



*Theme of the issue “Center and periphery: borderline cities and borderlines of cities”*

## BETWEEN EMPIRE AND NATION STATE. URBAN SPACE AND CONFLICTING MEMORIES IN TRIESTE (19<sup>th</sup>–EARLY 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY)

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**Abstract.** Cities are particular spaces in which such a fight for territory occurs. By their own nature, cities imply a work of transformation and appropriation of territory into a narrative construct or text. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Trieste underwent a transformation of its own urban space that expressed the existence and concurrence of different national narratives. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Trieste’s coastline performed the cosmopolitan elite’s identity by highlighting the relation between social status, ethnic origins of elite’s member, and the *individuals’* conscience of participating in the exceptionality of a city ‘without history.’ As the elite’s economic ground changed, the representation of identity in space changed consequently. The consolidation of fascist regime supported the construction of a new myth of Trieste characterized by an old Roman origin and the heroic efforts of its inhabitants to join the ‘Motherland’ that led to the creation of a new main urban axis constellated with sites highly representative of Trieste’s ‘Latinity’ and permeated by a sense of *collective* participation in historical continuity.

**Keywords:** Trieste, nation, memory, fascist architecture, elite, identity.

### Introduction

Maurice Halbwachs (1980) has pointed out that place and memory are strongly linked to each other. When a group becomes part of space – whatever it be – it transforms space to its own image and, at the same time, it adapts itself to certain material things which resist transformation. By doing that, groups express what geographer Robert Sack (1986: 19) has described as human beings’ natural tendency, namely the effort to affect, influence, or control actions, interactions, or access by asserting and attempting to enforce control over a specific geographic area. The ‘conquer’ of space is expressed not only through policies of social control, but also through symbols whose dissemination within territory concur to build a particular discourse on identity as well as giving the landmarks necessary to interpret, explain and legitimate group identity. Space, therefore, reveals its own dual character as an entity merging real and mental dimensions (Foucault 1986).

Cities are particular spaces in which such a fight for territory occurs. By their own nature, cities imply a

work of transformation and appropriation of territory into a narrative construct or text. On the one hand, the transformations of city real and mental spaces reveal the intentionality and identity of local groups that aim to ‘conquer’ it by the use of particular practices (demolishing, renovation, restoration etc.) (Fijalkow 2010: 8). On the other hand, the memory of cities is endlessly being constructed and transformed thanks to the stories local actors narrate *through* the city and its urban space. In particular, the memory of the city is expressed by a particular ‘mindscape’ or ‘cityscape,’ that is ‘a structure of thinking about a city [that] indicates something which exists between the physical landscape of a city and people’s visual and cultural perceptions of it’ (Weiss-Sussex, Bianchini 2006: 13).

In the next pages, I analyse how the urban elite of Trieste in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century used the city’s urban space as a framework to express at least two dominant social and national narratives. In my paper, I do not concentrate on the existence of

particular places of remembrance in the city space. My interest is focused on how the social and political changes that occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> and in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century influenced the transformation of the urban structure of the city. In particular, I investigate how the elite aimed to create a main urban axis able to represent elite's social and political identity, and to make it the main pivot of urban development of the city. My goal, therefore, is to show the transformations of Trieste mindscape following the transformation of the city from a cosmopolitan free-port of the Habsburg Empire into a provincial sea-port of the Kingdom of Italy after World War One. Until now, the topic has been partially studied mainly by architects (Marin 2002, 2012; Pozzetto 1976, 1982). Among historians, only Mellinato (2010) has tried to sum up the relationship between urban development and identity in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century's Trieste.

### **Austrian emporium to Italian periphery**

Until the 18<sup>th</sup> century the history of Trieste was nothing but the history of a small provincial sea-town. A flourishing town due to its position between Aquileia, the main Roman town in that area, and the Istria peninsula, Roman Tergeste remained economically attractive over the early Christian era. After being destroyed by the Longobardic invasion in 567 and becoming part of the Frankish kingdom in 788, Trieste went into the Aquileia sphere of influence from 1081. In the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, when Trieste developed as a free commune, the city began a two-centuries-period of war against the main regional power – the Republic of Venice. In order to put an end to Venice incursions the leading strata of Trieste petitioned the Duke of Austria Leopold III to accept Trieste as a part of his own domains. The act of cession was signed in 1382.

