

Architectural Reconfigurations and Urban Remaking After Ruptures: Interrogating Frontier Urbanism in Rijeka/Fiume

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Abstract

The city of Rijeka/Fiume underwent an array of transitions in the long twentieth century, from the port of Hungary in the Dual Monarchy to a free city, to D'Annunzio's Italian Regency of Carnaro, annexation by Italy, incorporation into Yugoslavia, and eventually the independence of Croatia. The article examines the processes of urban reconstruction and architectural reconfigurations in the city as "frontier urbanism", building on Wendy Pullan's (2011) discussion of how various actors employ architectural and place-making practices to secure the state in contested urban space. The article traces Rijeka/Fiume's urban development as a window of fixating state identities in the built environment throughout the century, focusing on the aftermath of the Second World War. It examines the urban transformations of the city as the demographic landscape was reshaped after the departure of the local Italian-speaking majority and the arrival of workers from various parts of Yugoslavia, but also from Italy. By analysing decisions to rebuild or not buildings damaged by war, as well as the demolition of the 1943-built votive temple in Mlaka, the article inquires how reconstruction and urban planning became avenues to secure the state at its new frontiers.

Keywords

Rijeka, Fiume, Yugoslavia, urban reconstruction, frontier urbanism

Introduction¹

In 1949, the authorities of the Yugoslav city of Rijeka decided to remove two material markers of the past. On January 20th, they took down the eagle statue that was topping the Old Town clock tower, decried as a symbol of both Habsburg imperial rule and the Italian takeover of the city in the inter-war period. In November, they decided to demolish a structure built just a few years before, under fascist Italian rule: the Votive Temple of Christ the Most Holy Redeemer. Rijeka witnessed such acts of symbolic destruction while it faced the great challenge of post-war reconstruction. After significant damage during the Second World War, its port area, industrial facilities, as well as segments of its housing stock were devastated. A vast reconstruction process occurred as the city became a new part of the Yugoslav state, while still standing past structures were removed. These reconfigurations of the built environment occurred as Rijeka, also known by the name Fiume,² was experiencing multiple processes of change. First, it was incorporated in a new state, Yugoslavia, after having belonged in the interwar times to Italy. Second, it saw a change of political system, with a socialist federation replacing the Italian fascist state and the two-year German occupation during the war. Finally, with the departure of the majority of the city's Italians and the arrival of workers from different parts of Yugoslavia and from Italy its population makeup changed fundamentally. Within this context, removing the heritage of past regimes, older or newer, marked the transition of power.

The aftermath of the Second World War witnessed such symbolic makeovers during reconstruction in cities which experienced border change, as research on the new territories of Poland and the Soviet Union has shown.³ Yet while

1 This article stems from research supported by the project "Rijeka in Flux: Borders and Urban Change after World War II", funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, as well as by AFF funding from the University of Konstanz. The author is grateful to the Rijeka in Flux wider team for the wonderful intellectual exchange and camaraderie.

2 The city's name in all its variants- Rijeka in standard Croatian, Reka in one of the local Croatian dialects and in Slovene, and Fiume in Italian and local Romance dialects, means "River". In this article, I use the name of the city as corresponding to the name used officially in the period to which I refer: thus, Fiume under Hungarian, Italian, and Free State rule, and Rijeka after 1945.

3 *Jan Musekamp*: Zwischen Stettin Und Szczecin: Metamorphosen Einer Stadt von 1945 Bis 2005. Vol. 27. Wiesbaden 2010.; *Gregor Thum*: Uprooted: How Breslau Became Wrocław during the Century of Expulsions Princeton 2011.; *Olga Sezneva*: Architecture of De-

many of these cities experienced an array of changes in sovereignty during the twentieth century, Rijeka/Fiume's transformation brings in a multiplicity of threads and a conjunction of cultural imaginaries and experiences. As Vanni D'Alessio pointed out, "Rijeka/Fiume presents itself as a mixed conundrum of Central European, Balkan and Mediterranean European histories"⁴. The city underwent a remarkable array of such transitions in the long twentieth century: from the port of Hungary in the Dual Monarchy (up to 1918), to a contested territory, to D'Annunzio's Italian Regency of Carnaro (1919-1920), the Free State of Fiume (1920-1924), annexation by Italy (1924-1943), occupation by Germany (1943-1945), incorporation into Yugoslavia (1945/1947-1991), and eventually the independence of Croatia (after 1991). In Rijeka/Fiume, the changes in the built environment occurred within a constellation of imaginaries, narratives and iconographies corresponding to a canvas of often shifting identities and allegiances,⁵ including cosmopolitanism and autonomism on the one side and Italian vs Croatian nationalism, on the other, with a Hungarian imperial touch. The urban imaginary of Rijeka/Fiume as constructed by its own city elites through various media has been one of a cosmopolitan city,⁶ one proud of its autonomist drive.⁷ From the outside, it was often portrayed as a city enveloped by avant-garde and revolutionary fever (due to the brief, but incendiary takeover by Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio in the aftermath of the First World War),⁸ or a "city of passions".⁹ For Hungarians, Fiume is the port that had connected Hungary to the world, for Italians it is largely associated with the D'Annunzio escapade, with irredentism and later with exile, while for Croats, Rijeka is the industrial gritty port that is somehow always different than the rest and has kept voting red since 1945.

scent: Historical Reconstructions and the Politics of Belonging in Kaliningrad, the Former Königsberg. *Journal of Urban History* 39. (2013): 767–787.

4 Vanni D'Alessio: *Divided Legacies, Iconoclasm and Shared Cultures in Contested Rijeka/Fiume*. In: *Borderlands of Memory: Adriatic and Central European Perspectives*. Ed. Borut Klavžan. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, New York, Wien 2019. 90.

