

The Historical Background to the Erection of the Monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper as an Example of a Fascist Cult of Personality

Zgodovinsko ozadje postavitve spomenika Nazariju Sauru v Kopru kot primer fašističnega kulta osebnosti

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Abstract

This article describes the factors that led to the construction of a monument to the sailor and irredentist Nazario Sauro in Koper in the interwar period. The monument on Koper's waterfront announced the beginnings of the town's new urban transformation. However, it did not reach its final epilogue due to the outbreak of World War II. This historical study deals with the ideological pretensions of the central fascist authorities, who enabled the financing and construction of the monument, alongside local actors. The erection of the monument was the result of extensive financial and organisational efforts.

Key words: Nazario Sauro, Koper, fascism, urbanism, collective memory.

Izvleček

Prispevek podaja vzrode za izgradnjo in postavitev monumentalnega objekta pomorščaku ter iredentistu Nazariju Sauru v Kopru v času med obema svetovnima vojnama. Spomenik na koprskem nabrežju je naznanil zametke nove urbanistične preobrazbe mesta, ki pa ni doživela končnega epiloga zaradi izbruha druge svetovne vojne. V historično obravnavo so vpete ideološke režimske pretenzije centralnih fašističnih oblasti, ki so bile poleg lokalnih akterjev tiste, ki so omogočile financiranje in izgradnjo spomenika. Fizična postavitev obeležja je bila rezultat obsežnih finančnih in organizacijskih naporov.

Ključne besede: Nazario Sauro, Koper, fašizem, urbanizem, kolektivni spomin.

Introduction

The main purpose of the paper is to present the circumstances, reasons and events that led to the erection of the monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper¹ in 1935, and which have been less known to the general public until now. These facts shed further light on the complex roles of various actors and their activities and plans that led to the monument's erection. The present paper is only part of a larger PhD thesis, which will comprehensively address all

the aspects of the erection of the monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper and its impact on the local population's views from the 1930s until the signing of the London Memorandum in 1954.

In the previous century, writing the history of 'contact spaces' was heavily ideologically and politically coloured, and was largely the domain of national identities marked by a national-political paradigm that represented one of the most important dividing lines of the common space (Pelikan 2012). The roots of national divisions dating back to the 19th century are thus presented through historical works on the basis of more or less exclusivist, national and ideological con-

¹ Over the centuries, Koper passed under different governments. Under Italian rule it was called Capodistria.

cepts. This, however, prevents methodological alteration and limits exploration of the plurality of political, social, economic and cultural elements operating in the multi-ethnic and multilingual environment of Istria (Pelikan 2012). Historical interpretations influenced by a political-ideological prism or treated by a specific generational group seeking to create a discourse with which a particular segment of the population will identify, are more prone to anachronism or fabrication and are therefore less relevant. We must therefore be guided by transnational historiography that understands the reasons for the asymmetric treatment of individual historical actors and tries to move away from stereotypical and simplistic representations of historical events and realities (Verginella 2012). A comprehensive scientific analysis of the facts and the search for clues within a precise time frame allow us to find so-called event details and as yet unknown interstices in the micro-stories that could lead us to further understand the impact of a local phenomenon on the macro level and vice versa. The focus here is on 'contact' defined by the demarcation and coexistence of regional and national identities, and political and economic systems, etc. As an example, consider the history of symbols in the public space of an environment where different national identities are in contact with each other. The dominant ideological or social elite used public space to shape individual and collective identity. Symbols used in such an environment are an effective means of visual communication and create a distinct national-spatial identity. These influences, based on a precisely structured narrative of the past, serve to objectify national identity (Schama 1996).

With the signing of the Rapallo Treaty between the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS) and the Kingdom of Italy, and the establishment of the new border in November 1920, the political reorganization of the territory of the Julian March and Istria was temporarily closed. With the annexation of Trento and Trieste, Italy achieved the much-desired national unity and integrity after World War I.

Nevertheless, this achievement could not suppress expansionist desires and prevent the emergence of fascism. For the former Austrian territories – Trieste with its wider surroundings and Istria – the new geopolitical reality had different consequences. Firstly, *Mitteleuropa's* economic interests ceased gravitating towards Trieste. There followed a transition from the precise and flexible Austrian state bureaucracy to Italian administration with its Bourbon customs and rigidly vassal relationship with the state apparatus. Meanwhile, there was a rapprochement of the local capitalist circles with the militarists and the irredentist national liberal oligarchy, which asserted its anti-Austrian, anti-Slavic and anti-socialist line (Steffè 1978, 13–38). The new government had repercussions on all aspects of the area's social life, but above all it radically changed its cultural image. This was evident in the manifestation of power through symbolism, embodied in public commemorations and the erection of buildings with symbolic value.

A clear example of the latter is the erection of a monument to the Istrian seafarer Nazario Sauro in Koper. Sauro was born in Koper on 20 September 1880. Prior to World War I, he was employed as captain of a small steamer called *San Giusto* by the Koper maritime company, sailing regularly between Koper and Trieste. Sauro often expressed his sympathy for the Kingdom of Italy through minor provocations aimed at the Austrian authorities, but above all, he had regular contact with the Italian consulate in Trieste. During the July Crisis in 1914, at the outbreak of World War One, Sauro's employment with the maritime company *Capodistria* was terminated, partly because of his unruly behaviour and partly because of his anti-Austrian stance (Sauro 2017, 111–112). Many prominent Austrian-Italian political representatives of the liberal-nationalist camp emigrated to Italy in the summer of 1914. Nazario Sauro expressed the intention of enrolling his son in a school in Udine as an excuse to obtain a passport that would allow him to cross into Italy. Despite the general mobilisation, the Austrian authorities allowed him to leave be-

cause he did not meet the medical requirements due to an eye injury. From Koper he travelled to Venice where he visited Giovanni Giuriati, a lawyer and president of the Trento - Trieste organisation because he wanted to join the Italian army as a volunteer. Nazario Sauro had often sailed along the eastern Adriatic coast before the war and wanted to join the Italian armed forces as an informer and scout. When Italy declared war in May 1915, he was enlisted in the Italian Royal Navy to fight against the Austrian fleet in Istria and Dalmatia. He took part in some naval military operations and was captured by Austro-Hungarian forces on 31 July 1916 while trying to escape from the submarine *Pulino*, which ran aground on the island of Galiola, between the island of Unije and the Istrian peninsula. As a citizen of Austria-Hungary, he was convicted of desertion and executed on 10 August 1916 (Ponis 2016). His conviction by a military court and subsequent execution had a strong public resonance, which was later manifested at the national level, especially during annual commemorations. In the interwar period, the myth of Nazario Sauro was shaped through metaphors in the public sphere (naming of schools, streets, publications, etc.), culminating in the erection of a monument in Koper in 1935. The construction of the monument to Nazario Sauro clearly shows the politics of remembrance imposed by various actors at national and local levels.

