



## VICTORY MONUMENT

Bolzano, Italy

46.50047°N, 11.345°E



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### Executive Summary

The Victory Monument in Bolzano was erected on the orders of Benito Mussolini in 1928. Since then, it has been at the symbolic centre of ethnic clashes between the German- and Italian-speaking communities, as well as a symbol of the unresolved legacy of Italian Fascism. Until recently, the monument has been one of the key regional, political, and ethnic grievances in the South Tyrol region. However, the 21st-century public policy efforts to historicize and modify the monument brought about a significant change within the attitudes towards the Victory Monument. This case study traces nearly 100 years of contestations surrounding the Victory Monument, as well as explores the decision-making process that led to the contextualization of the monument.

## Introduction

*Monumento alla Vittoria* (Victory Monument, also known as the Victory Gate) was constructed in 1928 in the city of *Bolzano* (Bozen). Erected on the orders of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini, the Victory Monument has stood at the centre of disputes over the regional identity of *Alto Adige/Südtirol* (South Tyrol) and the legacies of fascism. While officially dedicated to Italy's triumph and sacrifice during the First World War, the Victory Monument symbolised Fascist Italy's dominion over Bolzano's German-speaking population and formed a part of the attempts to Italianize the city. The Victory Monument has been contested ever since its opening in the 1920s, largely on the part of German-speaking residents of the region. After almost a century of contestation characterised by protests and terrorist attacks, the facade of the monument was modified in an effort to repair the divisions within the community. Additionally, a permanent exhibition was opened in the crypts beneath the Victory Monument, in an attempt to contextualise the Victory Gate, as well as educate on the region's fascist past.

## Background

### *Fascism and the Italianization of Bolzano*

The construction of the Victory Monument represented broader efforts of the Fascist regime to mould the newly acquired territory of South Tyrol into an integral part of the Italian nation. Italy had entered the First World War in May 1915 on the promise of territorial expansion made by the Allied Powers. After the Allied victory, Italy acquired territories from the defeated and defunct Austro-Hungarian empire.<sup>1</sup> The signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye in September 1919 fixed the Italian-Austrian border at the Brenner Pass, detaching the southern part of the region of Tyrol from Austria and incorporating it into Italy.<sup>2</sup> This new Italian region of *Alto Adige* had been ruled by the Austrian Habsburgs since 1363 and its population was largely German.<sup>3</sup>

After Mussolini assumed power in 1922, his regime sought to remove the region's German identity and consolidate its new Italian status. The city of Bolzano stood at the centre of these plans, as it was to become a local capital securing Italy's authority up to the new northern

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Thompson, *The White War: Life and Death on the Italian Front, 1915-1919* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2009), 31, 379-81.

<sup>2</sup> Luigi Blanco, "Storia e identità culturale in una regione di confine: il Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol," *Scienza & Politica* 18, no. 34 (2006): 131.

<sup>3</sup> Marchi Marzia, "Paesaggi di Frontiera nel Totalitarismo Bolzano/Bozen durante il Fascismo," *Annali di Ricerche e studi di geografica* 70 (2014): 4-8.

frontier.<sup>4</sup> The existing German population of the city was denationalised by far-reaching measures that extended into all areas of their lives.<sup>5</sup> At the same time Italian immigration was encouraged to both greatly expand the city's population and displace Germans as the largest ethnic group.<sup>6</sup> As a result Bolzano's demographics shifted, from a 73% German majority in 1921 to a 62% Italian majority in 1939.<sup>7</sup>

Urban changes accompanied the city's demographic developments. The remodelling that ensued has been termed by Sara Favargiotti, Alessandro Busana, and Daniele Cappelletti as a 'unique case in the history of Italian fascism', being the only example of a 'sort of Italian colonial city (...) built within Italian territory'.<sup>8</sup> New residential and industrial areas were constructed for the influx of Italian workers, with the Talavera river serving to divide these new communities from the German-dominated historic centre.<sup>9</sup> Explicitly Fascist structures were constructed within the city. One of them was *Casa Littoria*, also known as *Casa del Fascio*. Built between 1939 and 1942 the building served as the headquarters of the National Fascist Party.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Monumento alla Vittoria*