5 D'Alessio, V. 2019.

6 Milou van Hout: *Rediscovering Cityness in the Adriatic Borderland: Imagining Cultural Citizenship in Rijeka and Trieste Across the Long Twentieth Century*. PhD Thesis. Amsterdam 2020.

7 Ivan Jeličić: *Nell'ombra dell'autonomismo. Il Movimento Socialista a Fiume, 1901-1921*. PhD Thesis. Trieste 2017.

8 Claudia Salaris: *Alla Festa della Rivoluzione: Artisti e Libertari Con D'Annunzio a Fiume*. Bologna 2002.

9 Raoul Pupo: *Fiume Città di Passione*. Roma 2018.

In this eventful century, when it was not run as an incarnation of a city state, Rijeka/ Fiume had been on the frontier of most countries it belonged to: Hungary's only access to the sea, Italy's redeemed city at the periphery, and, after 1945, part of Yugoslavia's new Western territories. While geographically it was a periphery, the city was lavished with attention and development. In the Hungarian and the Yugoslav period, the importance of its port and industry made Fiume/Rijeka a dynamic and important economic hub. Under Italy, the attention came on symbolic grounds, connected to the representation of Fiume in interwar Italy as a city redeemed against all odds.

How can we make sense of Rijeka/Fiume's urban transformation with regards to its geographical condition of a borderland and experience of state change in much of the twentieth century? Roger Zetter and Brad K. Blitz argue that while borderlands are usually neglected by state development, their symbolic role in a post-conflict state often brings them more attention after a war, which leads to increased investment.¹⁰ Moreover, according to James Ron, in border areas of nationalizing states, practices of nation-building – which include securitization as well as a reshaping of landscapes – occur with a particular intensity: “nationalist states tend to be most radical at their margins, not their core”¹¹ The margins of states can be thus understood as a frontier: beyond the linear understanding of *borders* and the neutral territorial depiction of a *borderland*, the frontier is an area at the margin that is often contested, serves as a buffer, or is a shifting territory as states undergo expansion.¹² Cities become an important arena of such nation-building prac-

10 Roger Zetter and Brad K. Blitz: *Contestation and Reconstruction: Natural Capital and Post-Conflict Development in Borderland Regions*, *Stability. International Journal of Security & Development* 3. (2014) 1–18. The experience in Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War contradicts the assumptions about post-war borderlands as sites of privileged development. See for example the comparative marginalization of border areas like the Partium in Romania. Gábor Egry discussed the specific case of Maramureş and the Banat in *Gábor Egry: Unruly Borderlands: Border-Making, Peripheralization and Layered Regionalism in Post-First World War Maramureş and the Banat*. *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'histoire* 27. (2020) 709–731. One possible explanation is the great scale of territorial after the First World War in the region, with countries either emerging or greatly enlarged, gaining area from different Empires. The scale of change made state consolidation involve a larger geographical scale than just borderlands.

11 James Ron: *Frontiers and Ghettos: State Violence in Serbia and Israel*. Berkeley 2003. xv.

12 See Steven G. Ellis and Raingard Esser: *Frontiers and the Writing of History, 1500–1850*. Hannover-Laatzten 2006.; James Anderson and Liam O'Dowd: *Borders, Border Regions and Territoriality: Contradictory Meanings, Changing Significance*. *Regional Studies* 33. (1999) 593–604.

tices.¹³ Wendy Pullan defines the actions of states in contested urban spaces as frontier urbanism.¹⁴ She discusses two dimensions of frontier urbanism: first, the settlement of civilians to fixate the state's claim over an area, and second, architectural and urban makeovers in contested urban space to promote state power. In this article, while touching on the first, I focus on the second dimension, scrutinizing the place-making practices that secure the state.

Fiume in Hungary, as Rijeka after 1954 in socialist Yugoslavia, were solid parts of the respective country's economy, imaginary, and flows. I argue that it is during the volatile transition times when frontier urbanism practices come into play. According to ontological security scholars, state decisions across scales can be explained by perceptions of how secure political actors consider the state to be.¹⁵ As such, the frontier condition in the sense of a fleeting spatio-temporality, of insecurity of borders, but also sense of unbridled expansion, could be identified particularly in the transition times of ruptures. This article examines how changes in the urban environment sustain practices of frontier urbanism, related to a shifting ontological security of states. It inquires how reconstruction and urban planning became avenues to secure the state at its new frontiers. An attention to the built environment is not only useful to understand the entangled threads of Rijeka's past¹⁶, but can be also an important lens to see the city's remaking after ruptures, on which this article focuses. It examines the urban transformations of Rijeka in particular after 1945, when its demographic landscape was reshaped. While it focuses on the 1940s, it also briefly traces Rijeka/Fiume's urban development as a window of fixating state identities in the built environment throughout the century. After a quick overview of Fiume/Rijeka before 1945, the article will discuss how the city's reconfiguration after the Second World War reflects practices of frontier urbanism.

13 Vjeran Pavlaković and Gruia Bădescu: *Urban Monuments and the Spatialization of National Ideologies*, in *The Routledge Companion to Urban Media and Communication*. Eds. Zlatan Krajina and Deborah Stevenson Abingdon 2019.

14 Wendy Pullan: *Frontier Urbanism: The Periphery at the Centre of Contested Cities*. *The Journal of Architecture* 16. (2011) 15–35.

15 This emerging school of thought focuses on relations between states See: Brent J. Steele: *Ontological security in international relations: self-identity and the IR State*. London 2008.; Jelena Subotić: *Narrative, ontological security, and foreign policy change*. *Foreign Policy Analysis* 12. (2016) 610-627.), but has been also employed to examine the built environment and more domestic state politics. For instance, see Filip Ejdus: "Not a Heap of Stones": *Material Environments and Ontological Security in International Relation*. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 30. (2017.) 23-43.