Methodological Approach

In this article, I try to shed some light on the background and the reasons that led to the erection of the monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper. The research was based on various archival sources and preserved photographic material. In particular, I would like to highlight the influence of fascist ideology and architecture in shaping the urban image of Koper at the time. The latter is mainly presented chronologically on the basis of preserved archival material and the subject is not dealt with more broadly. The aspects of forming a place of collective memory through the erection of a monument to Nazario Sauro

would also go beyond the scope of this paper, so it is necessary to highlight a few key aspects that empirically provide reasons for a better understanding of the coexistence of symbolism with public rituals. Pierre Nora, one of the leading researchers on places of collective memory, stressed the social function of collective memory for national identity. He made it clear that collective memory creates its own specific dynamics, and that memory is not only a fundamental element of any community but a clear reflection of it (Nora 1989). In his work entitled *Il culto del littorio*, G. Gentile examines in depth the national myth of Greater Italy, which obsessively linked its perception of itself as a European superpower to the glory of its ancient history. The latter is clearly visible in the urban interventions in Koper in the second half of the 1930s with the tendency to preserve the town's historical continuity from the period of the Venetian Republic. Collective memory links individual experience with public experience, whereby individual history is side-lined and public history acquires its own autonomous narrative, giving way to the political exploitation of memory, which is certainly a fundamental element of mass nationalisation (Mosse 1975). The collective memory is thus formed on the basis of public rituals, organisations, and cultural and religious acts, which are centred on the element of belonging. The construction of powerful symbols in fascist Koper, which would serve as tools of social belonging and national cohesion, culminated in the erection of the monument to Nazario Sauro. The article sheds light on the events and circumstances that led to the erection of the monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper, which were largely pushed into the background due to the ideologically tinged public media at the time.

From irredentism to the Subsequent 'Fascisation' of the Cultural Landscape

The ethno-national conflict in the Austrian Littoral, especially in Trieste and Istria, escalated steadily in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The irredentist movement, which aspired to the

annexation of all the Italian 'unredeemed lands' (*terre irredente*), was part of democratic and republican forces in Italy and was always an important component of the left. However, one decade before World War I broke out, the movement moved to the political right. The discourse on irredentism as a possible class weapon, as a step towards militarism, is revealed in a series of nationalist journals on Italian soil in the first decade of the 20th century, in the years preceding World War I. Despite its strong presence in the Italian political discourse of the time, it did not receive any concrete encouragement from its supporters and defenders to achieve its 'main mission' – the annexation of all the 'unredeemed lands' (*terre irredente*). Nor did its inclusion in Italian politics at the beginning of the twentieth century significantly change the appearance of irredentism from that of the second half of the nineteenth century. More radical changes took place after the congress in Rome, at the end of December 1912, when about 30 representatives of the democratic wing left the nationalist movement because of its completely undemocratic spirit. After the Libyan war, which precipitated the integration of nationalists into the political struggle, the determined and intransigent wing of the nationalists welcomed into their midst a group of irredentists from Trieste (Fauro, Tamaro, Alberti, Xydias) and the Roman group centred around the magazine *L'Idea Nazionale*. Together they founded the so-called 'imperialist irredentism', of which Ruggero Timeus-Fauro became the most characteristic representative.² As the initiator of the 'new irredentism' movement, he became an advocate of the liberation of the 'unredeemed lands', but no longer in the name of a national or democratic ideal, but in the expectation of Italian domination in the Adriatic. According to Ruggero Timeus-Fauro, the Adriatic question would be resolved outside Austria-Hungary by Italy gaining the former possessions of the Venetian Republic and becoming the sole power in the Adriatic. In con-

trast to some of the young intellectuals in Trieste, such as the Stuparich brothers, Scipio Slataper and Angelo Vivante, Timeus-Fauro rode the wave of nationalism and populism, insisting that any reconciliation with the Germanic and Slavic worlds was impossible in the context of a dual monarchy because it would indicate the weakness of the Italian national component. Breaking away from liberal-nationalist circles, which continued to advocate the defence of Italian interests within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, he preferred to equate the national struggle with the quest for power and expansionism. He perceived the national struggle as an inevitable destiny that would be achieved by the complete disappearance of one of the races living there, and the Slavic danger could only be eliminated by the annexation of the 'unredeemed lands' to the Kingdom of Italy and the complete isolation of the Slavic population living in the territory of the Austrian Littoral (Verginella 2016, 709). Some historians have placed Pio Riego Gambini, the creator of the 'Istrian Youth Fascio' (*Fascio Giovanile Istriano*), founded in Koper on 1 October 1911, and the editor of the magazine *Giovane Istria* (1913), alongside Ruggero Timeus-Fauro on Istrian soil.³ Gambini expressed his thoughts and views in *La Giovane Istria* and other publications, as well as in some public appearances from September 1911 to August 1914, including a rather high-profile appearance in 1913 in front of students from the University of Naples, returnees from the Libyan campaign and fellow students from various colleges. Unfortunately, the texts of his speeches dedicated to Giuseppe Mazzini, the founding of the Italian University in Trieste and the speeches he addressed to the members and trustees of the 'Istrian Youth Fascio' in Koper in May 1914 have not been preserved. In the spirit of irredentist ideology, the young Gambini directed the strong fascio in Koper towards boycotting Austrian government measures, scaremongering and keeping a watchful eye on what was happening on Italian soil (Žitko, 2016, 699).

