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Trieste 1948–1952: A Contended Port City and the Marshall Plan

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The relationship between a city's institutional arrangement and its role as a maritime international commercial crossway is often not simple, especially during periods of major political transition. During more or less normal times (or, when changes could be kept under control) successful port cities could be powerful attractors of wealth, but also socio-institutional-economic structures so complicated as to require a wide range of special administrative care, both for the management of current business and for the development of strategies maintaining the equilibrium over time (OECD 2006).

Typically, in port cities economics, society, and institutions interact in peculiar ways, and, over time, almost every successful port city has elaborated a specific settlement of the tensions originating from the close interplay of different (even contrasting) interests, paving the way for the emergence of a great variety of typified solutions.

In some aspects, the maritime identity of Trieste is more complicated than usual, being not only an international port, but also a borderland city, and a link (or a chokepoint) between different nationalities and cultures. For these reasons, the historical reconstruction of the local port system activities is never a simple matter of recognition and reconstruction of roles, rules, the efficiency and efficacy of the businesses carried out inside the port areas, and the extension and shape of the interconnections. Instead, it is a matter of reconstructing the complexity of the port system as a whole, with its interweaving of different and interacting levels and dynamics, rather than a mechanical succession of causes and effects. Within this research, politics, economics, society, culture, and so

on thus become points of view, the necessary starting points to begin an analysis that considers the material and immaterial infrastructures of the port system as equally important.

Looking at the Trieste case, the Marshall Plan years are an exceptional point of view, since the destination of the Plan-related resources were administered by Allied officials, almost entirely American nationals, engaged in the chase of an extremely difficult-to-find equilibrium between the local needs and the general aims of the European Recovery Program. Actually, in the end, the local side prevailed, and the American officials used this exceptional flow of financial resources to revive a typical assisted and parasitic economy. In other words, the American intervention in Trieste produced a result strikingly opposite to the official mission of the Plan.

The Trieste exception

A large portion of the traditional port histories typically deals with the complexity of port operations considering mainly one dynamic (the movement of goods and the organization of services), and then elaborates by adding the interactions of the main dynamic with other notable aspects of a port-system evolution (Fischer and Jarvis 1999; Palmer 2020).

Recently, new streams of study and approaches have enriched the port historiography, coming from urban historians, cultural and social historians, international relation studies, and so on (Konvitz 2012; Harlaftis 2020). At the same time, new studies have given new energy to the traditional specialization. Summing up, the new studies all emphasize comparisons (Loyen, Buyst, and Devos 2003), long-term perspectives, the digital elaboration of datasets, and an integrative view of the peculiarities and complexities characterizing the maritime economic world (Rohou, Laube, and Garlatti 2017, 363–72; Harlaftis and Theotokas 2020).

On the other hand, the historiography about the Marshall Plan began to consider its wider infrastructural implications only recently, using the ERP experience in order to infer some evaluations concerning the possible future impacts of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative on the global commercial networks and, possibly, the entire world order (Shen and Chan 2018). Since the beginning of the Chinese initiative, in 2014 (Chen 2014), a new stream of studies tried to look at the multi-purpose, multi-faceted, multilateral integration achieved thanks to the Marshall

Plan as a possible backdrop for coping with the complexities related to the emerging new strategic perspectives. The role of seaport cities gained a key position inside these studies, not only as infrastructural intersections, but also as control points, both for commercial flows and for the reliability of the infrastructural network (Deepak 2018).

The establishment of a new kind of infrastructure connectivity would eventually change the spectrum of Chinese-European relations, just as the Marshall Plan changed the relations between the two sides of the Atlantic Ocean (Habova 2015). Within these studies, the main issue seems to have been the disentanglement of the infrastructural value of the Plan (the reconnection of the material flows) from the other effects connected with such massive transfer of material and immaterial resources (Da and Hai 2019), such as the economic recovery, the technological update, the productivity gains, and all the other, well-known and well-studied, long-term consequences (Eichengreen 2007; Bischof, Pelinka, and Stiefel 2010; Fauri 2010).

The case of Trieste during the Marshall Plan may bring some insights, especially regarding how in those times, the local Allied government figured out a possible solution for the complex combination of political and economic tools and goals, the overlapping of the short and long term, and the increasing contradiction between the local dimension and the global scenario. How the governors dealt with these difficulties in the past could tell us something about the forces at work, related to the economic balance on the surface, but also to the power transition underneath.

Trieste and the European Recovery Program

As it was said, ‘The port of Trieste, standing at a crucial strategic point at the head of the Adriatic, had a turbulent history in the mid-twentieth century’ (Hametz 2005, back cover). Whether those turbulences were mainly due to the geographical position, the economic role, or the geopolitical importance of being the southern link of the Iron Curtain we will probably never know. The best guess is that every aspect of the Trieste history has an inner international nature, and clearly the port (together with all the related activities) is the most international part of the city, at least in economic terms.

Being an international crossroads is a specific characteristic of every port city. This international exposure is usually related to quicker and wider changes in their histories. When changes reach a magnitude be-

yond the capacity of the local control, it could happen that the political instabilities of the city reflect themselves in the economic and port activities, or else, reversing the line of change, port difficulties can hinder the entire city life.

