

A CONCRETE MEMORY BETWEEN YUGOSLAVIA AND ITALY: THE BARLETTA'S MEMORIAL OSSUARY OF FALLEN YUGOSLAV PARTISANS

ABSTRACT

Memorial monuments from the Socialist Yugoslav era have recently gained international attention. These monuments, local expression of the International Modernism of the latter half of the twentieth century, play a key role in the construction of historical and collective memory. Among them stands the Memorial Ossuary to the Fallen Yugoslav Soldiers, built in Barletta in 1970: a circular complex designed by sculptor Dušan Džamonja characterized by concrete pillars, each standing over 11 meters tall. This monument exemplifies how Italy has embraced the Yugoslavian *Monuments to the People's Liberation War* phenomenon, symbolizing the collaborative spirit between Italy and Yugoslavia after World War II. Rooted in diplomatic history, the monument emerged from agreements addressing the repatriation of fallen soldiers' remains, setting a precedent for related sites like the Gonars Memorial, the Sansepolcro Memorial, and the Prima Porta Memorial. Today, we are facing pressing challenges in the preservation of these monuments. Structural decay and safety concerns prompt critical discussions on how best to approach their conservation. The symbolic significance as sites of memory is juxtaposed with the urgent need for preservation, underscoring the delicate balance between honouring the past and safeguarding the future.

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KEY WORDS

SPOMENIK
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The Memorial Ossuary to the Fallen Yugoslav Soldiers in Barletta, Italy, erected in 1970, stands as a symbol of diplomatic collaboration and artistic expression. Designed by Dušan Džamonja, this monument commemorates the sacrifices of those who perished in World War II and previous conflicts, embodying a spirit of unity between Italy and Yugoslavia. However, structural challenges now threaten its integrity, prompting a renewed call for preservation efforts and international dialogue to ensure its enduring legacy.

1. DIPLOMATIC FOUNDATIONS AND COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENTS

The Memorial Ossuary to the Fallen Yugoslav Soldiers, built in Barletta in 1970, stands as a testament to the renew, unifying *Monuments to the People's Liberation War* culture that swept through neighbouring Yugoslavia. This monumental structure symbolizes the tangible manifestation of the strong collaborative bond established between Italy and Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the Second World War.

The shared commitment to preserving the memory of recent historical events and honouring the soldiers who sacrificed their lives is deeply rooted in a more complex diplomatic context, spanning from the 1950s all the way through the 1970s.

After the end of the Second World War, Italy and Yugoslavia still struggled with the unresolved issue of borders and the 'Trieste question'. The London Memorandum of Understanding of 5 October 1954 marked the first sign of relaxation between the two countries. This memorandum, signed by the ministers of the United States, United Kingdom, Italy, and Yugoslavia, effectively dissolved the Free Territory of Trieste, signifying the formal transfer of civilian administration to neighbouring Italy and Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, disputes over the demarcation line and territorial claims persisted from both sides. These tensions were ultimately resolved with the signing of the bilateral Treaty of Osimo in November 1975 between Italy and Yugoslavia, which definitively settled any existing or prospective claims by dividing the Free Territory of Trieste between the two nations.

Starting from 1960, a series of agreements were signed between Italy and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to address the matter of the remains of citizens who had fallen on foreign soil. This collaborative effort sought to address the soldiers who had bravely fought during the liberation war against the invading Nazi-Fascist forces, as well as those who had perished in previous conflicts.

The significance of this collaboration extended beyond mere logistical considerations. It underscored a joint commitment to preserving the memory of the fallen heroes, acknowledging the historical context, and fostering a sense of solidarity between the two nations.

In this new atmosphere, the first agreement was reached through an exchange of notes on 12 February 1960. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, in a gesture of diplomatic cooperation, formally approved the request made by the Government of Italy to exhume, transfer, and repatriate the remains of Italian soldiers who had sacrificed their lives on Yugoslav soil during the tumultuous period of the Second World War. The terms of this agreement, valid for a three-year period, applied equally to the Italian government, which, under the same conditions, committed to allowing the exhumation and transportation of the bodies of Yugoslavs who perished or died and were buried during the Second World War in Italy, should the Yugoslav government request it.

In 1963, Italy witnessed a significant political shift with the election of its first centre-left government led by the Christian Democrat Aldo Moro and supported by the Socialist Party, which allowed for an intense dialogue between Italy and Yugoslavia aimed at fulfilling their mutual commitment, ultimately resulting in the expansion of the agreement's scope in the following year. Indeed, on 15 April 1964, the original agreement was extended for an additional five years.

Furthermore, it was agreed that the Yugoslav government would take on the responsibility of permanently relocating cemeteries and graves of fallen and deceased fighters from the Yugoslav People's Liberation War, as well as Yugoslavs who had fallen in previous conflicts on Italian territory. For this purpose, the Government of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia will undertake the construction of three commemorative ossuaries in cities designated by the competent Italian authorities. It is within this broader diplomatic framework that the Ossuary in Barletta emerges not merely as a physical monument but as a symbolic bridge connecting the two nations through the threads of remembrance and historical acknowledgement.

