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**BORDERLAND 'DAY TOURISTS' FROM THE EAST:  
TRIESTE'S TRANSITORY SHOPPING FAIR**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT**

Flows of people across international boundaries to shop have long been a common phenomenon. The end of the Cold War removed barriers to such flows from Eastern to Western Europe and gave rise to a distinctive strain of borderland shopper—officially a “day tourist” from Central Europe, but in reality a professional shopper working as an essential part of an international retail distribution system linking supply from the West to consumption in the East. The case of Trieste (Italy) is examined. The city’s borderland shoppers became important during the late 1980s and activity peaked in 1993-5 as bus loads of Central European consumers converged daily. The parameters of this unusual and transitory borderland activity are outlined, with particular emphasis on its impact on Trieste’s urban fabric.

**INTRODUCTION**

Vast geographic literatures exist on the topics of travel to shop and of the human characteristics of borderlands. Very little has been written, however, linking the two topics into a focus on borderland shoppers and their impact (2-4, 7-9). Many researchers have noted, if not seriously researched, the importance of

price and quality differentials in retail goods available across political boundaries in generating daily local population flows to exploit the advantages offered, especially across boundaries that have limited restrictions on the movement of goods and people. Normally this has been seen as a “local” phenomenon, but in some cases the journey to shop can cover distances of several hundred kilometers. The greater the price and availability differentials and the greater the openness of the boundary, the greater the volume of movement and the distances covered (6, p. 98).

This paper examines a particular type of boundary shopping activity along the borderland between Italy and its nearby eastern neighbors—a phenomenon that was large-scale and persisted for several years. Specifically, this paper studies the daily migration of shoppers from Slovenia, Croatia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary into the city of Trieste in the early-to-mid 1990s (3, p. 91-2).

This activity resulted in a set routine whereby literally several thousands of Central Europeans arrived in Trieste by bus and other vehicles four days a week, officially as day tourists but functionally acting as workers in a key segment of a retail distribution system moving goods purchased in Trieste to meet the demand of customers in their home towns and villages. Hence this Trieste phenomenon was

unique when compared to other borderland shopper cases in terms of its broader spatial scope, its multi-national origin, the volume of participants, and the longer term of its duration.

Certain aspects of this activity fall into a grey area of legality making data availability sparse and data collection in the field very difficult. Italian authorities do not differentiate between genuine tour buses and buses with shopper-tourists when recording entries into Italy near Trieste. The shoppers were always extremely busy with their “work” when in Trieste and avoided at all costs contact with any locals, especially with Italian officials. They were very skittish when approached and tended to refuse any kind of interview. Stall owners and Triestini shop clerks were similarly non-cooperative in providing information because many were not recording sales to avoid tax payments. To obtain necessary data, the researcher was left to a very careful “reading the landscape” during several mornings in Trieste, counting Central European buses, observing the spatial behavior of the shoppers including a good deal of walking and talking with Italian retailers, when possible. Aside from this field data, information was also gleaned from the occasional news item on the shopper phenomenon in the Trieste daily newspaper. Hence, this paper focuses more on assessing the impact that this hot-house post-Cold War phenomenon had on the urban geography of Trieste rather than on the complexities and dynamics of the daily movement linkages by which the activity created a new, if transitory, geographical pattern of international marketing.

## OUTLINE

Following a discussion of what is known about boundary shoppers in general and some essential background on the historic and political-geographic setting of Trieste, a detailed description of this daily multi-national migration phenomenon will form the core of the paper—an analysis of the urban problems it has created in Trieste. Each problem—traffic congestion, air pollution, trash disposal, public sanitation, and crime—will be discussed, and their collective impact assessed. Finally, I will speculate about the longer term impact of this unusual, if fast-fading, phenomenon.