In the literature, scholars have especially devoted attention to the physical organization and organizational management of port systems (González and Trujillo 2007), while port historians have adopted a more comprehensive approach. However, some topics, such as the multiple political and institutional influences determining the evolutive path of a port (along with technology, organization, and economics), still remain an understudied territory.¹

Recently, new attention has arisen for the study of the network of interconnections surrounding the life of the biggest ports (Lee and Lee 2016; Dwarakisha and Salim 2015): supply chains, value chains, long distance infrastructural connections, and the role of ports as key links of a more and more complex global connectivity system. From this point of view, not only the performance evaluations require a comprehensive update (Park and De 2004), but a new holistic approach should be adopted, in order to properly locate the history of a port inside its proper economic, technical, but also socio-politico-institutional environment (Jacobs and Notteboom 2011).

Looking at Trieste after the Second World War, during the Allied Military Government period, occupying authorities used their complete control of local economic activities to foster the social and ideological “normalization” of the residents, and to direct the city’s political future as well. Actually, the intertwining of economic instruments and political aims was something coming into Trieste from outside, with the experiences accumulated by AMG officials during their operations in the rest of Italy, and such procedures were quietly supported by the Roosevelt administration.²

1 Sarah Palmer spoke of ‘the recognition that a port is an interface, not only as conventionally perceived between sea and land, but also between types of institutions or interests’: Palmer 1990, 266; see also Tull 2014.

2 ‘It is for the sake of the future economic life of the world at large and thereby for our own future that we should go on with the job at once and utilise all the resources within our means. A total war is not won by winning battles alone. The peace must also be won’ (ACS, ACC, roll 508, box 92, folder 2165, Report of the Fea survey mission in Italy, p. 121).

The real novelty in Trieste was the sense of urgency connected with the unstable local social and political situation, and the insecure international collocation of the city. The roots of these instabilities were deeply grounded in the final years of the Second World War.

From 1944, it was clear that Germany would lose the war, and that its socio-economic system, devastated by the aerial bombings, would be in need of almost everything. The best chance to regenerate the economy of the countries in central Europe was therefore to strengthen the traditional, southern routes of communication: the Adriatic and the Danube. Dated April 1945, there is a Trieste port map over which someone has highlighted some areas for the location of future English and American infrastructures (quarters for troops, warehouses, areas of service, etc.).³ In the annexed document, the main purpose for those installations was identified as the managing of supplies and supports for combat troops in Austria and southern Germany.

Also for the Slovenians, the control of the Trieste port had, from the beginning, some important political implications: including Trieste inside the new Yugoslavia would have produced the conditions for the control of the entire old Italian Eastern frontier. In this sense, the best guarantee that in the postwar period the Trieste economic system would be in Yugoslav hands was given by the control of the territory obtained by the partisan troops who arrived first in the city, before it was controlled by the United States' and Great Britain's armies. The city's conquest was considered proper compensation for the violence of Fascism and for the Italian aggression against Yugoslavia in 1941. It was said that 'To our enemies it should not remain the booty of the violence. We should obtain the satisfaction that the violence is punished and in the meantime the test that the imperialist oppression not lead to some durable result.'⁴

In the end, an Allied Military Government ruled Trieste, in an increasingly bitter confrontation siding the USA and the UK with Italy, and Yugoslavia with the Soviet Union, at least until 1948, the first year of the Marshall Plan (Cox 1977; Valdevit 1996).

During the first months after the end of the war, the AMG tried to manage the emergency and avoided pledging itself to longer-term pro-

3 'Port of Trieste oct. 1944-dec. 1945', in: ACS, ACC, roll 25e, box 1011, subindicator 10000/109/1011.

4 Cf. the speech by Lojze Ude, *Nekaj načelnih pripomb k vprašanju o mejah*: Troha 2003, footnote 52.

grammes.⁵ The port itself was so damaged that the first supplies for the city were landed on a shore outside the port, using landing craft, because all the port's wharves were mined, damaged by air bombing, or rendered useless in other ways. Wreckage so cluttered the accesses to the port that it was impossible for ships to approach.

The port facilities, slowly reactivated, were used for months to disembark supplies for the troops and food for the starving population, including in the direction of Yugoslavia, under the Unrra and other relief programmes. Normal commercial flows were simply non-existent, but the military necessities helped in fostering the reconstruction of the damaged facilities, and in keeping the whole port system busy. Moreover, the reactivation of the main economic activities as soon as possible became the first political requisite, in order to employ (and to appease) a potentially dangerous mass of several thousand highly politicized workers, led by the pro-Yugoslav faction of the local leftist political spectrum.

AMG officers quickly had to find a single solution for two categories of problems. On the one hand, they had to find legitimacy for their role as trustworthy guarantors, not only in maintaining the status quo, but also as specialists in the transition from the disasters and famines of the war to a peace based on freedom and prosperity, as the propaganda of the time promised to everyone, including to the inhabitants of that Eastern Europe which in practice began in Trieste. On the other hand, the slow pace of economic stabilization and the poor prospects for a recovery in international trade put two of the fundamental pillars of the Trieste economy in crisis, which therefore had to be at least partially reinvented and adapted to the circumstances. These were the two fundamental determinants that forced the officers of the Venezia Giulia AMG to invent a completely new intervention strategy to steady the situation in the administered territory, both economically, but also socially and politically.

