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Anja Moric, Marjeta Pisk

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HERITAGE OF MULTICULTURAL AREAS

DEDIŠČINA VEČKULTURNIH OBMOČIJ

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Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's? The Heritage of Multicultural Areas

Anja Moric
ZRC SAZU, Institute of Ethnomusicology, Slovenia
anja.moric@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3497-4482

Marjeta Pisk
ZRC SAZU, Institute of Ethnomusicology, Slovenia
marjeta.pisk@zrc-sazu.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9350-7481

The introductory article examines the processes of creating, using, and interpreting heritage in diverse multicultural settings. Special attention is given to exploring the creative and performative power of heritage in minority, linguistically diverse, post-imperial, post-socialist, and other multicultural environments, where heritage functions as a dynamic field of negotiation, contestation, and connection.
▪ Keywords: heritage, heritagisation, multicultural areas, marginalised spaces, performativity of heritage, heritage negotiations

Uvodni članek obravnava procese ustvarjanja, rab in interpretacij dediščine v raznolikih večkulturnih okoljih. Poseben poudarek namenja preučevanju ustvarjalne in performativne moči dediščine v manjšinskih, jezikovno raznolikih, postimperialnih, postsocialističnih in drugih večkulturnih okoljih, kjer dediščina nastopa kot dinamično polje pogajanj, polemik in povezovanj.
▪ Ključne besede: dediščina, dediščinjenje, večkulturna območja, marginalizirani prostori, performativnost dediščine, pogajanja o dediščini

The present volume of *Traditiones* is dedicated to the complex and multilayered nature of heritage in multicultural areas, which is never merely a neutral legacy from the past. Rather, it is an active and dynamic arena of cultural politics, identity negotiation, and memory work (Smith, 2006). In areas marked by complex histories of migration, conquest, political reconfiguration, and economic transformation, the heritage landscape is often fragmented, overlapping, and contested (Ledinek Lozej, Pisk, 2025). The very question "whose heritage?" points to the competing claims and the social processes through which the past is interpreted in the present. In past decades, it has been increasingly recognised that heritage is not simply inherited but produced and re-produced, often as part of wider, especially identity-making projects (Ashworth et al., 2007). In contexts where multiple cultural and linguistic communities have coexisted – sometimes peacefully, sometimes in conflict – heritage emerges as a multi-vocal narrative space, particularly evident in border regions (see Ledinek Lozej, Rogelja Caf, 2025; Selvelli, 2025).

Contributions gathered in this issue explore these dynamics through various case studies where 20th-century political changes profoundly altered the composition and self-understanding of communities. Each one asks, in its own way: How is heritage

claimed, contested, or shared in multicultural regions? What is the role of historical turnpoints, trauma, silence, and memory in shaping present-day heritage discourses? To what extent can heritage become a space of reconciliation, and where does it remain a terrain of division? By analysing contexts ranging from post-Habsburg port cities to post-socialist borderlands, from ethnolinguistic regions marked by environmental disaster to migrant communities negotiating invisibility, the volume invites readers to consider heritage as a field of continuous negotiation.

Heritage in multicultural regions

Heritage in multicultural regions is not a neutral or static repository of the past, but rather a socially and politically mediated construct shaped through selective processes of evaluation, interpretation, and representation (Harvey, 2001; Smith, 2006). This conceptualisation challenges essentialist understandings of heritage as the unproblematic preservation of material traces, emphasising instead its discursive and political character (Smith, 2006). Heritage is thus more intimately connected to present needs and future aspirations than to any immutable past (Lowenthal, 1985; Harrison et al., 2020). The process of *heritagisation* – the transformation of particular pasts into recognised "heritage" – inherently involves selection, privileging certain histories while marginalising or erasing others (Harrison, 2013; Macdonald, 2013). In multicultural areas, this dynamic is particularly charged. Such regions function as sites of negotiation in which competing interpretations of history, belonging, and identity intersect. Heritage becomes both an arena of contestation and a tool for (re)constructing collective identities, determining who has the right to claim the past and how such claims are legitimised.

In practice, heritage in multicultural regions is frequently conflictual. Diverse social and ethnic groups often seek to assert the primacy of their own historical narratives, producing tensions between official and vernacular forms of memory (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996). Official heritage frameworks, such as those advanced by UNESCO or the European Union, tend to promote cultural diversity as a universal value (Macdonald, 2013). Yet, paradoxically, many historically multicultural regions have undergone processes of cultural homogenisation, frequently as a result of political upheavals, shifting state borders, and episodes of violent conflict (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983; Anderson, 2006).

