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# Albanian Hidden Heritage in Slovenia: Some Notes on Music-Making in Between the Centre and Periphery

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Focusing on Albanian communities' overlooked musical heritage in post-Yugoslav Slovenia, this paper analyses how and why the dominant framing of Albanians has reinforced the assumption of the absence of the Albanian heritage. By comparing central and peripheral settings in examining the ambivalence towards this heritage in Kočevje and the recent process of heritagisation in Ljubljana, we challenge the notion that minority cultural recognition occurs uniformly across national space.

▪ Keywords: Albanians in Slovenia, Albanian music, hidden heritage, marginalisation, Slovenia, Yugoslavia

V članku je obravnavana spregledana glasbena dediščina albanske skupnosti v postjugoslovanski Sloveniji. Gre za analizo, kako in zakaj je prevladujoče dojemanje Albancev okrepilo domnevo o njeni odsotnosti. S primerjavo urbanega središča in obrobja na primeru protislovnega pristopa k tej dediščini v Kočevju in novejšega procesa dediščinjenja v Ljubljani želimo premisliti podmeno, da se kulturno priznavanje manjšin v nacionalnem prostoru odvija enakomerno.

▪ Ključne besede: Albanci v Slovenija, albanska glasba, skrita dediščina, marginalizacija, Slovenija, Jugoslavija

## Introduction

The perception of Albanians and their immigration to Slovenia is often dominated by the media and public discourse that express concerns regarding the potential transformation of Slovenian society and its urban landscapes, as well as discussion about the pace of integration of Albanians.[1] The public interest and unease surrounding migration narratives have also incited a scholarly inquiry into the migration patterns of Albanians within the former Yugoslav territories. A growing body of research has sought to delineate the migratory trajectories of Albanian communities across Southeastern and Central Europe, with particular attention to issues of integration, assimilation, and the economic activities of Albanian migrants. These studies often emphasise the solidarity practices within Albanian (kin) networks, especially those formed by economic migrants from Kosovo and North Macedonia, while exploring the broader socio-political ramifications

[1] For example, the sarcastic observation that the abbreviation KR, which can be found on car license plates, should no longer be the designation for the town of Kranj but could be read as an abbreviation for the Republic of Kosovo, clearly reflects public concern about the presence of Albanians in Slovenia.

of their presence in host countries. Such investigations frequently engage with public perceptions of Albanians, underscoring both the challenges faced by these migrant communities and their impact on their countries of origin (see Nikolić Đerić, Orlić, 2014; Iveta Rajković, Geci, 2017; Archer, 2023). In addition, scholars have also explored the status of Albanians in Slovenia, analysing historical trajectories and their influence on the sociocultural position of the Albanian community within Slovenian society (Berishaj, 2004; Vadnjal, 2014; Kladnik, 2019; Mandelc, Gajić, 2022; Zobec, 2023).

However, specific gaps in the existing literature remain, particularly regarding the nuanced interpretation of Albanian heritage in Slovenia, focusing on cultural and, more specifically, musical heritage. This study seeks to address some of the understudied aspects of Albanian migrations, offering a critical examination of the special position of Albanian communities in Slovenia and the representation of their cultural and musical practices, which, until recently, have remained largely obscure and marginalised within the broader Yugoslav and Slovenian contexts. We argue that the prevailing discourse surrounding Albanians in the former Yugoslav states, including Slovenia, is predominantly shaped by narratives emphasising entrepreneurship, hard work and diligence. Such representations have inadvertently marginalised the significance of cultural engagement and the active preservation and interpretation of heritage within Albanian communities and also contributed to the perception of an absence of Albanian cultural heritage in Slovenia.

Minority cultural expressions are often analysed through an identitarian lens, frequently framed within the paradigm of methodological nationalism (Kozorog, Bartulović, 2015; Bejtullahu, 2016; Kovačič, Hofman, 2019; Pettan, 2021). This approach, applicable in some instances, gives no account for the specific dynamics of construction and preservation of Albanian musical heritage in Slovenia, which could be described as a form of hidden or neglected heritage or simply as legacy,[2] that has been slowly – and through various, often contradictory processes – transformed into the heritage for a segment of both Albanian and Slovenian audiences and performers.[3]

[2] In this context, we adhere to the distinction between 'legacy' and 'heritage', where 'legacy' is understood as a neutral term referring to something that is transmitted from past generations, leaving traces in the present world regardless of our awareness. In contrast, 'heritage' refers to that which is actively selected, nurtured, and preserved, valued positively as a source of pride and a cornerstone of identity for a specific group (Baskar, 2005: 46−47). Albanian musical practices can be viewed as an important legacy in the Slovenian context, linked explicitly to emigration processes and shared experiences within socialist Yugoslavia. At the same time, however, these practices constitute a complex heritage for the Albanian community. Whether intentionally or not, this heritage has been concealed or overlooked for various reasons by most Slovenians. The reasons will be further explored in this article.

[3] We want to emphasise that the Albanian community in Slovenia employs distinct emic terms to describe their cultural production, with the term 'heritage' gradually incorporated into their vocabulary. While Albanians in Slovenia do not use the expression '*trashëgimi*' (which could be roughly translated as [in] heritage) when discussing musical practices, they may rather use the expression '*traditë*' (tradition) in the context of continuity of a (music) practice, e. g. playing a traditional instrument like *çifteli* (a two-string plucked chordophone). Nevertheless, we are also intentionally using the term 'heritage' since it has important cultural, political, and juridical implications, and we are also focusing on the practices subject to the complex heritagisation process. However, not all musical practices can be conceptualised as a heritage.

Long-lasting obscurity and non-recognition of Albanian heritage in Slovenia stems from the limited channels available to promote Albanian cultural activities and a historical lack of meaningful contact between the Albanian community and the broader Slovenian public. Although Albanian cultural expressions and the public heritagisation of Albanian culture have slowly gained visibility in Slovenia in recent decades, these issues remain a marginal concern, both for many Albanians living in Slovenia and for the Slovenian public, the former being preoccupied with the immediate challenges of survival upon immigration and the burden of public misrepresentations, and the latter, owing to minimal direct engagement with Albanians, remains largely unaware of or indifferent to these cultural contributions. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the last decades, new forms of heritagisation of Albanian musical practices have been brought about, which we aim to explore here.

## Situating the research: Methods, sites, and applied ethnomusicology

This article, designed as an ethnomusicological and cultural anthropological study, is based on fieldwork conducted in 2023 and 2024 in Kočevje and Ljubljana among Albanians – an ethnic minority with migrant experiences or backgrounds – and Slovenians, the predominant population. These two research sites were selected due to their diametrically contrasting positions within Slovenia's sociogeographic landscape. By comparing a central and a peripheral location, the study aims to highlight the internal heterogeneity that shapes cultural production and the valorisation of minority heritage in Slovenia. While Ljubljana, as the capital, is an important centre of minority cultural activities, Kočevje is a small town in the Slovenian southeast that is often characterised as a peripheral region with a complex, multicultural, and contested history (see Moric, 2021). Both locations are marked by vibrant Albanian businesses operating in urban centres and residential neighbourhoods, but the Albanian population in Kočevje is notably smaller compared to Ljubljana. This demographic difference impacts the organising of the community and the way heritage and heritagisation processes are perceived and enacted. The comparison highlights the differing circumstances surrounding the recognition, presence, preservation, and popularisation of minority heritage in peripheral versus central multicultural areas, challenging the general assumption that the national acknowledgement of minority cultural practices occurs uniformly within a single national context.

