report	n/a
Response on progress	n/a
Follow-up visit	n/a
Participants: EN EIB Institute	n/a n/a
Report on follow-up visit	n/a
Fact sheet prepared by	n/a