

# Blueing the Coastline. From Heavy Industry to Sport Tourism in the Years Following World War II: The Case of Trieste

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Fig. 1 – The 2013 Barcolana. In the background, the Servola ironworks.

Source: Studio Borlenghi, Milan.

## 1. Introduction

The coastline around the city of Trieste, in Friuli Venezia Giulia, in the Upper Adriatic, is dotted with waypoints that describe a historical journey that has led to the transformation of a territory – in the last half century – from being

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a site of heavy industry plants to the stage of one of the world's most important sports tourism events, the *Barcolana* regatta.

As reconstructed in a previous contribution, the most apparent and perhaps most significant characteristic of Trieste, a seaport overlooking a gulf with the same name, is in its being a city of sea and wind. Predictably, the port infrastructure has always played a central role in the development of the appearance of the sea front, which was gradually adapted and equipped in order to favour the mooring of vessels, the loading and unloading of goods, and the setting-up of the companies handling the services necessary for these activities. This element was decisive in defining the urban history of the city, which gained increasing importance as the main seaport and emporium of the Habsburg monarchy between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries<sup>1</sup> (Modaffari, 2019). In fact, the link between Trieste and its port is constitutive in the history of the modern city which gained significant momentum with the privileges granted by Charles VI of free navigation in the Adriatic (1717) and the status of free ports for Trieste and Fiume (1719), deeds which would have led to the gradual integration and the «physical and functional interpenetration» between the two elements, with the construction of three planned villages (Teresiano, Giuseppino, Francheschino) to surround the coast overlooked by the medieval village of Città Vecchia (Old City) (Pultrone, 2011, p. 4).

In autumn 2021, in the southern part of the coast, the railway line connecting the Servola district and the agglomeration of Aquilinia was brought back into use: it had been in disuse since the end of the last century. Servola and Aquilinia are two very significant points on the industrial map of the area, along the coastline framing the sea, which connects them both to the contemporary port and the historic Porto Vecchio (Old Port); in the projects currently being implemented, the railway reactivation will be followed by the upgrading of the stations. While since the end of the 19th century, Servola had contained the Ironworks industrial complex (the *Ferriera*) where cast iron was produced for more than a hundred years for the metallurgical and iron and steel sectors, Aquilinia was established in 1938, following the inauguration – a few years earlier – of the *Aquila* refinery, which would remain active until 1985.

The revitalization of infrastructures linked to precise moments in the city's industrial past therefore stands as visible evidence of a gradual re-purposing of transport connections considered obsolete just a few years ago but which are now revealing their usefulness in the light of the reconversion of the area in relation to the increasingly prominent role played by the port infrastructure, and not only for merchant shipping. Tourism is also claiming its part of the coast and, in the most recent history of the *Barcolana*, it will be seen how the city center has also been involved in this broader transformation.

<sup>1</sup> For a historical examination of the events of the Trieste waterfront, see also Minca, 1995.

The first photo in this paper (fig. 1), showing the Ferriera belching its fumes in the distance, besieged by the sailing boats of the *Barcolana* in the foreground, is the perfect depiction of what can be seen as a radical shift in how Trieste's coastline is defined and represented: from a focus on heavy industry installations to the return of the sea. All these factors come together in the operation of blueing (a term more appropriate than *greening*) the coastline.

The visual documentation available can be a precious tool for observing these processes, especially if we analyse them using an ecocritical approach that focuses on specific aspects of a precise, localized relationship between culture and the physical environment, and provides us with the reasons underlying how the coast was transformed. Indeed, considering these representations of industrial plant as cultural objects, we see those hierarchies of values generated by Foucaultian discourse in its function of construction of reality and identity, enabling us to interpret the geopolitics interwoven into the «discursive practice» (Ó Tuathail, Agnew, 1992; Dell'Agnese, 2021, pp. 23-21). The changes in urban design go hand in hand with the changes in the discourse on the environment shown in the representations, and consequently with the changes in the visual repertoire emerging with the city's shifting from the myth of progress based on industrial development to the blueing of the coastline.

To verify this hypothesis, in the first part of this paper, we perform an analysis of the documentation collected in the context of the construction of the *GreenAtlas*<sup>2</sup>, taken from public and private archives, and referring to the case of the *Aquila* Refinery with the adjacent village of Aquilinia. We then explore the cases of the Servola Ironworks and the Barcola seafront. In the conclusions, we attempt to summarize our findings and propose possible future scenarios.

## 2. The *Aquila* Refinery

The *Aquila* Oil Refinery complex, in the Zaule-Monte d'Oro-Valle delle Noghere area, situated between the town of Muggia and the city of Trieste, began its activity in 1937, a year after construction was finished. The *Società Anonima Tecnico Industriale* (Anonymous Industrial Technical Society) *Aquila* was founded in August 1934 by the Austrian entrepreneur Franz Kind and had international investors as well as capital from FIAT motor company.