16 Radmila Matejčić: *Kako Čitati Grad: Rijeka Jučer, Danas*. Rijeka 1988.

20th century Fiume/Rijeka Before Yugoslavia

Fiume in Hungary

Fiume was the site of intensive urban development before the First World War as the port of Hungary within the Dualist Monarchy. It corresponded to the role of Trieste for the Austrian economy,¹⁷ and embodied Kossuth's call: "Hungarians, at sea!"¹⁸ The only access of Hungary to sea trade, and the seat of its Navy, Fiume was a place of intensive economic exchange and the gateway to Budapest. Beyond its small medieval old town, the architecture of the turn of the century expansion echoed fashions in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, with local historian Edoardo Susmel underlining how Hungarian rule shaped the city's urban design and character.¹⁹ From the grand structures erected at the sea front, the Riva, to the Governor's Palace overlooking the old town, these were the echoes the Andrásy út in Budapest on the Adriatic, blending a Hungarian, Central European visual identity on the existing Mediterranean cityscape. The Palace was designed by prolific architect Alajos Hauszmann, who authored buildings from Budapest to Nagyvárad and Kolozsvár in Transylvania. However, residential architecture in neighbourhoods like Belvedere mirrored Northern Italian styles, signalling the circulation of architectural fashions across borders. Moreover, Croatian cultural institutions were built, particularly, in the adjacent town of Sušak, including Central European fashions such as Sezession, and connecting it with trends existing in the development of Zagreb. These architectural repertoires mirrored the city's situation as ruled directly from Budapest, while inhabited mostly by a mix of speakers of Italian and Croatian dialects.²⁰

17 Daniele Andreozzi: *Lives, Mercantilism and Nations in the Growth of Multi-Ethnic Trieste (18th–20th Centuries)* In: *Controversial Heritage and Divided Memories from the Nineteenth Through the Twentieth Centuries. Multi-Ethnic Cities in the Mediterranean World 2*. Eds.: Marco Folin, Heleni Porfyriou. New York 2020. 83-95. 92.

18 *van Hout, M.* 2020.

19 *Edoardo Susmel*: *Disegno storico della città di Fiume* (Stab. tipo-litografico di E. Mohovich (IS), 1917). In: *van Hout, M.* 2020.

20 The 1911 census indicated that 46.9% of the population spoke primarily Italian, 31.7% Croatian, 7.9% Slovenian, and 7.3% Hungarian.

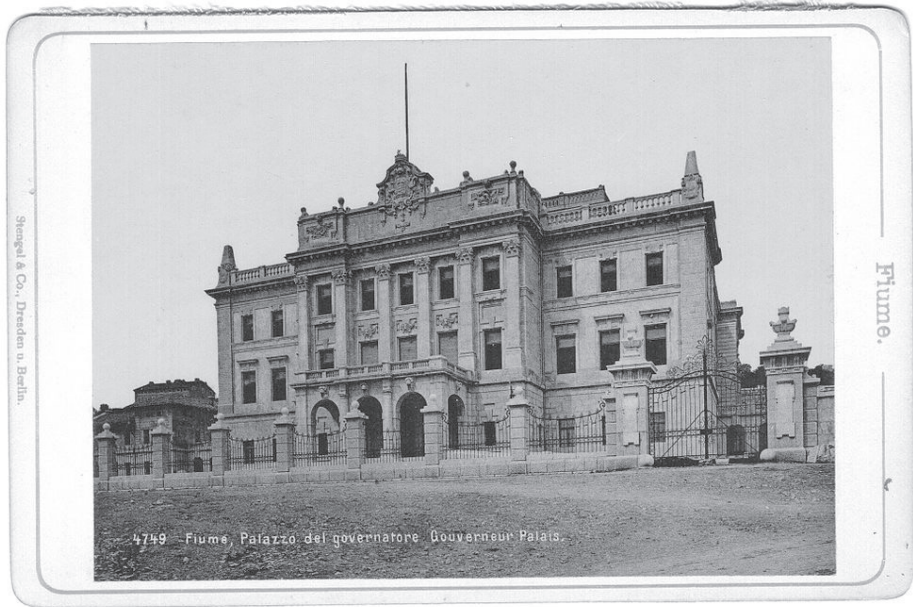


Fiume/Rijeka's waterfront, with the Adria palace, seat of the first Hungarian shipping company founded in 1882, in the left hand side.²¹

Fiume's architectural change can be seen as a form of a frontier urbanism in the sense of fixating the outpost of the state, the window to the world, the frontier in the sense of the open horizon of growth, rather than the contested space to be secured. The allegiance of the local elites to the Hungarian crown was increasingly connected to the recognition of local autonomy, as opposed to platforms to incorporate the city into a wider Italy and, particularly, Croatia of which the city was treated distinctively, with a status of a *corpus separatum* of Hungary beyond Zagreb's rule. A famous quote of mayor Maylender in 1897 indicated "Fiume's Hungarian patriotism cannot be imagined without its autonomy".²² However, the city was also emblematic for both Southern Slavic and Italian narratives of the modern nation. On the one side, the Rijeka Resolution of 1905 created a Serb-Croat coalition within Austria-Hungarian politics. On the other, the wide circulation of poet Gabriele D'Annunzio's 1919 *Pentecoste d'Italia* essay and tumultuous events after the First World War in Fiume projected the "redeemed city" as an important element in the imaginary of Italianness.

²¹ Fiume waterfront, "Views of the Austro-Hungarian Empire," Detroit Publishing Company, public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

²² Cited in *van Hout, M.* 2020. 113.



