

Hungarian Barracks that Became Superfluous

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Due to social and economic changes at the end of the 20th century the structure of the Hungarian Defence Forces and the number of its functioning barracks have changed significantly. Barracks in provincial towns were dismantled after rapid decisions, leaving behind established infrastructure and buildings, many of which still remain unused and dilapidated today.

We must therefore find ways to utilise the disused facilities and decrease the environmental damage still detectable around these areas today. I visited the areas with disused barracks all over the country during my several year long research and analysed my experiences. One aspect of my analysis is establishing where the facilities are located and the way the former barracks have been utilised.

I then describe past and present difficulties in utilising the facilities. Most towns and villages had no agenda for the utilisation of the barracks and were not in a position to make decisions. In addition, the local governments had insufficient funds to guard, maintain and control the environmental damage of these facilities.

Key words: Hungary, barracks, utilisation, environmental remediation

Due to significant social and economic changes at the end of the 20th century, the structure and garrisons of the Hungarian Defence Forces (HDF) also changed considerably. According to our calculations, there was a facility which became superfluous and disused in approximately 180 towns.

There were several facilities which were no longer required in Budapest, in other big cities and in medium-sized towns, and several facilities were also closed down in small towns. These included; the HDF 40th Galga Command Support Regiment and the Soviet Barracks in Aszód, the Dózsa György Barracks and the Soviet Barracks in Sárobgárd, the 44th Tóth Ágoston Artillery Brigade near the Böhönye side of Marcali and the Hunyadi János Barracks in the city centre, the Transdanubia Training Centre and HDF 8th Kinizsi Pál Tank Brigade in Tapolca, the Soviet Barracks in Szentendre near the Budapest city gates, the National Air Defence Barracks (Izbég) and the Hungarian People's Army (HPA) 37th Budapest Revolutionary Regiment and the Soviet Airport in Kalocsa.

Some infrastructure and vast numbers of unrehabilitated areas were left behind when these barracks closed; and this presumably also occurred in all V4 countries, including Slovakia. It is therefore advisable to examine this entire region. Slovakia's economy is improving with decreased budget deficit, and the Hungarian press description of this as a positive phenomenon implies that Slovakia could set a very good example to Hungary.

Examining these disused facilities is a good opportunity, because fending off impacts which endanger life and material goods needed for national sustainment and international migration remains important. Utilising the abandoned barracks would also preclude additional funding for infrastructural border protection and

territorial defence. It took several years to visit all the disused facilities, and clear changes were noted in their condition and recovery over that period.

Reasons for closing down the barracks

A significant number of facilities closed as personnel were made redundant by military reform and transformation. Major reasons for this dismantlement included that the size, structure and operation of the forces became incompatible with the prevailing risk and the national economy had insufficient resources for making improvements in the defence forces.

Hungary's capacity allowed only the creation of smaller but more efficient defence forces which could then be integrated in NATO's military structure. These transformations involved huge costs and the use of all Hungarian Defence Force reserves. The main objective of the transformations was to change the oversized defence forces managed and controlled by the party into national armed forces controlled by parliament and sufficient to provide Hungarian defence. Hence, rapid decision-making closed most rural garrisons leaving behind the remains of their infrastructure and areas which are still mostly unused and unrehabilitated. Jakus (2005) reported that seven total firearm brigades, one firearm brigade and twenty-two tank battalions were closed down.

The map in Fig. 1 currently contains most but not all closed-down barracks, but ongoing research intends to make this 100 %. In addition, Kádár, Kozma (2011) recorded that in 1991 94 garrisons were emptied. In these facilities, Soviet forces used 328 properties altogether.