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<sup>2</sup>This article is based on research material put together for the Research Project of National Relevance 2017 entitled *Greening the Visual: An Environmental Atlas of Italian Landscapes*. The project is aimed at reconstructing how visual media contributed to forge contemporary environmental discourse, both in a historical perspective and in contemporary visual practices. The Atlas, which includes the documentation discussed here, can be consulted at the link: <https://greenatlas.cloud/>. All quotations from works in languages other than English are translated by the author.

During an official visit on 18 September 1938, just a few hours before the announcement of the racial laws, it was the then head of the Italian government, Benito Mussolini, who inaugurated the workers' village that would bear the name of Aquilinia – 18 houses and a kindergarten – in the eastern-most part of the area. In the past, there had been salt marshes there – abandoned at the beginning of the previous century – at the mouth of the Rosandra stream which had served as the border between the Austria and the Republic of Venice until the fall of the latter (1797) (Zubini, 2004, p. 13). Since 1892, the production plant of the San Sabba *Raffineria triestina di Olii Minerali* (Trieste Mineral Oil Refinery) had also stood on the Zaule plain: run with local capital, it had positioned itself as the forerunner of the Giulian oil industry, one of the first oil refineries in Europe (especially for crude oil coming from Galicia and Russia, for an annual production of about 30 thousand tons) (Fait, 2020, p. 10) and one of the foremost industrial structures in the Habsburg Empire (Mellinato, Toninelli, 2008, p. 390). The *San Sabba* refinery would last almost a century, ending production only in 1979.

The earliest facilities of the *Aquila* industrial complex covered an area of over 400,000 square meters, including a pier over 400 meters long where oil tankers could dock, and about eighty storage tanks (Zubini, 2004, pp. 47-53). The refinery produced diesel and fuel oils, to which mass was added, and refined products such as white spirit, solvent gasoline and paraffins. In its first year of activity, *Aquila* processed about 400,000 tons of crude oil, one quarter of the total amount processed in Italy. The supplies of crude, which came principally from the Middle East, the United States and Romania (Fait, 2020, p. 18), not only arrived by sea in oil tankers, but also by rail. The division of the production cycle (distillation, refining, special processing) was accompanied by the separation of the plant into sectors (the cooper's department, a craftsman's laboratory, a chemical laboratory, various maintenance workshops and a fire-fighting system) (Zubini, 2004, pp. 72-77) and production covered almost one third of Italy's requirements, while just over a third of the products were exported to Switzerland, Yugoslavia, Greece, Hungary and Turkey (Fait, 2020, p. 23).

The Second World War resulted in serious damage to the plant due to the bombings, especially in the first half of 1944, affecting the storage tanks and the workers' village but at the end of the war, everything was repaired, and production resumed in May 1947 (Zubini, 2004, pp. 65-81). At this point, *Aquila* embarked on a whirlwind series of acquisitions and by 1949, it was unloading over one million tons of crude oil per year (*ibidem*, p. 87), becoming the second largest refinery in Italy by capacity and further expanding production in the following decade. The production plants were gradually extended until 1972 (*ibidem*, p. 152). That year saw production reach its peak, after which a slow but inexorable decline began.

One of the most significant audio-visual documents relating to *Aquila* dates back to the years just after the war, and is a short film called *Aquila* (1950), directed by the American director of the Ente Radio Trieste, Herbert L. Jacobson, alias Jacopo Erbi. The film uses some of the narrative

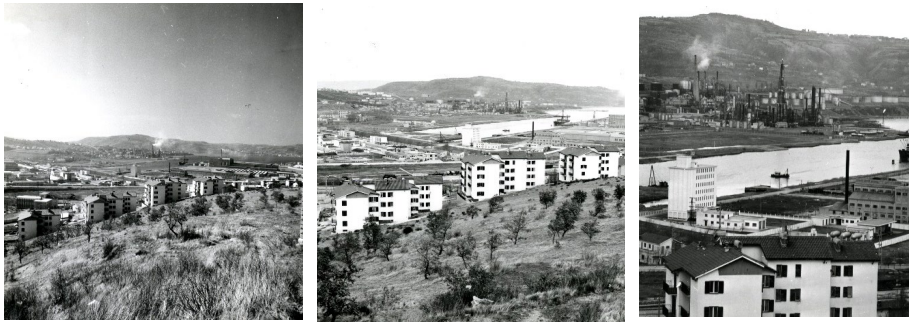
elements dear to the neorealist movement in vogue at the time, but also some of the more traditional elements of industrial propaganda cinema. An unemployed man from Trieste commits a theft in order to be able to give his children a present but is stopped by the police. Following the path of man's social betterment, and in an atmosphere very different than the one in the film by one of the pioneers of the neorealist movement, Vittorio De Sica's *Ladri di biciclette* (*Bicycle Thieves*, 1948) (Bonifazi, 2014, pp. 34-40) – the finale sees our hero saved thanks to the job that he gets rebuilding the *Aquila* oil refinery.

