

All the Colours of a Historic Facade: Dissonant Heritage Narratives about the Restoration of a Heritage Building in Multicultural Northern Istria

Neža Čebren Lipovec

Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, Slovenia

neza.cl@fhs.upr.si

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0998-5614>

Heritage dissonances in contested territories are a challenge for the conservation of built heritage as they embody diverging values of the numerous communities. The restoration of the “Venetian House” in Piran (Slovenia) in 2016 provides an eloquent example through which we can observe the impact of population changes on the dynamics of (mis)recognition in heritage and highlight the potential of participatory practice in such conservation.

▪ Keywords: built heritage conservation, restoration, heritage dissonance, place attachment, Venetian House in Piran, Istria

Neskladja v dediščini na spornih ozemljih predstavljajo izziv za konservatorstvo grajene dediščine, saj odražajo različne vrednote številnih skupnosti. Obnova »beneške hiše« v Piranu (Slovenija) leta 2016 ponuja zgovoren primer, ob katerem lahko opazujemo vpliv sprememb prebivalstva na dinamiko (ne) priznavanja v dediščini in izpostavimo potencial participatornih praks v konservatorstvu.

▪ Ključne besede: konservatorstvo, restavriranje, neskladja v dediščini, navezanost na kraj, »Benečanka« v Piranu, Istra

Introduction

Three decades after the foundations for a critical stand in heritage studies have been set with the publishing of Tunbridge and Ashworth’s seminal text on dissonant heritage, the critical heritage studies’ community is facing a turning point and undertaking quite diverse paths (Harvey, 2024). It is only in the recent years, with a decades-long lag, that the built heritage conservation field has also entered a phase of critical self-reflection and an active search for overcoming the “epistemological bias towards scientific materialism” (Winter, Waterton, 2013: 533) by considering the discursive dimension of the built heritage conservation field. This fundamental shift is crucial for the conservation practice to open up to community-based and collaborative research, and thus to participatory approaches, this way overcoming the marginalization of certain stakeholders, namely local residents (Liu et al., 2022). This framework also opens up the discussion about the challenges in conserving tangible and immovable heritage in multiethnic and multicultural territories, marked by different heritage dissonances due to major changes in the demographic structure and the related identities.

A central case for exploring the issue is offered by the conservation project – and the related controversies – of the Venetian Gothic House, or ‘Benečanka’, also called ‘*Lassa pur dir*’, in Piran/Pirano, northern Istria (Slovenia). This region is marked by a

turmoiled history throughout the 20th century, with several shifts of borders and rulers that ultimately resulted in the processes of mass migration, on both ethnic and ideological basis, out of and into the region after the Second World War. This, in turn, also conveyed major developments of the built environment, framed by the new socialist economic and sociopolitical agenda, with the region being annexed to Yugoslavia in 1954. Alterations in the built environment, however, followed a rather idiosyncratic new architectural language, coined by one of the main figures of Slovenian modernism, Edo Mihevc (Čebtron Lipovec, 2012, 2019a, 2019b). Among the most visible interventions was also the late-1950s restoration of the mentioned Venetian Gothic House in Piran, a characteristic mark of the main city square for seven decades until it was restored again between 2015 and 2016. The latter intervention significantly changed the building's exterior, which triggered a vast public controversy about the values and significance of the building itself, but also about the role of heritage protections institutions.

In the present contribution we address the issue of engaged conservation (Chitty, 2016), particularly in historically contested territories such as Istria, that needs to be based on participatory and inclusive approaches, especially in the significance assessment and in the planning phase of the conservation projects. We explore the heritage discourses that surrounded the case study conservation project of the Venetian House in Piran, by paying particular attention to the “trajectories of misrecognitions” (Smith, 2022) and the dissonances that underlie them. The analysis uses the seminal framework on dissonant heritage as designed by Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996). At the same time, we examine how the identified discourses, and dissonances, informed (or not) the conservation decisions and interventions, and pinpoint the key potentials of participatory processes in the field.¹

Methodological aspects

The paper presents the case study of a controversial conservation project through the analysis of a public tribune at its core. The public tribune was organised as a round table, in Piran on 1 June 2016 (organised by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, the Maritime Museum of Piran, and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Primorska), dedicated to the public presentation of the proposed conservation project of Piran's Venetian House. At the event, the author of this paper was not among the organisers but a member of the public, thus in the position of participant observation. Additional sources analyzed consist of 12 media news (articles and short notes) in national and local newspapers (*Primorske novice*, *Regionalobala*, *Delo*, *Megafon*, *Outsider*), published between 2016 and 2018. As recent

¹ This paper was prepared as part of a phased research in two scientific research projects financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS): The Potential of Ethnographic Methods in the Conservation of Built Heritage in Contested Sites, the Case of Northern Istria (2021–2023; Z6-3226), and HEI-TRANSFORM, Heritage for Inclusive Sustainable Transformation (2022–2025; J7-4641).

scholarship highlighted, a prominent tool for supporting community involvement in heritage conservation and management are the local social media groups (Liang et al., 2021; Mavrič, Čebon Lipovec, 2024). In order to identify the narratives, we analyzed the debates, comments and posts within the Facebook group *Piran, kot je bil nekoč/ Pirano com'era una volta*. Among the numerous posts we identified those showing and discussing the Venetian House and the volume of comments related to it. Central to the analysis were comments expressing statements about the role of the building, and particularly its facade. Aside from this ethnological-anthropological approach towards the core issue, the present research derives from two foundational historical researches: the analyses of the post-war architecture and urbanism in the contested region of Istria, carried out over the last 20 years by the author of this article (Čebon Lipovec, 2012, 2019a); and the site-specific historiographic research about the development of the addressed building, conducted mainly by the conservators in charge of the project (Kovač, 2002, 2016; Kavčič, Žbona 2016).

Bridging the gap between theory and practice

The heritage studies paradigm turn in the conceptualization of heritage as a cultural process has placed focus on its intangible dimensions, setting aside the concern for the tangible dimensions and the materiality of heritage (Harrison, 2013; Djabarouti, 2024), formerly at the core of heritage practice. It is however at least since the inception of the critical heritage studies (CHS) that a call for keeping equal focus on the materiality and the agency of objects was constantly present (Harrison, 2013: 31–38), promoting the actor-network theory and assemblage theory. The urge for not dismissing the materiality was reiterated in relation to the CHS' founding framework in the metatheory of critical realism (Skrede, Hølleland, 2019). These assumed shortcomings of the CHS, particularly in relation to the heritage conservation practice, were evident also in the publications of the leading conservation practitioners and researches, in which the original aim of conservation in retaining the historic fabric was underscored, and the CHS critical standpoint only mentioned as one of the possible entries into the subject (Avrami, Mason, 2019: 20–21), highlighting the division between research for conservation practice and pure scholarly projects.