Herein, we analysed 92 Hungarian barracks and 39 which were formerly Soviet. Examples include:



Fig. 1. The utilisation of disused military barracks in Hungary

Key: utilisation for ● – defence purposes; ● – public purposes; ● – civil sector; + – deteriorating

1. The riot police and the border guards now use the former Soviet (Esze Tamás) Artillery and Armour Barracks in Debrecen town. Sámsoni Road buildings in the best condition were transformed into flats. The Észak-Alföld Regional Directorate of the Immigration and Asylum Office is also located there. The total area covered 26.6 ha and some remains disused.
2. There was formerly a special mobile missile technical base with missiles and technical equipment in the 170 ha nuclear warhead storage area and ammunition depot in Császárszeged. This estate is now empty and dilapidated
3. Technical units and the signals corps once served in Ercsi in the 22 ha facility of the 37th "II. Rákóczi Ferenc" Pontoon Regiment.
4. The Akadémia Park Office building was established in the refurbished main building of the 12.7 ha facility in Budapest. This was sold by the armed forces to the Ministry of Defence in 2009, and the rest of the area is neglected and covered in weeds.
5. The 101st "Szigetvári" Zrínyi Miklós Artillery Bri-

- gade was located on a 20 ha area at the Highway No.6 Pécs access from the Budapest direction, and
6. Combat exercises including live firing were regularly held in the Bakony Mountains.

The new concept of the armed forces pushed brigades responsible for territorial defence into the background while it concentrated on foreign missions; and this was another factor contributing to the liquidation of the last artillery brigade in Hungary on the 30th of September, 2004.

Further analysis of the Hungarian barracks shows that location was not a decisive factor in their dismantling. Although this dismantling was typical throughout the country, central Hungary had both the greatest number of barracks and the highest percentage of closures.

Environmental remediation

Hegedűs (2016) reported that by the end of the 20th century global armed forces created the greatest pollution in the world, and the following soil and groundwater pollution of disused barracks is recorded:

- gas, oil and kerosene hydrocarbon derivatives pol-

Table 1. Groundwater samples

	Petrolstation (new)	Petrolstation (old)	Background (top)	Petrolstation (old)	Background (bottom)	B Pollution limit	C Pollution limit to require action
Drilling number	1.	2.	3.	5.	6.		
TPH concentration of groundwater [µg/l]	150	1 790	202	90.8	6.3	100	500

Source: Mélyépterv Kultúrmérnöki Ltd. (http://www.kulturmerenoki.hu/index_elemei/Page400.htm)

Note: TPH – total mineral hydrocarbons, B – the concentration of hazardous substances taking into account the quality of drinking water and the needs of the aquatic ecosystem in the case of groundwater, the multifunctionality of soils and the sensitivity of groundwater to pollution in the case of a geological medium, C – concentrations of hazardous substances which, in the absence of a specific limit value or, in the absence of a specific limit value for remediation, the Environmental Inspectorate shall take action.

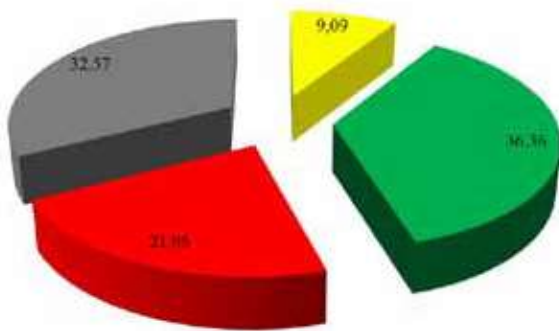


Fig. 2. The distribution of the utilisation of dissused barracks (%)

Key: utilisation for ● – defence purposes; ● – public purposes; ● – civil sector; ● – detriourating

luted fuel storage areas, repair workshops and airport areas;

- heavy metals contaminated warehouse sites, vehicle repair workshops and shooting range areas;
- inefficient sewage treatment and drainage created sludge and waste water.

Further, the 101st “Szigetvári” Zrínyi Miklós Artillery Brigade (Fig. 3) premises recorded their petrol station groundwater contaminated by hydrocarbons (Table 1) and analysis by Mélyépterv Kultúrmérnöki Ltd reported that an underground tank farm led to pollution at Táncsics Barracks in Kaposvár.

