



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Twinning across the Adriatic: history, memory and municipal co-operation between Italy and Yugoslavia during the Cold War

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Abstract

The heritage of World War II left an indelible mark on the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia. During the détente period, however, these two countries were able to overcome many historical resentments and established a fruitful co-operation in Cold War Europe. This article questions the engagement on state, regional and municipal levels and analyses the role of twin cities in this multilayered process. With the help of primary sources, we learn how the heritage of World War II played an important role in building new forms of post-war co-operation. In fact, post-war twinning is often the result of shared anti-fascist activities from the war years. However, this is not confined to communist municipalities or ‘red’ regions in Italy on one side, and socialist Yugoslavia on the other, but is a more fluid and flexible practice which involves historical ties, geographical positions, personal capacities and economic needs.

Introduction

Throughout its history, the Adriatic region has been defined in multiple ways and contested by several actors, from empires to local pirates, from nationalist movements to modern nation-states.¹ In the twentieth century, the Adriatic essentially embodied the waves of European history. Following the demise of the Habsburg Empire at the end of the Great War, the so-called ‘Adriatic question’ animated European diplomacies; the Kingdom of Italy on the one side and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (officially renamed Yugoslavia in 1929) on the other competed heavily for its eastern part. Bilateral animosities did not cease even when formal agreements settled the territorial questions in Rapallo in 1920 and in Rome in 1924. In April 1939, Italy attacked Albania; in October 1940, it invaded Greece; and in April 1941, it moved its army against Yugoslavia, which transformed the area into one of the bloodlands of Europe during World War II.² The local population suffered

¹For a general overview, see E. Ivetic, *Storia dell'Adriatico. Un mare e la sua civiltà* (Bologna, 2019).

²T.D. Snyder, *Bloodlands. Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York, 2010).

large-scale massacres and forced migrations, and at the end of the war several parts of Yugoslavia were in ruins.³ This policy impacted heavily on the post-war order, and especially Italo-Yugoslav relations, which were further strained by the territorial dispute over the northern Adriatic area, and Trieste/Trst in particular. Until the end of World War I, this former Habsburg port-city was claimed by both countries, and the northern Adriatic soon turned into a symbolic place of European bipolarity, becoming one of the 'shatter zones' of the Cold War.⁴ It represented not only the border between Italy and Yugoslavia, but also one of the symbolic borderlines between the East and the West, between Europe and the Orient, and between communism and capitalism. It defined the 'southern end' of the Iron Curtain, which in the aftermath of the war – to cite Churchill's historic speech delivered in March 1946 – divided Europe from 'Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic'.⁵

The border between Italy and Yugoslavia was only 'iron' during the first post-war decade. Tito's conflict with Stalin and the Yugoslav expulsion from the Cominform in 1948 led to the Adriatic space becoming gradually more porous and no longer representing an insurmountable divide between Eastern and Western Europe. In fact, recent investigations responded to the call for more nuanced research on European integration, ultimately demonstrating how a variety of entanglements linked East and West throughout the Cold War.⁶ A larger reservoir of knowledge on multilateral international co-operation has also emphasized the role of town twinning in this process.⁷ Again in this context, the history of Italo-Yugoslav co-operation is not new. Historians have dedicated substantial importance to this mutual relationship:⁸ furthermore, a new wave of studies has shown multiple forms of co-operation at the bilateral and multilateral levels: Saša Mišić and Karlo

³There are several studies on these questions. Among the most recent in the English language are R. Pergher, *Mussolini's Nation-Empire: Sovereignty and Settlement in Italy's Borderlands, 1922–1943* (Cambridge, 2018); A. Osti Guerrazzi, *The Italian Army in Slovenia, Strategies of Antipartisan Repression, 1941–1943* (New York, 2013); D. Rodogno, *Fascism's European Empire. Italian Occupation during the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2006); J.H. Burgwyn, *Empire on the Adriatic. Mussolini's Conquest of Yugoslavia 1941–1943* (New York, 2005).

⁴The term 'shatter zone' paraphrases the volume by O. Bartov and E. Weitz (eds.), *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German, Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Borderlands* (Bloomington, 2013).

⁵G. Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border. Difference, Identity, and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Albany, 2001).

⁶K.K. Patel, 'Provincialising European union: co-operation and integration in Europe in a historical perspective', *Contemporary European History*, 22 (2013), 649–73; T. Dragostinova and M. Fidelis, 'Beyond the Iron Curtain: Eastern Europe and the global Cold War', *Slavic Review*, 77 (2018), 577–87; S. Mikkonen and P. Koivunen (eds.), *Beyond the Divide: Entangled Histories of Cold War Europe* (Oxford, 2015).

⁷P.-Y. Saunier, 'Taking up the bet on connections: a municipal contribution', *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002), 507–27; P.-Y. Saunier and S. Ewen (eds.), *Another Global City. Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850–2000* (Basingstoke and New York, 2008); A. Langenohl, *Town Twinning, Transnational Connections, and Trans-Local Citizenship Practices in Europe* (London, 2015); J. Garrard and E. Mikhailova (eds.), *Twin Cities. Urban Communities, Borders and Relationships over Time* (London and New York, 2019).

⁸M. Galeazzi (ed.), *Roma-Belgrado. Gli anni della guerra fredda* (Ravenna, 1995); J. Pirjevec, G. Bajc and B. Klabjan (eds.), *Vojna in mir na Primorskem. Od kapitulacije Italije leta 1943 do Londonskega memorandum leta 1954* (Koper, 2005); J. Pirjevec, 'L'Italia repubblicana e la Jugoslavia comunista', in F. Botta, I. Garzia and P. Guaragnella (eds.), *La questione adriatica e l'allargamento dell'Unione Europea* (Milan, 2007), 45–61; M. Bucarelli, L. Micheletta, L. Monzali and L. Riccardi (eds.), *Italy and Tito's Yugoslavia in the Age of International Détente* (Brussels, 2016).

