

Young European journalists visiting Gorizia/Nova Gorica, the unique cross-border city

(14-17/09/2023)

GORIZIA-NOVA GORICA, THE FUTURE OF TWO CITIES DIVIDED BY THE BORDER BUT UNITED IN COOPERATION.

By CLARA LA CORTE

With one foot in Italy, with the other in Slovenia. On one side a long avenue lined with trees and houses, on the other side the station on the Via Transalpina (also called the Jesenice-Trieste railway line) inaugurated in 1906 by Archduke Francesco Ferdinando. At the center of the square a paving on which we read "Italy 1947-2004" and "R. Slovenia 1947-2004". Here is the point where the two cities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica and, as a consequence, Italy and Slovenia meet and recognize each other as part of a much wider culture, from historical events to raw times but also of union and collaboration.

This is the incredible scenery that unfolds when you visit Piazza Transalpina, between the cities of Gorizia and Nova Gorica, where once, not too far away, there was an imposing wall in heavy concrete 50 cm wide built in 1947 along the Italian-Yugoslav border. The fence cut exactly in half the city of Gorizia in its part attributed to the Italian territory, leaving on the opposite side that part of the territory that would later take the name of the city of Nova Gorica, Yugoslavia at the end of World War II.

However, 2004 marks a turning point in this fascinating border history: Slovenia becomes part of the European Union and Transalpine Square is born as it is known today whose name, for obvious historical reasons, has been renamed in Piazza Europa. A name that, certainly, requires a reflection on the beauty of a border territory whose parts, although belonging today to different nations, create contacts between them that promote human and cultural exchange in order to share a story that, However different, it can only be considered common.

Sometimes, however, the effort and difficulty of creating contacts and meeting points between Slovenes and Italians is evident. If you decide to cross the border and descend into the Slovenian community, the difference in approach compared to the need to merge the history of the two cities is obvious. We are talking about two peoples, the Italian and the Slovenian, with a different approach to history that inevitably unites them. On the one hand, for the Italians it is almost impossible to forget that the separation of the city of Gorizia also involved a separation of culture, history, human relations; but on the other hand for the Slovenes, or rather, for the Novogoricians the story that the Italians tell is outdated, old and has not much to do with the city of Nova Gorica, created ab initio as a kind of "socialist showcase on the West". The city of Gorizia bears important wounds in comparison to the division of the territory in 1947.

We have not forgotten what this event has entailed from different points of view. When there was the division of the border, even the cemeteries were divided in half leaving bodies buried for one part (the head) in Italy, for the other (the body) in Slovenia. The families themselves were literally

"divided". For Slovenes it is completely different, they have not undergone the same kind of change, for them there is no historical legacy. There is only one totally new city, built from scratch in which to live and build a new life» says an inhabitant of the city of Gorizia. However, the Gorizia people's desire to create solid contacts with the Novagorica is not lacking. There are many, in fact, the parents of Gorizia who decide to let their children study in Slovenian schools where there is very little Italian culture, as is normal. This, however, is not, for these incredible parents, a point of disadvantage for their children but, on the contrary, a great opportunity for growth and contact with the culture of others. In Slovenian schools you only speak Slovenian, you study the history of the territory (clearly from a local point of view), you translate everything into Slovenian and even learn and sing the national anthem.

Probably many parents around Italy, if they were proposed to send their children to study in a foreign school would turn up their nose stating that it is more right to study the history, art, literature and language of the place where you were born. On the other hand, he cannot be wronged on this point. In my opinion, however, we should not focus so much on the normality of the choice of parents who do not decide to send their children to foreign schools, but the wonderful atypical nature of Gorizia's parents who, on the contrary, welcome this alternative as an opportunity.

It is here that lies the beauty of this fascinating territory: in the desire on the part of Gorizia to want to get in touch with the Slovenian community certainly not to invade or change the cultural and social dynamics, but only to feel part of a much wider reality that shares history, culture, art and stories of people who live the border life on their skin, every day.

A story that struck me, precisely because of the power of the connection between the parties, is undoubtedly linked to the sad period of the Pandemic from Covid-19. Near the Kulturni Dom in Nova Gorica there is still an exhibition of images dedicated to the two cities as European Capitals of Culture 2025 that portray some important moments of collaboration and sharing between the two cities. Among these a group of young people who, despite the installation of nets to avoid border crossing, organize starting tennis and volleyball transforming the sad fence into an instrument of union and solidarity.

My grandmother and her sister, during the Pandemic from Covid-19, met in Piazza Transalpina (Piazza Europa) to share a moment together. Living one in Italy, the other in Slovenia had no other way to see each other. So everyone brought their own cup from home and drank together a herbal tea» says a local girl.

They are border stories that mix with the need to merge without invading each other, respecting their history, customs and traditions.

They are stories united by a border that sometimes unites, sometimes separates but is always there to remind us that, despite its indisputable existence, collaboration remains the most stimulating way to create human contacts of inestimable value. During this border journey I saw the most beautiful light in the eyes of young people, eager to collaborate with each other, to know the point of view of those who are close but at the same time far away for culture, history and traditions. And it is to them that I entrust the hopes of a closer collaboration between Gorizia and Nova Gorica in the future.