

## CONSTRUCTION OF THE MINERS' TOWN IN RAŠA (1936/37)<sup>1</sup>

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Although historiography (as part of the local history of the Labin region and its coal mines) and scholarly literature from other disciplines (primarily the history of architecture) have addressed different aspects of the construction of the miners' town in Raša, this paper focuses on the reasons, circumstances, and processes of infrastructure construction in Arsia / Raša, based both on a critical evaluation of the present research and on a study of archival sources. It has been observed that Raša – built within 547 days from April 1936 to November 1937 – was not primarily a project of the fascist regime intended to serve its glorification, but was constructed by the administration of the coal mine due to its need of new workers, in the context of increasing the production of coal for industrial and transportation purposes (railroad, navy, and maritime transport) at the time when approximately 1,000,000 tons or 10 % of the Italian needs for this energy resource were pumped from the Raška Basin. The town's construction was preceded by extensive land reclamation works in the area.

**Keywords:** Raša, coal mines, labour, black coal, Gustavo Pulitzer Finali

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## Introduction

In view of the great importance of mining for the history of the Labin region, especially during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> and throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there has been a great deal of historiographical literature about the coal mines around Labin, especially in the context of local history.<sup>2</sup> Coal mines in this area have been regularly mentioned in monographs on Istria covering the period from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards,<sup>3</sup> and the topic has also been covered in various monographs on the Raška Coal Mines company.<sup>4</sup> Specific aspects of mining life have also been analysed, such as the social position of the workers and their dissatisfaction (the so-called Labin Republic of 1921), the great mining accident of 1940, or the miners' sports life (FC Rudar from Labin).<sup>5</sup> Finally, the importance of mining in the Labin region, not only for Istria, but also for the functioning of the wider Croatian area, is evident from the fact that Zvane Črnja, one of the most esteemed Croatian writers of his time, dedicated a poem to it.<sup>6</sup>

When it comes to the construction and architecture of the miners' town in Raša, which was originally called Liburnia and later on, shortly before its inauguration, renamed to Arsia, scholars have placed it in the context of a sudden increase in coal exploitation, as part of the trend of building the so-called *città di fondazione*, twelve of which were planned in Italy between the two World Wars, and within various retrospectives of modern architecture, art history, and valorisations of modernism within the cultural heritage of Istria

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Marijan Milevoj, *Do socijalizma i natrag: labinska novinska kronika 1945-90* [To socialism and back: The newspaper chronicle of Labin, 1945-90] (Labin: Labinska komuna, 1991); idem, *Kartolini z Labinskih* [Postcards from the Labin region] (Labin: Naklada Matthias, 1997); idem, *Raša moje mladosti: Raša sa starih razglednica* [Raša of my youth: Raša on old postcards] (Labin: Mathias Flacius, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bernard Stulli, *Istarsko okružje 1825.-1860.* [The Istrian setting, 1825-1860] (Pazin-Rijeka: Historijski arhiv Pazin – Historijski arhiv Rijeka, 1984), 109-114; Dario Alberi, "Arsia – Raša," in *Istria: storia, arte, cultura* (Trieste: LINT, 1997), 1744-1746; "Ugljenokopi" [Coal mines], in *Istarska enciklopedija* (Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2005), pp. 832-833.

<sup>4</sup> Ilija Uzelac, *Ugljenokopi Raša: rudnici našega crnog zlata* [The coal pits of Raša: Mines of our black gold] (Zagreb: Društvo novinara NR Hrvatske, 1950); Tullio Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi: četiri stoljeća rudarenja u Istri* [Istrian coal mines: Four centuries of mining in Istria] (Labin: Istarski ugljenokopi, 1997); Marino Fonović, *Zadnja smjena: svjedočanstvo o posljednjem hrvatskom rudniku* [The last shift: Testimonies on the last Croatian mine] (Rijeka: Grafika Zambelli, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Vladislav Brajković and Vjekoslav Bratulić, ed., *Labinska Republika 1921. godine: zbornik radova* [The Labin Republic of 1921: Conference proceedings] (Rijeka: Sjeveroadrijski institut Jugoslavenske akademije znanosti i umjetnosti Rijeka, 1972); Giulio Cuzzi et al., *Raša: 28. veljače 1940.* [Raša: February 28, 1940] (Raša: Arsia Art, 2009); Marijan Milevoj, *Četrdeset zelenih proljeća: NK Rudar – Labin* [Forty green springs: FC Rudar – Labin] (Labin: Labinska komuna, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> Zvane Črnja, *Raša će dati srce: poema* [Raša will give its heart: a poem] (Rijeka: Izdanje Oblasnog odbora jedinstvenih sindikata R.N.J. za Istru i Rijeku, 1950), pp. 3, 5.

