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A City without Territory. Trade, Tourism and the Use of the Sea: the Case of Trieste

Una città senza territorio. Commercio, turismo e uso del mare a Trieste

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Abstract. This contribution offers a glimpse into recent developments in the administrative, economic and political history of Trieste, within the framework of the local, regional and – because of the town's unique circumstances – international communities. In the first parts of this work, the identification of the city with Italy's eastern border is retraced, following the historical events of the second post-war period, a phase in which Trieste was one of the sites of the confrontation, also from a commercial point of view, between Western democracies and the socialist countries of the Eastern Bloc. From the nineteen-sixties onwards, the city had to re-establish its position both within the autonomous region of which it is now the capital – Friuli Venezia Giulia – and in terms of its relationships with the neighbouring countries of Slovenia and Croatia, which are now members of the European Union alongside Italy. This new situation has highlighted the uncertain nature of Trieste's hinterland by reason of its limited administrative and political power. As is described in the second part of this work, the city had to redefine an economic system in which critical issues such as the absence of major manufacturing industry, the reduced activity of its port, and a trading network stuck in the local dimension have led to the image of Trieste being reconsidered from the point of view of an outside observer, and to a focus on tourism, also through, and as a consequence of, a new and different use of the sea. In this way, we will see how the redevelopment and gentrification of central areas such as the Cavana district or the triangle of via Torino has progressed at the same pace as the private sporting initiative known as the Barcolana, whose economic success and its promotion of the image of Trieste have contributed to remodelling the relationship between the city and the sea, that is, between its inhabitants and the resource upon which Trieste built its fortune.

Keywords: Trieste, trade, tourism, Adriatic Sea, Italian Eastern Border.

Riassunto. Nel presente contributo si intende ragionare sull'evoluzione recente della storia amministrativa, politica ed economica di Trieste, analizzandone le condizioni e discutendone gli effetti sulla comunità locale, regionale e, considerate le peculiarità del caso, internazionale. Nelle prime parti di questo lavoro, si ricostruisce l'identificazione della città con il confine orientale dell'Italia, in seguito alle note vicende storiche del secondo dopoguerra, fase in cui Trieste è uno dei luoghi della contrapposizione, anche commerciale, fra democrazie occidentali e paesi socialisti. Dagli anni Sessanta del secolo scorso, la città ha dovuto reinventarsi un ruolo sia all'interno della Regione

autonoma di cui è divenuta capoluogo – il Friuli Venezia Giulia – sia nelle relazioni con le aree vicine di Slovenia e Croazia, con le quali oggi condivide la appartenenza alla Unione Europea. Questo nuovo stato delle cose ha evidenziato l'incertezza del suo territorio di riferimento, in ragione della limitatezza dello spazio amministrativo e politico. Come si vedrà nelle parti successive del contributo, la città ha dovuto ridefinire un sistema economico in cui criticità come la mancanza di un apparato manifatturiero di rilievo, la ridimensionata attività del porto, una rete di commercio rinchiusa nella dimensione locale hanno condotto alla rielaborazione dell'immagine della città in funzione dell'esterno, del turismo, anche attraverso e in conseguenza di un nuovo e diverso rapporto con il mare. In questo percorso, si vedrà come alla riqualificazione e la gentrificazione di aree centrali come il quartiere di Cavana o il triangolo di via Torino si affianchi la crescita di un'iniziativa privata a carattere sportivo, la Barcolana, il cui successo economico e di promozione dell'immagine di Trieste contribuisce a rimodulare il rapporto tra la città e il mare, cioè tra gli abitanti e la risorsa sulla quale Trieste ha costruito la propria fortuna.

Parole chiave: Trieste, commercio, turismo, mare Adriatico, confine orientale italiano.

1. Introduction

The analysis of the case of Trieste in the relationship between city, territory and consumption must necessarily take into account the administrative development of an urban reality with unique features which are difficult to compare with other cases in Italy. The beginning of its new life as an Italian city – which dates back to 1954 – will be the starting point of a complex story of relationships with the national territory but also in the context of international dynamics. This work examines the various phases and moments of transitions through which Trieste's age-old central role in Mediterranean sea-traffic and trade routes was replaced by a new status as a border town which turned itself into the shop-window of the West for consumers from behind the Iron Curtain, as well as the administrative centre of the new Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (from 1964). Upon the subsequent end of this economic phase, those critical issues identified in the absence of a respectable manufacturing system and in a reduced port activity were accompanied by the stagnation in the trading network, in which the prospects for growth were mainly local. In the recent decades, Trieste has thus reworked its image to please the visitor's eye, focusing on tourism and concentrating its efforts towards the redevelopment of degraded areas – such as the Cavana district, through the URBAN Community Initiative – the invention of new spaces for the leisure activities (as is the case