In the port of Trieste, oil had become the most handled raw material (Fait, 2020, p. 20). The «grandiose development» (Touring Club Italiano, 1955, p. 180) that was *Aquila* – flaunted in the postcards of the time, where it was shown proudly in the view from the castle of Muggia (fig. 2), as if to treat it like a national monument – also took on the wider significance of the rebirth of the oil industry and the accompanying creation of the industrial zone of Zaule where 16 new companies were established between 1951 and 1954. In turn, these factors were linked to the development of shipbuilding, the revitalization of the port and the sharp reduction in unemployment when compared to the figures recorded at the end of the war (Mellinato, Toninelli, 2008, p. 357).



Fig. 2 – Postcard of Muggia, panorama from the castle with a view of the *Aquila* refinery, 1955.  
Source: private collection, Milan.

The period of reconstruction and the context, which were visually captured through the series of shots by photographer Alfonso Mottola (1921-2008)<sup>3</sup>, are equally important since the construction of the new refinery plants was made possible thanks to Marshall Plan funding<sup>4</sup>, thereby enabling *Aquila* to become the first refinery in Europe to use crude oil from the Middle East for the production of select oils, thanks to the trans-Arabian pipeline which had connected the Persian Gulf with the port of Sidon (Zubini, 2004, p. 93) (figs. 3-5).



Figs. 3-5 – Alfonso Mottola, *Aquila* refinery seen from Borgo San Sergio, Trieste, before 1968.

Source: Mottola Archive (F211463, F211467, F211468), Civic Museums of History and Art, Trieste.

Furthermore, with the gradual expansion of the petrol distribution network in those years, *Aquila* would leave a fascinating mark still visible on the seafront in Trieste with the petrol station located at number 14, Riva Grumula, a structure designed by the architect Ernesto Nathan Rogers from the Studio BBPR, inaugurated in April 1953 and still in use today as a multipurpose arts centre devoted to architecture, design, art and publishing. Another iconic *Aquila* petrol station would be built in Barcola (figs. 6-7), an area which will be dealt in paragraph 3. The careful attention to both aesthetics and functionality in the construction of these filling stations shows that the company clearly intended the facilities to be used for advertising and even tourist purposes. Suffice it to say that in 1959 the *Aquila* company received the diploma of honor at the local Flower Show «for the practical creation of a petrol station in a floral environment for tourism purposes»<sup>5</sup>, a circumstance which shows the paradoxical pairing between a sector

<sup>3</sup>The Mottola archive is now kept in the Photo Library of the Civic Museums of History and Art of Trieste. The documentation presented is particularly significant since it was produced by Mottola without any particular need for news and often accompanied his books about the territory of Trieste. See Archivio Alfonso Mottola, <https://fototecatrieste.it/fondi/archivio-alfonso-mottola/> and Colecchia, 2021.

<sup>4</sup>This was the popular name of the *European Recovery Plan*, within which the Free Territory of Trieste became the area in Europe that by proportion received the largest share of aid (Melinato, Toninelli, 2008, p. 353).

<sup>5</sup>Ente fiera campionaria internazionale di Trieste, *Diploma d'onore del 26 aprile 1959*, *Aquila* Archive, Trieste State Archive.

now considered one of the main culprits of environmental degradation, and the increasing care for the appearance of the urban environment.



Figs. 6-7 – Trieste-Opicina Car Race, May 1970, Rogers Petrol Station and the Aquila petrol station in Barcola.

Source: photo de Rota, Giornalfoto Archive, Civic Museums of History and Art, Trieste.

The oil crisis of 1973-1974 followed by the second energy crisis in 1979-1980, and the shrinking profit margins for oil companies in the following decade were all decisive steps that saw the oil refineries in Italy gradually becoming obsolete, bringing about the closure of the Getty Oil Refinery in Gaeta, the Mach Refinery in Volpiano (Turin), Stanic (Bari), Mediterranea (Milazzo), Montedison (Brindisi), Sir (Porto Torres), Gulf (Bertonico), Sanquirico (San Quirico in Val Polcevera), IP (La Spezia), and Eni (Ravenna) (Zubini, 2004, p. 177). This wave would not spare *Aquila*, which was eventually closed down in 1985 and subsequently completely razed to the ground in order to make room for a mineral oil storage facility and a bitumen plant (fig. 8).



Fig. 8 – The Aquila industrial site at the end of the 1990s

Source: Archivio Aquila, Trieste State Archive.

### 3. *The Servola Ironworks (Ferreira)*

We set off towards Servola, whose whitish fumes down there look like huge pillars erected to support the reddish vaults of the night.... Happy as schoolchildren in freedom, we stir around the sooty bellies of the ironworks, which give birth to walls of embers... Shouts of victory erupt from our breasts.... Finally, the craziest futurist images are realized: here are buildings of fire that walk, disembowel, and spill entrails of topaz and rubies to the ground!