Looking at the same scene from a completely different point of view, the international nature of the 'Trieste question' urged the USA and UK

5 Even in January 1946, the Chief Commissioner of Italian Allied Control Commission, the American admiral Ellery Stone, required instructions about the future economic collocation of Trieste and its territory: 'Broadly speaking, it appears that the question to be decided is whether AMG Venezia Giulia is to be treated economically and financially for all purposes as part of Italy, or whether it is to be administered as a separate economic entity (as is being done on the political side) until a final decision as to the future of the area has been taken.' Ellery Stone to Allied Force Headquarters, 18 January 1946 (NARA, WO, 204/411; in copy at IRSML, b. 72).

governments to a sequence of diplomatic moves, aimed both at securing the Allied position locally, and at extending the Western influence over the entire area. The first step was the Italian Peace Treaty, where a specific clause was dedicated to the international status of the Trieste port activities.

The Instrument of the Free Port of Trieste (Annex VIII) establishes the Free Port, free of customs, ‘in order to ensure that the port and transit facilities of Trieste will be available for use on equal terms by all international trade and by Yugoslavia, Italy, and the States of Central Europe.’ The Instrument binds the Free Territory and the signatory countries through whose territories the Free Port’s traffic passes to facilitate the movement of this traffic and not to apply any discriminatory measures against it (Unger 1947).

When a new set of opportunities presented itself in the form of an autonomous participation in the European Recovery Program, the AMG officials immediately interpreted it as a game changer. With only one move, participation in the Marshall Plan could solve several problems: an immediate solution for the financial difficulties and the anchoring of the Trieste economy (with the entire city following) to the Western field. At the same time, the Allied government had the opportunity to build up some key mechanisms, in order to control the social and political discontent inside the administered area.

In this sense, the relative percentage of landings out of the total port movement in the post-war years is more significant than absolute data.

Table 6.1: Port of Trieste 1945–1948. Goods loaded and unloaded (Addobbati 1968, 130).

| Years | Unload | Load | Total |
|-------|--------|------|-------|
| | % | % | % |
| 1945 | 92 | 8 | 100 |
| 1946 | 96 | 4 | 100 |
| 1947 | 84 | 16 | 100 |
| 1948 | 79 | 21 | 100 |

During the early years of the post-war period, the ‘resource’ port, so to speak, had its primary use entirely within the allied logics aimed at a stable settlement of Central Europe, in terms of a direct control of

the territory, starting from Trieste and reaching the occupied zones in Austria and Southern Germany. The city, if anything, benefited indirectly from the flow of supplies passing through it, and, in such times, this was indeed an essential benefit for the local economy.

The famous historian Arnold Toynbee was active as an expert at the Foreign Office study centre during the war years. He drew up a memorandum on the future economic role of Trieste, focusing his attention on its port. The central assumption of Toynbee's memorandum was the proposal to maintain the free port institution in Trieste, and to entrust its management to an international commission made up of representatives of the countries that would use the equipment of the port itself, in addition, of course, to the representatives of the winning powers. Such an internationalization would have had a whole series of consequences: firstly, it would have allowed the Allies to control the best lines of communication to central Europe that existed at the time (taking into account the heavy damage suffered by German infrastructures and the uncertain political situation of postwar Germany). Secondly, a ground of exchange would have formed with the Soviet Union and its allies in the difficult post-war planning. Finally, a medium-long term Anglo-American intervention in Trieste would have given substantial help to Italy in an attempt to resist the foreseeable Yugoslav pressures (with the 'formidable support of the Soviet Union', said the document) aimed at controlling the area of the Northern Adriatic.⁶

In the following years, once the emergency was over, the restoration of the international function of the port became one of the main aspects of the search for a self-sustaining economic system in Trieste. As time passed, this search proved more and more difficult, but above all increasingly politically dangerous, because it would have endangered that fragile consensus structure that the Trieste AMG had managed to build.

6 'It has become clear that if, for ethnographic and political reasons, we mean to resist Yugoslavia's claim to annex Trieste, we must have up our sleeve a plan for administering the port, and the roads and railways connecting it with its non-Italian economic hinterland, which will safeguard the legitimate economic interests, in Trieste, of Yugoslavia, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary, as well as the sovereign rights and legitimate economic interests of Italy.' *Administration of ports serving a Soviet or partly Soviet-controlled hinterland*, memo annexed to a letter by Arnold Toynbee, 22 May 1945 (but the protocol date was 24 July 1945), in the Public Record Office, Foreign Office (from now on Pro-Fo), 371/50791 (copy at Istituto regionale per la storia della Resistenza e dell'Età contemporanea (Trieste), b. 73, f. VII).

From this point of view, the management of the port issues could also be interpreted as a test of the viability and practical applicability of the entire strategy developed by the American military government structure during the Marshall Plan years.

ERP and the Trieste port system: quantities and qualities

The Free Territory of Trieste became a late member of the OEEC. The starting point was not an entirely local decision, but a request made by the Italian ambassador, when Italy was already a member state. The Italian representative asked for the recognition that the ‘The Italian Government cannot indeed remain indifferent to the moral and the material needs of the population of Venezia Giulia, which by immemorial tradition has closely participated in the development and achievements of the European population.’⁷

The ERP in Trieste, therefore, was devised mainly as “compensation” for a post-war settlement which (instrumentally or otherwise) was recognized as penalizing and worthy of an extraordinary remedy, while the usual image of a push for triggering an autonomous recovery after the war was left in the background.