Ruzicic-Kessler described the transition in Italo-Yugoslav relations from tense decades in the first half of the twentieth century to a period of co-operation during the Cold War. Benedetto Zaccaria underlined the (asymmetrical) attitude of individual Yugoslav Republics with the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1970s, while Vladimir Unkovski-Korica has recently analysed the role of Yugoslav town twinning as part of its international policy of non-alignment.⁹

This article positions itself within this historiography; however, rather than provide a detailed description of the relations between Italy and Yugoslavia in Cold War Europe, it aims at examining the process of their reconciliation from a transnational and urban perspective. As emphasized by Richard Rodger and Susanne Rau in their introduction to a recent special issue in this journal, such an investigation is especially fruitful if based on the intertwinement of urban space and spatial relationships.¹⁰ As shown by Antoine Vion, studying municipalities in their international activity is not of secondary importance, but instead represents a privileged viewpoint to study the social history of Cold War Europe.¹¹ In a special issue dedicated to identifying a structured theoretical framework for the study of town twinning at the global level, Pertti Joenniemi and Jarosław Jańczak explained the function of twinning as a tool to connect local politics and world affairs.¹² In fact, following the role of individuals as primary agents of co-operation and building on in-depth analysis of micro-historical cases helps us to uncover popular activism that goes beyond a mere juxtaposition of city against state.¹³ Therefore, building on the conclusions drawn by Stefan Couperus and Dora Vrhoci to further underline the need for a more nuanced periodization of recent European history,¹⁴ this article answers some of the key questions of this special issue: first, what was the interplay between twin cities and larger international trends, and, secondly, how did the heritage of World War II influence the process of twinning in Cold War Europe. Focusing on the Adriatic will thus not only provide new knowledge on a mostly neglected case in the history of

⁹K. Ruzicic-Kessler, 'Italy and Yugoslavia: from distrust to friendship in Cold War Europe', *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 5 (2014), 641–64; S. Mišić, 'The normalisation of political relations between Yugoslavia and Italy after the Memorandum of Understanding of 1954', in S. Radić and A. Biagini (eds.), *Serbian–Italian Relations: History and Modern Times* (Belgrade, 2015), 216–84; B. Zaccaria, 'Under the shadow of the Soviet Union: the EEC, Yugoslavia and the Cold War in the long 1970s', in S. Rajak, K.E. Botsiou, E. Karamouzi and E. Hatzivassiliou (eds.), *The Balkans in the Cold War* (London, 2017), 239–59; V. Unkovski-Korica, 'Non-aligned cities in the Cold War: municipal internationalism, town twinning and the Standing Conference of Towns of Yugoslavia, c. 1950–c. 1985', *International History Review*, 44 (2021), 559–76.

¹⁰R. Rodger and S. Rau, 'Thinking spatially: new horizons for urban history', *Urban History*, 47 (2020), 372–83.

¹¹A. Vion, 'Europe from the bottom up: town twinning in France during the Cold War', *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002), 623–40.

¹²P. Joenniemi and J. Jańczak, 'Theorizing town twinning – towards a global perspective', *Journal for Borderland Studies*, 32 (2017), 423–8.

¹³O. Gaspari, 'Cities against states? Hopes, dreams, and shortcomings of the European municipal movement, 1900–1960', *Contemporary European History*, 11 (2002), 597–621. See also the articles by A. Langenohl, 'The merits of reciprocity: small-town twinning in the wake of the Second World War', and V. Kaisto, 'City twinning from a grassroots perspective: introducing a spatial framework to the study of twin cities', *Journal for Borderland Studies*, 32 (2017), 557–76 and 459–75.

¹⁴S. Couperus and D. Vrhoci, 'A profitable friendship, still? Town twinning between Eastern and Western European cities before and after 1989', in E. Braat and P. Corduener (eds.), *1989 and the West. Western Europe since the End of the Cold War* (London, 2019), 143–59.

twinning, but it will also enable historians to overcome traditional chronological lines and to see 1989 not as an *annus mirabilis*, but as part of a long-term process in overcoming Cold War divisions going back to the very beginning of the post-World War II European order.¹⁵

Overcoming border divisions in the Cold War Adriatic

Despite tensions and recriminations permeating European societies in the years following the end of World War II, Tony Judt observed that 'war, [as it] seemed to many observers in the years 1953–63, was unthinkable'.¹⁶ Bilateral and multilateral international co-operation had gained ground and become more frequent since the 1950s. The Cold War, however, often limited co-operation to countries with similar socio-political systems. Such was the case with the European Coal and Steel Community, which was formed in April 1951 along the Bonn–Paris axis and then extended to include Italy, Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. These six countries further extended their co-operation into other economic sectors and, on 25 March 1957, signed the Treaty of Rome and established the EEC with the aim of facilitating the free movement of persons, goods and services across their borders. The continuation of European integration from the initial 6 members in 1957 to 12 30 years later strengthened regional connections and sustained an inclusive transnational policy.¹⁷