## CROSS-BOUNDARY SHOPPERS

Many contemporary instances can be cited of cross-border shopping behavior. For example, along the U.S.-Canada borderland in Washington state unusually heavy investment has been made in establishing shopping centers and outlet malls to cater almost exclusively to Canadians from the greater Vancouver metropolitan region seeking price advantages on a wide variety of consumer goods. Similarly, large numbers of shoppers flow daily by ferry and by train through the new Channel Tunnel from southeastern England to the port cities of Calais and Boulogne to buy goods such as wine and beer in purpose-built “hypermarkets” at prices considerably lower than at home, largely due to persistent differences in taxation policies between France and the United Kingdom even though they have been partners in the European Union since 1972. By the same token, many residents in the Nice region on the French Riviera make weekend shopping trips over the border to the Italian city of Ventimiglia to purchase wine, spirits and food items, and to eat a meal at considerable sav-

ings over French prices. In turn, Italians in the greater Milan region make daily trips into the Italian-speaking Swiss region of Ticino to purchase gasoline and a variety of processed foods at considerably lower cost than in Italy, and further east, Italians in the Gorizia region of Friuli cross over into Slovenia daily to shop for gasoline and fresh food products, to eat a restaurant meal, and to gamble in purpose-built casinos in Nova Gorica. Germans living in the northern part of the state of Schleswig Holstein make frequent trips into southern Denmark to take full advantage of lower prices on a variety of retail goods.

All these cases are common and only a limited selection of well-known examples of individual cross-boundary shopping behavior generated by comparative price advantage, a behavior that produces a particular kind of collective migration which registers officially as an example of an international group tour. Examples are not necessarily restricted to interfaces between contrasting economic systems. In many cases, such borderland behavior still exists despite the fact that the two neighboring states have been members of an economic union for over 40 years, such as France and Italy! Nor are they always simple cases of one-way traffic flows. For example, just as Italians cross into Slovenia, as mentioned above, Slovenes cross into Italy daily to purchase clothing and other consumer goods. Furthermore, many of these trips are multi-purpose, involving a variety of behaviors other than shopping, and in some cases, also including the selling of goods, gainful employment and seeking out professional services. Nor is this behavior necessarily a simple one-on-one relationship between two neighboring states, but in many cases, including the example examined in this paper, the circulation pattern involves several states, with the nearest neigh-

bor to the shopping focus acting both as a direct participant as the origin of shoppers as well as a transit state for shoppers from third states passing through to and from the shopping locus.

## END OF THE COLD WAR

As the Cold War progressed in Europe, two contrasting economic systems—capitalism and a consumer driven market economy in the West as opposed to communism and government ownership and control of production and distribution in the East—grew alongside each other with vast differences in very basic features, not least in the availability, quality and cost of desirable retail goods. As long as borders between these two systems were essentially closed to the movement of goods and people, the high levels of cross-border exchange that have been above normal in North America and Western Europe were denied, and the border shopper, despite the motivational contrasts, could not flourish. With the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and the inevitably long time-lag necessary for economic systems in the East to switch from state control and ownership to a free market economy, it is hardly surprising that borderlands along the East-West interface underwent rapid change, including the instant development of the daily shopper phenomenon from the East to exploit the advantages offered by continuing price and availability in the West coupled with the new opportunity to move and transport goods much more freely. At the same time, changes in the political regimes meant that what would have been a serious crime of exploitation and profiteering against the state was now seen as a legitimate entrepreneurial demand-based activity. Such developments were hardly unique to any particular location

along the old Cold War divide. A most dramatic pre-unification example can be found in 1990 in the German city of Hof in Franconia, into which thousands of “ossies” from nearby parts of East Germany poured daily to spend their deutsche marks, immediately following the July first one-for-one mark currency conversion. Even within the old communist bloc, growing contrasts and open borders had their impact, such as in the northeastern Hungarian city of Nyiregyhaza into which thousands of southern Ukrainians still flock daily to trade and shop.