Thus, we witness the fusion of the new futuristic sun, more colourful, more fantastic, hotter than the old sun of yesterday. The monstrous chimneys watch over the enormous incandescent flow, gruff giants, plumed with smoke who do not even hear the shrill escape of the trains passing under their feet, frightened iron mice....

Oh! how we envy the houses perched on the surrounding hills, the attentive houses whose eyes are set ablaze by the intoxicating joy of fire every night. How we envy the clouds with flushed faces and the marine horizon furrowed with long scarlet reflections! [Marinetti, 1910, pp.20-21].

The story of the Servola Ironworks (the Ferreira) can most fittingly begin with its final chapter: on 9 April, 2020, the blast furnace of the iron and steel plant was extinguished forever, which was the technical step necessary to signal the end of the local cast-iron age and the beginning of the reconversion of the industrial site which, in the words of the regional councillor for the environment Fabio Scoccimarro, will be based on the «principles of sustainable development and therefore compatible with the surrounding urban fabric» (Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2020b).

The particularly incisive impact of the plant on the southern part of the Trieste coastline had begun over 120 years earlier. As reconstructed by Paolo Ziller and Fiorenza De Vecchi, despite the abolition of its status as a free port on July 1, 1891, which had been the key factor in Trieste's fortunes for almost two centuries, and its inclusion in the Austro-Hungarian customs territory, the volume of maritime traffic passing through Trieste had not decreased: on the contrary, it continued to increase until the beginning of WWI. However, its commercial nature changed dramatically, in line with the changing approach to industry that took place in those years. In the context of a wider restructuring of the Austrian Empire's economy, the port of Trieste thus became a transit port, maintaining the advantages offered by the free zone and by the Adriatic railway tariffs, and at the same time developing shipbuilding, food and metallurgy industries, where the energies of the lost emporium could be re-channelled. In particular, iron and steel production, especially for shipbuilding, was becoming increasingly important in those years in the light of the replacement of wood with metal, and above all with iron. In addition to this, there was a continuous flow of emigration that began as early as 1871 and, perfectly in step with this, of immigration too (Ziller, 1997, pp. 9-10; De Vecchi, 1997, p. 55). In 1897, the year in which the ironworks began operating, Trieste had over 160,000 inhabitants and was still experiencing the positive momentum deriving from relations



with the Middle and Far East after the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), with its consequent inflow of money<sup>6</sup> (De Vecchi, 1997, pp. 56-57).

The initiative to set up the ironworks came from *Krainische Industrie Gesellschaft* (K.I.G.) of Ljubljana which was interested in building a plant to produce cast iron and iron alloys, and chose the Servola site. More precisely, that part of the coast which had previously been the Angeli estate and what on the maps was called the *werfte* (shipyard), i.e. the area of the Rossi, Rugger and San Lorenzo slipways. The choice of Servola, a fishing village with its own marina and hitherto known for its small-scale tourism, oyster farms and salt marshes (Jakomin, 1997, pp. 45-47; De Vecchi, 1997, p. 58), had also been influenced by the exemptions guaranteed by the Austrian government to any companies which established themselves in that municipality between 1891 and 1895. Furthermore, the K.I.G. intended to take advantage of the favourable prices for freight transported by sea from the countries exporting the main raw materials (De Vecchi, 1997, p. 55).

The initial surface area of the plant was 150,000 square meters; the subsequent reclamation of the marshy land and a series of landfills made it possible to gain another 100,000 square meters before it eventually covered an area of 650,000 square meters. Work had begun in August 1896, and the first blast furnace was started up on November 24 of the following year. In the same period, an important event in the future of the plant occurred when the *Società anonima degli Alti Forni e Ferriera* (Anonymous Company of the Furnaces and Ironworks) of Piombino was set up in Florence, from which the company called *ILVA - Alti Forni ed Acciaierie d'Italia* (the Furnaces and Steelworks of Italy) later originated (*ibidem*, p. 65). The start of the coke oven dates back to 1900; in 1906 it was the turn of the second blast furnace and the second coke oven, while in 1913 a third blast furnace was started up. According to popular tradition, among local working folk, the unpleasant working conditions and unhealthy environment led to the plant's name Ferriera being renamed «Siberia» (Bevilacqua, 1997, p. 29).

Still continuing in the reconstruction by De Vecchi, the interruption due to WWI was followed by the resumption of activities in 1924 and the ironworks being sold to *Alti Forni ed Acciaierie della Venezia Giulia*, a company then taken over by ILVA which would acquire ownership of the plant in 1931. Then began a series of landfill operations in the area adjacent to the Scalo Legnami (lumber transit area) which over the course of a decade aimed to reclaim an additional 26,500 square meters of land, while 7,200 square meters obtained from other landfills were to become part of a cement works planned in 1939. But the ironworks was severely hit by the bombings of January 1944-April 1945, and these projects were suspended. Recovery would be slow after the war and the gradual reactivation of the damaged plant would take several years (fig. 9).