Our fieldwork included semi-structured interviews with Albanian interlocutors (five in Kočevje, two in Ljubljana) from Kosovo and North Macedonia, through which participants reflected on their understanding of Albanian heritage. Most of our Albanian interlocutors were women active in their family businesses (aged 30−65) and living in Kočevje. In addition, interviews were conducted with singers, musicians, and members

of the broader public (six interlocutors) who have become increasingly engaged with Albanian musical heritage in recent years. These individuals provided insights into their understanding and perceptions of Albanian music, revealing shifting attitudes towards this aspect of Albanian cultural expression. Additionally, relevant insights were obtained through a series of informal discussions with various groups of Slovenians, who shared their perceptions regarding the status of Albanians in Slovenia.

The fieldwork also included observations of musical activities, particularly those of members of minority communities from the former Yugoslavia, including the Albanian community in Ljubljana. These activities offer valuable context for examining the current state of Albanian musical heritage within Slovenia, and the broader dynamics of minority cultural engagement and representation. This study employs autoethnography, as one of the authors is an active musician and an organiser of musical events for Albanian and other minority communities. This approach offers the perspective of a native researcher ("native" in the sense that she is also a so-called first-generation immigrant to Slovenia) as an experienced musician within the practice she analyses as an ethnomusicologist (Chou, 2002: 456).

The analytical part of this article is divided into two sections. The first examines the sociocultural status of the Albanian community in the former Yugoslavia, with a particular focus on Slovenia, emphasising the public representation and stereotyping of Albanians. It identifies reasons for the relative absence of Albanian cultural activities and heritage in the Slovenian public sphere, exploring how these expressions have been marginalised or neglected. The analysis situates this issue within broader discourses on the visibility of minority groups and their cultural contributions in post-Yugoslav contexts.

The second section discusses the autoethnographic aspects of applied ethnomusicological research. By applied, we refer to the activities carried out by one of the coauthors, whose engagement in music-making aims to improve the circumstances for the Albanian cultural community. As scholars note, applied ethnomusicology encompasses various areas, including cultural policy interventions, advocacy, education, and more (Pettan, Titon, 2019: 3). Thus, the work of the coauthor unfolds, to use Titon's words, making a musical intervention within an unexpected music group, to ensure not only a better representation of relatively unknown Albanian musical heritage but also to engage Albanians into musical exchange. This section further shifts focus to a specific case study: the music-making process of the singing group Kvali and its public performance of Albanian songs within the Slovenian ethnomusic scene.[4] The autoethnographic

[4] The emic term for ethnomusic in Slovenian is '*etnoglasba*' (also used hereafter), referring to the various but localised interpretations of musical practices from different global traditions, typically for intercultural concert or club audiences. While the original musical practices can originate anywhere in the world, Balkan music is frequently predominant in this style in the Slovenian context.

analysis addresses two key impacts of applied ethnomusicology – representation and self-perception – while examining the establishment of music practices.

Our case study explores the heritagisation processes and the role of Albanian music performance as a platform for recognising and integrating Albanian musical heritage within Slovenia's contemporary cultural landscape. It focuses on the musical interactions that foster new social connections in Slovenia and contribute to re-evaluating the Yugoslav past. These interactions allow a new audience to critically engage with the historical invisibility of Albanian culture in the former socialist state, recognising the political exclusions inherent in Yugoslav-era (cultural) politics. Additionally, the study highlights the shortcomings of the "host" society, as noted by Blumi (2003), in creating an environment conducive to Albanian cultural activities. The comparison between two multicultural locations in contemporary Slovenia, Ljubljana and Kočevje, further underscores the contrast between central locations more receptive to diverse musical expressions and the relative marginalisation of Albanians in peripheral areas with limited cultural access.

## Unknown neighbours: Changing perceptions of Albanians in Slovenia

Throughout the 20th century, the number of Albanians in Slovenia steadily increased, particularly as the era of Yugoslav socialist modernisation intensified migration from other Yugoslav republics, including Kosovo and Macedonia.[5] This trend was most pronounced during the 1970s and 1980s, a period of significant demographic and socio-economic transformation. Slovenia experienced, according to Kladnik, a more than fifty per cent increase in the migration of Albanians from Kosovo during the 1980s (2019: 221), and they played a crucial role, particularly in sectors such as food retail and confectionery. Working in food stalls, kiosks and pastry shops, they were instrumental in fostering the urbanisation of socialist Slovenia. Their labour contributed significantly to the development of newly industrialised neighbourhoods, where rapid urbanisation and rural-to-urban migration were reshaping the social fabric of Slovenian towns alongside the emergence of new forms of social stratification.

Although overlooked outside the economic sphere by their co-citizens in other republics of Yugoslavia, Albanians were subjected to intense surveillance by the Yugoslav state security services, which, under the rhetoric of "brotherhood and unity", also sought to monitor and regulate the activities of minorities. This dynamic underscored the complex positioning of Albanians within socialist Yugoslavia – visible in the economic and political realm,

[5] Some Albanian nobility families were present in the coastal Slovenia since the 13th century (more in Štoka, 2024). However, their number increased in the 19th century (Klopčič et al., 2003: 219).

yet marginalised in terms of cultural recognition.[6] Yugoslavia's modernisation project enabled new connections but also new cleavages and divides. According to Archer (2023), Albanians were observed with suspicion because they were over-represented in the private sector, an economic entity which was a clear contrast to the state's policy of social ownership and workers' self-management.[7] Additionally, they were largely excluded from political involvement in the League of Communists and other relevant institutions. Paradoxically, the state simultaneously complained that they showed little interest in contributing to the political life of local communities in the northwest of Yugoslavia. Officials also persistently emphasised Albanians' "isolation, distrust and closedness" (Archer, 2023: 9).[8] This also contributed to the selective political persecution of Albanians.[9]

Many believed that socialist reforms by the post-war Yugoslav government were intended to "divert Albanian traditions and cultural values to the new socialist ways. With a high level of illiteracy and beset by the continuous persecution of Albanian nationalists whom the state deemed to be irredentists, the Albanian community was left stagnant and existed on the margins of the new socialist society" (Limani Myrtaj, 2021: 185). This enhanced unequal development and widened social disparities between the rural Albanian underclass[10] and the urban classes in Yugoslavia, which were dominated by the Slavic population (ibid.: 185; see also Ströhle, 2016). Although they were the largest non-Slavic community in Yugoslavia, and their number in 1984 surpassed that of the Macedonians and Montenegrins, Albanians were not recognized as one of the constitutional nations of the country – '*komb*/*narod*' (see Hetemi, 2015: 142), but perceived as a '*kombësi*/*narodnost*/nationality'[11] – a categorisation that signalled that

[6] The similar societal invisibility of Albanians in Western Europe has been examined by Isa Blumi (2003), who emphasises how they were often perceived as Yugoslav and Turkish migrants. This perception significantly impacted the Albanian community's political activism, identity formation, and cultural development.

[7] Their businesses were primarily made up of family and kin networks, consequently allowing them to form a close-knit community of Albanians in their new homes.

[8] Mladen Zobec, for example, writes about the complex relationship between Albanian confectioners and the Slovenian local authorities. Based on archival documents, he presents the story of Redžep Redžepović, who experienced severe bureaucratic obstacles in the 1950s when establishing a private business in Kamnik, Slovenia. Numerous Albanians share similar stories (see Zobec, 2021).

