

Fascist Monumentality in Bolzano and Trieste: Can Public History Help to Deal with it?

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Abstract When the multicultural regions of Trieste and Bolzano became Italian, the liberal state followed by the Fascist regime imposed an ‘italianisation’ of the ‘allogeni’ and of the spaces using monumentality and architecture. After the Second World War, both regions proposed Public History projects to try to appease tensions embodied by remaining Fascist monuments. The paper, by presenting several multimedia public history projects and analysing the link between local powers, inhabitants and the role of historians in the memory-making processes, wants to ask how Public History can be useful in dealing with the remains of Fascist monuments.

Keywords Fascism. Architecture. Public history. De-fascistisation. Trieste. Bolzano.

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1 Introduction

Fascist Italy is the state that has the most politically invested architecture in Europe. It has been a part of the politic conduct by the regime, and it invests urban landscape with recognisable aesthetics. Architecture is an instrument of power from which the consensus of masses is reached and it participates to the totalitarisation process of society (Nicoloso 2008, 7). The “stone Fascism” is the most indelible imprint that Benito Mussolini left on Italian soil (Gentile 2007, 3) and in fact, from 1945 to today, the fascist period has cast a long, indeterminate, shadow over Italian culture and politics. Hannah Malone wrote that “Fascism is an absent presence in Italy, as its memory is alive, but distorted, fragmented and obscured” (Malone 2017, 445).

A monument is an artefact that radiates, causes reactions around it in the public space, it can dissolve in normalcy but also sometimes become, once again, a conflictual political object. If history has for several decades already focused on understanding the conditions in which this monumentality was conceived and implemented, it cannot fully solve the problem of the place of fascist monuments in nowadays public spaces. Public history, however, is interested in history made outside the university and is particularly attentive to the public uses of history. This paper aims to analyse how Public History was used in the cities of Trieste and Bolzano and how it can contribute to appease tensions linked to the presence of fascist monuments remains in the public space. This paper will first analyse how the fascist regime intervened - considering both political precise measures in the border context and architecture - in the cities of Trieste and Bolzano. Then will deal with the after Second World War context, how the cities constructed the heritage of fascist monumentality. Finally, it will present how Public History has been used in Trieste and Bolzano by analysing a series of Public History projects realised since the beginning of 2010s.

2 Comparing Trieste and Bolzano

2.1 ‘Italianising’ the Minorities

The areas of Trieste and Bolzano had frequently been compared for the study of the First World War, as being the location of several battlefields. The exit process of the war means for the two cities to newly be a part of the Italian kingdom after the collapse of the multicultural Habsburg Empire. In Trieste’s area, Italian communities were mostly in urban centres, whereas hinterlands of the region were mostly inhabited by Slovenes and Croats. Nevertheless, Trieste and Gorizia

also included important Slovene communities, which made the cities strongly multicultural (Pupo 2011, 12). In Bolzano's area instead, the separation between the German and the Italian communities was clearly marked. Bolzano was, in a very important majority, inhabited by Germanophones (Di Michele 2004, 80). The Italian immigration really started during the fascist regime. Once Fascism came to power, it operated a violent denationalisation of the German and Slavic communities. In Bolzano, Fascism was an 'import phenomenon': the Bolzano March of October 2nd of 1922, which caused the removal of the city mayor Julius Perathoner, had been realised by Fascists coming from the Julian and Trentino areas. Trieste, instead, was the first Italian city to have an organised fascist *squadristo* as early as 1920 (Vinci 2009, 84). In fact,

far from being a mere reaction, the Fascist *squadristo* was a crystallisation of previous nationalistic radicalism in the new context of post-war (and post-imperial) crisis. (Bresciani 2017, 51)

The fascist regime very quickly introduced laws and reforms that particularly concerned the provinces of Bolzano and Trieste and that were part of the process of 'denationalisation' of the 'allogeneic' populations.