Such disruptions have often led to situations in which the tangible and intangible remnants of multicultural life exist without the original communities that sustained them – a phenomenon Macdonald (2013) terms "heritage without communities". These traces, while materially enduring, are subject to highly selective remembering and forgetting (Connerton, 2008). In post-transition contexts, heritage narratives are often reframed to reinforce dominant national identities, marginalising or silencing displaced,

expelled, or otherwise absent groups (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996; Hrobat Virloget, 2017). A salient example can be found in Central and Eastern Europe, where post-World War II forced migrations of German populations and state-led resettlement policies fundamentally transformed the demographic and cultural landscapes of once-plural towns (Douglas, 2012; Ther, 2014). Similar dynamics can be observed after the First World War in Anatolia, where the population exchange between Greece and Turkey (1923) erased centuries of shared cultural coexistence (Hirschon, 2003; Clark, 2006); in the Middle East, where Jewish communities left behind synagogues, cemeteries, and schools following mid-20th-century exoduses (Fischbach, 2008; Bashkin, 2017); and in North America, where the displacement of Indigenous peoples has resulted in enduring yet decontextualised traces of their cultural landscapes (Deloria, 1998; Clifford, 2013), to name only a few examples.

Following Smith's (2006) argument that heritage is not a fixed entity but a cultural process, formerly multicultural regions pose unique challenges for heritage research. In these settings, absence is as central to heritage-making as presence. The erasure of certain ethnic groups leaves behind physical, spatial, and narrative voids, prompting the question of how these absences are acknowledged, ignored, or reinterpreted (Hrobat Virloget et al., 2016). Therefore, it is important to illuminate the varied ways in which local populations relate – or deliberately choose not to relate – to the material and symbolic remnants of multicultural pasts (Ilić, 2024). Acts of avoidance or denial can be as revealing as overt commemorations, offering insights into the politics of memory, the shaping of collective identities, and the long-term legacies of nation-building projects.

Within these complex and often contested contexts, heritage in multicultural regions can be more productively understood through a lens that emphasises its emergent, dynamic, and interconnected nature (Silverman, 2011). Rather than conceiving heritage as a static assemblage of objects or sites, this approach foregrounds its ongoing constitution through performative, discursive, and materially grounded practices, in which meanings are constantly negotiated, reshaped, and reenacted; often in response to shifting political priorities and social relations. This processual perspective draws attention to the ways heritage both reflects and shapes the power asymmetries, exclusions, and ideological agendas embedded within its making.

At the same time, recognising heritage as embedded within dense networks of relationships linking human and non-human actors, social institutions, and material environments, underscores its fundamentally relational character. The relational dimension reveals that heritage emerges through continuous interactions between people, places, and material forms, and cannot be separated from the ecological and socio-political contexts in which it exists. Taken together, these processual and relational understandings allow us to conceptualise heritage in multicultural areas as an immanent, open-ended, and co-constituted process, shaped through ongoing negotiations, reciprocal influences, and shared acts of meaning-making across diverse communities

(see also Mozzafari, Harvey, 2025). Such a perspective enables a more nuanced engagement with the layered, contested, and evolving character of multicultural heritage, while resisting static or monolithic interpretations.

An important phenomenon within multicultural heritage contexts is the persistence of hidden heritage, which arises from selective processes of heritagisation. This selective visibility amplifies certain memories and narratives while excluding others, thereby shaping public consciousness in ways that privilege dominant cultural groups (Macdonald, 2010; Bartulović, 2022). Minority heritages are often confined to private or community spaces due to political marginalisation, economic neglect, or societal prejudice. This marginalisation can be reinforced through exoticised or "orientalised" representations that reduce minority cultures to stylised or stereotypical images (Muzaini, 2012; Tyner, 2018).

In many cases, the absence of official recognition means such heritage is constructed and practised within families or communities through oral traditions, rituals, and everyday practices and usually acknowledged as "living heritage". Despite structural exclusion, the long-term suppression of minority heritage often generates countervailing pressures for recognition (Strahilov, Karakusheva, 2025). Marginalised communities may actively seek to reinsert their narratives into the public heritage sphere, advocating for inclusion in official histories and cultural programming. Such movements can range from grassroots initiatives, such as local festivals, commemorative projects, or digital archives, to formal campaigns for state or UNESCO recognition.

These efforts reveal a dual dynamic: while heritage can be instrumentalised as a means of exclusion, it can equally serve as a powerful medium for reclaiming visibility and fostering intercultural dialogue. In recognising both the conflicts and the creative possibilities inherent in multicultural heritage, ethnological research can contribute to more nuanced interpretations that resist static categorisations and foster inclusive narratives. By engaging critically with hidden and marginalised heritage, and by foregrounding the agency of diverse communities, scholarship can help reframe multicultural regions not as sites of lost plurality, but as dynamic spaces of ongoing cultural negotiation and renewal.