This was the starting point of all the contradictions of the unusual application of the Marshall Plan directives in Trieste. The main US Congress law, the one igniting the complex procedures for the realization of the European Recovery Program, clearly stated that:

*The restoration or maintenance in European countries of principles of individual liberty, free institutions, and genuine independence rests largely upon the establishment of sound economic conditions, stable international economic relationship, and the achievement by the countries of Europe of a healthy economy independent of extraordinary outside assistance.*⁸

Conversely, in Trieste the intervention perspectives remained much more linked to the war logic than to those aimed at a peaceful integration of Europe, and not only because of the exceptional duration of the allied military government (Granger 2006, 38). One of the main problems, as we will see, was the inability of the Allied officials to effectively imagine

7 IUE, OEEC, Memorandum Participation of Trieste in the European Recovery Program, 1010 C(48) 080.

8 The Economic Cooperation Act of 1948, *Public law 472*, 80th Congress, April 1948.

a stable positionality for the Trieste economic system inside the Western area, while, on the other hand, both the Italian government and the local Italian officials acted to subdue the local economy to certain Italian needs, especially in the maritime sector. At the end, the ERP-Trieste project was one of the most financed in Europe (on a per capita basis) but it was quite completely fruitless in creating a self-sustained economy.

On the one hand, the Italian Government did not hesitate to hinder or reject any initiative that did not fit into a national development plan and had exclusively local values, to the detriment of the country's interest. On the other hand, it did not hesitate to support strong national and local interests – such as public enterprises (Ilva, shipbuilding and shipping firms), or monopoly groups (Italcementi) – to the detriment of small and medium-sized industries:⁹ precisely the accusation that the Italian government and the ECA mission in Rome levied against the AMG (Serra 1954).

After the plan started, the attitude of the American officers within the AMG changed quite quickly. The first position was very close to the one expressed by the Public Law n. 472, which privileged in the first place the economic integration of the whole of Europe. During the second year of the plan, the attitude shifted, embracing a sort of local adaptation, which had as its main objective the creation of increasingly solid links between the Trieste economy and the Italian one.¹⁰ In practice, starting from its second year, the Trieste ERP became an unofficial extension of the Italian ERP.¹¹

9 NARA, RG, 331, File 75, Allied Secretariat Planning papers, AMG-BUSZ/FTT, Haralson, Establishment of new enterprises in Trieste (copy at IRSML, b. 76).

10 'It is unfortunate that the Italian Govt has found it necessary to adopt a political approach in dealing with matters which should be considered in economic terms if ERP is to be a success. [...] AMG's approach has been (and will continue to be) in the direction of the complete integration of this territory into a unified Western European economy. This may ultimately occur directly or via the Italian economy. In either case the final objective is the same and the course of action we have outlined is the only one which makes economic sense to us.' NARA, RG 469, entry 1394, box 10, fasc. Programs – Trieste 1948/49, Ivan B. White [Director Finance and Economic Department, GMA-Trieste] to Secstate, Washington, 5 May 1948, 'secret'.

11 'I have been mindful of your concern that AMG's recovery planning and programming be closely coordinated with that of the Italian Government, with a view to making the eventual transfer of this area to Italy as smooth a transition as possible.' NARA, RG 469, entry 1394, box 10, fasc. Programs – Trieste 1948/49, White to 'Members of the Council', Trieste's 1949–50 Investment Program, 15 August 1949.

Among the beneficiary countries, Trieste was the fastest, together with England, in making use of the ERP aid assigned it: by December 1948 almost 70% of the aid granted up to that point had already been committed, compared to 40% in Italy, 34% in Germany and 52% in France; cumulative utilization progressively increased to 91% in mid-1951 (Spagnolo 2001, tab. 3.1). By the end of 1949, the procurement authorizations connected with the ERP-Trieste project consisted of more than 50% of goods coming from the United States, while a further 16% consisted of crude oil. Noteworthy is the fact that more than 20% of the total expenses was absorbed by the ocean freights paid to transport the goods. The Trieste percentage was extremely high: for the entire programme, less than 8% of the expenses was paid for ocean transportations. Italy paid 14%, Austria and West Germany both paid almost 10%. Clearly, for Trieste, the transportation of the aid was a business in itself; a sort of secondary benefit, in addition to the goods, given for free.

Table 6.2: ERP-Trieste Procurement Authorizations - April 3, 1948, December 31, 1949. (Thousands of dollars)

| Area or Country of origin | Destination Trieste |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Grand total | 23,155 |
| Commodity total | 18,327 |
| Ocean freight | 4,828 |
| United States | 12,338 |
| Latin America | 1,273 |
| Participating countries | 525 |
| Other Countries | 4,192 |
| Middle East Oil Area | 3,749 |
| Siam | 443 |

Source: Economic Cooperation Administration 1950, Table XIV-4

The Free Territory of Trieste was also the only participating country, together with Belgium, to use 100% of the counterpart funds originating from US aid in industrial investments – more than twenty billion lire at the time – compared to a share of 61% in France, 58% in Germany, and 52.3% in Italy (Spagnolo 2001, tab. 3.1).

Formally, the plan favoured all industrial activities, but on closer inspection they were, in most cases, activities closely related to the mari-

time fate of the Territory of Trieste, and therefore to its identity as a port city.