However, this trend was not a Western European peculiarity and some Eastern European countries developed various forms of co-operation.¹⁸ After its expulsion from the Cominform in 1948, Yugoslavia too had to seek new alliances, becoming a precious interlocutor of the West. The American State Department emphasized how Yugoslav disobedience towards Moscow distanced the 'Soviet menace' from the Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean.¹⁹ Moreover, after the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, Tito's new policy made Yugoslavia one of the leading forces of the Non-Aligned Movement. This new global orientation of Belgrade was, however, accompanied by collaboration with its western neighbours, Italy in particular – a politically marginal but strategically important partner due to its role as a military base for NATO in the Mediterranean. Despite periods of mutual distrust and acrimony persisting after the war, on 3 February 1949, the Agreement on Small-Border Traffic was signed: it eased everyday life for border citizens, allowing a more flexible cross-border passage for those living within a 100-metre strip of the border-line and for landowners possessing land on the 'wrong side' of the border. In reality,

¹⁵P. Betts, '1989 at thirty: a recast legacy', *Past & Present*, 244 (2019), 271–305.

¹⁶T. Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (New York, 2005), 255.

¹⁷L. O'Dowd, 'The changing significance of European borders', in J. Anderson, L. O'Dowd and M.T. Wilson (eds.), *New Borders for a Changing Europe. Cross-Border Cooperation and Governance* (London, 2003), 13–36.

¹⁸See the special issue on 'Crossing the borders of friendship: mobility across communist borders', edited by M. Keck-Szajbel and D. Stola in *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 1 (2015). See also A.E. Gorsuch and D.P. Koenker (eds.), *The Socialist Sixties: Crossing Borders in the Second World* (Ithaca, NY, 2013); and S. Coeuré and S. Dullin (eds.), *Frontières du communisme: mythologies et réalités de la division de l'Europe de la révolution d'octobre au mur de Berlin* (Paris, 2007).

¹⁹J. Pirjevec, *Jugoslavija 1918–1992. Nastanek, razvoj ter razpad Karadjordjevićeve in Titove Jugoslavije* (Koper, 1995).

until the mid-1950s, cross-border exchanges were rare. It was only after signing the London Memorandum in 1954 and the abolition of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT), a buffer-zone created at the Paris Peace Conference in 1947, that the two countries stabilized their relations along the border. On 20 August 1955, Italy and Yugoslavia signed the Udine Agreement, consisting of 64 articles that regulated both land and sea border crossings, and also established a permanent commission responsible for its implementation. One of the most important provisions was the introduction of special border passes for local populations, which also meant relief from foreign exchange service tax and customs duties for their holders, and the possibility of cross-border shopping and transferring of small goods.²⁰ At the same time, the introduction and reciprocal regulation of bus and sea transport services transformed the Italo-Yugoslav border area through the increasing exchange of people and goods. As underlined by Jože Šušmelj, future Yugoslav and Slovenian consul general in Trieste, and despite constant mistrust on both sides, Yugoslavia and Italy gradually opened a new chapter on bilateral relations.²¹ The London Memorandum at the international level and the Udine Agreement at the bilateral level thus determined the lines along which the foundations of new relations could be laid. More and more frequently, the Yugoslav and Italian authorities began to depict the border as the gate between the Western capitalist and Eastern socialist countries, as well as an alternative paradigm to the Iron Curtain.²²

If in Berlin in 1961 the wall was built to divide the city between its Western and Eastern parts, in Yugoslavia, in the very same year, Mako Sajko, one of the leading Slovene documentarists directed the film *Where Is the Iron Curtain?*, ironically challenging conventional spatial and ideological separations between East and West.²³ Despite its idyllic depiction of Italo-Yugoslav border relations and the liberal nature of the new course of the Yugoslav regime, the cross-border exchange of goods and people became relatively open compared to many other borderlands throughout Europe. Indeed, as stated by William Zimmerman in his book on the political evolution of Yugoslavia at the end of the 1980s, Yugoslavia had already in the 1960s 'raised the notion of open borders to the level of state policy'. This policy '[came] to be identified...as one of the key defining features, along with market socialism and self-management, of what was distinct and positive in the Yugoslav socialist variant and an element that set off Yugoslavia from the Soviet model'.²⁴

The border between Italy and Yugoslavia soon became depicted as the most open border between the East and the West. In fact, the border question between

²⁰P.H. Patterson, *Bought & Sold. Living and Losing the Good Life in Socialist Yugoslavia* (Ithaca, NY, and London, 2011); W. Bracewell, 'Adventures in the marketplace: Yugoslav travel writing and tourism in the 1950s–1960s', in A.F. Gorsuch and D.P. Koenker (eds.), *Turizm: The Russian and East European Tourist under Capitalism and Socialism* (Ithaca, NY, 2006), 148–65; I. Duda, *U potrazi za blagostanjem. O povijesti dokolice i potrošačkog društva u Hrvatskoj 1950-ih i 1960-ih* (Zagreb, 2004); Alenka Švab, 'Consuming Western image of well-being – shopping tourism in socialist Slovenia', *Cultural Studies*, 16 (2002), 63–79.

²¹J. Šušmelj, 'Videmski sporazum', in Pirjevec, Bajc and Klabjan (eds.), *Vojna in mir na Primorskem*, 310–13.

²²C. Sambri, *Una frontiera aperta. Indagini sui valichi italo-jugoslavi* (Bologna, 1970); V. Klemenčič, 'Odprta meja med Jugoslavijo in Italijo in vloga manjšin', *Teorija in praksa*, 11 (1974), 928.

²³The original title in Slovene is *Kje je železna zavesa?* Available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLElxTOuep4, last accessed 29 Sep. 2020.