Whose heritage? Ours, yours, theirs, no one's?

A number of participants in the conference Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's? The Heritage of Multicultural Areas contributed the peer-reviewed articles collected in this special issue. Others contributed chiefly through thought-provoking discussions that significantly deepened the exchange of ideas. While these latter contributors are not listed among the authors here, their names appear in the official conference booklet *Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's? The Heritage of Multicultural Areas* (Moric, Pisk, 2025).

The conference adopted an inclusive understanding of heritage – as the diverse ways in which communities and individuals interpret, value, employ, and attribute meaning to the past. Central to its inquiry was the question of how heritage processes are shaped by political and historical contexts: shifting state borders (notably in the aftermath of the First and Second World War), the emergence of populist politics, demographic transformations (including population displacements), and tensions between competing historical narratives and memories. At the same time, the symposium served as a forum for reflecting on epistemological and methodological approaches to studying heritage in regions marked by longstanding cultural diversity. In doing so, it sought to broaden the conception of heritage as an evolving process, unfolding through the intertwined practices of remembering, management, and identity formation. The contributions published in this thematic issue therefore offer diverse perspectives and approaches to the mosaic of heritage studies.

Angela Ilić (2025) explores how the Late Habsburg past of Rijeka/Fiume/Reka and Maribor/Marburg is remembered today and whether genuinely shared cultures of remembrance can be achieved. Both cities, once regional centres of the Austro-Hungarian Empire with rich ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity, have navigated multiple sovereignties and now grapple with competing interpretations of their heritage. The study situates them in broader European debates on multicultural urban heritage, particularly through their roles as European Capitals of Culture (Maribor 2012; Rijeka 2020–2021). Ilić contrasts inclusive heritage initiatives, such as the Kozala cemetery in Rijeka where different Christian confessions and Jews have been buried side by side since the 19th century, with nationalist readings that claim heritage for a single group. She emphasises the value of "bridge-builders" like Rudolf Gustav Puff and Antonín Chráska, who crossed ethnic and religious divides, as focal points for representing shared heritage. Historically, historiography often prioritised one dominant group, sidelining the complex multi-ethnic realities of these cities; however, recent scholarship has embraced multiperspectival approaches. Today, remembrance practices range from material heritage, such as cemeteries and public buildings, to immaterial symbols, persons, and narratives tied to particular communities. Some heritage sites, once built for a single group, have evolved into shared spaces, while other cultural-linguistic traditions – such as Italian or Hungarian initiatives in Rijeka – remain oriented toward their own constituencies. Examples like Rijeka's industrial heritage illustrate how diverse historical assets can be embraced as collective heritage, benefiting all residents. Multilingual street signs, introduced for the 2020 Capital of Culture year, visibly acknowledge the city's layered cultural past while revealing the politics of naming. Simultaneously, national indifference, a historical feature of both cities, has been largely overlooked in nationalist narratives that resist more inclusive memory work. Ilić concludes that the heritage of the Late Habsburg period in Rijeka and Maribor is both shared and divided, with ongoing tensions but also emerging opportunities for inclusive reinterpretation.

Neža Čebron Lipovec (2025) examines the role of heritage dissonance in architectural conservation, linking it to critical heritage studies' shift from expert-led approaches toward values-led and people-centred frameworks. Her case study focuses on the Venetian Gothic house Benečanka in Piran/Pirano, whose façade restoration in 2015–2016 sparked public controversy. The building's red cement façade from 1959, part of a post-war modernist urban design for the Slovenian coast, was replaced with a pink lime-based finish, intended as a reconstruction of its earlier appearance. Drawing on the concept of heritage as an "ongoing narrative" (Walter, 2020) and Tunbridge and Ashworth's (1996) categories of dissonance, she analyses competing interpretations of authenticity, place attachment, and identity. The first dissonance emerged between the authorised heritage discourse seeking to enhance historical authenticity and large segments of local residents – mostly post-war Slovenian-speaking newcomers – who felt excluded from decision-making and experienced "solastalgia" over the loss of a beloved feature. A second, opposing view came from members of the Italian community, who saw the restored pink façade as affirming their historical connection to the site, while the red façade symbolised its erasure. Although the two community narratives diverged, they were not fully antagonistic and aligned with professional support for the pink façade. The third dissonance concerned tourism: both colour choices were justified as enhancing the town's appeal, either through recognisability or through evoking Venetian Gothic ambience. Čebron Lipovec argues that these overlapping consonances and dissonances reflect the complex heritage values embedded in multicultural, post-conflict settings like Istria. She concludes that heritage dissonance is itself part of a site's heritage value. Addressing it constructively requires early and inclusive stakeholder engagement, framing dissonance as a potential space for dialogue and mutual recognition (Kisić, 2017).