Within the socio-political landscape of the era, the conception and implementation of this initiative appear to have been regarded as a strategic and propitious opportunity to disseminate the intrinsic aspects of Yugoslav culture and identity beyond national borders, specifically within the context of a Western nation. Such an effort assumes heightened significance, given the recent liberation of Yugoslavia from the pervasive influence of the Soviet Union, marking an epochal moment that decisively steered the nation towards autonomy and self-definition.

In addition, it is noteworthy to highlight that the Italian Government made a commitment to the exhaustive disclosure of all relevant information about the concentration camps and sites housing Yugoslav refugees, prisoners of war, detainees, and internees in the midst of the upheavals characterizing the Second World War era. This included not only the meticulous provision of name lists but also the documentation of burial sites for all individuals who succumbed to the tragic consequences of that historical conflict.

In the aftermath of fascism's fall in southern Italy, in Apulia, some makeshift hospitals and refugee camps were set up, where thousands of Yugoslavs, civilians and partisans of the Overseas Brigades arrived wounded from various regions of the Federation, which were then under Nazi-fascist occupation. Those who managed to recover were repatriated, while others were buried in the northwest part of the Barletta cemetery. This was the area of 2,300 square meters that the municipal council of Barletta, led by the Christian Democratic mayor Michele Morelli, on 30 December 1967, granted for use to the Yugoslav government, with the aim of giving dignified burial to the bodies already present. The act of granting the use of the surface was formalized in Rome on 10 January 1968 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This crucial agreement established that the Government of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, in a perpetual commitment, would consecrate part of the cemetery of Barletta as the permanent resting place for the remains of Yugoslav citizens who had valiantly succumbed during the tumultuous years of the war, interred in Italy between 1941 and 1945. Additionally, this accord extended its reach to the interred bodies of the members of the Serbian Army, buried in Italy between 1916 and 1918. Within the framework of this protocol, it was established that the responsibility for caretaking, maintenance, and preservation of the Ossuary would be entrusted to the Yugoslav Embassy in the city of Rome. On 25 July 1969, the agreements between the two governments were renewed. A supplementary note was issued to reaffirm the existing protocols for an additional five-year period, extending the collaborative efforts.



FIGURE 1: Presentation brochures of the ossuaries erected in Italy

This extension proved useful in easing further decision-making processes and subsequently facilitating the construction of additional Ossuaries across Italy. [Figure 1]

One of these new monuments was the Gonars Memorial, designed by sculptor Miodrag Zivkovic. Unveiled on 10 December 1973, this Memorial now stands as a repository, cradling the sacred remains of 471 Slavs who endured the hardships of captivity in prison camps scattered across northern Italy.

Similarly, another noteworthy contribution to the landscape of remembrance came with the creation of the Sansepolcro Memorial in the province of Arezzo. Designed by the sculptor Jovan Kratochvil, this Memorial was inaugurated on 15 December 1973. Today, it serves as a solemn sanctuary housing 446 urns, each holding the remains of those who tragically lost their lives in the Renicci concentration camp.

The most recent addition, the Prima Porta Memorial, situated in the vicinity of Rome, was inaugurated on 22 September 1978. Functioning as a reverential resting place, this Memorial pays homage to the memory of 61 Yugoslav soldiers who, having been captured by the Italian Army during the Balkan military operations, lost their lives in prison camps scattered across diverse areas of Lazio and on the islands of Ponza, Pianosa, and Elba.

The Memorial Ossuary, completed in Barletta in 1970, was not only the first monument of its kind but also the largest among the four Yugoslavian Memorials built in Italy. Approximately 800 Yugoslav fighters who lost their lives in Southern Italy and on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia found their final resting place within its walls. Many of these soldiers, having sustained injuries in the battles against the Axis powers in the Balkans, were transported to the southern regions of Italy by British flights and ships. Since 1944, this area has served as a hub for military hospitals dedicated to the care of the injured.

2. BUILDING THE MEMORIAL OSSUARY IN BARLETTA

In 1968, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia launched a competition for the construction of the Memorial. This competition invited Yugoslav artists and architects, providing them with the freedom to express their designs and ideas for monuments and memorial sites without constraints. The competition was won by the sculptor Dušan Džamonja together with the engineer architect Hildegard Auf-Franić with project No. 11570. [Figure 2]