There are several starting points of this highly needed critical engagement in the field, marked by the earliest works of the anthropologist of place dr. Setha Low (2002) who foregrounded the potentially decisive role of ethnographic methods for conservation. The community-based and collaborative practices have been developed for heritage management particularly in the international context of the UNESCO sites, focusing on value-assessments and the public values of heritage, and cultural mapping as a central method (Avrami, Mason, 2019; Clark, 2019). While collaborative approaches had a longer

stand in urban planning (Sanoff, 2000), in the heritage field, we may identify post-colonial archaeology, working with indigenous people as ground-setting for promoting participation in heritage and also for identifying its risks (Neal, 2015). In line with the heritage studies theory, architects in conservation have also started rather recently to focus on participation, particularly through place attachment theory (Wells, Stieffel, 2019; Madgin, Lesh, 2021) as well as through narrative theory (Walter, 2020); the latter consisting in a recent attempt to address the shortcomings and bring together heritage studies, conservation, and architecture. It derives from a premodern understanding of innovation within tradition, thus deconstructing the modern practice of expert-led decision-making by positing narratives as the fundamental source for understanding both the changing and “living” of buildings, thus read as “ongoing narratives”, and the empowerment of local cultures and communities. In a similar vein, Jonathan Djabarouti (2024) proposed the reading of tangible heritage as a socio-material hybrid, placing central focus on the integration of the intangible heritage dimensions (use, meaning, symbolism etc.) into the assessment of tangible heritage and in the consequent conservation interventions. These long-awaited new epistemologies in conservation give finally also a theoretical response to the practice-driven approaches to heritage conservation and management that, over the last 20 years, evolved from a conventional approach – overlapping broadly with the concept of Authorised Heritage Discourse (Smith, 2006) – to a values-led approach (Wijesuriya et al., 2013) that aimed to democratise the conservation field, and more recently to a people-centred approach (Wijesuriya, 2023), placing a central focus on inclusion and community participation. In parallel, also the definition of conservation shifted from being “the management of change” to “the management of creative continuity and socially cohesive heritage practice (rather than management of change)” (Chitty, 2017: 2). This in turn matches also the proposal of Gustafson (2019: 28) to call the current period of conservation “Conservation 3.0”, thus placing focus on adaptive re-use as “an integrated conservation approach in direct interface with citizens while respecting historic dimensions, together with a humanistic attitude to heritage, especially its intangible, multi-factor quality dimensions”.

Nevertheless, questions remain open as to how to integrate heritage dissonances into such multivocal appraisals of heritage, and particularly into the interventions on the material. In territories with a contested history, where population change occurred, the conservation intervention acquires a much broader responsibility beyond mere conservation of materiality and its consonant, or consensual values. Particularly in the “maelstrom of (Central) Europe” (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996), marked by major demographic shifts after WWII (but also prior to that) and the post-war change of sociopolitical order, including the position along the Iron Curtain, heritage conservation has been at challenge for over half a century. Focusing this presentation on Istria, comparable territories in the maelstrom of Europe serve as reference points, with all due awareness that some similarities might only be apparent. We source here

the comparisons and attain the analytical toolkit for investigating dissonance from the seminal work by Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996). In their analysis, the two scholars showcased the Central European issues of 20th century dissonance through the examples of cities such as Wroclaw/Breslau and Gdansk/Danzig in current Poland, as well as Kaliningrad, former Königsberg, in the synonymous Russian enclave on the Baltic; all were marked by major population transfers after WWII that redesigned the ethnic structure of the urban areas, along with the shift in the ideological regime to Soviet Communism. Three main attitudes to the historic built environment by the then-new rulers were identified (Tunbridge, Ashworth 1997: 138–139): ‘destroy’ thus intentionally remove, ‘ignore’ through neglect and abandonment, and ‘reinterpret’ and thus appropriate. The reading lens is offered by both the key dimensions of dissonances (ibid.: 72–84); namely cultural (ethnicity, race, religion, language), and social (class, gender, sexual orientation, disability), and by the different facets of disinheritance related to the dissonance, which can be intentional or not, complete or partial, temporary or long-term, limited or widespread, important or trivial, concealed or obvious (ibid.: 21).

Central for the contemporary conservation practices in territories of population change is the relation of the different communities and social groups – “primary” ones and newcomers (Weber, 2007; Garrow, 2021) – to their built environment, especially how “historic sites create a sense of continuity with the past, embody group traditions and facilitate place attachment” (Lewicka, 2008: 211). Place attachment, as the cognitive-emotional bond between people and place (Altman, Low, 1992), is highly informative for heritage significance assessment, namely for understanding how group identity, collective memory and place are structured, and particularly among the different groups, since it “can create belongingness by symbolically connecting individuals to their ancestors and cultures, [...] or by reinforcing social ties and community membership” (Scannell, Gifford, 2017: 257), it thus has a strong psychological effect. Among the key categories that compose place attachment, memory (representing one’s lineage or family history and thus placing the individual in time) and sense of belonging (providing a sense of “homeness”, rootedness and thus sense of origin and stability) rank at the top, followed by a sense of comfort and security (ibid.: 259–260). When place attachment is disrupted – as in cases of forced or voluntary relocation – it can have negative implications that lead to alienation and disorientation (ibid.: 256–257). In her seminal research on place attachment in territories of shifting borders and population change, namely in Lviv/Lwow and Wroclaw/Breslau, Maria Lewicka (2008) pointed out two useful concepts: the “ethnic bias” in the collective memories, and the attitudes to the “urban reminders”, namely the remains from previous inhabitants, that can either directly influence the memory of current inhabitants through conveying historical information, or indirectly by arousing curiosity about a place’s forgotten past. She emphasized the difference in top-down, national- or ethnic-driven discourse on place attachment, and more bottom-up, local-reality oriented appraisals. Lewicka’s key conclusion was that

“restoration of a forgotten past and coordination of different historical perspectives is a prerequisite for a successful approach, while bidding on who suffered more is nothing but shameful” (Lewicka, 2008: 228), referring to the concept of competing victimhood.

However, while the new paradigms are evolving on the international scale, the Slovenian conservation field remains a clear example of an authorised, and thus material-focused, conservation practice. Despite individual attempts by conservators in the field to engage inclusively with local stakeholders, as well as by few scholars mainly in the field of archaeological management (Pirkovič, 2019) and urban conservation (Golob, 2019), inclusion and participation remains an exception. Recently, a new institutional methodology for significance assessment, the so-called VOD (*varstvena območja dediščine*; heritage protection zones; Hohnec, 2023), promotes a set of criteria which could provide space for participatory approaches, but it is at this time still too early to assess. There is however one specificity of the Slovenian conservation practice that carries an enormous potential for developing participation: the profile of the ethnologist-conservator. It is one of the official profiles of the conservation experts employed by the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (along with art historians – conservators; architects – conservators, etc.), that mirrors also the evolution of the field in the country. Although such profiles are present elsewhere in Central Europe and former Yugoslavian countries as well, having this specific profile institutionally recognised, the opportunity is offered to introduce also the ethnographic-anthropological approaches in the official framework. In fact, a similar attempt to engage ethnological approaches in the urban conservation practice to promote participation and investigate the community’s perception was carried out in several Slovenian towns already in the late 1970s, but within a set of interdisciplinary architectural-ethnological students projects, without entering the official practices (Čebtron Lipovec, 2021, 2023a).