[9] Many Albanians from Slovenia (including Kočevje and Maribor) were also imprisoned in concentration camps on Goli Otok island. Since they were often marginalised and not part of the local community, they were frequently seen as most suspicious and critical towards the official ideology (Božidar Jezernik, personal communication; see also Jezernik, 2013).

[10] Being a member of the underclass, according to Ströhle, "implies isolation from other social segments of society as well as deviation from 'normal' or 'normative' biography, in socialism that is being a productive member of society" (2016: 116–117). In a particular context, it denotes the populations unable to achieve the Yugoslav dream for structural reasons and for whom *Gastarbaiter* migrations opened new avenues for financial and personal development.

[11] Yugoslav nations and ethnic groups (*kombet e kombësitë*/*narodi i narodnosti*) were a complex political concept, legally solidified with the 1974 Constitution to distinguish between the nations, which were, in fact, a majority in six political entities (republics), and ethnic minorities or nationalities (narodnosti), which had less political power and were primarily understood as minorities. Among the latter were Albanians, Hungarians, Roma, Turks, and others.

their "original" homeland lay beyond the state's borders, that is in Albania rather than Yugoslavia. Thus, they were considered "a subversive minority" (Baker, 2018: 158). Nevertheless, their status has changed over time, especially during the 1970s (see Hetemi, 2015: 143), but also varied in different Yugoslav republics. In Serbia, open othering of Albanians existed throughout the 20th century (see Pavlović, 2019a, 2019b), in Croatia and Slovenia they were mostly treated as "a semi-racialised, culturally and ethnically distinct underclass" (Baker, 2018: 159).[12] This kind of policy made the Albanian community even more self-sufficient and also hindered communication with other majority or minority communities. The ideas of an isolated Albanian community that is self-sufficient have persisted until today, also in Slovenia, where, according to Jaka Vadnjal (2014: 124), we can find "a well-established" and integrated and, above all, economically sustainable community since Albanian nationals "usually take care of themselves and do not contribute to the unemployment rate".

The position and perception of Albanians in Slovenia fluctuated over time,[13] depending on the political climate and historical events. After the student protests in Kosovo in 1981,[14] which marked the turning point in Yugoslav dissolution and essentially called for an improvement in the political status of Albanians living in Yugoslavia, mistrust of Albanians in Yugoslavia only intensified. Slovenia was not an exception. This is evident from the fact that the activity of the Albanian student association, which published the newspaper *Besa*, was banned (Berishaj, 2004: 143). As Archer notes, officials regarded the purchase of real estate in city centres as a suspicious practice, indicating considerable purchasing power and suspect financial resources of Albanian "migrants" (2023: 9). In the early phase of Yugoslav disintegration, Slovenians and Albanians nevertheless had common political goals; they were united in the same aspiration for independence. Moreover, this was when politicians not only publicly supported the political rights of Albanians in Kosovo but also enabled renewal of cultural organisation and the development of activities that generally supported Albanians' cultural identity in Slovenia. Albanians in Slovenia started to self-organise and, in some cases, for example, in organising the Albanian language afternoon classes, had some support from state institutions (Ministry of Education).

This (albeit short-lived) political alliance between the Slovenian and Albanian political elite and Slovenian support for the identity-building of Albanians during

[12] In the 1980s, ideas about the Albanians as fundamentalist Muslims prevailed in the majority of nationalist discourses in the post-Yugoslav space.

[13] In recent years, there has also been enhanced cultural production with stereotypical depictions of the Albanian community that have a global audience and thus influence ideas of Albanians in the region; for example, some popular depictions focused on "the exotic value of the re-emergence of vendetta killings, prostitution and other informal practices". In general, they are also portrayed as a homogeneous group and as Muslims, ignoring the Albanian religious and regional diversity (see Schwandner-Sievers, 2008: 47−64; Rydzewski, 2024: 51).

[14] For more on the 1981 student protest, see e.g. Limani Myrtaj (2021).

Yugoslavia's dissolution did not translate into everyday life; contacts between Slovenians and Albanians remained limited. With the nationalisation of the society in the 1990s, the distance between Slovenians and other communities from the territories of former Yugoslavia grew even further. This process was significantly different for Albanians, who were not even considered to be a Slovenian "noteworthy" Other – that place that belonged to the speakers of former Serbo-Croatian language that were often stigmatised, but also had a stronger presence in the public, political, and cultural sphere. As one of the interlocutors from Velenje explained, Albanians were not even "*worth of othering*".

## Reflections on Albanian music

The anti-Albanian attitude in the post-Yugoslav region stems from "the intersection of ethnicity, language, social class, religion and racism, which all shape Albanians' relationships with post-Yugoslav states, as well as their otherness and the feeling of abandonment" (Rydzewski, 2024: 50). Public perceptions of Albanians in Slovenia, particularly those of Kosovar and Macedonian origin, have evolved in tandem with the broader political transformations in the region. However, it can be argued that, relative to other former Yugoslav nations, Slovenians tend to feel a greater ethnic distance towards Albanians. This is corroborated by various public opinion surveys (Udovič et al., 2007), which highlight a persistent sense of disconnection between Slovenians and Albanians. Interviews with interlocutors who grew up in socialism in Slovenia reveal a marked distance toward Albanians, with many describing the relationship as "*mutual ignorance*". While individuals born in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s often recall the ubiquity of Albanian-operated fruit stalls, bakeries, and confectioneries and the familiar presence of *burek* – a popular pastry often served by Albanians[15] – few of these individuals reported having personal relationships with Albanians. Furthermore, many admitted to knowing little about Albanian culture.

Several interlocutors reflected on their lack of engagement with Albanian culture, with one musician in his late 40s stating, *"It seemed like we did not live in the same country"*. This sentiment points to a broader feeling of cultural dissonance, a lack of shared cultural space, and a limited awareness of Albanian popular culture and cultural activities. As mentioned, for many Slovenians, the image of Albanians was primarily informed by their visible presence in the marketplace, simplified in the 1988 Radenska commercial produced by Studio Marketing to promote the Yugoslav mineral water brand. This commercial aimed to depict the music/activities of diverse peoples

[15] Jernej Mlekuž (2013) writes that for some generations of Slovenians, the "real" *burek* is the greasy and unhealthy one sold by Albanians in city centres.

of Yugoslavia, yet it reinforced stereotypical representations of Albanians, highlighting their role in the service economy – specifically their work in selling ice cream and cream cakes (see also Kladnik, 2019: 219) and, in many ways, detaching them their cultural heritage. Although this representation forms part of a broader marketing discourse, it simultaneously reflects a profound lack of in-depth knowledge and understanding of Albanian traditions, culture, and cultural production. The absence of a more nuanced representation of Albanian culture in the public sphere can be interpreted as politically motivated, reflecting a latent fear of Albanian unification and its potential implications for the broader socio-political landscape.

