

The Island of Žirje: Challenging Claims of Isolation

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The article examines the influence and remnants of economic and political systems as layers of time on the remote island of Žirje in Croatia, focusing on developments from the sixteenth century onwards. The author explores changes in local economic, political, legal, religious, spatial, and kinship arrangements to shed light on contemporary ethnographic realities. By adopting a relational approach to studying Žirje, the author challenges the notion of islands and cultures as isolated entities.

▪ **Keywords:** Dalmatia, Šibenik archipelago, agriculture, pasture, industry, tourism, inheritance, world systems, relational analysis

V članku so analizirani učinki in ostanki ekonomskih in političnih sistemov kot plasti časa na odmaknjem otoku Žirje na Hrvaškem, s poudarkom na razvoju od 16. stoletja do danes. Avtor je raziskoval spremembe v lokalnih gospodarskih, političnih, pravnih, verskih, prostorskih in sorodstvenih ureditvah, da bi pojasnil sodobno etnografsko realnost. Z relacijskim pristopom raziskave Žirja v časovnem, prostorskem in družbenem kontekstu avtor spodbija dojemanje otokov in kultur kot izoliranih entitet.

▪ **Ključne besede:** Dalmacija, Šibeniško otočje, kmetijstvo, pašništvo, industrija, turizem, nasledstvo, svetovni sistemi, relacijska analiza

Introduction

In more than ten years of research in Dalmatia, I have visited the islands of Zlarin, Mljet, Hvar, Šolta, Silba, and Žirje. I have visited many other Adriatic islands as a tourist or participant in various conferences. Whereas other ethnographic surveys and visits were mainly aimed at collecting comparative Dalmatian material, I stayed on Zlarin and Žirje and systematically gathered research material for over a year: at different times of the year, with different emphases, and with different interlocutors (thirty in Žirje). The fact that I carried out the most work in the Šibenik archipelago and on the island of Žirje is the result of some insights discussed below.

First, a great deal of historical, ethnological, geographical, demographic, and folklore research has been carried out in the Šibenik archipelago, but contemporary social and ecological processes are rarely recorded and evaluated (in ethnology). The sources on Žirje go back to Pliny, quoted by the naturalist and geologist Abbe Alberto Fortis in his 1774 travelogue *Viaggio in Dalmazia* (published in English as *Travels into Dalmatia* in 1778). English travel writers from the nineteenth century wrote more often about the town of Šibenik than about its islands (see Šišak, 2019). Several important texts were written in the twentieth century: Ćiril Metod Iveković's article 'Otok Žirje' (The Island of Žirje) in the journal *Starohrvatska prosvjeta* (1927); the book *Sela šibenskoga kotara*

(Villages of the Šibenik Region) by Don Krst Stošić (1941; two chapters are devoted to the history, institutions, traditional economy, and culture of Žirje); and the volume *Agrarni odnosi na otoku Žirju (od XVII–XIX stoljeća)* (Agricultural Relations on the Island of Žirje, Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century) by Josip Ante Soldo (1973; an excellent overview of Žirje’s agriculture based on archival monastic sources). The work of the Zagreb Institute of Ethnology and Folklore on Zlarin in the early 1980s is worth mentioning (Bezić, 1981; Muraj, 1981a, 1981b; Rajković, 1981). One contemporary ethnological researcher of the Šibenik region is the professor and museum curator Jadran Kale (1994, 1995–1996, 2019, 2023; Fuerst-Bjeliš, Kale, 2018). The Zagreb Institute for Migration Research and the Zadar Centre for Adriatic Onomastic Research have also analyzed data from the Šibenik archipelago (Lajić et al., 2001; Lončar, Klempić Bogadi, 2016). The most important project on the ethnological history of Žirje is the anthology *Žirajski libar* (The Žirje Book, 1994), edited by Eduard Kale, a sociologist and cultural studies specialist born on the island. The anthology contains some of the aforementioned works about Žirje and other basic studies, as well as some more recent and original reflections on the island, visions of tourism, and the Croatian War of Independence. Most of the above references offer a temporally, spatially, or thematically limited insight into Žirje—an integrated and comparative socio-ecological and historical overview of the island has not yet been written. By juxtaposing the references, one can identify socio-ecological processes on and around the island of Žirje and evaluate some general observations about Dalmatian society and the environment on the island. Most importantly, an attempt can be made to explain its ethnographic contemporaneity based on available historiographic, linguistic, geographical, demographic, and other sources.

The Šibenik archipelago is one of the last areas on the Croatian coast (including Istria, the Kvarner Gulf, and Dalmatia) that has been subject to the general and inevitable trend of tourism. This process of tourism development in the eastern Adriatic in the second half of the twentieth century can be traced through economic, infrastructural, demographic, and other statistical indicators, but it overlooks the fact that the numerous coastal and island settlements lost their population, cultural continuity, and traditional environmental knowledge in this process, and that the tourist transition requires a different organization of time, space and interpersonal relationships. Among the inhabited islands of Šibenik, Žirje is the most distant from the mainland and is considered the least developed. These regional and insular characteristics allowed me to closely examine the transformation process of its (post)agrarian and industrial society and the creation of a tourist destination (cf. Kozorog, 2009). I am particularly interested in the “backstage” of tourism (Goffman, 2014); that is, the social and cultural processes that take place among the locals. In any case, social relations in the Šibenik archipelago must certainly also become an important framework for data analysis (cf. Baldacchino, 2015; Young, 1983).



Figure 1: Šibenik archipelago. Source: Google Maps, 2024.

Finally, the reason for my special interest in Žirje is its once very important agriculture. The Žirje Plain (*Žirajsko polje*) is the largest and most fertile area; the terra rossa soil here is by far the deepest.¹ These agricultural conditions led to the specific property relations that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and strongly influence social relations today. A special feature of Žirje is also the long history of the presence of various armies, which were attracted by the island's remoteness and its unobstructed view of the Adriatic.

The problem of isolation

I am intrigued by the influence that the Massim archipelago had on British social anthropology (Young, 1983). In the anthropology of Charles Seligman and Bronisław Malinowski (and later E. E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes in Africa, etc.), the study of cultures meant the study of interactive (cultural, social) islands, consequently with a protracted and structured ethnographic approach (Simonič, 2017, 2020). A broader political, economic, and scientific contextualization of the Massim archipelago or any other region was not needed and not undertaken. Globalization has since found its way into ethnology, but the idea of an island as a cultural and social isolate still has strong appeal.

¹ The plain lies in the center of the island, and they both extend from southeast to northwest. The plain is about 4 to 5 km long and a maximum of 350 m wide, whereas the island is 12 km long and an average of 1.2 km wide (Friganović, 1994: 63). It is bordered lengthwise by two ridges. On the northeastern ridge (in a sunny position) is the village of Žirje.

The island of Žirje has always been contextualized according to its position in regional or world systems (cf. Braudel, 1996; Pitt-Rivers, 1954; Wallerstein, 1980; Wolf, 1998–1999). Although it is an island, one cannot speak of isolation at any level of social life. Some may feel or seek solitude and contact with nature, and the idealized image of isolation may also bring certain economic (tourist) benefits, but all these strategies are in turn linked to political and economic centers, or civilization (Saxer, Andersson, 2019; cf. Simonič, 2017; Scott, 2009). The people of Žirje lived on the periphery of various centralized political and economic systems.