Katja Hrobat Virloget and Martina Tonet (2025) investigate how intergenerational trauma and memories are transmitted in the Slovenian-Italian borderland, a region still shaped by the legacies of fascism, anti-Slavic racism, the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus, and post-war divisions. Through qualitative research with young people from both Slovenian and Italian minorities, they identify patterns of silence, avoidance, and selective disclosure in family narratives. This "conspiracy of silence" emerges both as a coping mechanism and as a form of controlling the narrative about a traumatic past. The study reveals how competing victimhood discourses and contested public memories have profoundly influenced identity formation in these communities. While earlier generations often upheld rigid national narratives, the third generation – those who did not directly experience the major traumatic events – shows a growing desire to overcome inherited divisions. Participants in the focus groups described the burden of conflicting public histories, which sustain painful memories and hinder reconciliation. Yet, they also expressed an aspiration to live beyond such narratives, seeking healing through dialogue, mutual recognition, and shared heritage framing. The authors note

that cross-community encounters can challenge monolithic national ideologies that reduce borderland residents to singular identities and foster hostility toward neighbours. By openly confronting painful histories, young people can reclaim agency over their identities and reframe relationships with the national majority and with each other. The focus groups demonstrated that voicing and acknowledging trauma may help dismantle silence and foster more inclusive understandings of the "Other". This shift represents an important move toward transforming the borderland's contested past into a platform for coexistence. Ultimately, the study positions the younger generation as potential bridge-builders, capable of reshaping inherited memories into narratives that support reconciliation and multicultural belonging.

Oksana Mykytenko (2025) examines Polesia as a paradigmatic ethnocultural borderland, where the cultural geographies of Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Poland, and Lithuania intersect. The article traces both the history and the present state of research into this complex region, with particular emphasis on Ukrainian Polesia. It underscores the significance of systematic, long-term interdisciplinary studies that have positioned Polesia as one of the Slavic cultural-historical "archaic zones". The study outlines the historical and ethnographic boundaries of Polesia, its internal differentiation, and the distinctive features of its traditional culture. Polesia is presented as a contact and transitional area of linguistic, cultural, and ethnic entanglements, where intercultural interactions have shaped a diffuse and shifting ethnocultural field. This fluidity engenders dynamic exchanges of language and culture, while simultaneously complicating questions of identity. The research employs a combination of dialectological, areal, and structural-typological methods in analyzing folklore and traditional practices. Ethnolinguistics provides the central methodological framework, aiming to reconstruct invariant cultural forms through comparative study of local variations and the interpretation of semiotic codes embedded in tradition. The creation of the *Polesian Ethnolinguistic Atlas* epitomizes such integrative work, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage amid sociopolitical ruptures and ecological catastrophe. In this context, the article also reflects on the post-Chernobyl heritage loss, where entire dialectal micro-continua vanished. By integrating linguistic, ethnographic, and folkloristic evidence, the study demonstrates the analytical potential of Polesia for broader debates on cultural continuity, variability, and the interplay of local and translocal traditions in the Slavic world.

Bartulović and Bejtullahu (2025) explore migrant heritage through the case of the Albanian diaspora in Slovenia, with a particular focus on heritagisation processes and the Slovenia's contemporary cultural landscape. They note that expressions such as traditional Albanian music are largely absent from national post-Yugoslav heritage frameworks, making them doubly marginalised: both invisible to the majority population and contested within the community itself. Drawing on ethnographic research, the authors foreground migrants as active (or in-active) agents in heritage-making, thereby challenging static, nation-bound conceptions of heritage. Fieldwork in Ljubljana

(the country's capital and a multicultural hub) and in Kočevje (a multicultural yet socio-oeconomically marginalised area) highlights how local environments and community contexts shape Albanians' self-understanding, daily practices, identities, and reflections on their past and future. Cultural associations play a central role in heritage valorisation but also serve as arenas for disagreement due to divergent interpretations of heritage. In Ljubljana, Albanian social and cultural life is vibrant, while Kočevje presents a much quieter and less dynamic scene. This contrast, though not representative of all contexts, illustrates how sociocultural, political, and spatial factors affect the visibility and preservation of minority heritage. The findings challenge the notion that minority heritage is equally recognised across national settings, exposing disparities in cultural visibility and institutional support. The authors emphasise music heritage not only as a tool for fostering inclusion and reshaping public attitudes toward minority communities, but also as sites of identity negotiation, learning, creativity, social bonding, and political engagement within those communities.