At the heart of Mussolini's Bolzano stood the Victory Monument located on the *Piazza alla Vittoria* (Victory Square). Inaugurated in 1928, it occupies the space between the pre-existing German historic centre in the east and the new Italian neighbourhoods in the west.<sup>11</sup> As a fascist monument it needs to be read in both the specific context of Bolzano, as well as with regards to the broader contours of Italian Fascism. Fascism's self-presentation was inextricably connected to the legacy of the First World War. After their rise to power, the Fascist regime sought to establish a monopoly over the commemoration of Italy's war effort.<sup>12</sup> The construction of the Victory Monument itself stemmed directly from Mussolini, who aimed to erect a monument that signified the Italianisation of the region, as well as marked Italy's triumph in the First World War.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Sara Favargiotti, Alessandro Busana, and Daniele Cappelletti, "Beyond Italianization: Conflicts, stories, and reactions of the afterlives of fascism in Bolzano/Bozen," in *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture: Reception and Legacy*, eds. Kay Bea Jones and Stephanies Pilat (Abingdon, 2020), 199.

<sup>5</sup> Blanco, "Il Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol," 132.

<sup>6</sup> Favargiotti, Busana, and Cappelletti, "Beyond Italianization," 199.

<sup>7</sup> Marzi, 'Paesaggi di Frontiera nel Totalitarismo,' 10.

<sup>8</sup> Favargiotti, Busana, and Cappelletti, "Beyond Italianization," 199.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 198, 200.

<sup>10</sup> Gerald Steinacher, "Fascist Legacies: The Controversy over Mussolini's Monuments in South Tyrol," *European Yearbook of Minority Issues* 10, no.1 (2011): 653.

<sup>11</sup> Håkan Hökerberg, "The Monument to Victory in Bolzano: desacralisation of a fascist relic," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 23, no. 8 (2017): 764.

<sup>12</sup> Daniele Pisani, "From Italian Monuments to the Fallen of World War I to Fascist War Memorials," *RIHA Journal* 165 (2017), para 9.

<sup>13</sup> Rolf Steininger, *South Tyrol: A Minority Conflict of the Twentieth Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 35.

Designed by Marcello Piacentini, the Victory Monument has been described as the ‘first truly fascist monument’, its architect seeking ‘nothing short of the architectural symbol of the fascist soul’.<sup>14</sup> The monument draws upon the ancient Roman symbols utilised by the Fascist regime, taking the form of a Roman triumphal arch supported by columns carved into ‘fasces’, the bundles of rods and an axe after which the Italian Fascist Party was named. Within the arch are busts of Cesare Battisti (figure 1), Damiano Chiesa, and Fabio Filzi, all Italian war heroes killed during the First World War.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 1:** The bust of Cesare Battisti by Adolfo Wildt. Image by Wolfgang Moroder, CC BY-SA 3.0.

The monument was provocative to the German population of Bolzano, for it signified Italy’s victory over both Austria-Hungary and the South Tyroleans themselves. In this manner, Johanna Mitterhofer has likened it to such memorials as the Valley of the Fallen in Spain, for it represents a ‘victory for one part of the population and oppression for the other’.<sup>16</sup> It was constructed on the site of an unfinished memorial that was started during the First World War to commemorate the Austrian *Kaiserjäger* killed in the conflict. The incomplete memorial was symbolically destroyed and its remains were used as foundations for the Victory Monument, a process Schnapp

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey Schnapp, “Small Victories (‘BZ ’18-’45),” in *The Routledge Companion to Italian Fascist Architecture: Reception and Legacy*, ed. Kay Bea Jones and Stephanie Pilat (Abingdon; Routledge, 2020), 533.

<sup>15</sup> Steinacher, “Fascist Legacies,” 652-3.

