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# Edinost – Finding places for the past in Trieste

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Edinost is a Public Art and storytelling project for Trieste, created and directed by the artist Alessio Mazzaro. A space of encounter and dialogue for the communities of the city.

Publisher: Alexandros Delitanassis  
Editorial board: Alessio Mazzaro

**KA**  
Asterios Editore

SERVIZI EDITORIALI srl  
via G. Donizetti, 3/a, 34133 Trieste  
P. IVA 01084190329

# EDINOST

This issue is co-curated with the Max Planck Institute (DE) and written by Giulia Carabelli, Andrea Grifante, Maura Hametz, Martin Hlavacek, Annika Kirbis, Daša Ličen, Jeremy Walton, and Glenda Sluga.

Bimonthly publication. Price ..... 0,50 €

## Finding place(s) for the past in Trieste.

### FOREWORDS

GIULIA CARABELLI, ANNIKA KIRBIS, JEREMY WALTON (MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY, GÖTTINGEN)

Trieste has long been a city where the past remains remarkably present. Memories of the city's centuries-long history as the principal commercial port for the Habsburg Empire have underpinned conflicting narratives of its geopolitical and cultural identity since the end of the Empire itself. More recently, in pursuit of new regional affiliations and geographies of belonging—fuelled, especially, by a reinvigorated tourist industry—Triestinos have come to recognize the Empire as repository of opportunities in the present and for the future. Despite the singularity of Trieste's history, the city is by no means alone in this. Whether aimed at restoring bygone social, cultural, and political forms or motivated by the pleasures and profits of reminiscence, nostalgia is very much contemporary. And it has taken root especially in cities such as Trieste, which boast pasts of ethnic, religious, and linguistic plurality capable of satiating today's appetite for cosmopolitanism. Nostalgia also reshapes, polishes, and occasionally obscures spaces within cities. Urban renovation and restoration take many forms; among their most overt interventions are statues, sculptures, and monuments. With the power of municipal and state legitimation, statues authorize which pasts can speak in the present, which memories are recuperable, and, conversely, which histories must remain subterranean. Nor should we assume that monuments speak in a monotone about the past. Sometimes—as in the case with The Risiera di San Sabba—monuments may even recapitulate very modes of violence that they are meant to commemorate. Hence, far from being frozen in time, the essays of this issue capture the (often quite literally) moving lives of some Triestine monuments. Once carved in stone (or cast in bronze for that matter) the material solidity of these monuments may well obscure the inherent ambivalence of their meanings, as each epoch and each community places, reads and instrumentalises the same monuments for their own, diverse purposes. Navigating the currents of time, histories embodied in the monuments themselves are dismembered and re-membered in order to form new narratives of continuity and coherence. The imperial past of Trieste has also experienced waves of erasure as well as revaluation. Even those nostalgic about the former Habsburg presence and the city's status in the empire have different reasons for their nostalgia. While monuments can be removed, as in the case of the Fountain of Four Continents and the statues of Elisabetta and Fer-

dinand Maximilian, they may linger on in their absence, and once reinstated, their monumentality does not necessarily prevent them from falling into amnesia and becoming architectural 'background noise'. Through complex processes of making and un-making Habsburg traces in Trieste, unlikely encounters in the city's urban space have been produced, even as histories and memories often become conflated. In light of these interwoven and contested memories, whether Habsburg nostalgia may be invoked to inspire unity and inclusivity among Trieste's urban dwellers, as the recent campaign in support of a statue of Maria Theresa suggests, remains an open question. The very history of Edinost, shut down by fascists in 1928 and now resurrected, is emblematic of the same process of silencing and voicing memories that are celebrated or destroyed according to shifting political powers. Narodni Dom, the centre of the Slovenian Cultural life where Edinost was printed, was also destroyed. Once it was rebuilt to host a school, its presence became the remainder and reminder of an absence that was never fully restored. The revived Edinost wishes to foster a space where people of Trieste can think, talk, and find ways to cultivate attitudes and modalities of acceptance rather than supporting the erection of walls separating communities that share the same city. This edition reflects on the erasure and reinstitution of memories that materialise in the urban environment, but it also embraces the spirit of the original publication that did so much to voice European Anti-Fascist movements when Fascism was on the rise. Edinost lost its original battle, but time has proven that this loss was not permanent. Now, we strive recover its memory in the hope that it can become inspirational yet again.