This ignorance of Albanian cultural identity has contributed to constructing an image in which Albanian culture is perceived as either non-existent or, at best, monolithic and reductively confined to conservative practices, rituals, and customs. Such perceptions are often framed within the context of a traditionalist society, thus reinforcing stereotypes that distance Albanian cultural expression from more contemporary or dynamic forms of cultural production.[16] This was also observed in the study on language and cultural barriers in the health system, where Albanians are often seen as a problematic and homogeneous community. The only difference that health workers noticed between "Albanians" relates to gender, with men stereotypically described as patriarchal and women as subordinate, socially isolated and unmotivated for integration into society (Lipovec Čebron, 2020: 132−133). These views are also reinforced by a specific orientalist aversion to Islam or islamophobia in Slovenia (see, for example, Bartulović, 2010; Baskar, 2015), which resonates with Slovenian self-positioning in Western and "Christian" Europe (Mandelc, Gajić, 2022: 124).

Our non-Albanian interlocutors realised they had not regarded Albanians as creative[17] or interested in cultural activities.[18] This focus on entrepreneurship, hard work and diligence when observing the Albanian community in the countries of former Yugoslavia has also convinced many people that cultural activities are entirely outside of

[16] See Schwandner-Sievers, 2008 for a discussion of the stereotypical image of Albanians or the subcategory of Albanianism in the West.

[17] Prejudiced and reductive perceptions of Albanian culture often emerge in unexpected contexts, even among individuals who are otherwise progressive or anti-nationalist. A notable example is the work of Đorđe Balašević, a prominent figure in the Yugoslav pop-cultural scene and outspoken pacifist who criticised the nationalist regimes of the 1990s. In his 1991 book *Tri Posleratna Druga* [*Three Post-War Friends*], published during the tumultuous period of Yugoslavia's dissolution, Balašević expressed frustration not only with the break-up of the country but also with what he viewed as Albanian secessionist ambitions. He depicted Albanians as culturally and historically insignificant, claiming they were "without painters, ballerinas, cellists […] These are unhappy people […]" (Balašević, 1991). Although he later expressed regret for these remarks, Balašević's views reflected a broader cultural and political climate in which the marginalisation of Albanians, both from Kosovo and Albania, was widespread.

[18] The idea that Albanians needed help in cultivating their culture was also evident in the political discourses of the 1940s, when, for example, the Slovenian composer Bojan Adamič was sent to Albania in 1947 as a so-called cultural aid to help rebuild the Albanian symphony orchestra, the military choir, and the opera and ballet orchestra. He was similarly active in Kosovo. However, it is often overlooked that Adamič was also fascinated by the Albanian cultural heritage (Tole, 2024).

their interest. An interlocutor from Ljubljana claimed in the informal conversation: "*They have no free time to indulge in activities that might not prove to be productive; they work all the time … They do work a lot. Who has time for heritage?*" Additionally, some interlocutors asserted that, during their childhood, their Albanian peers were often occupied with assisting their parents with work, which limited their ability to engage in recreational activities or participate in extracurricular pursuits, such as singing in the choir or playing a musical instrument. Nevertheless, economic success is often the most "effective way of relieving some of the stigmata of one's foreignness" (Blumi, 2003: 959).

One individual, for instance, reflected on a recent visit to Kosovo where he had become acutely aware of his ignorance regarding the existence of Albanian rock bands in the 1970s and 1980s. He was surprised that Kosovo had a vibrant popular music scene and an alternative music culture. Another interlocutor from Ljubljana recalled that the only connection between Kosovo and music he could remember from his youth in Yugoslavia was a song by the rock band Bijelo Dugme titled 'Kosovka' [Kosovo girl]. He asserted that he believed this was the first rock song performed in Albanian and emphasised that it was disturbing for him not to understand the lyrics. He agreed with other interlocutors who believed that the language barriers were the most significant reasons for widening the gap between Albanians and other Slavic-speaking inhabitants of former Yugoslavia. For example, a female translator, fluent in many European languages, criticised Slovenian prejudices against Albanians as a closed-off community but also admitted that there is often a lack of communication skills on both sides, which also prevents musical interactions. She believed that the "*strangeness*" of the language, the impossibility of recognising "*where one word begins and another ends*" causes Slovenians to keep their distance and prevent deeper interactions. After the initial surprise upon her attending a concert of Slovenian women singing Albanian songs, she realised that Albanian musical heritage now seemed more familiar and that most Slovenians are ignorant about Albanian traditional music.

At numerous events that brought together individuals from various communities across the former Yugoslavia, we observed informal gatherings – often after official events – where a well-established repertoire of traditional songs from the region was performed. This repertoire predominantly featured Macedonian, Bosnian, and occasionally Serbian songs, yet Albanian songs were consistently absent. Interestingly, while Albanian musicians frequently perform regional songs, particularly Macedonian and Sevdalinka songs, which gained popularity in Slovenia during the 1990s (see Kozorog, Bartulović, 2015; Bartulović, Kozorog, 2019, 2023; Bartulović, 2023), contributing thus to maintaining the music heritage of these ethnicities, the presence of Albanian musical heritage in post-Yugoslav musical context in Slovenia is disproportional. Therefore, we may speak of Albanian music in Slovenia as a (Yugoslav) legacy (see Baskar, 2005),

a form of neglected or hidden heritage or heritage created in the shadows or away from the public eye.[19]

In a larger Slovenian context, Albanian (musical) heritage has remained largely unrecognized or perceived as non-existent despite the continuous activity of several Albanian cultural societies across Slovenia since the 1990s.[20] These have played a key role in preserving and interpreting musical heritage, yet they were primarily directed inward towards the Albanian community and diaspora. In recent years, the cultural society Migjeni in Ljubljana has been instrumental in fostering connections between the Albanian community and the Slovenian public, making musical heritage more visible.

## Hidden heritage: Who has time for (Albanian) music?

While some scholars equate "hidden heritage" with intangible cultural heritage or "difficult heritage",[21] which is often silenced or contested (MacDonald, 2010; Bartulović, 2022), our definition frames it within the dynamic process of heritage formation, or heritagisation, which is inherently selective and exclusive, highlighting specific memories, narratives, and histories but also suppressing others. While in the Yugoslav era the political and cultural environment, at least until 1981, did not promote and support Albanian identity (Blumi, 2003: 956), post-Yugoslav time enabled the nationalisation of Albanian heritage, which was often hidden in the close-knit diasporic communities, away from the public eye. Hence, we can see hidden heritage due to particular political and socio-economic circumstances. Even in multicultural areas, Albanian cultural heritage was not publicly visible, contributing to the long process of marginalisation of Albanians and their cultural activities.

Exclusion from national heritage typically targets minority groups within a society (Stone, MacKenzie, 1994). In the case of numerous migrant communities, particularly those marginalised, their heritage is not only rendered unrecognisable but reduced to stereotypical representations. Furthermore, it is also often invisible due to the lack of official promotion. As a result, it is primarily experienced by community members themselves in their everyday lives as *living heritage* (Tyner in Muzaini, Minca, 2018: 8). Moreover, it is frequently unsafe and detrimental to exhibit elements of the heritage in public (see Muzaini, 2012). The emotions elicited by the heritage of stigmatised communities can be uncomfortable and unsettling for the majority, which is evident

[19] It is also possible to speak about "absence heritage", which includes calculated, accidental, or neglected heritage (see James-Williamson et al., 2024).

[20] Six active Albanian cultural societies or associations are in the largest Slovenian cities.