The facade of the Venetian Gothic House in Piran/Pirano: A mirror of socio-political changes

In the case of Piran’s Venetian House, the most incisive intervention – that of painting the facade with an intense red colour, however, took place after 1957, when the area of Northern Istria was annexed to Slovenia, and thus to Yugoslavia. At that time the whole region was undergoing a major redevelopment in order to accommodate the new economic and political reality of socialist Yugoslavia, after a decade of diplomatic negotiations over territorial claims by both Italy and Yugoslavia, in which the area consisted of a temporary buffer-state divided into two zones. The dispute was settled in 1954 with the London Memorandum which allocated the northern Zone A to Italy and southern Zone B to Yugoslavia, so it was only from the mid-1950s that the future of the region was decided. The period was marked by several processes, namely modernisation

through industrialisation, but also a slow proletarianization (with the shift to socialist self-management as leading economic paradigm) and Yugoslavization (Čebon Lipovec, 2019a). In fact, the decade between 1943 (the capitulation or “armistice” of Fascist Italy in WWII, and takeover by the Third Reich), the end of the war in 1945 and the London memorandum in 1954, saw a progressive change in the demographics due to emigration. It reached its peak between 1953 and 1956 when a vast majority of Italian, and not only Italian, population left the region, some voluntarily and many not (Hrobat Virloget, 2021). The process is termed, mainly by Italian historians, as the ‘exodus’ since particularly the urban population left in masses, leaving empty houses that were then slowly resettled by the newcomers, mainly Slovenes, from either the hinterland of Istria and Trieste, but also from other Slovenian regions, and later from Yugoslav republics (Weber, 2007; Kalc, 2019; Hrobat Virloget, 2020, 2021).

In the first two years after the annexation in 1954, the development of the region was still subject to different options (Čebon Lipovec, 2019a), related to the choice of the location of the new and only Slovenian port. Finally in 1956, the decision to locate it in Koper/Capodistria determined the development orientation of the region that was to be newly denominated as the ‘Slovenian Coast’. The major directions of development were gathered in a spatial plan – the ‘Regional Plan for the Slovenian Coast’ – developed by the architect and major exponent of the Communist Party, Edo Mihevc, who had drafted the plan between 1959 and 1963, and elaborated it by 1966 (Čebon Lipovec, 2019a). In this plan, the three cities of the Slovenian Coast were allocated each a particular role: Koper/Capodistria as the maritime and administrative centre; Izola/Isola as the industrial and fishing centre; Piran/Pirano as the future centre of tourism with the historic town preserved for its scenic attractiveness, and the nearby 19th century spa town of Portorož/Portorose as its mundane tourism resort. Edo Mihevc designed also an idiosyncratic architectural language for the region that he called “progressive and Mediterranean architecture” (Mihevc, 1963; Čebon Lipovec, 2019a) as a tool for preserving the visual continuity of the landscape, by both preserving the open green spaces and local flora, as well as by searching for connections between the historic image of the cities and the needs of the contemporary architecture. He considered “traditional architecture” to be crucial in this aim of continuity, and particularly free of “ethnic or political differences” (Mihevc, 1963: 42). As a result, the “Mediterraneanness” of his architecture rested in the use of plastic elements as quotes from the vernacular idiom – namely pitched roofs with tiles, vertical windows with wooden shutters, pergolas, stone cladding, and the use of what he called “earthy” colours. Among these, the most used and propagated was the so-called “Venetian red” (Kresal, 2016), identified as a manner of respecting the Mediterranean character of the region. Despite the intentions about establishing continuity and respecting the historic character, the architect entered the national architectural history for his highly controversial approach of demolitions of large portions of the historic tissue and building of modernist skyscrapers mainly

in the historic core of Koper. Part of it was also the dense modernist tourism infrastructure in Portorož, as well as partial demolitions of the historic tissue in Piran old town (Hoyer, 1999).

Mihevc's planning approach towards the historic environment opens a large chapter about the development of the conservation practice, in Slovenia in general. The attitude was generally identified as "political urbanism" (Hoyer, 1999) which prioritised development over a more nuanced approach to the existing cultural environment; an approach broadly known and used during the post-war building boom, identified as "progressist" and opposed to the "culturalist", as termed by Choay (1965). In the case of northern Istria, however, the issue acquires a significant symbolic load since Mihevc's interventions took place in a moment of major restructuring of the identity of the region due to the processes of population change, and could thus be read as examples of *marquage symbolique* (Veschambre, 2008).

Fates of the facade of Piran's Venetian house

The Venetian Gothic House, or "Benečanka" (literally the "Venetian Lady"), also known as the "Red House", is an emblematic historic building on Tartini Square, the main public space of the historic town of Piran/Pirano. It was built in the 15th century by the local aristocrat family Del Bello, but came into local history as the "*Lasa pur dir*", meaning in Istro-Venetian dialect "Let them talk", a statement inscribed in a stone plaque on the facade, recalling its origin of being built by a merchant for his mistress (Kovač, 2002: 94–98). It was a typical Venetian urban house until it changed function on the ground floor and was used as a café in the early 20th century (Kovač, 2020: 177–178). Written sources about its modifications are scarce, the material analysis and restoration investigations, however, showed that it was subject to several adaptations and interventions, including the addition of cement plastering on the facade in the early 20th century, under the supervision of the then leading architect-conservator Ferdinando Forlati (Kovač, 2002: 97, 2020: 177–178). The first post-war conservation plan for the restoration of the Venetian House was designed in 1957, but it was thoroughly reworked by 1959 (Kovač, 2016).

The 1957 plan was focused on restoring the building to become a museum of urban housing interior and accommodate the local tourism society; the main architect involved then was Marjan Mušič. As of 1959 – when the first draft of Mihevc's Regional Plan was getting its early shape – the plan for the Benečanka was redrawn. It was finally decided it was to house the offices of the new main transport company Slavnik, while its facade was to be painted red. Notably, today the large Tartini Square is free of traffic, while until the early 1990s it was used as a parking lot, including for buses. In 1959, a study of the colours of the facades of Tartini Square was prepared by the architect Jaroslav Černigoj (Kovač, 2016), who was then (1957–1961) architect-conservator at the central Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments in Ljubljana. In his

reflection about the needed interventions in Piran, Černigoj was very clear that the town “should not become a museum [...] and the conflict between the old and the new should be avoided” (Černigoj, 1960: 8–9), yet he added that all “forces that form life, such as economy and transport” (ibid.) should be considered. He highlighted the urban form and complex structure of Piran as its main value, and so he called for all interventions to respect this historic component, but warned against historicist and Sezession-style interventions. He claimed that “copying original details appears unserious” and that “the new should be discernibly different from the old, yet the new should be inspired by the old” (ibid.: 11). Lastly, he was very critical of the treatment of facades at the time and the contemporary plastering techniques, and called for the use of the traditional technique of lime mortar that “will be the most resilient and will best preserve the unified image of the town, with the genuine earthy pigments” (ibid.: 15). Černigoj’s words – about drawing inspiration from, but not copying the historic form – were later almost literally reproduced in Mihevc’s text explaining the Regional Plan in the renowned international architectural journal *Casabella-Continuità* in 1963 (Mihevc, 1963: 43).