<sup>6</sup> On the relationships between Trieste and Suez, see Modaffari, 2022.



Fig. 9 – Aerial view of the Servola Ironworks in the 1950.

Source: Giornalfoto Archive (7310/61), Civic Museums of History and Art, Trieste.

The merger between ILVA and Cornigliano, in 1961, brought the *Ferriera* under the umbrella of *Italsider* led by Oscar Sinigaglia, focused on steel and determined to exploit the possibility of transport by sea as a decisive element of its ability to remain in the market. Thus in 1964 the foundry was inaugurated, and it was devoted to produce the ingot molds for the large steel mills<sup>7</sup>, right in the landfill area whose works had been blocked by the conflict, but which had now been completed by diverting the course of the Strane stream and moving the marina that K.I.G. had built in the late 19th century. The construction of the new pier, 350 meters long, was accompanied by new landfills for 200,000 square meters (De Vecchi, 1997, pp. 72-76).

Also in this case, the photos of Alfonso Mottola (figs. 10-12) constitute a relevant documentation, above all in the representation of the *Ferriera* of the time as a constellation in the landscape line of the city and in the relationship with the adjacent Scalo Legnami.

After the phase of public control, in the 1980s, the *Ferriera* became Alti Forni and Ferriera di Servola, passing from the ownership of the Pittini Group (1990-1994) to the Lucchini Group from Brescia, in 1995, by now becoming

<sup>7</sup> It was the first foundry in Italy that produced ingot molds using cast iron coming directly from blast furnaces (Circolo Ferriera di Servola, 1997, p.14).

Servola S.p.A. (*ibidem*, p. 30), finally to Arvedi in October 2014, a group that would have managed it until the closure. The years immediately preceding 2020 were characterized by heated conflicts within the population, between the working world of the Ferriera and the requests for environmental protection represented by various citizens' committees, up to the inevitable outcome of the closure. In the end of the existence of the Ferriera and in the controversies that arose around it, one can read the gradual change in sensitivity and in values that in its wider application led to the radical changes that took place on the coast of Trieste.



Figs. 10-12 – Alfonso Mottola, *Night view with Ironwork plant*, 1970?.

Source: Mottola Archive (Album MOTT 1, Cc. 636, 637, 638), Civic Museums of History and Art, Trieste.

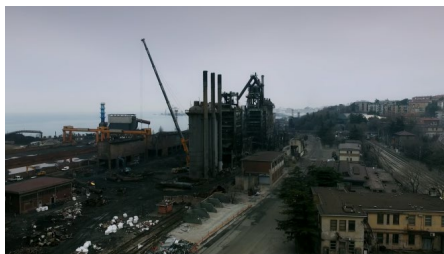
In this sense, it is useful to re-propose some of the testimonies that explicitly account for it. As reconstructed, the story of the *Ferriera* spans over a century, a long period in which the proximity to inhabited centers has aroused different reactions in the face of the awareness narrated by the words of one of the workers:

It should be said that once the worker was a melting pot of knowledge and experience, but no one cared about health, the fumes from the coking plant, the gases from the blast furnace. You just had to work [...] The iron and steel industry is dirty, it stinks, it's ugly to see and to live with. [...] When the flame is red – explains Maurizio – the gases from the blast furnace burn, when it is blue, the gases from the coke oven burn. The fumes that are released are not exactly healthy. Above all the ammonia and the components of the aromatic cycles released by the coking plant, which distils the hard coal, are carcinogenic. [...] Today there is the *Servola respira* [Servola breathes] committee [...], the fun fact is that the soul of the committee is made up of former colleagues of Maurizio who remembers when those workers didn't care about pollution just to work [Belluzzo, Rodriguez, 2019, p.30].

Furthermore, the testimony of a worker at the beginning of the 2000s clearly describes the gap between the ages and the differences in the involvement of the population in environmental issues that the presence of the ironworks entailed:

Pollution has always been a problem, ever since the Ferriera was born. What has changed instead? It has changed that the sensitivity, as regards the environment and the environmental situation of the air, water and other elements, has changed in the citizen. Today citizens perceive that to live better the quality of life also includes clean air, clean water and living in a condition where there is no noise from the factory, there is no doubt about this. But the Ferriera has always polluted. People who live in the neighborhood no longer accept having a steel plant near their home. [...] In the 1970s, ecological awareness was not widespread [...] [*ibidem*, p.31].

In the visual repertoire selected for this research, the documentation relating to the final phase of the Ferriera and concentrated in the medium-length film *L'ultimo calore d'acciaio* (The Last Heat of Steel, 2021) by Francesco De Filippo and Diego Cenetiempo is particular importance. In the documentary, the images (figs. 13-14) tell of the dismantling of the systems and the sensations of the inhabitants of the district, as well as the latest employees, in witnessing the radical transformation of what had been a symbolically representative area of a sizeable part of city.