Although Trieste retained a certain degree of autonomy, it was the process of transformation of the Habsburg Empire that radically changed the destiny of the city. In 1719 Charles VI proclaimed Trieste a free-port: the city was transformed into an important trade hub, the focal centre in the imperial project of expansion into the Adriatic and the creation of new trade-routes to Asia (Finzi *et al.* 2003). The new role of the city and, from 1841, Maria Theresa's institutional reforms strongly influenced the further development of the city. On the one hand, the encounter between the new bureaucratic apparatus and Trieste traditional leading class stimulated the emergence of a new commercial and mercantile 'urban spirit' (Finzi, Panjek 2001). On the other hand,

the new status Trieste and the facilities provided to people that held their own business there changed the physiognomy of the city: increasingly more people from all over Europe and the Mediterranean basin chose Trieste as the city to do their own business. Besides the traditional distinction between Slovenian-dominated peripheries and Italian-speaking city core, a merchant and economic elite in which Germans, Austrians, Greeks, Serbians, Armenians, Greeks, Italians and others gathered together, settled down in the city (Kacin-Wohniz, Pirjevec 1998).

However, it was after the Napoleonic period that Trieste's economic potential started intensively to grow. With the foundation of *Assicurazioni Generali* and *Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà* (RAS) the city became the leading centre for the insurance industry in the Habsburg Empire. Furthermore, the new role of Trieste within Austria was confirmed by the foundation of the *Lloyd Austriaco*, a shipping and insurance company that came to represent the entire economic interests of Trieste bourgeoisie (Finzi *et al.* 2003; Schiffrer 1978). Dominant political strata in Austria looked at Trieste as a port fulfilling a vital 'bridge' function for imperial economic expansion towards Asia through the Mediterranean sea (Agnelli 2006).

Regardless of its economic and geopolitical importance and the elite's push for it, Trieste was not recognised any particular status until 1850. Only that year was the municipality given a separate status as a autonomous (*unmittelbare Stadt*) city in Austria. 1848 events, however, had shown that the political scenario had already changed considerably. The emergence of Slavic nationalism in the southern part of the monarchy had shed light upon Trieste as a laboratory for new solutions at the crossroad of German, Italian and Slavic 'civilisations' (Schiffrer 1978; Sestan 1997). Nonetheless, Metternich's conservative and centralizing policies soon smoothed down not only the hopes of a wider reform of the (now) dual monarchy, but also the unity of the elite's identity. Thus, although especially after the opening of the Suez canal the local elite remained conscious the support of the Empire's central powers represented the key-point for any further development of Trieste's economic life (Finzi *et al.* 2003), the unity of Trieste cosmopolitan elite began to fade (Negrelli 1978) giving place to the rise of a new 'territorial imperative' (Minca 2009). Firstly, the increasing activeness of the Slovenian national movement (Rogel 1977; Salvi 1971; Zwitter 1967), the spread of Slovenian education institutions and the emergence of a Slovenian bourgeoisie in Trieste gradually became to concern the Italian-speaking elite, preoccupied with maintaining its economic position in the city's social structure (Verginella 2001). The 'fight for survival' that

opposed Italian-speaking and ‘Slavic’ bourgeoisie in Trieste and in all Eastern Mediterranean (Cattaruzza 2007) came along with a different geographical understanding about the link between the city and its hinterland. While the traditional elite looked at the hinterland as ‘belonging’ to the city, the Slovene discourse embraced the opposite view (Verginella 2008). The idea the city ‘belongs’ to the hinterland could count on an increasingly strong ideological appeal within the Slovenian-speaking population flocking from Trieste’s hinterland to the city in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Secondly, the birth of the Italian nation state gave new ideological background to the Italian / Slovenian polarization. Although until the end of the century only a smaller part of the local intelligentsia sincerely supported irredentist issues, the reference to the common kinship with unified Italy gained place in public discourse.

Thirdly, the suppression of the free port in 1891 and reconversion of Trieste into a modern shipbuilding centre definitively compromised assimilation mechanisms which relatively low migration rates from the countryside had guaranteed earlier (Finzi, Panjek 2001). At the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the politicization of the masses and the ethnic polarization of social conflicts also became a key-issue for the emergence of Slovenian / Italian conflict (Cattaruzza 1998; Gombač 1977, 1979; Maserati 2007; Rutar 2004), the memory of the cosmopolitan ‘nation’ just echoed in some critical pages about Trieste’s past (Vivante 1984).