[21] Here, we avoid using the term 'difficult heritage' due to its overuse, which reduces its analytical value and fails to capture the nuances of the specific historical and cultural dynamics it is meant to address. We intend to highlight the Albanian community's invisibility in Slovenia, which influences the fact that its heritage was hidden and invisible for the majority of Slovenians.

also in Slovenia where Albanian culture is routinely "orientalised". Such processes not only obscure the cultural contributions of these communities but also perpetuate their marginalisation within the broader national narrative.[22] This also shapes the attitudes of community members toward their heritage. In specific contexts, such as Western Europe during the latter half of the 20th century, members of the Albanian community expressed, as Blumi (2003: 954) highlighted, a strong desire to be seen after enduring decades of invisibility and imposed identities.

Throughout our interviews in Kočevje, our (Albanian) interlocutors displayed a noticeable discomfort when expressing positive views regarding certain Albanian traditions. Specifically, initiatives concerning preserving or promoting national heritage were met with disapproval and a marked sense of distancing. For example, women from different generations disapproved of Instagram posts featuring young girls from Kosovo and North Macedonia dressed in traditional Albanian attire at weddings. The respondents suggested that such attire should be reserved for folkloric contexts and not incorporated into everyday life. Faced with discrimination, anti-Muslim sentiments and societal stereotypes targeting in particular Albanian women as conservative, many felt shame. They showed the need to hide or protect their heritage from additional judgments.[23] These attitudes reflect not only discomfort with the visibility of certain national traditions within the Slovenian context – where the Albanian community is often perceived, as previously noted, as backward or "stuck" in the past – but also a broader critique of the nationalisation of heritage in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. In the context of our research, Albanian invisibilities are framed as a form of protection against further stigmatisation. Thus, the strategic silencing of certain aspects of their connection to Albanian heritage can be understood as an attempt to influence how members of Slovenian society perceive them. Hence, hidden heritage is also a result of intentional hiding because of the past experiences of invisibility and contemporary experiences of stigmatisation and judgment.

Heritage among our interlocutors was also very much associated with the past, while personally they were future-oriented. So, rather than discussing the past and culture, our interlocutors systematically reoriented discussions towards the future. This is also clearly demonstrated in their discussion of their family business, where they look to the future goals. In this sense, heritage is mainly related to family heritage and less to national Albanian heritage. While family heritage can function as a "future-making" project (Harris, 2013) or one that enables the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004),

[22] It should also be emphasised that the Albanian community in Slovenia is very heterogeneous and has diverse attitudes towards heritage and heritagisation processes.

[23] In the interviews, which were conducted in three languages (Slovenian, Albanian and English), some answers were intentionally delivered only in Albanian and directed only to the researcher with proficiency in the Albanian language, with the special note that these parts should not be translated to the non-Albanian researcher due to mistrust that some traditions will not be adequately understood.

on the other hand, Albanian heritage as national heritage is sometimes a source of shame and something that should be hidden or preserved in a closed community. Thus, while family heritage can facilitate future-oriented goals and personal growth, national heritage could be perceived as a burden, subject to critique and marginalisation in the broader social context.

However, the activities of some of the Albanians clearly state that there are many different ways of heritagisation of music and culture in the Albanian diaspora (Bartulović, Bejtullahu, 2021), since the Albanian community in Slovenia is very heterogeneous, which is the result of several factors, including the country/region of origin, education, class, religion, and others. This is also confirmed by a study carried out in 2004, where Berishaj goes quite far in his interpretation, claiming that "being an Albanian from Fužine [neighbourhood in Ljubljana] is something completely different from being an Albanian in the Centre or Šiška [neighbourhood in Ljubljana]" (2004: 146). While the statement may be somewhat exaggerated, it underscores the significance of the local environment and community in shaping the self-understanding, way of life, identity, and, ultimately, the reflection on both the past and future of members of the Albanian community. A crucial aspect of heritage valorisation lies in the role of cultural associations, which, while integral, can also become sites of conflict due to the diverse interpretations and understandings of heritage. In contrast to cities such as Ljubljana, where the social life of Albanians is vibrant, Kočevje presents a very different scenario. As one of our interlocutors, a small fruit shop owner in Kočevje, remarked, there are "*not enough Albanians*" in the town to sustain a cultural life. Consequently, cultural expression tends to be confined to the family sphere, a pattern reflected in the interviews with Albanian women from Kosovo and North Macedonia. This is confirmed by their approval of public inclusion of Albanian heritage in some of the cultural events organised by other organisations. For example, while our interlocutors in Kočevje expressed appreciation for the inclusion of Albanian music and folklore performed by a society from Novo Mesto during the Days of Cultures event (organised by the Kočevje Tourist Board in cooperation with the Serbian Cultural and Artistic Society of Kočevje and the Association for the Development of Voluntary Work from Novo Mesto) in recent years, they did not express a desire to establish their own cultural association or become active and visible interpreters of Albanian heritage. Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been a gradual rediscovery of Albanian "hidden heritage" among segments of Albanians and the Slovenian public, particularly those interested in Balkan ethnomusic. In this context, we observe initiatives that seek to make Albanian culture more visible, thus creating opportunities for innovation and reinvention (James-Williamson et al., 2024: 2), mainly in the Slovenian capital – Ljubljana.

## The background on musical exchange between Slovenians and Albanians in Slovenia

Since Slovenia's independence, there have been very few musical interactions between Albanian and non-Albanian musicians. Until 2010, it was next to impossible to hear Albanian music in Slovenian public venues. To our knowledge, a few contemporary classical music concerts presented Albanian and Kosovan composers and musicians. Most occurred during the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century when certain Albanian classical musicians were active in Slovenia, most notably Zeqirja Ballata.[24] Ballata advocated presenting this music to the Slovenian audience and was instrumental in collaborations between Kosovan and Slovenian classical musicians.[25] Though limited to the connoisseurs of this genre, this improved the knowledge about this segment of Albanian music.

At that time, it was not feasible to transform this initiative into a larger project, partially because Albanian cultural societies in Slovenia lacked the resources (human and financial) to implement an agenda for improving the public representation of Albanian music. Another reason lies in the society: between the 1990s and the first years of the 21st century, the cultural spaces and institutions managed by Slovenians, as a majority, did not prioritise intercultural exchange with the countries of the Western Balkans. On the contrary, it was shunned due to the Yugoslav break-up and the complex process of independent Slovenia's self-positioning within the West European context. During this period, listening to and playing music from the Balkans in general, and we are talking primarily about popular music, was marginalised into subcultural scenes (Stanković et al., 1999: 76; Stanković, 2002). But even in these circles, Albanian music, such as rock music from Kosovo and North Macedonia, was mostly unknown.

Regarding Albanian music available in public,[26] things began to change around 2010 when the first public performances of musicians (Albanian and non-Albanian) playing Albanian music started taking place. A fortunate combination of the venue and musicians seems to have been crucial for this change, in this case, the stage of the hostel Celica in Ljubljana and musicians at the early-stage career, among others the guitar duo Aritmija,[27] who explored and uniquely interpreted the music of the Balkans.

[24] Albanian Zeqirja Ballata (1945) is a composer who was a professor of music in Maribor at the time. Over the years, one of the authors of this paper was able to observe his work and even collaborate on one of his projects.

[25] These concerts were held in Ljubljana (among other, in the studio of Radio Slovenia) and Maribor (in the Kazina concert hall) until Ballata's retirement.

[26] From here on, Albanian music encompasses music with Albanian lyrics, primarily traditional but also, in some cases, evergreen songs.

[27] Guitarists began including a few compositions based on Albanian traditional tunes as early as 2010. The first one is the composition 'Merak n't u Bana', based on the arrangement of an Albanian folk song by American guitarist Tim Sparks.