Figs. 13-14 – The demolition process of the Ferriera in Servola.

Source: *L'ultimo calore d'acciaio* (2021) by Francesco De Filippo, Diego Cenetiempo.

Since 2001, the coastal area which also included the Ferriera corresponds to the *Trieste* site identified by the then Ministry of the Environment as the recipient of reclamation interventions of national interest (SIN)<sup>8</sup>. The perimeter defined in 2003<sup>9</sup>, then modified in 2018<sup>10</sup>, has recently been reworked as illustrated in figure 15.

<sup>8</sup> Decree by the Italian Ministry for the Environment and Territory, n. 468, 18 September 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Decree by the Italian Ministry for the Environment, n. 639, 24 February 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Decree by the Italian Ministry for Environment, Land and Sea Protection, n. 25, 2 February 2018.

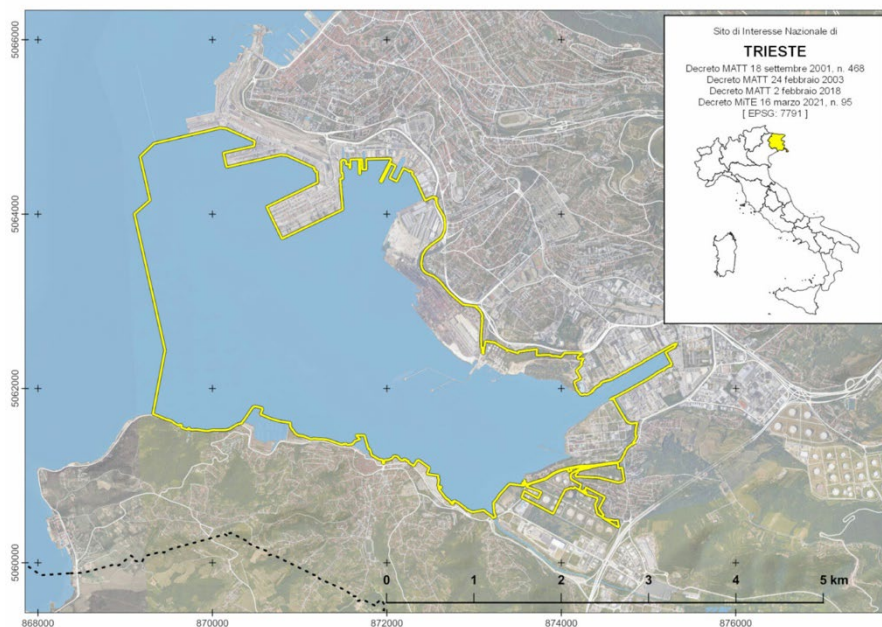


Fig. 15 – Trieste Site of National Interest (SIN).

Source: Ministry of Ecological Transition, 2022.

The surface thus delimited includes 190 hectares of land, with the port and industrial areas and 1,195 hectares of marine area, including the Bay of Muggia. On the coastal line, the entire segment that extends from Molo V of the Port of Trieste to the coast of Muggia is included. In addition to the Ferriera, the site of the former Aquila refinery and the port, in the Trieste territory there are also landfill areas, while large portions of built-up area are characterized by the presence of landfill material in the soil. Among the environmental criticalities that led to the identification of the site, there are the contamination of the soil and groundwater with metals, hydrocarbons and carcinogens directly deriving from the activities of the ironworks, the port, the transport of hydrocarbons, the sales pitch of marine areas with material landfill and the presence of uncontrolled landfills (Ministry of Ecological Transition, 2022).

#### 4. *Barcola and the Old Port*

In the years following WWII, it was once again the port of Trieste, with the enormous potential it offered for the revitalization of the entire Friuli Venezia Giulia region (Mellinato, Toninelli, 2008, p. 370), that played the most important role in the city's infrastructure.

In more recent decades, the radical changes in maritime flows and a general trend towards deindustrialization, would doubtless have led to the port being reconverted and repurposed in a similar way to what has been happening in other similar port areas around the world<sup>11</sup>. More precisely, for Trieste, too, this phase can be seen as corresponding to that post-industrial stage (with the re-development of the waterfront) proposed by Adalberto Vallega in his reworking of Hoyle's model (Vallega, 1993, p. 23; Hoyle, 1988) which describes the typical historical development of a city-port. In the case of Trieste, the most significant example of this kind of transformation is undoubtedly to be found in the area of the Porto Vecchio (the Old Port, extending over 600,000 square meters), for decades left to decay as a prime example of industrial archaeology, despite having been earmarked years earlier as an ideal vehicle for future urban regeneration, thanks to its size and location. Despite considerable investment more recently in infrastructure, its removal from state control (Comune di Trieste, 2019) has still not led to significant developments.