2 For more on Fauro's nationalist doctrine see in particular Verginella (2016, 705–720).

3 For more on the ideological views and activities of P. R. Gambini, see Quarantotti Gambini (1940, 158–169; 1954).

In terms of his ideological and political thoughts, Nazario Sauro was initially a supporter of the socialists but distanced himself from them because of their anti-militarist stance. He established close contacts with Vico Predonzani and the aforementioned Riego Gambini and advocated the creation of a socialist Mazzinian fascio, which eventually became the 'Istrian Youth Fascio' with its headquarters in the Tacco Palace in Koper. Due to the age limit of 24, Sauro did not formally join it but regularly attended meetings. Informal meetings of the young irredentists of Koper were frequently held in Sauro's cabin on the steamer *San Giusto* while sailing (Sauro 2017, 56–57). It would be superficial to characterise Sauro's ideological thoughts as merely traditional irredentist, aimed at defending the Italian identity of the Istrian coastal towns and their institutions. From the surviving sources, we can conclude that Sauro was strongly inspired by Mazzini's ideas of the *Risorgimento*, which were diametrically opposed to the militant slogans and precepts of the national interventionist circles of the Italian right at the time. However, it must be understood that by the time war broke out, irredentism had gradually acquired a strong nationalist ideological-political connotation, which was increasingly identified and consolidated in the state institutions, moving away from classical irredentism. Under the influence of interventionist circles, the idea of cultural domination was replaced by theses similar to those published by Ruggero Timeus-Fauro in his pamphlet entitled *Trieste*. He emphasised the aspect of national defence with the aim of extending Italy into Balkan territory within the framework of imperialist logic (Cattaruzza 2005, 71–79). The latter was 'spiced up' by Gabriele D'Annunzio with his picturesque prose and punchy slogans, thus displacing the ideas of cultural irredentism, which drew its inspiration from the concepts of Mazzini and Marx (Seton-Watson 1967, 409–427). The outbreak of World War I brought about a strong radicalisation in Italian cultural and political life, accelerating processes that had emerged in the pre-war

years in the most radical irredentist circles (Cattaruzza 2005, 71–79). The movement of the irredentist lands was profoundly transformed by the popularisation of nationalist and imperialist ideas. From its original strict territorial limitation, it acquired a new importance for the Italian political and military leadership of the time, due to the major political changes before, during and after World War I. From national antagonisms under Austrian rule, it evolved into strong support for interventionism and developed as a handy instrument for achieving foreign political and military goals. The irredentist circles became a tool and a striking force for the interventionist phenomenon and created the basis for fascist ideology to flourish and establish itself even before the March on Rome. In his rhetoric, Mussolini described Italy's entry into World War I as the beginning of the fascist revolution, so the role of the war, which cost Italy 651,000 lives, was presented by the fascist regime as regeneration (Mortara 1925, 28–29).

Italian nationalism did not subside after World War I, which ended in victory and the realisation of the ideal. Instead, it intensified and strengthened its former anti-Slavic orientation. The policy of national defence was therefore seen as the only appropriate policy for the protection of Italian identity, even after the annexation to Italy. As there were no longer any real historical reasons for it, national defence became a formula that was able to gather the consensus of the majority of the population by artificially emphasising the danger to national identity. On the other hand, this formula fostered radicalisation in the maximalist sense among a large part of the proletariat of Trieste, and radicalisation in the nationalist sense among the Slavic population of the Julian March. In this tense atmosphere, fascism found fertile ground for its development. In almost all the territories annexed after the war, it was able to present itself as a defender of victory and its fruits (Ara and Magris 2001, 147). The systematic construction of the memory of the Great War was consequently reflected in the 'fascisation' of the cultural landscape (Bosworth

and Dogliani 1999; Gentile 1994, 38–49). The metamorphosis of the new state was supposed to reflect the glory days of the Roman Empire, which would have developed Italian society according to the model of a new avant-garde civilisation of global status (Klabjan 2017). According to Mussolini, architecture had great importance in this transformation, especially as a medium of the regime – a handy tool in the hands of the politics of the time (Nicoloso 2008). The buildings constructed as a direct consequence of the Great War had to embody the dominant narrative, creating and maintaining a national consciousness that was crucial in the construction of a commemorative iconography. Nationalist groups, local committees, veterans' organisations, the army, families, and local and state institutions in the northern Adriatic region were based on irredentist tendencies, displaying images of the fallen or of so-called martyrs who fought for the redemption of the 'unredeemed lands'. The transformation of the towns and cities, beginning with Trieste, did not only mean the removal of 'Austrian' symbols and changes in street names but was a much more radical process that changed the appearance and transformed the very identity of the cities in the long term (Klabjan 2017). A complex visual transformation that transcended the local character – with the city of Trieste taking most credit for this – sought to acquire a new role in the Italian state. The new urban image of Trieste, removed from the Habsburg monarchy, had to reflect dynamism, new forces and intellect (Canali 2018, 251–335). A concrete example was the erection of the 'Victory Lighthouse' (*Faro della Vittoria*) on 24 May 1927 – the 12th anniversary of Italy's entry into the war. The idea of erecting a lighthouse had already emerged in irredentist circles at the end of October 1918, as a result of the euphoria following the victory at the Piave River. With some modifications to the original plan, work finally started in January 1923 on the site where the Austrian fortress of Kressich (built in 1854) once stood. A military installation, intended to protect the city from possible

attacks from the sea or to control possible unrest and rebellions in what was then the monarchy's largest port, completely lost its original purpose in the post-war landscape urbanism. While the old building provided an excellent foundation for the new structure, the choice of location was primarily symbolic and can be interpreted as the submission of a defeated Austria to a victorious Italy (Salimbeni 2001, 139–143). The lighthouse has two other important symbolic elements – a statue of winged victory on the top and, at the base, the anchor of the Italian battleship *Audace*, which was the first Italian ship to arrive in the port of Trieste on 3 November 1918. In combination, they give symbolic meaning to a building that had no practical value, as the port of Trieste already had a functioning lighthouse (Collotti 2000, 33–61). Symbolically, the Victory Lighthouse should be a tribute to all fallen Italian sailors, including Nazario Sauro. However, the figure of the executed sailor Nazario Sauro already served this purpose when the foundation stone for the monument was laid in Koper in 1926. The fusion of the two symbols of victory and sacrifice would not lead to the desired national cohesion that could be based on the historical experience of the Great War.