Celica's concept is to enable musicians to participate in jam sessions immediately after the weekly concerts of *etnoglasba*, thus opening the stage for young or unaffirmed musicians, often members of various minorities.

The multipart singing group Kvali from Ljubljana embarked on a more systematic public interpretation of Albanian traditional two- or three-part songs. This women's non-professional group of singers, initially founded as a Georgian multipart singing group in 2008, is composed mainly of Slovenian singers.[28] The singers had no previous knowledge of Albanian music. Around 2011, the Albanian-Slovenian group member and co-author of this article introduced Albanian songs to the repertoire. Gradually, Kvali started to sing them as a try-out in concerts (with Georgian music), mainly in hostel Celica and the ethno-club Zlati Zob, places frequented by the audience with a genuine interest in *etnoglasba* or so-called world music. In a few years, Kvali slowly built a repertoire of Albanian songs and presented them to the Slovenian audience. Kvali's activity was introduced to the Albanian community at a concert in Ljubljana. The concert was well received by a mixed Slovenian and Albanian audience, encouraging the group to explore Albanian songs further. Thus, Kvali is the first musical entity to perform Albanian music continuously in a Slovenian context. In addition, we can speak about a specific case of making Albanian musical heritage more visible.

## The significance of Kvali in the heritagisation of Albanian music: From public representation to self-perception

In examining the processes of presentation and heritagisation of Albanian songs – initiated through the applied ethnomusicological work – we identify two key areas of impact. Firstly, the activities influenced non-Albanian perceptions of Albanian music and, by extension, the Albanian community, contributing to a re-consideration of Albanians' status within (post-)Yugoslav society. Secondly, these efforts shaped the self-perception of Albanians themselves, fostering a renewed sense of cultural visibility and value. There is also a third effect that is more an unintentional byproduct of affecting the public representations of non-Albanians: the rapport the singers developed with the Albanian songs, which is also changing attitudes towards Albanian music in the Slovenian music scene.

Kvali played a pivotal role in introducing Albanian music to the ethnomusic scene in Ljubljana. Their performances were met with enthusiasm, with many interlocutors expressing admiration not only for the women performing in Albanian but also for the richness and diversity of the musical heritage. One noted that the songs felt

[28] Ranging from 11 to 18 singers, born between 1972 and 1980. All but four are non-professional musicians, music is their leisure activity.

simultaneously familiar and distant. At the same time, another reflected on how Kvali's concerts prompted a rethinking of Yugoslav musical heritage, remarking, "*It is curious that we have never heard these songs before*", reflecting the fact that Albanian music was not promoted equally as the music traditions of other Yugoslav peoples. Even some ethnomusicologists acknowledged their limited familiarity with Albanian musical traditions despite the official ideology of brotherhood and unity. Through its work, Kvali contributed to expanding the Slovenian musical landscape and offering greater visibility to Albanian cultural expression. In a sense, it also managed to "deorientalise" Albanian culture in public perceptions. However, this transformation of a primarily hidden heritage into a recognised one is most evident when examining the evolving perceptions of Albanian music among the singers through the embodied process of learning and performing Albanian songs.

For members of Kvali, the process was complex and personal. For the coauthor, singing Albanian songs begun as a "*spontaneous experiment of introducing their music to the group of co-singers*", while for the Slovenian singers, it was the process of learning through socialising that was crucial. This transmission, in a way, intersected the relations between "teacher" and "student" with the "native" and "non-native singer" (Albanian and Slovenian). Singers of Kvali regard learning and being acquainted with Albanian songs as a positive experience because it occurred simultaneously with social bonding. It is hard to distinguish which plays a more important role to them, the subjective aesthetic evaluation of Albanian songs or the importance of the friendship they developed through singing. In the words of singers, singing Albanian songs is intertwined with forging friendship among singers: "[Albanian songs] *stayed with us because we like them and it is great to interpret them*" but also "*I took* [them] *as my own because of the socialising and the friendship*".

The coauthor planned to gradually introduce three types of Albanian traditional music: Arbëreshë[29] songs, urban traditional music, and iso-polyphonic singing. These songs range from somehow familiar to less familiar melodies and singing techniques. The three types of multipart songs mentioned above could be distinguished from each other according to their respective tone scales as well as the melodies and harmonies. Speaking in musical terms, it was important to start with songs closer to the major-minor (diatonic) tonal system and in regular rhythms (time signatures), which are more common in Slovenia. That is why Kvali's repertoire features several Arbëreshë songs, a singing tradition influenced by the music practices of Italian neighbours. This type of song was the easiest to master by the singers and was aesthetically appreciated by the (Slovenian) audience.

[29] Arbëreshë are members of a historic Albanian minority from various regions of south Italy and are descendants of Albanians who migrated to Italy around the 15th century (and later) during the Ottoman invasion of the Balkans. Arbëreshë lived and still live in compact communities in Italy, becoming thus a distinctive minority in Italy today. While Arbëreshë still speak and sing in Albanian, the influence of Italian music on their songs is very much evident.

The second type, Albanian urban traditional songs,[30] are also tonally and harmonically within the range of Western tonality, due to the tonal influence of predominantly Western instruments. Kvali's singers overcome possible diminished intervals, melisma, or irregular rhythms in these songs (albeit still within the Western harmonies), which might sound unusual to Slovenian listeners. The most complex part of the repertoire, the iso-polyphonic singing[31] based on (anhemitonic) pentatonic scales and vibrant embellishments, is sonically more distant from Slovenian music than previous styles due to the complexity of three- or four-part melodic lines. While the singers may master some parts easily, the soloist parts need more training. The good training of a couple of soloists, which takes time, is crucial for a successful interpretation. One of the singers describes that this unusualness or differentness of these songs "*brings up emotions*" to her, and she "*liked them instantly*" [because] they are different and felt that "*they caress me*".

Most singers of Kvali, as Slovenians, may not feel Albanian songs as "their own" in a sense of cultural belonging. At the same time, they (perhaps paradoxically) internalise these songs as their own in the sense that singing them publicly, after long rehearsals, gave them an experience that brought great joy and made the group feel closer. Moreover, although the Albanian language remains a mystery, singers describe that Albanian songs have become very close and familiar to them. In this sense, some sort of transformation occurred; hidden musical heritage became known and embraced as a part of the group's repertoire and something that incites favourable feelings.

Despite being an unknown practice, Kvali's performance of Albanian songs was received very well by the audience (Slovenian and other) and supported by the organisers in these venues. The audience listens to these concerts with an open mind and primarily evaluates the quality of interpretation ("*the singing is wonderful*", "*each concert is an improvement in singing*") and the melodiousness of the music. One of the listeners said "*I am surprised with how the songs match Kvali's voices*". It is not uncommon for someone in the audience to have a profound emotional reaction to the music. Overall, people describe the concerts as a pleasant experience and a surprise. The surprise, just as for the singers themselves, entails the revelation of Albanian songs as an aesthetically satisfactory practice for its recipients, meaning that it satisfies the audience's music standards. This also comes from the position of high esteem for vocal music, which is practised thoroughly in both classical and traditional music in Slovenia.

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[30] This music style was (and is) practised since the 19th century as vocal and instrumental music played and sung in public urban places such as cafés, wedding, and others. Most of the instruments in these ensembles were Western (accordion, violin); these also replaced older instruments of Turkish origin that may have been used initially. Emic expressions are *muzika popullore* / *muzika lirike* / *këngë të ahengut shkodran* / *saze*. Similar urban music traditions also exist(ed) in other Balkan countries.