of the commercial conversion of the triangle of via Torino), and a wider range of hotel accommodation. The revival of the waterfront, though reduced, being limited by the road system that separates the city from the water, has been led by a private sporting initiative (Barcolana) whose media, and consequently promotional, success has brought about a change in attitudes towards the use of the sea.

2. Return to homeland

When it returned to Italy permanently, Trieste did not have a well-defined role to play; after being the major port of the Austrian Empire it was now the last port at the top end of the Adriatic Sea and had lost its strategic position for the hinterland. After the end of the regional centrality attributed by the Italian and fascist administration, after the war and the risk of becoming part of the German Reich or the Yugoslav Socialist State, the city had to submit to occupation by the Allies (Anglo-American for the city; Yugoslav for its hinterland in north-western Istria) (Apih 1988; Verrocchio 2004; Caturuzza 2007; Zilli 2013). The choice of Trieste as the tail end of Europe, together with Berlin, yet worthy of a continued occupation, brought the considerable advantage of keeping it at the center of international political attention. This paved the way for funding from the ERP (the European Recovery Program, better known as the Marshall Plan) thanks to which the local manufacturing industry was rebuilt, the shipyards were reopened and the maritime business resumed, addressing the issue of mass unemployment (Mellinato 2005; Verrocchio 2006). At the same time, the economic flows from Italy continued, preserving the national cultural primacy, and the local university became the only one in the Italian system which received funding beyond its borders.

Nationalism in the new Yugoslavia had forced tens of thousands of Italian citizens to abandon their homes and take refuge in Italy, mostly by way of Trieste (Colummi et al. 1980; Volk 2004; Altin Badurina 2018). Their presence served as a tool to exert political pressure locally, nationally and internationally. The strengthening of an Italian identity in the city, which was made up by thousands of refugees who had become Italian citizens in 1920, provided solid support to oppose the Yugoslav designs for annexation in the Northern Adriatic (D'Amelio 2015; Capano 2016; Maggi 2019). The resources, however, were unable to sustain a demographic increase of almost a quarter of the urban population and those arrivals translated into a parallel hemorrhage of the native Triestines, many of whom emigrated. (Apih 1988; Sapelli 1990; Fait 1999).

After 1954, with the loss of that central position that had guaranteed its economic fortunes, Trieste was pushed to the sidelines of the West, at the southern edge of the “Iron Curtain” (as Winston Churchill called it) and was left seeking new points of reference, both external and internal. The novelty came with the closure of the connections with the surrounding territories, in particular with Istria which, in the previous phase and especially during the Fascist era, had been the ideal region for fostering relationships, and where the new administrators – the Yugoslavs – were the same who had driven the *new* Triestines away from their lands. A prohibition of any *political* contact was linked to an *emotional* refusal, which isolated the city in the Cold War era. The only open direction was towards the west and the provinces of Gorizia and Udine, together with which Trieste was supposed to make up the Autonomous Region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, the only region among those with a special status yet to come into being, which did not happen until 1964 (Zilli 2019).

3. The loss of the sea

The new condition finally saw the birth of the Region, whose creation took ten years nevertheless, and the recognition of its peculiarity as the only real city led Trieste to become the administrative capital of the new region nineteen years after the end of the second world war. However, its relations with the other part of the region did not take off and the city withdrew into itself, also because of the continuing availability of internal funding, which enabled it not to depend on resources from outside, except for State funding for the border areas. In the decades that followed, the separation between Friuli and Venezia Giulia – the latter commonly identified with Trieste only – remains constant and the two sides undertook independent and distinct development paths (Degrassi 2002; Zilli 2012 and 2019).