In Trieste, there is also a monument to fallen Italian soldiers on San Giusto Hill. The symbolism of this site is not accidental, as it represents anachronistic historical continuity between the remains from Roman times and the later cathedral as a symbol of Christianity, and the medieval fortress, which testifies to the city's autonomy from Habsburg rule onwards. Not only Trieste, but the whole of the Julian March was strongly subject to the erection of similar symbols. An example is the monument to Dante Alighieri erected in Tolmin at the end of the 1920s, a small regional centre in the upper Primorska region, which was a step away from commemorative buildings dedicated to wartime events. At the request of the Tolmin fascist organisation, the city of Florence donated a bronze bust of the poet Dante Alighieri, the work of the sculptor Moschi. The statue was unveiled on 9

August 1929 in the presence of the Italian heir to the throne, Umberto Prince of Savoy, and the Vice-Mayor of Florence, Dauphiné. The base of the statue bore the inscriptions: '*Dante presso il confino misurato da Dio*' (Dante at the border set by God) and 'Florence to the most Italian Tolmin'. According to legend, Dante entered a cave, known as Dante's Cave, somewhere in the area of today's Triglav National Park. This myth was therefore used to confirm the borders of the Treaty of Rapallo (Kastelic 2007, 34–44).

In the evolution of its political religion, fascism tried to portray the 'rituals of death' as 'rituals of life'. Especially when celebrating death, it had to symbolically express vitality and faith in the future. It wanted the sacrifice of those who fell for the country to be the potion that would breathe new life into the nation and give it strength for its rebirth. In this context, the fascist liturgy wanted to promote the 'myth of collective harmony', which was a key tool in the project of 'transforming the character of the Italian citizens at the time' (Gentile 1994, 54–59). Many memorials were built in line with this guiding principle: the cemetery in Redipuglia and the Kobarid ossuary – both inaugurated in 1938, the Park of Remembrance in Gorizia, the monument to Filippo Corridoni in San Martino sul Carso (today Italy), all set along the current Slovene-Italian border in the upper Primorska region, etc.

The Reason Behind the Construction of the Memorial on the Waterfront of Koper

The basic concept behind the monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper in 1935 is somewhat different from the above. The reason for it took shape like the sacrifices made in the Great War, but as a monument to a hero it was subjected to a specific ideological-mythical narrative, which was meant to serve as a collective example and memorial of sacrifice. During the fascist period, Nazario Sauro's life story was therefore further subjected to historical falsification. The result was a personality cult of Nazario Sauro, marked by a tradition of naval battles and extreme individual he-

roic acts. The monument's design, which would conceptually encompass both, was focused on the construction of a sacral building, but it later differed slightly from the original plans, and the unveiling ceremony also took place during the period of great changes in foreign politics in the 1930s. The extant archival material reveals the extensive organisational and financial efforts required to erect the monumental memorial to the seafarer Nazario Sauro in Koper. Preparations took two decades and fostered a diverse mythology on which the nationalist-tinged fascist discourse based itself. When the monument was inaugurated in Koper on Sunday 9 June 1935, the fascist MP Carlo Delcroix gave a speech in which he stressed the importance of the 'warrior tradition' of the local population associated with Sauro. In addition to the so-called martyrs of irredentism, he also mentioned the heroes of the Battle of Lepanto (1571). The sea, the winged lion of Venice, the King and the Duce, faith, the homeland, war and sacrifices, the nation, and the maritime tradition were the key elements used in his speech. On the waterfront, which was named after a seaman from Koper, he concluded his speech with the thought that both the Istrian towns and the monument were looking at the homeland of Italy (Marini 1936). Official wreath-laying ceremonies at the Nazario Sauro monument continued until 1943, when fascism fell and Italy surrendered. The imposing monument on Koper's waterfront, largely destroyed by German forces on 22 May 1944, was only the physical materialisation of a symbol with which the local population of the Julian March, and especially of Istria, as well as of the whole Apennine peninsula could identify. The monument created to commemorate the fallen hero of Koper wanted above all to celebrate the greatness of the nation, which was symbolically represented by winged victory. The creation of the myth of Nazario Sauro was the result of a long period of commemorations and events between the two wars.

The idea of erecting a memorial to Nazario Sauro was first mooted immediately after

the end of World War I, on 26 December 1918, when a committee was set up under the leadership of Captain Biagio Cobolo. On 7 January 1919, a call for tenders was issued for the erection of a monument to Nazario Sauro (Derin 2002). Seven years later, on 10 August 1926, a ceremony was held in Koper to mark the symbolic laying of the foundation stone, with a speech by Giovanni Giuriati, then Minister of Public Works of the Kingdom of Italy and formerly President of the Free State of Fiume. In the same year, a competition was held for Italian artists to come up with a design for the monument. The members of the jury included Leonardo Bistolfi, Cipriano Efisio Oppo, Francesco Salata and a few prominent local political figures. Out of 34 sculptors and architects, the first prize was awarded to the architect Enrico Del Debbio and the sculptor Attilio Selvi from Trieste. The second prize went to the architect Umberto Piazza and the sculptor Roberto Terracini from Turin, and the third prize was given to the sculptor Adolare Plimieri from Trieste. The winning project was based on triangular geometric shapes that allowed the prismatic volumes to support a column on which the symbolic figure of Istria was placed. The work, which the jury judged to be 'particularly original', underwent a few more changes before it was realised. The modifications were mainly the result of new construction concepts connected with a change of location. It was envisaged that the monument would stand closer to the sea and would be oriented towards the peninsula Debeli Rtič (Punta Grossa) to the north and so towards Trieste (Neri 2006, 352). Although the foundation stone was laid in 1926, followed by the competition, the actual beginning of construction was postponed for almost a decade, presumably due to the economic crisis at the end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s (Faveri 2010). Commemorative ceremonies were nevertheless regularly held on an annual basis. For example, on Saturday 7 July 1928 the ceremony in commemoration of Nazario Sauro took place in the presence of a destroyer of the Royal Italian Navy, which was named after the irre-