I am particularly interested in the adaptations of societies and communities in the face of profound changes in political systems, property relations, basic modes of production, and environmental conditions. In ecological anthropology, such rapid breakthroughs or paradigmatic social changes are associated with increased stress and adaptation (Moran, 2018: 3). They can be located in the temporal flow of the respective community as caesuras or transitions that bring old and new forms of everyday life—and different adaptive strategies—into consciousness. In other words, my interest in political and economic systems and ecology is always also historical (archival), never only synchronous (ethnographic). Political economies and ideologies that have shaped and utilized the (peripheral) island at different times are a reminder that (world) history is important for (local) ethnography (Schneider, Schneider, 1976).

Of course, the geographical distance of the local society from the mainland is an essential part of its “insularity.” However, an island is both a spatial and a metaphorical marker (Shell, 2014), neither of which says much about the functioning of the local community. In literary studies, insularity has been defined as the representation and construction of small worlds (Dautel, Schödel, 2016). Geographical and poetic aspects cannot determine the phenomena and anthropological interest in social relations and meanings, at least since the 1960s (Ma, 2020). This fact is also recognized in interdisciplinary island studies (Baldacchino, 2018; Hay, 2006). In this aspect, this study differs, for example, from Lopašič’s authenticistic anthropological approach to the Mediterranean islands (2001).

A (small) island is an anthropological laboratory: it allows a microanalysis of social relationships, influences, and changes and their position in a larger social and natural space. In the book *Anthropology, Islands, and the Search for Meaning in the Anthropocene* (2023), Armstrong generalizes the thinking about the island of Yap in Micronesia: “This island, like all islands, is layered deeper than it is wide” (2023: 15). These layers or sediments of time (Koselleck, 2018) are both historical and contemporary. They have emerged over the course of history, they have overlapped, strengthened, or weakened each other, and they refer to each other.² They continue to shape the framework and

² Compare this with the cultural layers in Vilko Novak’s 1958 work *Struktura slovenske ljudske kulture* (The Structure of Slovenian Folk Culture), in which he refers extensively to the Croatian ethnologist Milovan Gavizzi.

imagination of the legal, economic, religious, political, scientific, and kinship life on the island. Layers are divided by “unexpected events” that change the course of history and announce a new set of social and legal rules and values (*ibid.*). Their contemporary (individual or collectively codified) interpretations come from within and without. It is in this interplay of circumstances and traditions that modern local memories, identities, and survival strategies emerge. Identities are always related to the self and the (timely and spatially) other; they are therefore not isolated (*cf.* Barth, 1969).

For this reason, I prefer to speak of different degrees of integration or distance—or, better still, remoteness from urban, economic, informational, and administrative centers (Saxer, Andersson, 2019). A connection to the mainland has also been the maxim of the residents of Žirje in all historical political and economic structures. The island was, of course, always dependent on the navigation technology available and other infrastructure. During the twentieth century, with motorized ships, postal service, radio, telephone, and internet, the spatial remoteness and temporal delay of Žirje weakened. The locals are proud of this; they want more public boats or catamarans traveling between the island and Šibenik, and they are already globalized in terms of information.

Only in times of crisis, with systemic stresses such as military conflicts (with pirates, or with German, Italian or Yugoslav armies, etc.), times of illness (plague in the sixteenth century and COVID-19 in 2020–2021), or the choice of spiritual hermitage (in the Middle Ages and forms of modern escapism), did the perspective reverse, and isolation determined the human meaning of life on the island. Otherwise, all social endeavors were always marked by maintaining and building connections within the community, with the town of Šibenik, and with the state. Therefore, it is not possible to write about the Šibenik archipelago the way Malinowski wrote about the people of the Trobriand Islands. This does not mean that I neglect the local perspective, but that I insist on its relational and contextual interpretation.

I have arranged available data on Žirje into five historical layers with regard to political and economic structures and the consequent position of the island: Byzantine, Venetian, Austrian, Yugoslav, and Croatian. The last two layers include local oral histories and finally some personal observations. The result is an ethnological, ecological, and historical overview of a dynamic and open society.

The Byzantine layer

In the southeastern part of the island are the remains of two fortresses: Gradina on the west coast and Gusterna on the east coast. Researchers do not agree why they were built. Some believe that these were merely refuges where locals could hide in case of danger. No one is ever believed to have lived there (in contrast to the local myth of the

Illyrian queen Teuta; Iveković, 1927: 52). Zlatko Gunjača, on the other hand, believes that the fortresses of Gradina and Gusterna (also *Guštarna*, *Gušterne*) could have been built in the sixth century AD as part of Justinian's Byzantine defense system on the Adriatic against the Goths. This hypothesis is supported by the massive construction of the walls, the fact that the fortresses were built in pairs for better observation, and the presence of cisterns (Gunjača, 1994).³



Figure 2: The remains of mediaeval stone buildings. Top left and right: Gradina. Bottom left: Gusterna. Bottom right: Kućišta. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2018, 2023.

Another ruin, Kućišta, higher to the northwest, at the beginning of the plain, provides information about the medieval social integration of this remote island. The question arises as to whether it is the remains of an eleventh- to twelfth-century monastery founded after the Benedictines received the island as a gift from Croatian King Krešimir IV in 1059 (Stošić, 1941: 197). Alternatively, it could be the ruins of a residence that belonged to the monastery of Saint Lucy of Šibenik; in that case, the Benedictine monastery must have stood even higher to the northwest, at the site of today's Saint Mary's Church and cemetery (Stošić, 1941: 199). However, it is also possible that the Benedictine monastery was located somewhere on the slope of the highest peak on the island, Kapić (Iveković, 1927: 55).

Today, all these ruins are located outside the central areas of the settlement: the old village and the bays on the northern half of the island. The remains of large or even mighty stone buildings remind the locals of the island's mediaeval military and ecclesiastical role. They also offer opportunities for tourism. Gradina is often the only

³ Justinian's Code (529), which marks the beginning of his reign, is now a primary source for the study of the colonate laws in the Eastern Roman Empire (Sirks, 2024). There are no records of the existence of the colonate system on the island of Žirje at that time.

place visited by tourists—hikers, cyclists, or sailors—on a short visit to or vacation on the island. What is less well known, as two locals told me, is that after the Second World War the bodies of political and military opponents, allegedly from the Trieste area, were thrown into Gradina Cave.