2.2 'Italianizing' Urban Spaces: Architecture and Monumentality

In the cities of Trieste and Bolzano, the fascist regime used architecture as a way to 'Italianise' urban public spaces. In Bolzano, Fascism planned an entirely new, 'Italian' quarter or even a new-town west of the river Talfer: with its broad streets and vast squares, it stands in clear contrast to the small and narrow spaces of the historic Tyrolean city centre. In Trieste, Fascism completely destroyed and restructured the old town, right behind the Piazza Unità, the main square of the city, creating several 'political' buildings such as the Casa del Fascio, which is right in front of the ancient Roman theatre excavated by the fascist regime in 1939.

The first buildings that were built demonstrate the interest of the fascist regime for the First World War. In Trieste the Lighthouse of Victory [fig. 1a], made by the triestine architect Arduino Berlam, was inaugurated in 1927, as well as the Monument to the fallen soldiers [fig. 1b] designed by the triestine sculptor Attilio Selva and the architect Enrico Del Debbio, from Tuscany, who designed the Foro Mussolini in Rome. The monument represents a dramatic war scene with five naked and muscular men. An inscription appears on the marble pedestal "Trieste | to the dead of the Liberation War | 1915-1918" which is linked to how the fascist regime in Trieste saw the First World War. The monument is placed on the San Giusto Hill which



Figure 1a The Victory Lighthouse in Trieste, designed by Italian architect Arduino Berlam. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

Figure 1b The Monument to the fallen soldier in Trieste. The sculptural group was designed by Attilio Selva, the covering by Enrico Del Debbio. Photo by the Author



Figure 2 The Monument of the Victory in Bolzano, designed by architect Marcello Piacentini and built between 1926 and 1928. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

dominates the whole city, just in front of the San Giusto Cathedral. It was inaugurated in 1935 during a very important ceremony where the King Victor Emmanuel III was present to officially inaugurate the monument.

In Bolzano the Monument of the Victory [fig. 2] was designed by Marcello Piacentini, one of the most important architects of the regime, which underlines the importance that has been given to this first monument of the fascist regime ever erected in Bolzano. The monument represents an arch dedicated to the victory of Italy over the Empire during the First World War. Inside the monument are the busts of Cesare Battisti, Damiano Chiesa and Fabio Filzi, Italian patriots, considered as heroes by the fascist regime. On the top of the monument, the inscription “Here at the border of the fatherland set down the banner. | From this point we educated the others to language, law and culture”, which directly aims the Germanophone community of Bolzano.

In both cities a Casa del Fascio (where are the local headquarters of the National Fascist Party) was built. The Casa del Fascio of Tri-

este [fig. 3a] was made by triestine architects Raffaello Battigelli and Ferruccio Spangaro. The town development plan of 1934 required the new Casa del Fascio be placed in a symbolic spot: near the hill of San Giusto, in front of the rediscovered Roman Theatre. It was also the first and largest modern building to be built on land freed from the demolition of the old city, which included the old medieval part of the city but also the Jewish district (Sardei 2008, 217). The works started in 1937 and the Casa del Fascio was inaugurated in 1942. The Casa del Fascio of Bolzano (1939-42) [fig. 3b] was part of the vast project of the city transformation by Fascism (Di Michele 2020, 159). To embellish the façade, the local sculptor Hans Piffrader was asked to create a bas-relief. The work is composed by 57 panels (Strobl 2015) and tells the history of Fascism triumphs, from the end of the First World War and the upheavals of the so-called 'red biennium' to the birth of the fascist movement, the seizure of power, the conquest of the empire, the participation in the Spanish civil war up to the image of a peaceful, rich and prosperous Italy.