Given the stubborn contrasts, however, in standard of living and disposable income, a very particular and new type of borderland shopper developed. It was not the independent, private entrepreneurial shopper-tourist typical of the West, but rather a professional shopper, operating as part of a team, employed as an essential link in a wholesale/retail chain established with entrepreneurial skill to exploit the opportunity provided by the lack of a viable consumer-driven system in the East. The range of consumer goods choice was thereby extended into the West by carrying back these goods to meet the otherwise unfulfilled demand back home. In other words, these borderland shoppers, while officially registering in the Western host country as members of a visiting foreign tourist group, were, in fact, working for an organized commercial enterprise making up part of a consumer-driven international distribution system. They were chosen for their language skills, their trustworthiness in handling large sums of hard currency, their good judgement in making decisions on price and type of purchases, their efficiency in using the limited resources of time and hard currency funds available to shop, and their ability to pass unhindered through border post check points.

Now, almost a decade later, free market forces have created growing consumer systems in most ex-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, especially those closest to the West. Three of those in the Trieste orbit have now passed muster for the next wave of membership into the European Union—Slovenia, Hungary, and the Czech Republic—scheduled for 2002. Price and availability contrasts have declined and the profit forces that gave rise to the border shopper in the early 1990s no longer exist to any degree that would justify the borderland shopper phenomenon at the earlier scale. Certain elements may remain, but its zenith is already over. Krätke has noted in his study of the Polish-German border that under these post Cold War conditions, border regions can provide a frame for a “bazaar economy”, where market places near the border act as short-term spatial anchoring points, insecure and precarious, temporarily flourishing and then dying (1, pp. 256-7).

## THE CASE OF TRIESTE

### Historical and Political-Geographic Background

During this century the Italian port city of Trieste at the head of the Adriatic Sea has been impacted by several dramatic shifts in sovereignty and international boundaries which have in turn changed the relationship between the city and its hinterland. With the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the end of World War I, Trieste’s function as Vienna’s major outlet to the sea suddenly ended as Italy, in setting its boundary with the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia, gained control of a vast area to the east of the Veneto and Friuli,

including the Istrian peninsula to the south and much of the Karst hinterland to the north and east.

Following two decades of Fascism, Tito's Partisan army briefly occupied the city at the end of World War II before the Allies moved in. The peace treaty of 1947, pending a final territorial settlement, created the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) by which Zone A, the actual city of Trieste, remained occupied militarily by the Allies, and Zone B, the suburbs to the east and south, came under Yugoslav military occupation. In 1954, following a tense period of military confrontation and diplomatic negotiations between Italy and Yugoslavia, the A-B zonal boundary became part of the Italo-Yugoslav border and the FTT was history. The arrangement left Trieste barely in Italy, with the new boundary cutting it off completely from its immediate hinterland and connected to the rest of Italy by a thirty-kilometer long karstic corridor, only 4 to 8 kilometers wide between the sea and Yugoslavia. Trieste remained "*nel sacco*" and the city became a depressed peripheral part of Italy without a hinterland and on the Cold War frontline, cited by Churchill as the southern anchor of the new "Iron Curtain" that had descended across Europe "from the Baltic to the Adriatic".

More recently, a third shift has taken place. Forty years of Cold War military confrontation has ended, travel restrictions on their own citizens have been removed by the emerging new regimes of Central and Eastern Europe, and wholly new international patterns of movement of goods and peoples across the old Cold War divide have emerged. This shift and the consequent break-up of Yugoslavia in 1991 have given Trieste an entirely new situation as a borderland urban center and port of

over 250,000 residents, with two new neighbors, Slovenia and Croatia, and an opening up of its original hinterland toward the north and east.

### The Daily Migration

Even during the more rigid period of the Cold War, a trickle of shoppers entered Trieste regularly from Yugoslavia, mainly Zone B residents from the old FTT days and borderland dwellers who, by mutual consent between Italy and Yugoslavia, even after 1954, continued to enjoy cross-border privileges denied other Yugoslavs. This increased to a larger and more regular flow as relations between Italy and Yugoslavia warmed during the 1970s, although a large portion of these shoppers were ethnic Italians who had remained in nearby settlements in Slovene and Croatian Istria. Also, the pattern remained essentially local in spatial scope, although, as Hungary moved first among the socialist states to relax travel restrictions on its own citizens in the late 1980s, clusters of Hungarian shoppers began to arrive by rail and later by road through Yugoslavia daily in Trieste, thus establishing early links going beyond the local and regional levels.