The Venetian layer

Venice controlled the Adriatic from the twelfth century onward. The turning point for Dalmatia and Žirje was the year 1409, when Croatian King Ladislav sold Dalmatia to the Venetians for 100,000 ducats. Disgruntled Šibenik was militarily subjugated by the Venetians in 1412. The entire Adriatic became the “Sea of Venice.” Their rule lasted almost four hundred years, until the dissolution of the Republic of Venice in 1797. The Venetians supported the colonate system and levied high taxes on the tenants. The maritime republic (or thalassocracy), on the other hand, took very little interest in the development of the mainland, the Dalmatian archipelago, or its other overseas possessions (Bek, 1998; Internet 1; Wolff, 1997). In the eighteenth century, the Venetian attitude toward Dalmatia changed somewhat, as can be concluded from the 1778 travelogue of the Enlightenment philosopher and seeker of new economic opportunities Abbe Alberto Fortis.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Republic of Venice was confronted on the one hand with the shift of European trade to the Atlantic and on the other with the territorial ambitions of the Ottoman Empire in the Balkans and the eastern Mediterranean



Figure 3: Left: Signpost to the sacred buildings (Muna Bay). Right: The church of St. Marija. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023

(Bek, 1998). Therefore, Venice was interested not only in taxes in Dalmatia but also in its defensive position. The control over the spiritual life of the Dalmatian population was just as important as the navy, the rowers on the galleys, local defense, or the conscript groups under bandit leaders (*harambaše*). Žirje became an independent parish as early as 1460 (Stošić, 1941: 195). Its ratio of eleven priests to a thousand believers in Dalmatia was later the highest in Europe (Peričić, 1980: 55). There are many churches on Žirje today, all of which were built during the Venetian period. The ecclesiastical brotherhood of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary (*bratovščina Velike Gospe*) was founded on the island in 1484, and from 1809, for example, there are records of regular masses of the Brotherhood of the Spirit of the Purifier (*bratovščina Duha Čistilista*) and its twenty memorial services for deceased members (Stošić, 1941: 196).

During the Ottoman-Venetian war in Crete (1645–1669), the conflicts in the Balkans, in the Dalmatian hinterland, and around Šibenik also intensified (Internet 2; Soldo, 1973: 9). After 1645, Žirje was further populated with refugees from the Dalmatian and the Šibenik hinterland. In gratitude for supporting the resistance of the Catholic population and their conversion to the Venetian side, the Franciscans received the island of Žirje with all tax revenues from the Republic of Venice in 1650.⁴ Their representatives on the island more or less successfully levied a tax on agricultural land (*teratik*), a tax on building land (*livel* or *kućevina*), a twenty percent tax on all crops, olive oil, and wine (*petine*), and a tax on pasture land (*herbatik*), and they also demanded various services. The fishing warehouses on Muna Bay, which were intended for storing equipment and salted sardines or mackerel, were built in the sixteenth century but were owned by fishermen from Šibenik itself and other islands in the Šibenik archipelago, Zlarin and Prvić (Soldo, 1973: 16–46, 55; 2022).

Another legacy of the island's landscape presumably dates to the Venetian period, but now refers to its absence and as a precondition for later environmental intervention. According to the locals, the name of the island derives from the word for 'acorn' (*žir*, plural *žirje*), which refers to the composition of the former forests on the island (Stošić, 1941: 194).⁵ Today there is no black oak left on the island. What happened to this forest? Was it deforested by the Venetians for their construction projects and trade in the Mediterranean (cf. Bek, 1998)? Or was it cut down for firewood and to expand agricultural and grazing land (Tekić et al., 2015)? Or was it really burned by the "Turks" (1570–1573; Furčić, 1994: 139), as some locals say? Some old forests were certainly

⁴ The Franciscans planned to build a new monastery on the island to replace the monastery on Lake Visovac (1445–1648; in today's Krka National Park), from which they had fled. For the same reason, they had settled in Visovac after fleeing Bosnia (Soldo, 1973: 14–15). The Franciscans finally decided to build Saint Lawrence's Monastery in Šibenik.

⁵ Another etymology is based on the external essentialization of the island. It refers to Pliny's mention of the island of Sirium. According to this interpretation, the root *Zuri* is said to be of Greek origin and refers to the turn or circle that ships made around this island. Various other variants of this name also appear (Friganović, 1994a, 1994b).

cut down for lime burning (Fuerst-Bjeliš, Kale, 2018: 549–550): in Žirje there were many coastal sites for this economic activity, and the toponym *Japlenišće* (literally, ‘limekiln’) still exists. Lime was needed for the modern transition from wooden to stone house construction. The answer to deforestation is probably a combination of all these factors and not only Venetian.

Among the enduring Venetian layer of Žirje society and culture, mention must be made of viticulture, which has become especially important over the centuries. The economy was also based on the production of olive oil, as in many other Dalmatian places. By law, the Venetians determined the planting of olive trees between vineyards and the distance between them (Stulli, 1980: 52–53). Agricultural products were compulsorily collected in Šibenik and then in Venice, and only from there could they go to the international market (Stulli, 1980; Wolff, 1997). The development of Dalmatian and Žirje viticulture was part of the mercantilist organization of the Venetians, which did not change much over the centuries.

The institution of *posoba* can also be placed within the framework of balancing between local and state aspects. This was the communal self-government recognized by the Republic of Venice and at the same time the place where the assembly of the villagers met. “In the Early Modern Age use of *posoba* was documented by Venetian authorities because they recognized commoners’ councils as the best way for recruiting armed bands and whole communities for borderland military duties” (Kale, 2019: 21). The *posoba* area in Žirje is built over today, and it houses an important village institution: a health center and above it an apartment for a nurse in residence. The center of the village’s events had already moved earlier, probably in the nineteenth century, to nearby Srcela (the center or heart of the village), another crossroads of village paths and new collective memories (gatherings, dances, later the agricultural cooperative, etc.).

The Austrian layer

The occupation of Venice by Napoleon in 1797 meant the end of the maritime oligarchy and its control over Dalmatia. The administration was soon taken over by the Austrians (1797–1805), who, after a brief French period, ruled it until the First World War (1813–1918). In 1815, they founded the Kingdom of Dalmatia with its seat in Zadar, which was subordinate to Vienna. During this period of modernization, the less developed conditions of Dalmatia compared to many other parts of Austria (and Hungary) becomes clear: farming with hoes and pasturing, no industry, simple infrastructure (donkeys and boats), no education, and widespread disease (Foretić, 1969; Ravlić, 1969; Wolff, 1997).

The most important administrative intervention of the Austrian Empire in the Šibenik archipelago was the decision to make the island of Zlarin the center of most of the

surrounding islets in 1826.⁶ Zlarin was made the seat of the municipality and given a post office, captain’s office, school, and doctor. In Žirje, for example, ten miles away, a primary school was only opened in 1908, eighty years after Zlarin. The inhabitants of Zlarin were able to read and write, and they sent their children to schools outside earlier than others. The proximity of Zlarin to Šibenik (two miles) and the early strong ties to the town, the shipbuilding and trading families, and the administrative center strengthened the power of Zlarin and aroused respect and at the same time envy among the inhabitants of the other inhabited islands. In Prvić, I even heard that the inhabitants of Zlarin “once” had their own saloon on the barge that brought the islanders to Šibenik. In any case, the Austrian administration introduced micro-centralization and a hierarchy to the Šibenik islands. For all administrative matters, it was necessary to row or sail from Žirje to Zlarin.

One enduring element of the Austrian Monarchy on Žirje was certainly the location known as Straža (literally, ‘guard’), which only appears on the maps of the Third Military Survey between 1869 and 1887 (Internet 3), shortly after the foundation of Italy in 1861. Straža was also associated with military activities during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Today, the observatory, which offers a good view of the sea and the entire island, is used by a small unit of the Croatian army.



Figure 4: Žirje in the 3rd Austrian military survey (1869–1887). Source: Mapire, 2023.