and Croatia.<sup>7</sup> Due to his design and implementation of this project, Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, an architect from Trieste who did not manage to enter the circle of famous regime architects of the Italian state and – if we exclude Raša – is better known for furnishing the interiors of passenger and other ships than for planning and designing larger constructions in public space, has found his place in Croatian scholarly literature.<sup>8</sup>

Based on a review of the research results of historiographers and other experts on mining in the Labin region, and a critical evaluation of the archival sources preserved at the State Archive in Pazin, in this paper we are analysing the circumstances and reasons for building the miners' town in Raša.<sup>9</sup> Namely, it has usually been considered as an example of fascist regime architecture in Istria or evaluated for its architectural features. However, although this architectural complex indisputably exhibits certain stylistic features of fascist architecture, it was not built by the regime, but by a company engaged in the extraction of coal in the Istrian mines and placing it on the market, which is why, in our opinion, the town reflects the importance of this branch of economy, of coal as an energy resource, and of the need to accommodate non-domicile workers, all of which was essential for maintaining and increasing the annual coal production, which peaked shortly before World War II and exceeded 1,000,000 tons of coal per year. Our research is therefore heading in this direction, our aim being to prove the said hypothesis based on the source material.

### **The circumstances of constructing the miner's town of *Arsia* / Raša**

The Labin region – located in south-eastern Istria between the southern slopes of Učka, the Raša River, and the sea – is known for its black coal deposits. However, systematic exploitation of coal did not take place before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Habsburg Monarchy – with the widespread use of the

<sup>7</sup> Darja Mahečić Radović, "Raša – grad-spomenik moderne arhitekture – Gustava Pulitzer-Finalija" [Raša – a town-monument of modernist architecture: Gustavo Pulitzer Finali], *Radovi Instituta za povijest umjetnosti* 24 (2000), 113-126; Krešimir Rogina, "Raša je naša: o potrebi i naporima inkorporiranja vrijednih djela talijanskoga racionalizma u hrvatski kulturni prostor" [Raša is ours: On the need and efforts to incorporate valuable works of Italian rationalism into the Croatian cultural setting], *Kultura: art magazin* 72-73 (2002), pp. 122-123.

<sup>8</sup> Antonio Rubbi, ed., "Pulitzer Finali, Gustavo," in *Arhitekti modernog pokreta u Istri: biografska grada* (Pula: Društvo arhitekata Istre, 1997), 21; Berislav Valušek, *Gustavo Pulitzer Finali: Raša – Arsia* (Rovinj: HABITAT d.o.o., 2000); Darja Mahečić Radović, "Gustavo Pulitzer Finali: Raša ali kako zelena je bila moja dolina" [Gustavo Pulitzer Finali: Raša or how green was my valley], *Oris: revija za arhitekturo in kulturo* IV (2002) 18, pp. 29-47.

<sup>9</sup> Državni arhiv u Pazinu [State Archive in Pazin, DAPA]-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula].

steam engine (in industry, railroad transportation, and navy) – developed a market for this energy resource.<sup>10</sup> Although the Venetian authorities had been interested in coal since the 1750s, they never ventured into exploiting it systematically.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, black coal from the Labin area did play an important role in the earlier centuries, as it appeared closer to the surface in the form “pegola” (in resinous form due to prolonged exposure to precipitation and other atmospheric influences), i.e. tar (Ital. *pece*), used to seal galleys and other wooden ships to make them waterproof.<sup>12</sup>

Over the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the coal mines in the Labin region reached the maximum of production, and were closed down at the end of the century as the last mines in Croatia.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in the 1930s, the port of Bršica in the Raška Canal was the leading port in the Adriatic due to the activities of these mines in its immediate vicinity, or – after Genoa – the second most important port of Italy

<sup>10</sup> In 1801, about forty workers excavated 560 tonnes, while from 1819 to 1829 a total of 10,833 tonnes of coal were extracted. In 1830, the trading houses of M.A. Rothschild, Gaymüller, Stametz, Neuwak, Wartheimstein, and others became interested in the exploitation of coal in Dalmatia and Istria, and in 1835 their company “Adriatic Black Coal Mines in Dalmatia and Istria” (*Adriatische Steinkohlen-Gewerkschaft in Dalmatien und Istrien*) was granted the right to exploit the ore for 30 years. From 1850 to 1860, the Company extracted more than 100,000 tonnes of coal in the Labin region, and in 1881 the Rothschilds sold the shares to the Trbovlje Mining Company (*Trifailer Kohlenwerks-Gesellschaft*), which, with 750 workers in the Krapan, Vinež, and Štrmac mines, extracted 67,223 tonnes of coal annually. Cf. Fonović, *Zadnja smjena*, pp. 10-11; Milevoj, *Kartolini z Labinšćini*, 5-6; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, pp. 18-19, 29-39.