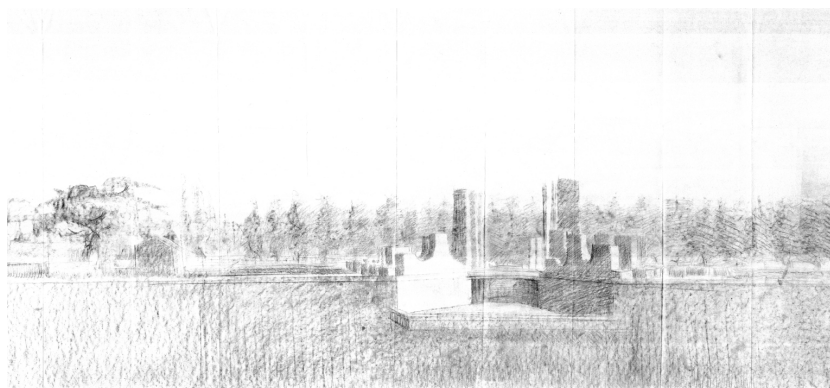


FIGURE 2: Sketch of the project autographed by the author

Hailing originally from Strumica, Macedonia, Džamonja had already achieved international acclaim since the early 1950s for his commemorative sculptures in London and at the Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps. Additionally, he represented Yugoslavia at the 1960 Venice Biennale, highlighting his artistic prowess on a global stage. However, it was in 1967 that he experienced a significant breakthrough in the scale of his works with the creation of the “Monument to the Revolution of the People of Moslavina” in Podgarić, Croatia.”

Within a few months, all the necessary procedures and authorizations for the construction of the commemorative ossuary for the Yugoslavs who fell on the territory of the Italian Republic during the Second World War were completed, thanks to the commitment of the Yugoslav government, the Mayor of Barletta Morelli, and the Italian Ministry of Defense - specifically the General Commissariat for Honors to Fallen of War, who promptly sent the preliminary project to the Municipality of Barletta. This project included plans, elevations and sections, along with photographs of a wooden model. [Figure 3] Additionally, a comprehensive description of the works, accompanied by a detailed bill listing the necessary materials and their quantities, was provided. The first two months of 1969 were dedicated to securing a favourable opinion from the Superintendency of Monuments and Galleries of Puglia, a necessary step in the process. The execution of the Yugoslav war memorial project was entrusted to the local construction company Calò Giacomo di Domenico under the supervision of engineer Aldo Maria Palmiotti.

The drawings were completed in April 1969, and the executive project, drafted and signed by Dušan Džamonja, Hildegard Auf-Franić, and Miljenko Simić, along with the static report jointly signed by engineer Aldo Maria Palmiotti and the construction company was deposited at the prefecture of Bari on 21 May 1969. [Figure 4]

FIGURE 3: Photograph of the wooden model created for the National Design Competition