Between the late 1950s and the early 1960s, several other prominent historic buildings in northern Istria were painted red – such as the cloister of the Franciscan Monastery in Piran, the Manzioli Gothic-Renaissance house in Izola, or the Totto ex-Gavardo Palace in Koper. The red colour was generally called “Venetian red”, as it was supposedly termed by the architect Edo Mihevc – in fact, no official written documents report this denomination but it is passed down from the architect’s students and collaborators (Kresal, 2016). The choice of the dark red colour fitted in the overall architectural idiom that the architect coined as “progressive and Mediterranean”, and the adjective Venetian referred to the discourse of attempted visual continuity and dialogue with the historic environment. It must be remarked that the new colour was not only an issue of tone but also of material, since the tone of the colour was intrinsic to the new cement plastering, highly popular in the mid 1950s and known under the name of its brand, *terranova*. It was a cement plastering that started to be used already at the end of the 19th century (Kavčič, 2001) and was broadly promoted by the mid of the 20th century. The fashion of applying strong colours to the facades (as well as in the interiors) was a salient feature of the historicist architecture of the 19th century (Sapač, Lazarini, 2015). This repertoire was present also in Istria during the 19th-century Austrian rule, of which some traces remain visible to this day. Red was particularly used for the so-called *case cantoniere*, the buildings for the public service of road and railway maintenance located along main transport routes, characteristic of the late 19th and early 20th century landscape (Contu, 2019). The dark red colour was called “Pompeian red”, *rosso pompeiano*. The use of vivid colours on new, but also on historic facades, can thus be classified within a historicist approach; in fact, the label “romantically immature” was used to tag (pejoratively) the aesthetics of Mihevc’s architecture – as we can read in the text of his major critic, the prominent architectural historian Stane Bernik (1968: 96). How much of a conscious reference to the historicist

approach was present in Mihevc's oeuvre remains a matter of debate, but the fact is that this "invention of tradition" approach was quite evident in his work: also in the case of the major renewal plan for Koper (designed from the 1957 on), he foresaw to renew the historic town by demolishing the majority of the urban tissue consisting of vernacular housing, while retaining major palaces and churches, and (re)building with blocks of flats and high-rises in a circular shape, as a reinterpretation of the historic city walls; an approach he himself called a middle way between full demolition and total preservation (Čebrov Lipovec, 2019b). In the case of Piran, it is evident that the backing intention of such a historicist approach was not necessarily used to establish an imagined continuity of *identity* but rather an imagined continuity of *image* that would contribute to the scenic effect and picturesqueness (another concept of the 19th century vocabulary) of the historic environment preserved for tourism purposes. The choice of red, out of the broader repertoire of the historicist palette, could be linked with red being the symbolic colour of communism; however, this interpretation could not be traced in written documents as an explicitly stated intention, neither by the architect nor by the then authorities.

Preserving facades: Sacrificial layer or key architectural component?

In architecture, the facade has at least a twofold role; in the more technical branch of the profession, it is considered to be the "sacrificial layer", but also the "skin of the building" which protects the building's structure from external factors, namely climate effects, and it is (or was, historically) thus subject to continuous maintenance and therefore change. In the conservation field, however, the facade is an equally important component of the architectural whole (Fister, 1979: 121), and so a salient element of its authenticity (understood as truthfulness), bearing a broad variety of values – aesthetic, historical, spatial, technical, but social as well. Moreover, it is the facade that shows the most visible signs of patina, largely pursued by the promoters of the minimal intervention and maintenance as the main preservation approach (Muñoz Viñas, 2005). With the advent of the first conservation doctrines, aiming at restoring the "original form", the "19th-century habit for 'scraping' historic buildings to remove signs of wear, age and handling, in order to return them to a stylistic unity [...] resulted in both the distortion of features and the removal of all signs of wear, age and handling" (Djabarouti, 2024: 62). The Slovenian conservation field dealt with this issue thoroughly already in the late 1970s when the then-leading conservator-architect Peter Fister, active also in the interdisciplinary projects on urban conservation, focused his research on the issues of colours of the facade. Based on a broad set of urban restoration projects in several Slovenian cities (Škofja Loka, Tržič, Kranj, Ljubljana, Radovljica etc.), in his seminal text of 1979, *Obnova in Varstvo Arhitekturne Dediščine* [Restoration and Protection of Architectural Heritage] he provided a succinct overview of the issues and then accepted approaches. The latter were based on the clear understanding of the layered character of a building facade, particularly within vernacular (urban and rural)

architecture that only rarely represents a single moment in the past, consequently the scholar warned against pursuing the “original”, or first layer (Fister, 1979: 122). He did promote, though, the concept of “unity of spatial concept” which consisted in the choice to restore that layer of the facade that is aligned with the spatial concept being restored (ibid.: 123). This approach was evidently undertaken also in the last, 2016 conservation project. However, experts agreed that the issue of restoring facades is a highly challenging, and most of all responsible task (ibid.: 21). By the end of the 1980s, the issue gained central attention: Slovenian experts already acknowledged the palimpsest character of the buildings but also of the facades. The selection of the layer to be presented was based on the following criteria: “the best documented, the best preserved, the most fitting to the surrounding, the oldest, the one that the conservator likes best, or a palimpsest presentation that no one understands” (Mikuž, 1989: 67). The quoted conservator and restorer Janez Mikuž was already then highly critical of these approaches, finally concluding that all the listed criteria are a mere illusion and contrivance of the monument that should simply be preserved and maintained *as it was*. Most of his critique however was oriented towards the stylistic cleaning approaches, still present in his time, that aimed at making the monument “shine in new glitter”, which he considered a nonsense, and even more so “shine in its original glitter” which he considered “nothing but a mere lie” (ibid.: 67). The Yugoslav senior scholar and authority in the conservation field of the time, Ivo Maroević, shared this highly critical position particularly about restoring facades at the expense of later historical layers (Maroević, 1989). Contemporary conservation-restoration principles promote a similar minimal intervention approach (Kavčič, 2001), which is today largely supported by the help of digital research and presentation tools (Acke et al., 2021), while the primary requirement remains the same as 50 years ago when professor Fister put the need for a thorough research through probes and stratigraphy as a precondition (Fister, 1979). Considering the contemporary theory of values-based approaches and heritage discourses, however, such preliminary research should include also an ethnographic research that would reveal the social and affective value of this same facade. In the case of Piran, it should have encompassed the assessment of heritage values of the different layers, and the potential conflicts between them, by identifying the narratives and related discourses that accompanied the heritagization process (Harvey, 2001) as a social process within the community and the different stakeholders involved.

Trajectories of dissonances

The Venetian House in Piran was declared a monument of local importance in 1983, with all the attributes of the time, thus including also the red facade of 1959. The building is property of the Municipality of Piran that rented it to privates for tourism use, until 2014

to a local association. In 2015 the roof was restored, using new brick tiles typical of the historic core of Piran (Kovač, 2020: 178). In the same period, an intensive restoration-investigation of the structure of the plastering brought about information about several interventions on both the structure and the facade. In these endeavours, at least seven historic layers of the facade were identified, spanning from thick lime mortar to cement-based of different thicknesses; among these older layers, there was a typical traditional lime-based mortar with brittles of brick that usually conveyed a pinkish tone (Nagode idr., 2016; Zupančič idr., 2016). Accordingly, six different versions of a potential new lime-based plasterwork were proposed (Kavčič, Žbona, 2016). Based on this discovery, the expert decision was taken to remove the outer, 1950s red facade made of cement and red paint, and reconstruct the supposed earlier lime-based pinkish facade (Kavčič, Žbona, 2016; Kovač, 2016). In 2018, also the architectural fittings in stone were restored (Kovač, 2020).

