



## The Town Hall of Littoria and Italy's Fascist Public Sphere

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In 1932, Benito Mussolini inaugurated the jewel in fascist Italy's crown of 'New Towns': Littoria ('fascist town'). He spoke from the balcony of the commune, a two-storey building with a tower bearing a deliberate resemblance to medieval commune models, and overlooking a piazza filled, on that day, with black shirts and settlers. The structure's self-conscious reiteration of Italy's foremost architectural symbol of political autonomy - the commune tower - was but one of the guises under which the regime attempted to dismantle such autonomy, targeting boundaries between the private and public spheres, and aimed to impose on the population a life entirely within and for the State; or, in the terms of some scholars, under which it elaborated a 'fascist public sphere'.

Littoria's status as Mussolini's darling among the many public works of the time made of this town hall an emblem of fascist success: it appeared in countless propagandistic publications advertising Italy's vast resettlement program, sometimes in conjunction with an image of the dictator. It also remains iconic today, signifying for some the positive memory of Mussolini and the town's origins. Drawing on research in Latina (the town's name since the fall of fascism) and its surrounding areas (south of Rome), this paper explores the life of this building up to the present; how its history confirms or challenges the notion of a fascist public sphere; and its centrality in the locals' allegiance to the memory of Mussolini.

KEY WORDS: Public space, town halls, civic life, public sphere.