²⁴W. Zimmerman, *Open Borders, Nonalignment, and the Political Evolution of Yugoslavia* (Princeton, 1987), 76.

Yugoslavia and Italy was settled in 1975 with the Treaty of Osimo, following the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, held in Helsinki. Although recent studies partially detach the Italo-Yugoslav agreement from the direct impact of Helsinki and the global détente, by the 1970s, Rome and Belgrade found ample reason to co-operate.²⁵ As stated by Drago Mirošič, a member of the Slovene commission for the preparation of the Osimo Agreements, and, from 1982 to 1986, the Yugoslav consul general in Trieste, Yugoslavia was able to boast about this to the rest of the world.²⁶

While in the first post-war period, many illegal attempts to cross the border from Yugoslavia to Italy were met by shots fired by border patrols, almost no border incidents occurred in the following decades. If problems arose, they were resolved amicably, 'through diplomacy, and often at the local level', explained Ivo Murko, long-time director of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Executive Council of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia.²⁷ An approach interconnecting memoirs, diplomatic documents and personal correspondence shows how actors at the local level, in particular mayors of border municipalities, played an active role in contributing actively to the implementation of state-to-state co-operation: 'Politics was created here, on this border', acknowledged Mirošič, emphasizing how Belgrade often left to Slovenia the control over cross-border activities. During his tenure in Trieste, Mirošič maintained close contacts both with the highest representatives of Italian politics and the economy, as well as with local representatives of the Slovene minority in Italy. Rather than through official meetings at the level of foreign ministries, the importance of such contacts was instead revealed through politically less exposed channels. In his memoirs, Bogdan Osolnik, a prominent Yugoslav diplomat, stated that the 'many years of successful cross-border co-operation [had] resulted in the development of a personal trust between individuals on both sides of the border who followed the situation with concern and felt they needed to take the initiative to find a way out of the deadlock'.²⁸

Sometimes, however, co-operation along the border was more challenging than elsewhere. Italian border towns such as Trieste and Gorizia were dominated by nationalist political majorities who marginalized the local Slovene minority and refused to co-operate with neighbouring Yugoslavia. This mistrust has been bypassed by strengthening the links with other Italian cities and regions such as Veneto and Lombardy, which had no particular nationalist concerns towards their Yugoslav partners but were keenly interested in developing economic exchange.²⁹ Close contacts were advocated for, in particular, by the governor of Veneto, Carlo Bernini, an important member of the Christian Democrats (Democrazia Cristiana), who later became senator and minister of transport. Top-level businessmen such as Giovanni

²⁵B. Zaccaria, *La strada per Osimo. Italia e Jugoslavia allo specchio (1965–1975)* (Milan, 2018). Cf. J. Pirjevec, B. Klabjan and G. Bajc, *Osimska meja* (Koper, 2007).

²⁶The conversations between the author and Drago Mirošič took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia in Ljubljana, 15 Oct. 2012, and in Lokev, 23 Mar. 2013. The transcript of the conversations is kept by the author.

²⁷I. Murko, *Meje in odnosi s sosedomi* (Ljubljana, 2004), 253.

²⁸B. Osolnik, *Med svetom in domovino. Spomini 1945–1981* (Maribor and Novo Mesto, 1992), 285.

²⁹M. Bucarelli, *La questione jugoslava nella politica estera dell'Italia repubblicana (1945–1999)* (Rome, 2008), 78–9; G. Bajc, 'Italija, razpad Jugoslavije in osamosvojitve ter mednarodno priznanje Slovenije', *Studia Historica Slovenica*, 12 (2012), 380–4.

Agnelli developed close contacts with the Yugoslav government, while several Yugoslav factories followed the economic boom of Italian small and medium enterprises with great interest. In fact, not only were significant international companies, such as FIAT, developing remunerative projects in Yugoslavia, but numbers of economic delegations of all kinds were exchanging past experiences and shared visions for future co-operation.³⁰

In many cases, this activity was framed within a larger context of co-operation provided by the twinning of towns. As recently explained by Unkovski-Korica, town twinning, though relatively unbalanced among individual Republics, provided strong support for the Yugoslav foreign policy, revealing the primary role of municipalities as subnational actors in both international affairs and in developing a successful neighbourhood policy.³¹ Even if relatively marginal, the twinning between the municipality of Trebnje, in south-central Slovenia, 50 kilometres from Ljubljana, and Guastalla, a commune in the province of Reggio Emilia, testifies to the multiplicity of levels of co-operation. Closer links were established in the mid-1970s by Bogdan Osolnik, on the one side, and by the Italian socialist senator Giuseppe Amadei, native of Guastalla, on the other. A formal agreement was then signed in 1981 and, despite the twinning having originated in the common tradition of naïf art in both locations, the Slovenian delegation also visited the soaking machine factory in Guastalla and showed great interest in the production of local Parmesan cheese.³² This example is one of the many that testifies to the vitality of economic co-operation across the Adriatic. Such politics were in line with Yugoslavia's need to overcome political isolation after its breakup with the Soviet bloc, matching the geopolitical interests of Italy, which had become one of Yugoslavia's most important economic partners.³³ In the second half of the 1980s, Italy even overtook West Germany as the most important Western European export market for Yugoslav products.³⁴

World War II as a catalyst of co-operation and reconciliation

It would be misleading to think that only the marginalization of war memories enabled this mutual dialogue; pragmatic economic interests were not the only driving force of this process of bilateral reconciliation. This section will demonstrate how the international détente was interwoven with the memory of World War II and how town twinning played an important role in overcoming war resentments between Italy and Yugoslavia. In the initial post-war years, accusations of war atrocities, mass-murder, imprisonments and ethnic cleansing inhibited collaboration between the two countries, with dialogue often being limited to practical issues, such as the return

³⁰ Arhiv Slovenije (Archives of Slovenia) (AS), Ljubljana, 223 Vlada Republike Slovenije (Government of the Republic of Slovenia), box 6489. See also AS, 1131 Republiški sekretariat za trgovino Socialistične Republike Slovenije (Republic Secretariat for Commerce of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia), boxes 25 and 33.