No environmental remediation has been performed for most evacuated barracks; and reasons often proffered for disuse are that the facilities are outside urban areas, generally controlled by local governments with small cashflows

and that the amount of money required for environmental regeneration exceeds the cost of renovating the buildings. This then leads to further deterioration of the buildings. The Ministry of Defence then commissioned the Ministry of Defence Electronics, Logistics and Property Management Private Company to commence the 1st of January 2012 sale of Hungarian Government properties managed by the Ministry of Defence which had become redundant for defence purposes under the Kormányportál-Government Portal/Property sale. The involved towns wanted to acquire the areas free of charge for their local governments but they did not always succeed.

In addition, the Soviet troops charged a large amount of money for the facilities vacated after their withdrawal, but Hungary countered this by presenting accounts for the environmental damage caused by the

Soviets. A compromise was eventually reached with both parties waiving their claims against each other and equating the assets left behind by the Soviet troops and the extent of the economic damage caused by them (https://mult-kor.hu/20100310_husz_eve_allapodtak_meg_a_szovjet_csapatok_kivonasarol?pldx=2). This left Hungary with the responsibility of rectifying the environmental damage. Moreover, the managers of the closed facilities faced the same remediation problems following Soviet troop withdrawal as the current managers of the abandoned barracks; how to repair the environmental damage and dilapidated buildings, and especially, how to determine precise ownership of the premises.

Interested investors then needed to cleanse and environmentally remediate these areas and make them attractive for re-use; but this was often deterred by the lack of sufficient resources.

Situation and reuse of abandoned barracks

Former military facilities are brownfield areas, defined as an area that was previously used for industrial or commercial purposes and which is polluted with low concentrated hazardous waste or other contaminants but is possible to reuse after cleansing is called a brownfield area (www.terport.hu/fogalomtar/barnamezos-terulet). Kádár (2008) added that heat reflection is high at these areas and it is hard for rainwater to penetrate them as a result “urban deserts” are formed.

Permanent recovery of these brownfield industrial, transport and military areas is an important urban developmental task. Therefore, while visiting and assessing the abandoned barrack, we reviewed a special segment of brownfield areas at the former Soviet and Hungarian military facilities and then prepared a chart and a summary of

the extent of their recovery (Fig. 1, 2).

The original intention of our research was to determine barrack area environmental aspects, but consideration of the exponential growth in migration forced us to assess how these neglected facilities could be re-used. We therefore analysed the 132 barracks we visited and investigated whether the garrisons highlighted in Fig. 1 were used for defence or for other purposes. We established which parts were demolished, which building structures were continually deteriorating and then examined possibilities for recovery. This research established the following conclusions:

- 12 barracks were fully utilised for defence purposes (9.09 %);
- 48 were used by the civil sector (36.36 %);
- 29 fulfilled public purposes (21.96 %), and
- the remaining 43 barracks are deteriorating unused (32.57%) (Fig. 2).

Table 2 herein records the facilities fully utilised for defence purposes, and Tables 3–5 list the 7–9 major barracks in the remaining three categories above.

The following provides a more detailed breakdown of the use of the barracks, apart from those recovered for defence purposes; and most importantly all the following are only partly recovered:

- 8 barracks partly recovered and used for social purposes;
- 15 barracks used for cultural purposes;
- 6 barracks for sports;
- 24 barracks for residential use;
- 33 barracks for industrial park use;
- 17 barracks for commercial enterprises; and
- 3 barracks used for tourism.

In addition, although the entire area of the barracks recovered for use by the civil sector and for public purposes has not been utilised, civilian use has compensated to some extent for the former employment losses in the state-owned barracks. However, for cities without municipal status, the population concentration and the economic level do not justify demand for use of these areas as a resource.

The following provides the location of the 132 examined barracks:

- 46 units are within the settlement, and 38 of these are barracks in use (82.6 %);
- 84 units are on the outskirts and outside the settlement, and 22 of these are utilised (26.1 %).

These figures highlight that barracks built in the inner areas, near the city centre, were used to a greater extent than those on the outskirts or outside the city or settlement, and this is especially due to tidier surroundings, better infrastructure and the more advanced economic situation within the settlement.