Today, Barcola's seafront (in the northern part of the city) is the site of the clubhouse of the *Società Velica di Barcola e Grignano* (SVBG), the sailing club founded at the end of 1968 which organizes the *Barcolana*, and other sailing and rowing clubs. The *Barcolana* has made the entire Riviera of Trieste into a world-renowned «natural sailing stadium» (Karlsen, 2018, p. 86), becoming the largest regatta in the world by number of participants and undoubtedly the city's most important annual event: it brings great benefits in terms of economic impact and above all, for the positive image it projects of the city. Because of its impressive size, with the fiftieth edition in 2018 attracting over 230,000 registered visitors/spectators<sup>12</sup> and almost 2,700 boats<sup>13</sup> (and numbers are gradually going back up in the post-pandemic years<sup>14</sup>), the *Barcolana* is definitely Trieste's most important calling-card, not just as a sporting event, but also as proof of the blueness of the new direction taken by this stretch of coastline and its historical identity that links it with the sea (Zilli, Modaffari,

<sup>11</sup> According to Hall, for example, the great transformation of the American port areas dating from the 1950s, followed by other regions, and their subsequent displacement into extra-urban areas was due to the gradual spread of containerization, the decline in passenger traffic following the increased accessibility of commercial flights; transformations in the fishing industry; increase in the tonnage of ships and the consequent need to find deeper waters for the piers; the increase in ferry traffic and the consequent concentration of such traffic in ports with direct access to major road and railway arteries (Hall, 1993, p. 12).

<sup>12</sup> According to a study carried out by B2G Consulting, there were 300,000 arrivals on that occasion (meaning the number of days that visitors spent in the city). Of these visitors, 44% came from the provincial territory of Trieste, 6% from abroad and the remaining half from other Italian regions. Again, in the 2018 edition, the overall economic impact of the event was estimated at around 71,5 million euros (B2G Consulting, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> In particular, the 2,689 registered boats led to the Guinness World Record naming the *Barcolana* the largest regatta in the world by number of participants (Guinness World Records, 2018).

<sup>14</sup> There were 1,424 boats registered in 2020 (<https://www.barcolana.it/it/storia/2020/>); in 2021, 1650 (<https://www.barcolana.it/it/storia/2021/>) (last access: 20/2/2023).

2020, pp. 182-183)<sup>15</sup>. The event has succeeded in combining a strong environmental message with awareness-raising initiatives aimed at the wider public, also by organizing the Barcolana Sea Summit alongside the regatta itself: this is a multilateral platform involving not only institutions, businesses, academia and civil society in narrating and protecting the Mediterranean, but also the circular economy in boating<sup>16</sup>. Furthermore, in 2020, it was the first regatta in the world to introduce the figure of the 'ecological manager' aboard each boat, a figure responsible for the sustainability of every aspect linked to a boat taking part in the competition<sup>17</sup>.

All these elements point to the new direction being taken by the city, as it moves out into the Mediterranean and beyond, taking care to make sure that the most important stretch of seafront also plays the role of protagonist (in symbolic terms too): the section from the Grand Canal to the Molo della Pescheria (therefore comprising Piazza Unità d'Italia), which embody those aspects of awareness of environmental issues and an ethical, responsible relationship with the sea and protecting it (Modaffari, 2019, pp. 147-152).

## 5. Conclusion

On the evening of 18 September 2022, the day the hot-fired ironworks of Servola were finally demolished, Trieste's skyline was lit up by a firework display, as if to symbolize the final sparks of an era now over (D'Amelio, 2022) while the *Aquilinia* area is now preparing to regain its nodal function in the very near future, thanks to the container terminal and hub planned by the Hungarian government, but also thanks to projects by Metinvest and Danieli that will re-interpret in new ways the legacy of iron and steel production (D'Amelio, 2021).

The documents analyzed in this contribution are precious testimonies of the period described and of the spirit influencing it. For over a hundred years, Servola's *Ferriera* (and later, the *Aquila* oil refinery) spread clouds of sooty smoke over the coastline of Trieste: in the representations of those years, however, there was clearly a yearning for an industrial future for the town and almost a rejection of the sea, closing off a connection to water which in previous centuries had been continuous. The process of reconnecting with the sea occurred with initiatives such as the gradual development of the *Barcolana*, marking a clear break with the land-based industrial past.

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<sup>15</sup> At the beginning of the 2000s, 40% of the boats in the Region and 80% of those in the province of Trieste were registered as sailing boats (against a national average of 20%) (Tracogna 2010, p. 151). Also, to be recalled is the presence of related specialized construction sites (Karlsen, 2018, p. 15).

<sup>16</sup> Barcolana, *Barcolana Sea Summit*, <https://www.barcolana.it/it/barcolana-sea-summit/a-chi-si-rivolge> (last access: 20/2/2023).

<sup>17</sup> Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2020a.

