

**LEGENDA**

- 1 TOWN CONCEPT MODEL
- 2 A FOREST IN THE CITY - NOVA GORICA AS A BOTANICAL GARDEN
- 3 FOUNDATION STONE AND YOUTH WORK BRIGADES
- 4 PARK HOTEL AND THE FIRST CITY PROMENADE
- 5 OLD »FRNAŽA« (BRICKYARD) BUILDING
- 6 FORMER CEMETERY
- 7 SHOPPING CENTRE
- 8 FORMER ARGONAVTI – NOWADAY'S PERLA
- 9 NEW NEIGHBORHOOD
- 10 EUROPE SQUARE
- 11 THE GRAVE OF THE LAST KING OF FRANCE
- 12 VILLA OF AN ARCHITECT WHO BUILT PALACES FOR THE EGYPTIAN ELITE

**TRAIL LENGTH:**

- 1-8: 1,6 km (20 min walk)
- 1-10: 3,6 km (45 min walk)
- 1-12: 5,8 km (75 min walk)

**INFORMATION:**

Tourist Board – Tourist Information Centre Nova Gorica  
 Delpinova ulica 18b  
 SI-5000 Nova Gorica, Slovenia  
 T: +386 5 330 46 00  
 E: tzticng@siol.net  
 www.novagorica-turizem.com



# NOVA GORICA

## A TRAIL THROUGH THE HISTORY OF THE YOUNG TOWN

from a socialist display window for the West to the European Union

*Nova Gorica*  
 New adventures

**COLOPHON**

Publisher: Tourist Board – Tourist Information Centre Nova Gorica  
 For: Dejana Baša  
 Concept and text: Blaž Kosovel  
 Translation: Bojan Albahari, Miha Pompe, Tadej Turnšek  
 Photo: Goriški muzej, Jošt Gantar, Blaž Kosovel, Archivi Alinari (Firenze)  
 Design and print: A-media Ltd., 2018  
 Circulation: 2.500 copies



Field with the cemetery at the beginning of the 20th century, before the city was built.



Nova Gorica at the beginning of the 60s.



Nova Gorica today



Former solar sculpture in the year 1970, demolished in 1999.

## 1 TOWN CONCEPT MODEL

Our journey begins with the model of Nova Gorica – not of the contemporary town, but of its first conceptual design.

In September 1947, a border sliced through a thousand-years-united Goriska region. The city of Gorica, whose first mention dates back to year 1001, was given to Italy, leaving the majority of the region without its proper centre. Instead of expanding one of the existing surrounding villages the authorities decided to build a new city according to the then popular guidelines of modernist design by Le Corbusier who envisioned large buildings and vast green areas. This was the first completely new city in the new Yugoslavia.

Selected among many urbanistic projects was the plan by Edvard Ravnikar, featuring large and wide Magistrala street (nowadays Kidričeva street), which was supposed to be the main venue for social life. The city was meant to be a »socialist display window for the West«, but after the Cominform Resolution of 1948, when Yugoslavia turned its back to the Soviet Union, the enthusiasm and also any need for such a display window waned, and with them the financial inflow from the capital city waned as well. The project of these enormous dimensions also failed to win any sympathies with the local area.

In the end, 11 buildings were completed according to Ravnikar's plans, seven of which are represented in the

architectural model: six apartment blocks designed by Ravnikar and the municipality building (architect Vinko Glanz who later also designed the Slovenian Parliament) along with four apartment blocks alongside Trubarjeva and Rutarjeva streets (designed by Danilo Fürst). Two more administration buildings of the same size were planned to be built around the central paved square to emphasize the monumentality of the project. They were never realized, and in spite of a plethora of later solution proposals the lawn was preserved, so it didn't become a real square only until 1994 when the theatre was completed, joined in 2000 by the city library. Both of these majestic buildings were designed by Vojteh Ravnikar (not related to Edvard in any way). Ravnikar's plan was therefore abandoned very quickly, and soon new plans were designed, which reduces the dimensions of the buildings and the distances between them.

Ravnikar's panoramic concept drawing of the city centre is exhibited in the Museum of Modern Art in New York as part of the exhibition on Yugoslavian architecture 1948–1980, with a whole room dedicated to his opus. Today, he is considered as one of the most important Yugoslav architects of the second part of the 20th century. His other projects worth mentioning are the whole complex of the Ljubljana Revolution Square, the Modern Gallery, and also many buildings in New Belgrade.