The city by the sea lived a phase of strong deindustrialisation, partially offset by the development of the tertiary sector following the new regional centrality, and saw a high rate of employment in both insurance companies, such as Assicurazioni Generali and the Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà, and in the remaining companies (Sapelli 1990; Andreozzi Panariti 2002; Verrocchio 2006). In this period, Trieste was seen from the eastern side of the Iron Curtain as the showcase of the West, where jeans and coffee were the best-selling goods, distributed every day in huge quantities to the various parts of the Balkans. Thousands of Yugoslavs crossed the border every week to buy products that could not be found in socialist countries, and also to see that *other world*

beyond the barrier¹. It was a trade that filled the streets of the city, the pockets of traders, the coffers of banks and of exchange offices, activating an economy, mostly underground, which gave Trieste the status of one of the fifteen richest cities in Italy (Battisti 1979).

At the end of the twentieth century, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the significant development of Friuli – two concurrent events – changed the previous system of relations. The birth of the republics of Slovenia and Croatia drove away consumers from Trieste’s market and the sales of jeans disappeared with no alternative presenting itself. The other part of the region – from which Trieste and its economy had stayed away, having neither interest nor the will to invest in the poorest province of Northern Italy – was completely transformed after the two devastating earthquakes of 1976, thanks to a careful use of the funding made available for reconstruction. From an out-migration area it has become a production center for small and medium-sized enterprises aimed at the European market, attracting workers from the rest of the country and from abroad (Grandinetti 2016). Within its borders, it has set up a structured system of relationships and its provincial capital has grown from a small town into a city. Udine is the political, but also economic, social and cultural reference point for the entire Friulan territory. Where it was once Trieste which avoided relations with Friuli, it is now the latter which shows no interest in the city by the sea.

4. The dawn of the new millennium

At the beginning of the new millennium, the city found itself without an area to be a reference point for, without a manufacturing system, with a port with reduced activities (80% of the tonnage of goods is represented by the oil discharged by ships and placed in the pipeline that connects the Northern Adriatic with Munich) and with the entire area of the Old Port – as extensive as the flat urban part (about 600 thousand square meters) – completely unused and abandoned (Porceddu 2009). Without the Balkan customers, with a manufacturing sector that sees the local health care company at the top in terms of the number of employees, followed by the public administration (regional, municipal and provincial) and by the high educational network (the two universities and the international research centres), and with the national primacy (in percentage) of resident pensioners, Trieste

¹ As it is admirably shown in the documentary film *Trieste, Yugoslavia. Quando Ponterosso era il più grande centro commerciale dei Balcani*, directed by Alessio Bozzer (2017).

shows no sign of opening up towards the outside and is *used* only by its population.

The trading network has not seen any development and has maintained the features of an internal service structure, with neighbourhood shops or supermarkets. With regard to the food industry, there was a local distribution chain founded in 1903 – the Cooperative Operai di Trieste, Istria e Friuli (Workers' Cooperatives of Trieste, Istria and Friuli) – which in fact played a dominant and controlling role in the commercial policy. It maintained it until 2015, when bankruptcy, linked to management problems, opened the doors to the entry of national operators who, however, did not change the situation. The development of an organized large-scale distribution is also hampered by the urban structure. The spaces available between the sea and the surrounding hills (which reach 300 meters above sea level a short distance from the coast) are small and the road network is not adequate for external connections. The urban layout is recent, developed in the twentieth century, although the area of the old town dates back to the period between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, except for some new buildings erected in the Fascist era. On this basis, the commercial network was unable to expand, and the only two examples of a shopping center – of modest size, inaugurated in 1991 and 2003 respectively – cater only for the needs of the residents. A medium-sized commercial center is located a few kilometers from the city borders, with over 32,000 square meters of sales area, but its position, approximately one kilometer from Slovenia, well suggests the target audience. Overall, the sales area of large-scale distribution in Trieste is 25% lower than the regional average (Umek 2019, 101). New commercial centers are springing up in the Friuli area, particularly near the motorway toll booths (Selva 2019), or in the coastal areas of Slovenia, in a median position in the flows between Italy and Croatia (Umek 2019). These also attract buyers from Trieste due to the competitive prices and a varied offer compared to the local market.