Table 63: Financing of Trieste's Economic Recovery Program 1948–52.¹²

| | Recapitulation | Investment Program by Category (Lire) |
|-----------|---|--|
| A. | Shipbuilding | 51,000,000,000 |
| B. | Industrial Reconstruction and Modernization | 9,000,000,000 |
| C. | Fisheries and Fish Canning | 1,560,000,000 |
| D. | Tourist Facilities | 900,000,000 |
| E. | Housing | 2,100,000,000 |
| F. | Port and Industrial Zone Development | 1,900,000,000 |
| G. | Rehabilitation of Public Utilities | 985,000,000 |
| H. | Agricultural Development | 1,250,000,000 |
| I. | Petroleum Refining | 4,600,000,000 |
| | Total | 73,295,000,000 |

From the end of 1947 onwards, the US and UK Governments began to think about the future of Trieste on a longer-term perspective,¹³ well beyond the simple management of the post-war emergency, and we can detect some strategic lines.¹⁴ Particularly, the most important aim in the economic field was the building of a system of self-supporting economy. The governors of the new state-like entity (the Free Territory of Trieste) wanted to create firm conditions for independency from Italy but also from Yugoslavia. The project elaborated inside the AMG was directed in the first place at reaching a situation of a self-supporting econo-

12 NARA, RG 469, Mission to Italy, Office of the Director, Subject Files, Meeting Erp Coordination and Progress (copy in IRSLM, b. 76, f. RG 469), Commander and Military Governor's Erp Coordination and Progress Meeting. Minutes of Meeting No. 5, 8 July 1949, pag. 2.

13 'In relation to the present economic emergency in Europe. the logical consequence of the present state of the world is that measures of assistance envisaged by this Government should be consciously limited to Western Europe, based on the concept of the economic unity of Europe west of the Stettin-Trieste line.' (From a US Department of State Memorandum, 30 August 1947, in Holm 2017, 157–8.

14 The constitution of the Free Territory of Trieste can be considered as a clarification of the actual tasks of the AMG itself. The Chief officer for economics (the British Lt. col. Birkensteth) was told that 'It was in British political and economic interests that Trieste should become a going concern. It was on the borderline between the Western Powers and the Soviet sphere of influence, and we should therefore make every effort to see that it functioned smoothly.' Public Record Office, Foreign Office 371, 67467, R-12356, Minutes of a Meeting held in Room 25 Foreign Office on Wednesday 3rd September [1947], on the Economic Future of Trieste.

my, and that goal was believed to be easily achievable because the Trieste and Italian economies were considered not complementary (Economic Cooperation Administration 1949b). Apart from other things, self-sufficiency was intended as a result of economic integration between Trieste and the entire Western Europe economic system, in coherence with one of the fundamental postulates of the European Recovery Program. A little romantically, it seems that Allied officials thought it possible to create a kind of Hong Kong on the Adriatic, an autonomous and economically efficient port-city, capable of providing its maritime and commercial services to all possible customers, on both sides of the Iron Curtain.

Such a view led the AMG to privilege, between the objectives of the plan, the immediate restoration of transport activity from the port of Trieste to Austria, Germany, and Switzerland (Valdevit 1999, 126). In 1950, the Austrian ECA mission organized a major ceremony in Trieste, on the occasion of the arrival of the four-millionth ton of ERP goods, unloaded in the Adriatic port and directed to Vienna (Schröder 2000, 219). It was the confirmation of the pivotal role assigned to the city, inside a wide network of interdependencies, that was the backbone of the American control strategy along the southern section of the Iron Curtain (Hogan 1987).

Especially at the beginning of the Marshall Plan, for different reasons, the logistic opportunities available in Trieste were considered as a key element for a quick start of the recovery not only in Austria, but also in Southern Germany and Italy.

For the Western-occupied zones of Austria, one of the main concerns was the lack of fuel and raw materials, indispensable for a restoration of the main industrial activities and after that, for the reactivation of the entire Austrian economic system along a self-sustaining perspective of development (Economic Cooperation Administration 1949a, 4 and 55–9). Without an initial injection of food, fuel, and raw materials the entire Austrian industrial system could not have produced sufficient output to restart the export circuit and gain an acceptable level of economic self-sufficiency for the entire country.

For Germany, the question of the availability of supplies was critical. The main problem was the complete disruption of the system of complementarities that had sustained the economic development of the country since its unification:

The chief problems of Western Germany are recovery from the complete disorganization of economic life and political institutions which followed the defeat, and the difficulties of adjusting to the separation from industrial Western Germany of the predominantly agricultural Eastern territories which were formerly a major source of food for the West (Economic Cooperation Administration 1949c, 1).

The direct political connection between the US-occupied portion of southern Germany (Bavaria, Hesse, and Württemberg-Baden) and the US quota of the Trieste AMG was certainly an element in favouring the Northern Adriatic port. Furthermore, the selective destruction of vital lines of communication (especially bridges) redirected a large part of the main supply routes along some unusual North-South lines Economic Cooperation Administration 1949c, 60–2), instead of the traditional network of interconnections over all the territory. Also for these reasons, Trieste was perceived as the best choice to feed Bavaria, and then to hustle the economic recovery of the entire American zone.

Finally, for Italy, the most important matter was not the port in itself, but the possibility of benefitting from the flow of foreign currencies connected with the port activities. Operating in Italian lire, Trieste port activities, in practical terms, generated valuable currents that directly supported the course of the national currency, with advantages such the ability of the entire Italian economy to relate to the international markets.