The Governor's Palace²³

Divided City

The presence of such clashing imaginaries and aspirations and the array of changes in the status of the city led to a different articulation of city-making in the borderlands after the collapse of Austria-Hungary. While the city experienced contestations and multiple changes in sovereignty (including the D'Annunzio episode), it also witnessed a recontextualization of practices and spaces that reflects significant continuities, including at the urban scale.²⁴ Moreover, a commitment to the local character recognizing the multinational nature of the city was mobilized both by the autonomist and by the workers' socialist movements²⁵. The treaty of Rapallo (November 1920) made the city of Fiume independent, initially run by the Autonomist Party, but in 1924, the Treaty of Rome between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slo-

²³ Magyar Királyság, Fiume. Edoardo Schambik fényképész. Public domain, Wikimedia Commons.

²⁴ *Dominique Kirchner Reill*: The Fiume Crisis. Cambridge MA. 2020.

²⁵ *Ivan Jeličić*: Uz stogodišnjicu riječkog Radničkog vijeća. Klasna alternativa nacionalnim državama na sutonu Monarhije [With the centenary of the Workers' Council in Rijeka. Class alternative to national states at the eve of Monarchy]. Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske 12. (2017) 63-84.

venes gave Fiume to the first and Sušak to the latter, with the river that gave its name to the city becoming the state border.



The border between Italy (Fiume) and Yugoslavia (Sušak), 1937.²⁶

From the sole port of an otherwise landlocked Hungary, Fiume was reduced to a peripheral port in a country with abundant sea access. While it lost its economic hinterland, it held the status of a Free Port. Moreover, Fiume received financial support from the Italian state. In the aftermath of D'Annunzio's campaign, Fiume had an almost sacred status in the Italian imaginary.²⁷ That accounted to subsidies, tax reductions and investments supporting the redeemed city. It also connected to an intensive Italianization of public spaces, as well as the population. Interwar Italian modernism embodied in elegant new apartment buildings, as well as in emblematic structures such as the church dedicated to Saint Romuald and All Saints, also known as the Votive Temple, and the ossuary on Cosala (Kozala).²⁸ The fascist period led to

²⁶ Rijeka State Archives [hence: DARI], Zbirka Razglednice, 173.

²⁷ *Milou van Hout*: In Search of the Nation in Fiume: Irredentism, Cultural Nationalism, Borderlands. *Nations and Nationalism* 26. (2019). 660-676.

²⁸ *Daina Glavočić*: Monumental Cemetery Kozala. *Architettura e Arte a Fiume e Trieste Tra '800 e '900/Arhitektura i Umjetnost u Rijeci i Trstu Krajem XIX. i Početkom XX. Stoljeća*, 2011. Paper presentation.

the increase in the number of people declaring themselves Italian, including also new arrivals from other parts of Italy, as well as people from mixed or Croatian-speaking family backgrounds who took on the Italian identity in a period where Slavic culture was being marginalized. In 1936, 72% of people in Fiume declared themselves Italians.



Border crossing at the bridge over the Eneo/Rječina river. Source: Fortepan 28798

On the other side of the river, Sušak was one of the most dynamic cities in interwar Yugoslavia. Its economic growth was boosted by its location at the border, becoming a shop window of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes called Kingdom of Yugoslavia after 1929. As such, its urban development reflected, like in Hungarian times, the sense of frontier as expansion of horizons, but also the contestation and competition with nearby Fiume. Architectural projects were connected to the border condition of the two cities. For instance, after the construction of the modern Croatian Cultural House and skyscraper in Sušak, intended to display the progress of Yugoslavia, a Fiume skyscraper appeared in a key location: at the end of the Corso, in the Italian modern style of the fascist 1930s.

Yet the two cities were not only very visible to each other, but also connect-

ed through a border bridge. Here, movement of people – unrestricted for residents from both sides-, continuous trade and exchange made this what in studies of borders is called a “thin border”, one that is easily permeable.²⁹ As such, urban space constituted both a sense of competition and border-making, as well as circulation, flows and continuity.

Reconstructing Post-War Rijeka

Border Change and Demographic Shifts

Controlled by Nazi Germany as part of the Operation Zone of the Adriatic Littoral from September 1943 to May 1945, Fiume was bombed by Allied forces for its industry, which included shipyards, the torpedo factory and an oil refinery, as well as for its port infrastructure. The devastated city experienced reconstruction as part of a different country. It would be only with the treaty of Paris of February 10th 1947 that Rijeka officially became a part of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia. It was, however, de facto administered by the Yugoslav state through the National Liberation Committee of Rijeka since May 1945.³⁰ The two years were marked by continuity and rupture. In particular, the population profile changed with the arrival of Yugoslav citizens in the devastated city as a call to participate in its industrialization drive and its reincorporation into Croatia.³¹ At the same time, a majority of the Italian speakers fled the city, a process which was discussed by many historians of both Italy and the former Yugoslavia.³² The termino-

²⁹ *Gabriel Popescu*: *Bordering and Ordering the Twenty-First Century: Understanding Borders*. Lanham. 2011.

³⁰ *Andrea Roknić Bežanić*: *Rijeka Od Oslobođenja 1945. Do Pariškog Mirovnog Ugovora 1947. Godine [Rijeka from the 1945 Liberation to the Paris Peace Treaties of 1947]* PhD Thesis. Zagreb 2012.

³¹ See *Francesca Rolandi*: *Došao Sam u Grad Iz Pasivnog Kraja. Domestic Migration, Social Differentiations and Housing in Post-WW2 Rijeka*. forthcoming.