Table 2. Utilisation of hungarian barracks for defense purposes

	Name of Barracks	Town
1	HDF Savaria Training Centre	Szombathely
2	Border Guard Directorate	Szombathely
3	Border Guard Barracks	Nagykanizsa
4	Border Guard Barracks	Óriszentpéter
5	Border Guard Barracks	Letenye
6	Border Guard Barracks	Kelebia
7	Bajcsy Zsilinszky Endre Barracks	Pécs
8	Sámsoni úti (Esze Tamás) Armour Barracks	Debrecen
9	HDF 36. Gábor Áron Artillery Regiment	Kiskunhalas
10	Border Guard Training Centre	Nyírbátor
11	Bocskai (Rudolf) Barracks	Miskolc
12	Zách Street Barracks	Budapest, Kőbánya

Note: HDF – Hungarian Defense Forces

Table 3. Utilisation of hungarian barracks for civil sector purposes

	Name of Barracks	Town
1	MD Unit III	Budapest, Pasarét
2	Soviet Barracks	Kaposszekcső
3	Budai Nagy Antal Barracks	Nagyatád
4	HDF 14th Thury György Mechanized Infantry Brigade	Nagykanizsa
5	Rákóczi (Frigyes) Barracks	Győr
6	Szabó Lajos Barracks	Mezőtúr
7	13. Türr István Technical Regiment	Baja

Note: MD – Ministry of Defense, HDF – Hungarian Defense Forces

Table 4. Utilisation of hungarian barracks for public purposes

	Name of Barracks	Town
1	Erzsébet-ligeti Soviet Barracks	Budapest, Mátyásföld
2	Bóbita Street Soviet Barracks	Budapest, Óbuda
3	HDF 7th Bethlen Gábor Air Defence Missile Regiment	Keszthely
4	HPA 33rd Mechanized Infantry Brigade	Zalaegerszeg
5	Border Guard Barracks	Sopron
6	Soviet Technical Unit	Tolna
7	60th Technical Brigade	Szeged
8	Artillery – Technical-Corps of Signals Barracks	Vác
9	Esze Tamás Barracks	Berettyóújfalu

Note: HDF – Hungarian Defense Forces, HPA – Hungarian People's Army

Specific examples for recovery and further possibilities

(A) Recovery Examples

The Hungarian government aims to limit overcrowding in prisons and increase its labour-market by creating new prisons. For this purpose, abandoned barracks have been used in some places. Examples here include:

Table 5. Deteriorating unused hungarian barracks

	Name of Barracks	Town
1	Transdanubia Training Centre	Tapolca
2	101st „Szigetvári” Zrínyi Miklós Artillery Brigade	Pécs
3	Dózsa György Barracks	Sárbogárd
4	Soviet Barracks	Baj
5	HPA 37th Revolutionary Regiment	Kalocsa
6	Szentistván Road Barracks	Mezőkövesd
7	HDF 93rd Petőfi Sándor Chemical Defence regiment	Kiskőrös
8	40th Galga Command Support Unit	Aszód
9	Petőfi Sándor Barracks	Budapest, Újpest

Note: HPA – Hungarian People’s Army, HDF – Hungarian Defense Forces

Table 6. Barracks suitable for use

	Name of Barracks	Town
1	101. „Szigetvári” Zrínyi Miklós Artillery Brigade (Picture 1)	Pécs
2	44th Tóth Ágoston Artillery Brigade	Marcali
3	Budai Nagy Antal Barracks	Nagyatád
4	Dózsa György Barracks	Sárbogárd
5	Soviet Barracks	Baj
6	Transdanubia Training Centre	Tapolca
7	Petőfi Sándor Barracks	Újpest
8	Dobó István Barracks	Újpest-Székesdűlő
9	37th „II. Rákóczi Ferenc” Pontoon Regiment	Ercsi
10	Soviet Barracks	Szentendre
11	108th Mészáros Lázár Mechanized Infantry Brigade	Baja
12	HDF 36th Gábor Áron Armour Regiment	Kiskunhalas
13	HDF 31st Hunyadi János Mechanized Infantry Brigade	Rétság
14	40th Galga Command Support Regiment	Aszód
15	HDF 24th Bornemissza Gergely Cavalry Squadron	Eger
16	Szentistván Road Barracks	Mezőkövesd
17	HPA 37th Budapest Revolutionary Regiment	Kalocsa