³¹ Unkovski-Korica, 'Non-aligned cities in the Cold War', 569.

³² Dolenjski list, 20 May 1982, *Umetnost ju je zblížala*, 1.

³³ F. Tenca Montini and S. Mišić, 'Comunisti di un altro tipo: le simpatie filo-jugoslave in Italia (1948–1962)', *Acta Histriae*, 3 (2017), 785–812.

³⁴ AS, 1134 Republiški komite za mednarodno sodelovanje Socialistične Republike Slovenije (Republic Committee for International Co-operation of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia), box 4279, folder 7; E. Vrsaj, *Il nuovo ordine economico mondiale e la sfida del 1992* (Trieste, 1988), 133.

of the bodies of fallen soldiers. Given the intricate political context, as well as the complexity of such operations, negotiations progressed slowly. Only in the mid-1960s was an agreement on mutual co-operation reached, which allowed Italy to exhume and repatriate many of their 13,000 Italian soldiers who had perished on Yugoslav territory. Yugoslavia had few soldiers within Italian borders: the great majority were members of the partisan army that had perished during the battle for the liberation of Trieste/Trst in May 1945. The great majority of Yugoslav deaths were instead prisoners in Italian camps, and a different solution was thus adopted: rather than transferring corpses over the Adriatic, the Yugoslav government decided to gather the remains of their 8,000 victims in six locations around Italy. One in the south, Bari, two in central Italy, in Rome and Sansepolcro in Tuscany, and three in the north-eastern part along the border: Trieste, Gorizia and Gonars. In these locations, the Yugoslav government constructed commemorative ossuaries.³⁵ Despite constraints and bureaucratic delays, the first memorial was completed in 1970 at the cemetery of Barletta in Apulia, where the remains of over 800 fallen Yugoslavs scattered across southern Italy were transferred.³⁶

This south-eastern Italian region vis-à-vis the Yugoslav coast played a crucial role from both a symbolic and a practical point of view: it was here that the so-called Yugoslav Overseas Brigades were formed and sent to the other side of the Adriatic Sea to fight alongside partisan troops on Yugoslav territory. There was also a practical aspect to this; after the fall of Mussolini in summer 1943, hospitals were set up all over Apulia: in Andria, San Ferdinando, Grumo Appula, Altamura, Gravina, Barletta, Taranto, Monopoli, Brindisi, Trani, Bari, Santa Maria di Leuca and other locations, all of which treated thousands of wounded Yugoslav soldiers. Those who recovered usually joined the Overseas Brigades, while others were buried at local cemeteries. Their remains were gathered in the ossuary at Barletta.³⁷ The memorial project was not only the sign of human *pietas*, but was also part of a larger political puzzle of bilateral co-operation. The ossuary was constructed by local companies, while the project was financed by the Yugoslav government and designed by the sculptor Dušan Džamonja, a leading member of the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb. The monument was unveiled on 4 July 1970, the day Yugoslavia celebrated Fighter's Day. Even though Yugoslav President Josip Broz Tito did not attend the event, as the local authorities had hoped, the ceremony was still attended by high-ranking military and civil officials from both countries, confirming the great investment made by the local administration led by the Christian Democrat Michele Morelli.³⁸

³⁵ Diplomatic Archive of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Serbia (DAMSPRS), PA 1968, Italy, box 64, folder Groblja.

³⁶ Archive of Yugoslavia (AJ), 297 SUB NOR 1947–73 (I), box 81, Material Odbora i komisije za obeležavanje istorijskih mesta iz NOB/Material of the Board and Commission for Marking Historical Places from the National Liberation.

³⁷ AJ, 297 SUB NOR 1947–73 (I), box 81, 1969, Materjali o spomen kosturnici u Barleti-Italija/Materials on the memorial ossuary in Barletta, Italy. Regarding the central role of Apulia in the Yugoslav resistance movement, see G. Colantuono, 'La presenza di partigiani jugoslavi nella Puglia centrale 1943–1945. Il caso del comune di Grumo Appula', *Italia Contemporanea*, 1 (2012), 43–65.

³⁸ DAMSPRS, PA 1970, Italy, box 84, folder 6, former fighters; AJ, 297 SUB NOR 1947–73 (I), box 81, Materjali o izgradnji i otkrivanju spomen kosturnice umrlim Jugoslovenima-borcima iz II-og rata na teritoriji Italije/Materials on the construction and unveiling of a memorial ossuary to the deceased Yugoslav fighters from the Second World War on the territory of Italy. The website www.cnj.it/PARTIGIANI/JUGOSLAVI_IN_ITALIA/appen.htm#barletta includes, in addition to an extensive recent

The ceremony in Barletta represented an important bilateral event involving some of the most influential authorities, with many other commemorations all over Italy also witnessing the participation of Yugoslav delegations, both civil and military. They often originated from personal relationships developed during the war years, and the case of Anton Ukmar-Miro, born in Prosecco/Prosek, a Slovene-speaking village near Trieste, is but one of them. Ukmar was named honorary citizen of Genoa, where he fought as a partisan commander; he and Grga Čupić (otherwise known as Boro), a partisan from Dalmatia who led the Mingo division over Genoa, attended several commemorations, most often organized by the local sections of the biggest association of Italian partisans, the Associazione Nazionale Partigiani d'Italia (ANPI).³⁹