<sup>11</sup> It was not until 1754 that the Venice Mining Authorities began inquiring with the Podestà of Labin about the exact location of the mine, the available ore reserves, and the costs of transportation to Venice, and ordered him to deliver 1000 libre (approximately 477 kilograms) of coal for further study. From the Podestà's letter of 1756 we learn that he inquired about the quality of coal with the English workers at a sugar factory in Rijeka, and in 1785 this factory became the first permanent buyer of that coal. Cf. Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, pp. 17-18.

<sup>12</sup> “Tar”, “black tar”, or “ship tar” (Ital. *pece*, *pegola nera*, or *pece navale*) was used to impregnate wooden boats and ships, and the first mining concession in the Labin region was granted by the Venetian Council of Ten to a certain Filippo Veranzi in 1626. Cf. Fonović, *Zadnja smjena*, 9; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> On the eve of World War I, the annual coal production reached 130,000 tonnes, and despite numerous difficulties during the war it was maintained at around 100,000 tonnes (in 1918 it dropped to 79,500 tonnes). In 1919, the “Joint Stock Company of Raša Coal Mines” (It. *Società carbonifera “Arsa”*) was founded. Early in March 1921, a workers' strike broke out (the so-called “Labin Republic”) and was violently suppressed. Its consequences were felt in production for a full five months. At the turn of 1924, the management closed down the mines for more than three months because of the surplus of supplies and the inability to place coal on the market. In 1925, “Arsa” was producing 2 % of Italy's coal needs, and in 1939, with an annual production of 1,000,000 tonnes, it reached 10 % of Italy's needs (an absolute record was reached in 1942, when 1,158,000 tonnes of coal were mined with 10,470 workers). After the financial collapse in the late 1920s, the banks and the state rehabilitated “Arsa” in 1935 by establishing the “Italian Coal Mining Company” (*Azienda carboni italiani*), which took a loan for the construction of the workers' settlement in Raša. Although the closure of these mines was contemplated already in the early 1970s, the energy crisis in the second half of the decade led to their continued operation, but the business was in crisis from the second half of the 1980s and the mines were finally closed in 1998. Cf. Fonović, *Zadnja smjena*, 12-14; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, pp. 43-44, 82-85, 87-96, 98-103.

in “bunkering” ships (supplying steam vessels under Italian and other flags with coal fuel).<sup>14</sup> In such tumultuous circumstances, with great and sudden interruptions, but also constantly breaking the records in annual coal production, soon after the rehabilitation of the mining company by the state and the banks, in the atmosphere of preparing for the war and the economic sanctions imposed by the League of Nations on Italy in view of its attack on Ethiopia (from November 18, 1935 to July 4, 1936)<sup>15</sup> and the increased demand on the Italian market for this energy resource from domestic sources, the Minister of Public Works, Giuseppe Coboli Gigli of Trieste, granted a loan to the “Italian Coal Mining Company” in the amount of 5,000,000 lira for constructing a workers’ town in Raša.<sup>16</sup> However, the construction of the town with its public

<sup>14</sup> In 1931, steam ships were supplied with 279,000 tonnes of coal in Genua and with 155,000 tonnes in Bršica, while the port of Naples was in the third place with 104,000 tonnes of coal loaded. The situation was similar in 1933: Genoa was the leading port with 200,000 tonnes, followed by Bršica with 148,000 and Naples with 106,500 tonnes of coal sold. Cf. *Arsa: società anonima carbonifera Trieste* (Trieste: Arsa, s. a.), pp. 22-23.

<sup>15</sup> The economic sanctions imposed by the League of Nations (led by France and the United Kingdom) were not aimed at denying Italy the import of energy resources, oil and coal, or the raw materials, especially iron. Although the member states discussed this option in January and March 1936, it was abandoned for its estimated inefficiency, although it was logical that only a shortage of energy and raw materials could hinder Italy’s efforts to strengthen its military industry and production. The League’s sanctions – the ban on arms trade between Italy and Abyssinia (Ethiopia), the ban on the importation of some Italian products (except gold and silver), the ban on granting loans to Italy, and the suspension of all trade agreements between Italy and the member states had almost no consequences. On the contrary, under the pressure of these sanctions, the fascists developed a policy of self-sufficiency (economic autarky), reflected in a somewhat reduced import need for machinery, victuals, and some raw materials. However, Italy could not obtain sufficient amounts of oil and coal without imports. Although from this period the autarky policy also led to an increase in coal production, Italy mostly imported coal from Germany, while oil was mainly provided from Germany and the USA. As a way stood open to acquire these energy resources, the sanctions of the League of Nations had almost no impact on the Italian economy and military readiness. According to Ristuccia’s estimates, only curtailing the import of oil and its derivatives from the USA oil could have led to a collapse of Italian industrial production, even as early as March 1936, with an expected fall of as much as 80 %. Cf. Christiano Andrea Ristuccia, “The 1935 Sanctions against Italy: Would Coal and Oil Have Made a Difference?” *European Review of Economic History* 4/1 (April 2000), 85-110; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 113-118, 120.