<sup>16</sup> Johana Mitterhofer, “Competing Narratives on the Future of Contested Heritage: A Case Study of Fascist Monuments in Contemporary South Tyrol, Italy,” *Heritage and Society* 6, no. 1 (2013): 51.

recognizes as a metaphor for Italy's annexation of South Tyrol.<sup>17</sup> On the façade facing east and towards the Victory Square, appears a sculpture of *Vittoria Alata* [the Winged Victory]. It is situated above a Latin inscription (figure 2) reading, 'Here are the boundaries of the Fatherland. Set up the standards! From here, we ennobled the others with language, laws and arts.'<sup>18</sup> Adapted from an imagined dialogue between a Roman legionary and an Italian participant in the 1918 Battle of the Piave River, it expresses the superiority of the region's new Italian culture over its previous German identity.<sup>19</sup> Winged Victory's arrow pointing towards the Italo-Austrian border has been interpreted as a warning against interference by the German nations to the north during the process of Italianisation.<sup>20</sup>



**Figure 2:** The Winged Victory sculpture. Image by blu-news.org, CC BY-SA 2.0.

## History of the Contestation

### *A Clash of Communities*

Italy is a nation that has not had a reckoning with its fascist past, and the influence of Mussolini's

<sup>17</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 535.

<sup>18</sup> Hökerberg, "Monument to Victory," 762.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 762.

<sup>20</sup> Steinacher, "Fascist legacies," 652.

regime continues to be felt in Italian politics and society. Across the country the physical markers of the regime remain, having escaped the physical destruction meted out to the markers of authoritarianism in other European countries.<sup>21</sup> The survival of the Victory Monument after the collapse of the Italian Fascist regime and the end of the Second World War, a conflict in which Italy suffered considerable damage at the hands of German occupation forces,<sup>22</sup> is a testament to this broader national phenomenon. The monument's only casualty was the erasure of its inscription to Mussolini in 1945.<sup>23</sup> However, it is the distinctly regional dynamic that is responsible for the controversy it has engendered since the Second World War. As a physical representation of the Fascist regime and its oppression of the German-speaking population, it has stood at the symbolic centre of regional, political and ethnic disputes.<sup>24</sup>

The end of the Second World War and the advent of Italian democracy brought with them political developments that led the Victory Monument to become a symbolic battleground. That is not to say it was uncontested under Mussolini's regime. Indeed, at the same time as Vittorio Emanuele III inaugurated the monument, the Austrian town of Innsbruck hosted a demonstration against it, attended by members of South Tyrol's German-speaking community.<sup>25</sup> It was, however, in the context of South Tyrol's increased autonomy in the post-war period that the Victory Monument became a target. In 1946 Austria and Italy signed the Gruber-De Gasperi Agreement to guarantee the region's autonomy and protect the rights of its German-speaking minority. Dissatisfaction with the terms sparked violence in South Tyrol.<sup>26</sup> In the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, separatists attacked the physical representations of the Italian state wherever they could be found, amongst which were the region's fascist monuments.<sup>27</sup> In September 1978 and again in April 1979, the Victory Monument itself was subject to bombing attempts.<sup>28</sup> While the latter attempt failed, the 1978 attack caused significant damage to several parts of the structure and the site was permanently fenced off as a result.<sup>29</sup> The Victory Monument experienced non-violent opposition during this period as well. For a brief time an alliance between the German-speaking and conservative South Tyrolean People's Party (SVP), and those from both the German-speaking and Italian-speaking left, called for its demolition and replacement.<sup>30</sup> However, the majority of Bolzano's Italian-speaking community remained in favour of the status

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<sup>21</sup> Joshua Arthurs, "Fascism as 'heritage' in Contemporary Italy," in *Italy Today: The Sick Man of Europe*, ed. Andrea Mammone and Giuseppe A. Veltri (London: Routledge, 2010), 114-27.

<sup>22</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 536.

<sup>23</sup> Steininger, *South Tyrol*, 38.

<sup>24</sup> Hökerberg, "Monument to Victory," 766.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 764.

<sup>26</sup> Ianco, "Il Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol".

<sup>27</sup> Mitterhofer, "Fascist Monuments in Contemporary South Tyrol," 49.

<sup>28</sup> Steinacher, "Fascist Legacies," 656.