The hinterland of Trieste is in fact smaller than the already limited territorial extension of its province (just over 200 square km) and the international border closes it in a restricted and peripheral area. Under these conditions, the attachment to the previous operating methods of the local economy works against the idea of making use of the territory for tourism, despite the town's history and specific features of the landscape, including the sea (Valussi, Minca 1989). Starting from the end of the Habsburg era, the sea, the great historical resource of Trieste, has gradually lost its importance in the local economy. As a matter of fact, by the beginning of the new millennium, it has slowly become, both in fact and

in geography, the last port at the far right of the Adriatic, surpassed in activities by the adjacent but Slovenian structure of Koper (Catalan, Zilli 2008). The resumption of traffic and the full reactivation of port activities took place after the first fifteen years of the century. The reduced availability of spaces equipped for bathing use is absorbed by the local population, on the basis of a relationship with the sea transversal to the social classes and to the eras. This is testified by the continued existence of a bathing establishment in which sunbathers are separated according to sex, the only example in Europe, a legacy of the early twentieth century². In addition, the city suffered from a reduced attractiveness, as evidenced by a limited hotel availability – 10 hotels in 2008 (Umek 2019, 99) – which discouraged the arrival of tourists.

5. A new look

In such a stasis, hopes and requests for a different attitude were not answered within the local political establishment, who were more interested in maintaining the status quo (D'Amelio 2009; Pagliaro 2013). However, the end of the Cold War and the birth of new states that gradually joined the European Union paved the way for a new central role of Trieste, based on the memory of the role it had played in the past (Andreozzi et al. 2004). The city slowly became aware of both having an exploitable heritage in terms of attractiveness and of the new favourable international conditions.

The beginning of this change coincides with the election as mayor of a person external to the *classic* environment of local power, an entrepreneur – Riccardo Illy – who set the management of the administration on different tracks. The choice adopted was to create a new image for Trieste, shifting its attention from a peripheral and decayed center to that of a privileged witness of the past eras overlooking the sea. The starting point was the restoration of an area close to the historic centre (1996), also using specific European Union funding to restore the neighbourhoods in an advanced state of decay. This triggered an important process of gentrification involving the whole area, also encouraging new initiatives such as the competition in the year 2000 for the city's candidacy for Expo 2008 (Colombino, Minca 2005).

Beyond the lack of services, which are gradually recovered, the relationship between the parts of the city must be reviewed (Minca 2009; Bialasiewicz, Minca

² The story of this establishment is reconstructed in the documentary film *The Last Beach* (2016) by Thanos Anastopoulos and Davide Del Degan, presented at the Cannes Film Festival in the year of its release.



Figure 1. The *Rive*, the main urban sliding axis during the Barcolana of 2016. Source: Photo Studio Borlenghi.

2010). From an economic point of view, the issue of the Porto Vecchio (the Old Port) emerged very clearly, the continuous abandonment of which has kept away new economic actors and represented a visual testimony of the lack of commitment to finding a solution. There was a growing need to expand the new port, undersized as a result of years of minimal commercial choices, although its position reduces connection times with the markets of Central Europe by at least four days. Only in the last five years has the structure managed to re-enter the international trade network, becoming one of the first eleven European ports by tonnage (Port of Trieste 2018), and a candidate as the final stop for one of the branches of the *Belt and Road Initiative* promoted by the Chinese government. There is still no regulation on the contact between the residential area and the access to the sea, interrupted by the main urban sliding axis and by a series of parking lots that follow along one after the other on the seafront (Fig. 1). The local primacy of the car does not allow adopting solutions which may foster a direct relationship with the sea, but the new policy identifies a path going from the central railway station to the recovered area

of Cavana that is both suitable for a different use of the center and favourable for tourists. The pedestrianization of areas, the relocation of parking lots, the widening of sidewalks, new regulations for the open air sections of bars and restaurants, incentives for new commercial initiatives and an improved accommodation capacity³ have all helped to restart the local commercial initiative, also thanks to the internal financial availability.

6. A re-invented city centre

In the centre of the city, the vast redevelopment plan taking place in recent years which principally involved the area of Cittavecchia (the Old Town) has radically transformed commercial activities and consequently, the ways in which the city is used, producing a new balance between districts and neighbourhoods. Three segments

³ In 2019 the number of hotels had risen to 24 and the number of beds available in the provincial territory, also including those in B&Bs, exceed 6,300 units (Source: authors' elaboration on data from the Bilateral Regional Tertiary and Tourism Authority of Friuli Venezia Giulia).