Although the outburst of World War One was seen at first with enthusiasm by the local Italian-speaking elite, any fervour was smoothed down soon after 1918. The ‘return’ of Trieste to the ‘Motherland’ after the First World War revealed to be quite painful for the very elite. While the memory of the city’s elite was still bound to the splendour of Habsburg Trieste, the new reality depicted quite a different panorama. Deprived of the Austrian hinterland, of prestigious German schools, and intelligentsia, Trieste had lost most of its own importance and become nothing but a second-rank Italian seaport. In this framework, fascism found an extremely fertile ground to grow and to transform the ‘Trieste problem’ into a ‘national question’ (Minca 2009). In the 1920s and 1930s the divide between Italians and ‘Slavs’ underwent, thus, a further radicalization that led to the criminalisation and persecution of the Slovenian population (Verginella 2007; Vinci 2011).

### Narrating cosmopolitan Trieste in space

The economic and political vicissitudes that characterized Trieste and its history over 150 years considerably influenced the development of its urban structure



Fig. 1. Trieste’s coastline (photo by Filippo Brescia)

both as an economic and a symbolic space. The creation of the free-port entailed a first caesura. Since that moment Trieste started to develop along a longitudinal axis on the seacoast in a general atmosphere dominated by the marginal influence of the Austrian authorities, the local merchant bourgeoisie’s economic drive and its will to be represented in the symbolic space of the city (Fig. 1).

Until the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Trieste had remained a small seaside town in which people compactly lived within the medieval walls between the port and the castle. On the one hand, after the proclamation of the free-port the adaptation of the city’s infrastructure represented a task to be accomplished as soon as possible in order to enable economic development. On the other hand, the medieval town was far too small to host the growing flow of people coming to Trieste in search of new economic chances. The first step towards the redefinition of Trieste’s space was made by institutional actors in 1736 when the ‘Plan for a new town to be build upon the Trieste’s saline’ (*Piano per una città nuova da farsi sulle saline di Trieste*) was approved. The new urbanisation process was clearly function-oriented. An entirely new district – the so called Borgo teresiano – was built under the direction of architect Giovanni Fusconi and aimed to merge the need for housing and the commercial tasks Trieste was supposed to perform. Thus, the new district was build according to a strict chess-board structure around an artificial channel – the Canal Grande (Fig. 2) – that represented the main new infrastructure of the commercial city. The channel was intended to supply docking facilities for newcomers and the local commercial bourgeoisie who had moved and had its own homes and storehouses in the new district (Mellinato 2010: 80).

Moreover, the new district by the channel became the stage on which the new bourgeoisie could expose its own identity and the complexity of it. In the 19<sup>th</sup>



Fig. 2. The Canal Grande (photo by Stengel & Co.)

century Trieste elite found in the work of local historian Domenico Rossetti a myth of foundation that clearly reflected the feeling of local cosmopolitan bourgeoisie. According to Rossetti, Trieste represented a separate homeland (*patria*) in which two different civilisation grounds – the

German and the Italian – encounter and melt together forming the ‘Trieste nation’. Such a framework was considered to naturally synthesise all cultures irrespective of people’s religion or nationality (Negrelli 1978). In this regard, the Italian language and especially the local dialect played a key role becoming a tool for assimilation without linking the Italian language to any sense of belonging to the Italian nation living in the peninsula nearby (Ara 2009; Ara, Magris 1987). In other words, Rossetti described the ‘Trieste nation’ referring back to a pre-modern concept of nation in which the municipal tradition and the relationship with the Habsburg monarchy were conceived as the only source for the historical rights, and the Italian language as the cultural minimum upon which the community was grounded (Negrelli 1968, 1978). Homogeneity was not implied in the concept. In the monolithic socio-cultural physiognomy of the elite elements of diversity were therefore accepted as the unavoidable heritage of diverse members’ origins and part of the elite’s collective biography (Kandler 1862: 1). The elite’s palaces that grew up all around the channel expressed both the common economic core and diverse ethnic origins of the ‘Trieste nation.’ The buildings’ structure was usually common. While the ground floor had practical economic functions and was usually devoted to stock the merchandise, rooms at higher levels were kept for housing only. It was, however, the very position of the palaces in the urban context, their architectural style – usually composed along with neo-classical lines – and the decorations of their facades that carried out much clearly connotative functions and merged the