This exceptional (and very temporary) coexistence of positive aspects strongly pushed the resumption of traffic in the early days, but it could not support the transition of port activities towards more modern forms of logistics. In other words, the haste of the early days brought immediate benefits, which were paid for with less capacity for modernization over a longer time frame.

In the short run, the strategic value of the port infrastructures increased the still greater-than-usual political importance of the Trieste socioeconomic stabilization, leading to a local standard of living generally higher than the Italian one.

Table 6.4: Indexes of cost of living or retail prices (1948 = 100)

| Period | Austria | Germany (bizonal area only) | Italy | Trieste | |
|---------------|----------------|--|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 1948 | Jan. | [not available] | [not available] | 100 | 99 |
| | Feb. | [not available] | [not available] | 99 | 107 |
| | Mar. | [not available] | [not available] | 102 | 97 |
| | Apr. | [not available] | [not available] | 102 | 101 |
| | May | [not available] | [not available] | 101 | 99 |
| | June | [not available] | 100 | 100 | 100 |
| | July | 88 | 105 | 95 | 94 |
| | Aug. | 87 | 104 | 99 | 95 |
| | Sept. | 87 | 105 | 101 | 99 |
| | Oct. | 100 | 109 | 100 | 102 |
| | Nov. | 100 | 109 | 101 | 102 |
| | Dec. | 104 | 111 | 102 | 104 |
| 1949 | Jan. | 104 | 111 | 103 | 107 |
| | Feb. | 104 | 111 | 102 | 97 |
| | Mar. | 104 | 111 | 103 | 107 |
| | Apr. | 104 | 109 | 104 | 109 |
| | May | 104 | 106 | 104 | 113 |
| | June | 119 | 105 | 103 | 109 |
| | July | 119 | 106 | 100 | 105 |
| | Aug. | 119 | 104 | 101 | 105 |
| | Sept. | 120 | 103 | 101 | 103 |
| | Oct. | 124 | 103 | 99 | 102 |
| | Nov. | 133 | 103 | 99 | 101 |
| | Dec. | 135 | 103 | 98 | [not available] |

Source: Economic Cooperation Administration 1950, Table IX–2

Since 1948, the funds expected from the Marshall Plan would have been spent especially to restore and to modernize the circuit of production and use of ships that had been typical during the Austrian period: shipbuilding, maritime transport, port activities, and commerce. Out of about 170,000 gross tons of ships launched in those years in the Trieste and Monfalcone shipyards, ships for a total of around 100,000 tons were financed by the Marshall Plan (Valdevit 2002, 631–50). It is a known fact that the Free Territory of Trieste was the unit that gained more in Europe (on a per capita basis) from the Marshall Plan benefits.

ECA aid to Trieste has, therefore, been of benefit of Italy, as well, both directly in that a considerable portion of the imports provided by this aid have been on Italian account, and indirectly, in that the receipt of aid by Trieste and the resulting generation of counterpart have decreased the contribution of dollars which Italy has been required to make from the common foreign exchange pool, and of lira to cover Trieste's budget deficit, which Italy is committed to supply. [...] Properly stated, therefore, the issue is not whether aid to Trieste should be terminated but rather whether it should continue to be supplied directly as Eca aid to Trieste, or should be handled indirectly through the Italian program.¹⁵

The construction of this new identity for the local economy should also keep in account the particular interplay between the internal and external determinants. After Tito's expulsion from Cominform (1948), the American politics for the area's stabilization succeeded in detaching Yugoslavia from the Soviet influence, also subsidizing the construction of a new port system in Slovenia, located near the boundary with Trieste at Koper-Capodistria. The help given to Capodistria is a good example of the limits of the short-term optics of that time. The doubling of the harbour capacity was a good choice with respect to the Anglo-British desire, after 1953, to solve the problem of Trieste with a compromise, assigning Zone A to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia. However, in a more long-term perspective, the objective of a self-supporting economy was lost, and for Italy there remained the commitment to assist an over-sized and in part parasitical economy.

'Unfortunately, during the reconstruction process Trieste missed a priceless opportunity to renew its port facilities in the light of recent experience made in the field of maritime transport, and in view of its foreseeable evolution' (Maggi and Borruso 1996, 38). In fact, in other ports, especially in Germany, after the almost complete destruction suffered during the war, the ports were completely rebuilt following an up-to-date approach. In contrast, the prevailing trend in Trieste was to restore things exactly 'as they were before', thereby missing a crucial opportunity for endowing its port facilities with a layout that might have been more

15 NARA, RG 469, Eca, Deputy Director for Operations, Office of European Operations, Italy Division, Trieste Decimal File 1948-1953, folder: TR Ec. Activ. 1.0 1.2 1.24 (copy in IRSML, b. 76), Alex B. Despit to C. Tyler Wood, 16 February 1951.

adequate to the needs of the immediate future, needs that were already emerging at that time.

In those years, the destiny designed for the port was a wholly international one, in sharp contrast with the political destiny of the city and its territory. We can say, so many years later, that it was the right place, but the wrong time.