<sup>29</sup> "Breve Storia del Terrorismo Sudtirolese", *Misteri d'Italia: Archivio Storico Giornalistico Diretto da Sando Provvigionato*, accessed March 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Steinacher, "Fascist Legacies," 656.

quo. The restoration of the monument after the damage it had suffered under German occupation was funded by a national fundraising campaign organised by Italian veterans.<sup>31</sup> For the Italian political right it became particularly important in response to regional developments. Amidst the increasing size and political assertiveness of the region's German-speaking community, the neo-Fascist Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) held protests at the Victory Monument against the region's increased autonomy.<sup>32</sup>

With both sides diametrically opposing each other, tensions repeatedly flared over any efforts and suggestions to restore, remove, or alter the monument. In 1990 the Italian government allocated a 400 million lire fund for its restoration, which provoked threats of a demonstration from the Tyrolean *Schützen*, as well as a counter-demonstration from the MSI.<sup>33</sup> In 1992, in reaction to the announcement that the monument would be restored, Michael Seeber of Bolzano revealed an opinion shared by many:

It is not about removing the structure made of marble and bronze, rather it is a matter of taking away the meaning and symbolism that both sides ascribe to it. The goal should be to free the monument of its opposing ideologies and to consider what it has become over time: a witness of a bygone era.<sup>34</sup>

Having that sentiment in mind, in 2001 Mayor Giovanni Salghetti decided to rename Victory Square as *Piazza della Pace* (Peace Square). However, the decision was greatly opposed and led to a referendum in which 62% of the constituents voted to restore the original name. In what *La Repubblica* described as a 'furious clash', individuals largely voted alongside ethnolinguistic divides.<sup>35</sup> In response to his defeat, Salghetti described it as 'a childish vote of sentiment and not of reasoning. When you are attached to symbols [and] names, it is difficult to break away from them'.<sup>36</sup>

A subsequent clash took place on 8 November 2008 in the context of the electoral success of right-wing German parties that favoured addressing the monument.<sup>37</sup> Those on the German right, largely consisting of *Schützen*, but also involving members of the SVP, protested against Bolzano's Victory Monument and the bas-relief of Mussolini at the *Piazza del Tribunale*, both of which they considered as 'relics of fascism'. Their protest was met by those on the Italian right, amongst which was Alessandro Urzì, then of *Alleanza Nazionale*, who described the protests as

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<sup>31</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 536.

<sup>32</sup> Steinacher, "Fascist Legacies," 656-7.

<sup>33</sup> Sandro Bortolini, "Quattrocento milioni per restaurare il monumento che divide l'alto ad," *La Repubblica*, June 10, 1990.

<sup>34</sup> Oswald Zoeggeler and Lamberto Ippolito, *Die Architektur für ein Italienisches Bozen 1922–1942*, 1992.

<sup>35</sup> Luca Fazzo, "Bolzano, successo dei sì per piazza della Vittoria," *La Repubblica*, October 7, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Steinacher, "Fascist Legacies," 677-60.

a 'Nuremberg parade atmosphere of dismal memory'.<sup>38</sup>

### *A Historical Breakthrough*

An alternative approach to the wholesale removal of the monument or the maintenance of the status quo emerged in 2011. The response was rooted in a call from Bolzano's *Archivio Storico* in May 2010 to historicize the monument and defuse its fascist connotations.<sup>39</sup> In January 2011 the desire amongst historians for historicization coalesced with the political desire for change when the Minister of Culture Sandro Bondi reached an agreement with the SVP to contextualise Bolzano's fascist monuments.<sup>40</sup> A petition from local historians followed in February, titled '*Risolviamo insieme il problema della monumentalistica fascista*', or 'Let's resolve the problem of Fascist monuments together'. Signed by historians from both the German- and Italian-speaking communities, the signatories favoured the solution of contextualizing the monuments over their removal.<sup>41</sup> Within a month a team of historical professionals was formed to develop a documentation centre in the Victory Monument's crypt. Named 'BZ '18-'45', the exhibition was inaugurated on 21 July 2014 and received a generally positive response from both the German- and Italian-speaking press.<sup>42</sup>

### Decision-Making Processes

The developments that resulted in the opening of the 'BZ '18-'45' exhibition in 2014 were a collaborative effort between historical professionals and the political authorities. The political response involved cooperation across different levels of government, with the national, regional, and provincial authorities agreeing in 2011 to establish a commission of both Italian- and German-speaking historians and art historians to consider the issue.<sup>43</sup> The decision to historicize was criticised by those from both Italian and German political parties. Some local members of *il Popolo della libertà*, the party in government at the time, criticised concessions made to the SVP. Enrico Lillo felt it '[s]old out years of battles in a few talks', whilst others wanted the inclusion of an exhibition on the First World War in the crypt to reflect its original purpose.<sup>44</sup> Conversely, Elmar Thaler, who shortly after was elected leader of the *Schützen*, remained committed to the removal of the Monument.<sup>45</sup>

Despite the opposition, the five-member team met for the first time in March 2011, tasked with

<sup>38</sup> Fumagalla Marisa, "Bolzano, sfilano 3 mila Schützen Tensione con i militanti di An," *Corriere della Sera*, November 9, 2008.