Amongst other fascists artefacts in the public space, there is a new railway station [fig. 4] in Bolzano built between 1926 and 1928, whose style reminds the Novecento Milanese (Bevilaqua 2003; Giuntini 2017). Interesting is its relationship with the landscape and, specifically, with the Rosengarten/Catinaccio, a characteristic range of mountains in the Dolomites. Both the northern bell tower and the central hall of the station frame the mountains and the height of the building and the connecting wings take into account the landscape in the background, according to a detail clearly intended by Ettore Tolomei (Tragbar, Kossel 2018, 195-6). In Trieste, the University [fig. 5] designed by Raffaello Fagnoni and Umberto Nordio is an important example of how Fascism wanted to impose 'italianity' in the city, in fact the University has been called "the most beautiful and most Italian monument of the whole new Trieste, the one of Mussolini".¹ Benito Mussolini himself put the first stone of the future building during his visit to the city in September 1938. It is during this visit in Trieste that Mussolini announced the racial laws, underlining the importance of the city in the struggle for 'italianity' (De Sabbata 2008; Vinci 1997).

After the fall of Fascism in July 1943, from the 8th of September until the end of the war, both cities were occupied by the Third Reich.

¹ "L'Università supererà tutti i monumenti e costituirà il più bello e il più italiano degli edifici della nuova Trieste, quella di Mussolini". *Rivista Mensile della Città di Trieste*, 6, 1938. Archivio Generale del Comune di Trieste.



Figure 3a The ex-Casa del Fascio building in Trieste, now occupied by the police headquarters. Photo by the Author

Figure 3b The ex-Casa del Fascio in Bolzano, now a financial office building. Photo by the Author



Figure 4 Bolzano railway station, built between 1926 and 1928. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

Figure 5 The headquarters of the University of Trieste, designed by Raffaello Fagnoni and Umberto Nordio. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0

3 After the Second World War: Constructing the Heritage of Trieste and Bolzano Fascist Material Monumentality

3.1 Bolzano: The Struggle for the Autonomy and the Rights of the German Community

Bolzano starts its democratic process with the creation of the Südtiroler Volkspartei the 8th of May 1945, which have since the beginning the will to defend the rights of the Germanophone community after the violent 'denationalisation' operated during Fascism. The Südtiroler Volkspartei gives the push to a series of discussions for the autonomy of the province. On the 5th of September 1946, the Gruber-De Gasperi (names of the foreign minister of Austria, Karl Gruber and the prime minister of Italy, Alcide De Gasperi) Agreement was signed. The Agreement granted the German-speaking population the right to autonomy and to preserve its cultural identity and customs. It also recognised German and Italian as official languages. Germanophones also granted the right to return to their original German family names. Nevertheless, the Agreement was not fully accepted by the German community, and the 1950s saw, for example, the creation of the South Tyrolean Liberation Committee (Befreiungsausschuss Südtirol, BAS), a secessionist and terrorist organisation which aimed to achieve the right for self-determination for South Tyrol and the related secession from Italy via bomb attacks.

Fascist monuments are quite at the centre of polemics and materialise the tension between the two communities. For example, the Monument of the Victory remained used by the Italian community to commemorate the First World War right after the end of the Second World War. But the German community quickly questioned the presence of the fascist monument. Two voices were then in opposition: the one that considered the monument untouchable because it commemorated the (Italian) victims of the First World War and the one that wanted its destruction. There have been numerous public demonstrations organised by political movements and associations where the Monument of the Victory was the heart of the contestations until the 1st of October 1978, when a bomb exploded near the monument, which caused serious damages and after which the monument was fenced and in fact made inaccessible.

3.2 Trieste: The Struggle for Italianity

Trieste, after being occupied by the Yugoslavian forces for 43 days, from the 9th of June 1945 belonged to the 'A Zone' managed by the 'Allied Military Government of Occupied Territories' and became the

Free Territory of Trieste. During this period, Anglo-Americans reused some of the fascist buildings such as the ex-Casa del Fascio as headquarters. This situation was quite frequent, because there was no specific policy of 'de-fascistisation' to eliminate traces of the dictatorship from Italian cities (Arthurs 2015, 289; Carter, Martin 2017, 345) and because it fulfilled practical needs. Thus, major institutions continued to occupy buildings that were created under the regime, offering striking symbols of the 'continuity of the state' (Pavone 1995). Also, the TV or cinema news programmes created by Anglo-Americans often showed the city's most important monuments, including fascist monuments – such as the Monument of the fallen soldiers or the Lighthouse of Victory – but Fascism was never mentioned. In fact, in the Anglo-Americans' vision, those monuments were built to commemorate the First World War, so it was, in a certain way, more acceptable. As a consequence, the presence of fascist monuments remains was very rarely questioned.