representation of the economic power with ethnicity (Baird, Jencks 1974). One of the main examples of the conception of power representation in space is merchant Demetrio Carciotti palace. Built according to the aforementioned structure, the palace was placed at the intersection between the Canal Grande and the seacoast thus making stocking operations and transportation easier. The imposing main facade was significantly sea-oriented as to certify the partners coming from the sea about the owner’s financial solidity. Furthermore, the neoclassical style and the symbolic figures positioned on the top of the building reminded the visitors of Carciotti’s Hellenic origins and the connection with the sea business (Firmiani 1989). The transformation of Trieste into a cosmopolitan emporium in which the economic dynamism of the merchant bourgeoisie went hand in hand with the memory of the elite’s mixed ethnicity did not leave confession apart: ‘Trieste’s countryside – Giovannina Bandelli (1851: 192–193) wrote in her guide to Trieste – is almost totally inhabited by the Slovenes... The city, inhabited by Italians, did not lose its own character, nor its own dialect which, on the contrary, was adopted by new inhabitants that had flocked from all over around. Religion retained national elements, that’s why Greeks, Illyrians, Protestants, Helvetians form separate communitarian groups, preserve their own institutions and languages. Catholics that make up the majority should not be divided into communities according to their language and nation; most of Israelites are Italian.’ Religious buildings that arose in the new city between the last part of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century represented one more urban element in which the ethnic memories of the ‘Trieste nation’ continued to be performed. Most activism in this field was demonstrated by non-Catholics. Among them, the Serbian and Greek orthodox communities could count on a particular numerical and economic strength (Finzi *et al.* 2003). Although after being authorized to hold religious services already in 1751 the two groups used a common space, in the last quarter of the 18<sup>th</sup> century each of them opted for separate buildings. The Greek-orthodox St. Nicholas church was erected on the seacoast nearby the Canal Grande between 1784 and 1795. Matteo Pertsch, the Swiss architect that had previously planned Carciotti palace (Fig. 3), partially re-designed the church with essential neoclassic elements – recalling the Hellenic origin of the community – in 1818–1821 (Benco 1995). The Serbian community, on the contrary, continued to use for religious services the building shared with the Greeks on the north-eastern coast of the Canal Grande. The old St. Spiridione church was however rebuilt by the Serbian community in 1861–1868. The new building,



Fig. 3. Carciotti Palace (photo by Stengel & Co.)

projected by Milan’s architect Carlo Maciachini, was erected on a Greek-cross plan in neo-byzantine style with a big cupola and four smaller calottes, and echoed much clearly the national character of the community in the very core of the new city. Although a Lutheran community was present in Trieste since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, a separate neo-gothic Lutheran church was erected in a lateral street west of the Canal Grande and inau-

gurated only in 1874. Catholics were not absent but their religious geography in Trieste’s urban space was somehow different. The centre of local Catholicism had traditionally been the St. Giusto cathedral positioned on a hill close to the Medieval castle. In the new city, an old chapel sited at the top of Canal Grande was first widened in 1771. A neo-classic building planned by the Swiss architect Pietro Nobile and with Antonio Bosa’s sculptures representing the saints related to Trieste history on the top of the facade, took then the place of the old one. The St. Anthony Church was build over 20 years and inaugurated in 1849.

In the years of Restoration the growth of financial bourgeoisie made Trieste urban text experience a two-fold process. The axis along the seacoast continued to be the main stage for the representation of the elite’s power by putting emphasis on the relation of it with the sea (Fig. 4). Anyway, the immaterial relation to money that characterized Trieste financial bourgeoisie, mainly related to insurance (Generali, RAS) and shipping (Lloyd Austriaco) and strongly bond to the development of Austrian capitalism, implied a shift in