dentist hero. During the event, the destroyer's crew received a battle flag as a tribute from the town. On the fifteenth anniversary, 10 August 1931, Minister Siriani gave a solemn speech⁴. It was not until 1932 that Mussolini approved the formation of a special Committee for the erection of a monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper, within the framework of the Commission for National Monuments in Honour of Cesare Battisti and Nazario Sauro. The Committee consisted of General Vittorio Zupelli as chairman, Senator Francesco Salata, lawyer Nino de Petris (*Commisario prefettizio*) for the municipality of Koper as member (Cherini 1990),⁵ Commander Daponte from the Government Cabinet (*Gabinetto Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri*) as member, and the sculptor Selva and the architect Del Debbio as competition winners. At its second meeting on 16 January 1933, the Committee discussed the final terms of the contract for the construction of the memorial in Koper⁶. Following a request from the Ministry of Public Works, Article 4 of the contract authorised civil engineers from Pula to manage the technical aspects of the works. The latter were also authorised to settle the financial accounts for the works, including payment for the artwork, which had a fixed price.⁷ Just how much importance was ascribed to the monument's final appearance is evident in Article 10 of the contract, which stipulated that the approval of the highest authority in the country, the Prime Minister, was required for artistic corrections during the construction phase. Any request was to be addressed to the Monuments Committee. Regarding the suitability of artistic creations, the

4 PAK, 7, 510, Fond Mestne občine Koper.

5 On 13 October 1934, Nino Derin was appointed the new Podestà of Koper.

6 The engineers from Pula were also obliged to comply with Article 12 of the contract, which provided for the supervision of both the amount and quality of the materials and the execution of the works, and the engineers were required to supervise the completion of the individual works and to make payments to the subcontractors accordingly.

7 Interestingly, Francesco Salata used the foreign term 'forfait' to emphasise the unchanging cost of an artwork. (PAK, 7, 510, Fond Mestne občine Koper).

Special Committee was able to rely on the recommendations of an external expert advisor, whose suggestions were then sent to the Duce for review. Another aspect indicating the significance of the monument's erection can be detected from this meeting – Zupelli compared it with the Victory Memorial in Bolzano as a response to the pro-German demonstrations. In view of possible violence and demonstrations by the Yugoslavs, Zupelli stressed that the erection of a monument to Nazario Sauro in Koper was essential for confirming Italy's new and inviolable right to the Adriatic. It is noteworthy that in the case of Nazario Sauro, the Italian political leadership did not question Nazario's 'anti-Austrianism' and whether the erection of the monument would lead to pro-Austrian or pro-German demonstrations, but rather that the planned erection was primarily intended to demonstrate Italian supremacy in the Adriatic. The Mayor of Koper, Nino de Petris, added that on 15 January 1933, the general assembly held in Koper to celebrate the 'fascist *befana*' voted in favour of an agenda item stipulating that in the 11th year of the fascist era a monument should be erected to the Italian hero, the martyr of irredentism and defender of the Italian character of the Adriatic Sea – Nazario Sauro, as a solemn warning and response to Yugoslav provocations. Based on extant sources, it is clear that the memorial on the Koper seafront was not only intended to preserve the memory of the town's seaman but that it was also intended to reflect the 'warrior seafaring tradition' of its Italian population. According to prominent representatives of the authorities, the monument was also supposed to reflect historical continuity in past naval battles, from the Battle of Lepanto (1571) at the time of the Venetian Republic to Sauro's naval exploits in World War I (Marini 1936, 129–140).⁸ The completion date was set for 10 August 1933, followed by the opening on 10 August 1934, coinciding with the anniversary of Nazario Sauro's execution. On 23 March 1933, Prime Minister

⁸ The latter is evident from the speech given by Carlo Delcroix at the unveiling of the monument.

Benito Mussolini authorised the signing of the contract with the competition winners, and on 3 May the contract was signed and endorsed by a decree of the Council of Ministers (*Consiglio dei ministri*). On 18 May, the contract was approved by the Ministry of Finance. In line with the contract, 300,000 *lire* were released in June 1933 so the works could begin. The Commission for National Monuments in Honour of Cesare Battisti and Nazario Sauro also drew up a funding programme for the works in Koper, which was originally included in the budget of the Ministry of Public Works. The cost of demolishing the former Patzowsky salt warehouse, where the monument was to be erected, and of building a wall along the quay called '*Riva Nuova*' amounted to 39,652.30 *lire* (equivalent to €42,138.06). The landscaping of the monument's surroundings amounted to a further 708,183.37 *lire* (equivalent to €752,578.63). Sources indicate that the Ministry of the Interior contributed 640,000 *lire*, as the construction work did not only benefit port activities.⁹

Construction of the Monument to Nazario Sauro

As work had not begun even a year after the contract was signed, the completion date was postponed to 10 August 1934 and the proposed opening date to 4 November 1934, the anniversary of the Italian victory in World War I. The multiple postponements of the construction deadline could not be blamed on possible subversive or anti-state actions or on the 'inactivity' of the people involved but on the technical complexity and demanding nature of the construction itself, as can be seen from the archival documentation. The sculptor Selva expressed the opinion that in order for the monument to be of the desired quality the construction deadline should be extended, and that it would only be reasonable to talk about the date of completion once work had actually begun (Marini 1936, 129–140). Francesco Salata pointed out that the selected contractors or artists should be encouraged as much as

⁹ PAK, 7, 510, Fond Mestne občine Koper

possible in their work, as the foundation stone had been laid way back in 1926. The cabinet of the Minister of the Interior gave the final green light for the start of construction work on the site of the monument on 4 September 1934, when the work actually began.