<sup>16</sup> Giuseppe Coboli Gigli (Trieste, 1892 – Malnate, 1987) was the Minister of Public Works in Mussolini’s government from September 5, 1935 to October 31, 1939. From 1919 and the establishment of “Arsa”, banker and entrepreneur Guido Segre (Turin, 1881 - Rome, 1945) was the head of the company. When the new company, *Azienda carboni italiani*, was founded in 1935, the Sardinian lignite mines were integrated into it, thus increasing the role of state capital, so that the company gradually became state-owned and its headquarters was moved from Trieste to Rome. Segre remained its head until 1938 and the introduction of racial laws, which was a sort of recognition of his successful leadership. Although his wife was Austrian and they were married according to the Catholic rite, and were friends with the Bishop of Trieste-Capodistria, Fogaro, who defended Segre publicly during the first half of the 1930s, it seems that the pro-regime circles of Trieste could not tolerate the latter’s opinions on the issue of the Croatian and Slovenian languages, and therefore refused to endorse his rehabilitation upon the adoption of racial laws, despite the said favourable circumstances. Cf. Milevoj, *Raša moje mladosti*, pp. 24-25; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, p. 95.

facilities and the entire infrastructure seems to have exceeded the stated loan by far and the financial construction proved much more complex.<sup>17</sup> In his report on the works in the Raša basin, submitted on March 30, 1936 to the State Undersecretary for Land Reclamation, the chief inspector – who had spoken with the heads of the relevant services in Trieste on March 24, while on March 25, accompanied by the Provincial Governor and the provincial inspectors in charge, he visited the building sites and met with the local authorities, construction managers, mine managers, and Count Lazzarini, chairman of the Land Reclamation Consortium – wrote that:

1. Works had been done on the upper part of the Krapan watercourse, about 3 km in length, near the entrance to the pits, worth 200,000 lire, and it had been estimated that the watercourse should be secured with concrete slabs (worth 325,000 lire) in the plain where the workers' town would be built, all of which was to be completed by the end of May;
2. The workers' settlement near the Krapan stream, built by the "Independent Institute for People's Houses in Eastern Istria" (*Istituto Autonomo per le Case popolari dell'Istria Orientale*), founded by the "Arsa" Company, had increased its share capital from 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 lire, and received a loan of 5,000,000 for the construction of the town, while the approved project was likely to cost 7,641,000 lire for the construction of 107 houses to accommodate 700 workers with their families (2,000 people in total), a church, a school, a Fascist Centre (*Casa del fascio*), a Workers' Centre (*Casa del Dopo Lavoro*), and a sports field; currently, 18 large wooden barracks for the temporary accommodation of 600 workers, four refectories, two rooms for drying the miners' clothes, a warehouse and the Workers' Centre were under construction;

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<sup>17</sup> In a letter dated December 17, 1936, sent by the Provincial Governor, Oreste Cimoroni, to the President of the Mining Society, Guido Segre (Royal Provincial Administration of Istria, Department: Cabinet, No. 5189), which indicated that the Youth Sports Centre in Raša would be financed by the State Undersecretary for Physical Education and Youth with 50 %, and that contributions (from the total amount of 260,000 lire) should be requested for the rest. In this context, and referring to the cited letter from the provincial governor, Ramšak wrote that the facility would cost 700,000 lire. It is likely that a loan of 5,000,000 lire was used for building some of the public buildings (the hotels, the church, etc.), while the infrastructure and other public facilities (the school, the kindergarten, etc.), and even some buildings that were very important for the fascist regime (such as the *Casa Balilla*) were built largely from the revenues of the local government and were only partly financed by the state and partly – judging by the said letter from the Provincial Governor – from forced "contributions". HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], box (hereinafter: b.) 307; Jure Ramšak, "Avtarkična strogost in preprosta italijanska duša: konstrukcija novega rudarskega mesta Raša v vzhodni Istri (1936-1937)" ["Autarkic austerity and the simple Italian soul": Construction of the new mining settlement of Raša in eastern Istria], *Acta Histriae* 24 (2016) 4, p. 861.