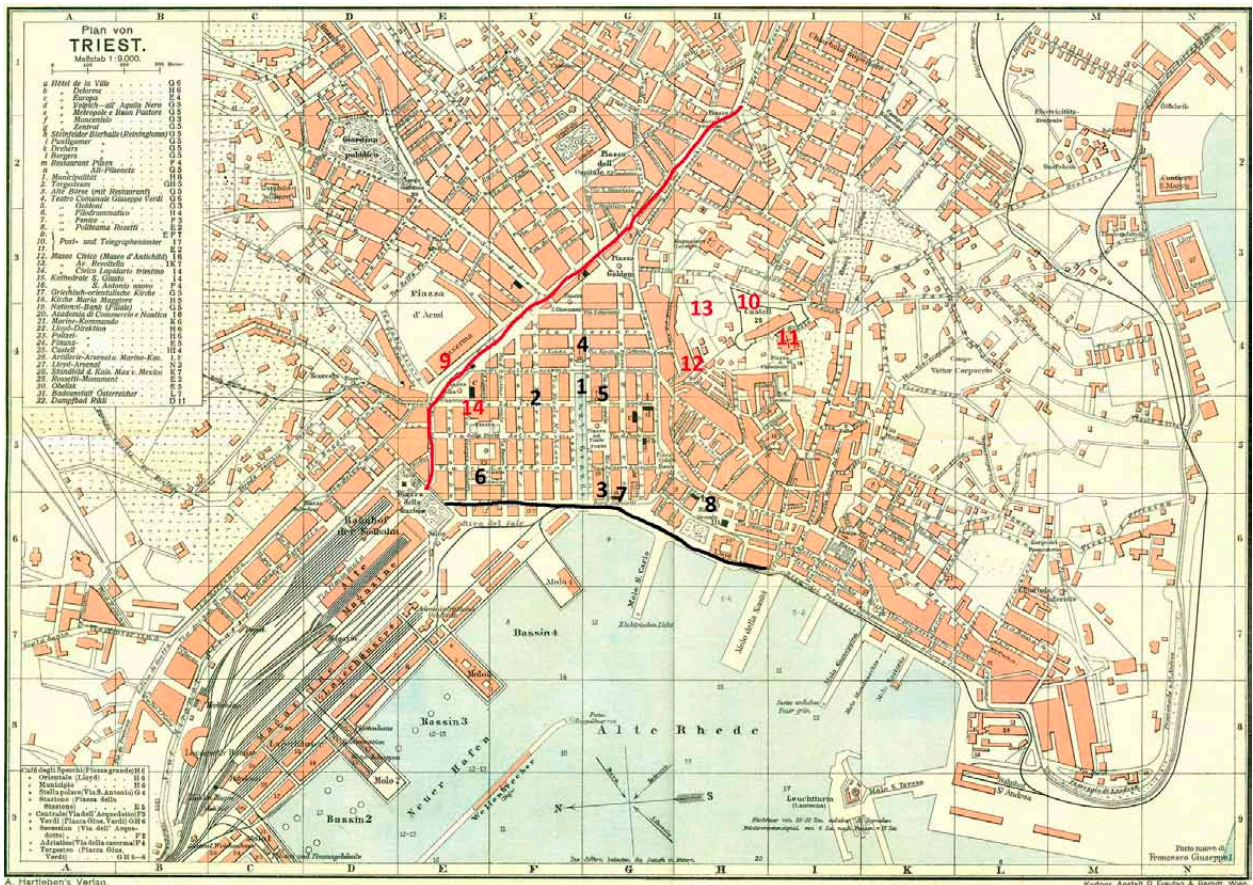


Fig. 4. Trieste city plan, early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hartleben’s Verlag). 1. Canal Grande; 2. Borgo Teresiano; 3. Carciotti Palace; 4. St. Anthony Church; 5. St. Spiridione Church; 6. Lutheran Church; 7. St. Nicholas Church; 8. Piazza Grande). 9. Austrian barracks; 10. St. Giusto Castle; 11. St. Giusto Cathedral; 12. Roman theatre (discovered in the 1930s); 13. Remembrance Park (after WW1); 14. Narodni dom. In black: Habsburg Trieste’s main urban axis. In red: Trieste main urban axis in the 1920s and 1930s

the relation with city space, as well. For the new elite material space was not so important as it was for elder merchant bourgeoisie. Therefore, the connotative functions of urban space could be capitalized more easily. The main example of the new elite's representation in space, in which the link between the interests of the central bureaucracy and those of the local elite becomes clear, is probably represented by the creation of the city's main square.

The new square – Piazza Grande – was planned as a sort of *place royale* (Fig. 5), an abstract and artificial space for the representation of Trieste's economic and political elite (Treleani 2009). In order to create a unitary space in front of the Trieste bay, the project involved the filling in of the old port and a series of demolitions. The operations were accomplished between 1858 and 1872. Over the later 30 years the new space was then completely reframed with new buildings (with the exception of Stratti and Pitteri palaces) housing the main economic and political actors of the city: the Lloyd Austriaco Palace, the Generali insurance company palace, the Government palace, and the Municipality house (Semerani 1969). While the Fontana of the five continents (1751–1754) at the centre of the square symbolically reflected shipping and insurance companies' expansionist ambitions, the new square symbolically reflected the elite's new mindscape and values. By connecting the sea and the cafés, the bourse, and the theatre situated in the squares nearby, the Piazza Grande asserted the elite was still connected to the sea, but the very core of that relation had changed. The new palaces and spaces were the expressions of financial 'collective capitalism'. The new architectural elements of Trieste's public spaces were not related to persons, but to collective *personae* – societies – that over a few decades had not only become dominant and had changed the very understanding of work and business (Mellinato 2010: 86–88).



