

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
Master of Science in Architecture Construction City
Honors theses

Buildings by the border. The territory reshaping and housing programmes for the Istrian - Dalmatian refugees after the Second World War

by Lara Gregori
Tutor: Sergio Pace

The Italian eastern border was the last to be defined, in the second half of the twentieth century. For hundreds of years harsh clashes have taken place along this imaginary line, with the city of Trieste, a gate towards the eastern Europe, being a clear symbol of these conflicts. The frontier created was unstable and this precariousness led to evident consequences, with strong repercussions in the social, economical, industrial and urban environments.

The free territory of Trieste was divided in two areas, District A controlled by the Allies and District B ruled by the Yugoslav civil administration (Socijalistička Federativna Republika Jugoslavija, under the authority of field marshal Josip Broz Tito). This situation caused the migration of 350.000 people due to the loss of territories in the Istrian and Dalmatic regions, both multiethnic at the time. Italians, defeated in WWII, and non-communist Yugoslavs were forced to leave their homes and suffered many other forms of tyranny. The subsequential evolutions in urban design and buildings are rather complicated and closely related to this situation.

Refugees were given the permission to live in the district A only after political resolutions, which were followed by the construction of specific buildings to host them, the so-called border houses. A new national recovery began, causing thousands of fugitives: the goal was to increase the percentage of Italian people living in Trieste. The wish was that, with a clear majority of Italians, the district A would have been given to Italy once the temporary government had expired.

A first definition came in 1954, when Italy gained power over the District A, but lost a part of the hill country around Muggia. After the confirmation of Yugoslavian authority on District B, the migration pace, which until then was slowly decreasing, started accelerating again and thousands of people reached Trieste. Both housing and primary care emergencies continued for many years, to the extent that some refugee camps were closed only in the 60's.

A quite peculiar case, which could well describe what happened after the Second World War, is the city of Muggia, the first town on the istrian peninsula and last Italian coastal city.



(immagine1: Work in progress in Borgo San Cristoforo-Muggia, one of the new village for refugees - Sixties. Source: Municipality of Muggia)



(immagine2: Borgo San Cristoforo today. Source: Picture of Lara Gregori)

In 1954 the London Memorandum modified the border (Muggia still being part of Italy), a decision which was later confirmed by the Treaty of Osimo in 1975. Nevertheless Muggia was deprived of a large amount of territory, welcoming at the same time many of the refugees coming from Yugoslavia. The changes in the authority over some territories, together with the new growing suburbs, caused some deep transformations of the urban structure. Lately, first with the Slovenian independence from former Yugoslavia, then after its access to the European Union, this fragmentation is less perceived than it was before: nowadays the border, the same line once known as the Iron Curtain, can be crossed without checkpoints and visible frontiers, hardly noticing any change.



(immagine3: the border across Cerei Alta-Muggia. Source: Picture of Lara Gregori).

Walking along the border, the only sign that can still be seen today are the boundary stones, last remains of the old violence on a now evenly shaped land.

The boundary line was the main cause of the great migration and all its consequences. Indeed the border defined the countries but it also mutilated a territory, without any consideration about history and traditions: this brought to the construction of new roads and houses and entire cities had to change in order to cope with thousands of immigrants moving towards the Italian peninsula. All these consequences, which for decades have been disregarded, might today offer a good example to clarify the meaning of the word border.

For further information, please contact:
Lara Gregori, e-mail: lara.gregori89@gmail.com