The articles presented, while regionally and thematically diverse, converge on several analytical points. Firstly, they collectively reject the idea of heritage as a fixed, objective set of assets. Instead, heritage emerges as a negotiated construct, contingent upon the perspectives of stakeholders, institutional frameworks, and broader political contexts (Harrison, 2013). Secondly, silence – whether deliberate or structural – plays a critical role in shaping heritage. As Hrobat Virloget and Tonet show, what is not transmitted can be as formative as what is. Similar dynamics are implicit in Ilić's discussion of selective commemoration and in the migrant heritage examined by Bartulović and Bejtullahu. Thirdly, the interdependence of material and intangible heritage is evident across all cases. Built heritage gains meaning through narratives, rituals, and identity work, as seen in the Kozala cemetery, the Venetian House, and the village landscapes of Polesia. Finally, several contributions point to the possibility, though not inevitability, of reframing contested heritage as shared heritage. This requires not only institutional openness but also grassroots engagement and recognition of multiple pasts.

The title of this article, *Ours, Yours, Theirs, No One's?* encapsulates the paradox of heritage in multicultural areas. Heritage is rarely unclaimed, yet the claims can be overlapping, conflicting, or strategically downplayed. In multilingual, multi-ethnic settings, heritage becomes a mirror of social relations: it can serve as a bridge for dialogue or as a tool for exclusion. By juxtaposing cases from different historical, political, and cultural contexts, this volume highlights both the specificity of local heritage debates and their resonance across regions. It invites scholars, heritage practitioners, and policymakers to embrace multiperspectivity – not as a dilution of truth, but as a necessary recognition of the complexity of the past. Doing so may not resolve all conflicts, but it can open space for shared custodianship and mutual recognition.

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Naša, vaša, njihova, nikogaršnja? Dediščina večkulturnih območij

Pričujoča številka revije *Traditiones* se posveča večplastni in pogosto sporni naravi dediščine v večkulturnih prostorih. Dediščina v teh okoljih ni nevtralna zapuščina preteklosti, temveč dinamično polje kulturnih in dediščinskih politik, pogajanj o identiteti in spominjanju. V regijah, zaznamovanih z migracijami, političnimi preobrazbami in konfliktnimi zgodovinami, je dediščina pogosto fragmentirana in izpodbijana. Vprašanje »Čigava dediščina?« opozarja na tekmiške interpretacije in družbene procese, ki oblikujejo razumevanje preteklosti v sedanjosti.

Študije v tej številki raziskujejo, kako se dediščino na večkulturnih območjih vzpostavlja, oblikuje, deli ali zavrača. Obravnavajo vpliv zgodovinskih prelomnic,

tišine in travm ter možnosti, da dediščina postane prostor sprave ali pa ostane področje delitev. Posebno pozornost namenjajo primerom z območij nekdanje Avstro-Ogrske, postsocialističnih meja in diaspornih skupnosti.

Prispevki se lotevajo dediščine kot procesa, ne kot fiksne entitete. Poudarjajo selektivnost v procesih dediščinjenja, kjer so nekatere zgodovine poveličevane, druge pa izbrisane. Opozarjajo na pojav »dediščine brez skupnosti«, kjer materialni ostanki večkulturne preteklosti obstajajo brez skupnosti, ki so jih ustvarile. Pogosto so manjšinske dediščine potisnjene v zasebne sfere ali pa eksotično predstavljene.

Angela Ilić analizira, kako se danes spominjajo habsburške preteklosti Reke in Maribora ter možnosti za skupno kulturo spominjanja. Neža Čebron Lipovec obravnava »dediščinsko disonanco« na primeru prenove hiše Benečanka v Piranu, kjer so se mnenja lokalnih skupnosti in stroke razhajala. Katja Hrobat Virloget in Martina Tonet proučujeta prenos travmatičnih spominov v slovensko-italijanski obmejni regiji in opozarjata na tišino kot obliko dediščinskega delovanja. Oksana Mykytenko predstavi Polesje kot etnokulturno območje, kjer se prepletajo ukrajinska, beloruska, ruska in poljska dediščina. Alenka Bartulović in Alma Bejtullahu raziskujeta dediščino albanske diaspore v Sloveniji, s poudarkom na vlogi tradicionalne glasbe v procesu priznavanja in vključevanja.

Ti prispevki skupaj ponujajo multiperspektivni pogled na dediščino v večkulturnih kontekstih. Poudarjajo, da je dediščina lahko orodje izključevanja ali pa prostor za vključevanje in dialog. Z naslovom »Naša, vaša, njihova, nikogaršnja?« številka zajema paradoks dediščinjenja v večkulturnih okoljih, ki je pogosto prekrivajoče se, medsebojno nasprotujoče ali pa strateško potisnjeno v ozadje.