Fig. 5. The Piazza Grande (photo by Foto Stampa Angeli, Terni)

### **Trieste is ours: making Trieste Italian**

Along with the changes in the nature of Trieste's bourgeoisie another process took place. In the central decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Trieste entered the path of industrialization in the fields of shipbuilding and heavy industry. The new economic phase of Trieste's economy modified both the trends of migrations and urbanisation. Between 1859 and 1910, the population of Trieste doubled. Migration from Carniola and Istria made the figures of Slovenian population in Trieste increase quickly: in 1880 the Slovenian-speaking population in the municipality reached 18%, in 1910 even 24% (Cattaruzza 1989). Consequently, the urban frame expanded into the area that had been more interested by the process of industrialisation: the port near the railway station and the industrial district east of the city. Along with industrialisation, the suppression of a big part of free-port privileges in 1891 changed once more Trieste's economic morphology. The development of the tertiary sector entailed the emergence of a new urban panorama. On the one hand, the high bourgeoisie once more chose the coast as a scene for palaces, such as the new palace of Lloyd Triestino, in which the old neo-classical elements were faithfully repeated as parts of a already meaningless auto-celebration (Mellinato 2010: 94). On the other hand, the growth of imperial and local bureaucracy and the widening of employee strata made the model of storehouse-palaces definitively obsolete. New models of housing appeared the inner parts of Trieste towards the Carso area breaking with the traditional concentration of elite's building on the coast.

In the framework of Trieste's changing economic facet, the myth of 'Trieste nation' underwent a fatal crisis. The immigration-boom to the city and the sharpening opposition between Italian and Slovenes in the public sphere caused the emergence of other myths which turned out to be much more representative of the elite's feelings and identity strategies. The emergence of the Slovenian narrative on Trieste dated from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. In those years, the Trieste Slavic society (*Slavjansko društvo*), that was one of the first expression of Slovenian bourgeoisie, took over a fight against the process of assimilation on which the 'Trieste nation' was based. As Marta Verginella (2008) has pointed out, the Slovenian historical narrative on Trieste that began to develop passed through at least a couple of phases. As a way to ground their own rights to exist separately, the Slovenes maintained that the Slovenian population had been living in the city since the pre-Christian era. Later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Slovenian narrative overcame the simple rights to exist and aimed to symbolically 'conquer' the whole city

space. Among others, historian J. Godina-Verdelski asserted that Trieste had always been part of ethnic Slovenian territory. Geopolitical arguments underscoring the need for a port supporting the development of ethnographic Slovenia's economic individuality often completed Slovenian arguments. In the cityscape, however, the Slovenian narrative remained quite isolated. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, no elements in Trieste could recall Slovenian memory. However, it was the growing presence of the Slovenes in the city and the day-after-day more active participation in city political and social life that led to a partial shift. Thanks to the effort of Slovenian liberal parties and with the support of the first Slovenian bank that had been opened short earlier, the so called National House (*Narodni Dom*) was inaugurated in 1904 (Fig. 6). The building had been planned as a centre to host all Slavic organizations operating in Trieste. However, not only were Slovenian organizations numerically dominating, but the very building was planned as to give them visibility and assert the cultural maturity of that ethnic community. The National House was projected and realized as one of the first multifunctional buildings in Europe and intended to represent an alternative pivot in Trieste's cultural life. In fact, the 4-floor building hosted a theatre, a bank, a gym, a bank, two cafés, two restaurants, a hotel and a number of flats, and was located far from the coast. Therefore, it coherently tried to initiate the construction of a Slovenian cityscape (Pozzetto 1998).

The emergence of a Slovenian urban strategy was, however, just a response to a generally changing situation. The fading of the 'Trieste nation' was accompanied by the progressive ethnization of the Italian discourse. Although the Roman origins of Trieste had been already underlined by Rossetti (Negrelli 1978: 66), in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the Italian narrative increasingly emphasized it. As in the case of the

Slovenian one, over time the Italian narrative became an instrument not only to assert the right to existence, but the exclusive belonging of the city to the universe of Italian civilization: 'Italic races already lived in the entire Venezia Giulia region at the dawn of history. But it was Rome that made them part of [Latin] Civilization when they founded an emporium for the northern Adriatic Sea area in Aquileia, which became a bulwark for the Alpine valleys and conquered the natural borders [of Italy]' (Caprin 1914: 14).