The information about the restoration-investigation insights and the consequent decision about the reconstruction of the historic facade reached the public through articles in the local newspapers and after the scaffolding was set up. The lack of communication, and particularly any news about the final decision on the fundamental change of the colour of the facade, stirred several reactions. The establishment of a civil initiative of the inhabitants of Piran against the planned restoration, based on over 400 signatures collected in a few days, was most eloquent. Following this, on 1 June 2016, a public round table was organised to present to the public the expert studies that brought to the decision. The dissonances in heritage that were articulated in this debate can be identified at least along three trajectories. Partly they refer to the feeling and labelling of belonging by the different groups in the city, and the consequent “continuously fluctuating ascription of the ‘autochthonous’, the ‘immigrant’, and the ‘virtual’ inhabitants” (Weber, 2007: 161). These categories are not self-evident for Piran since the shifts in demography were partly idiosyncratic, and need to be outlined for a clear understanding of the case. Several waves of change in populations marked this tiny city: first was the post-WWII exodus of the pre-war mainly Italian inhabitants; during the exodus, Slovenians from the broader region and the inland regions started to move into the empty houses in the 1950s; by the 1970s, then, several of the latter had moved to larger and new houses in the nearby Portorož and Lucija; in the meantime, more newcomers came from other Yugoslav republics; after the independence in 1991 and the real estate law of the early 1990s that allowed a highly economic purchase of the rented flats, many Piranians bought and later resold at higher prices their flats to wealthy new owners from central Slovenia, who converted the housing into weekend and holiday flats. The latest major wave, at least since the Slovenian independence, was the immigration of Albanians from Kosovo and Macedonia.



Picture 1: Venetian House in Piran with the new pinkish facade, 2025. Photo: Neža Čebon Lipovec.

A textbook dissonance between authorised and subaltern discourses

A first clear dissonance arose as a textbook example of the clash between Authorised Heritage Discourse, or AHD, and the subaltern, dissenting discourse(s) (Smith, 2006), which in fact permeated the whole public debate thereafter. The AHD was embodied by the position of the experts in charge of the conservation plan and their colleagues specialists, who supported the conventional, exclusively expert-led view on heritage values. Their position rested on the principle that “it is our duty to protect the monument in its authentic testimonial” and “to improve its authenticity” (Kovač, 2016), where “authentic testimonial” referred to its role as one of “the most important architectural monuments in Piran” (ibid.), the values of which were primarily aesthetic, or art-historical, because the building is an evident echo of Venice, particularly of the so called *gotico fiorito* in the design of the stone elements (window frames, balcony) on the facade, while also the floor plan and disposition were mentioned. The composition of the facade plastering, after the restoration probes and the retrieval of the lime-based mortar with brick brittle, thus composed a key element in the reconstitution of the entirety of the supposed historic facade. The discourse beneath this reasoning is, again, a textbook example of past approaches to heritage preservation that aimed at “stylistic unity” (Jokilehto, 1999: 381), at the expense of removal of later layers and especially other assessments of the object. Such an approach rests on the understanding of authenticity as “original form”, or at least by restricting the assessment of authenticity to form, design, and material (Jokilehto, 2019). It comprises an understanding of authenticity that the professional field, on the international scale, has overcome since the 1994 ICOMOS Nara Charter, although the identification of authenticity (or authenticities) remains fluid (Muñoz Viñas, 2005). As we saw earlier, the restrictive and conservative approach was criticised in the Slovenian professional field as early as the late 1980s (Mikuž, 1989). Such a conservative approach is a typical feature of the AHD, namely the exclusive focus on material aspects of heritage and expert-led assessment (Smith, 2006: 88). In the case of Piran, it also seems to match another AHD feature – the search for a univocal presentation of the past. Considering the contested interpretations of recent Istrian history, the Venetian period of the region “reflects a distant past that does not need to be contested since it is virtually nobody’s past and can safely be ‘remembered’”, as it was pointed out for the specific case of Piran by one of the earliest anthropological researchers of the Piran tourism-related heritage narratives, Irena Weber (2007: 162).

The opposed, dissenting discourse of a part of the local population demanded the red colour of the facade be preserved. This narrative highlighted the role of the red facade as a key element of collective identity and memory of the local community: “*We have adopted the red, because three generations have known it red and we think it should remain red, especially for the sake of visibility, both in Slovenia and more broadly in the world*” (Interlocutor 1). Another statement points again to the collective

meaning of the building, particularly linked to its position on the prominent location in the main square:

I have to say that I definitely refuse any other colour. For the simple reason that I'm an inhabitant of Piran, because my mother, to this day, when she comes to Piran says 'meet me at the red house', we all know the red house, anyone asks anything – meet me at the red house, we know where that is, and besides, she's going to get lost in the string of a hundred houses that are all the same colour in Piran. (Interlocutor 1)

Likewise, the succinct statement: “*Benečanka rests in the hearts of all of us*” (Interlocutor 6), represent a typical example of its role in collective memory and place attachment, but also particularly of ‘solastalgia’, or emotional distress when a beloved place is being threatened, or already mourned for being lost, usually due to urban renewal (Albrecht, 2005: 7; Gregory, Chambers, 2021: 43). In the case of Piran’s community of post-war newcomers, it becomes an issue of ontological security provided by the known built environment. Ontological security refers to the “confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action” (Giddens, 1991 in Grenville, 2007: 448), and the sense of anchored security gets disrupted in wholesale renewals, causing disorientation and loss of past certainties. In the case of newcomers’ communities, namely in the three-generations one of the post-WWII inhabitants of Piran, the negative effect is even stronger since the rootedness in the space might supposedly be weaker, thus cherishing the spatial references to their (relatively short-termed) collective memory. Two important remarks from the local inhabitants belonging to the Civil Initiative pointed out criticalities about the experts’ position:

Of course, I thank the profession. It's right that we have you and it's right that you control certain things, but I'm surprised that... this discovery of what the Venetian House was yesterday may determine what it has to be tomorrow. It's red today and it was red in '83 when it became a heritage monument. We hear now that a historical mistake [adding the red colour] has been made. Okay, I have to say, to me, a very fine mistake ... (Interlocutor 1)

And in a more emphatic way: “*And what will the experts say in 50 years? Uh, horror, what a mistake has been done ...*” (Interlocutor 3). Likely in an unreflected way, brusquely, this statement embodies a contemporary understanding of both heritage as a process in constant evolution, and of authenticity as a superposition of layers equally in constant becoming. Another comment pointed to another criticality:

The decision is technically correct, ok, we have seen that you have done your research, you have come up with some facts [...]. What about social acceptability? What about taking into account the wishes of the people who now live in the city? I think that your institution was set up to listen to the people of today, to live in some kind of harmony. (Interlocutor 1)

This comment embodies the awareness of the local community as being the bearer, or at least a central stakeholder in the contemporary approaches to heritage, such as the values-led approach. With this remark, the civil society highlighted, unwittingly, the fundamental paradigm turn that took place in the conservation profession since at least the 1970s which encompassed a “revulsion against professionalism and experts in general” (Glendinning, 2013: 325), and democratised the heritage field by expanding the array of values that compose the heritage significance from the sole aesthetic and historical, to the technical, spatial, social and spiritual value (Avrami, Mason, 2019).