We can find out more about the phase of viewings and preparations for construction from the report by the municipal engineer from Koper, dated 13 January 1933. It was written at the request of the Prefect of Koper, Nino de Petris, and could be used to present the progress of the preparatory work at the meeting of the special committee. This document shows that the architect Del Debbio and the sculptor Selva had already visited the site in Koper in the autumn of 1930 and determined the most suitable location for the monument and the orientation of its components. They also noted that the 'backdrop' to the monument would also need to be developed. It would consist of a nearby park and a platform on which the sculpture would stand. To this end, it was decided to take some building material from the seabed of a nearby shipyard and an islet created by the excavation of material for the Dreher brewery. The two competition winners then began visiting Istrian quarries and examining rock samples in order to determine the most suitable material for the monument's construction. On the basis of the results (inspection, measurements and the rocks themselves) and some suggestions from the committee, they refined the original plan. At the same time, a unit of the Royal Engineers from Pula (*Corpo reale Civile di Pola*) was given the task of examining samples from the plot on which the monument was to be built in order to draw up a plan for the foundations. In the course of drilling, it was realised that the new foundations would partly rest on the remains of the former salt warehouse, so Selva and Del Debbio proposed to shift the monument's location so the entire composition would rest on more solid ground. In addition to drawing up a plan for the foundations, the Royal Engineers from Pola were also required to provide the ministry with an estimate for the amount of

material (soil) that would have to be brought in to build suitable foundations. The quality of the soil from the Dreher brewery that was to be used for the foundations was not assessed. In addition, the municipal engineer in Koper stressed the necessity of landscaping the wider area around the monument that had often been used as a waste dump. In his view, there was a risk the landscaping might not be carried out later, or it might cost more. On 28 January 1935, Bianchetti, Head of the Cabinet of the Council of Ministers, informed the Ministry of Public Works that the estimate given by the engineers from Pola for the purchase and development of the land to be used for the monument amounted to 105,000 *lire*. Bianchetti added in his letter that the Prefecture of Koper estimated another 250,000 *lire* would be needed to pave the entire surface around the monument – in addition to the already anticipated costs. The municipality of Koper was not able to cover this cost, so it turned to state aid, which approved all the planned financial inputs. A letter from January 1935 shows a rough estimate of the additional costs amounting to about 355,000 *lire* (105,000 *lire* estimated by the engineers from Pola and 250,000 *lire* by the Prefecture of Koper). Bianchetti also informed the Ministry of Public Works that the engineers from Pola had been given permission to begin urgent construction work in the area surrounding the monument. The *podestà*, or mayor, of Capodistria tried to take advantage of the monument's construction – for which the state had allocated a considerable sum of money – to carry out additional infrastructure works in the town itself, requesting an additional 185,000 *lire* for this purpose. These would be earmarked for the redevelopment of St. Mark's salt warehouse (the present-day Taverna), but his tactical intention did not succeed. In a letter from 23 February 1935, we can see that the Prefect of Pola informed the *podestà* of Koper that the Ministry of the Interior had not approved an additional 185,000 *lire* for the landscaping of the monument's surroundings. The letter also made it clear that, given the financial situation, such renovations

could only be carried out after the opening ceremony. The available sources also show that the restoration of public property in Koper did take place, as on 18 January 1935 the Milanese company Imprese Generali began landscaping the area around the monument. On this occasion, the architect and conservator Ferdinando Forlati, the new *podestà* of Koper Nino Derin, the engineers Maier and Madonizza, and representatives of the construction companies tasked with the additional work were present to see the works begin (Cherini 1990, 248).

The monument's shape resembled a submarine, consisting of an elongated oval base on which a staircase and a pillar in the form of a conning tower were erected. The monument was constructed mainly from roughly hewn granular cubes of Istrian stone. The height of the monument measured from the walkway to the top of the tower was 10 m. At the rear of the monument, on the first terrace, there were two 2.3 m high bronze statues representing Nazario Sauro and his mother. The visual representation of this encounter was based on a real event that happened on 6 August 1916, when the gendarmerie of Koper received a telegram demanding that Nazario Sauro's mother and sister appear before the court of the Austrian Admiralty in Pola. Despite the fact that Anna Depangher Sauro, Nazario's mother, firmly denied knowing the captured Italian sailor before the military court in the hope of saving him, the court sentenced Nazario Sauro to death. The event had a strong propaganda connotation under fascism, as such an extreme act embodied the virtues that Italian mothers were supposed to possess in the time of fascism (Sauro 2017, 249–259).¹⁰

The front of the monument, facing the sea, had a 2.5 m high bronze statue of a helmsman holding a ship's rudder. The sculptor Silva modelled the helmsman on the sailor Gianni Pi-

ras from Sardinia. Piras had been a crew member on the submarine Giacinto Pullino when it ran aground and subsequently became a prisoner of war (Derin 2002). The main statue, which was placed on top of the tower, symbolised the winged goddess of victory with a sword and shield. The bronze sculpture, weighing a total of 5 tonnes, measured 6.8 m in height, which meant that the entire monument measured a full 17 m from the ground.¹¹ The base of the monument was adorned by an exedra of evergreens forming two lateral grassy patches. Six lights placed in the flowerbeds themselves illuminated the monument in all its grandeur.¹² On 9 June 1935, the monument to Nazario Sauro was inaugurated in Koper in the presence of King Vittorio Emanuele III, Corrado Ricci, Armando Diaz and more than 50,000 people. On this occasion, the Savoy dynasty awarded the architect Enrico Del Debbio and the sculptor Attilio Selva the Knighthood of St. Maurice¹³ (Neri 2006).

The Urban Interventions in Koper as a Reflection of Fascist Ideology

Less than two years after the signing of the contract, on 16 January 1935, the Royal Monument Conservation Department of Trieste (*R. Soprintendenze alle opere antiche e di arte*) took part in a wide range of restoration works in Koper.¹⁴ In addition to the many proposals for finishing works around the monument, they also began renovating St. Mark's salt warehouse (the present-day Taverna). After the proposal to demolish the warehouse was rejected, its use was changed to that of 'a folkloristic social facility with catering services'.¹⁵ Saint Justina's column (*Colonna di S. Giustina*), dedicated to the Battle of Lepanto, was relocated to Carpaccio Square,

11 Note: In the surviving archival material on the monument, the main statue is also referred to as naval glory.

12 PAK, 7, 510, Fond Mestne občine Koper.

13 PAK, 7, 110 Spomenik Nazario Sauro, Fond Mestne občine Koper.

14 PAK, 7, 510, Fond Mestne občine Koper.

15 Letter from F. Forlati from the *R. Soprintendenze alle opere antiche e di arte* from Trieste to the prefect of Koper, 16 January 1935 (PAK, 7, 510, Fond Mestne občine Koper).