³² *Pamela Ballinger*: *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*. Princeton 2003. *Franko Dota*: *Zaračeno Poraće: Konflikti i Konkurentski Narativi o Stradanju i Iseljavanju Talijana Istre*, 2010; *Katja Hrobat Virloget*, *Catherine Gousseff*, and *Gustavo Corni*: *At Home but Foreigners. Population Transfers in 20th Century Istria*. Koper 2015; *Mila Orlić*: *L’esodo Degli Italiani Dall’Istria e l’insediamento Nella Provincia Di Modena*, *Quaderni Centro Di Ricerche Storiche Rovigno* 18. (2007) 33–68.; *Mila*

logy used focuses on the issue of choice: the Italian usage of *esuli* frames the migration as forced, as an undesired rupture caused by irruptions of violence and the climate of fear among Italian speaking communities. In contrast, the usage of *optanti*, preferred in the Yugoslav historiography, highlights that the Italians made the choice to leave, while they could have stayed - as some indeed have - and build socialism together with the South Slavs in a regionally reinterpreted “brotherhood and unity” as a wider umbrella.³³ Moreover, some 2000 Italian workers even joined the building of socialist Rijeka from industrial Montfalcone. By 1953, there were 7770 people declaring themselves Italian in Rijeka.³⁴

Already before the actual incorporation into Yugoslavia in 1947, the local administration was preparing new urban planning documents that were focused on integrating Rijeka from a territorial-functional perspective in the state. One key move was the shaping of a unified regulatory plan for Rijeka and Sušak. While the latter already had a freshly approved plan in 1938, one which responded to its condition as a border town, the new consensus was that the situation was so radically different, that a new, integrated plan had to be thought. The new plan had to treat the two towns as “a whole to build”.³⁵

The unification of the two cities was seen as a repair of an artificial separation.³⁶ General Major Veceslav Holjevc decried this “unnatural border, which came even from the old Austria-Hungary”.³⁷ Minister Karl Mrazović-Gaspar underlined that it was not only the Italian authorities, but also the Austro-Hungarians who imposed this separation: “švapsko-madzarski političari wanted to leave our land in desolation”.³⁸ This fed to the Croatian perception

Orlić: “Italians or “Foreigners”? The Multilayered Memories of Istrian Refugees in Italy. *Borderlands of Memory. Adriatic and Central European Perspectives* 2018. 255–272; *Raoul Pupo*: *Il Lungo Esodo*. Milano 2006.

33 *Marco Abram*: *Integrating Rijeka into Socialist Yugoslavia: The Politics of National Identity and the New City’s Image (1947–1955)*. *Nationalities Papers* 46. (2018) 69–85.; *Hrobat Virloget, Gousseff, and Corni*, 2015.

34 *Abram, M.* 2018. 72.

35 “Radi se na izradi jedinstvenog regulatornog plana za Sušak I Rijeku” [Work is underway to develop a single regulatory plan for Sušak and Rijeka], PK, 29-9-1946, nr. 362, p. 2.

36 “Završeno je djelo spajanja Rijeke I Sušaka” [The work of connecting Rijeka and Sušak has been completed], PK, 23-10-1946, nr. 372, p. 1

37 “Završeno je djelo spajanja Rijeke I Sušaka” [The work of connecting Rijeka and Sušak has been completed]

38 “Švapsko” has a slightly pejorative note. “Završeno je djelo spajanja Rijeke I Sušaka” [The work of connecting Rijeka and Sušak has been completed]

of the unjust separation of Rijeka from Croatia as the corpus separatum. The new regulatory plan for Rijeka was seen as a great opportunity to repair the urban planning mistakes of the past, associated with past rulers:

“And those ...Hungarian ... and the ... the Italian (in fact, a reduced Hungarian plan) did not take much account or, more importantly, did not take into consideration the position of the industry, the resolution of the question of the railroad, the more dense city center, the old city”³⁹

One key integrative project was the public space replacing the old border between Rijeka and Sušak, over the river. During Tito’s 1946 visit after the takeover of Rijeka, he gave a speech calling for the abolition of the border. A monument with the engraving of this call was placed on the bridge, making this public space the symbolic place of the erasure of the border.

The Old Town

In January 1950, concerned about the fate of his apartment in the old town centre Franjo Jelovčić wrote a letter to the Rijeka authorities. He owned of a third-floor apartment in Calle Isolani, in a building that he described as “old and dilapidated, but not in ruins”. The city had launched a demolition campaign in the old town, to clear the ruins of the war bombings. Jelovčić insisted that the apartment looked the same even twenty years before, when he had bought it. A manual laborer at the Brušić wood company, he was still living in his “small house with only a ground floor” on Ragusa street, and he rented his flat in the old town. “I consider the house is not ruined”, he argued, mentioning how he had invested 25000 lira for repair. He demanded a flat in equally good conditions in case the authorities insisted on demolishing the building.⁴⁰ Several owners of old town property wrote such letters. In

³⁹ “Priprema se regulacioni plan za Rijeku, Sušak i okolicu. Projeckt novog plano pred-vida jedinstvenost citavog predjela od Mošćenica do Kraljevice. Autor: Ing. Z Kolacio” [A regulatory plan is being prepared for Rijeka, Sušak and its surroundings. The project of the new plan envisages the cohesion of the entire area from Mošćenice to Kraljevica. Author: Ing. Z Kolacio], 12-01-1947, PK, nr. 406, p. 2.

⁴⁰ DARI 86 JU 16 Gradjevinski Odjel. Rušenje zgrada GNO RI, 387-1950, Zapisnik 31. I 1950. Pristupa Jelovčić Franjo od Ivana, vlasnik III kate lijevo stan, Calle Isolani 1 Rijeka

some cases, the author of these missives were renters since owners had fled to Italy. Many were working class people living modestly in the old housing stock of Rijeka's historic core. They were trying to make a case for either not demolishing the buildings or receiving compensation, in reaction to the municipality's plans for the old town.