### THE FOUNTAIN OF THE FOUR CONTINENTS

ANDREA GRIFFANTE (HISTORIAN OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE. RESEARCH FELLOW OF THE VYTAUTAS MAGNUS UNIVERSITY, KAUNAS, LITHUANIA)

To the tourist who enters the magnificent stage that is Piazza Unità d'Italia, Trieste appears as an empress embellished with imperial regalia. Yet, like a thorn in her side, the Fountain of the Four Continents bears witness to the contested identities of this city, which have been discussed, destroyed, reshaped, and rearranged as part of its history. The fountain was built in the 18th century to be placed in the piazza and to celebrate the financial success of Trieste, which was due to its new status as a porto franco (free port). The allegorical sculptures of the four known continents are overlooked by a winged figure who announces Trieste's newly acquired fame to the

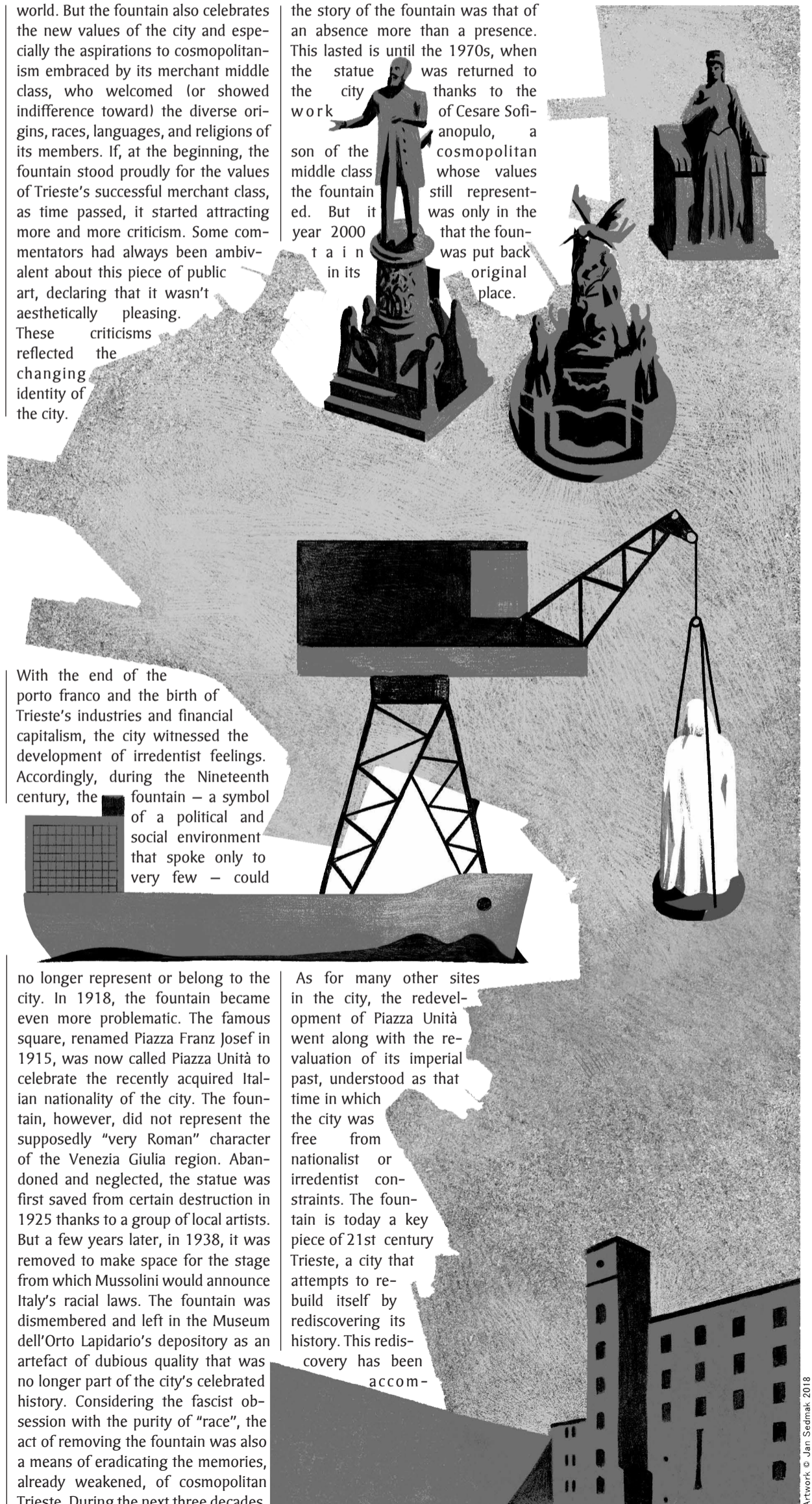
world. But the fountain also celebrates the new values of the city and especially the aspirations to cosmopolitanism embraced by its merchant middle class, who welcomed (or showed indifference toward) the diverse origins, races, languages, and religions of its members. If, at the beginning, the fountain stood proudly for the values of Trieste's successful merchant class, as time passed, it started attracting more and more criticism. Some commentators had always been ambivalent about this piece of public art, declaring that it wasn't aesthetically pleasing. These criticisms reflected the changing identity of the city.