3. The approved construction (worth 995,000 lire) of a drainage channel, about 2 km long, for the watershed of Rogocana / Rogočana, which threatened the pits, would be completed by September;
4. One fifth of the total of 15,000,000 lire had been approved for regulating the Raša River, i.e. around 6,000,000 lire for the two final sections of the Krapan and Raša basins, and allocated to two companies in order to have the works completed within one year at the first location and within a year and a half at the second;<sup>18</sup>
5. After drying up the Krapan lake, the remaining small pools should be drained together with the watershed in order to avoid a malaria outbreak near the mine, for which a cost of 120,000 lire was expected; protection and health care was to be provided for the workers engaged on these works;
6. Water supply in the Raška Basin had been entrusted to the Consortium for Land Transformation in Istria, which had been allocated a fifth of the money for the development of waterworks in the total amount of 22,300,000 lire, and the works were to start as soon as possible;
7. Amelioration of the Čepić lake was underway and the Consortium had already spent 600,000 lire for that purpose, and demanded further work on reinforcing the dam, etc., which needed to be done urgently.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of landscape, the mining town that was called *Liburnia* at the time of construction, but soon the name *Arsia* or Raša prevailed, arose in an area that had hitherto been swampy and plagued with malaria (at the newly regulated Krapan stream, that is, in the valley located largely between the stream and the Labin-Pula road).<sup>20</sup> The above report best exemplifies the scope of land reclamation and regulatory activities that were undertaken just before the construction of the miners' town in Raša or were in progress at that time, as well as the rather extensive state investments in the area, all with the aim of ensuring the highest possible and safest productivity, thus indirectly proving Raša's importance to the state at that moment.

As for the financing the construction of Raša, specifically its public buildings, several memoranda are preserved that were sent to the Provincial Governor of Istria, based in Pula. In the memorandum on the construction of

<sup>18</sup> When the Consortium for the Development of Raša was established in 1927, the Ministry of the Interior allocated 8,000,000 lire to it, but as the report shows, the total investment exceeded this sum by far. Cf. Ramšak, "Avtarkična strogost in preprosta italijanska duša...", p. 859.

<sup>19</sup> "Relazione a V[ostra] E[ccellenza] il Sottosegretario di Stato per la Bonifica Integrale sui lavori nel bacino dell'Arsa". HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

<sup>20</sup> Dario Alberi, *Istria: storia, arte, cultura* (Trieste: LINT; 1997), 1744-1748; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, 94.

sewage and lighting networks, 200,000 lire were foreseen for this purpose, which was, according to the law, the responsibility of the local municipality.<sup>21</sup> In another, similar document on the construction of the water supply network, as well as on building streets and squares in Raša, one finds a total cost estimate of 600,000 lire (200,000 for the waterworks and 400,000 for the squares and streets). As for the financing, the Ministry of Public Works was to cover a part of the waterworks, while the rest of it and other costs would be covered by the Municipality from the consumption tax.<sup>22</sup> The memorandum about the construction of school facilities is written in a similar spirit: it foresaw that the costs would be borne by the local self-management units, which for the school and the kindergarten were estimated to the total amount of 1,000,000 lire, whereby the Ministry of Public Works offered most of the financing with significant subsidization over a longer period of time, while to a lesser extent – with significantly less favourable loan conditions (6 % interest for 15 years) – the costs would be entirely borne by the Municipality.<sup>23</sup> So, if we add to the capital of 7,000,000 lire, which was at the disposal of the Independent Institute for the Construction of People's Houses in Eastern Istria, the above amounts for the *Casa Balilla* sports facility (260,000 lire), the construction of sewage and lighting network (200,000 lire), the waterworks, streets and squares (600,000 lire), as well as the construction of a school and a kindergarten (1,000,000 lire), it turns out that at least 9,060,000 lire would have been necessary to build all the private and public buildings, and the communal infrastructure, not counting the cost of landscaping (rainwater drainage, stream regulation and concreting, etc.), while Pulitzer Finali's calculation was 7,641,000 lire.

## Constructing the infrastructure

In November 1935, while Italy was isolated from the international community and felt an urgent need for independent energy resources in relation to the international market, which meant activating all its available domestic resources (including the maximum exploitation of the coal mines), the Minister of Public Works approved a special purpose loan for the construction of a workers' settlement with the supporting infrastructure in Raša, next to the new coal pit, with an annual interest of 3 %. The regime wanted the settlement to be called *Liburnia*, but apparently the distinguished Istrian historian

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<sup>21</sup> HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem.