The successful secession of Slovenia and Croatia from the Yugoslav Federation in 1991 led to an immediate relaxation of border restrictions on transit movement of traffic through these countries and from them into Italy. The flow of daily shoppers increased sharply as did the demand for a variety of goods. The war between Croatia and Serbia, and later the Bosnian civil war had some negative impact on these trends and tended to restrict the hinterland penetration in that direction while the flow increased from the north and northeast away from the armed conflicts.

What followed was this remarkable 2-3 year period of mass daily cross-border shopping which began to decline only as market conditions changed significantly in the participant countries of central Europe, and as institutional reactions took hold. Late in 1994, Hungary, worried at the serious loss in state income from this activity, placed a limit of 110 deutsche marks (DMs) on the value of goods individual reentering "tourists" were allowed to bring in. And Italy, responding to pressures from fellow EU countries worried about illegal immigration into the Union (especially after the Schengen Agreement on a common external border for immigration) and from internal interests against the flow of shoppers, moved to a policy of selectively, in terms of timing and crossing point location, slowing down the process of clearing Central European buses at the border, which had the intended impact of disrupting the shoppers in their work.

By spring and early summer of 1994, this phenomenon was peaking out and had developed a fairly set routine. On the four regular shopping days of the week in Trieste—Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday—between 9:30 and 10 a.m., hordes of foreign "tourists" entered Italy at the major crossing points from Slovenia just north of the city. Most were in chartered buses (estimated at an average of about 35 per day), some in private or hired cars, mini-vans, or micro-buses. The bulk of the traffic was in roughly equal numbers from Hungary and eastern Croatia, the remainder from Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and northern Slovenia (Figure 1). About 2,500 professional shoppers were arriving each day, with the numbers swelling at the weekend when people with regular jobs during the week would join the group, raising the weekly figures to an estimated 15,000 to 25,000. In

financial terms, a conservative calculation for the period 1993 to 1995 of the yearly volume of spending by these shoppers, based on an average of 100 DMs per person per trip, is at least USD \$55 million.

The shoppers left during the night from their towns and villages with sleeping bags, blankets and food, at a time which would allow them to arrive around opening times for the shops and market stalls of Trieste (Figure 2). Estimating an average speed of about 55 km/h, this would mean, for instance, a 3 a.m. departure if the distance to Trieste were in the 375 kilometer range. The quality of the roads was constantly improving, especially through Slovenia which continued to open new stretches of super-highway during this period. Allowing for some congestion at crossing points, the total time elapsed between leaving home and returning could be as much as 18 hours, from 2 am to 8 pm, with seven to eight hours of travel each way, and a furious three-to-four hours of shopping in Trieste in between. This would place any location within a 450 kilometer range of Trieste within daily shopping distance, and interviews and checks of bus license plate origins confirm this (Figure 1). Clearly, even though shoppers could spend a good deal of the travel time sleeping in a bus, few worked successive days, hence the average professional shopper would make only two trips a week.

On arrival in the city, the buses invariably let out their shoppers at or near the Piazza della Libertà, which acts as a central bus station and is just south of the railway station at the north end of town in the district known as the Borgo Teresiano (Figure 3). The Borgo, as one might expect from its location between the railway station and the city core at Piazza Oberdan, tends to be a rundown commercial district with

cheap cafes and restaurants, foreign exchange places, and discount stores of various types. Flanked by the via Carducci to the east and the corso Cavour along the sea front, the Borgo has long been geared to the needs of lower income Triestini and shoppers from the East. Not surprisingly, as Trieste's problems in handling this phenomenon began to be an issue, the Borgo's merchants banded together in 1993 into an association both to exploit this bonanza and to remain responsible Trieste business people with the best interests of the city in mind. The association's major task was to help with the search for legal parking places for the buses, to win the cooperation of city officials for leniency in parking violations and for the provision of public toilets, and to pressure national customs and border police not to harass the shoppers both at border crossing points nor within the city (Figure 4).