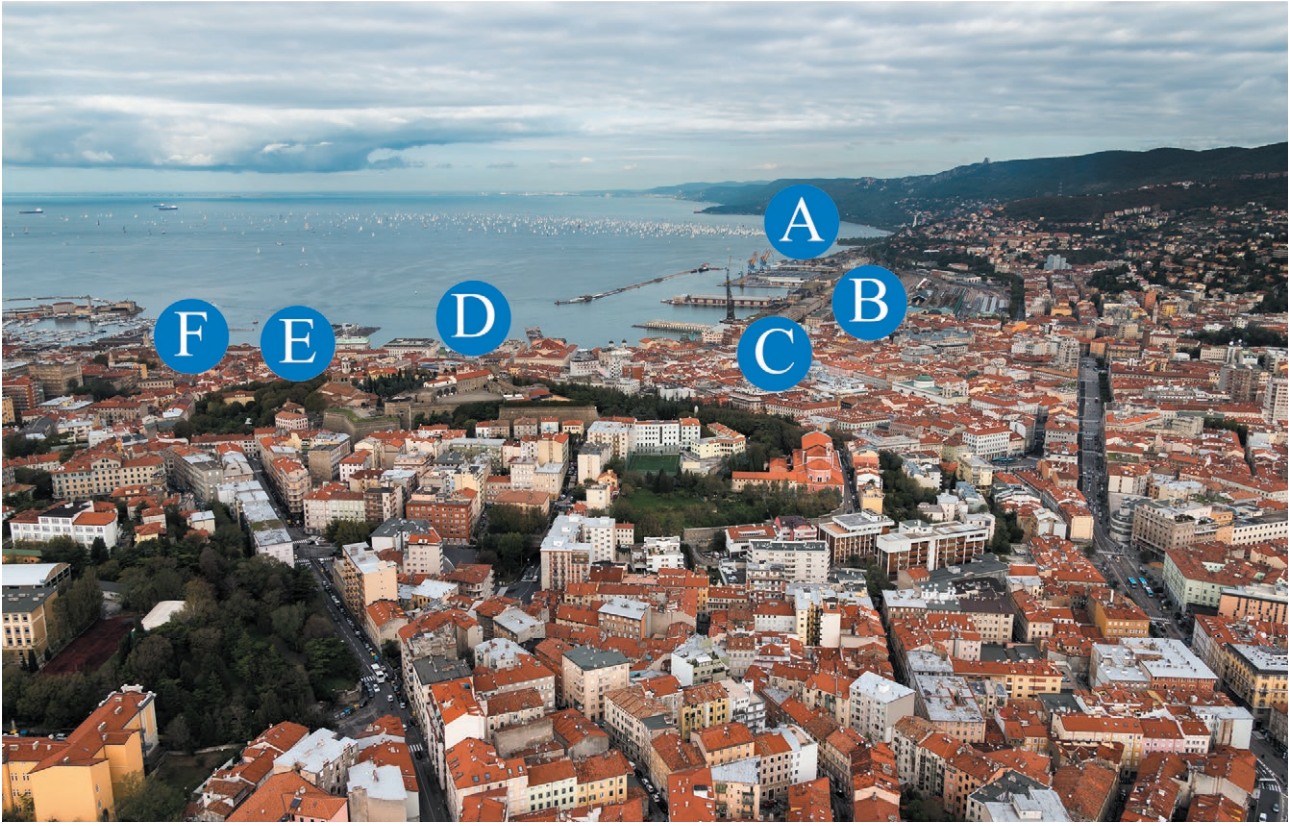


Figure 2. Trieste City Centre: (A) the Old Port, (B) Trieste Railway Station, (C) Piazza del Ponterosso and via Genova, (D) Piazza della Borsa and Piazza Unità, (E) Cavana and Cittavecchia, and (F) via Torino and Piazza Venezia. Source: Photo Studio Borlenghi, Milan, 2012.

of the centre in particular have shown the most evident signs of these changes. Starting from the railway station (therefore from the north) these are: the Grand Canal (Piazza del Ponterosso), the district of Cavana, and the triangle of via Torino⁴. The most evident aspect has been the reshaping of the dynamics of retail commerce with a view to increasing the number of premises for restaurants, shopping and tourism in general. The latter has been the main beneficiary of both public and private investment in recent years, with results that can be considered generally successful. This is particularly true of the Barcolana, especially if we take into account the expansion in the hotel network observed following the increased number of visitors, with a doubling in the number of beds. Furthermore, the total number of tourists who visited the city in 2018 was more than 513,000 (for almost 1.2 million presences), almost half of whom came from abroad (Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia 2019, 173).

⁴ The triangle between via Torino, via Cadorna and via San Giorgio, including Piazza Venezia, in the south-western area of the city centre and within walking distance of the Riva Nazario Sauro.