It was however World War One and the takeover of Trieste by the Italian state that determined the outspread of the Italian narrative. Prior to and especially during the conflict, Trieste was depicted along with Trento as as one of the 'twin-towns of Italian irredentism' necessary to complete the process of Italian unification. Nevertheless, as the Italian take over the city, the transformation of the cityscape was unavoidable in order to affirm and testify visually the Italianness of Trieste. From the point of view of the urban representation of national identity, Italian Trieste had to cope with a couple of problem grown in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the increasing Slovenian presence in the city and the memory of the cosmopolitan elite looming on the coast. The emergence and consolidation of fascism in Italy had represented a main instrument to put the idea of symbolic transformation of the city space into practice. A first step was taken in 1920. In the first big outburst of violence, the fascists put the Slovenian National House in fire destroying it almost completely (Kravos *et al.* 1995).

By irreparably compromising the compactness of the Slovenian cultural life and denying the very legitimacy of their presence in the city, the fascists concretely began the transformation of Trieste cityscape by annihilating the visible presence of ethnic otherness. The rise of fascism, however, needed not only erasing procedures, but also processes of affirmative consolidation. In the 1920s and 1930s, the fascist regime needed to rewrite Trieste's urban text, first, in order to underline the city's national identity and exclusive legitimacy of the Italian presence there. Second, as the 'Italian gate to the Balkans' (Alberti 1915), Italian Trieste was supposed to give the observer the sense of a bridge towards the new Italian territories of Istria and Dalmatia. As far as the 'return' of the eastern Adriatic coast to Italy was the result of a heroic fighting, the 'holy city' of Trieste had to eternalize the memory of the very 'Fathers of the Fatherland' who had scarified themselves to give Italy the craved territories.

Third, Trieste's centre was supposed to supply a stage for the representation of the regime and the superiority its own totalitarian modernity upon the captive past of the city. The urban text of Trieste, therefore,



Fig. 6. The Slovenian Narodni Dom (photo by Adrija dr.)

was supposed to embody the Mussolini myth (Gentile 2002; Melograni 1976) through the rediscovering of the Roman past of the city and the use of city space as a mirror of fascist modernity and symbols.

Some incursions into the 19<sup>th</sup> century elite's cityscape are apparent in the Maritime Station and the seaplane base that were built on the seacoast in fascist time (Nicoloso, Rovello 2005). Nonetheless, the actualization of Trieste's memory through the transformation of its urban text was accomplished mainly by diametrically changing the urban axis and joining the coast west from city to the Istria and Dalmatia coast through Trieste urban core (Marin 2012). By the creation of such a new axis, planned in 1925, urban designers aimed to relegate the coast to a space of amnesia. Conversely, the axis gave a chance to highlight the renewed reading of Trieste's history and spaces.

Although the axis coincided with a series of contiguous boulevards and wide streets mainly bordered by already existing buildings which belonged to the earlier phases of city's urban development, the designers' attention was mainly concentrated on the reinterpretation of some peculiar spaces of memory. The reconstruction of city space began, spatially, with the construction of a veritable Italian 'gate to the city' (Nordio 1934). The reconversion of an old Austrian barracks had been discussed already in Habsburg time, but after the war, the use of that very space was 'covered' in a particular symbolical meaning. The barracks had been the place in which Italian patriot Guglielmo Oberdan was executed in 1882 for having attempted to the life of Emperor Francis Joseph. In order to sublimate the mystics of Italian (irredentist) martyrdom related to that very place, the local powers planned the whole reorganization of the area in order to make it a 'modern and monumental' district – Oberdan district – introducing the traveler to the symbolic 'gate' of Italianness (Fig. 7).



Fig. 7. Oberdan Square (photo by Foto Stampa Angeli, Terni)

In fact, group of buildings related to the memory of World War One (the Combatant House), the memory of irredentism (Oberdan's Memorial), and the memory fascist regime (the Balilla's House) merged with the image of new Trieste economic power (Ina insurance and TELVE Telecommunication palaces) (Marin 2012: 624–625). Moreover, since the new district arose where the Slovenes' National House stood, the rewriting of Trieste's 'gate' might be understood as the 're-conquest' of an area the Slovenian had tried to appropriate and ethnicize. The urban axis, then, underscored and tried to join semantically three more objects reminding of Trieste's Italianness: the St. Giusto hill. The importance of that very place was clearly expressed in a guide published by the fascist tourism organization ENIT: 'The relics of the past which are worth to be visited because of their artistic or historical value or because they are particularly interesting have been preserved and restored as everywhere else in Italy ... The Capitol Hill, around which the 'Remembrance Park' stretches up, groups the most remarkable monuments of Trieste's history (Fig. 8). The Castle was erected on the Citadel of Roman Tergeste fortified by August ... The Cathedral represents the eternal and pious sentiment of Trieste's Latinity and Italianness.'<sup>1</sup> The image of Trieste as the 'Rome of the East' (Cobol 1919: 1) needed to raise the symbolic importance of the very traces of Roman past in the city. On the one hand, both the Castle and the Cathedral called back to Roman antiquities. The Cathedral had been built in the Middle Ages upon the relics of a Roman temple. On the same place a lapidarium with archaeological fragments and inscriptions created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century testified of the Roman origins of the city (Caprin 1906: 14–18). Then, the Cathedral signified and highlighted