Until 1995, the derelict center of the Piazza della Libertà was used as an informal daily open market, with a score of itinerant vendors in their panel trucks which convert to stalls, setting up informally in the square displaying mainly clothing and leather goods (Figure 5). This market began and closed down early in the day so the shoppers tended to start at this close-by location. Indeed, this group of stalls making up the market on the Piazza della Libertà was entirely a creation of consumer demand generated by the borderland shoppers. The goods sold were geared to their tastes and virtually no local Triestini could be seen shopping there. The cluster of itinerant merchants making up this market were not from the nearby provinces of Trieste, Gorizia or Udine but came from the more populous Veneto region two hours drive from the west. They had simply added Trieste to their weekly schedule of shifting market locations—an

eastern outlier justified by the volume of sales generated.

Rested and fed, the shoppers spread out into the Borgo to start shopping as the city's stores opened. Generally, the shoppers worked in teams of three or four. All carried large duffel bags for carrying purchased merchandise. Over the three to four hours of shopping available before shops closed around 1:30 pm, some or all of the team would have made two or three return trips to the bus—as and when it could be found, depending on the parking problem that day—to unload the purchases, remove and discard the wrapping and packaging, inventory the items, concentrate the merchandise, and stow it into the bus before returning to another round of shopping (Figure 6). Some time also had to be spent moving around from shop to shop and district to district, comparing prices, and changing currency as virtually all stores demanded hard currency, with most stores in the Borgo marking items in DMs as well as in Italian lire. On occasion, when searching for specialty or quality goods, border shopper teams would range as far as the upscale retail district of Trieste, south of Piazza Oberdan on and for several blocks east of via Carducci. Easily identified by the more elegant Triestini shoppers as invading foreign shoppers from the East by their standard slept-in attire (normally cheap crumpled track suits), bulging holdalls or plastic bags, foreign language chatter, and a hunting-in-packs appearance, they were striking evidence to Trieste's more influential citizens of the growing issues the city was facing from their daily presence. By early afternoon, with all the stores closed, the borderland shoppers returned to their vehicles for the last time, and the buses would head home, only to return the following morning with a new set of shoppers.



## **Impact on Trieste's Urban Structure**

As suggested above, there are many facets of this remarkable phenomenon that lend themselves to geographic study, most of which remain uninvestigated because of problems in collecting appropriate data. Hence the focus of this section is on the more traditional and more easily measured impact of these borderland shoppers on the city of Trieste itself. The impact is assessed in five categories of problems created: traffic congestion, air pollution, trash disposal, public sanitation, and crime.

### **Traffic Congestion**

The Piazza della Libertà lies at the northern entrance to the city, into which the coastal highway and the parallel via del Friuli, descending from the karst plateau, pour their heavy morning commuter traffic from Monfalcone, Gorizia and the Friuli region within the urban sphere of Trieste. Congestion in the piazza with tailbacks in all directions is normal at most peak hours but the addition of scores of shopper buses, unable to find cheap off-street parking, double parked around the square served to narrow the lanes for traffic moving through. The resultant chaotic traffic jam at the northern end of the center became a daily occurrence and lasted long into the morning. The buses attempted to unload and then to park somewhere in the vicinity so that they could be found later by returning shoppers to stash their merchandise. Frequently no such legal parking places could be found as the streets of the Borgo are narrow and restrictions on street parking severe. Despite valiant efforts by Trieste's traffic police, the resultant haphazard bus parking led routinely to blocked traffic, especially impacting the already difficult maneuvers of city transit buses which have exchange points in and around the square and

the central railway station. Due to Trieste's extremely restrictive topography, this notorious bottleneck could not be bypassed by normal commercial and commuter traffic. Without doubt, the role of the shopper buses was overblown in the reporting of this chaotic development but it is quite clear that an already chronic situation was made much worse. By the efforts of the Borgo merchants' association and the election of a more liberal mayor in November 1993, room for some buses was found around the Sala Tripovich, just west of the station. While this helped ease the congestion problem, it also spread the trash and sanitation problem, as seen below.