In November 1953, violent manifestations and strikes started in Trieste against the authority of the Allied Military Government and in defence of Trieste's Italianity. The manifestations pushed the Allied Military Government, Italy and Yugoslavia to engage on a new peace treaty: on the 5th of October 1954, after eight months of discussions, the Memorandum of Understanding of London was signed. The treaty granted, amongst other things, the return of Trieste to Italy. The Treaty of Osimo, signed on the 10th November 1975 by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Italy, definitively set the borders between the two countries.

In this large context of struggle for the defence of Italianity carried out by some members of the (majoritarian) Italian community, fascist monuments quite kept their original symbolic purposes as being marks, 'proofs' of the Italianity of the city, and were rarely challenged.

The importance of the context in which the uses of monuments take place is clearly demonstrated by the examples of Bolzano and Trieste. The assimilation Fascism/identity lies at the heart of a differentiated reception of the regime's architecture. So far, we can say that in Bolzano fascist monuments were at the heart of sometimes violent manifestations mostly linked to the claim of Germanophone populations for autonomy, which necessarily pushed to reactions of local authorities. In Trieste instead, we can see that fascist monuments, assimilated with a challenged – but victorious – Italianity, tend to very quickly melt in the urban landscape, and not being the heart of contestations between the different linguistic communities. These constructions of fascist monuments' heritage since the end of the Second World War clearly influenced the Public History projects proposed in the two cities.

4 What Can Public History Do with Remains of Fascist Monumentality?

4.1 Public History in Italy

The Italian Republic's moral basis is the Resistance and anti-Fascism. However, beginning in the late 1960s, and with a subsequent acceleration (especially at the end of the Cold War, with the collapse of the Italian Communist Party and the fall of Italy's first republic), the 'anti-fascist' narrative was challenged by a wave of revisionist historiography, with its leading proponent Renzo de Felice, who questioned the totalitarian aspect of Mussolini's regime and emphasised consensus instead of coercion (Arthurs, Ebner, Ferris 2017, 3). The crisis of anti-Fascism facilitated the rise of Right-wing parties, such as Forza Italia and Lega Nord (Malone 2017, 447). Revisionism drew the myth of 'italiani brava gente' to present the regime as harmless (Corner 2005, 177-9; Fogu 2006, 147) and contributed to relativise fascist crimes. Around the same time as the 'post-fascist' party Alleanza Nazionale entered Silvio Berlusconi's coalition government in 1994, the historical narrative was being distorted to restore Mussolini's reputation through books, films and TV programmes that presented a trivialised and nostalgic view of the fascist period (Bosworth, Dogliani 2001, 7; Foot 2009, 122).

The end of Berlusconi's government coincides with the arrival of Public History concept in Italy. The 37th issue of *Memoria & Ricerca* journal, edited by Serge Noiret, entitled "Public History. Pratiche nazionali e identità globale", was published in 2011. In 2016, the Italian Association of Public History was officially created with support of the International Federation of Public History and the Giunta Centrale per gli Studi Storici. In 2017, during the 1st Congress of the Association in Ravenna, Serge Noiret was elected its president. The AIPH's manifesto declares that Public History is an asset because:

The growth of a full and conscious citizenship passes through a more widespread knowledge of the past that allows the overcoming of prejudices and fears that are multiplying in the contemporary world. The practices of public history offer opportunities and tools for the critical understanding of the historical contexts and processes in progress, helping to face their complexity and avoiding solutions dictated by rancour or alleged 'identity' contrasts. For all this, public history is a precious resource for social cohesion, fostering understanding and encounter between people of different origins, of different generations and with sometimes conflicting memories.²

² *Il Manifesto della Public History italiana*, which can be downloaded from <https://aiph.hypotheses.org/3193>. If not otherwise stated, all translations are by the Author.