⁶ Even today, only six of the 249 small islands and islets of the Šibenik archipelago are inhabited: Murter (connected to the mainland by a drawbridge in Tisno since 1832), Krapanj, Prvić, Zlarin, Kaprije, and Žirje. On the uninhabited islands and islets, people grazed sheep, gathered wood and herbs, set up fishing camps, and the like. Some of them are leased today. The large number of Šibenik islands, their sparse population, and the neighboring Kornati islands provide an ideal setting for nautical tourism.

The Austrians also built two artillery batteries: one on the northwestern edge of the island (known as Vela Glava) and the other on the southeastern edge (known as Zvizdulje).⁷ These batteries were later also used by the Yugoslav army. Zvizdulje was last known for the artillery defense of Šibenik during the Croatian War of Independence in September 1991. After the war, there were several initiatives to establish a memorial site there.

The population of the island grew considerably from the middle of the eighteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, which according to Josip Ante Soldo (1973: 9) indicates a strengthening of the economic power of the peasants. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the locals became the owners of all the land in the plain (*Polje*), and some also concluded lease agreements with each other. For the citizens of Šibenik, the nobility, and the Franciscans, the collection of taxes on a remote island became an ever-increasing burden. However, the land—be it for vineyards, olive groves, gardens, or orchards—was the key to the survival of the agricultural community in Žirje. The landowners were therefore happy if they could sell and then find work in administration or trade, and the islanders were happy if they could buy. However, as the population grew and needs increased, the land was divided into smaller and smaller plots due to the egalitarian rules of inheritance (Sirovica, 1994; Soldo, 1973: 66–115; Todd, 1985). In principle, property was divided equally among all children. These social rules eventually made it difficult for individual families to make a living, which led to the economic emigration of their younger male members.

Protracted legal disputes with the Franciscans over taxes, especially their right to levy the one-fifth tax (i.e., *petine*) on the karst land outside the plain, which the locals had cultivated for centuries as pasture and for olive trees or grapevines, and where most drystone walls were built, led to an official agreement in 1876 on the final sale of the entire island (and its surrounding islets). This agreement was signed and paid by sixty-six island families. The areas outside the plain became village property, and the locals now owned the entire island in either private or communal form (Kale, 2019; Soldo, 1973).

Simultaneously with the growing administrative, travel, and scientific interest in new acquisitions on the Adriatic, Austria developed its transport infrastructure on land and water (Baskar, 2010; Šišak, 2019). The construction of the railway line from Oštarije to Split via Knin, which runs for several dozen kilometers through the Šibenik hinterland, was only started in 1912 but completed under the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (Internet 4).

Žirje has long been a producer of grapes and olives. The farmers' considerations to buy the island in the second half of the nineteenth century must have been based on these crops and sheep. Agriculture and pastoralism were their worlds, in which they

⁷ The southern edge of the island, where Zvizdulje is located, was excluded from the common village pasture for the needs of the army (Kale, 2019: 25).

invested all their knowledge, time, and money (cf. Geertz, 1963: 82). The wine boom and territorial sovereignty were soon interrupted by the Austro-Italian trade agreement (the wine clause of 1892), which encouraged Austrian (and German) merchants to buy Italian wines instead of those produced domestically. The prices for Dalmatian wines fell. A few years later, around 1894, phylloxera (an aphid that attacks the vine) destroyed viticulture, an important branch of Dalmatian foreign trade (Edinost, 1892; Lajić et al., 2001: 34). This was followed by a large emigration of (overpopulated) mainlanders and islanders from Dalmatia throughout Europe and the world. However, statistics show that the high number of residents of the island of Žirje continued until the middle of the twentieth century and even increased significantly after the phylloxera plague.⁸

Some local farmers found at least partial relief in fishing. At the end of the nineteenth century, an Italian named Conte (or Conti) from the region of Corsica came to the island, settled on Muna Bay, and promoted his fishing and lobstering techniques. This story from historical literature (Friganović, Šterc, 1994: 84; Stošić, 1941: 195) is repeated by the locals. It is unlikely that the islanders had no idea about fishing. The greater problem was poverty and the inability to buy larger nets and boats. At the time of his death, Conte owned four different fishing boats, several longlines, and lobster traps (Friganović, Šterc, 1994: 84). The people of Žirje, who were organized into fishing associations (*ribarske družine*), worked on his boats within the framework of a certain hierarchy with certain duties and a corresponding share of the catch. In any case, the Žirje fishermen also began to take over the fishing warehouses in Muna Bay at this time (Kale, 2019: 25; Soldo, 2022). The historical placement of this narrative is interesting information for understanding the essential importance and longevity of agriculture and animal husbandry on the island, as well as the late shift to marine resources and labor among the locals—although the sea near Žirje was always considered one of the richest in fisheries and corals (see Soldo, 1973).

There is no source of water on the island, the humidity is low, and droughts are frequent. Just as the plain was formed over millennia by rainwater draining from the nearby shores, a pond formed at its lowest point. People widened and deepened it, and walled it in. Until the beginning of the twentieth century, it was used for drinking water by all the villagers, sheep, and donkeys. Some of the water was carried by women with buckets on their heads or with donkeys to the houses for the household and the goats, as well as to the fields for irrigation and spraying with blue vitriol.⁹ The people collected

⁸ Approximate population development: 1298 (103 inhabitants), 1667 (183), 1742 (178), 1841 (355), 1901 (634), 1928 (750), 1951 (751), 1991 (130) (Sirovica, 1994; Soldo, 1973: 8–9; Stošić, 1941: 194). In comparison, the population of Zlarin began to shrink significantly as early as the 1920s (Korenčić, 1979), and male emigration occurred earlier and to a greater extent, so that women took over most of the island's economy, education, and culture (Simonič, 2017; Sremac, 2010). Patriarchal relationships (in the sense of “the woman on foot, the man on the donkey behind her”) are said to have existed in Žirje for a long time.

⁹ The height of the drystone wall around the pond was therefore at the height of a woman's head for easier loading (Bilan, 2021: 2).



Figure 5: Pond (*Lokva*). Photo: Peter Simonič, 2023.

the water on the east side of the pond (known as *Gornje žalo* ‘upper shore’), and the animals were allowed on the west side (known as *Donje žalo* ‘lower shore’) (Bilan, 2021: 2). Although Bilan writes that there were no digestive diseases and people on Žirje died more often from tuberculosis, which affects the malnourished (Bilan, 2021: 2, 6), on the other hand, poor hygienic conditions due to stagnant water and the simultaneous feeding of animals, frequent malaria, and the death of many children are reported.¹⁰ At the beginning of the twentieth century, the royal authorities of Zadar sent a reporter to Žirje, where there was a malaria epidemic. Based on a joint assessment by reporters from various places in Dalmatia, the reporters suggested that the state should tackle the problem by treating and eliminating the causes of the development of this disease: unclean water sources and the large number of infected mosquito species (Sirovica, 1994). It is not known to what extent the state later contributed to the construction, but before the First World War the villagers built a central village cistern above the village, and after the war they extended it further down the slope.¹¹ The development of medicine naturally also contributed to the disappearance of malaria.