With the end of the porto franco and the birth of Trieste's industries and financial capitalism, the city witnessed the development of irredentist feelings. Accordingly, during the Nineteenth century, the fountain — a symbol of a political and social environment that spoke only to very few — could

no longer represent or belong to the city. In 1918, the fountain became even more problematic. The famous square, renamed Piazza Franz Josef in 1915, was now called Piazza Unità to celebrate the recently acquired Italian nationality of the city. The fountain, however, did not represent the supposedly "very Roman" character of the Venezia Giulia region. Abandoned and neglected, the statue was first saved from certain destruction in 1925 thanks to a group of local artists. But a few years later, in 1938, it was removed to make space for the stage from which Mussolini would announce Italy's racial laws. The fountain was dismembered and left in the Museum dell'Orto Lapidario's depository as an artefact of dubious quality that was no longer part of the city's celebrated history. Considering the fascist obsession with the purity of "race", the act of removing the fountain was also a means of eradicating the memories, already weakened, of cosmopolitan Trieste. During the next three decades,

the story of the fountain was that of an absence more than a presence. This lasted is until the 1970s, when the statue was returned to the city thanks to the work of Cesare Sofianopulo, a son of the middle class whose values the fountain still represented. But it was only in the year 2000 that the fountain was put back in its original place.

As for many other sites in the city, the redevelopment of Piazza Unità went along with the revaluation of its imperial past, understood as that time in which the city was free from nationalist or irredentist constraints. The fountain is today a key piece of 21st century Trieste, a city that attempts to rebuild itself by rediscovering its history. This rediscovery has been accom-



Artwork © Jan Sedmak 2018

panied by a significant re-reading of the fountain's symbolism. No longer the celebration of the cosmopolitan merchant middle class of the 18th century, the fountain is today the symbol of the Mitteleuropean culture embraced by Trieste, along with its singular way of being European.

#### "ELISABETTA IN LIBERTY SQUARE"

MAURA HAMETZ (OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY, NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, USA)