Furthermore, noteworthy is the fact that the direct ERP aid programme in Trieste ceased early, in 1951. From that moment on, the support to the Trieste economy was directly mediated by Rome: the ECA mission in Rome absorbed all the remaining Marshall Plan-related activities in Trieste, and the ERP mission in Trieste was closed. This was the result of strong disagreements between the AMG and the Italian government regarding the most appropriate economic policies to follow in relation to the FTT, but also (and perhaps above all) between the AMG and the head of the ECA mission in Trieste, Galloway – the only one strongly supporting a pure economic view inside the application of the ERP aid programme. In other words, the official position was to consider the Trieste situation as exceptional as the one adopted in Berlin, or in Greece and Turkey.

At that time, the figures could give the impression of a successful recovery. Starting from 1949 the weight of the goods loaded and unloaded in the port of Trieste was permanently higher than the previous maximum of 1913. But these were very different goods. In 1951 ‘poor’ goods such as cereals, coal, oil, and timber contributed a total of 63.1% of port traffic, while in 1913 their share was only 40.9%, clearly indicating how at the time the trade was made up of a greater share of ‘richer’ goods, the transport of which made more money, and whose handling and trade left the city with greater wealth. Furthermore, starting from the 1950s, a large part of the overall growth of the port movement was linked to the increase in the traffic of oil products: almost 40% of the unloaded goods in 1955, stably over 50% since 1962 (Mellinato, Scrignar, and Staccioli 2004).

What can be learned?

When the end of Marshall aid in Trieste was approaching, the United States representative to the GMA briefly explained to the State Department the profound meaning of what had been done in Trieste during the previous years, and what would have to be done while the experience of the allied administration lasted.

*No one here really thinks of Trieste recovery in the same sense as the recovery of other OEEC countries; as long as the present international situation continues [...] Trieste cannot hope to achieve full recovery and self-sufficiency at any reasonable standard of living. [...] Such a policy also has had the political objective of keeping the Trieste population on the side of the West through demonstrating continual improvement in the material situation.*¹⁶

The overexposure of the city's political role had turned out to be the best bargaining chip for attracting extraordinary resources to the city, and not only for its reconstruction, but also to achieve a certain positive transformation in living conditions, at least relatively, compared to what had been done in Italy (Valdevit 2004, 259).

The combined action of the Italian government and the allied military government of Trieste had determined the simultaneous interweaving of two converging lines of intervention, generating the conditions for a reconstruction of the Trieste maritime economy, which only partially took into account the changed settlement of the international maritime market. The result, already highlighted by Giampaolo Valdevit,¹⁷ was an increase in the dependence of the local economic system on state intervention, an involvement that followed operational criteria partly different from the search for company profitability. Summing up, we can say that, over the years, such misled use of the Marshall Plan resources led to a weakening of the Trieste maritime positionality, precisely in the years in which, even in the maritime sector, the economic presence of the new Yugoslavia was significantly expanding.

[I]t was apparent that neither the Yugoslavs nor the Italians would go along with this Free Territory of Trieste and we didn't press it, A, because we were pretty well committed politically to returning the city to Italy, and, B, it didn't make much economic sense to have a Free Territory of Trieste since the city had been developed under the old Austro-Hungarian Empire as a port for the whole empire, which

16 NARA, RG 59, State Department Central File, 850G.00 / 5-24 50, (copy in IRSML, b. 76), US Political Adviser (Trieste) to State Department (Washington), 29 July 1950.

17 During the reconstruction years, the public actor was the dominant presence in Trieste, in striking contrast with the basic vision permeating the Marshall Plan. This kind of legacy would leave substantial traces also during the following decades, 'in mentality, in practice, in results'. Cf. Valdevit 1999, 133.

made sense before World War I. Trieste's hinterland had been so fragmented politically that the port's raison d' être was lost (Fuchs 1974, 41).

The Marshall Plan provided the Trieste AMG with the abundance of financial means necessary to support all the activities started, but it also entailed abandoning the search for a self-sufficient economy: the much sought-after stabilization ended up with a nearly complete subjection of the local economy to state support.

In its essence, the ERP made the city economy more dependent on Italy both directly (with financial integration) and indirectly. For example, the reconstruction of the Trieste Lloyd fleet took place within the logic of the Italian 1936 Finmare reform (the Italian state-owned and quasi-monopolistic shipping company), thus inextricably linking the Trieste company's fleet to the Italian integrated maritime transport system.

Over time, ERP aid had helped to restore the Trieste-AMG budget by making the Italian financial intervention less and less decisive, while Trieste had become a sort of 'dollar factory' for Italy, as ECA officials remembered. On the other hand, the true nature of the Trieste ERP (political, not economic) rose from every angle the problem was faced, and made it increasingly incompatible with the remaining structure of the Marshall Plan in the rest of Europe.

*The relatively higher standards of living which must be maintained there for political, social and military occupation reasons create a set of conditions which make it impossible to consider Trieste's needs with the same economic criteria as are used in Italy. For obvious reasons, the Occupation Authorities must be left free to establish economic, political and social conditions which make the Occupation as acceptable as possible, but at the same time to accomplish Anglo-American objectives. [...] The entire pattern of economic development in Trieste has been based upon the necessity of maintaining minimum unemployment levels and maximum social and political tranquillity, without too much concern for the future economy of the Territory. [...] I can only see an economic unit of another agency being effective, if it is the economic arm of the Military Government in Trieste.*¹⁸

18 NARA, RG 469, Eca, Deputy Director for Operations, Office of European Operations, Italy Division, Trieste Decimal File 1948–1953, folder: TR Ec. Activ. 1.0 1.2 1.24 (copy at IRSML, b. 76), Memorandum, M. L. Dayton to Alex B. Despit, 6 February 1951.