The origins of the modern island landscape can also be traced back to Austrian times. In the Kingdom of Dalmatia, as elsewhere in the Mediterranean, “undemanding” Aleppo pines were systematically planted from the middle of the nineteenth century onward

¹⁰ In my opinion, the difference in interpretation stems from the fact that Bilan wrote the book in 2021 based on conversations with local women born in the twentieth century: Ljubica Konti (née Šižgorić) and Mileno Grguričin (née Šižgorić). In the middle of the twentieth century, people are said to have drunk water from the pond. Nowadays, people no longer do this. The pond and the canals connected to it are likewise no longer maintained.

¹¹ If the pond and cistern dried up, people relied on a thin layer of brackish water in a deep cave at Gradina (Bilan, 2021: 3; interlocutors).



Figure 6: One hundred years apart. Left: Muna in 1905 (anon.). Right: Muna, *Donja Banda* in 2023. Photo: Peter Simonič, 2023.

to stop soil erosion after the devastating deforestation of the oaks. Planting continued into the twentieth century, with the pine spreading by itself in some places (Tekić et al., 2015).¹² A comparison of a black-and-white photo from 1905 with a contemporary color photo illustrates the spatial changes at Muna Bay and the new “natural state” that defines modern life (cf. Fuerst-Bjeliš, Kale, 2018).

The Austrian period ends with the monument to Jerko Šižgorić (1889-1918), which stands near the old village center. It preserves the memory of a local naval officer that was involved in organizing an ethnic rebellion on Austrian ships in the Bay of Kotor at the end of the First World War and was shot after a swift verdict by an Austrian military court (Internet 6; Stošić, 1941: 195).

The Yugoslav layer

After the First World War, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia completed the Dalmatian railway. Industry developed in Šibenik. In the 1930s, this region was also affected by the global economic crisis and the harsh reaction of political parties.

As a collective remnant of the Second World War, the memory of the Slovenian priest Ferdinand Kolednik lives on in Žirje, where he has been commemorated by a memorial plaque in the village for the last few years. After the Partisans fired inaccurately at German ships in October 1943, the Germans invaded the island and gathered the entire population at Srcela, where they were threatened with execution.

¹² In Zlarin, I heard that people would boil the seeds the evening before the officially ordered pine planting campaign so that they would not germinate.

In the meantime, the few Partisans that had carried out the attack hid in Little Stupica Bay (*Mala Stupica*). According to sources and oral tradition, Kolednik knelt before a German military unit and begged them for mercy in German. He saved 630 inhabitants of Žirje, an entire village, but he ended up in a German concentration camp (Šavez boraca NOR otoka Žirja, 1952: 54–57).¹³

Despite the historical changes, agriculture, growing fruit, and pasture farming continued until the mid-twentieth century. This predominant local economic model began to disintegrate at the end of the nineteenth century, but the final collapse of agriculture on the island occurred in the mid-twentieth century, when Šibenik became an industrial center.

Life in communist Yugoslavia and its institutional consequences can already be reconstructed with the help of local interlocutors. Because they witnessed the disintegration of the traditional island society and culture during their lifetime, these narratives are always emotional.

Even after the Second World War, daily work in the vineyards and gardens, work in the olive groves (involving people of all ages and both sexes), collecting wood for cooking, and grazing sheep (women's and children's work) were part of village life. In the 1950s and 1960s, each family owned twenty sheep, which they grazed together (the animals were marked). Each family also owned a goat for the children's milk.

After the day's labor in the fields, some went fishing in the evening or at night (the work of men and widows). In the morning, they often rowed to Šibenik to sell the fish, often unsuccessfully. "*There used to be a lot of fish, but hardly anyone wanted to buy it. Today, everyone would like to eat fish, but the waters around Žirje have been decimated by industrial, tourist, and local fishing,*" said an islander. For a long time, the only way to store the catch (before canning and freezing) was salted fish, which was stacked in barrels (at Muna Bay). According to another man, salt was too expensive for his family after the Second World War, and so they poured seawater onto the terrace and then collected the salt. After the Second World War, they hoped to build a fish canning factory, but perhaps because of "*better political connections*" the factory was then built on the island of Prvić.¹⁴

Patrilocalty prevailed in the founding of new families, and the wedding ceremony re-enacted the transition of the bride to her husband's house (Furčić, 1994). Several fraternal-patrilocal families lived in manors: compound buildings with courtyards that were sometimes shared. It made sense to extend the manor houses because only three walls had to be built for each additional family house, which saved time and money by conserving stone.

¹³ After the war, Kolednik established himself internationally as a translator (Internet 5).

¹⁴ The factory in Prvić was short-lived. For the broader economic and social potential and consequences of the fish-canning industry in (northern) Dalmatia, see Kosmos et al. (2020).

The fraternal arrangement did not entail a common household; instead, each family worked their fields and looked after their animals separately. Mutual help also included the education of children. Joint labor was expected for construction work, the most important seasonal tasks (hoeing and harvesting), and pasture work, in which other villagers also helped.

The emotional framework of nostalgia encountered in people today has its roots not in the former quality and ease of subsistence, but in the diversity of social life that developed in the densely populated village; it was vibrant and alive.

When Yugoslavia wanted to catch up economically with the developed European countries, industrialization also became increasingly important in Dalmatia. After the Second World War, industry supported the development of infrastructure in transport, business, education, culture, sports, and tourism. After the 1950s, state or social enterprises in Šibenik, Split, and Zadar employed many island and mainland farmers and provided them with housing, leisure facilities, education, and so on. The need for labor on the coast also attracted people from Žirje.¹⁵ This had devastating consequences for economic and social life on Žirje, but individual families saw and seized the opportunity to escape chronic poverty and overpopulation.¹⁶ As early as 1963 or 1965, the primary school in Žirje was closed, forcing the parents of school-age children that remained to quickly move away with their families. The population of the island has thus aged statistically, which is why today it is also referred to as the “home of pensioners at sea” (Sirovica, 1994: 98). The average age of the approximately one hundred inhabitants is over sixty, and only one or two families with children of preschool age still live in Žirje.

Due to the abandonment of vineyards, orchards, gardens, and pastures in the postwar period, the island was increasingly overgrown with pines and maquis in the following decades, an ecologically reversed process compared to the previous centuries of oak deforestation, clearing, and intensive cultivation (cf. Oelschlaeger, 1991). Staying in the village in the interior of the island near the plain eventually became unnecessary

¹⁵ Some went abroad, especially to the United States. According to one local, at least part of the emigration after the Second World War was political and not only economic. It would be necessary to investigate more closely what connections and influences the emigrants and their descendants have on the island today. The property relations also suggest that social relations can be explained not only from the perspective of the locals on the island, but also from the perspective of distant, often invisible, but present actors (from Šibenik, Zagreb, New York, etc.). Today, they occasionally appear on Facebook as admirers of the island’s (family) traditions, and they come to the island more or less regularly to take care of apartments and olive groves, or for vacations. Regardless of their physical distance, they are always relatives and co-owners that have the right to shape the social and spatial processes on the island.

¹⁶ Braudel emphasized the precarious existence of most Mediterranean islands in the sixteenth century because the question was always how to survive with their own resources, land, orchards, and poultry (and other small animals; author’s note), and, if this was not possible, they looked outward (Braudel, 1972: 152). I would like to add that research on the Dalmatian islands shows that today this problem increases with the smallness of the island and its distance from the mainland and its urban centers (Lajić et al., 2001; Podgorelec, 2015), whereas Braudel noted a stronger integration of the outer islands into the international shipping flows of the time. Although the large plain was a great comparative advantage, it became a modernization trap for the islanders of Žirje.