Figure 6 The brochure of the city of Bolzano, entitled *Percorso tra architettura e fascismo*

Linking Public History with the “learning of citizenship”, or the “overcoming of prejudices and fears” is particularly important when dealing with multicultural cities like Trieste and Bolzano, and that is really what Public History has to offer in those two contexts. In the following part, we are going to consider two kinds of Public History projects realised in Trieste and Bolzano: guided tours and museums.

4.2 Following the Traces of Fascist Monumentality: Guided Tours

From the ending of 2000's, both of the cities of Trieste and Bolzano proposed guided tours brochures to discover architecture and monuments from the fascist period. Bolzano's mayor was Luigi Spagnoli (from 2005 to 2015), elected with a coalition which brought togeth-

Itinerario dell'architettura razionalista

Rationalist architecture itinerary
Route - razionalistische Architektur
Pot racionalistične arhitekture

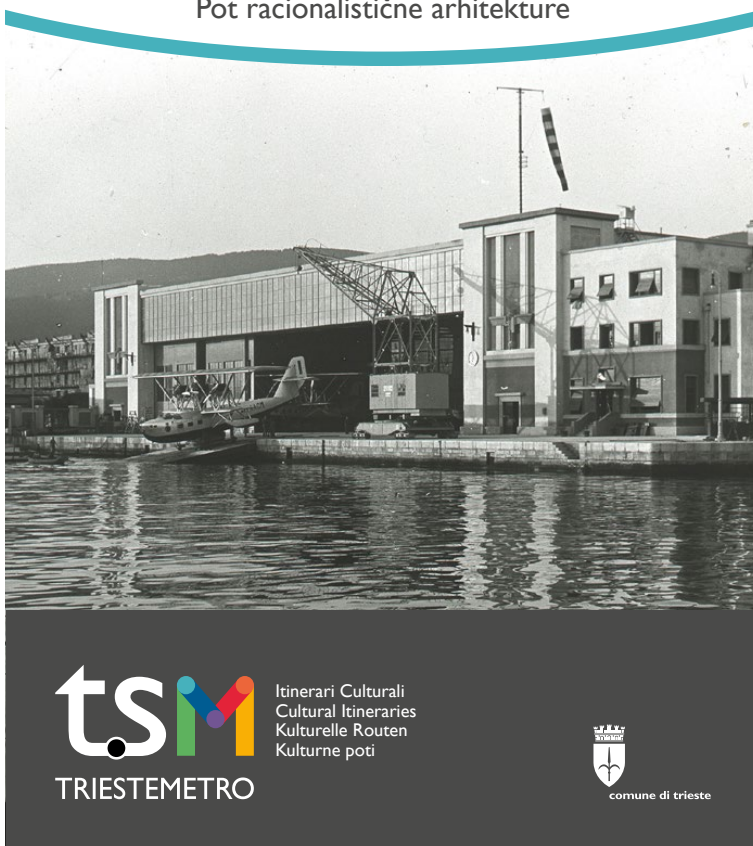


Figure 7 The 30-page brochure of the city of Trieste, entitled *Itinerario nell'architettura razionalista*

er Italian parties from the left and the centre (like the Democrazia e Libertà - La Margherita, or the Socialisti Democratici Italiani) but also the Südtiroler Volkspartei and the Ladins list. In Trieste, Roberto Dipiazza was the mayor (from 2001 to 2011) with a coalition which assembled a series of Italian centre, right and far-right parties like Unione del Centro, Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord.