Detail of the model of Ravnikar's urbanistic plan, erected in 1998.

## 2 A FOREST IN THE CITY – NOVA GORICA AS A BOTANICAL GARDEN

Nova Gorica was conceived as a city-in-a-park, but became a true botanical garden. Ravnikar's plans included a double avenue lined with plane trees alongside Magistrala street, but since the construction was never completed, the trees were never planted. However, something completely different happened: the empty space among the buildings was very spontaneously planted with various kinds of trees. Thus, the city got a horticultural type of tree-planting, for the purpose of viewing the trees, instead of the functionalist tree-planting to provide shade for the passers-by, as was the original Ravnikar's idea. This was the initiative of Žarko Bole, head of Komunalna (municipal services company), and his colleague Miha Ogorevc, the director of the Volčji Potok Arboretum. The emphasis here was on the diversity of the plants and they wanted to emphasize in

particular the specific climate of Nova Gorica by planting trees from different climate zones together, such as a palm next to a spruce.

Today, there are 141 different genera and 256 different species of trees, shrubs and other plants in the city. The most common tree is the Himalayan cedar, followed by the Mediterranean cypress, the small-leaved lime and the London plane. The city also hosts many other trees that can hardly be found anywhere else in Slovenia, such as the dawn redwood and Paulownia, while the most central place is occupied by the cork oak.

In addition to the trees, Bole and Ogorevc also conceived the planting of different species of roses, which are abundant in the city today. It is also due to these rose gardens that rose found its way into the coat of arms of Nova Gorica in 1968, and that the city is now known as the »city of roses«.

## 3 FOUNDATION STONE AND YOUTH WORK BRIGADES

There are two different interpretations as to the birth-day of the city. Some people maintain it is June 13, 1948 when the foundation stone for the first building in the city was laid, while others insist on on September 15, 1947. This is when the signing of the peace treaty between Italy and Yugoslavia drew a dividing border line between the countries, which resulted in the decision to build a new city.

This represented the ideological project of construction of a new socialist society, and so the initial work was done by youth work brigades from all parts of Yugoslavia. The first brigades arrived on December 3, 1947 and the last ones left the city in November 1948. Altogether, almost 5,200 young people participated in the construction. They set up the Magistrala street, regulated the nearby Koren creek into a straight canal, and also helped to build the road across the hill to Sempeter, as all the other nearby road connections ended up on the Italian side. In June, they reached the point where the

construction of the buildings themselves could begin. The first building was today's Kidričeva 33, one of the six Ravnikar's apartment blocks alongside Magistrala, which were later named »the red/Russian blocks«. This is where the city administration, a post office, a butcher shop and other shops used to be in the early days. In the beginning of 1950, the first inhabitants moved in. The majority of these colonizers – pioneers came from remote surrounding villages, and needed some time to accustom themselves to city life. In the beginning, many of them even kept pigs and cows in their rooms. At the same time, the authorities also needed to attract direly needed professionals such as doctors, teachers, engineers, etc. The construction of new apartments didn't go according to plans, but they still wanted to quickly equip the city with as many institutions as possible so that it would become an actual regional centre as soon as possible.

This soon created a housing problem, which was

addressed by putting several families in the same apartment for years. These »red/Russian« blocks had spacious two- and three-room bourgeois apartments and few small flatlets. Therefore, subsequent urbanistic plans reduced the dimensions of the buildings and

apartments, the construction was partly entrusted to individual companies so that they could build flats for their workers, while also giving away building plots for single-family houses completely free of charge.



»Red/Russian« blocks on the postcard from 1961.

## 4 PARK HOTEL AND THE FIRST CITY PROMENADE

Not just the seven buildings alongside Magistrala were built according to the main Ravnikar's plan. Four similar apartment blocks were built simultaneously on the southeast side next to the Koren creek. The completion of these blocks instead of other objects along the main street had proved crucial for the later development of the city. Save a few exceptions, the construction first expanded from the Magistrala street to the area above Koren along today's Kosovelova, Erjavčeva and Delpinova streets. This latter one, at that time called Street 5, played an important role in the initial development of the city. The ambitious idea of the Magistrala included a majestic hotel with a coffee house and a restaurant, but this proved to be overwhelming in new circumstances. This is why they decided to build a smaller one on the parallel Street 5. At first, a large café with a restaurant was built (architect Stanislav Rohrman), later followed by the hotel wing. There were also several bars and a ballroom, and the first night club was opened later in the basement. The

construction of the complex began in 1951, and was only completed in 1959.