Figure 7: Abandoned *dvori* in the old village (*Selo*). Photo: Peter Simonič, 2023.

and unpromising.¹⁷ Others began to look around the coast of the island, especially in the nearby harbor at Muna Bay. In this way they would be closer to the daily shipping connection with Šibenik, their fishing warehouses, and boats. In the 1970s and 1980s, most of the social weight and investment shifted to Muna Bay.¹⁸

As far as the relationship between the Yugoslav communist political economy and Žirje is concerned, the longer episode with the Žirje cooperative is very interesting. It was a local cell of the planned economy and at the same time an attempt at collective market participation by the villagers. It was also an extension of the island's patriarchal-egalitarian families (cf. Todd, 1985). For a time after the Second World War, the cooperative managed to slow the trend of declining population and economic activity, or so it seemed. The Žirje Fisheries Production and Processing Cooperative (*Ribarska proizvođačka i prerađivačka zadruga Žirje*) is associated with many local memories, and many see it as one of the last great community endeavors that cannot be repeated,

¹⁷ The islanders' orientation toward the plain had not only ecological and political-economic reasons (land as a basic resource in colonate agriculture), but also local defense reasons: away from the coast meant away from the pirates: "On October 9th, 1808, English pirates stole goods worth 890 lire from the house of Jakov Požarev and Kuratova" (Stošić, 1941: 199). Such a settlement model was therefore common on the Dalmatian islands.

¹⁸ The island is very exposed to the winds (Friganović, 1994a). The only news one can read about the island in winter is the temporary suspension of shipping traffic due to strong winds. A retired fisherman that lives in the village, because it is on the leeward side, told me that the name *Muna* comes from the word for 'mad' (from *munjena* 'struck by lightning'); the bay is open to the northeast, against the bora wind. The same applies to Mikavica Bay, and to Tratinska and Pečena Bays, whereas Big and Little Stupica Bays (*Vela Stupica, Mala Stupica*) on the east coast are exposed to south winds.

although it would be good if it were. At the regional office of the Croatian State Archives in Šibenik, I examined the material on fishing, agricultural, and consumer cooperatives in the Šibenik area in the twentieth century. The Žirje cooperative was founded in its final form in 1947, was fully functional for about thirty years, and was finally closed in the 1980s. As far as my interlocutors can remember, the cooperative owned three or four fishing boats in the 1960s, which were organized into fishing associations. They also traveled to Šibenik and Vodice to sell prized sweet green plums, which no longer exist today. The locals say that the climate has probably changed or that nobody took care of the plums, and so they have become overgrown. The house of the main cooperative was located at Srcela. This is where people sang, drank, played cards, talked about politics, danced, and, of course, bought agricultural equipment. In the 1980s there was a discotheque, which also attracted visitors from Šibenik and other islands. The cooperative also owned an oil mill and a shop with a restaurant on Muna Bay. Today they transport small olive harvests to the oil mill on the neighboring island of Kaprije. After the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the cooperative dissolved and its facilities were abandoned. They were then sold to an entrepreneur from the mainland that did not fulfil his investment promises, and so they are still slowly deteriorating.

The communal agreements on the economy, space, and future of the village emphasized so far should not lead one to believe that there was complete political and economic equality. I am referring to the built-in social inequality through property and class relations at settlement, as well as local political and informal inequalities. As already mentioned, during the conquest of Dalmatia, the Venetians, in search of local allies, granted land in Žirje to some deserving orders, the inhabitants of Šibenik, and their families. Among them, the Šižgorić family, who came from Skradin on the Krka River, stands out. “In the first half of the fourteenth century (1323), the noble families



Figure 8: Sold socialist co-operative buildings. Left: In the old village, *Srcela*. Right: In the Muna bay, *Donja Banda*. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023.

of Šibenik—Šižgorić, Jurin, and De Saracenis—acquired estates on the island, and the *coloni* became more closely associated with the town” (Friganović, 1994c: 76). “The numerous and old Šižgorić family from Šibenik owned a lot of land on Žirje since the fifteenth century, when they received property on the island from Venice as a reward for their loyalty. Over time, this property was divided among many branches of the family” (Soldo, 1973: 69). “In 1914, the Šibenik chronicler Vincenzo Miagostovich compiled a family tree of the Šižgorić family, listing more than three hundred members. Today, the descendants of the family live mainly in Žirje and Šibenik” (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2013–2024).

Among the members of this family was a bishop of Šibenik, Juraj Šižgorić (1398–1453/54), who had a vacation residence on the island; later, a ship captain with the same surname was also rewarded with land on Žirje (Hrvatska enciklopedija, 2013–2024; Stošić, 1941: 198–199). In the agricultural study by Soldo (1973), the surname frequently appears among tax (non-)payers. One should also remember the monument to the insurgent naval officer Jerko Šižgorič. One of the members of this highly branched family is now a leaseholder (maritime concessionaire) at Big Stupica Bay (*Vela Stupica*) and is considered the most entrepreneurial and wealthiest islander. As far as inequity is concerned, I have already mentioned the preindustrial patriarchy and the varying success of farmers and families in accumulating arable land in the plain, fishing boats, and so on. Participation in various municipal bodies in Šibenik and other political and economic connections outside the island have always brought some benefit to members of the local community.

The following story from the decline of Yugoslavia can be interpreted in the context of internal political relations. The controlled or institutionalized littoralization of Žirje was represented by the division of the coastal land in the late 1970s and early 1980s. According to an agreement adopted by the village council, the authorized committee divided the land on Muna Bay (especially on the northern edge of the bay, known as *Gornja banda*), Koromašn(j)a Bay, and Tratinska/Pečena Bay, all of which were owned by the village community according to the purchase agreement of 1876. This measure was intended to stop the depopulation of the island, but instead vacation homes were soon built on most of the plots, to which apartments were later added by the descendants living on the mainland. Only a handful of these houses are permanently inhabited in winter. The stories about building houses on Muna Bay at that time revolve around transporting building materials, excavating the solid rock, and the lack of water: they are full of doubt, renunciation, perseverance, and mutual help in the village when this was still taken for granted. There are also stories about growing up on the gravel by the sea. Today, anyone that appropriates part of the coast (especially on Tratinska Bay or Big Stupica Bay) without consulting the other villagers is frowned upon, which is why the representatives of the local community go to court to defend their common property.



Figure 9: Bays of Žirje. Top left: Mikavica. Bottom left: Tratinska. Centre: Muna, *Gornja Banda*. Top right: Vela Stupica. Bottom right: Koromašnja. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023 (except Vela Stupica, 2018).

During the Yugoslav era, a unit of the Yugoslav People's Army was stationed on the island. The social life at that time cannot be understood without the army, which had men and facilities all over the island. The locals formed many bonds with them: they arranged joint communal projects and parties, and some soldiers married women from Žirje. Due to the constant presence of the army and poor connections with Šibenik, Žirje was unable to participate in the first wave of tourism in Dalmatia, which began after the construction of the Adriatic highway in the 1960s, attracting tourists from across Europe and irrevocably changing the character of the coastal villages and towns that had been difficult to access until then, previously only accessible by donkeys and boats, and by railway in the remote hinterland.