The three segments all fall within the part of urban space most directly exposed to the sea and which perhaps best represents the historical development of the city, which owes its fortune to its past ability to position itself as a port hub for the fundamental dynamics of trade. The area of Piazza del Ponterosso, with its shifts in the type of goods sold there, is truly a piece of commercial archaeology, having been, as we have seen, an important market and at the center of the most varied traffic, including those of *jeansinari* and coffee retailers; it is now an organic fruit and vegetables market. The object of various architectural and road interventions that have harmonized its appearance in recent years, the area now has two streets (via Rossini and the quieter via Genova) that are perpendicular to the axes that run parallel to the sea line and along which the last decade has witnessed the openings of several restaurants and bars, favoured by a gradual process of pedestrianization⁵. A development still uncertain and subsequent to the more intense one which involved the triangle of via Torino,

⁵ Il Piccolo August 23, 2018.

which had started a few years earlier. Observing the city road network (Fig. 2), Piazza del Ponterosso, Cavana and Via Torino are connected by a pedestrian walkway less than 2 kilometres long which runs parallel to the road axis of the Rive, starting at the station and ending in Piazza Venezia. This route also passes through two focal points of the urban design of Trieste: Piazza Unità d'Italia and Piazza della Borsa.

7. Old Town/New Town

Descending from the hills of San Vito and San Giusto towards the sea, between the seafront and the Theresian part of the city, Cittavecchia is an area that – according to the famous boxer Nino Benvenuti, who grew up there – found its essence in the relationship “for the sea, with the sea, of the sea. That was its life” (Benvenuti 2002, 133-134). To better understand the role of the Cittavecchia, however, it is appropriate to highlight its functional connections with those areas that are notable for their level of commercial activity: Cavana and via Torino.

Cavana⁶ is the geographical and historical *heart* of Trieste but since the second post-war years it has witnessed a long phase of depopulation: from around 12,000 inhabitants in the 1950s to 450 registered at the end of the 1990s, most of whom fell into at-risk social categories (Campagna, Speranza 2002, 135; Campagna, Sampaolo 1999, 18-19; Palermo, Savoldi 2002, 185).

The condemned buildings had led to road closures and de-population. It also brought about a progressive environmental and socio-economic degradation. This process resulted in a fragmented city center whose functional part remained limited to the area in front of the port, full of commercial, professional and service activities (Campagna, Ricci 2000, 37). Since the 1990s, Cavana has undergone social and environmental redevelopment interventions made possible within the framework of the European initiative called the URBAN I Community Plan (European Commission, 2003). In the case of Trieste, it was decided that European, national, regional and local measures would be adopted under the *Progetto Tergeste* (Tergeste Project)⁷, designed for completion in

the two-year period 1997-1999, with the redevelopment of the Cittavecchia, identified as a *target area* (Zubini 2006, 219).

The goal of the Project was to start a process in order to promote the recovery of the housing market in the area through the “creation of positive expectations on the part of the population” (Campagna, Speranza 2002, 131). Some critical issues made the start particularly difficult: the small population of the target area and the resulting difficulty in identifying internal resources; the extreme state of decay of the buildings and the structures. The Project was also aimed at the residential and commercial revitalization as well as inverting the depopulation process (Palermo, Savoldi 2002, 185-186). In this way, the redevelopment of both the road system and the buildings was carried out, fostering the renewal of the population through economic activities – with particular attention to local craftsmanship – residence halls and meeting spaces. Furthermore, the original purposes of the URBAN Plan included a *social gentrification*, namely an integration of heterogeneous social groups by social and economic profile (Colombino, Minca 2005, 47-48). For this reason, additional tools were envisaged: student houses, multipurpose social centers, such as anti-violence centers for women and minors or other intercultural and multiethnic centers, a reception community for drug addicts, and a House of Music to integrate the new inhabitants of the neighborhood (Progetto Tergeste 2001, 12). However, only a few of these ideas were actually implemented. The most apparent consequence over the years has been the foreseeable increase in the value of the properties recovered in the hamlet and finally brought back to life. Cavana, even in the pre-2008 crisis period, stood as one of the most valuable areas of the city⁸, where the increase in prices had created exclusivity and transformed many spaces into restaurants or tourist accommodation activities.