After 1957, three elongated buildings were built on the opposite side of the street, hosting a bakery, a general store, a butcher shop, a hairdresser, and the first café in the city, with the city market in the back. The street became the first true city promenade, the hotel hosted many balls and the first guests from Italy started frequenting it as well. In 1984, the ballroom was enclosed and converted into an American style casino. This marked the beginning of the transformation of the city into one of the most popular gambling destinations that would attract gambling tourists from far away. The establishment of a comprehensive catering and tourism services would give birth to HIT company, which would surpass the then largest Yugoslavian gambling centre in Portorož as soon as in 1988.

The entire Park complex was later rebuilt and completely transformed, with the hotel building as the only remnant of the original site.



Coffee house and restaurant at the opening in 1959.

## 5 OLD »FRNAŽA« (BRICKYARD) BUILDING

At the crossroads at the beginning of the Street 5 (today Delpinova street) once stood the brickyard, built in 1922, which ceased to operate in 1944. The surrounding area is rich with clay, and the remains of clay digging can be best seen in the Borov gozdiček (Pine Grove) behind the library and theatre. The building was 125 metres long and featured a 50 meter tall chimney, the tallest in the Goriska region at the time. When the building of the city began, this place was a veritable miniature town on its own: first it was used as housing for the brigadiers, and later got the nickname »department store«, since all kinds of

different shops found their place there: from bakery to hardware store, different craftsmen, there was even a law firm, and it also became a temporary residence for various business managements and public institutions, as well as for many associations, and many others. The building was in poor condition and unsanitary and thus unsuitable for living, so the city decided to demolish it. The first to fall was the chimney in 1957, but the whole process of demolition took almost ten years. Today, only a small administration building remains, now the Local Community Centre.



Brickyard at the end of the 40s.

## 6 FORMER CEMETERY

The street with the brickyard is older than Nova Gorica and represents the main street connection with the »old« Gorica. The street was once narrower, lined with chestnut trees, and led to the city cemetery which used to be right where the centre of the new city is today. Its magnificent entrance gate was located on the other side of the crossroads, next to today's Eda centre. The cemetery extended all the way to the theatre, covering an area of 299 by 200 metres. As many as 28,000 people are said to be buried there, which is more than the number of people living in the city today. It was inaugurated in 1880 but has been plagued by scandals even before the construction, since the clayey soil is not suitable for burying. Apart from that, the Koren creek often flooded and washed the effluents from the cemetery into the city. It was closed in 1916 with the emergence of the Isonzo Front.

After the relocation of the cemetery, many graves remained there, as there were a lot of people who did not have relatives to claim their remains. The cemetery



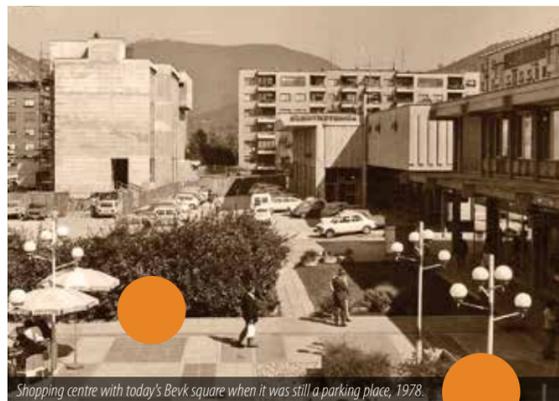
Destroyed cemetery after the First World War.



Icarus – monument to Edvard Rusjan at the time of its construction in 1960.

## 7 SHOPPING CENTRE

The city grew steadily, and by mid 1960s, the need for a new shopping centre emerged. In 1966, Marjan Vrtovec designed the new centre as an organically enclosed space for pedestrians only. This type of enclosed building represents a complete shift away from the logic of the city-in-park, which for this same reason finally creates a city centre. There are mulberry trees growing through the middle of the promenade, in memory of the once very common tree in this environment (after all, sericulture, or silk farming, was the most important industry in 18th century Goriska region).