Note: HDF – Hungarian Defense Forces, HPA – Hungarian People’s Army

1. the HDF Savaria Training Centre in Szombathely has now become the National Prison Institute;
2. Kőbánya, which is the Counter Terrorism Centre in Budapest, has moved into the Zách Street facility;
3. police contingents have moved into the buildings of the Szombathely Border Guard Directorate, the former barracks in Nagykanizsa, the Bocskai Barracks in Miskolc and the former barracks in Nyírbátor. In addition, the former Border Guard Barracks of Óriszentpéter, Letenye, Kelebia are now police property;
4. a station for receiving refugees in Kiskunhalas now

operates in the former HDF 36th Gábor Áron Artillery Regiment facility, and

5. the former Építő Battalion barracks was situated in the 13th district in Budapest near Vasas Stadium, in the area bordered by Frangepán Street-Béke Street-Fáy Street. However, the Kodolányi János College, the Chinese Trade and Information Centre and Restaurant and The Oriental Hotel have now operated there for years. The social demand and funds for this use were available because the area lies within the public institution zone and its recovery and fitting into the fabric and style of the area were therefore achieved (Fig. 4).

(B) Further Possibilities

1. one additional possibility is the benefit derived from abandoned barracks use for healthcare facilities because insufficient hospital beds continue to create health problems;

2. today we face new challenges in Europe as a result of the migration crisis and consequent increasing number of terrorist attacks. Greater political, environmental and economic pressure is forcing mass migration to Europe, even in the absence of armed conflicts. One of the most important possibilities for future use of former military facilities is to ensure greater Hungarian security. This can be achieved by supporting and integrating public organisations into the army and police force to further strengthen the defence sector.

Table 6 herein highlights disused barracks with buildings in relatively good condition that can be immediately utilised after renovation.

* * *

Soviet troops left Hungary in 1991 and most of the Hungarian Defence Force units were terminated in the early 2000’s. Property prices plummeted because of short term downsizing from simultaneous increased supply and low demand. Hungarian municipalities,

however, proved effective in utilising the abandoned barrack areas when local communities initiated good ideas in suitable central and peripheral locations and when entrepreneurial and municipal financial strength galvanised these processes.

The important quote from Dannert, Pirisi (2016) state that the acquisition of the barracks and the investment required to do so left the local governments with assets hard to liquidate and which they were capable of spending on economic or settlement developmental goals only with great difficulty (if at all). Most towns and villages had no concept of how to use the barracks



Fig. 3. Pécs, 101. "Szigetvári" Zrínyi Miklós Brigade, V-shape (Pécs, 2016). Photo: Róbert Bársony

to best effect, and none were in any position to make such important decisions. Moreover, the local governments had insufficient funds to guard and maintain the sites or to control the environmental damage caused by these facilities.

In conclusion, herein we have examined the many factors that influence the utilisation of abandoned barracks, and the most important problem we encountered is the lack of environmental remediation. In their present state, these establishments continue to pollute the environment and they would be suitable for use only after expensive remediation and renovation. Society and decision-makers must therefore examine all possibilities of utilising these facilities and reducing the environmental damage. Sustainability can then be ensured by the renovation and reuse of the abandoned facilities.

Finally, society can never manage alone, so government action is urgently required to replace abandoned barracks. This, however, will incur significant cost and unfortunately there are no government programmes currently in place to solve these ongoing problems.

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Fig. 4. The Old Barracks in Fáy Street (Budapest, 2018). Photo: Róbert Bársony

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