Žirje only became a tourist destination in the late 1980s. It was the last island in this wave that spread from the mainland: with boats and passengers, electricity, internet, state and municipal development programs, EU funds, and the like. The strongest effect was in Zlarin, which published its first tourism brochure as early as 1936 (Simonič, 2017). Žirje only opened to foreigners after the withdrawal of the Yugoslav army in 1991 and the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995).

The contemporary Croatian layer

Žirje played an important role in the defense of Šibenik against the tanks of the Yugoslav Army in September 1991. Shelling from the artillery platform in Zvizdulje was possible, it is said, because relations between the army and the population were

so good. The commander of the Yugoslav army unit on the island decided to switch to the Croatian side, to Žirje. This gave him the right to remain on the island after the war as a highly respected member of the community. He reversed the balance of power in the conflict because the Yugoslav army did not initially realize that the base on Žirje was now hostile. The artillery, which included several men from Žirje, managed to stop the tanks at the Šibenik Bridge twelve miles away, which was at the limit of what was possible given the type of artillery at their disposal (Alić, 1994; Miškić, 1994). This was the heroic era of the island. According to some locals, this is not sufficiently appreciated in Šibenik, and they would like to erect a memorial to the Croatian army at Zvizdulje, whereas others are fed up with the repetition of this history and distrust its national mythologization.

The period after the war saw the collapse of communist-era industry, shipbuilding, and shipping. The locals name several factories in Šibenik that went under during the war, denationalization, and privatization after 1991: the Lozovac aluminum factory, the Ražine aluminum factory, the iron alloy factory in Crnica, the Dane Rončević factory, the Elemes aluminum factory, the Poliplast plastic products factory, and so on.

The opening of Žirje after the war of independence and the post-Yugoslav economic crisis on the mainland have rapidly driven the tourist commercialization of land, houses, and services. The restrictions are already well known: a woman at Muna Bay told me that to release her sole ownership she had to negotiate with 250 people—that is, all the living heirs of the sixty-six families that purchased the island in the nineteenth century, many of whom live all over the world. Only so-called 1/1 plots (*jedan kroz jedan*; i.e., one owner per one plot) can be now taken seriously, purchased, or sold. Despite the restrictions, domestic and foreign purchases of houses and plots are slowly increasing (with buyers including Slovenians, Italians, and Germans).

In 2022, the majority of tourists to the island were Slovenians (40%), Croats (23%), Germans (6%), Czechs, and Austrians. In total, the island was visited by almost a thousand tourists (more than ten times the number of permanent residents), who spent around 9,500 nights on the island (Amaterska kulturna udruga Žirje, 2022: 18). Every winter is now a potential missed opportunity to expand or improve the tourism capacity at home. There is no shortage of construction work, and so laborers from Šibenik or Bosnia can work on the island almost all year round. I was invited to a celebration to mark the completion of a new apartment block, where I met almost all the locals. Two musicians from Šibenik were invited. The Croatian flag ceremonially fluttered on the roof of the new extension.

Parallel to the tourist development of Žirje, the presentation of the island's cultural heritage has also evolved. It consists of fragments of the past that are important for the internal identification of the islanders and at the same time for the tourist presentation of the local culture and past. For example, there is Saint Mary's Church, where a group of keepers of the island's religious heritage meet, thus going beyond religious motives

and socializing. The artefacts are mainly various relics donated by the locals after being acquired over many years from various Venetian masters. Under communism (1945–1991), religious life declined sharply due to depopulation and political ideology. The modern Croatian state favors relations with the Vatican. In summer, Saint Nicholas’s Church at nearby Muna Bay is transformed into a venue for concerts and theater performances of the “tourist summer.” The Gradina Fortress is open to tourists. There are also two large dry-stone huts, known as *Stari stan* ‘old house’ and *Novi stan* ‘new house’ (Kale, 1994). An attempt is being made to build a tourist-ecological board next to the pond. The history of viticulture, the colonate system, and the cooperative has not been documented and presented, and the remnants of a former olive press are deteriorating in the mouth of Muna Bay.

The pedigrees of several families have recently been displayed next to the remnants of the press, and data collection is still in progress. These genealogies emphasize the importance of the individual island families and their affiliation to the area, and at the same time serve as a kind of distinguishing marker of the old local families in their relationship to all newcomers at the public space of the harbor, the entry point to the island. Genealogies are also an important form of recording local history because most of the accessible records of the island’s past up to the end of the twentieth century come from the outside, from various land registers, court records, and chronicles.

Today Žirje is a municipality of the town of Šibenik, as are most of the inhabited islands of the Šibenik archipelago.¹⁹ Along this line, there have been political struggles between the long-dominant HDZ party and occasional local groups supported by other parties. In the last ten years, two independent local parties have successfully participated in local elections.

One of the most important recent achievements of the island was opening a permanent grocery shop at Muna Bay in 2022. After the cooperative was dissolved, people only had a shop available in the summer; otherwise they had to travel to Šibenik, two hours away, to the market, the hospital, the municipal office, and other services.

The plain is almost overgrown with pine trees on all sides. There are only a few cultivated vineyards here and there. The last donkey left in the 1980s, and the last sheep about ten years ago. The olive trees remain tended by the families because they require less care, and their fruit is always valuable.

After the Second World War, some people began to build domestic cisterns, which later became the general standard. Today, water is delivered by boat tanker (holding 500,000 liters), which fills the old village cistern, from where the water is distributed to various (but not all) locations on the island, where people can fill their household cisterns (10,000 or 20,000 liters) by connecting them to a hydrant. In the summer

¹⁹ Today, Šepurine on the island of Prvič administratively belongs to the municipality of Vodice, whereas Murter is divided into two municipalities: Murter (with Kornati) and Tisno.

months, this amount of water lasts for ten days. Currently, the construction of a public water supply system linking Kopno, Prvić, Obonjan, Kaprije, and Žirje is underway, which will significantly ease people's worries and at the same time change the current (no longer so modest, but still more conscious) attitude toward drinking water.

Fluidity and relationality of the island of Žirje

The historical aspect and the integration into various “world systems” make it possible to read the layers of place, organization, and meaning of the island of Žirje, making it dynamic and flexible and removing the fiction of isolation. A better term to describe island life would be remoteness, and until the twentieth century also time delay and today even slowness (ageing). A distinction must be made among the spatial, metaphorical, and ethnographic or cultural isolation of the place. The culture of Žirje was originally authentic in the way the rural inhabitants and immigrants from the mainland—farmers and shepherds—adapted to the broader military, political, economic, technological, and, of course, natural environmental conditions of the island. Most of them were allowed to settle. Later, the technological, economic, political, and social conditions changed, and with them the positioning and social and environmental arrangements on the island of Žirje.

The fundamental difference between the description of the Trobriand Islands and the Šibenik archipelago is that Malinowski was not dealing with an external constraint, with an urban center that would connect and subordinate the islands: small or large *kula* ‘gifts’ and *gimwali* ‘barter’ were the result of self-initiated integration between the Trobriand people—a mechanism to avoid armed conflict between clans and tribes. This changed considerably for the Trobriand people in the twentieth century precisely because of the commercialization of bracelets and necklaces and the centralization of the Papuan state. The name *Šibenik Islands*, on the other hand, implies hierarchical administrative relations, and the modern history of island colonization, its economy, and culture. The identities of the Šibenik Islands were always more connected to Šibenik (and the world) than to each other (cf. Barth, 1969; Malinowski, 2017; Simonič, 2020). Island life and identity are the result of sociohistorical processes and negotiations with the world, not an “authentic” social capsule trapped in the sea.