The old town center of Rijeka was partially destroyed in the bombings, yet it in the post-war reconstruction efforts, it played a marginal role. The post-war authorities were focused on building workers houses in other areas of the city, and the old town was also used for such housing. Nevertheless, the old town was seen both by the city's population, old and new, as well as by planners, as undesirable.⁴¹ Some people ascribed the ruined state of several buildings in the old town to war destruction.⁴² Nevertheless, the squalid conditions in the entire area also showed continuity, as the "slum conditions" of the area existed in the interwar times as well. In the reconstruction, the old town was treated as a problematic, unsanitary ground, in need of clearing. Lacking a specific vision for the entire district, most interventions included the occasional clearing of ruins and even of undamaged existing buildings. It was only a decade later that local architect Igor Emili turned his attention towards the old town, interested in its modernization and reactivation. In his capacity as a planner of the Urban Institute for Istria and the Croatian Littoral, he drafted a plan for the regeneration of the old town. Later, in the 1970s, practicing as an architect, he designed modern interventions in the bombed out or cleared sites.

For many of the Fiumans who left to Italy, the old town was an important part of the city's Italian identity- for instance, Marisa Madieri recalled in her autobiographic novel "the center with its dark buildings" as her quintessential Fiume.⁴³ The demolitions in the area, particularly of buildings owned by Italians who had left, could have then been seen as part and parcel of the erasure of the Italian presence in the city. Nevertheless, the clearing of ruined buildings and those which were considered as unsanitary was a common practice throughout Europe at that time- in Germany, for instance, the operations of *Sanierung*, were a common feature of post-war urban reconstruction.⁴⁴ Moreover, the reports on the demolitions and the letters from

41 Stari Grad Moje Mladosti (Vremeplov 50-Ih Godina) - Rijeka. Rijeka 1998.

42 Stari Grad Moje Mladosti, 1998.

43 van Hout 2020. op.cit. *Marisa Madieri*: Verde Acqua. Torino 1987.

44 *Jeffrey M. Diefendorf*: In the Wake of War the Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II. New York 1993.

residents, as well as from conservationists, also support the interpretation that clearings had to do with the generic technical views of the time, of a slum that needed redevelopment: residents and former residents with often Italian names merely asked for compensation, while planners and conservationists, after 1947 mostly with Croatian names, advocated either for the rehabilitation (*sanacija*) of the area or for the safeguarding of what seen as important built heritage.⁴⁵ For instance, in the case of Calle della Nave, from where most pre-war inhabitants had already left to Italy,⁴⁶ reports assessed its buildings as “unhygienic”, “in danger of collapse”, “abandoned and ruined”, “uninhabitable”, “prone to infectious diseases”, “must be demolished”.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the Conservation Institute, the institution dealing with heritage matters in Rijeka, opposed the demolition of several buildings in the street, as they reflected “the architectural image, of one part of the old town”, yet did not consider the entire segment as an urban ensemble. In a later letter from March 1950, conservator Aleksandar Perc, the Institute’s representative, pointed out that these buildings were the goods of the people, framing heritage as a common good, a “common national good “according to the legislation of the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia and fitting the socialist tenets.⁴⁸ The arguments of both proponents of destruction and of protection were framed in technical frames corresponding to the generic professional opinions at the time in Europe- an urban planning practice that looked at reconstruction as an opportunity to modernize and to move beyond the unsanitary old urban fabric, and a conservation approach still hesitant to consider entire ensembles and focusing on select objects. The stated intention thus matches professional frames.

45 DARI 86 JU 16 Gradjevinski Odjel. Rušenje zgrada GNO RI 1948-49. Rušenje starih zgrada u starom gradu. Zapisnik 17 III 1950 [Demolition of old buildings in the old town]

46 DARI 86 JU 16 Gradjevinski Odjel. Rušenje zgrada GNO RI 1948-49. Rušenje starih zgrada u starom gradu. Letter 8.I.1950, Predmet: Rušenje objekata u starom gradu [Subject: Demolition of buildings in the old town]

47 DARI 86 JU 16 Gradjevinski Odjel. Rušenje zgrada GNO RI 1948-49. Rušenje starih zgrada u starom gradu.,,Pregled za rušenje u obzir dolazecih kuca u Calle della nave” [Overview for demolition of houses in Calle della nave”]

48 DARI 86 JU 16 Gradjevinski Odjel. Rušenje zgrada GNO RI, 387-1950 Predmet: Rušenje kuca u starom gradu



Street scene from the old town under the Roman gate.⁴⁹

An underlying assumption could be that with residents already gone, technical language could hide attempts to erasure. Then the question would be why were those very sections of the old town cleared, and not others- and why would some particular ensembles, described in contemporary accounts as slum-like, suggest more Italianness than others. Moreover, Belvedere, the nineteenth - earliest 20th century neighbourhood with an architecture resembling that in Northern Italian towns, was the main area associated with Italians.⁵⁰ As such, we cannot infer from the examined sources that the old town redevelopment can be connected to an intentionality of frontier urbanism practices related to nation-building. What the case of the old town reflects instead is how practices associated with urban redevelopment were framed as technical operations in the spirit of the times. Residents and owners, both those who left and those who stayed, did not have a say in the evolution of the area, but aimed at negotiating forms of compensation for the loss of the built environment.

⁴⁹ Photo courtesy of National Library, Zagreb, Zbirka Razglednice, topic: Rijeka.

⁵⁰ Marco Abram, personal communication



The Venetian Lion.⁵¹

Symbolic Makeovers

While the demolition of buildings in the old town were framed as a technical operation, other acts of removing buildings were directly connected to getting rid of the presence of Italian rule and can be seen as frontier urbanism. This included the removal of buildings considered symbolic to the fascist past, or selected markers of the Italian interwar rule in general.