The guided tours brochures are very different from one city to another especially in the vocabulary employed in titles and main texts which, in a certain way, concord with the political ideologies of the two municipalities. In Bolzano, the brochure (edited in 2007) is entitled “Percorso tra architettura e fascismo” (Tour between architecture and Fascism) [fig. 6], in Trieste, the brochure (also edited in 2007), is entitled “Itinerario dell’architettura razionalista” (Itinerary of rationalist architecture) [fig. 7], so from the outset we can see where the accent is put.

In Trieste, the brochure³ presents eleven monuments and buildings all erected from 1927 to 1942. In the whole brochure the word ‘Fascism’ is only mentioned three times: in the presentation of the itinerary (“The essentialised neoclassicism and the rationalist architecture of the fascist period in Trieste are of great interest”), in the description of Bagno Ausonia presented as “a very popular historic beach resort, in a vaguely fascist retro style” (we can underline the use of the word ‘vaguely’) and in the description of the University: “The construction of the university started in 1938. Designed by architects Raffaello Fagnoni and Umberto Nordio, it follows the fascist style of the 1920s with references to the classic period and italianity”. The use of the word ‘italianity’ and also the mentioned reference to the classic period is interesting but not more explained in the description. In all others descriptions, the accent is put on architectural and artistic aspects, such as “[t]he building has a trapezoidal plan and has five floors. At the top, angular towers give an austere and institutional appearance to the white limestone building” for the description of the ex-Casa del Fascio, or, for the Lighthouse of Victory: “68 meters high, it rests on the bastion of the Austrian fortress Kressich (built in 1854). The lighthouse commemorates the fallen of the Great War with the statue of the Unknown Sailor by Giovanni Mayer, and the anchor of the destroyer Audace”. There is no mention of the two lictor fasces present side by side of the Unknown sailor statue which have been removed in 1943, but whose marks we can still see today.

In Trieste, brochures are focused on the artistic aspect rather than the historical one, in Bolzano instead, the visitor can expect a tour dedicated to an architecture developed during the 20th century linked to a political regime: Fascism. The brochure presents 28 monuments and buildings all erected during the fascist period. Its aim is really to tell the history of the city during Fascism, using monuments, by assembling both historical and artistic descriptions such as the description of Druso Stadium:

³ The brochure is also available on <https://www.triestemetro.eu/itinerari/itinerario/20/itinerario-dell-architettura-razionalista>.

The sports stadium was inaugurated in 1931. The name is a reference to the Roman leader Drusus, who in 15 BC conquered the area of Bolzano. It is one of many examples of fascist instrumentalisation of Roman history.

Or the ex-Casa del Fascio:

The building for the headquarters of the fascist party, the so-called 'Casa Littoria', was built between 1939 and 1942. The façade is slightly curved outwards, thus making it a pendant to the concave façade of the Palazzo del Tribunale in front of it. The building has a trapezoidal plan with an inner courtyard bordered on the sides by colonnades that hold the so-called *arengario*, the balcony from which the party officials held their meetings.

4.3 Investing Monumentality: Museums *in situ*

In Bolzano the monuments erected during the fascist regime crystallised the tensions between the Germanophone and the Italian community. Those remains of fascist monuments cause the organisation of numerous demonstrations in the public space and a multitude of debates. In the beginning of 2009, for example, some monuments of the fascist regime were in the centre of a polemic, where especially the Schützen, members of the association that wants to defend the cultures and traditions of Südtirol, wanted the removal of the Monument to the Alpini. At that time, Luis Durnwalder, provincial governor, member of the Südtiroler Volkspartei, declared "[t]he bas-relief of the ex-Casa del Fascio and the Monument to the Alpini do not have any justifications anymore".⁴ Durnwalder suggested that the bas-relief would be put in a museum and also that the fascist monument to the Alpini could be replaced by a new monument that commemorate Alpini but erected inside of a military barracks (instead of in the public space). For Durnwalder, the Monument to the Victory must not be destroyed, but "placed in its historical context".