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Whose Heritage? Examples of Contested and Shared Cultures of Remembrance and Heritage Questions in the Multicultural Formerly Habsburg Cities of Rijeka and Maribor

Angela Ilić

Institute for German Culture and History, Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München, Germany
ilic@ikgs.de
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9949-018X

To whom do material and immaterial heritage belong? Can remembrance cultures be inclusive instead of cancelling each other out? This article explores possible answers to these questions in two historically multicultural cities, Rijeka/Fiume/Reka and Maribor/Marburg, in relation to their heritage of the Late Habsburg period. Drawing on original sources and recent literature in various languages, public attempts at narrating the Habsburg past through exhibitions, monuments and the like are examined.

▪ Keywords: remembrance cultures, contested heritage, shared heritage, Rijeka, Maribor

Komu pripadata materialna in nesnovna dediščina? Ali so lahko kulture spominjanja vključujoče, namesto da se medsebojno izključujejo? Članek obravnava možne odgovore na ti vprašanji v dveh zgodovinsko multikulturnih mestih – Reki/Rijeki/Fiume in Mariboru/Marburgu – v povezavi z njuno dediščino poznega habsburškega obdobja. Na podlagi izvirnih virov in sodobne literature v več jezikih analizira javne poskuse pripovedovanja habsburške preteklosti prek razstav, spomenikov in podobnih praks.

▪ Ključne besede: kulture spominjanja, sporna dediščina, skupna dediščina, Reka, Maribor

Introduction

Interest in researching the way certain historical periods are remembered in the post-Yugoslav space has increased in recent years, as a growing number of academic publications also demonstrates. Much of the focus is – understandably – directed at exploring the way contemporary societies remember the Yugoslav era and the wars of the 1990s (Höpken, 2007;[1] Kuljić, 2010). Other works place World War Two and its direct outcomes in their centre of attention, while yet others try to present more multifaceted narratives of hitherto – and still – hotly debated subjects (Pavlaković, 2008, 2010, 2020), including Socialism[2] and various forms of totalitarianism.[3]

[1] Höpken only reflects on Croatia ("Culture of remembrance between the creation of national identity, the 'burden of the double past' and the discourse of guilt"), Serbia ("From nationalist euphoria to 'memory chaos'") and Bosnia and Herzegovina ("A state without memory") in his study. It would be interesting to see how he describes the dominant historiographies and cultures of remembrance in the other former Yugoslav republics.

[2] Examples include the series of biannual conferences Socialism on the Bench at Juraj Dobrila University in Pula, which has been ongoing since 2013 as well as projects exploring cultures of remembrance around the material heritage of Socialist Yugoslavia: Finding Tito, a database of street names bearing Tito's name in the former Yugoslav republics (https://giorgiocomai.eu/findingtito/); Spomenik Database: An exploration of Yugoslavia's historic and enigmatic endeavor into abstract anti-fascist WWII monument building between 1960 and 1990 (https://www.spomenikdatabase.org/).

[3] The transregional and international ERC research project based in Prague, Memory and Populism from Below (MEMPOP; https://www.mempop.org/) explores this topic in relation to various local settings.

Comparably less attention has been paid to the remembrance cultures concerning an era preceding both of these periods, one that was nonetheless very influential and lasted for a relatively long time. Due to vastly differing perceptions even today, remembrance of the Late Habsburg period, the era of the Dual Monarchy between 1867 and 1918, is either shunned or glorified. Erasing or ignoring certain layers from the past has resulted in skewed and fragmented views of history, as Wolfgang Höpken (Höpken, 2007) argues. The same can be said for material and immaterial heritage: recognizing it as shared heritage or as elements of rival heritages often depends on the viewpoints of the people. Is it possible to overcome these divides and collectively embrace certain things as shared heritage in the post-Habsburg realm?

This article focuses on the remembrance cultures and practices as well as on questions of immaterial – and to a lesser degree, material – heritage in two cities that were multicultural regional centres in the Late Habsburg Empire: Rijeka/Fiume/Reka and Maribor/Marburg (an der Drau). Both Rijeka and Maribor held tenures as European Capitals of Culture in the recent past: Maribor in 2012 and Rijeka in 2020/2021. This offered an opportunity for increased reflection on their multifaceted historical heritage and sparked renewed academic interest, while undoubtedly also inspiring future projects relating to exploring the cultural heritage in each city.[4] That becoming the European Capital of Culture can act as a catalyst for weaving various traditions together and thereby creating a common city space has been shown on the example of Nova Gorica and Gorizia by Jaro Veselinovič and Miha Kozorog (Veselinovič, Kozorog, 2022). Diversity in past and present has also been a central element in some of the other European Capitals of Culture located in Central Europe in recent years, featuring most notably in Timişoara/Temesvár/Temeswar/Temišvar (2023) and Novi Sad/Újvidék/Neusatz/Nový Sad (2022).