One key symbol of the Italian rule over Rijeka had been already destroyed in 1945 by the German occupying forces. The Lion of San Marco, traditionally associated with Venice- which had in fact never ruled over Fiume/Rijeka- had been built in 1926 on a prominent location on the Riva. Dedicated to Italian army volunteers of the First World War, it featured a *fascio littorio* on the side.⁵² As such, it blended the Venetian reference to the contemporary Italian polity. It acted as a new landmark of the city, bringing forward a narrative of a Venetian, then Italian, Adriatic, into a key public space.⁵³ In the

51 DARI, Zbirka Razglednice, "Monumento ai Caduti", RI 33.

52 Ivan Jeličić: "Venetian Lion", Rijeka/Fiume [Mobile app]. 2020, Google Play. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.rijekafiume.ca&hl=en_US&gl=US

53 Abram, M. 2018.

interwar period, the promenade dock was itself renamed San Marco, shifting the symbolic geography from the local toponymic Adamich, referring to an important Rijeka family, to Venice. Nevertheless, after its destruction in war, its debris was used for the reconstruction of the dock, renamed Riva Boduli.⁵⁴

The emblematic eagle on top of the City Clock Tower did not have such straightforward connotations as the Lion. The decision to remove it in 1949 was described as a removal of a symbol of both fascist and imperial rule, incompatible with the new socialist city.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, its connection with fascism was rather tortuous. A double-headed eagle, with heads facing the same direction, had been a feature of the city's official seal since 1659, when Habsburg Emperor Leopold I assigned it to the city. The City Clock Tower was adorned with sculptures of both the Rijeka eagle and the Habsburg eagle, which was also double-headed, with heads facing opposite directions.⁵⁶ An eagle statue was placed on top of the tower from the middle of 18th century, but that was removed in 1890 with the construction of a new cupola. Tensions emerged between those who wanted the cupola to be adorned with the Hungarian flag – on the eve of Hungary's grand Millennium celebrations, a key event of nation-building –, and those who wanted a local Rijeka flag.⁵⁷ In 1906, a group of women, close to the autonomist movement, paid for a metal sculpture of a double-headed eagle which topped the cupola. However, during D'Annunzio's occupation of Fiume, as the eagle was seen as connected to the Habsburgs, two *arditi* – Italian soldiers- climbed the tower and cut off one head, thus leaving a single-headed eagle, like the Roman bird. During the interwar, the bird indeed signified a reconquered Italianness, which the 1949 decision was based on. However, the history of the troubled bird reflects the multiple threads of Rijeka's history: between a local and often autonomist identity and conflicting imperial visions- Habsburg – the usual suspect of Empire, but also Hungarian and Italian nation-building projects, which can themselves be understood as imperial projects.⁵⁸

54 *Jeličić, I. 2020.*

55 *Igor Žic: A Short Story of the City of Rijeka. Rijeka 2007. 168.*

56 *Ivan Jeličić - Vjieran Pavlaković: "The double headed eagle", Rijeka/Fiume [Mobile app]. 2020, Google Play. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.rijekafiume.ca&hl=en_US&gl=US*

57 *Jeličić -Pavlaković 2020.*

58 *Pieter M. Judson: The Habsburg Empire: A New History. Cambridge MA 2016.; Paul Miller and Claire Morelon: Embers of Empire: Continuity and Rupture in the Habsburg Successor States After 1918. Oxford and New York 2018.*



The Clock Tower without the eagle statue during the socialist Yugoslav period.⁵⁹

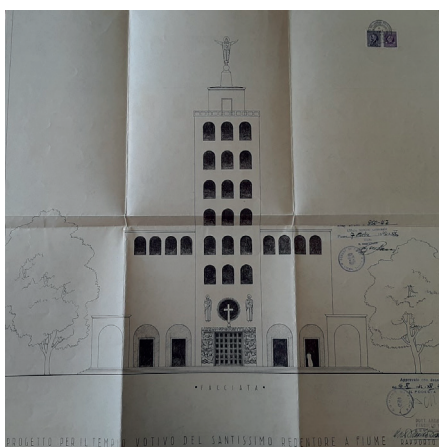
Also in 1949, the local council decided to remove also a much newer feature, connected more directly and explicitly to a past that was to be removed. The Temple of the Most Holy Redeemer was erected during the last years of Italian rule as a marker of the redemption of the Italian nation. It was placed on the Southern corner of the park in Mlaka, intended to mark the place where Italian land troops first entered the city on November 17th 1918. Its location marked what was seen as the liberation of the city, with the square named XVII Novembre, and the street Santa Entrata – the Holy Entrance. The temple replaced a small old church of St Andrew, removed through the Regulatory Plan of 1938, which made place for this symbolic new structure. The vision was to shape new civic center for Fiume, bringing together the profane and the sacred in a new, representative public space and expression of Italianness in Fiume.⁶⁰ The temple was built with the help of money

⁵⁹ Croatian State Archives (hence: HDA), AG FOTO fond HR-HDA-1422

⁶⁰ *Julija Lozzi Barković*: Medjuratna Arhitektura Rijeke i Sušaka-Usporedba i Europsko

raised during a collection which started in 1941.⁶¹

The competition for the design of the votive church and the ossuary was won by the architect Virgilio Vallot. The Venetian architect was known as the author of the new train station in Venice and he won the competition against three other competitors. As the Venezia Santa Lucia station, his project for Fiume was a modernist building. However, it included elements of the early Christian and Romanesque tradition including a mosaic inspired by those in the Venetian island of Torcello, with the representation of Christ the Redeemer on the throne. Vallot declared that the church would embody the “new dignity of contemporary Italian architecture”.⁶²



Plan of the Temple of the Most Holy Redeemer⁶³

Construction began at the end of 1942. Because of high costs, the difficulty in procuring materials, and the lack of workforce, by the time it was inaugurated in March 1944, only the nave and the altar were completed. From the original plan, the high bell tower and the entrance were missing, as well as the marbles and mosaics. It was already used for service in 1945 and

Okruženje [Interwar Architecture of Rijeka and Sušak-Comparison and European Environment] Rijeka 2015. 365.