In the beginning of 2011, three historians, Andrea Di Michele, Hans Heiss and Hannes Obermair, launched a petition which wanted to solve the tensions provoked by fascist monuments. The petition underlined that the monuments must no longer be used either as "identity elements or as an opportunity to assert counter-identity", and invited to "finally historicise in a profound and effective way"

⁴ "Alto Adige: Durnwalder, spostare i monumenti di Mussolini e degli Alpini". ANSA, 10 febbraio 2009.

the monuments.⁵ The petition disagrees on the idea of removing the monuments because it would create “new emotional waves, making it impossible to use them in an educational point of view and making a real take away”. Following this petition, Bolzano’s County and the City of Bolzano decided to gather a group of historians and archivists⁶ from both of the language communities whose purpose was to create a permanent exhibition inside of the Monument alla Vittoria.

In 2014, the city of Bolzano officially opened the exhibition inside of the Monument alla Vittoria. The exhibition is in the undergrounds of the monument and uses different documents (from videos to posters in a modern scenography) to present the history of the construction and the life of the monument, adding reflections on how it has been perceived from the inhabitants or used by the different political regimes that succeeded until today, but also to tell and reflect on the history of Bolzano during Fascism and the Nazi occupation. Outside the monument there is also an object, a LED light ring that circled one of the lictorian fasces, where the title of the exhibition is written. The aim is to notify any person that comes along the monument that there is something, that the monument has not been left as it is. The exhibition has been received in a very positive way from the inhabitants, and also from the Academy. It received a Special Commendation (the European Museum of the Year Award in 2016) that said the exhibition was the example of “what can be done with triumphalist architectural heritage that exists throughout the world”, and “a highly courageous and professional initiative to promote humanism, tolerance and democracy” (Di Michele 2020, 164).

Regarding the bas-relief of the ex-Casa del Fascio, debates around its possible removal were contemporary to the creation of the Monument of the Victory exhibition. In 2011, after the petition of the historians, a call for ideas on how to make the bas-relief no longer directly visible was published. It is finally on November 5th, 2017 that was inaugurated the work proposed by Arnold Holzknacht and Michele Bernardi (local artists), who provided for the placement on the bas-relief Hannah Arendt’s phrase “No one has the right to obey”, reproduced in the three languages of the province of Bolzano, German, Italian and Ladin.

In Trieste, some fascist monuments are generating several debates among historians, such as the Museum of Risorgimento which is in the Casa del Combattente near to the Oberdan sacrarium in the

⁵ The petition is available online: <https://storiaeregione.eu/it/news-eventi/leggi/risolviamo-insieme-il-problema-della-monumentalistica-fascista>.

⁶ Andrea Di Michele (historian of contemporary history), Hannes Obermair (historian of medieval history), Christine Roilo (archivist), Ugo Soragni (architect), Silvia Spada (art historian).

Oberdan square. The museum was opened in 1934 and its collection was added to the one present in the former (and smaller) museum of the Risorgimento in Trieste, opened in the early 1920s, and comprising a series of private archives and a few objects (Baioni 2006, 81-2). The new location of the museum in the city-centre and near the old cell where Guglielmo Oberdan was jailed gave a new impulse to the figure of Oberdan as a hero and martyr for Fascism. The museum presents the history of Risorgimento in Trieste – with a focus on the Irredentism aspect – and also the First World War with a series of objects, sculptures, paintings. All themes are presented following the fascist rhetoric: there is no mention of Slavic communities, or how violent and traumatic the First World War was for civilians; it presents instead a ‘combative’ spirit. Today, the museum is managed by the City Council and, from 2018, by the Lega Nazionale, an association created in Trieste in 1891, which defends the “italianity of Trieste”.⁷ Almost nothing has changed since the opening and on the museum’s website the word ‘Fascism’ is not mentioned once nor the period is explained.⁸ When I asked about this aspect to several persons in charge (from the City Council and the Lega Nazionale), they explained that the accent is put on artistic aspects: the building was designed by Umberto Nordio, a very important Triestine architect, and hosts Carlo Sbisà’s works of art (which some of them have lictor’s fasces, still today). Local historians disagree on what to do with this museum. Gaetano Dato, for example, underlined that it is a “fascist museum” but he thinks that it must be left as it is, because it allows to show how Fascism used to talk about the Risorgimento and the First World War (Dato 2012, 99-105). For others, it is impossible to leave it as it is and how the Risorgimento period and the First World War are represented (that is according to a fascist lense) must be explained to visitors.