I would like to draw attention to the historical changes in the manmade environments on the island: from defense (Byzantine fortresses) in the southeast of the island to agriculture and pasture in or from the center of the island, to fishing and tourism in the bays of the northern part. Each era utilized a specific niche, and these niches determine the history of the landscape and other features of Žirje's cultural heritage, identity, and imagination.

Economic value has shifted from fertile land to rocky shores. The once unpopular and worthless coast, especially in the partially sheltered bays, have become the most sought-after places where the descendants of the people of Žirje (with all those that live elsewhere), Croatian citizens or foreigners, set up a vacation home. In the meantime, the old village has largely fallen into disrepair. The desire of locals and foreigners for tourism on the coast has clashed with the common ownership of the island. Only small modifications are allowed. The complete ownership of the island by old families still makes large investments in vacation resorts and hotels impossible because they would require negotiations with many people to acquire large plots of land. The presence of the Yugoslav army also prevented adaptation to tourism for a time, although it helped modernize the island's roads and other infrastructure and integrate it into the Yugoslav state. Tourism promises similar integration today, in a different sociopolitical context and with different goals.

The hard or poor life in Žirje until the middle of the twentieth century can be explained not only by environmental conditions (climate, vegetation, and water), remoteness, or the army, but also by the long colonial and colonate extraction of wealth. In addition, the inheritance system and population growth from the eighteenth to the twentieth century led to fragmentation of agricultural property and undermined the economic basis of families. These are all social constraints that influence island life. Industrialization on the mainland and emigration abroad were devastating for the island community, but they were largely successful for many of the nuclear families. Associations of all kinds (extended family, fishing, cooperatives) did not survive but are fondly remembered. The family capital acquired elsewhere is now returning to the island in the form of new or partially restored family homes and new tourist accommodation.

The development of tourism facilities has transformed many small families into active, state-registered market entities that are promoted on influential tourism platforms on the internet. Tourism has become an important part of owners' livelihoods and a social front stage: social status on the island is measured by it. The political economy contributes to community and personal identity.

Industrialization, tourism, and the sale of property have changed the structure of society on Žirje. The family genealogies are being revived publicly today, serving as an important source of rights and status among the locals in this newly emerging multinational island community.

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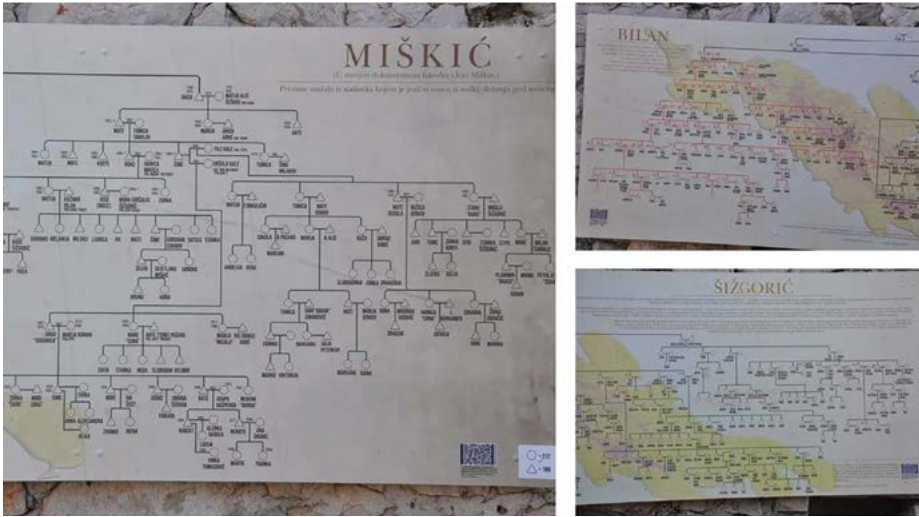


Figure 10: Panels with family genealogies on the wall of an abandoned olive mill in Muna Bay. Photos: Peter Simonič, 2023.

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Otok Žirje: spodbijanje trditev o izolaciji

V članku je predstavljena analiza otoka Žirje na Hrvaškem s poudarkom na njegovem družbeno-ekonomskem razvoju od 16. stoletja do danes. Preučene so ostaline ali plasti gospodarskih in političnih sistemov (Bizanc, Benetke, Avstrija, Jugoslavija, Hrvaška), ki so vplivale na otok in njegovo prebivalstvo ter so zato pomembne tudi pri pisanju sodobne etnografije. Avtor se opira na mnoge predhodne raziskave, opravljene na šibeniškem otočju, pri čemer poudarja, da so sicer dokumentirale raznovrstne vidike Žirja, vendar so spregledale sodobne družbene in ekološke teme ter historične primerjave, s katerimi je mogoče slediti družbenim prilagoditvam v daljšem časovnem obdobju.

Besedilo opisuje prehod od obrambnih struktur in kmetijskih praks k osredinjenosti na ribištvo, industrijo in turizem. Gospodarska vrednost se je v drugi polovici 20. stoletja z rodovitne zemlje sredi otoka preselila na kamniti priobalni pas, kjer nastajajo počitniška bivališča. Avtorja je zanimalo, kako so ti premiki povezani z lokalnimi političnimi, pravnimi, verskimi in sorodstvenimi strukturami. S prostorsko in časovno relacijsko analizo je lahko ovrgel poenostavljene ideje, ki prikazujejo otoke kot izolirane entitete, in namesto tega pokazal, kako so njihove družbe in identitete oblikovali širši družbeni (svetovni) sistemi in procesi.

Pomemben del identitete otoka Žirja predstavlja bogata kmetijska zgodovina, povezana z Žirskim poljem. Odlične kmetijske razmere so oblikovale tudi otoška lastninska razmerja v poznem 19. stoletju, ki še danes vplivajo na druga družbena razmerja. Poleg tega ima otok dolgo zgodovino vojaške navzočnosti zaradi odmaknjene lege in neoviranega pogleda na Jadransko morje.

Na stiske, s katerimi so se spoprijemali otočani do sredine 20. stoletja, so vplivale okoljske razmere, kolonialno in kolonatsko izkoriščanje, rast prebivalstva in pravila nasledstva, ki so povzročila razdrobitev kmetijskih zemljišč. Industrializacija in izseljevanje po tem sta razkrojila otoško skupnost, vendar je veliko družin uspelo drugod, na celini ali v tujini, njihov kapital se je vrnil v obliki obnovljenih domov in novih turističnih namestitev. Turizem je jedrne družine spremenil v tržne subjekte, ki imajo pomembno vlogo v lokalnem gospodarstvu in si tako krepijo družbeni položaj. Struktura skupnosti na otoku se s prihodom tujih obiskovalcev in lastnikov spreminja, javno poudarjene družinske genealogije pa postajajo pomembne kot znamenja starih prostorskih in političnih pravic v rastočem večnacionalnem okolju.