These shared memorial ceremonies transcended the often relatively limited context of associations of combatants, veterans and their relatives. The heritage of war offered multiple situations of exchange and transfer, in both directions. As early as the 1950s, individual Italians travelled to Yugoslavia, alone or with their families, to visit places where they had been stationed during the war. Gradually, such cases became more frequent and were organized by groups, parties, associations and trade unions. On several occasions, their visits were linked to political goals, such as socializing with party organizations and visiting factories to demonstrate the progress of the reformed Yugoslav state and socialist society. In the following years, however, entire groups consisting of mayors, municipal councils, city delegations, party sections, trade union representatives, chambers of commerce, civil society organizations and entrepreneurs began to forge ties with Yugoslavia which stretched well beyond mere relations between political parties and veterans' associations.⁴⁰ Increasingly, such practices would include schools, sports associations, music and folklore groups and cultural organizations, intertwining international relations and social engagement at several levels.

In many cases, personal contacts between ex-combatants played a central role, with this encouraging the formalization of relations at the institutional level. In May 1966, Škofja Loka, a town north of Ljubljana with 20,000 inhabitants, twinned with Medicina, a town near Bologna, with a population of 15,000. This all began when the mayor of Medicina, Argento Marangoni, as part of a delegation of Italian cities from Emilia-Romagna, attended a meeting with Yugoslav mayors in Zagreb, jointly organized by the Italian and Yugoslav committees of the United Towns Organization (Fédération mondiale des cités unies, FMCU). There, the mayors formalized their friendship, and the meeting, aimed predominantly at economic co-operation, evolved first into a widespread co-operation of schools and children's summer camps, and then into shared cultural events, exchanges of fire brigades and union associations and tourist visits.⁴¹ Again, it should be highlighted that the mayor of Medicina was an Italian partisan during the war, and among his

photograph documentation, an overview of press releases on the various stages of the construction of the ossuary and its opening.

³⁹ Archivio dell'Istituto ligure per la storia della Resistenza e per l'età contemporanea (Archive of the Institute for the History of the Resistance and for the Contemporary Age in Liguria), Fondo Gimelli, vol. 2, box 13, folder 8.

⁴⁰ AJ, 297 SUB NOR 1947–73 (I), box 40.

⁴¹ A. Marangoni, 'Škofja Loka è gemellata con Medicina da 40 anni', *Brodo di serpe* (Medicina, 2006), 59.

former comrades-in-arms were many Slovenes, who had joined the Italian resistance in the Apennines.⁴²

This example confirms how in the 1960s, the trend of town twinning was launched between Italian and Yugoslav towns, often based on personal acquaintances from the war years. Those who fought side by side against the fascists and the German army during the war would often advocate for various types of co-operation after the war. Over time, such contacts were enriched by cultural and sporting themes, and often also by economic co-operation, making these meetings a springboard for twinings between Yugoslav and Italian cities and municipalities. It was during an organizational meeting for the Yugoslav memorial ossuary in Sansepolcro, near Arezzo, in Tuscany, unveiled in 1973, that the local municipality communicated to the Yugoslav Ministry of Foreign Affairs its desire to twin with a Yugoslav city, which later evolved into a co-operation with the Croatian city of Sinj.⁴³ Even today, the local section of the ANPI maintains close bilateral relations with the partisan veteran's organization in Koper/Capodistria because of the memory of Dušan Bordon, a young Slovene partisan killed near Sansepolcro after he escaped from the nearby camp of Renicci.⁴⁴

In many cases, what started as the participation of individual former combatants evolved into multiple forms of co-operation, including not only veterans' associations but also local authorities. Thus, war commemorations and a shared anti-fascist heritage were often the starting point for more institutionalized links and ultimately, in some cases, evolved into proper and formalized twinning. In fact, it was the ANPI, together with the veteran's organization in Slovenia (the ZZB NOV), that initiated the twinning between Aquileia (Italy) and Piran/Pirano (Slovenia). Both mayors were former partisans, and the motivation of the twinning agreement clearly emphasized 'the joint struggle of Italians and Slovenes in the fight against Nazi-fascism'.⁴⁵ From 1976 onwards, delegations of veterans' organizations regularly participated in mutual commemorations. This was facilitated by their geographical proximity, the presence of the Italian minority in Piran, a strong leftist heritage in Aquileia and a political majority in the local government, and by the active engagement of both municipalities. Similarly, a shared anti-fascist sensibility led contacts between Koper and Ferrara to evolve from a personal level to institutionalized co-operation in the mid-1970s; namely, what started as a collaboration among personnel of radio stations, the first 'free' radio in post-fascist Italy on the one hand and Radio Capodistria, the Italian-speaking radio in Yugoslavia based in Koper, on the other, resulted in organized twinning in economy, culture and sports, while a street in Koper is still named after its partner city today.

Eloisa Betti and Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, who investigated the co-operation between Bologna and Zagreb, underlined that this twinning had a strong political background.⁴⁶ Bologna was one of the symbols of the Italian Communist Party (PCI). Although it never took power at the state level, the PCI, the largest communist party

⁴²For an overview in English, see C.S. Capogreco, *Mussolini's Camps: Civilian Internment in Fascist Italy (1940–1943)* (London, 2019).

⁴³DAMSPRS, PA 1970, Italija, box 84, folder 6.