In Trieste, there are two museums that have the credit to talk about the fascist and the nazi period in the city: the museum of the Risiera San Sabba and the museum of the Jewish community “Carlo e Vera Wagner”.

The museum of the Risiera San Sabba is a museum created inside a 19th century factory which functioned during World War II as a nazi concentration camp for the detention and killing of political prisoners, and a transit camp for Jewish people, most of whom were then deported to Auschwitz. The camp also had cremation facilities, the only ones built inside a concentration camp in Italy, and were destroyed before it was liberated (Matta 2012; Fölkel 1979). In 1965, the Risiera San Sabba became a national monument and the muse-

⁷ As the association presents itself on its website: <http://leganazionale.it/>.

⁸ <https://www.museodelrisorgimentotrieste.it/>.

um was inaugurated in 1975. The whole *in situ* museum is a combination of exhibition spaces dedicated to the transmission and pedagogy and to the “historical” spaces of the Risiera such as prisoners’ cells, which have been left intact. The exhibition spaces have been recently redesigned in a new scenography, using modern technologies adapted to museums, such as videos and sound systems.

The museum of the Jewish Community “Carlo e Vera Wagner” was opened in 1993, in a building where between the end of the eighteenth and the end of the nineteenth century there was an Israelite hospital which welcomed thousands of refugees fleeing first from tsarist anti-Semitism then from Nazism. The Jewish Agency that assisted Jewish emigration to Israel was also located in the building (Wiesenfeld, Cusin, Haddad 1995). Between 2014 and 2015, the whole museum was refurbished. The museum tells the story of the Jewish community in Trieste since the Middle Ages until today, showing objects and documents of the Triestine Jewish community, and gives an important space to the fascist and nazi periods in the city and their consequences for the everyday life of the community.

5 Conclusion

Since 2015, monuments are investing major social debates. Movements for decolonising urban spaces, such as “Rhodes must fall” in South Africa, the Black Lives Matter movement, or the debate on the Mussolini’s obelisk in Rome (Arthurs 2019) caused a renewed interest from the public at large (and not only historians) in questioning the influence of monuments in the public space in the whole occidental world. However, as Thomas Cauvin, professor of Public History in the University of Luxembourg and President of the International Federation of Public History, said to his students: “the first thing to do when dealing with problematic, sensitive monuments is to foster public discussion to see if the monument is unwanted and by whom, and in any case, removing the monument without discussion does not solve the problem”.

In Bolzano, Public History projects have been initiated by the city, in collaboration with local historians, archivists, and inhabitants. The autonomous region and the city understood that those projects and, behind them, the work of explaining contemporary history were necessary to appease the tension between communities. However, it is clear that this has been made possible because the German community has a majority, so its revendications have a real echo for local authorities. In Trieste, fascist monuments have not been as questioned as in Bolzano. In fact, fascist monuments in Trieste quite melted in the urban landscape. But it does not erase the tensions and interrogations about the remains of fascist monuments in the public space. If Public History has been really used in Bolzano, it is not the case of

Trieste, yet. But the creation of a Public History course held by professor Tullia Catalan in autumn 2020 at the University of Trieste, particularly focused on Public History in a border context and attended by students from all over Italy, will certainly have allowed new questions and new ideas on how to transmit the history of the fascist period in Trieste, through the presence of fascist monuments.

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