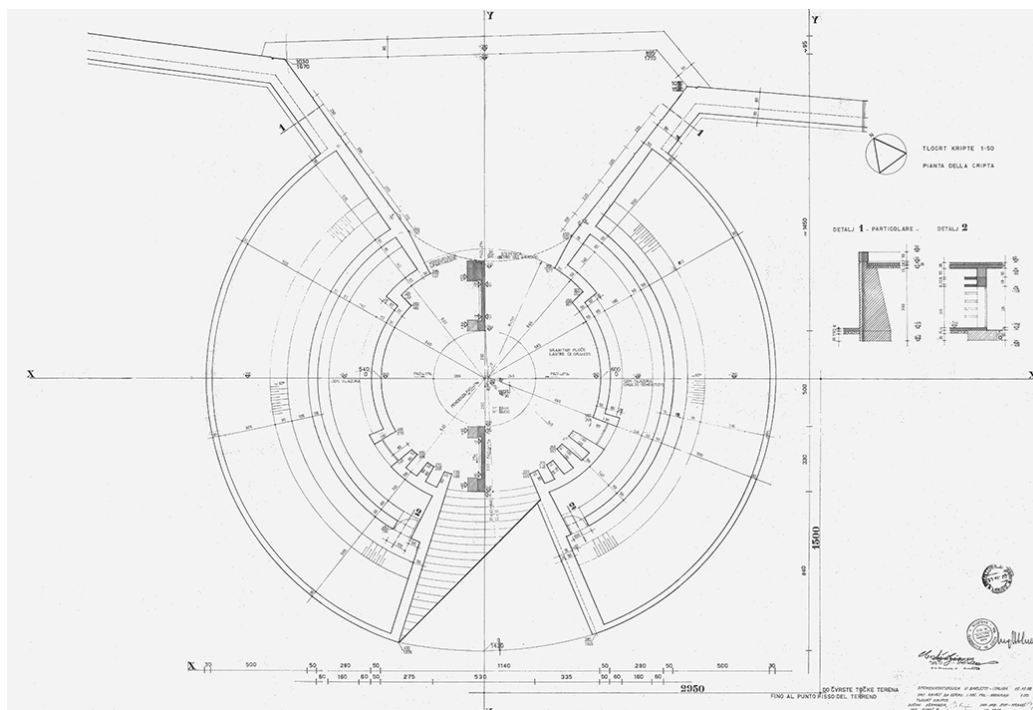


FIGURE 4: Executive project of the crypt's floor plan

The construction of the monument began on 30 September 1969 and was closely followed by the municipal administration, eager to fulfil the agreements made with Yugoslavia to give a dignified burial to the fallen scattered throughout the Italian peninsula. Within a few months, it was completed by the local company Calò Giacomo di Domenico, based on Džamonja's project, with construction supervision entrusted to Palmiotti at the expense of the Yugoslav government. In May 1970, the Italian engineer and the construction company jointly signed a structural report in which they affirmed that the sizing and stresses of the reinforced concrete works complied with the standards outlined in the Royal Decree of 16 November 1939. On the days of 10 and 11 June of the same year, engineer Carlo Savella conducted a load test on the cantilevered portion of the floor above the crypt and a sclerometric examination of the concretes employed in the pillars. Just eight months after the beginning of the works, on 12 June 1970, the engineer prepared and submitted the Certificate of Successful Testing to the Prefecture of Bari, attesting to the successful completion of the monument. On 4 July 1970, the solemn inauguration of the Ossuary took place in Barletta. The event was attended by Marjan Cvetković, a member of the Yugoslav Federal Council, the highest Italian officials, and a

large Yugoslav delegation, including relatives of the deceased fighters. During the ceremony, metal caskets containing the remains of 825 victims, exhumed from various gravesites in southern and insular Italy, were placed inside the crypt, while the bronze plaques of the portals were engraved with the names of another 463 partisans, whose remains had not been found, bringing the total to 1,288 fallen. [Figure 5]



FIGURE 5: Interior of the crypt with urns containing the remains of fallen partisans

On the day of the Memorial's inauguration, a deeply moving moment unfolded as the mother of a fallen fighter took the floor before the assembled attendees. Her heartfelt speech, later echoed in newspapers, sums up the profound essence and significance of the monuments, elevating them beyond mere physical structure to embody the very essence of freedom and the worship of historical events and protagonists:

'My children, and you, my son! In this solemn assembly, your mother takes pride in having given her life to who sacrificed his for the Homeland. I stand proud and resolute, even as I face this imposing monument instead of your living presence. You have sacrificed yourself for a new life, a new generation, and a new frontier, allowing me to bear my mother pain. My son, your mother stands here now, proud of you. Though physically alone, I am not truly alone, for I am accompanied by the new generations born from the freedom for which you laid down your life.'

3. A CONCRETE SYMBOL

Džamonja conceived the Yugoslav war memorial in Barletta as an architectural complex with a strong landscape value and in consideration of its relationship to the surrounding territory, given that the plot assigned for the work stands 400 meters from the coastline on a promontory towards the Adriatic Sea, whose position is ideal for dominating the coast and for an unhindered view of the Homeland. [Figure 6] In the comprehensive document titled ‘Spatial, Ideal, and Technical Argumentation of Project 11570’ submitted to accompany the preliminary project forwarded to the Italian Ministry of Defense, Džamonja indicated that *‘the full appreciation of the Memorial Ossuary may be hindered from the access area’* because access to the area was limited to a road to the west and one to the south, the latter planted with tall cypress trees on one side, which prevented a complete view of the commemorative ossuary from the cemetery side. Therefore, he developed his idea that *‘the true essence of the monumental complex can only be fully grasped when experienced up close’*, relying on the direct experience of the monumental complex and the fact that the monument was visible from the sea. Therefore, the tree barrier was proposed to be retained but made symmetrical. So, the designer suggested to the Barletta municipality to add a new row of trees on the empty side and complete the existing one with some trees of the same species. In this way, the trees will act as a backdrop, enhancing the aesthetic appeal of the surroundings and *‘facilitating the seamless integration of the memorial into the urban landscape [...] and achieving a harmonious visual composition of the monumental complex’*. [Figure 7]

All these Džamonja’s meticulous considerations reveal a deep understanding of the interplay between the Memorial and its context. By addressing access challenges and proposing solutions for optimal visual integration, the artist demonstrates a commitment to creating a monument that not only stands as a testament to historical significance but also engages with its environment in a meaningful and aesthetically pleasing manner.

The construction process took place during the winter months between 1969 and 1970, following a meticulous sequence of phases. It began with a preparatory excavation phase for the creation of the basement of the crypt, followed by reinforced concrete pours for both the foundations and the retaining perimeter of the crypt. Rebar-laying phases for the terrace were completed during the colder months. All these crucial steps are well-documented through site photos discovered in later investigations, offering valuable insights into the craftsmanship and dedication invested in the project.



FIGURE 6: Seaside view from the Ossuary



FIGURE 7: View of the Ossuary from the seaside

Upon completion of the crypt's basement floor, the construction seamlessly progressed to the next significant step—the installation of the roof slab positioned at the cemetery level. This essential element not only provided protection for the crypt but also served as the base from which the 22 vertical reinforced concrete elements would later extend. These elements stood as distinctive features of the Memorial, contributing to its unique architectural identity.