Ethnicity-based difference?

However, another trajectory of dissonance was evidenced clearly, and relates to the contested or even difficult past of the region; namely the ethnicity-based dissonance between the Italian and Slovenian inhabitants of the city. Speaking in Italian language, a member of the Italian community said:

There were already problems in the 1960s, when the inhabitants of Piran, of the city, for a decade or so, they were in a bad mood passing through the square, watching this red colour. (Interlocutor 3)

It was not explicitly stated that the position related to the Italian community of the city, but the narrative can be discerned both in the use of the language as identifier, as well as in the wording about the “inhabitants of the city”. Similar in tone, and strongest in message was one of the final comments by another representative of the Italian community:

This abuse that you feel [...], of a change of colour, it is because you are used to it, you were born with this colour around ... but look, the same thing happened at the end of the 1950s when the colour was changed. Many people suffered from the change in the colour of the facades, from the change of the toponymy that no longer exists, that was original, was Istro-Venetian and so on. (Interlocutor 7)

The same interlocutor continued, highlighting the relationship with the experts and institutions:

But I think that we're here not to talk and decide on the colour of a house facade. We are here ... it's a day of emancipation for Piran. Let's respect the architects, let's respect the institute of cultural heritage which has done an excellent job and is finally restoring in a conservative way, not distorting and not making politics for the sake of colour. And so it's worthy of respect, or as the architect said, we will finally have a colour worthy of the Venetian House [...]. (Interlocutor 7)

Another comment pinpointed the representational value of Venetian architecture as the central value and reason for the choice of intervention:

The Venetian House was restored several times, inside and out, but I think it's just rekindling that little bit of Venetian character that is left ... valorising it as it was valorised by the architects of Venice. (Interlocutor 3)

The quotes resonate partly with the initial assumption we made, referring to previous research (Weber, 2007) about the Venetian heritage being a “safe distant past”. Nevertheless, the Venetian character has also been identified several times as an element pertaining to the Italian identity in Istria, both in relation to tangible as well as intangible heritage (Hrobat Virloget, 2020: 27, 2021: 52), thus placing the Italian community in “a privileged position” as the caretakers of the Venetian historical elements that “convey a sense of continuity and distinctiveness” (Weber, 2007: 166).

The underlying dissonance could be thus identified as ethnicity-based, or at least linked to the legitimization strategy of “primacy of occupation of the claimed area” (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996: 136) or “indigenoussness” (Weber, 2007). Such legitimization strategies are often present in heritage narratives also in undisputed areas (cf. Garrow, 2021). However, when this legitimization strategy is used in contested territories, it becomes a tool of misrecognition and denial of a non-hegemonic group (Smith, 2022). On the level of affective value, in this case again we can identify the argument of disrupted place attachment due to changes in the built environment – that took place in the late 1950s when the beige-grey facade was turned red – and its negative psychological implications in relation to the sense of security.

The specific case of Piran results in a somewhat paradoxical situation: the significance assessment of the heritage value of the Venetian House as a Venetian Gothic urban house with a bright facade results in the convergence of the discourses of the expert authorities in charge and those of the Italian community – designated due to its generally unknown and silenced collective memory (Hrobat Virloget, 2020, 2021) as a minority group, thus unheard and considered non-hegemonic and subaltern. This is even more telling in light of the narratives of members of the Italian community reflecting on the neglect of the historic built environment and a hurtful approach to their

identity (ibid., 2020: 27–28, 2021: 227). In fact, neglect, particularly of inner cities, is considered one of the three “approaches” towards heritage in areas of population change (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996: 139).

However, an ethnicity or primacy-based dichotomic view of the conservation project for the Venetian House in Piran, reduced to the antagonism between Italians and Slovenians, does not pay justice to this complex case. As both the narratives expressed at the 2016 round table, as well as the contemporary active posts on local social media show, the support for one or the other option was much more varied. A middle-aged member of the Slovenian community contested her community members by saying:

I came to Piran in '55, and I remember the city with those houses ... And then 4 years later we moved to Bernardin, there was this one red house there, casa rossa they said, it was a brothel. And then they painted red this house in Piran, the Benečanka, and I kind of related it, and I didn't like it. I thought it was a violence, a coarseness. So I'm excited about the experts who are going to bring back its noble bright colour. (Interlocutor 5)

On the other hand, posts from some members of the Italian community in the Facebook group *Piran, kot je bil nekoč / Pirano com'era una volta* show old images of the Venetian House with its red facade with comments such as “*Come era bella rossa*” (How beautiful it was when it was red) (FB PKN-PCV, Paolo de Luise 29.11.2024), or again “*Lassa pur dir. Rossa era meglio*” (Let them talk, red was better) (FB PKN-PCV, Paolo de Luise 26.12.2023). Overall, the majority of the group's posts favoured preserving the red colour. Lastly, in the most recent book *Raccontare Pirano / Pripovedovati o Piranu* (Paliaga, Manzin, 2024) about Piran's heritage, written in Italian and Slovenian and aiming at the general public, the presentation of the Venetian House implicitly acknowledges, in the conclusion, the controversy about the latest restoration:

The building underwent a total renewal in the beginning of the 20th century. The interior was changed completely. The recent restoration of the plaster perhaps unveiled the original one. Before that, the house was painted with an intense red colour. (Paliaga, Manzin, 2024: 67)

At the basis of the apparent ethnicity-based dissonance, one additional insight must be noticed: the representatives of the two competing discourses and valuing, particularly in the public event, are mainly either Slovenian or Italian middle-aged and elderly-generation members of the community. Absent were the voices of the 1960s–1970s newcomers from other Yugoslav republics as well as the specific Albanian community. As pointed out by Irena Weber, the latter groups, particularly the Albanians, are never present and never included as “Piranians” in other groups' narratives (Weber, 2007: 166).



Picture 2: Venetian House in Pirano with the grey facade, early 1920s–1930s. Photo: Courtesy of KAMRA Regional portal of libraries.



Picture 3: Venetian House in Pirano with the red facade, 1960s–1970s. Photo: Courtesy of KAMRA Regional portal of libraries.

Tourism – as source and tool of dissonance

An additional trajectory of dissonance can finally be traced, in relation to the arguments supporting primarily the retention of the red colour: the arguments of tourism. In fact, several of the narratives in support pointed the role of the visual effect of the former red facade as an important marker of the square and the town:

We think it should be red, especially for its visibility both in Slovenia and in the wider world. I'm amazed when I talk to a tourist and they say 'what colour? Isn't it supposed to be red? But it's the 'Rotte Haus'! I can't imagine it not being red, and I think it's right that there is one house in the square that attracts attention, that is recognisable in the world. (Interlocutor 1)

I know that today Piran is a frenzy, there are tourists from all sorts of places, they prefer to sleep in houses where the interiors have preserved the old characteristics, in the houses of the past, so not only on the outside but in the interior, too, and few houses in Piran, by now, have retained such characteristics inside as well ... (Interlocutor 4)