10 The extant archival material shows that the judicial authorities verified Sauro's identity through a request made to the municipality of Koper on 3 August 1916. In the letter, the municipality was asked to confirm that Nazario Sauro was the son of Giacomo/Beretta and Anna Depangher (PAK, 7, 510 Spomenik Nazario Sauro, Fond Mestne občine Koper).

and the aforementioned Monument Conservation Department also organised the restoration of the Carpaccio House. Some sacral buildings were also renovated – in the Romanesque rotunda of St. John the Baptist, now the Chapel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the municipality financed the demolition of the old sacristy and the erection of a new altar. The chapel known as the *Santissima del Duomo* was also restored. The idea of asphaltting the nearby main square (today's Tito Square) was quickly abandoned so as not to destroy the 'typical Italian square', as the architect Ferdinando Forlati, head of the Royal Monument Conservation Department in Trieste, described it at the time. Some minor works were also carried out in the Loggia Café (removal of the glazing on the Gothic vaults and restoration of the ceiling in the interior). In addition, the façades of important buildings that were most visible at the inauguration of the Nazario Sauro monument were repainted. Forlati also issued clear instructions that the Isola Codex of Dante's Divine Comedy should be presented in the Museum of History and Art ahead of the ceremony and had the 'less relevant literary works' removed from the shelves¹⁶.

However, things began to get complicated two months before the ceremony. Forlati wrote a letter directly asking the Prefecture of Koper whether they preferred to discuss things rather than working. The available documentation shows that the municipality's ownership of the salt warehouse, and consequently the planned construction works, would not be resolved by the date of the monument's inauguration. Neither was there any progress in the renovation of Carpaccio House and the Loggia. The surviving sources also show that despite delays in the main construction works, minor 'aesthetic' improvements in the town continued to be made, such as the removal of the modest wooden buildings in the square named after Vittor Pisani (to-

day's Ukmarjev trg).¹⁷ At the beginning of April 1935, the architect Forlati also inspected the so-called 'Venetian House', then owned by Arturo Steffè. The conservation department spent 2,500 *lire* restoring the windows on the house. Steffè received a letter from the government indicating that the typical 14th-century Venetian-style building was the subject of a sale between him and the son of Nazario Sauro for a price of 4,000 *lire*. Ultimately, the sale did not go through because the future owner wanted to use the ground floor for a mechanic's workshop. The building was unsuitable and most of it would have had to be demolished. This did not make sense due to its historical value and the cost of demolition. Forlati also ruled out the possibility of the building being bought by the Monument Conservation Department from Trieste. However, he wanted to emphasise the 'Venetianness' of Koper in a different way. At the end of April 1935, he proposed that the statue of the Venetian winged lion be moved from the Libertas Rowing Club to the façade of the salt warehouse because he thought it did not serve the right 'purpose' on the sports club building. He justified his proposal on the grounds that the statue had recently been placed on the external wall of the Koper sports club and that relocating it again would not cause any major inconvenience. Nino Derin, the new *podestà* of Koper, was of the same mind and wanted to emphasise Koper's 'Venetian aspect' with a Venetian flag measuring 2 x 3.5 m, which the municipality of Koper had ordered from the Venetian section of the National Veterans' Association of Military Volunteers 1915-1918 (*Azzurri di Dalmazia*)¹⁸.

From a broader perspective, the 'urban renewal' of Italian cities at the time coincided

16 PAK, 7, 510 Spomenik Nazario Sauro, Fond Mestne občine Koper.

17 Forlati referred to Planning Law No 778 of June 1922 and demanded that the 'unsuitable buildings' be removed before the monument's inauguration. In his view, this would restore the square's ancient beauty and make the whole area 'worthy' of a monument to a fallen hero of Koper. Forlati should be credited with evaluating and protecting the town's anonymous architecture (Čebren Lipovec 2020, 249–158).

18 PAK, 7, 510 Spomenik Nazario Sauro, Fond Mestne občine Koper.

with an architectural trend that emerged after the move away from Futurism and towards classical elements of Expressionism, the Renaissance and, above all, the Italian imitation of ancient Rome. This was overseen by the *Ministero Corporativista* with twenty associations, the seventeenth of which was dedicated to the '*Belle Arti*'. Control over the architectural sector was further tightened with the creation of the national Syndicate of Fascist Architects, headed by Alberto Calza Bini between 1923 and 1936. Three architects made the decisions on urban planning at the national level: Gustavo Giovannoni, Marcello Piacentini and the aforementioned Calza Bini. They were also present in the Fine Arts and Public Works Committees and were authorised to approve urban development plans (Kastelic 2007, 155–156). The architect Ferdinando Forlati had the main say regarding Koper, especially from the point of view of architectural and cultural heritage. In the absence of 'suitable traces of the Roman Empire', he focused on the iconography and motifs of the Venetian Republic. The history of the Serenissima's hegemony in the Adriatic coincided well with Italy's imperialist aspirations in the Mediterranean and the Balkans. The reconquest of Trieste and the Istrian peninsula was reminiscent of the territory that the Venetian Republic had once dominated, and the port cities of the newly conquered territories were thus once again under the former domination. Venice had the opportunity to regain its status as a privileged centre on the Adriatic (Fincardi 2001, 3–5).¹⁹

In Koper, the Italian authorities used architecture for two purposes: as a tool for marking space and as a convenient ideological apparatus (Čebtron Lipovec 2020, 249–158). The town of Koper, as an urban interventions entity, had only just begun its transformation when the war interrupted the planned constructions. The Nazario Sauro monument and its surroundings

had been designated as a place of commemoration for years. The promenade and park in which the collective imaginary was able to find its link with the past also provided an ideological vision for the future. In addition to the monument, a primary school named Anna Sauro Depangher was built in Koper between 1939 and 1940, but never opened due to the outbreak of the war (Sauro 2017, 311; Čebtron Lipovec 2012, 215).²⁰ The naming of the school after the self-sacrificing mother of an executed seaman from Koper probably had strong symbolic value. The modernist building, which was never completed, distanced itself from the historic land subdivision and created new intermediate market spaces with offset sections.