8. Once upon a time in via Torino

The commercial *reconversion* of Via Torino can be considered as a strategy which resulted from the wider redevelopment of Cavana. Analysing in detail the triangle, some more general gentrification features (Semi 2015, 7) could be considered as the result of the redevelopment of Cavana, which has generated advantages also for the economic activities located in this part of the center. The gradual replacement of the traditional shops of the streets with more recent ones, mainly dedicated to busi-

⁶ Lying at the centre of Cittavecchia, Cavana is part of the district “Città Nuova – Barriera Nuova - San Vito – Città Vecchia”. In the early 2000s, 16.5% of the population (37,000 inhabitants) lived in this district (Campagna, Ricci 2000, 38).

⁷ In this project, economic resources were allocated for initiatives of financial support and social services; smaller amounts were allocated for the redevelopment of buildings and education (Campagna, Speranza 2002, 131).

⁸ Il Piccolo, May 7, 2008.

ness of eating and drinking, was favoured – as with Via Genova – by the pedestrianization of via Torino (where the Museum of the Civilization of Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia is located) and via Diaz (where the Revoltella Museum can be found). The radical change of the entire area led to a change in the consumer audiences. The new businesses, almost homogeneous in terms of the type of activity, all appeared around the same time. In the wider area, including Piazza Venezia, the oldest activity dates back to 1920s (Buffet Siora Rosa); out of a list of 23 establishments, 14 were opened after 2014; of these, 8 started their activity between 2017 and 2018⁹.

This upheaval in the economy and commerce had the effects of transforming the area into one of the centers of the city's nightlife, thus inaugurating an unprecedented use of this space. Important consequences can also be observed from an aesthetic point of view, since those areas of the public property used for outdoor activities are subject to the council rules contained in the regulation for the installation of open-air furniture and fittings (Comune di Trieste 2016).

The traditional shops or those belonging to types that are similar to the previous ones, have vanished. The final point of this route can be considered the Ancient Wine Warehouse which, standing on the Riva Tommaso Gulli, is another important symbol of the commercial history of Trieste; converted into Eataly restaurant and market in 2017, it is the first stop for an ideal entrance to the city centre from the south.

The gentrification of the triangle around via Torino is characterized by its predominantly commercial nature, with the increase in activities designed for greater volumes of consumption compared to the traditional ones and aimed at much larger audiences, such as the various segments of the student population and the expulsion of activities not related to leisure. In addition to the presence of the museums mentioned above, the upper floors of the stately buildings that surround the streets are partly occupied by offices and, as has already happened in similar situations, the new identity of the streets has met the resistance of the residents due to the contrasts deriving from the scarce compatibility of needs.

9. The sea reconquered

The central part of the waterfront of Trieste is mainly occupied – on the city side – with restaurants and bars which are, however, lacking on the most exposed

strip, which acts as a limit to the sea – except for isolated exceptions such as Eataly – and where they were replaced by structures geared to supporting pleasure boating and tourism. This strip of seafront hosts the event with the highest economic as well as symbolic value held today in the city: the Barcolana. The seafront (the Rive) is the natural theater of the largest regatta in the world (by number of participants)¹⁰. From the waterfront evolution model described by Vallega (1993, 23), Trieste is now going through its *post-industrial stage*, with an attempt to recover a large part of Porto Vecchio, which is the most important opportunity for investment; nevertheless, its gradual removal from state control has not yet led to true redevelopment (Comune di Trieste 2019). With the Barcolana and other side events, the city manages the sea as a resource that “helps to implement its development, to redevelop itself, to obtain otherwise unimaginable visibility” (Guala 2015, 170). The birth of the organizing body of the Barcolana, the Società Velica di Barcola e Grignano (Sailing Company of Barcola and Grignano), dates back to 1969 and represented a decisive step in the transition of a previously elite sport from *yachting* to *sailing*¹¹.

Taking visibility as the first parameter to measure the Barcolana's contribution to the city system, according to a SWG study conducted for the 51st edition of the Barcolana, the percentage of Italians who knew about the event jumped from 21 to 53% between 2001 and 2019¹². Barcolana, an event now spread over two weeks preceding the Sunday of the main regatta (in the month of October) has set itself over time as an event *larger than the city* thanks to the size of the economic impact that has managed to grow steadily over 50 years (Modaffari 2019).