Deviation from the originally presented drawings became evident during the realization phase. Instead of the envisaged 24 slabs, the finished Memorial Ossuary featured only 22. This adjustment aimed to achieve a greater width for the six access paths leading to the central oculus. Additionally, logistical considerations at the construction site played a role in the absence of these two elements. The limited available space between the slabs posed practical challenges for the installation and subsequent removal of the scaffolding, as well as the associated concrete casting containment structures and wooden formwork. The compact nature of the space would have made these tasks cumbersome, potentially hindering the smooth execution of the construction process. As a result of this change in symmetry, an additional cubic element was created and another one was omitted in the most peripheral northern part of the complex.

Moreover, without knowing the reasons, two expansion joints weren't made in the castings of parapets that overlook the terrace. The two missing joints, initially included in the preliminary drawings of the project, were strategically located precisely at the meeting point between the circular walls of the crypt and the retaining walls bordering the terrace facing the sea. This intersection represented a crucial point in the overall structural dynamics of the building, further emphasizing the complexities involved. This break in the continuity of the parapets tells us of a deep understanding on the part of Džamonja and his team of the limitations and behaviours of the construction materials used. However, this idea was probably not fully understood by the construction company during the realization phase.

Džamonja opted for exposed reinforced concrete throughout the structure because he considered it a modern material, more cost-effective than marble and granite, suitable for creating large-scale works, capable of blending well with the environment in which the monument was placed, and capable of expressing the memory of the victims to the fullest. The Ossuary stretches 70 meters long and 20 meters wide and is structured on two levels with a total height of 11 meters. Access to the monument and the pathways throughout the entire complex is barrier-free, except for the crypt and the terrace overlooking the sea, whose entrance is through the granite staircase starting from the cemetery avenue in front of the Ossuary.

The conceptual essence of the project was conveyed through the symbolic use of sepulchral elements. This symbolic narrative unfolded on Level 0, where 22 pillars, like tombstones, emanate from the periphery, orchestrating a spatial rhythm that converges towards the heart of the composition.

This arrangement creates a circular embrace, standing as a guard over the opening of the crypt atrium.

These burial elements are meticulously organized in a radial formation, converging around the central fulcrum marked by an oculus that opens to the crypt floor. At their peak of height and solemnity, the monumental steles command the centre of the composition. From this focal point, they begin alternating shapes—curved and straight—evoking a rhythmic and purposeful progression. As this arrangement unfolds, the steles gradually diminish in scale, transitioning from the grandeur of the central area to a more fragmented arrangement towards the outer boundaries of the site. This intentional diminution captures a sense of solemnity, creating the impression of a gradual and contemplative retreat. The composition, with its rhythmic pacing of monolithic concrete blocks, evokes the notion of a slow and dignified procession. It conjures images of austere figures advancing from a distant horizon, converging in silent unity at the fulcrum of the ossuary. This visual metaphor symbolizes a journey—representing a collective pilgrimage from various sites across Italy where Yugoslav soldiers had fallen and been buried. The monument’s design seems to express the aspiration to accompany these fallen soldiers and ultimately unite them in a single, monumental dedication.

Level -1 hosts the crypt, located entirely under the surface of the ground. It serves as a sacred repository for the urns containing the remains of Yugoslav fighters. The level is designed with two circular wings ending in a breathtaking vista—a magnificent terrace that opens up to a panoramic view of the sea.

Descending to Level -1, where contemplation reaches its apex, visitors are guided by a granite staircase that mirrors the flooring. In the heart of this level, the central focal point is marked by a slightly elliptical basin covered with small red mosaic tiles—a symbol evoking the profound sacrifice of the fallen, with each tile embodying a drop of their blood. This space of remembrance is defined by two wings of curved walls, lined with three rows of bronze rectangular elements each, meticulously arranged to evoke a sense of order and solemnity. The strict alignment of these bronze elements imparts a powerful visual rhythm to the space, underscoring the gravity and reverence that permeate this sacred area of reflection.

The two distinct wings are enclosed by two imposing bronze portals that bear profound significance: they serve as monumental canvases, meticulously embossed with the names of the fallen and missing Yugoslavs in Italy, perpetuating their memory for generations to come. Upon one of the doors, an inscription unfolds: *‘Pali i umrli u južnoj Italiji’* (Fallen and died in southern

Italy), a solemn declaration that encapsulates the sacrifice and valour of those who laid down their lives on the southern Italian soil. Conversely, the second door bears the inscription: *'Nestali na teritoriji južne Italije'* (Missing in the territory of southern Italy), a sombre acknowledgement of those whose fate remains unknown, evoking a sense of longing and remembrance for the individuals who disappeared in the course of their duty.