Shopping centre with today's Bevk square when it was still a parking place, 1978.

was slowly forgotten.

Nowadays, only the last three tombstones that remain in the city remind us of the old cemetery: nobody has ever moved them. The only remnants of the cemetery are the tombstones of those once forgotten by everybody else.

Opposite to these tombstones stands Icarus, the first public monument in the city, erected in memory of Edvard Rusjan, the first Slovenian – and former Yugoslavian – aviator who flew his self-constructed home-made airplane named EDA in 1909. He died in an accident in 1911 during a demonstration flight in Belgrade. The nearby Eda Centre, the most recent large building in the city, has been named in his memory. The brutalist monument by sculptor Janez Lenassi, erected in 1960, was originally positioned in front of a small grove of trees, but later a new shopping centre was built behind it, altering the original appearance of the area entirely.

## 8 FORMER ARGONAVTI – NOWADAY'S PERLA

From the very beginning, the centre of city life has thus been moving away from the Magistrala street. But then, in 1976, a 20,000 square meter hotel, recreational and entertainment centre named Argonavti was opened at the city's northern end. It included a pub with a 50 metre counter, a 24–7 grill club where the guests could grill the meat on their own, a pizzeria, a cake shop, a night club, an indoor pool with a gym, a bowling alley and much more. The complex was designed by Niko Lehermann in collaboration with the avant-garde art group OHO, and represents Argo, the ship of the Argonauts. Opposite the entrance, along the main road to the Soča valley, there was a great concrete sundial with tables inside. The Argonavti project was in the red from the begin-

ning and closed down very quickly in the early 1980s. Later, the complex was empty for a few years, and in 1993, HIT company opened Hotel & Perla Casino, which remains the largest casino in Europe by the number of gaming tables. This new casino firmly consolidated the status of Nova Gorica on the European gambling scene.

With the expansion of the new centre, the facade of the building was altered and another wing to the building added, while the sundial was simply destroyed.

On the opposite side of the street stands the only church in the city, built only in 1982 (architect Franc Kvaternik). It became the first co-cathedral in Slovenia in 2004.



Hotel Argonavti at the opening in 1976.

## 9 NEW NEIGHBORHOOD

In the early 1970s, the most ambitious project in the history of the city was started under the leadership of the chief town urbanist Tomaž Vuga: the construction of a residential neighbourhood which today hosts the majority of the city's inhabitants.

In 1968, the construction of a complex of apartment blocks begun on Cankarjeva street, followed by a much more ambitious complex in the Gradnikove brigade street. The neighbourhood is still the most prominent set of tall buildings in the city, originally planned as a backdrop for even more prominent buildings along the Magistrala. The residential buildings were built from the west

in the direction of the centre, while the lawn along the Magistrala still awaits suitable content. Similarly, the neighbourhood itself remains unfinished, missing lower buildings in front of the taller ones, with kindergartens, shops and other public content, which were never built.

There is now a parking lot there, increasingly eating into the lawn, which also hosts one of the two homesteads that were not demolished during the construction of the city, preserved in time, illustrating the appearance of the area before the city was built. The other one is on September 15 street, which is the very day when the border was set.



Gradnikove brigade street on the postcard from the 80s.

## 10 EUROPE SQUARE

The Transalpina Square, or the Bohinj Railway Square, was built along with the train station on the railway line between Trieste and Prague, one of the most picturesque railroads, built in 1906. Thus, Gorica got its second train station, which is now the oldest public building in Nova Gorica.

After the demarcation of the border, the railroad was given to Yugoslavia, leading to an unusual situation of the square in front of the station being divided between the two countries. In this case, the border divided precisely the place intended for socializing. Six decades later, in 2004, Slovenia entered the European Union alongside nine other countries of Eastern and Central Europe. The president of the EU Commission of the time, Romano Prodi, celebrated the entry into the EU of the former Eastern Bloc in this very square.

For the occasion, the square was renamed into Europe Square (the square on the Italian side is still called Piazzale Transalpina). However, the border fell for good in December 2007 when Slovenia entered

the Schengen area. The beginnings and changes of the border are presented in the museum collection at the train station. Not only the square, but also the nearby border control building got a new life. Since 2016, it hosts Carinarnica, a hub for urban and NGO culture. Following the railroad three kilometres northward, at the entrance to the Soča valley, we can also see Solkanski most (the Solkan Bridge) with the longest stone arch span in the world – 85 meters.