In 2020, on the side wall of house number 88 in via Servola, the artist Gabriele Bonato painted the large mural entitled *Look Up* (fig. 16), depicting «the workers, the fusion of metal, the fusion of iron», the forge of Vulcan and «the work of low, material things [...] the economy, human sweat». But in the drawing, the transformation of metals, in turn, «tends to rise through the metal flower, the mechanical octopus [...] on which a little bird symbolizing Nadia lands<sup>18</sup>. The name Nadia means hope. The future is nature, and humanity's only hope is to reconnect with nature [...], to look upwards». This mural might also be seen as symbolizing the city's desire to make peace with its past, with its relationship to the sea there where it meets the coastline, and to look ahead to a blue future.



Fig. 16 – Gabriele Bonato, *Look Up*, 2020.

Source: Municipality of Trieste, Polo Giovani Toti Youth Center, 2021.

<sup>18</sup>The mural is a Chromopolis Project - the City of the Future, promoted by the Department of Youth of the Municipality of Trieste and coordinated by the Youth Area Project as the result of a team work made possible thanks to the contribution of the Pietro Pittini Foundation, the collaboration with Edilmaster - The Construction School of Trieste and the artistic consultancy of Inward - National Observatory on Urban Creativity. It was dedicated to the journalist Nadia Toffa, author of the popular television show *Le Iene*, in which she carried out numerous reports on the pollution produced by the Servola Ferriera. Bonato's statements are taken from the documentary *L'ultimo calore d'acciaio* (2021).



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*Blueing the Coastline. From Heavy Industry to Sport Tourism in the Years Following World War II: The Case of Trieste*

In recent decades, the coastline of Trieste has undergone a radical *blueing* operation during which it has re-acquired its relationship with the sea. This characteristic was central to its identity since it was declared a *free port* in 1719, but from the end of the 19th century onwards, this identity was overshadowed by large-scale industrialization, the major examples of which were the Ironworks of Servola and the Aquila Oil Refinery. These plants transformed the city's identity into a centre for heavy industry but inevitably, in the post-war period, a slow but inexorable decline occurred, and they eventually closed. Trieste's identity as an industrial town has gradually changed, to be replaced with a *blueing* agenda whose most significant example is a massive sports tourism event, a sailing regatta called the Barcolana. Thanks to this event, Trieste is tracing a new path towards the future based on caring for the sea and protecting it. The present article takes an ecocritical look at events and tries to account for the *blueing* agenda adopted by Trieste, by analysing both the known and unpublished visual documentation.

*Blueing the coastline. Dall'industria pesante al turismo sportivo negli anni del secondo dopoguerra: il caso di Trieste*

Negli ultimi decenni il litorale di Trieste è stato oggetto di una radicale operazione di *blueing* attraverso la quale ha finalmente riacquisito il suo rapporto con il mare. Tale caratteristica, al centro dell'identità urbana fin dal 1719, anno in cui la città viene dichiarata porto franco, da fine Ottocento viene oscurata da un'industrializzazione pesante i cui maggiori esempi sono la Ferreria di Servola e la Raffineria Aquila. Questi stabilimenti mutarono l'identità della città in direzione dell'industria pesante ma già dal secondo dopoguerra si registrarono i segnali dell'inesorabile declino.

Gradualmente, l'idea di Trieste come città industriale ha fatto spazio a un'agenda blu il cui esempio più significativo è un grande evento di turismo sportivo, la regata velica *Barcolana*, grazie a cui la città sta tracciando un nuovo percorso verso un futuro basato sul mare e sulla sua tutela.

Il presente articolo propone una lettura di tali eventi e dell'operazione di *blueing* attuata a Trieste, a partire dalla documentazione visuale nota e inedita.

*Blueing the coastline. De l'industrie lourde au tourisme sportif dans les années qui ont suivi la Seconde Guerre mondiale : le cas de Trieste*

Au cours des dernières décennies, le littoral de Trieste a été soumis à une opération de bleuissement radical au cours de laquelle il a retrouvé sa relation avec la mer. Cette caractéristique était au cœur de son identité puisqu'il fut déclaré port franc en 1719 mais, à partir de la fin du XIXe siècle, il fut éclipsé par une industrialisation à grande échelle, dont les exemples majeurs

furent les Forges de Servola et la Raffinerie Aquila. Ces usines ont transformé l'identité de la ville en un centre d'industrie lourde mais inévitablement, dans la période d'après-guerre, un déclin lent mais inexorable s'est produit et elles ont fini par fermer.

Peu à peu, l'identité de Trieste en tant que ville industrielle a changé, pour être remplacée par un programme bleu dont l'exemple le plus significatif est un événement de tourisme sportif massif, une régata de voile appelée la Barcolana. Grâce à cet événement, Trieste trace une nouvelle voie vers l'avenir basée sur le soin et la protection de la mer.

Le présent article jette un regard écocritique sur les événements et tente de rendre compte de l'agenda de bleuissement adopté par Trieste, en analysant à la fois la documentation visuelle connue et inédite.