The deliberate pursuit of a *'psychosomatic effect'* emerges as a fundamental characteristic underlying the genesis of the author's projects. It is possible to find another noticeable example that shows Džamonja's artistic philosophy in the creation of the 'Monument to the Revolution on Mount Kozara' in Bosnia and Herzegovina, built in 1972. The design of this monument was purposefully crafted to induce a feeling of discomfort and anxiety when entering the narrow space inside. The spatial experience was planned to parallel the harrowing situation of encirclement faced by the population and partisans in 1942 during the Nazi army's siege.

4. STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND MAINTENANCE CHALLENGES

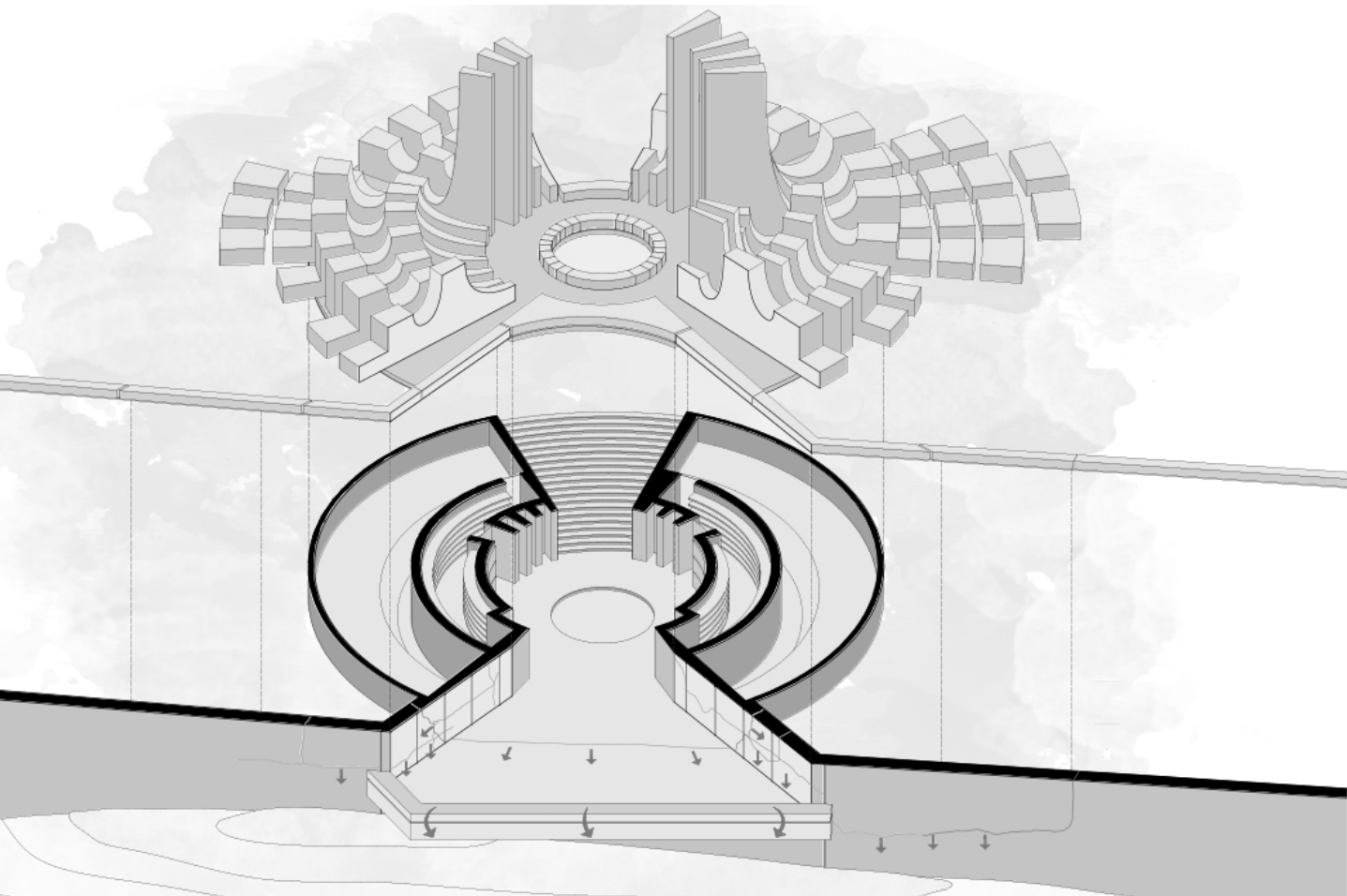
According to documents found in the archives of Barletta, just three years after the completion of the complex, the need for maintenance works had already become apparent. The construction company Calò, involved in the initial construction of the Ossuary was asked to submit an offer including tasks such as *'painting the flagpoles after scraping them and application of antirust'*, along with a more generic *'restoration of some concrete blocks'*. Further documentation, dated June 1988, reveals that Architect Giuseppe Cej, operating from the studio based in Gorizia, compiled a report certifying an ordinary maintenance intervention. This report included a description of the works carried out, comprising the execution of waterproofing for the covering slabs of the sepulchre, the creation of channels to facilitate rainwater discharge, restoration of damaged or detaching concrete components, and the application of a protective coating with colourless silicone paint on the concrete partitions forming the sculptural structure.