[31] This is a multipart singing practice, specific for Albanians in southern Albania and some areas of North Macedonia and Greece; it is a combination of drone singing, two soloist voices that intertwine in a contrapuntal/polyphonic style and sometimes by the third soloist who interprets embellishment on the (minor or major) third.

The impact of Kvali and the circle around the cultural society Migjeni (see below) is important to Albanians and their vision of publicly engaging with heritage. This is significant also because the general perception outside the circle of *etnoglasba* connoisseurs is, as mentioned, inclined to understand this act as an act of pursuing the heritage of an alien, "backward" culture. In addition, as we argued above, there are always ideas of "Eastern" or "Islamic" assumptions connected with Albanians,[32] which are also reflected in the music-making process.[33] That is why singers admit that they were surprised by the structure of the music, which "*was not that much of a deviation*" from what they were used to (meaning Slovenian or other non-Albanian music). The "surprise" referred to the anticipation that Albanian music could have "*influences from the southern lands, such as Turkey* […] *something more oriental*", but after learning songs, this changed into a perception that it is "*not so distant*" and "*it is not such a deviation*" meaning that contrary to the expectations, it does not depart that much from already established music norms.[34] Similar can be seen from the comments of Kvali's audience because their contemporary interpretation of Albanian songs is not seen as "oriental". This could result from the intentional repertoire choice and enhanced knowledge of the Slovenian music audience about similar and contemporary styles from other Balkan countries.

Kvali's work influenced not only the public representation of Albanian music – challenging its underrepresentation and misrepresentation – but also contributed to a shift in how Albanians perceive their musical heritage. This impact was particularly evident in Ljubljana, which is known for its support of intercultural dialogue and is home to numerous minority cultural associations, including Migjeni (Albanian cultural association from Ljubljana). Migjeni's perspective on Albanian music evolved through collaborations with Kvali. Positive feedback from the Slovenian music community encouraged Albanian musicians to reengage with their traditions; some instrumentalists initiated rehearsals with Migjeni to collaborate with Kvali. These joint performances catalysed renewed interest and participation among Albanian and Slovenian musicians. Over time, even after Kvali entered a post-COVID hiatus, Migjeni initiated other collaborations involving second- and third-generation Albanians learning to perform traditional and

[32] Besides cultural societies, Albanians in Slovenia do not engage much in religious associations or organisations. Albanian representatives are not present in Slovenia's official Islamic community. The Catholic Albanian community has some activities, primarily masses in Albanian language twice a year in Kranj and Velenje, held by Albanian priests from the Albanian Catholic Mission in Zagreb.

[33] These racist prejudices, as Hemetek argues, can be found everywhere, as she analyses the similar situation in Austria: "[T]here are prejudices among the dominant society against the 'Turkish immigrant', including the following: that they are backward and conservative, that the women are subordinate, and that they are Islamic fundamentalists – and therefore dangerous and not willing to integrate" (Hemetek, 2019: 131). Hemetek suggests several ethnomusicological strategies in addressing these prejudices.

[34] This is an interesting point, music-wise, particularly when considering that urban music traditions of the Balkan people flourished during the Ottoman era, so it is impossible to erase the traces of the Ottoman musical legacy.

evergreen popular Albanian songs – musical forms that have found resonance among Slovenian performers and audiences alike. Notably, the most experienced Albanian musicians from Migjeni gradually assumed the role of mentors, effectively replacing the initial leadership provided by Kvali's performers and creating opportunities for younger generations to engage with Albanian musical traditions. This emerging network of musicians included collaborations within the Albanian community and with members of other minority groups and Slovenians. These activities soon expanded beyond the musical domain, engaging with broader social issues affecting minority communities. Significantly, this collective has become an active stakeholder in negotiations with state cultural institutions, advocating for greater recognition and support of minority cultural heritage, particularly those from the former Yugoslav region.

## Conclusion

This article explores the evolving processes of heritagisation of Albanian musical practices in Slovenia, focusing on the historical marginalisation of Albanian heritage in the post-Yugoslav context. We have examined the status of the Albanian community, particularly during the latter half of the 20th century, and how public and political perceptions of Albanian heritage – both in the Yugoslav era and contemporary Slovenia – have contributed to the invisibility of Albanian culture. From the mid-20th century until 2010, Albanian heritage was largely hidden, existing primarily within diasporic communities and unrecognised by Slovenian society. In this context, we aimed to analyse the socio-political implications of the Yugoslav othering of Albanians, illustrating how these dynamics obstructed the ability of Albanians to publicly articulate their own interpretations of heritage and identity. The unique position of Albanians within Yugoslavia, compounded by the lack of institutional mechanisms for public representation, perpetuated the idea that their cultural heritage was irrelevant or non-existent.

Furthermore, the public image of Albanians in Slovenia was often linked to their portrayal as entrepreneurs, investing long hours in labour-intensive work, which made it difficult for them to engage in or preserve cultural activities. This narrative is also reflected in the experiences of most of our Slovenian interlocutors, many of whom only began to explore Albanian musical traditions after the dissolution of the common Yugoslav state. Their lack of knowledge about the Albanian music was mostly attributed to the linguistic barriers. However, through the process of rediscovering Albanian music, many came to realise that Albanians were not included in the common Yugoslav cultural space as other Slavic nations. This led them to rethink the idea of the complete inclusiveness of the Yugoslav state and the ideology of brotherhood and unity.

We particularly focused on comparing different processes of heritagisation related to the musical creativity of the Albanian community in Kočevje and Ljubljana.

This comparison was made possible through a case study of the Kvali music group, which illustrates distinct approaches to uncovering and publicly representing "hidden" musical heritage, or processes of heritagisation in two contrasting contexts. A central figure in the reinterpretation and introduction of Albanian music into the Kvali group's repertoire was the ethnomusicologist, a co-author of this article. Kvali's interpretation of Albanian music played a key role in introducing Albanian heritage to Ljubljana's ethnomusic scene, making hidden heritage visible, at least to an audience with a preference for ethnomusic. The repertoire chosen for the group was carefully curated to foster a shared cultural connection between the Slovenian musicians and the Albanian community in Slovenia. The inclusion of Arbëreshë songs, which serve as a link between Albanians and their non-Ottoman heritage, as well as the incorporation of the complex iso-polyphony, has played a significant role in challenging stereotypes and reshaping the perception of Albanian music as being only "oriental" and "completely different" from Slovenian. By performing songs whose lyrics many listeners could not fully comprehend due to language barriers, Kvali nevertheless facilitated a shift in awareness and evoked some affective reactions. Their performances not only enabled the singers to connect to the Albanian musical heritage and to feel it, but they also partly influenced non-Albanian perceptions of Albanian music and community.

In addition, their music practice has had the effect of shaping the musical activities and self-perception of Albanians themselves, thereby giving rise to a renewed sense of cultural visibility and value. This has resulted in a variety of interpretations of Albanian music and collaboration with different minority associations, thus making music not just a matter of fun and heritage preservation, but also providing the community with a basis to form new political alliances. The case study of the Kvali music group is particularly interesting in this regard, as it demonstrates how Albanian music has served as a crucial space for identity negotiation and political engagement. This has allowed both the Albanian community and Slovenian audiences to confront and reinterpret the cultural and historical narratives surrounding Albanian heritage, as well as Yugoslav past.