<sup>1</sup> *Venezia Giulia*. Roma: Ente Nazionale Italiano Turistico, 1938: 11–12.



Fig. 8. Remembrance Park (photo by F. Brescia, Trieste)



the fidelity ab saecula of the city to Catholicism by reminding the figure of St. Giusto, the patron of Trieste, who underwent martyrdom in the city (Bassi 1932). Furthermore, the Remembrance Park surrounding the St. Giusto Hill once more remembered the importance of the recent war events. Just one of lots of similar parks created as temples of civic sacrifice throughout Italy, the Remembrance Park represented the ideological interpretation of World War One. The creation of it in the very centre of the city and in near the ‘sacred’ relics of Latinity symbolically interpreted the war as the sacrifice necessary to ‘save’ the Latinity of Trieste. The fascination with Roman antiquities, however, went hand in hand with the particular idea of modernity the fascist regime intended to instil in the urban text. A new urban plan, receiving the suggestions of earlier regulation projects, was officially started in 1934. Its main object was the redevelopment of the Old Town – the only part of the city characterized by a ‘past without magnificence’ (Antonucci 1937) – at the foot of the Hill inhabited by lower society strata and lacking of hygiene. The project was intended to further a big amount of demolitions and build an exemplar fascist district inspired by an ideal of order visually and semantically linked to the Hill (Marin 2012: 621–622). Although just part of the project was effectively realized, the operations shed light upon the existence of a Roman theatre just behind the Piazza Unità, as Piazza Grande had been renamed. Once more, the fascist ‘healing pick’ was represented as a mode to connect hygiene and history, change life conditions and inform consciences (Bassi 1938; Villani 2012: 205–248). The urban axis continued then to the southeast (Fig. 9). The city centre became, thus, the pivot of a new urban logic that directed the later development of the city by leaving the coast in the background and leading to the erection of new residential districts having the brand of Italiannes (Marin 2012: 627–628).



Fig. 9. Via Carducci, the new Trieste’s urban axis (photo by Alterocca, Terni)

## Conclusions

Trieste is a good example how the urban text can be used in order to perform identity in space. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Trieste’s coastline performed the cosmopolitan elite’s identity by highlighting the relation between social status, ethnic origins of elite’s member, and the *individuals*’ conscience of participating in the exceptionality of a city ‘without history.’ As the elite’s economic ground changed and the emergence of a Slovenian bourgeoisie gave path to the national polarization between Italian and Slovenes, the representation of identity in space changed consequently. Especially after Trieste had become part of the Kingdom of Italy in 1918, the interest of the new dominant elite shifted towards the search for Trieste’s history within its urban framework. The consolidation of the fascist regime supported the construction of a new myth of Trieste characterized by an old Roman origin and the heroic efforts of its inhabitants to join the ‘Motherland.’ Due to the eminently individualistic and cosmopolitan character of the coastline, the fascist elite developed a new main urban axis constellated with sites highly representative of Trieste’s ‘Latinity’ and permeated by a sense of *collective* participation in historical continuity. The creation of a new main urban axis was just partially successful in guaranteeing Trieste a new Italian identity in space. The new urban axis undoubtedly highlighted the city’s historical (and ethnic) identity and its link to the eastern Adriatic coast – one of the goals of Italy’s imperialism. Nonetheless, Trieste’s economic-maritime identity (which the fascist regime never denied) was unlikely to be detached from the coast which remained just slightly affected by architectural changes semantically related to fascism and its myth of Romanity. Thus, the creation of a new urban axis turned out to reproduce in space the complexity of Trieste identity. While the new axis by-passed the sea that had been the central key for Trieste’s wealth and tried to “standardize” Trieste identity through a historical myth directly relating to the new state centre – Rome, the Habsburg urban axis on the coastline just reminded of the history of the most important Austrian emporium that, regardless of any rhetoric declaration, had become nothing but an ordinary provincial Italian city with a particular regional identity.

## Competing interests

I declare I do not have any competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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