On 29 November 2017, a communication from the Maintenance Sector of the Municipality of Barletta to the Ministry of Defense – General Commissariat for Honors to Fallen of War announced the closure of the Ossuary Monument to the public. The accompanying report expressed deep concerns, outlining that the complex *'faces severe static problems due to its construction atop a cliff and it is split in half due to landslide subsidence [...], for safety reasons, a fence has been installed around the compromised peripheral areas now protected by a too-low retaining wall on the cliff side'*.



FIGURE 8: Photograph of the construction site by Giacomo Calò Company

FIGURE 9: Axonometric section of the Ossuary illustrating the ongoing collapse mechanisms of the terrace



To better understand the terrace's ongoing collapse mechanism, it was necessary to compare the structure of the Ossuary with the composition of the soil on which it was built. From previous studies and analysis of the collected sample, it was possible to determine that the land is composed of sand. In fact, the Ossuary is located 400 meters from the coastline and above an embankment. The geological model of the terrace's area provides sediments consisting of fine sands, limestone, silt, and clays typical of coastal environments. Furthermore, the material produced by the excavation of the volume subsequently occupied by the crypt, was accumulated on the embankment on which the terrace rests. This may have resulted in a compaction of the soil over time, due to the great weight of the new structure.

Another crucial point in the comprehension of the structure is represented by the archival photographs taken by the construction company during the Ossuary's construction. [Figure 8] These visual records played a key role in validating the close correlation between the identified damages observed during the survey and the reinforced concrete structure. Notably, the fracture that split the terrace facing the sea into two distinct parts was found to precisely coincide with a resumption of the concrete casting on the floor. This fracture then extends into the vertical walls, matching a narrowing of the masonry section between the ground and the crypt. [Figure 9]

The complex's proximity to the sea renders it highly susceptible to the deleterious effects of salts. Consequently, the reinforcement embedded within the concrete undergoes localized corrosive action, particularly in the form of pitting induced by chlorides. Adding to this vulnerability, a huge portion of the surfaces is exposed to the rigours of weather, enduring cyclical freeze/thaw cycles, and integrated into an urban context. The exposure to so many different elements further increases the susceptibility of the structure to the phenomenon of carbonation." [Figure 10]

5. PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF DUŠAN DŽAMONJA'S MEMORIAL

The enduring legacy of Dušan Džamonja finds expression in a foreign land through his multifaceted creation that seamlessly blends art, landscape, and architecture, all encapsulated in the resilient medium of reinforced concrete. However, after more than five decades, the symbolic values of this memorial space clash with significant challenges concerning material decay and secure accessibility. Currently, the site is closed to the public due to structural and safety concerns that endanger the Memorial's image and perception and cast a shadow over its potential future transmission.