⁴⁴Pokrajinski Arhiv Koper (Regional Archive of Koper) (PAK), 621 Občinski odbor zveze združenj borcev NOV Piran, box year 1997, folder Vabila (Invitations).

⁴⁵PAK, 621 Občinski odbor zveze združenj borcev NOV Piran, box year 2000, folder 27/2000.

⁴⁶E. Betti and V. Unkovski-Korica, 'Town twinning in the Cold War: Zagreb and Bologna as "détente from below"?', 5. Paper presented at the conference of the European Consortium for Political Research in Prague,

in the West, governed several important cities. In addition to Bologna, these cities also included Pistoia in Tuscany, which at that time was led by a communist mayor and twinned with Kruševac in Serbia. It was with a match against the Serbs in September 1966 that the Pistoiese home team opened their new football stadium.⁴⁷

Ideological kinship certainly played an important role in twinning, both in the case of Bologna and Pistoia, as well as Reggio Emilia, which twinned with Zadar in 1972. All three cities were run by communist mayors and belonged to the strongholds of the Italian left. However, research shows that ideological affinity was neither the only nor, in some cases, the most important factor. It was prior to the inauguration of the Yugoslav memorial in Barletta, in September 1969, that the municipality twinned with Herceg Novi in Montenegro, just on the opposite side of the Adriatic. As emphasized above, its administration was headed by Mayor Morelli, a member of the Christian Democrats, Italy's largest political party. Throughout the Cold War, this party shaped the fate of Italian politics, led at that time by Aldo Moro, also from Apulia. Moro was kidnapped and killed by the Red Brigades in 1978, but prior to this, his policy was marked by dialogue that transcended party boundaries, especially with the left-wing parties, that is, the communists. Morelli shared Moro's political orientation and followed its direction also in regional foreign relations. For his commitment to establishing friendly relations with the neighbouring country and in particular building the ossuary, the Yugoslav government presented him with the highest national award. This shows not only how town twinning transcended municipalism *per se*, but also how Cold War Italo-Yugoslav twinning moved beyond strict ideological boundaries.

In Yugoslavia, town twinning matured as part of the Standing Conference of Towns of Yugoslavia (Stalna konferencija gradova Jugoslavije, SKGJ), a member of the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA). The Conference of Towns functioned within the Socialist Alliance of Working People, one of the largest and most influential mass organizations in Yugoslavia. Although this multifaceted co-operation did take place within an international framework at the highest bilateral level, it was implemented mainly through meetings and visits at lower levels. Furthermore, it involved not only larger and more important cities, but also smaller towns and villages that housed a few thousand inhabitants, the latter of which also engaged in international and trans-Adriatic forms of twinning: Alessandria in Piedmont and Karlovac in Croatia in 1963, Mola di Bari and Tivat in Montenegro formalized their co-operation in 1969, the border town of Sežana and Sant'Ambrogio di Valpolicella, not far from Verona, in 1972, the same year as Cetinje in Montenegro and Spoleto in Umbria, as did the municipalities of Quiliano in Liguria and Ajdovščina in Slovenia. In the next decade, these town twinnings were followed by many other places such as Castel San Pietro Terme in the province of Bologna and Opatija on the Croatian coast near Rijeka in 1983, as well as Varaždin near Zagreb with the town of Montale near Pistoia in 1987.⁴⁸

7–10 Sep. 2016, available at ecpr.eu/Events/PaperDetails.aspx?PaperID=29958&EventID=95, last accessed 27 Sep. 2020.

⁴⁷www.uspistoiese1921.it/stadio-marcello-melani/, last accessed 7 Jan. 2023.

⁴⁸Unkovski-Korica, 'Non-aligned cities in the Cold War', 562–7. Twinning is listed on the web pages of individual municipalities, e.g. Spoleto (www.comune.spoleto.pg.it/la-citta/citta-gemellate/), and Castel San Pietro Terme (www.comune.castelsanpietroterme.bo.it/citta-e-territorio/opatija), last accessed on 6 Jan. 2023.

In his study on Yugoslav twinning, Unkovski-Korica demonstrates the asymmetry between different parts of the country: while Slovenia and Croatia mainly linked with Western European municipalities, Serbia and other Republics privileged cities from the Soviet sphere or non-aligned countries. In fact, our research confirms that Slovene and Croatian towns had an advantage due to their geographical position and general inclusion of their political elites in economic co-operation with several Italian regions (as well as with Austria and West Germany, Bavaria in particular), but at the same time, it would be misleading to think that the rest of Yugoslavia was simply excluded from this trend. Ljubljana, the capital of the Yugoslav Republic of Slovenia, twinned with Pesaro and Parma as early as 1964, and was followed by many other places: Kranj with Rivoli in 1970, Nova Gorica with San Vendemiano near Treviso in 1973, Maribor, the second largest Slovene city with Udine in 1985, and Gonars near Udine with Vrhnika, the Croatian city of Pula with Imola in 1973 and Verona in 1980, Zadar with Reggio Emilia in 1972, and Rijeka with Faenza in 1983; but it should not be overlooked that it was also with a city in Italy that the oldest twinning of Novi Sad was concluded. Namely, the capital of Vojvodina twinned with Modena in 1974, whose city park still bears the name of Novi Sad today. Again, World War II was central to this and other twinning practices: from 30 June to 2 July 1961, Grugliasco, near Turin, hosted an important transnational meeting of 'cities martyrs of Nazi-fascism', as it was named by the organizers. Delegations from Stalingrad, Liege and Coventry, as well as from many French and Italian cities, attended the gathering organized as part of the activities of the *Fédération mondiale des villes jumelées* – United Towns Organization (MFVJ-UTO). Yugoslavia had a lot of options: several of its cities were heavily damaged during the war. At the end, the Serbian town of Kragujevac, where German troops massacred almost 3,000 men and boys in 1941, was chosen to represent Yugoslavia as its 'city martyr'.⁴⁹ This represented the starting point for Kragujevac to establish its first formal co-operation with Suresnes, a commune in the western suburbs of Paris, followed by other European towns, such as the Italian city of Carrara in 1975.