61 Il tempio del Redentore si sta realizzando al voto dei Fiumani [The Temple of the Redeemer is being realized by the vow of Fiumians]. La vedetta d'Italia. Br. 9. Fiume. 10.1.1944.2.

62 Lozzi Barković 2015. 366.

63 DARI 57- kut 85/4-0/1 Chiesa Giardini Publici

remained opened until 1949.⁶⁴ It was demolished on November 4, 1949, because city politicians thought it was a symbol of fascism, with its “lictor style”. Moreover, the church impeded the construction of the new avenue connecting the center with the Kantrida quarter.

The Highway as the Yugoslav Project

The National Front Highway⁶⁵ was the ultimate urban project to fixate the new socialist identity of Rijeka. Finalized in November 1949, the almost two kilometer avenue linked Mlaka, the gateway to the city center, with Kantrida. As a road connecting more directly the center of Rijeka to the shipyard and onward to the Opatija coast, it marked a renewed connection. As an infrastructure project, it showed the technical progress of modernity that the socialist project would come to embody. As a project conducted by brigades of volunteers, it was meant to represent the allegiance of people to the new system, the work of solidarity and the abnegation of Rijekans to build a new society. The official press assiduously reported on the project all throughout 1949, boasting the large numbers of volunteers – in his overarching history of Rijeka, Igor Žic qualified them as people who “more or less” volunteered.⁶⁶ The press highlighted the thousands of people and hundreds of thousands of hours spent on this project, with a report in July 1949 showing that 9749 volunteers from the first rayon of Rijeka, 7965 from the second, and 9244 from the third volunteered for the highway.⁶⁷ The newspapers praised the efforts of the volunteers and also invited others to join. Nevertheless, they also mentioned how an important contribution to the construction was given by the military, underlying that the volunteer effort wasn’t enough.⁶⁸

64 DARI 57, kut 85/4-0/1 Chiesa Giardini Publici

65 The road was later called Marx and Engels street, and is today Zvonimirova street.

66 Žic: 2007. 169.

67 I frontisti della città di Fiume hanno dato 596208 ore di lavoro volontario [The frontists of the city of Fiume gave 596,208 hours of voluntary work], Giovedì, 14 luglio VI 165.

68 Ultimato l’80 per cento dei lavori sull’Autostrada [80 percent of the work on the highway completed]. La Voce, 16 July 1949.



Volunteers building the National Front Highway (later Marx and Engels highway).⁶⁹

At the completion of the project, the press declared the success of the highway construction as the proof of the importance and popularity of the socialist idea. A first page title boasted that the work of the highway was a response to the “calumnious campaign of detractors”, the enemies of socialism.⁷⁰ The road thus became an iconic project for the new state, and the erasure of the Votive Temple at its Eastern end reflected how the elements of the old fascist rule were replaced by socialism as a world of the future. Just as the redevelopment of the old town echoed the transnational practice of post-war ruin clearing in the name of *Sanierung*, the highway represented the transnational socialist project, fixating the state presence in its frontier to the capitalist world.

⁶⁹ DARI 1171-3-25.

⁷⁰ Dovršenje Austostrade “Narodnog fronta” bit će još jedna velika radna pobjeda frontovaca Rijeke [Completion of the “People’s Front” highway will be another great working victory for the Rijeka front] I Rijecki List, 4 Nov 1949.

Conclusion

We have seen how the transformations of the built environment in Rijeka/Fiume in the twentieth century mirrored broader European trends in urban planning and architecture- the popularity of historicism before 1914 and of modernism in both the interwar and the post-war period, the urban decay of old city centres and their representations as “slums” in need of clearance for *Sanierung* and redevelopment. On the other hand, particular reconfigurations highlighted the political transitions that the city has experienced: monuments erected and demolished, including building-monuments such as the Votive Temple, projects that show the triumph of a new system such as the highway constructed through volunteer work. These fixated the political identity of the city and secured the new states in urban space, thus reflecting practices of frontier urbanism. However, as the discussion of the old town underlined, even if a narrative frame can portray an urban planning act as motivated by a nation-building agenda, the intentionality of urban planning can be also connected to mere technical arguments within a profession. As such, reading the transformation of urban space solely through a political lens of states securing their ontological security has its limits.

In April 2017, a two-headed eagle statue was placed again on the dome of the City Clock Tower in Rijeka. In the eve of the city becoming the 2020 European Capital of Culture⁷¹, the cityscape received this reference to a symbol of the city’s past that connected it with the Habsburg era once again. Discussions of a cosmopolitanism connected with imperial nostalgia are abundant in Central Europe, but in the case of Rijeka with its multi-layered threads and interpretation of the past, this can be seen in a multitude of ways- from a nod to the past autonomy, of Empire, a cancellation of both the Italian beheading and the socialist one. It can also signal a city in search of its past. The opening celebrations of the European Capital of Culture in 2020, however, despite under the slogan of A port of Diversity, focused on the recent past of a thriving industrial port, while references to Italians or Hungarians were reduced to a minimum. While for many of the new arrivals in Rijeka after 1945 and their descendants, the memory of Rijeka was one of a city functioning mostly in one dominant language, the built environment attested to the layers of a multifaceted past. Yet, reading such cues in the built environment is not

71 Together with Galway in Ireland.

direct and immediate. Acts such as the new street signs in the old town indicating past names, or public history projects such as the Rijeka/Fiume app⁷², can contribute to an awareness of these layers.

72 Rijeka/Fiume [Mobile app]. 2020, Google Play. https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.riekafiume.ca&hl=en_US&gl=US

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Fiume (Rijeka). Source: Fortepan / Ebner, 1938