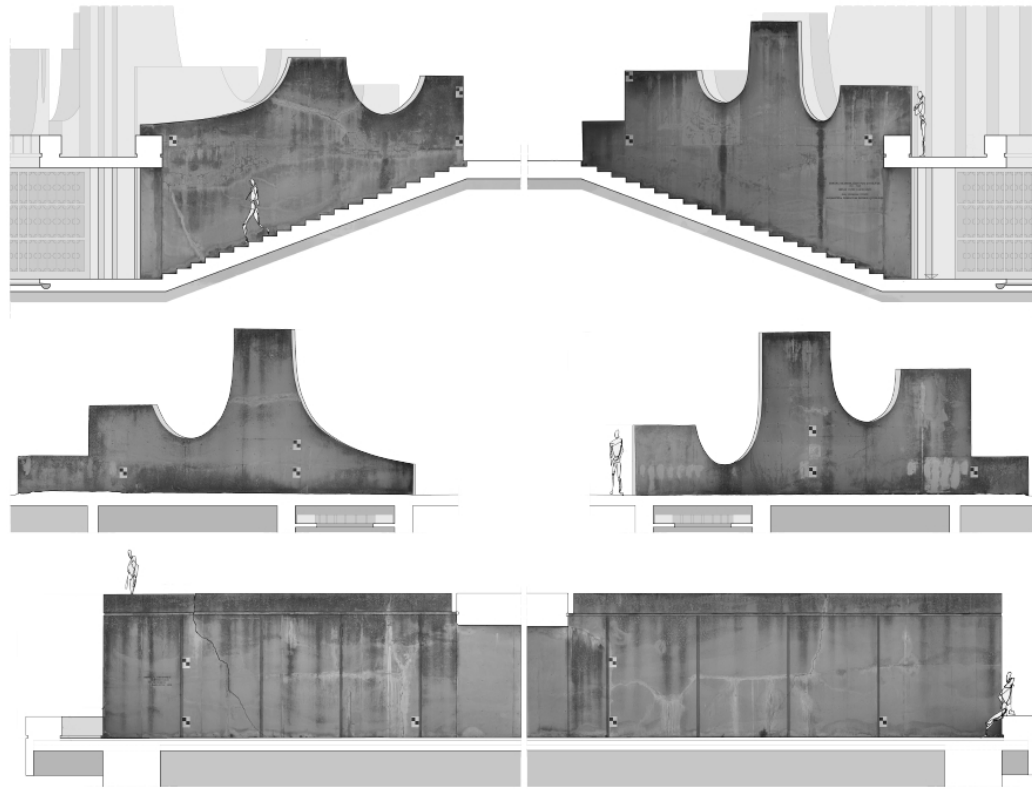


FIGURE 10: Reinforced concrete elevations

In the absence of effective protective measures—indeed, according to the Italian Code of Cultural and Landscape Heritage (Italian Legislative Decree 42/2004), only objects created more than 70 years ago by authors who are no longer alive can be declared of cultural interest—the study of archival documentation plays a significant role. This analytical tool becomes an invaluable resource, offering insights into the genesis, evolution, and challenges faced by the monument over time.

Unfortunately, it remains unclear who should assume responsibility for the maintenance of the monument. As previously noted, the Protocol concerning the erection and maintenance of an Ossuary for Yugoslav soldiers who died in Italy during the last war stipulated that all maintenance and conservation expenses for the Ossuary were the responsibility of the Federal Government of Yugoslavia. However, after the dissolution of the Federation and the birth of independent republics, it is not so simple to decide who is now responsible for the care and protection of the monument in Barletta. According to statements from some Serbian diplomats, the Republic of Serbia, as it did not exit the Federation like the other republics, would have inherited all the treaties and international agreements of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Therefore, it would be Belgrade's responsibility to maintain the

monument. Despite various requests from local associations to the municipal administration, nothing seems to be moving forward. Even if Serbia were now responsible for the building, the remains preserved there are not only of Serbian partisans. The other republics should also show interest in allowing their young fighters to continue their rest and for the Ossuary to withstand the passage of history.

Dušan Džamonja passed away in 2009, perhaps unaware that his great Memorial had already undergone such rapid degradation. However, he stated, *'the victim is a victim, a tortured or murdered person, regardless of any political, religious, or national affiliation, for me there is no difference'*. It is with this spirit that all efforts should converge to save the Ossuary in Barletta from oblivion and destruction.

The current debate on the conservation of built heritage mainly focuses on the importance of finding new functions and modern uses to reactivate the mechanisms of care and maintenance necessary to ensure its preservation over time.

However, such an approach is not essential when considering monuments like the Barletta Ossuary, where sculptural and architectural elements blend seamlessly. Instead, drawing attention back to this monument and others with the same strong symbolic and testimonial character requires the seemingly simple exercise of memory, sometimes open to controversial or distorted interpretations. For this reason, it is imperative to ensure that the transmission of remembrance passes through a deep understanding and knowledge of these buildings, thus preserving their cultural and historical significance within the community. This not only ensures their physical preservation but also their enduring legacy for future generations.

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State Archive of Bari, Fund Supervision of Environmental Assets Barletta – folder 173. Drawings of project 11570. Photo of the model. Description of the works with a list of materials for the construction of the Memorial Ossuary in Barletta

State Archive of Bari, Fund Supervision of Environmental Assets Barletta – folder 176, file 40. Spatial, ideal, and technical argumentation of project 11570 for the Memorial Ossuary of Yugoslav Soldiers who fell and died on the territory of the Italian Republic in the Second World War and in previous wars, in Barletta/Bari area

NOTES

- 1 ONU, Vol. 1466, n.24848. *Traite pour la delimitation de la frontiere pour la partie non indiquee comme telle dans le Traite de paix du 10 fevrier 1947 (avec annexes, echanges de lettres et acte final). Signe a Osimo (Ancona) le 10 novembre 1975.*
- 2 ONU, Vol. 379, n.5434. *Scambio di note per la traslazione delle salme dei militari italiani e jugoslavi deceduti rispettivamente in Jugoslavia e in Italia durante la Seconda guerra mondiale.*
- 3 ONU, Vol. 379, n.5434. *Scambio di note relativo alla costruzione in Italia di n. 3 ossari per le salme dei militari jugoslavi morti combattendo sul suolo italiano durante la Seconda guerra mondiale e le guerre precedenti.*
- 4 Biblioteca Comunale “Sabino Loffredo” di Barletta, Op. 23/191. *Presentation booklet of the commemorative ossuary of the Yugoslav fighters who fell and died in the territory of southern Italy and the islands during the Second World War and during other wars.*
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