Border point on the Europe Square that was made at the time of the accession to the European Union.

Our stroll through the history of Nova Gorica may be over, but we still need to mention two important

landmarks that – like the former cemetery – belong to the »old« Gorica, but are more than worth a visit.

## 11 THE GRAVE OF THE LAST KING OF FRANCE

In 1623, the first small church and a monastery were built on Kostonjeva, a small hill between the two Goricas, otherwise also a part of the ancient city forest named Panovec. Franciscan monks have been living there since the 19th century. The ground under the Kapela, as the locals call it, hides the crypt of the last French king Charles X, his five family members and his court minister. Although King Louis XVI was triumphantly beheaded in 1793 following the French Revolution, the twelve year period of the republic was followed by the period of the Napoleonic Empire, and then by the reinstatement of the monarchy that ended in 1830 with the so-called July Revolution. The monarch Charles X had to flee the country in order not to end up like his predecessor. This event is most famously commemorated in the Delacroix's painting »Liberty Leading the People«. This ended the reign of the Bourbon Dynasty in France after more

than three hundred years.

After a short stopover in Edinburgh, the king and his 100 strong entourage left for Prague, from where he set off to spend the winter in Gorica, whose mild climate earned it the nickname of the Austrian Nice. However, after only 17 days in Gorica, the 79 year old king died of cholera. Charles X is the only French king ever to be buried outside France, yet his sarcophagus nevertheless lies on French soil. The 100 members of his entourage remained in the city for several decades.

The monastery also hosts a huge library where Stanislav Škrabec, one of the most prominent linguists of late 19th century used to work. There is the second largest public collection of Bourbon roses in Europe in the garden, and the monastery is also the home of Skupnost Srečanje, the first Slovenian commune for treatment of drug addicts.

## 12 VILLA OF AN ARCHITECT WHO BUILT PALACES FOR THE EGYPTIAN ELITE

At the end of the 19th century, economic migrations in the opposite direction from today: Egypt was the Promised Land for many people from these parts, and Alexandria in Egypt had a direct shipping connection with Trieste. The phenomenon of the Alexandrines, young girls who left the Goriska region to work as wet nurses and housemaids in Alexandria and other Egyptian cities, leaving their children and families at home, is getting increasingly well known. The rich Northern Africa also became the home of an architect who designed the palaces for the Egyptian elite, where these Alexandrines used to live as well. Anton Laščak, or Antonio Lasciac, was born in Gorica in 1856. He left for the other side of the Mediterranean in 1882 when he started very quickly to design palaces for the rich Cairenes, big banks and insurance companies, as well as churches and public institutions.

After a short stay in Italy, he came back to Cairo where he became the personal architect to prince Said Halim. The idea at the time was to do a Paris-style modernization of the capital. His clients were not the bourgeoisie anymore, but the nobility, until he gained the status of a court architect and received the title of Bey (similar to English Sir) from the king himself in 1907. At first, he built huge imposing building in the Neo-Baroque style, but later tried to develop a unique »Egyptian style«, which all of the citizens

could identify with. He basically convinced the Egyptian elites not to simply copy Europe but to develop their own distinct style.

It is in this Neo-Islamic style that his private residence in his hometown of Gorica, under the Rafut hill, was built in 1914. He did not spend much time in it, though, since it was quickly destroyed in the WWI, and it never really served as his residence even after its reconstruction. The villa is a unique example of this peculiar style in Slovenia and the wider region. He also built a very thoughtfully designed park around the villa, with a road winding around it and a footpath crossing the road several times through the middle of the park. The park is a true botanical garden that used to have 500 species of trees and shrubbery from 114 genera.

Between WWI and the nineties, the villa hosted the Institute of Hygiene, which improperly adapted the building for its own needs. After that, the villa and the park were left abandoned. All the responsible parties evaded their responsibilities in spite of the uniqueness of the complex, showing the very sad state of the protection of our cultural heritage in general. However, in recent times, it seems that the status of a court architect and received the title of Bey (similar to English Sir) from the king himself in 1907. At first, he built huge imposing building in the Neo-Baroque style, but later tried to develop a unique »Egyptian style«, which all of the citizens

The villa and park are closed for the public at the moment.



The Laščak Villa at Rafut in 1930.