Camillo De Franceschi intervened and presented some historical arguments to Mussolini about the inappropriateness of such a name, so it was called *Arsia*, i.e. Raša.<sup>24</sup> The sources do not say exactly who achieved the name change and with what arguments, but we certainly know who and when decided about the issue: it was Mussolini personally, between October 10 and 20, 1936, and the decision was announced to the Provincial Governor of Istria in Pula by the Head of the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior.<sup>25</sup> The project was entrusted to an architect from Trieste, Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, who designed a hundred public and residential buildings with a capacity of 4,000 inhabitants (with the possibility of expanding up to 6,000 inhabitants).<sup>26</sup>

The construction works began in April 1936 and were carried out by workers from Bergamo, and on August 7 that same year, Mussolini visited the site. One year after the beginning of the construction, the first workers started to move in.<sup>27</sup> In the presence of a number of officials and distinguished public personalities, including the Duke of Spoleto, while Giovanni Host Venturi, an adherent of D'Annunzio from Rijeka, who was at that time the State Undersecretary at the Ministry of Communications, officially inaugurated the settlement on November 4, 1937.<sup>28</sup> The events around the opening ceremony

<sup>24</sup> Milevoj, *Raša moje mladosti*, 26-27; Mahečić Radović, "Raša – grad-spomenik moderne arhitekture...", p. 117; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, p. 96.

<sup>25</sup> Letter with the Reg. No. 3001.V.10, written in Rome on October 10, 1936 by the Head of the Cabinet of the Minister of the Interior to the Provincial Governor of Istria in Pula. HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 273.

<sup>26</sup> Gustavo Pulitzer Finali (Trieste, 1887 – Genoa, 1967) was an architect, urban planner, and designer famous for his ship interiors between the two World Wars. Of Hungarian Jewish origins, son of a Viennese opera singer and a Hungarian timber merchant, he spoke German in the family, graduated in architecture in 1911 in Munich, travelled around Europe before World War I, worked in Brazil (during World War I to avoid mobilization) and lived briefly in London between the two World Wars. Pulitzer Finali designed the mining settlements of Raša in Istria and Carbonia in Sardinia (the latter in collaboration with Ignazio Guidi and Cesare Valle). From 1939 to 1947, he lived and worked in the USA, after which he moved to Genoa and again focused primarily on the interior design of ships. Cf. Antonio Rubbi, ed., *Arhitekti modernog pokreta u Istri: biografska građa* [Architects of modernist movement in Istria: Biographical sources] (Pula: Društvo arhitekata Istre, 1997), p. 21; Milevoj, *Raša moje mladosti*, pp. 25-26; Valušek, *Gustavo Pulitzer Finali*, pp. 5-6, 17; Rogina, "Raša je naša...", p. 123.

<sup>27</sup> The regime and publicity spoke about the construction of a total of twelve towns. Of the three mining settlements, Raša was the first, and Carbonia was built immediately afterwards, while *Pozzo Littorio*, or Podlabin, was built between 1940 and 1942. Mahečić Radović, "Gustavo Pulitzer Finali...", p. 33; Mahečić Radović, "Raša – grad-spomenik moderne arhitekture...", p. 119.

<sup>28</sup> Aimone di Savoia-Aosta, Duke of Spoleto (Turin, 1900 - Buenos Aires, 1948), at that time the commander of the naval base in Pula with the rank of a rear admiral, was in 1941 appointed King of the Independent State of Croatia by the name of Tomislav II, although never enthroned.

Giovanni Host Venturi (Rijeka, 1892 - Buenos Aires, 1980) was an irredentist born as Host-Ives-sich, but as an Italian volunteer in World War I, he took the surname Venturi (taking a second surname was a common practice among irredentist volunteers in order to avoid direct execution if captured and embarrassment to the rest of the family). In 1919, he founded the so-called "Rijeka Legion" (*Legione fiumana*) and invited Gabriele D'Annunzio to take over the city. He was a supporter

included a tour across Istria for the high state delegation.<sup>29</sup> And of course, the inauguration also received adequate media coverage, while the National Institute *Luce* from Rome organized the filming of the event and sent its cameraman to Raša.<sup>30</sup>

On October 27, 1937, the settlement was also declared a municipality. Understandably, the Municipality of Labin resisted the seizure of part of its territory.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, the process of forming the new municipality of Raša took its course, and as one might expect, the “Arsa” Company had a significant role in tracing its borderline. On May 26, 1937, it sent its first letter to the Provincial Administration of Istria with a list of geodetic points along which the border of the Municipality of Raša was to be created, and on June 7 that same year, the Company submitted to the Provincial Administration a corrected version of the border, with the changes indicated on the attached map, whereby additional 36 hectares of the territory of the Municipality of Labin and 7.5 hectares of Krapan were annexed to the Municipality of Raša.<sup>32</sup>

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of fascism and advocated the denationalization of Croats and Slovenes in Julian Venice. Among his numerous duties, he was the Minister of Communications from 1939 to 1943.