Historiographies of Rijeka and Maribor

The historiography of both cities with ethnically-linguistically-religiously mixed populations[5] in relation to their Late Habsburg past has not been without controversies and has contributed to cementing already existing historical stereotypes and tropes,

[4] For example, the German-language journal *Spiegelungen: Zeitschrift für deutsche Kultur und Geschichte Südosteuropas* has been following the European Capitals of Culture in Central and Southeastern Europe since 2020, through publishing academic articles and feature articles in German and in English. These are also available on the website of the journal: https://spiegelungen.net/. The journal *Zibaldone: Zeitschrift für italienische Kultur der Gegenwart* dedicated a volume to Rijeka/Fiume in 2019 (http://www.stauffenburg.de/asp/books.asp?id=1476).

[5] In purely statistical terms, the diversity of various cultures, ethnic groups and languages represented in Rijeka was much greater than that in Maribor. However, as it is argued in this article, not only was the diversity in Maribor and its surroundings in fact greater than including only Slovenes and Germans, but there were also numerous institutions, individuals and initiatives that aimed at recognizing and embracing this cultural diversity, while simultaneously promoting a peaceful coexistence.

while interpreting historical developments through the narrow lens of nationally or ideologically framed perspectives. Thus, much has been written either from the exclusive perspective of one group (such as the history of Rijeka from a Croatian point of view) or at most from a binary viewpoint (presenting the entire history of Late Habsburg Maribor as a continuous struggle between Germans and Slovenes with no other groups seemingly present in the city). The fact that archival sources from both cities are scattered and kept in several different locations in various countries, at diverse institutions and are preserved in various languages and alphabets, makes research on the multifaceted history of Rijeka and Maribor even more challenging than usual and has thus acted as a deterrent for historians from exploring the diversity of written sources. This situation propelled the author of this article to produce a monograph on the various identity constructions represented in both cities during the Late Habsburg period (Ilić, 2024), in which all available sources were consulted in order to present as much of a complete picture as possible.[6] Rijeka and Maribor were selected for this project because they were both regional centres with a diverse population and were located in different halves of the Dual Monarchy and on national or cultural-linguistic borders, with different legal frameworks and political traditions.

The dominant historiographies vary widely in different languages and within different national boundaries, as Jure Krišto and Vinko Rajšp have shown, among others, on the examples of Croatian and Slovenian historiographies respectively (Rajšp, 1988; Krišto, 2001). Concerning Rijeka, it is important to recognize that the vast majority of historical works about the city display very strong political or ideological influences, especially with regard to historical phenomena from the First World War until the 1990s. This has been guided by national interests, as Borut Klabjan observes (Klabjan, 2011).

Apart from the Croatian-centred and Yugoslav-centred historiographies of the city, other perspectives of writing about Rijeka's past have flourished as well. The case of Italian exiles (*esuli*) who were put under pressure to emigrate after World War Two, when Rijeka was incorporated into the newly established Socialist Yugoslav state, is unusual, as a large group of them moved to Italy, where they established their own parallel city of Fiume called Libero Comune di Fiume (Free Commune of Fiume), itself a place of remembrance and a place where the memory of the former town was intensely cultivated, complete with a mayor and other governing structures. In addition, they moved the Società di Studi Fiumani (Society of Fiuman Studies), which had been founded in Rijeka in 1923, to Rome, along with a periodical which they have been publishing in Rome since 1953. The Società also has a museum and archives in Rome.[7] In this way, a parallel culture of remembrance was established in Italy and has

[6] In the case of Rijeka, sources in Croatian, English, the local Istro-Venetian dialect, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Old Church Slavonic, Serbian and Slovenian were consulted; in the case of Maribor, in Croatian, Czech, English, German, Hungarian, Latin, and Slovenian.

[7] More information at: https://www.fiume-rijeka.it.

been carefully cultivated since then – in recent years also increasingly in Rijeka itself, primarily through the Italian Community of Rijeka.

In the years leading up to World War One much of the political argumentation of pro-Italian politicians rested upon the concept of the *italianità* of Rijeka, claiming the predominantly Italian nature and the inherent belonging of the city and its inhabitants to the Italian cultural and linguistic circle – an argument made in history books and in political speeches as well as publications at the time, which has also influenced Italian-language historiographies ever since. A renaissance of interest in Rijeka in recent years has also been observable in Italy (see e.g. Stelli, 2017; Pupo, 2018).