In 2018, 300,000 tourist arrivals were counted (corresponding to the days visitors spent in the city), corresponding to 234,000 people. Half of the diverse range of visitors was made up by spectators from other Italian regions; 44% was the share of residents within the former province of Trieste, while 6% came from abroad (especially from Slovenia and Croatia); 73% of visitors declared they had attended at least one previous edition of the Barcolana, confirming a high level of loyalty to the event. The broader economic impact for 2018,

¹⁰ In the 2018 edition, there were 2,689 boats on the starting line, corresponding to over 16,000 crew members (Guinness World Records 2018; B2G Consulting 2019a).

¹¹ In the early 2000s, 40% of the boats registered in the Region were sailing boats, 80% in the province of Trieste compared to the national average of 20% (Tracogna 2010, 151); the widespread nature of this practice is connected to the presence within the territory of boatyards specialized in the construction of sailing dinghies and related components. In this regard, see also Karlsen 2018, 15.

¹² Il Piccolo October 16, 2019.

⁹ Source: our processing on data from the Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Agriculture and Artisanry of Venezia Giulia (Trieste).

calculated in terms of public, organization and sponsor spending, amounted to over 70 million euros, with an overall multiplier of 33 compared to the investment (B2G Consulting 2019a). Considering that the share of public funding for the event stands at 15%, a minimum percentage if compared to the average of Italian events (40%), the tax impact is estimated at € 6,2 million in revenue against a public investment of 340,000, producing a *return on investment* (ROI) of around 18,4 (B2G Consulting 2019a; 2019b). The occupational impact, however, was estimated as 572 full-time equivalents¹³.

The media coverage for the fiftieth anniversary edition (2018) reached an estimated value of over 26 million euros, with direct coverage by RAI and by networks in those countries where sailing plays a major role in the popular culture (Australia, New Zealand, etc.). This element was also amplified through the use of new social media, with around 100.000 spectators at the competition's Facebook Live (B2G Consulting 2019a).

10. Conclusions

Trieste has based its development and fortunes on its external relations, in particular with non-neighboring areas. The post-WWII conditions interrupted this process, first with the secession of Italian territories to Yugoslavia, then with the creation of the Iron Curtain and the continuation of military occupation until 1954.

While, on the one hand, Trieste's return to Italy paved the way for the birth of the Friuli Venezia Giulia Region, of which it became the capital city, it also presented the opportunity to establish a new system of relationships with Friuli, which Trieste decided not to take advantage of. The city survived thanks to the primacy of the services sector and the exploitation of its image as a western outpost for citizens coming from behind the Curtain. The collapse of the socialist systems of the east and the economic revival of Friuli forced the city to review its internal organization. Faced with the impossibility – due to historical, demographic and urban planning reasons (Columi, Ferrari 1980; Ara, Magris 1982; Apih 1988; Sapelli 1990; Andreozzi, Panariti 2002; Melinato 2005; Cattaruzza 2007; Zilli 2019) – of becoming a point of reference in the organized distribution or marketing of high consumption products – a role that was taken on by other cities – the solution adopted was to give Trieste the image of a tourist hub.

This process took place through a redevelopment of

the town centre, with the identification of urban spaces intended for restaurants and leisure activities, and by rebuilding its relationship with the sea.

This process took place through the reorganization of the waterfront, with a renewed vitality of port exchanges, and above all with the consequences of the success of a sailing regatta that publicizes the image of Trieste as a city on the sea around the world. Since 2016 Trieste is also by Regional law a “tourist city” and this gives it a series of prerogatives that make it easier to provide services for tourists. In a few years, the number of beds available doubled (between hotels and B&Bs) and the city is now part of the international tourism circuits.

In light of the events linked to the global health emergency of 2020, Trieste too finds itself facing numerous unknowns that call into question the continuation of the path undertaken so far. The organization in the city of the EuroScience Open Forum 2020, the main European event for scientific research, at the time of writing, has been postponed and is likely to suffer the consequences of global events in terms of attendance and downsizing of the promotion of city. The Barcolana finds itself suffering repercussion with regard to the number of participants and public, and must now reinvent itself to comply with COVID-19 regulations.

The tourist sector on the one hand and the entry into the *Belt and Road Initiative* on the other are now the important elements that Trieste needs to develop new territorial relationships, with both the rest of the Region and, above all, Europe. Whether or not these favourable conditions can be maintained will depend on how things proceed in light of the effects of the COVID-19 crisis, and also on the ability of the local ruling class.

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¹³ Full-time jobs on a yearly basis that would theoretically be created by that amount of money (B2G Consulting 2019a).

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