The twinning between Titovo Užice, in southern Serbia, and Cassino in 1981 was also based on the destruction of both cities and the sacrifice of their populations during the war. Occurrences originating from the war also provided the basis for the twinning between Cerignola, again in Apulia, and Pljevlja, in Montenegro. The twinning was formalized during the Italian President Sandro Pertini's visit to Yugoslavia. On 21 September 1983, he attended the unveiling of the monument dedicated to the Italian partisan division Garibaldi in the village of Mrzovići near Pljevlja, where 40 years earlier this unity was formed. After the fall of the fascist regime and the Italian armistice in September 1943, several disbanded Italian militaries joined the resistance in Yugoslavia. In Berane, in Montenegro, they were helped by the local doctor Vasilije Labudović. His personal engagement during the war represented the initial link for the twinning with Teramo, just across the Adriatic. Delegations from Italy often visited the cemetery in Berane, where local partisans were buried together with 20 Italian comrades, and a street is still named after the sister city of Teramo. Finally, the capital of Montenegro, Titograd (now Podgorica), also established close trans-Adriatic connections, with the city delegation having visited the neighbouring Bari, the capital of Apulia, on several occasions. Yugoslav

⁴⁹DAMSPRS, PA 1984, Italy, box 44, several documents.

hopes to establish an airline between the two cities was never realized; however, together they still co-operated closely in economic, scientific, cultural and touristic projects, a feat which confirms once again that while Slovenia and Croatia may have more twinings than other Republics, close co-operation with Italy was far from unknown in the rest of the country.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Italo-Yugoslav town twinning varied across time, space and dimensions, and contributed to what Betti and Unkovski-Korica termed a 'détente from below'.⁵¹ This process seems in line with what was happening elsewhere. However, due to the density and number of people involved, and despite ideological and geographical trajectories, in-depth research from below might reveal an intensity of connections well beyond other European and extra-European cases. Furthermore, in the Italo-Yugoslav case, rather than capital cities and large urban settings, many medium and small-scale municipalities benefited most from town twinings. Due to a stronger integration with their environment and a widespread social network, even *communes* of some thousand inhabitants invested in their international agendas, and were thus able to create continuous and concrete transnational webs, which included a relatively large percentage of the local population.

It would, however, be a mistake to claim that twinning functioned only on a transnational level. In fact, this process also had a fundamental impact on internal cohesion. This aspect perhaps deserves its own analysis, and the example of the mayor of Medicina near Bologna is particularly telling: when co-operation with towns in France and Yugoslavia was established in the mid-1960s, the domestic social fabric was heavily divided along political lines arising from the fascist *Ventennio* and the Italian civil war between 1943 and 1945.⁵² After 20 years, war wounds had yet to heal and an unstable democracy fostered ideological divisions. Fairs, concerts and other events connected to twinning activities thus helped to not only connect people from Italy, France and Yugoslavia through twinning, but also had a decisive impact in re-establishing co-operation at home. Therefore, more in-depth empirical research on micro-cases may reveal that twinning was no less important in terms of the reconciliation of former enemies at the international level than it was to ease the resentments within fractured domestic societies.⁵³

Moreover, post-war twinning was often the result of a shared anti-fascist heritage inherited from the war years. This twinning was not confined to 'red' municipalities in Italy governed by a communist mayor and with a left political majority, on the one side, and socialist Yugoslavia, on the other, but rather represented a more fluid and flexible practice that depended on historical ties, geographical positions, personal capacities and economic needs. By examining the town twinning between Yugoslav and Italian towns and cities, as well as analysing local actors, this bottom-up, municipal perspective shows certain features of co-operation that most scholarship

⁵⁰DAMSPRS, PA 1984, Italy, box 49, folder 4, document no. 413616, 23 Mar. 1984.

⁵¹Betti and Unkovski-Korica, 'Town twinning in the Cold War', 5. See also O. Bange and P. Villaume, *The Long Détente. Changing Concepts of Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1950s–1980s* (Budapest and New York, 2017).

⁵²Claudio Pavone, *Una guerra civile. Saggio sulla moralità nella Resistenza* (Turin, 1991).

⁵³Marangoni, 'Skofja Loka è gemellata con Medicina da 40 anni', 60.

misses by concentrating on traditional international relations. Instead, a multilayered investigation has revealed how state and municipal institutions co-operated with other agents at several levels in all sorts of entanglements and international co-operation. In fact, it was the participation of smaller towns that proved decisive for this rapprochement to take place in concrete terms and not just on a declarative level. While the political level provided the initial framework, the success of reconciliation was eased by visits of music and cultural associations, folklore groups, sports clubs and tourist excursions to the respective shores of the Adriatic. Thus, following town twinning across the Adriatic shows not only the long path to reconciliation and reconstruction, but also helps us to rethink both spatial and temporal convictions: it, first, further softens the strict division between East and West, and second, it shows that post-1989 co-operation cannot be detached from either previous experiences or from the heritage of the Cold War.

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