Despite these efforts, the transformation in public perceptions of Albanian music remains limited to niche audiences, particularly in Ljubljana and among those with an interest in ethnomusic. The challenges faced by Albanians, including perceptions of marginalisation, continue to influence their engagement with cultural practices in public spaces. Many Albanians, especially in peripheral areas like Kočevje, may prioritize personal and familial advancement over institutionalised heritage preservation. With limited knowledge of the broader social activities of Albanians in Slovenia, they tend to prioritize self-improvement and the development of their family businesses. However, their non-participation in formal musical or cultural activities should not be interpreted as a lack of connection to their cultural heritage. While cultural practices, music in particular, remain important in private spheres, public participation in heritage activities is still hindered by the enduring stigma associated with Albanian culture.

This reluctance is rooted in decades of marginalisation and reinforced by dominant discourses that portray Albanians as traditional, secluded, and uncooperative.

The comparison between Ljubljana and Kočevje, which cannot be generalised, underscores the influence of a variety of factors, including sociocultural, political, and spatial, on the recognition and preservation of minority heritage. It is important to note that this comparison challenges the assumption that minority heritage is uniformly acknowledged within national contexts, revealing significant disparities in access to cultural visibility and institutional support. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on minority heritagisation and offer insights for future, localised studies on the role of music in fostering inclusivity and reshaping public perceptions.

Despite ongoing public discourse that continues to demonise and problematise the presence of Albanian communities in Slovenia, we argue that focusing on cultural heritage – moving beyond the orientalised and stereotypical portrayals of Albanians – could facilitate new avenues for reexamining both historical and future relationships between the always heterogeneous majority and minority groups. This is evident in Ljubljana's context, but also broadly as confirmed by numerous studies (see Bartleet, Heard, 2024). Musical practices that engage the wider community significantly contribute to addressing persistent exclusion and stereotyping of particular communities, fostering dialogue, and prompting reinterpretations of dominant perceptions. Music, therefore, can serve as an important new space for representation (Hall, 1990), allowing for diverse interpretations of musical traditions that are inclusive and appealing to a broader audience. Or as one of the Kvali singers observes, through the experiences of sharing and learning as well as engaging with the music of the Albanian Other, "*everyone gains something, and that is good*".

This perspective also underscores the potential for musical heritage and practices to function not merely as tools for cultural preservation but also as sites of identity negotiation, learning, creativity, social bonding, and political engagement within minority communities. In this regard, it is essential for host societies to create spaces and initiatives that promote the articulation of new, non-exclusive musical practices. However, as demonstrated by the case study of Kvali, the involvement of individuals with a deep knowledge of (musical) heritage can be instrumental in fostering new musical solidarities.

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The authors state 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 authors.

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## Skrita dediščina Albancev v Sloveniji: premisleki o glasbenem ustvarjanju med središčem in obrobjem

Sodobno priseljevanje Albancev v Slovenijo vzbuja zanimanje javnosti, medtem ko je prepoznavnost njihove kulturne dediščine v Sloveniji skoraj nična. To je izhodišče članka, ki se osredinja na vrednotenje, navzočnost in interpretacijo albanske (glasbene) dediščine v Sloveniji. Članek ponuja etnografsko primerjavo pogledov in prakticiranj albanske (glasbene) dediščine v Ljubljani in Kočevju ter razgrinja premisleke o dediščini Albank in Albancev v Sloveniji in stališča slovenskih poslušalcev ter izvajalcev albanske etnoglasbe.

V prvem delu članka je analiza položaja in dojemanja albanske skupnosti v Jugoslaviji in specifično v Sloveniji od druge polovice 20. stoletja, poudarjeno je javno in politično dojemanje albanske dediščine tako v jugoslovanskem obdobju kot v sodobni Sloveniji. Dediščina Albancev, ki jo je mogoče označiti kot jugoslovansko zapuščino, se je vsaj do leta 2010 razvijala večinoma v albanski skupnosti. V tem smislu lahko govorimo o skriti dediščini, ki je nastala ob družbenopolitičnih implikacijah drugačenja Albancev in ob strahovih, ki so Albancem onemogočali njeno javno interpretacijo. Omejevanje kulturnega delovanja Albancev v Sloveniji in domneve Nealbancev, da albanske dediščine sploh ni, izvirata tudi iz percepcije načina življenja Albancev, ki temelji na intenzivnem delu in dolgih delavnikih v zasebnih podjetjih. Iz tega je nastala prevladujoča javna podoba o podjetnih in delavnih Albancih, ki pa nimajo časa ali interesa za kulturno delovanje in ohranjanje svoje dediščine.

V drugem delu članka je študija primera dediščinjenja albanske glasbe na podlagi analize delovanja skupine Kvali in dela soavtorice članka, ki je s pristopom

aplikativne etnomuzikologije izbrani repertoar albanskih pesmi predstavila pevski skupini in nato slovenskemu etnoglasbenemu občinstvu. Poudarjene so glasbene strategije pri postopni popularizaciji glasbenega izročila in albansko-slovenska glasbena zavezništva, ki so omogočila proces specifičnega dediščinjenja albanske glasbe. S tem je skrita dediščina postala vidnejša. Albanska glasba je za pevke in slovenske poslušalce postala manj eksotična, bližja, kar je omogočilo tudi svojevrstno spremembo v razumevanju stigmatizirane albanske skupnosti. Te glasbene prakse so vplivale tudi na okrepljeno samopercepcijo Albancev, ki so se v zadnjih letih, organizirani v kulturnih društvih (npr. Migjeni), sami aktivirali pri promociji in reinterpretaciji albanske glasbene dediščine. V tem procesu se je albanska skupnost sčasoma vključila tudi v sodelovanje z drugimi manjšinskimi skupnostmi, s katerimi skupaj nastopajo, da bi dosegli večjo družbeno vidnost in si izboljšali manjšinski položaj.

Primer skupine Kvali izraža moč glasbe v procesih reinterpretacije identitet in tudi političnega angažiranja. Albanska glasbena dediščina omogoča tudi reinterpretacijo kulturnih in zgodovinskih pripovedi o albanski in tudi jugoslovanski preteklosti, saj so se novi poslušalci začeli zavedati jugoslovanske politike izključevanja. Vendar je seznanjanje z albansko glasbo v veliki meri še vedno dosegljivo le tistim, ki jih etnoglasba zanima, in sicer predvsem v Ljubljani. V obrobnem okolju, kakor je na primer Kočevje, kljub multikulturnosti razmere za promocijo dediščine niso enake, kar vpliva tudi na samorazumevanje Albancev in njihov odnos do lastne dediščine. Tako so sogovorniki in sogovornice v Kočevju poudarjali bolj družinsko in manj nacionalno dediščino, pozorni pa so bili zlasti na osebni in družinski napredek, namenjen razvoju družinskih podjetij. Njihovo manjše zanimanje za kulturno dediščino pa ne pomeni, da niso navezani na lastne kulturne tradicije, marveč ga je treba videti skozi prizmo stigmatizacije albanske kulture oz. kot ponotranjenje nekaterih dominantnih stereotipov o Albancih. Primerjave med Kočevjem in Ljubljano ne gre posploševati, vendar ta poudarja, da gre pri ohranjanju dediščine za mnogoterost družbenokulturnih, političnih in prostorskih dejavnikov.