Both arguments on the one hand refer to, and also counter, those of the experts: the experts aimed at the unity of the image of the square, so against one building striking out of the whole; the experts also promoted the complete restoration, including the interior, to present the historical value of the building in its entirety. However, the major driver for these quoted comments was the instrumentality of the heritage site for tourism purposes – and thus for its commodification. Tourism was, however, the major driving force also in the late 1950s when the facade was painted red, as Piran was set to become the scenic tourist attraction within Mihevc's Regional Plan and its "Mediterranean and progressive" aesthetics. Such preservation approach, identified by Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996: 138–139) as "ideologically somewhat ambiguous communist policy towards heritage" in contested territories of population change, resulted in three main policies, among which the third encompassed "to accept the existence of the physical heritage and even to maintain it, but to treat it as having aesthetic rather than contemporary political value, focusing on the intrinsic qualities of the object rather than its relation to the people who created it"; finally, these sites were usually transformed into tourist gems (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996: 136). Preservation for primarily tourism consumption was a general approach since the 1960s and culminated in the "heritage boom" of the 1980s that benchmarked the commodification of heritage (Harrison, 2013). This trend has been ever-evolving in the tourist region of the Slovenian Coast, and particularly in Piran, especially with the prevalence of cultural and heritage tourism. It is thus not surprising that the tourism

discourse underpins the other heritage discourses. It is highly telling, however, of cultural dissonances that both the main narratives – pro and anti-red facade – take the tourism issue as a central argument.

Dissonances and the conservation field

“Political conversion of a facade” (Kosec, 2016) was the term used in a professional journal to tag the process of the Venetian House dispute. The analysis of the three main trajectories of dissonances – between authorised expert discourse; between different ethnic groups; and versus the tourism role of heritage – however pinpoints topics that are specific to the conservation field but actually address some fundamental epistemological basis of heritage studies. Three such topics can be exposed.

First are the core conservation topics. The transformation of “all the colours” of the Venetian House’s facade from the 1950s beige-grey to a “Venetian” red in 1959, and then into a pinkish beige in 2015–2016, and the grand dispute that it stirred, reopens the apparently technical question about the facade being the sacrificial layer. The term itself explains that it is the layer and aspect (also of authenticity) most prone to change; which was the case also of Piran. This sacrificial layer firstly bears important historical, aesthetic but also strong and controversial social and affective values. From the point of view of conservation as a technical field, thus from the heritage science perspective, the experts in charge performed a reference type of accurate research. Primarily, the technical aspect of the decision to reconstruct the assumed historic lime-based plastering was a well-grounded expert decision that followed principles of better sustainability and better quality of natural materials. From a historical and aesthetic point of view, the decision about the reconstruction, however, raises the debate on the authenticity and the equal treatment of all relevant historical layers. Considering that authenticity does not refer to the essentialist understanding as original image, but rather to the truthfulness of the whole identity (meaning all layers) of the heritage object (Muñoz Viñas, 2005; Jokilehto, 2019), the removal of the 20th century layer and colour is at least questionable. As we showed, this underpins the main point of critique related to the contemporary heritage theory: decisions as to its fate should not have been exclusively expert-led, but rather a matter of a shared and informed, and most of all participatory process. Social and affective values still represent a “deeply buried and hard-to-admit emotional aspect of conservation and restoration” (Grenville, 2007: 458), so the decisions cannot be reduced to mere technical or legislative procedures, but rather a collaborative research that informs values-led and people-centred approaches. The Piran case was therefore an exemplary case of the situation described by scholars as follows: “Where different perceptions are not recognized or respected, conflict may arise due to the denial and repression of values” (Liu et al., 2022).

The second topic relates to collective memory, place attachment, and issues of ontological security. Since Piran is a typical example of a multicultural as well as contested place, namely due to the post-war change in demographics in which minorities and majorities switched power positions, the changed facade of the Venetian House conveyed a double rupture in place attachment that impacts the sense of belonging, security and thus of identity. For the pre-war, mainly Italian inhabitants, used to the beige-grey facade of the building, the change to red in the late 1950s represented a major rupture in their built environment and thus in the place attachment. Considering that most of the pre-war urban community had left with the exodus, the social dimension of place attachment was not only disrupted but actually lost (Hrobat Virloget, 2020, 2021: 227), where the loss of also the material dimension, meaning the built environment, amplified the sense of loss and insecurity. On the other hand, for the several post-war, mainly Slovenian and Yugoslav newcomers, who are today the majority in the town, the red facade represented – 70 years after the change of colour – an “urban reminder”, thus a visible, symbolic element of place attachment. In terms of authenticity, the red colour should have composed today an additional historical layer of the authentic, genuine character of this building, or “ongoing narrative” (Walter, 2020: 149). Although highly disruptive, or even violent towards the pre-war community, the red colour could have been read even as “difficult heritage” (Macdonald, 2009). The 1950s transformation to red can be interpreted as an act of misrecognition of the pre-war Italian community, likewise the top-down decided removal of this red facade can be read as an act of misrecognition of a majority of the post-war community as well. The collective memory, and related appurtenances, opens the extremely broad issue of defining a “community”. Within the limits of the present contribution, let us just remind that critical heritage scholarship warns against the use of the conservative and restrictive ethnogenetic notion, and suggests the reading of community through the Latourian “actor-network theory” as a dynamic network of relationships based on common interests (Waterton, Smith, 2010; Harrison, 2013). Furthermore, scholars warn against the use of the term “community” itself, since it tends to generate hierarchies and conflicts, if it arises from the notion that the “cultural heritage belongs, in first place, to the cultural community that generated it, and subsequently to that which cares for it” (Turner, Tomer, 2013: 188), which leads to process of misrecognitions. In the case of Piran, further research would be beneficial to identify the latest heritage discourses, analyzed through the lens of the currently unheard groups such as the third-generation descendants of post-war Yugoslav newcomers, the recent Albanian immigrants, and the youngsters.

The third topic relates to the concept of community and participation in heritage conservation as a central issue for contemporary values-led and people-centred approaches. Piran’s case indicates that its communities are multiple and fluid, in line with contemporary theories on communities as assemblages and fluid networks (Harrison, 2013). Most of all, Piran’s inhabitants are active and eager to be involved

in heritage issues, as proven by the activities of local heritage associations such as the Anbot who are the main organisers of the European Heritage Days and other similar activities, well-documented in the works by Irena Weber (2007). This in turn offers a splendid case of participation, in its highest form, even, on Arnstein's (1969) participation ladder – that of full participation from the assessment to the final management that leads to empowerment. Being active in a territory of contested history, where parts of it still remain silent (or silenced; Hrobat Virloget, 2020, 2021), such as the small Italian community that had remained, conflicts over the contested nature of heritage are ever-present. So, it is exactly thoughtful participation that takes dissonance not “as an exceptional and static problem [...], dissonance should be used as a space for mutual recognition, acceptance, dialogue and dynamic relationship with the past” (Kisić, 2016: 289), that offers tools not only for a smarter and resilient heritage conservation, but also opportunities to acknowledge the historic misrecognitions and repair, at least partly, the ruptures in place attachment, by eventually creating new anchors. As Lewicka wrote for Poland and Ukraine, rather than confronting “discrepant ethnic or national versions of place histories [...] perhaps it would be more efficient to step down to encourage the involved parties to carry detective investigations in situ, in order to discover themselves the place's unique and multicultural identity” (Lewicka, 2008: 229); a recommendation that meets Walter's reading of buildings as “ongoing narratives”. In fact, Piran's case was among the main cases that triggered recent research about the potentials and ways to improve participation in conservation in Slovenia (Čebren Lipovec, 2021, 2023b), considering also the skills of the ethnologist-conservator profile. In this framework, a particular new method is being developed, called “group memory talk” (Čebren Lipovec, 2023b, 2024) that takes the heritage dissonances in a contested site as the topic to be investigated collaboratively and through a multivocal approach, with the aim to identify the shared values and voice the differences, and collaboratively translate them into guidelines for conservation interventions. Similarly, the current Slovenian national research project HEI-Transform is designing a multicriterial approach for conservation projects that are based on the four pillars of sustainability, and foremost on the participation of all key stakeholders (Ifko, 2025).