In Trieste/Trst/Triest's Piazza Libertá, in front of the once terminal station of the Habsburg Südbahn, stands the statue "Elisabetta." The memorial to the Habsburg empress remembered as "Sissi," proposed by a worker's committee in 1900, was inaugurated in December 1912. After the Habsburg collapse, "Elisabetta" was sent to storage. For seven decades, "Sissi" remained in the shadows. In October 1997, the monument returned to the piazza. Fierce debate over the statue's site reflected delineations of space in the urban imagination – the San Giusto Hill or Cathedral rejected as an Italian or religious space, Piazza Hortis rejected as dedicated to the arts, and Miramar Castle rejected as too remote. The city commission decided on Piazza della Stazione, which already held a monument commemorating five hundred years of Trieste's dedication to the Habsburg empire. The Sissi monument comprised of a bronze maiden empress figure (by Viennese sculptor Franz Seifert), marble slabs (by Triestine architects Teodoro Hummel and Francesco Schranz) and a plinth (paid for by private contributions) was a compromise, combining Viennese, Triestine, and workers' homages. It referred subtly to Elisabeth's reputation as a royal "outsider" and champion of oppressed peoples. Elisabeth stood surrounded by common people. The slab to the right featured commoners with a youngster offering up flowers, a testament to the people's affection. To the left, mythological images represented the arts and culture depicting Elisabeth's love of nature and the arts. Elisabeth's role as the emperor consort, emphasis on her femininity, and her reputation as an enigmatic, elusive, and embattled member of the Habsburg royal family, contributed to the ambiguity of the meanings of her representation of the Habsburg legacy. While a royal, she was a non-threatening one in the context of Habsburg power. Yet, her charismatic appeal to the masses and heritage as a Bavarian princess made her likeness appear awkward in the contested border city. At the end of World War II, ethnic animosities and uncertain politics in the Italo-Yugoslav borderlands caused Elisabeth, a reminder of the Habsburg past of the Adriatic port and links with German culture, to remain hidden from public view. Calls to restore the statue in the 1950s and in the 1970s came to naught. But, with the 1990s rebirth of Central Europe and the emergence of independent Slovenia and Croatia, the statue became a potential symbol of reconciliation and revival of former imperial lands. Still, "Elisabetta" remained a source of contention, and proposals to restore the statue caused a public furor, with opposing political factions facing off in the media. Supporters of Central European initiatives called for restoration of the statue as a sign of Trieste/Trst's transcendence of its contentious past and an inspiration for cooperation; opponents saw Elisabeth as a sign of retrograde

nostalgia and anti-nationalism in Italy. By 1997, Elisabeth's supporters prevailed, and the refurbished monument was unveiled in the restored park in front of the rail station. Since 1997, the "Sissi" furor has died down, and the site has fallen into disrepair. Yet, Elisabeth still stands in the park, in front of the station built as the Sudbahn terminal, in a piazza named for Italy's "liberation" from the Habsburg empire. While Elisabeth has faded into the background for the moment, she will surely re-emerge as a contested figure – the protector or despoiler of a public site in a European border city.

#### TRIESTE SALUTA VIENNA

GLENDA SLUGA (PROFESSOR OF INTERNATIONAL HISTORY AND ARC KATHLEEN FITZPATRICK LAUREATE FELLOW, THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY, AUSTRALIA)

Habsburg nostalgia began almost as soon as the Habsburg empire disappeared. But that nostalgia was not all waltzes and strudel. The German military that occupied Venezia Giulia in late 1943, after the collapse of the Italian fascist regime, restored the old Austrian Küstenland province, promoting nostalgia for the Habsburg past in radio programs such as Trieste salute Vienna. Another strategy was to foster the Slovene language – a policy intended to evoke memories of an older imperial community, and win over Slovenes who might otherwise support the resistance. On some accounts, the Nazi occupiers themselves were former Austrians. But it was a German memory of the Habsburg empire that was critical to this short but destructive period in Trieste's history. The resuscitation of a Habsburg past was also the context in which a rice processing factory, the Risiera di San Sabba, built in 1913 under Austria, was repurposed thirty years later as a Nazi internment and extermination camp. The Risiera building now acts as an imposing museum, memorializing the complex and controversial Second World War past in this region. On some estimates twenty-five thousand civilians and resistance fighters—as if there was no discrimination in the policy of internment towards Slovenes, Italians, or Jews, men, women, or children. Five thousand were murdered and disposed of in the Risiera's especially built cremation ovens. All under the auspices of a distorted memory of the cultural strains of the Habsburg empire. The Risiera stopped operating April 28 1945, the material remnants of its sinister purpose destroyed by fleeing Waffen-SS troops. The museum educates visitors about the horrors of that war. In the museum's entrance, a photographic exhibition provides accounts of the experiences of the Risiera's victims. In a rear section, a series of plaques recalls the victims remembered by the 'Trieste Council', the 'eternal upholders of the ideals of patria and libertá'. By contrast, the 'Women of Trieste' pay homage in Slovene and Italian to the 'mothers, wives, and daughters of Trieste who died for the freedom of others'; a plaque featuring the partisan star mourns in Slovene and Italian for those who were killed for their 'ideals of freedom'. In 1976, an Italian trial of the German commanders in charge of the Risiera was less confident of whose lives, and deaths, mattered. Its judges disallowed crimes against humanity, de-