According to the programme of the “Inauguration of the Municipality of Raša” (*Inaugurazione del Comune di Arsia*), Host Venturi was to inaugurate the Municipality and the event was also to be attended by “His Royal Highness”. Cf. Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, 97; HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

<sup>29</sup> The program foresaw departing by cars from Trieste on November 4, 1937 at 7:00 am, arriving at 9:30 am in Pula, and the inauguration of a number of facilities (among others: the refurbished waterfront and parks, the civilian airport, the resort and beach at Stoja, the covered market, and the bus station), at 11:00 am departure for Raša, at 12:00 arrival in Raša and the inauguration of the Municipality and the waterworks, at 1:30 pm lunch, at 3:30 pm the awarding of workers, inauguration of the new coal pit, the sightseeing of land reclamation works, and finally, at 5:30 pm, departure by cars for Trieste. HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

<sup>30</sup> Antonio Carbonelli, in a letter (with the heading of *Partito Nazionale Fascista / Federazione Istriana dei Fasci di Combattimento*), dated in Pula, November 2, 1937, informed that he was to make a report for *La Stampa* in Turin, as well as for the radio journal of the E[nte] I[taliano per le] A[udizioni] R[adio], and asked for the passes to the ceremonial events in Pula and Raša on November 4, 1937. On October 25, 1937, the Director of the Stefani Agency in Rome wrote to the Provincial Governor of Istria, Oreste Cimatori, that the report on the festivities of November 4 had been entrusted to the agency's correspondent from Pula, Ruggero Pascucci. On October 23, the General Directorate of the National Institute *Luce* informed the Provincial Governor of Istria that it intended to send a cameraman with the task of cinematographic filming on November 4. HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

<sup>31</sup> Thus, a letter from the Municipality of Labin to the Ministry of the Interior dated January 20, 1937 outlined on four pages the merits of the Municipality of Labin in defending the Italian identity of the region and concluded that separating a part of its territory might have a negative impact in this regard, upon which the Ministry inquired about the opinion of the Provincial Governor of Istria in Pula.

Even before that, and more explicitly, the Management Council of the Workers' Society for Mutual Aid in Labin (*Società operaia di mutuo soccorso – Albona*) expressed its position against splitting the territory of the Municipality of Labin in a letter to Prime Minister Mussolini on October 26, 1936. HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

<sup>32</sup> Ibidem.

However, regarding the construction of the settlement, although the regime's publicity claimed that it would be completed within 547 days, it was still being built in 1938, when 500 workers were employed to this purpose.<sup>33</sup>

Looking at the plan of the settlement, one can see that the central position is occupied by a square with the church of St Barbara in the form of a mining wagon turned upside down, its belfry shaped like a miner's lamp, and the rectory. Other public and representative buildings were located there as well, and so was the football field (and the football club, which was briefly in the Third Italian League). To the northeast, in the direction of Labin, there was a smaller elite part of the settlement intended for the management (the *villette*), while to the west of the main square there were houses for the miners' families, each comprising four two-room apartments, as well as a hotel for single workers with four-bed rooms.<sup>34</sup> The houses had hot water supply and sewage, and all the facilities were equipped with furniture, specially designed for this purpose. There was also a telephone exchange with 130 lines, waterworks, public lighting, a 22-room staff hotel, and a 152-bed workers' hotel (in four-bed rooms), a heating plant, an ambulance, a post office, a school, a kindergarten, a swimming pool and other public offices, 22,000 square meters of streets and roads, a regulated stream, driveways, etc.<sup>35</sup> Of course, the whole complex seems to have been intended for workers and their families from other parts of the country, while workers from Labin and their families were not to be accommodated there.<sup>36</sup>

As for the architectural style of Raša, it would be an oversimplification to say that it was built in the fascist style (*Stile Littorio*), which was the "regime" style of construction during the 1930s, evident primarily in public and sports facilities throughout Italy (the sports centres *Opere nazionale Balilla*, *Case del fascio*, various public buildings). Pulitzer Finali's architectural designs did possess some elements of the architectural styles of that time (historicism, secession, modernism), but did not strictly adhere to any of them. As for Raša, it may display some aspects of the *Stile Littorio* (e.g. *Opera nazionale Balilla*), but also some architectural elements borrowed from the local, Istrian traditional architecture (such as porches of the *ballatoio* type or the arched openings in

<sup>33</sup> Milevoj, *Raša moje mladosti*, 29; Mahečić Radović, "Raša – grad-spomenik moderne arhitekture...", p. 113; Vorano, *Istarski ugljenokopi*, p. 97.