The story was ended at the highest level of the ECA, recommending three measures which were then all adopted. The maintenance of ERP-related aids to Trieste would continue through Italy, the military government would retain ownership of a part of the counterpart funds, and finally the ECA Mission in Trieste would be suppressed, but some economic officer of the GMA would become ex officio the manager of the ECA for the Free Territory.

Despite the insistence of the official US Political representative in Trieste to the State Department, the Marshall Plan was suspended in Trieste earlier than elsewhere, in June 1951. The sudden stop left behind not only some troubles for the AMG (not only of a financial nature, but also in relation to food supply, for example) but above all it created a weakening of the local authorities, confronting the growing Italian requests for returning Trieste to Italy as soon as possible. In March 1952, when the Marshall Plan was over, an ECA telegram from Rome to Washington also concluded the parable of US financial commitments in favour of Trieste.

Since our policy is one of furthering integration of Trieste into Italy and since Italy is both willing and anxious to meet Trieste's financial needs (in fact Amg claim Govt is too generous with result that unnecessary and uneconomical use of resources is being continuously proposed by Itals), there does not appear to be economic justification for further aid to Trieste with the outlay of administrative funds to maintain a special mission. [...] Allocation of the aid earmarked for Trieste or Italy therefore would serve three very definite purposes: (A) tie Trieste more closely to Italy; (B) give Itals an opportunity public-relations-wise to show extent of their assistance to Trieste and (C) utilize US aid for defense-supporting purposes.¹⁹

Alberto Berti, an observer very informed about the Trieste economic situation, but active outside the city at that time, in 1954 presented the 'Perspectives of the Trieste economy' in a Milanese magazine. He explicitly said that 'The new administration will have to deal with a demanding and depressed city' (Berti 1954, 10), which in the following years would address schizophrenic requests to political power: a greater administrative

19 NARA, RG 469, Eca, Mission to Italy, Office of the Director, Subject Files 1948–1957, folder: Trieste 1952 (copy at IRSML, b. 76), Telegram, Eca-Rome to Eca-Washington, 22 March 1952.

autonomy, in the name of the ‘specialty’ of its economy, but also greater economic assistance, interventions, and subsidies (Balestra 2001).

The episode reveals the mental architecture with which the city economic ruling circles really planned the reconfiguration of their roles. The State (whether the AMG or Italy, it did not matter) should have functioned as a financial background for port-maritime-merchant activities, and the added value produced by these activities would have constituted the income for the city. Self-government (i.e. control by representatives or trustees of those executive circles) of the general warehouses, shipping companies, shipyards, and other bodies responsible for managing ships and services would have constituted the best guarantee for their use below cost, and therefore granting that added value flow that fed the city.

To obtain similar results, the local economic groups needed to rely on a strong state, financially able to support the commitments associated with maintaining an assisted and largely parasitic area (*Comitato di coordinamento delle medie e piccole aziende di Trieste 1954*). Clearly, the local economic leadership lacked the ability to mature a development project suited to the needs of the Trieste commercial and maritime identity, especially considering the context of the cold war.

In 1954, with the return of Trieste to Italy, the prospects that opened up for the port were not easy. A threat came in the form of the increasing competition from the Croatian port of Rijeka, rebuilt after being completely destroyed during the war. Moreover, since the end of the fifties, the dangerously close Slovenian port of Capodistria-Koper also became operative. It was built largely from scratch thanks to US funding, provided to facilitate the conclusion of the Trieste question, as a sort of compensation for the final transfer of the city to Italy (Lodato 2000, 309; Ažman Momirski 2020). Again, a plain example of how the impelling political urgencies prevailed, at the expenses of a sound long-term economic programming.

The activities carried out by the Trieste AMG also represent a sort of verification of the development process followed by the local system in that period, because of what happened in the previous decades. Even more significant, in my opinion, was the failure to devise some original solutions, or new intervention projects and mentalities, with which the Allies futilely tried to find their solutions to Trieste’s problems. Often these plans were carried out starting from suggestions or models emerging from the local reality, but, in particular in the economic field and in

the years considered here, the final decision was always taken within offices where only allied personnel were present. In this sense, the strange experience of the Trieste version of the ERP is also a verification of the practical viability of the entire political background of the plan, which entrusted local representatives with the task of finding a balance between political objectives and economic instruments. The same local representatives inevitably filtered both suggestions and plans for their realization through their own conceptual background and experiences in the motherland, in this case provoking a short-circuit: the use of exceptional resources officially pursuing long-term goals, but practically, aiming at very short-term results. It was a complex game of filters and mirrors, which at times, but not always, was able to take advantage of the best aspects of both experiences: the US and the local one.

Like many hybrids in nature, even the Americanization of Trieste and its territory was not fruitful. The massive US involvement did not give rise to a dynamic and prosperous economy, but rather to a sleepy and assisted society. During the second half of the twentieth century, the local society replaced the ethics of making its own in the best of times with the opportunism of positional rent and the repeated affirmation of 'rights' for compensation, for the numerous and troubled political events that the region had experienced in the first half of the century.

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IUE, OEEC: Istituto Universitario Europeo, Organisation Européenne de Coopération Economique.

NARA, RG: The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, Record Group.

NARA, WO: The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, War Office.

PRO, FO: Public Record Office, Foreign Office.

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