

Scirocco - Kurzinfo aus Italien

08 May 2026: The Panopticon of Castel Volturno: Architecture of Exclusion

In Castel Volturno, a new detention and deportation center is planned that marks a troubling turning point in Italian migration policy. With a budget of more than €41 million, the facility is designed according to the Panopticon model developed by Jeremy Bentham. Its architecture strongly resembles that of a high-security prison: radially arranged housing units, a barred circular walkway for constant surveillance, and high fences and walls. The design therefore aims at permanent control and the spatial isolation of those detained. According to Ristretti Orizzonti, official documents explicitly use the term *confinamento* (“confinement”) for the first time.

Equally troubling is the security narrative reflected in statements by the Italian Ministry of the Interior. Leisure and communal activities are described as tools to prevent “situations of discomfort” that could foster hostility. In this framing, such activities are not understood primarily as rights, needs, or elements of a dignified everyday life, but as instruments to pacify and manage detained people. Migrants are thus implicitly portrayed as potentially dangerous, disruptive, or hostile, while the architecture of the CPR is presented as a rational and preventive response.

This logic also appears in the categorization of detainees. Particularly controversial is the proposal that people who have not committed criminal offenses, but who are held in an administrative limbo, should be divided into different levels of deprivation of liberty. These levels would depend partly on a person’s legal status and partly on an attributed degree of “hostility.” In this respect, the facility recalls historical prison models in which detainees were placed in hierarchical categories ranging from stricter to supposedly more lenient conditions of confinement.

Why is this project so problematic? Beyond ethical criticism — including from church representatives who regard it as a violation of human dignity — there are also ecological and financial concerns. The center is planned within the protected natural area Parco La Piana, an important resting site for migratory birds, apparently without a prior environmental impact assessment. It also raises the question of why public funds are being invested in a structure of confinement and control rather than in social services, schools, healthcare, or integration measures.

The CPR in Castel Volturno is therefore more than a local construction dispute. It represents a policy that treats migration not as a social, economic, and human-rights reality, but primarily as a security issue. A just migration policy would instead focus on legal pathways of entry, social protection, labor rights, and inclusion. What is being built instead is an infrastructure of exclusion that systematically discriminates against migrants and frames them as a security risk to be managed, controlled, and removed. The problem therefore lies not only in the architecture of the CPR, but also in a political discourse that reinforces the systematic criminalization of migration. The planned center in Castel Volturno embodies this logic in a particularly visible way.