### **Air Pollution**

Trieste is recognized as having one of the worst air pollution problems among Italian cities. Its location at the head of the Adriatic Sea and jammed up against the steep escarpment of the high karst plateau frequently gives rise, especially under certain winter conditions, to days when pollutants in the air greatly exceed acceptable levels. By regulation, under these emergencies, selected segments of the city are temporarily closed to traffic, and vehicle circulation is limited to odd-even alternate days, based on the last digit of a vehicle's license plate. As vehicles with non-Italian license plates are excluded from this ordinance, such emergencies did not restrict the buses from the East. Most of the Eastern European buses used by the shoppers tended to be in questionable condition with their diesel engines contributing to this pollution problem, especially in cold weather when the bus drivers tended to run their engines to retain heat in the buses for themselves and for the rotating shoppers. Again, while it is impossible to calculate with any accuracy the contribution made by the shopper buses to the level

of air pollution under these conditions, the buses were very visible evidence to Triestini of adding to the pollution problem while they suffered by losing the right to use their own vehicles.

### **Trash Disposal**

As already stated, as they made their several runs back with stuffed holdalls to stash a load of shopping into their respective vehicles, the shoppers needed to reduce the bulk-weight of their purchases so that they were able to carry more and to have enough storage space. The packaging discarded daily from this compression process carried out by over two thousand shoppers on merchandise valued at almost USD \$200,000 was of enormous proportions, especially as it was quite site specific, on the sidewalks and streets of the Borgo and especially concentrated around the parked buses, on the street in the vicinity of Piazza della Libertà and in the Sala Tripcovich parking area. A fleet of city trash collection trucks had to be employed every afternoon in an attempt to clean up the streets prior to the onset of the evening rush hour. From 1993 to 1996, opera performances, normally held in the famous Teatro Verdi, located well to the southwest off the corso Cavour, had to be held in the Sala Tripcovich due to extensive renovations on the Verdi. Hence, on opera nights, the elite of Trieste were frequently forced to negotiate a route from their cars parked legally at night on the corso Cavour and in the parking garage north of the Sala and west of the station, through mounds of uncollected trash and worse left by the shoppers—another very visible and annoying reminder to the upper strata of Trieste society of the negative impact of the shoppers on the city's quality of life.

### **Public Sanitation**

As in most Italian cities, public sanitation services are virtually non-existent in the Borgo. The shoppers had left home in the early hours of the morning, had no toilet facilities on board their buses, ate a picnic breakfast on the bus before arrival, spent the morning shopping, eating a picnic lunch on the run, and then returned to their vehicles for the journey home. Clearly some relief of personal needs were essential. Without the facilities, the inevitable commonly occurred in the gutters and sidewalks especially around the parked buses, whose bulk offered some privacy. Local merchants had been willing to pay for at least half the cost of providing sanitation facilities, but civil authorities, fearing this would only serve to encourage more shoppers, did not support such a provision, even after the administration passed into the hands of a more liberal regime. For the opera buffs, stepping through trash was one thing but human waste was something else!

### **Crime**

Inevitably, as this phenomenon became routine, many of the shoppers became experienced frequent travelers with ever increasing familiarity with Trieste and its patterns of life. Many established links in the city that went well beyond the purchasing of goods twice a week for resale at home. Several, using Trieste as a gateway to the West, also became involved in a variety of illegal activities such as arms and drug smuggling, moving stolen car parts and organizing prostitution. The period of maximum shopper activity coincided with the conflict in Bosnia. This conflict and the related embargo on Serbia generated a high level of arms smuggling throughout the Balkans and some of this activity was channeled through