Picture 4: Graffiti “Aliens” on the Venetian House, May 2022. Photo: Courtesy of Danijel Hugo Ercegovčević.

Had the local community in Piran been called to participate in such a collaborative investigation of the history and meanings of the Venetian House, the result would most likely have been different – perhaps the new facade would have nevertheless been created anew in a “new old” pinkish or other tone, this way repairing the past misrecognition, yet the red would have gotten its rightful value as a relevant historical layer that determines the identity of some inhabitants. Contemporary digital tools offer the only compromise so far – a mobile application has been designed about the city’s history that virtually renders the former red facade. However, this tiny attempt again mainly addressed the “community of tourists”, while the built environment with the pink facade added a new layer to this “ongoing narrative”. As a recent graffiti on the house’s side attests, to some, it still remains “alien”.

Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on ethnographic research materials that are not classified as research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic research materials are available on reasonable request with the author.

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Fieldwork material

Hand-noted and partly recorded at the public roundtable in Piran on 1 June 2016:

- Interlocutor 1, female 50–60 years, Slovene. 1.6.2016, Piran
- Interlocutor 2, female 60–70 years, Slovene. 1.6.2016, Piran
- Interlocutor 3, female 50–60 years, Italian. 1.6.2016, Piran.
- Interlocutor 4, female 50–60 years, Italian. 1.6.2016, Piran.
- Interlocutor 5, female, 60–70 years, Slovene. 1.6.2016, Piran.
- Interlocutor 6, female, 60–70 years, Slovene. 1.6.2016, Piran.
- Interlocutor 7, female 50–60 years, Italian. 1.6.2016, Piran.

Social media sources

Facebook Piran, kot je bil nekoč / Pirano com'era una volta, Paolo de Luise, 29.11.2024.

Facebook Piran, kot je bil nekoč / Pirano com'era una volta, Paolo de Luise, 26.12.2023.

Vse barve zgodovinske fasade: neskladni dediščinski narativi ob obnovi spomeniške stavbe v večkulturni severni Istri

Prispevek se osredinja na vlogo dediščinskih neskladij v konservatorstvu, torej ohranjanju historičnega grajenega okolja, in povezavo s teoretskimi izhodišči kritičnih dediščinskih raziskav. Konservatorsko stroko je v zadnjih dveh desetletjih zaznamoval prehod iz konvencionalnega pristopa, ki je v rokah izključno strokovnjakov, k vključujočemu pristopu, ki temelji na vrednostih in vrednotah za vse (*values-led approach*), ter k sodobnejšemu, na ljudi osredinjenemu pristopu (*people-centred approach*). Poseben pomen imajo neskladja v večkulturnih prostorih, kjer se je prebivalstvo korenito spremenilo. Tako je bilo v Istri vse 20. stoletje, posebej pa po 2. svetovni vojni, ko je prišlo do t. i. eksodusa (ne samo) italijanskega prebivalstva, obenem pa se je opazno spremenilo tudi grajeno okolje. V prispevku analiziramo diskurze, ki so spremljali konservatorske posege na beneškogotski hiši »Benečanka« v Piranu, ko je bila v letih 2015–2016 restavrirana fasada, po velikih posegih iz 50. let prejšnjega stoletja.

V prvem, teoretskem poglavju sta koncept stavbne dediščine in avtentičnosti kot »stalna pripoved« (*ongoing narrative*; Walter, 2020) predstavljena vzporedno s sodobnim konceptom dediščine kot procesom. Orisane so kategorije neskladja (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996), poseben poudarek je namenjen konceptu navezanosti na kraj. V drugem poglavju sta predstavljeni dediščinska problematika Istre in spreminjanje grajenega okolja od časa po drugi svetovni vojni, ko je po načrtu Eda Mihevca novoimenovana regija Slovenska obala dobila novo regionalno modernistično arhitekturno podobo, katere pomemben del so bile prav barve fasad kot element ustvarjanja vizualne kontinuitete krajine. V osrednjem poglavju predstavimo historiat poznogotske hiše »Benečanka«, ki je leta 1959 dobila novo, rdečo cementno fasado, slednjo pa so v letih 2015–2016 odstranili in nadomestili z domnevno rekonstrukcijo predhodne rožnate barve, ki temelji na tradicionalni rabi apnene malte. V analizi javne razprave junija 2016 so se najjasneje izrazila nasprotujoča si stališča zaradi tega konservatorskega posega, v katerem smo prepoznali tri sklope neskladij. Prva zadeva najznačilnejše neskladje med strokovnim, torej avtoriziranim dediščinskim diskurzom, ki je z odstranitvijo

poznejših plasti sledil cilju »izboljšanja avtentičnosti« in rekonstrukciji karseda enotne podobe beneškogotske fasade z odstranitvijo poznejših plasti, ter podrejenega diskurza večje skupine prebivalcev, ki se z odstranitvijo rdeče fasade niso strinjali, v proces odločanja pa niso bili vključeni. V temelju podrejenega dediščinskega diskurza, katerega nosilci so pretežno povojni, slovensko govoreči priseljenci oziroma njihovi potomci, je »solastalgija«, torej tesnoba ob izgubi ljubljene prostora, ki jo spremlja krhanje občutka navezanosti na kraj in ontološke varnosti. Podoben narativ, a z obrnjenim pogledom, značilen za drugo skupino prebivalcev, je stališče tistih, ki so stavbo videli še pred barvanjem v rdečo; za člane italijanske skupnosti je »beneška« podoba stavbe prav tako referenca za njihovo navezanost na kraj, rdeča barva pa je razumljena kot njeno zanikanje. Pomembna sta uvida, da vendarle podrejena diskurza dveh etničnih skupin nista dihotomna, obenem pa se jasno izrisuje skladnost med strokovnim diskurzom in zagovorniki rožnate barve. Tretje neskladje je odnos nasprotnih podrejenih diskurzov do vloge turizma: turizem postane razlog tako za rdeči (prepoznavnost) kot za rožnati odtенок (poustvaritev historičnega ambienta beneške gotike), torej skladnost v neskladju. Analizo sklence ugotovitev, da so – upoštevaje sodobne dediščinske teorije – neskladja del dediščinske vrednosti objekta. Za ozaveščanje neskladij in njihovo dejavno obravnavo pri odločanju o konservatorskih posegih pa je nujno čim zgodnejše in širše sodelovanje pomembnih udeležencev, predvsem skupin lokalne skupnosti; tako je obravnava neskladij prostor »za dialog in vzajemno prepoznavanje« (Kisić, 2016).