termined to only consider individual acts unrelated to military orders or the exigencies of war. The concluding judgement reinterpreted the Risiera as a transit camp from which a relatively small population of 'innocents' mainly Jewish were sent away to be murdered beyond the boundaries of the Italian state. All other victims killed at the Risiera site were 'non-innocent', particularly if they were members of a pro-Yugoslav local resistance movement that had been fighting against the (fascist) Italian state, on the argument that the resistance had incited the ferocity of Nazi and Fascist repression. Ironically, this judgement denied the existence of a pro-Italian resistance, whose members were also victims of the Risiera. The non-innocents were in effect complicity in crimes perpetrated against Italians by an alien occupying force. There was no space in this legal memory of the Second World War for a moral or ideological interpretation of battles that occurred across ethnic lines against Fascism, or for multi-lingual civilians of Trieste caught in the ideological crossfires. There was absolutely no memory of the Habsburg empire, above and beyond its nostalgic use as a pretext for installing Nazi rule and its brutal discounting of cultural, racial, and political enemies. Instead the same nationalist logic that had refused a linguistic and cultural memory of the Austrian past in 1943, was being used to interpret the Second World War itself. The Risiera di San Sabba, however, still stands, a material monument to all those intersecting, interwoven, Triestine pasts, and its own plural cultural and political reality.

#### FERDINAND MAXIMILIAN: FROM OVERLOOKING MIRAMARE TO BEING OVERLOOKED AND BACK

DASA LIČEN (DOCTORAL RESEARCHER, INSTITUTE OF SLOVENIAN ETHNOLOGY, ZRC SAZU)

On 3 April 1875, an eight-meter tall bronze statue dedicated to the deceased Archduke and Prince Ferdinand Maximilian of Austria, Prince of Hungary and Bohemia (1832–1867), was erected in Piazza Giuseppina. After the Great War, this square would be renamed Piazza Venezia, as its former name (Piazza Giuseppina) – clearly evoking the memory of Franz Josef – no longer fit Trieste's political aspirations and projected identity. The same could be said for the statue of Ferdinand Maximilian that stood tall overlooking "his" castle. To be sure, Castello Miramare was completed only in 1871, four years after Ferdinand Maximilian's tragic death in Mexico; but, in the meantime, it had become a symbol of his presence in Trieste, the Habsburg dynasty, the Austrian Empire, the good old times and, as the present text suggests, perhaps even the sign of a possible bright future to come. Unlike Ferdinand Maximilian's monument that was removed in 1919, the Castle of Miramare could not be hidden, and so it stayed, becoming a famous part of Trieste's landscape. Interestingly, in the past few decades, both the statue and the castle regained their prominence as key symbols of the city. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Trieste has been reimagined. Nostalgia for the Habsburg Empire has been resurrected to reshape everyday life in the city, often in very