Trieste. Also Trieste has long been an entry point for illicit drugs from eastern Europe and the shopper bus trips occasionally provided easy cover with guaranteed scheduled access on a regular basis for moving small arms and drugs. Given the required mix of skills necessary for a successful buying trip, about half of the shoppers were female, mostly young women in their twenties and thirties. The Italian police believed, and with some good reason, that East European mafias were routinely using the cover of bus shoppers to move their prostitutes around between their original locations in the east to various centers in Western Europe by funneling them through Trieste. And even beyond the criminality discussed above, the bus shopping activity also served to allow people to enter Italy unrecorded and thus stay for unlimited periods without permission. Triestini tended to exaggerate the role of the bus shoppers in contributing to these illegal activities in their attempts to shut off or at least cut down the level of this phenomenon. Nevertheless, the authorities regarded the dangers seriously and the shoppers were open to constant harassment.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Several major points can be made in summary. This Trieste borderland shopper phenomenon was not a chance happening. Created by the comparative advantage of the initially steep gradient at the Italian-Central European interface between free market forces and as yet poorly developed consumer economies, it was a well-organized yet fairly spontaneous entrepreneurial enterprise. It created a temporary geography by which a retail distribution system centered on Trieste was linked to a multinational region of Central Europe defined by the four to six hour travel isochrone to Trieste.

The system contained about 100 Italian retailers—locals concentrated in permanent locations and non-locals with their itinerant stalls—all located in one relatively small part of the city, the Borgo; several thousand Central European shopper-tourists, including a hard core of perhaps 1500 full-time professionals, whose work was to travel to buy, transport and resell the purchases at a minimum overhead cost; a very diffused transportation industry based on the chartering of buses for routine round trips of from 400 to 900 kilometers on a daily scale; and a network of insatiable consumers in Central Europe to which the goods were diffused.

Clearly, the routinization of this cross-border semi-legal phenomenon had a widespread impact for several years, particularly on the nexus of activity, Trieste. The evidence that very negative effects were felt on the quality of the public environment and on the normal functioning of the city is persuasive. Public opinion in Trieste has understandably followed a very nationalistic Italian line, given the city's experiences this century. This frequently translates into strong prejudices against Slavic neighbors. The habits of the daily invaders from the East did nothing to offset this attitude. Even after the election in late 1993 of a left-center mayor following more liberal and constructive policies toward neighboring states, there could be little easing up on the city's determination to cut down on the number of shoppers given the mood of the electorate. On the other hand, vested interests in ensuring that this activity continued as long as the entrepreneurial efforts were justified by opportunities for profit remained considerable and prevailed.

Italian tourism statistics concerning country of origin and tourist per-capita spending were

certainly badly skewed by this activity. One must be somewhat cynical about the findings of any academic or public policy studies based on them. Here, we do **not** have a measure of the relative prosperity of leisure time of the tourist's country of origin, nor of the competitive attractiveness of northeastern Italy as an international tourism magnate. There are none of the normal spin-off spending habits from tourism on such items as food, lodging, gasoline or entertainment. Rather, we have hard-working blue-collar international traders in a narrow range of goods, linking supply from one economic system to demand in another.

One can speculate that Austria's entrance in 1995 into the European Union now gives its urban centers closer to home bases of these shopper-tourists an intervening opportunity, which has led, in part, to a decline in the Trieste activity. On the other hand, the successful termination of the Bosnian conflict and the potential for improved Croat-Serb relations could lead to improved opportunities for participation in shopping activities based in Trieste to regions of eastern Croatia, western Serbia and northwestern Bosnia, albeit at a much smaller scale than at the mid-1990s level (Figure 1).

Given developments of the past few years and predictions for the first years of the new century, it seems more than likely that we will continue to see versions of the Trieste shopping phenomenon appear periodically in market centers on the western edge of the shifting borderland between the enlarging European Union and the ex-socialist states to the east, still struggling to establish viable market economies. As the Schengen process and EU enlargement remain co-driving forces in Europe, perhaps we shall witness a series of Trieste-like developments over time, migrating in successive steps eastward.

As Newman and Paasi have recently noted, the renewed interest in boundary studies and particularly the focus of border landscapes as a fruitful area within diverse academic fields, has been driven in part by territorial transformation at the global scale and the deinstitutionalization of territories in Eastern Europe (5, p. 186). The next decade would seem a most propitious time to pursue the links between borderlands and tourism of any kind in east-central Europe.

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FIGURE 1

Distances to Trieste from Central Europe.



FIGURE 2

Photo of borderland shopper bus from Hungary illegally parked on Piazza della Libertà, Trieste in mid-morning, March 1994. Note the sleeping bags and blankets piled onto the front seats.