<sup>39</sup> Hökerberg, "Monument to Victory," 767.

<sup>40</sup> Marco Rizza, "Troppi ritardi sui monumenti," *Alto Adige*, January 28, 2011.

<sup>41</sup> Davide Pasquali, "L'appello degli storici italiani e tedeschi 'Il passato va spiegato senza rimozioni'," *Alto Adige*, February 5, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 537-42.

<sup>43</sup> Carlà and Mitterhofer, "Controversial Memories in South Tyrol."

<sup>44</sup> *Alto Adige*, "Rivolta nella base Pdl Riesplode la guerra tra Holzmann e Biancofiore," *Alto Adige*, January 29, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> *Alto Adige*, "Schützen: 'Via anche il Monumento'," *Alto Adige*, February 2, 2011.

drawing up a thematic index for the exhibition in the crypt.<sup>46</sup> Rather than establish a singular narrative, the historians sought to reflect the contested meanings of the Victory Monument in their work.<sup>47</sup> Once this thematic index had been produced, it was submitted to the different levels of government for approval, which it received from the provincial and communal authorities in May,<sup>48</sup> and from the Minister of Culture in December.<sup>49</sup> This was followed in January 2012 by an agreement on the €834,000 funding for the project, with the province and municipal authorities contributing €100,000, and the central government the rest.<sup>50</sup>

From 2012 until the exhibition's opening in 2014, the commission worked with designers, historians, and archivists to establish an identity for the exhibition and to translate their plan into reality. The original title for the exhibition, 'Bolzano 1918-1945: City, Monuments, Memories', was replaced with 'BZ '18-'45' and the subtitle 'one monument, one city, two dictatorships'.<sup>51</sup> 'BZ' is the abbreviation for the province of Bolzano, and '18' and '45' refer to the end dates of the First and Second World Wars. To underline South Tyrol's diverse ethnic make-up, the subtitle appears in English, Italian, German, Ladino, and a mixture of the latter three.<sup>52</sup> To enable the narration of both the story of the monument and that of the municipality and province, at the suggestion of Jeffrey Schnapp, an American historian who joined the project in 2012, the two stories were to unfold at once, divided between the external and internal walls of the crypt.<sup>53</sup> A third narrative was introduced in the four corner rooms, examining the career of the architect Marcello Piacentini and broader questions surrounding the nature of monuments themselves.<sup>54</sup> Rather than physical interventions, the commission used technology to neutralise the Victory Monument's fascist iconography. It was decided the atrium once lined with physical wreaths would have projected wreaths formed of phrases common under the dictatorships,<sup>55</sup> highlighting the fact that today they are 'obsolete slogans and meaningless words'.<sup>56</sup> Projections of quotations from Hannah Arendt, Bertolt Brecht, and Thomas Paine were used to overlay the friezes in the crypt with phrases against fascism and dictatorships.<sup>57</sup>

According to Jeffrey Schnapp, the most difficult decision was how to visually signify that the Victory Monument had been historicized.<sup>58</sup> Interviewed after the exhibition opened, Hanners

<sup>46</sup> Alto Adige, "Bolzano: Monumento alla Vittoria, entro aprile il progetto del museo," *Alto Adige*, March 30, 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Carlà and Mitterhofer, "Controversial Memories in South Tyrol."

<sup>48</sup> Alto Adige, "Monumento alla Vittoria nel museo anche la storia del nazismo in Alto Adige," *Alto Adige*, May 24, 2011.

<sup>49</sup> Alto Adige, "Monumento alla Vittoria, sì al museo," *Alto Adige*, December 17, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Alto Adige, "Monumento, il 'sì' di Durnwalder," *Alto Adige*, December 31, 2011.

<sup>51</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 537-8.

<sup>52</sup> Monuments Commission, *Concept for the Design of the Permanent Exhibition within the monument to Victory in Bolzano/Bozen* (Bolzano: BZ '18-'45, 2014), 13.