Conclusion

The tendency to present Italy as a 'strong' nation on a par with other 'great' nations took on more militant forms in Italian nationalism, and especially later under fascism. This 'violent' attitude was also adopted towards members of the same nation (Erjavec 1988). Social loyalty to the state apparatus had to be nurtured and glorified through historical practices. In interwar Koper, the monument to Nazario Sauro embodied several ideological concepts including historical myth, the ideological narrative of fascist rhetoric, and was a suitable tool for constructing general commemorative belonging to the ruling local community. At the same time, it is necessary to take into account the change in the social perception of the subject in question, which changed together with the figures in power in local politics, along with a change in the external appearance of this space. The creation of the myth of 'Nazario Sauro' did not actually be-

19 Marco Fincardi points out that the rise of fascism saw two Venetians take the reins of very important state portfolios: Giuseppe Volpi became the Minister for Finance and Giovanni Giuriati Minister for Public Works. We cannot say this was a political affirmation, but a targeted strategic investment for the port of Venice and the coastal industry.

20 In her article entitled Architectural monuments in Koper's reconstruction after World War Two, Neža Čebtron Lipovec states: The central body of the building was built in 1940 according to plans drawn up by the architect F. Mazzoni and assistant engineers S. Scimone and V. Quasimodo (SAT, ASopTS Istria Quarnero Dalmazia, busta 2, fasc.117 and busta 4, fasc.172). The partially preserved plans in the archival material are not signed, but the accompanying documents from Edilit mention the architect of the post-war remodelling of the school, 'our architect Matossi', 'il nostro architetto Matossi'.

gin with the laying of the foundation stone or the establishment of the competent committee, but germinated over decades and became deeply ingrained in the general consciousness of the population. The process presented was therefore multi-layered. It was primarily the regime's official institutions that made it financially possible, committing substantial financial resources, and managing and coordinating the most important projects for the construction of the imposing monument and the landscaping of its surroundings. At the local level, it is also possible to trace a number of actors who, through their respective competencies, kept the basic conceptual framework in line with the guidelines of the ruling elite. Their work was crucial in shaping social consciousness and transmitting ideas with which the public could identify, regardless of the historical discontinuities in the treatment of Nazario Sauro and his actions. The latter was also passed on to generations that were not familiar with heroic deeds, sacrifice in war, and naval tradition. Even though the younger generations felt that 'old-school' irredentism was archaic, they were nevertheless able to identify with the aspirations and visions of the new fascist regime through the prism or the symbolic myth of the domestic environment, regardless of the new circumstances.

Archival Sources

PAK: Pokrajinski arhiv Koper / Archivio Regionale di Capodistria.
SAT: Archivio della Soprintendenza di Trieste.

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Summary

In the last century, the writing of the history of 'contact spaces' was strongly ideologically and politically colored and to a greater extent the domain of national identities. The dominant ideological or social elite often used public space with the aim of forming individual and collective identity. The manifestation of political power took place through symbolism, which was present both in public commemorations and in newly built buildings. In Koper, the Italian authorities, for example, used architecture in two ways: as a tool for marking space and as a convenient ideological apparatus. The article deals with the erection of the monument to the Istrian sailor Nazario Sauro. A myth was formed about the latter in the period between the two wars, through metaphors in public space (naming of schools, streets, editions of publications, etc.), which reached its peak with the erection of a monument in 1935 in Koper. The construction of the monument clearly indicates the imposition of memory politics by various actors, both at the national and local levels. The professional article presents the buildings that were built as a direct result of the 'Great War' in the Austrian Littoral. The article also deals with the extensive organizational and financial efforts that were necessary to erect a monumental memorial to the aforementioned sailor in all its grandeur. The ideological pretensions of the central fascist authorities, which together with local actors enabled the financing and construction of the monument, are given historical consideration. In the period between the two wars, the erection of the monument to Nazario Saura probably marked the beginning of Koper's urban transformation. Due to the outbreak of World War II, this transformation never experienced an epilogue.

Povzetek

V prejšnjem stoletju je bilo pisanje zgodovine »stičnih prostorov« močno ideološko in politično obarvano ter v večji meri domena nacionalnih identitet. Prevladujo-

ča ideološka oz. družbena elita je pogosto izrabljala javni prostor z namenom oblikovanja individualne in kolektivne identitete. Manifestacija politične moči je potekala preko simbolike, ki je bila prisotna tako v javnih komemoracijah kot tudi v na novo zgrajenih objektih. V Kopru se je italijanska oblast npr. arhitekture poslužila pri dvojem, in sicer kot orodja za označevanja prostora ter kot priročnega ideološkega aparata. Strokovni članek obravnava postavitve spomenika istrskemu pomorščaku Nazariju Sauru. O slednjem se je v obdobju med obema vojnama preko prispevkov v javnem prostoru (imenovanje šol, ulic, izdaj publikacij itd.) oblikoval mit, ki je svoj vrhunec dosegel s postavitvijo spomenika leta 1935 v Kopru. Izgradnja spomenika jasno nakazuje na vsiljevanje politike spomina različnih akterjev, tako na nacionalni kot tudi na lokalni ravni. V članku so predstavljeni objekti, ki so bili zgrajeni kot neposredna posledica »velike vojne« v Avstrijskem primorju. Članek obravnava tudi obsežne organizacijske in finančne napore, ki so bili potrebni za postavitve monumentalnega spominskega obeležja omenjenemu pomorščaku v vsej njegovi veličini. V historično obravnavo so pri tem dane ideološko-režimske pretenzije centralnih fašističnih oblasti, ki so bile poleg lokalnih akterjev tiste, ki so omogočile financiranje in izgradnjo spomenika. V obdobju med obema vojnama je začetek urbanistične preobrazbe Kopra najverjetneje predstavljala prav postavitve spomenika Nazariu Sauru. Slednja pa zaradi izbruha druge svetovne vojne nikoli ni doživela končnega epiloga.