<sup>34</sup> Milevoj, *Raša moje mladosti*, pp. 26-27.

<sup>35</sup> Mahečić Radović, "Gustavo Pulitzer Finali...", p. 34; Rogina, "Raša je naša...", p. 123.

<sup>36</sup> The Mayor of Labin, in a letter sent on April 13, 1937 to the Commissioner for the Raša Affairs at the Provincial Administration, wrote that he had received complaints from a number of workers from Labin as they were refused accommodation in the settlement under construction, saying that they should be taken into account both because of poverty and because of having worked at the mine for years. HR-DAPA-55, Prefektura Istre u Puli [Prefecture of Istria in Pula], b. 307.

the porch of the church complex, reminiscent of Istrian town loggias and the porches of rural churches), and one should also mention the characteristic features intended to make the settlement appealing to the miners' population for which it was built (church in the form of an overturned wagon, with an interior reminiscent of the interior of a mine and a belfry shaped as a miner's lamp), as well as some elements (such as round windows) borrowed from ship-building, which was the architect's primary area of work.<sup>37</sup>

The most specific feature is certainly Raša's main square, its photographs evoking the atmosphere of estrangement known from paintings by Giorgio de Chirico, which has inspired the architects and art historians writing about Raša more than any other aspect. They have called it "a place that connects and relates the two divided cities," and "an empty square, dehumanized (in terms of absence of people), a framework resembling a stage set," "a space of negatives, a void in the midst of a volume," and so on, to which one may add a certain parallelism with the working world of miners of that time, and man's alienation from labour during the period when the Istrian coal mines were at the peak of exploitation, i.e. from World War I to the socialist times: from the *Ambinden* (a method of hanging or punishing miners during World War I) over the *Bedeaux* method for determining the working norm, which the supervisors and the administration seem to have abused blatantly against the workers (according to some indicators, it was practiced in Raša from the late 1920), to the concept of shock labour or Stakhanovism in its Yugoslav variant (using the figure of miner Alija Sirotanović).<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

According to the above, and based on the scholarly literature and an analysis of archival sources, it can be concluded that the workers' settlement of *Arsia* or Raša was built primarily to increase the number of workers at the local mines and boost the production of coal, and since the domicile workforce was not enough, miners had to be brought from other parts of Italy. But although the village of Raša was built with this purpose in mind, it had particularly high infrastructure standards with regard to other contemporaneous settlements of this type (with hot water, a heating plant, sports fields, a kindergarten, a cinema, a theatre hall, etc.). Thus, Raša was created as an investment in mining,

<sup>37</sup> Valušek, *Gustavo Pulitzer Finali*, pp. 6-11.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp.8, 13; Andrea Matošević, "Maksimalizacija proizvodnje i dehumanizacija rada: *Ambinden*, *Bedeaux*, *stahanovizam* (znanstveni) sistemi organizacije rada" [Maximization of production and dehumanization of labour: *Ambinden*, *Bedeaux*, and *Stakhanovism* as (scientific) systems of work organization], in *Raša: 28. veljače 1940*. (Raša: *Arsia Art*, 2009), pp. 17-29.

although the company was increasingly taking on features of a state-owned enterprise and the totalitarian regime was inclined to claim all the merits and everything that was considered a success.

As for the architectural style, it would be an oversimplification to say that it was built in the fascist style (*Stile Littorio*). Specifically, it features elements of traditional local and Mediterranean architecture (such as loggias or porches of the *ballatoio* type on apartment houses), features of other European architectural styles of the time (Secession and modernism), as well as original architectural solutions characteristic of the mining profession (manifest in the form of the church and the belfry). Some of the stylistic features can be related with the specialty of architect Gustavo Pulitzer Finali, renowned as a designer of ship interiors (both civilian and wartime, produced in Trieste and Monfalcone between the two World Wars). It is interesting to note that, although he was not one of the creators or leading architects of the fascist style, Pulitzer Finali tried out urban planning in Raša for the first time, and he was also engaged in the initial planning stages of Carbonia. This engagement is likely to have resulted from his friendship with Guido Segre, President of the *Azienda carboni italiani* company, with whom he was associated by their common religious background and a liberal spirit, averse to all forms of discrimination by the regime.

Raša is “undoubtedly one of the most significant achievements of modernist architecture in Istria today.”<sup>39</sup> With this project, Gustavo Pulitzer Finali – as Krešimir Rogina has written – “endowed Croatian architecture with one of the most original and complete sequences we still have to evaluate accordingly.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Mahečić Radović, “Raša – grad-spomenik moderne arhitekture...”, p. 124.

<sup>40</sup> Rogina, “Raša je naša...”, p. 123.

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