<sup>53</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 538-40.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>56</sup> Monuments Commission, *Concept for the Design*, 4.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>58</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 541.

Obermair, one of the original five commission members, stated they wanted something 'light', something that would, 'contrast lightness with heaviness (...). Everyone will understand [that]. Everyone will feel less heavy, distressed by a sacred approach to history, (...) which made us stand still for eighty years.'<sup>59</sup>

To achieve this the commission agreed on the installation of a LED ring over one of the monument's columns. The decision was in part practical, as the measure had to be both cheap and 'not too invasive', recalled Ulrich Prugger, who formed part of the *Gruppe Gut* design team.<sup>60</sup> The ring also had a symbolic value. Firstly, its placement over one of the fasci, the marker of the fascist state, symbolised the primacy of citizens over the state. Secondly, it symbolically 'married' the exhibition to Bolzano, recalling the sacrifice by Bolzano's residents of their wedding rings in the 1930s to fund Italy's imperial expansion. Aware of the potential controversy this would generate, the commission kept the addition of the LED ring secret leading up to the exhibition's opening in July 2014.<sup>61</sup>

In the first four months the exhibition received 22,000 visitors, which led a prominent local Italian newspaper *Alto Adige* to describe it as 'a sign of new times'.<sup>62</sup> Opposition to the historicized monument came from the political right, much of which centred on the LED ring. Neo-fascist organisation *CasaPound* criticised the exhibition and issued a list of demands, at the top of which was the ring's removal. They considered the LED ring offended 'the sacredness of the Victory Monument, ruining the work and the urban planning act that surrounds it'.<sup>63</sup> Alessandro Urzì, provincial councillor of *l'Alto Adige nel cuore*, complained to the public prosecutor over the ring's 'alteration of the material and historical characteristics' of the Monument.<sup>64</sup> *Unitalia* similarly filed a complaint, seeking to 'protect' the monument.<sup>65</sup> For *Unitalia* the façade was:

[today] tampered within its aesthetics due to the affixing, on one of the frontal columns, of a circular sign, probably installed by piercing the historic marble of the column (...) Not only that: in the crypt located below the monument and specifically dedicated to the Fallen, four 'metal totems' have been affixed, which project, with laser technology.<sup>66</sup>

This potential violation of the Victory Monument's legal protections led the Deputy Prosecutor of Bolzano to investigate the additions.<sup>67</sup> On the other side of the divide, some considered the

<sup>59</sup> Paolo Campostrini, "Finalmente è caduto anche il nostro muro," *Alto Adige*, July 25, 2014.

<sup>60</sup> Campostrino, Paolo. "Gli inventori dell'anello 'Serviva un po' di ironia'," *Alto Adige*, July 31, 2014.

<sup>61</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 541-2.

<sup>62</sup> Paolo Campostrino, "Il Monumento ora parla anche ladino," *Alto Adige*, November 30, 2014.

<sup>63</sup> Casa Pound Italia, "Bolzano, Casapound copre con tricolore anello monumento alla vittoria subito dopo provocazione secessionisti sud-tirolesi," Casa Pound, accessed March 18, 2021.

<sup>64</sup> "Monumento, esposto di Urzì: "Alterate le caratteristiche storiche," *Alto Adige*, July 22, 2014.

<sup>65</sup> "Monumento alla Vittoria Nuovo esposto contro il led," *Alto Adige*, August 5, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Alto Adige*, "Monumento, inchiesta sull'anello," *Alto Adige*, August 7, 2014.

exhibition did not go far enough. Members of *Süd-Tiroler Freiheit* sought the renaming of the square. Referring to the attempt to change its name over a decade earlier, Sven Knoll, a provincial councillor, stated: 'In 2002 the city was not ready, but now the moment has arrived to dedicate this space to anti-fascism, abandoning the formative path it has had until now. The museum route is not enough.'<sup>68</sup>

The historians involved expressed satisfaction that what had been achieved was sufficient and that further measures were unnecessary. When asked about the potential for renaming the square in the future, Obermair replied that the opening of the exhibition had ensured:

The monument is no longer a violent artefact. It has been historicized and, by changing its skin, it has also changed the square. Now the Victory Square bears witness to the victory of democracy, of civilization. It is the victory of coexistence and of many courageous who wanted our wall to fall.<sup>69</sup>