tangible ways. It should not come as a surprise, then, that on 19 December 2008 the statue of Ferdinand Maximilian was repositioned in its original location, (though the square is still called Piazza Venezia). The restitution of this monument to the city reflects a broader process of reevaluating the Habsburg past, and it serves as one of the many reminders of a vanished imperial grandeur. This time around, there was no Emperor Franz Josef or other members of the noble family to celebrate the event, but many local dignitaries were indeed present, including representatives of the Catholic Church, who gave the statue their blessings. During the event, the "truly Mitteleuropean" dessert krapfen was served, while a marching band played Cielito Lindo, a song that was, according to some Austro-nostalgic people, quite inappropriate. It could be that critics would have preferred Johann Strauss' Radetzky March or a similar, "more Habsburg" tune. In fact, in the past years, many such tunes have been a regular part of this port city's soundscape, accompanying events such as the Gran Ballo Mitteleuropeo, or simply serving as a backdrop to drinking Ottakring beer and eating pretzels. Nostalgia for the supposedly tolerant and cosmopolitan 19th century Trieste is, however, not so much about the past as it is about the contemporary social configurations of the city and, even more, about its expectations for the future. Nostalgia is political. Of course, Trieste went from being a central European hub under the Empire to becoming a very peripheral Italian city. The present nostalgia thus reflects and exposes lingering hopes (and even strategies) for a brighter future, including the financial return that comes from celebrating the Habsburg past. For instance, Roberto Dipiazza, the current mayor of Trieste, claimed that the restitution of Ferdinand Maximilian's monument will attract more Austrian visitors. Along the same lines, in 2015, the light and sound performance Maximilian and Miramare: A Magical Dream for a Habsburg (performed in Italian, German and Slovenian) re-enacted Ferdinand Maximilian's life on stage, exemplifying how a romanticized version of 19th century Trieste had been commodified. Relocated monuments, as well as the revitalization of Habsburg cuisine, and other seemingly nostalgic revisions of the past, are predictable by-products of imperial nostalgia that, regardless of their historical accuracy, helps to lucratively market the city of Trieste and push it towards a more successful future. That being said, I would like to conclude somewhat provocatively by adding that local newspapers should not be astounded and overly suspicious of wealthy Austrians who have been acquiring many of Trieste's elite residences, especially in recent years.

#### A CITY SEARCHING FOR AN IDENTITY

ARCH. MARTIN HLAVACEK (STARASSOCIATI)

In 2017, various events in Trieste contributed to the celebration of what would have been Maria Theresa's 300th birthday. On 19 March 2017, Massimiliano Lacota, a representative of the Austrian House in Italy and the president of the Union of Istrians, established a Committee for the Realisation of a New Monument commemorating Maria Theresa, launching a massive campaign on social media. They disseminated

images of similar statues of the empress that can be still found in Austria, Germany, Slovakia and Ukraine. This was supposed to prove that Trieste should have erected such a statue, too. Eventually, the Committee approved the proposal for a gigantic statue of Maria Theresa standing on a pedestal (the proposed scale is 1:2). We could think of this popular initiative as a nostalgic movement towards the celebration of an idealised past, often narrated as peaceful and prosperous. This sentiment seems to be shared among the population of Trieste, which often regrets no longer being a pivotal part of an empire, and feels as if the city has been side-lined to such an extent that nothing new ever seems to happen here. In this sense, the monument acquires quasi-oneiric features. On 23 November 2017, a sketch of the proposed statue was presented at the exhibition Maria Theresa and Trieste. History and Culture of the City and its Harbour. The sculptor, who seems to have no previous experience, nonetheless received approval to build the statue from the regional office for the promotion of culture. Asked to comment on the proposal for the statue, the Regional Councillor for Culture, Mr. Torrenti, stated, "We (Triestinos) are the lucky result of various interactions between cultures, a result that is hard to understand even five kilometres away. Among us, there are Italian nationalists who are also pro-Habsburg, irredentists, and much more...both of my grandfathers fought in World War I, one with the Habsburgs and the other against them... luckily, they never faced each other during the war... Unfortunately, it seems as though there is always that one person who judges the memories of another person as inadequate. Therefore, interventions like this are of utmost importance." The vice-president of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage, Bortolotti Buitoni, added to this sentiment: "What our epoch lacks is a vision that goes beyond our single existences. Trieste is the most cosmopolitan city of Italy and because of this it should become a teacher for the future (maestra di futuro)." Both official representatives pragmatically commented on the popular initiative by stressing that the monument won't become the memory of one faction. Rather they described the statue as the catalyst for a more inclusive future for the city. Trieste is no longer the last frontier before communism, but this doesn't imply that it should be a small provincial town where the only foreigners who are welcome are the researchers working at its world-class scientific facilities. Furthermore, if we can no longer trust trade, industrial growth or tourism to bring wealth to the city, we should try to trust (memory of) Maria Theresa herself. Even though there are other equally valuable projects of urban renewal that the city administration should consider, the proposed erection of the statue of Maria Theresa is distinctive. It has a powerful role to reinvigorate the city's morale due to its symbolic power. This is also what urban development needs: to find ways to create enthusiasm among its citizens so that the future of the city can become, once again, a matter of debate. In other words, I, too, hope that this statue will create a positive opportunity to inspire a different future for Trieste.