FIGURE 3

Environs of Piazza della Libertà, Trieste.

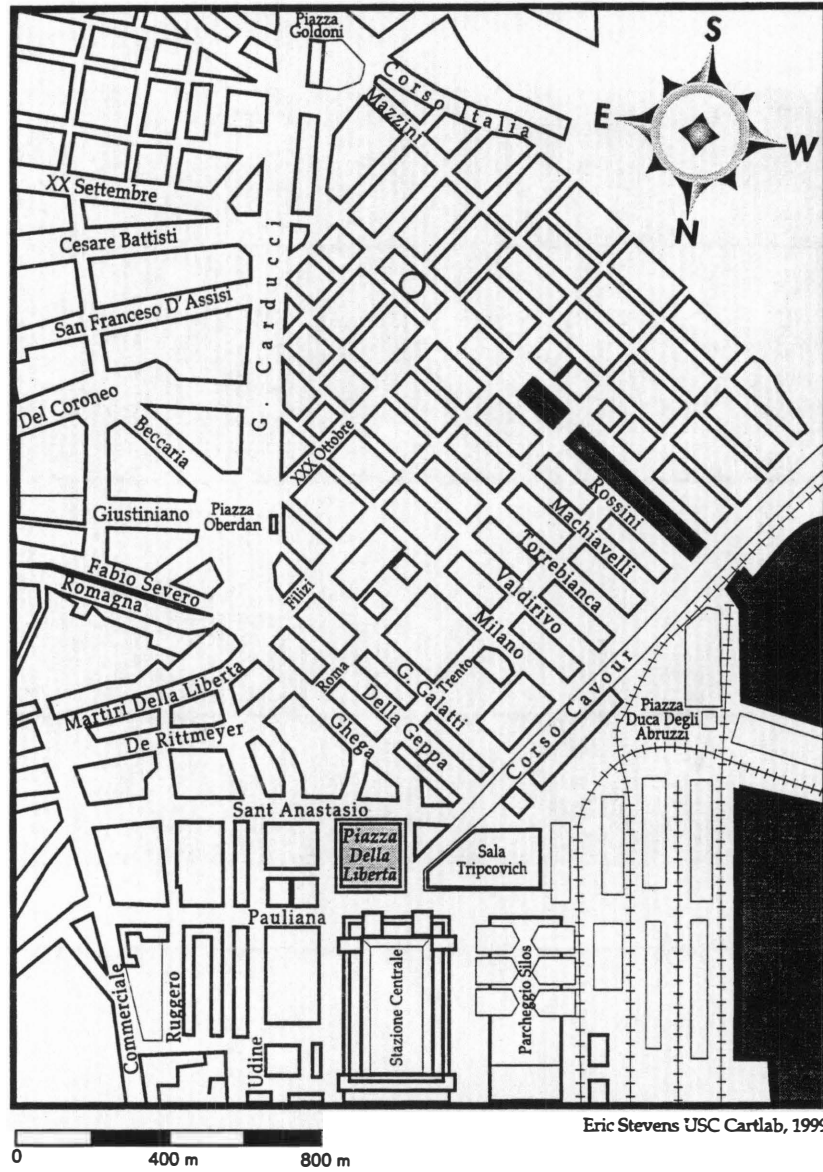




FIGURE 4

Photo taken in parking area between Sala Tripovich and the Central Railway Station, late morning, March 1994. Note Italian customs police inspecting the documents of a eastern shopper who has arrived by car while colleagues of both the police and shopper observe at a distance.



FIGURE 5

Photo taken among the itinerant market stalls in middle of the Piazza della Libertà, morning, March 1994. Note the particular type of clothing on display and two eastern shoppers toting their heavy holdalls.



FIGURE 6

Photo taken in parking area of Sala Tripcovich, late morning, March 1994. Note these female shoppers sorting and repacking their purchases before loading them into the luggage space of the bus from Oslava, the Czech Republic. The rear door of the panel truck on the left carries a Hungarian license plate.