Though apprehensive as regards the ring, Bolzano's mayor Luigi Spagnolli was similarly positive, describing it as an important moment for the community. He commented that 'the ability to deal with one's past is essential so that the territory can look to the future with confidence'.<sup>70</sup> With time the controversy surrounding the ring died down, and it has now become an accepted part of Bolzano's urban tissue.<sup>71</sup>

The decision-making process provides an indication of some of the dynamics present in a successfully resolved contestation. The cooperation of national, provincial, and local governments ensured the commission had the authority and funding to create the exhibition they envisaged. By including historians from both communities involved in the contestation, it ensured the project was not overly influenced by a single viewpoint of the issues at stake. Importantly, as a result of the programme agreement signed between the state, province, and municipality in January 2012 the commission worked without political interference.<sup>72</sup> This enabled the commission to craft a multifaceted narrative un beholden to either side of the debate, and, most significantly, permitted the addition of the contentious LED ring. Given its contentiousness, it is unlikely it would have been approved had the political authorities been involved. The Victory Monument also acts as a warning to future decision-makers. It demonstrates that efforts to bridge the divides of contestation will inevitably provoke a response from those for whom compromise is unthinkable.

## Summary and Conclusions

<sup>68</sup> Alan Conti, "Una piazza per l'antifascismo," *Alto Adige*, August 12, 2014.

<sup>69</sup> Camostrino, "è caduto anche il nostro muro."

<sup>70</sup> Alto Adige, "Spagnolli, 'L'anello non mi entusiasma,'" *Alto Adige*, July 24, 2014.

<sup>71</sup> Schnapp, "Small Victories," 543.

<sup>72</sup> Francesca Gonzato, "Nuovo Momento Processione senza fine," *Alto Adige*, July 23, 2014.

On 4 May 2019, a threat to the monument again featured in the local press. Rather than referring to calls for demolition, the threat came from the forces of nature, which had caused a marble slab to fall onto the steps below.<sup>73</sup> Only Jürgen Wirth Anderlan, commander of the local *Schützen*, called for its destruction as a 'danger for society both as a structure and as a message'.<sup>74</sup> For the time being the contestation appears to have been neutralised, although further changes have been opposed. In 2016 Bolzano's mayor Renzo Caramaschi proposed renaming it to *Monumento alla Pace* (the Peace Monument),<sup>75</sup> but in a poll run by *Alto Adige*, 78% of the respondents rejected the suggestion.<sup>76</sup> This is indicative of the broader divisions that persist within South Tyrolean society. Despite the success of 'BZ '18-'45' in contextualising the Victory Monument, it can only be said with limited certainty that the contestation has been dampened. The policies undertaken by decision-makers do not entirely preclude future disputes arising from a society that remains divided by language and ethnicity. Members of respective ethnic and political communities remain wedded to their separate identities, and the physical representations of their heritage remain important.<sup>77</sup>

Research contributed by Jake Gasson, Louis Nagy and Mateusz Kacperski

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## About Contested Histories

In recent years, there have been many contestations over memorials, street names, and other physical representations of historical legacies in public spaces. These contestations often reflect deeper societal tensions whether triggered by political transitions, demographic shifts, inter-ethnic strife, or a growing awareness of unaddressed historical injustices.

The Contested Histories project is a multi-year initiative designed to identify principles, processes, and best practices for addressing these contestations at the community or municipal level and in the classroom. Conflicts about history, heritage, and memory are a global phenomenon, and, although each case is different, comparative cases can indicate lessons learned and reflect best practices.

## About IHJR at EuroClio

The Institute for Historical Justice and Reconciliation (IHJR) is a research centre at EuroClio - European Association for History Educators in The Hague, The Netherlands. The IHJR works with educational and public policy institutions to organise and sponsor historical discourse in pursuit of acknowledgement and the resolution of historical disputes in divided communities and societies.

## Contact information

Marie-Louise Jansen

Program Director

+33 66828327

contestedhistories@euroclio.eu

www.contestedhistories.org

EuroClio Secretariat Riouwstraat 139

2585HP The Hague The Netherlands

secretariat@euroclio.eu

www.euroclio.eu

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