Research has also been published with a focus on select historically present groups in the city, including Jews, Orthodox Christians (primarily Serbs), and Slovenians (see Toševa Karpowicz, 2002; Lukežić, 2007; Simper, 2018; Roksandić, Jovanović, 2020).

Rijeka's exotic look and climate made the city appear a colony by proxy in the Hungarian imagination and would eventually pave the way for othering, for justifying modernization, a civilizing mission, and an aggressive policy of Magyarization, all in an effort to make Rijeka more Hungarian. This nostalgy is made visible through a massive current wave of nostalgia, mostly imperially-coloured nostalgia, in Hungary concerning the city. Accordingly, much of currently produced literature in Hungarian focuses on presenting historical Rijeka as a Hungarian city from various perspectives (including T. Pelles, 2001; Skultéty, 2009; M. Pelles, Zsigmond, 2018; Juhász, 2020).

The historiography of Maribor has so far also been dominated by two nationally oriented approaches, which has led to the emergence of two almost completely separate traditions. Accordingly, most studies for several decades focused only on one specific ethnic group in the city. This was in the tradition of Yugoslav (and broader European) historiography, which was not only strongly ideologically influenced, but also – in line with political expectations and discourses – largely ignored and even concealed the history of the Germans or attempted to discredit their achievements. The emphasis was placed instead on researching the history of the Slovenes in the city and the surrounding area from various disciplinary perspectives. In this sense, Slovenian historians saw themselves as successors to the tradition of the [Slovenian] Historical Society (Zgodovinsko Društvo), which was founded in Maribor in 1903 and whose journal continued to be published in socialist Yugoslavia and up until today.

Only a few historians dared to write about German-Slovenian networks and mutual connections in the last decades of Yugoslavia, especially in the field of cultural history. Bruno Hartman was arguably the most influential and most prolific author among them (see e.g. Hartman, 1968, 1983, 1997, 2001, 2007). Another breach of convention was represented by selected works by Janez Cvirn, who researched the history of the Germans in Lower Styria and mutual perceptions between the German and Slovenian populations in the region. His book, *Trdnjavski Trikotnik* [*Triangle of Fortresses*] (Cvirn, 1997) was also published in German translation posthumously (Cvirn, 2016).

Outside of Yugoslavia, especially in Austria and Germany, a professionalization in the reappraisal of Maribor's history only began several decades after the end of the war, which was partly associated with a generational change. In addition to overviews, German-language publications focusing on interethnic tensions and struggles dominated – and still dominate today (see e.g. Rumpler, Suppan, 1988; Heppner, 2002; Moll, 2007). This also applies to the historiography of Lower Styria. These parallel developments have created a gap between German-language and Slovenian-language historiographies on Maribor, offering vastly differing perspectives.

The research landscape on Maribor has thus long been dominated by either monoperspectival or binarily focused works in the ethnic, linguistic, and religious sense, and the academic debates have also largely moved along this axis. The research literature on Maribor would therefore welcome more studies that consider the interethnic, intercultural and linguistic situation in the city not only from the perspective of the German and Slovenian sections of the population, but also from that of the numerically smaller but nonetheless present Czech, Croatian, Jewish etc. population groups.

The existence of city histories and of works dedicated to the cultural history of Maribor, including different perspectives, has been a welcome addition to literature. Maribor's tenure as European Capital of Culture in 2012 also provided an impetus for multiperspectival research into local history. The most significant results of this stage include the exhibition and accompanying volume *Germans and Maribor* (Ferlež, 2012), a concise history of the city (Griesser-Pečar, 2011), and an art history guide (Ciglenečki, 2012). In recent years, more examples of innovative and often multiperspectival research have been published (Almasy, 2014; Almasy et al., 2018; Jesenšek, 2020; Ferlež, Lipavic Oštir, 2024).

That forgetting or denying aspects of the past can not only negatively influence the present, but also the future, has been argued in a similar multicultural regional context (Hrobat Virloget, 2022). Based on that example, one should also consider that presenting something as shared heritage is different from presenting a series of heritages claimed by various groups and asserting that the sum of those individual claims makes up a shared heritage. Shared heritage means that stakeholders, regardless of their sense of belonging or self-identification, all regard something as theirs, without variations, caveats or opt-outs.

It is also important to remember that local, regional and hybrid forms of self-identification that curtailed people's interest in nationalist mobilization and allowed them "in-between spaces" for self-identifying resulted in delayed nation-building processes (Zahra, 2010; Judson, Zahra, 2012; Judson, 2016; van Ginderachter, Fox, 2019). This phenomenon, known as national indifference, was clearly recognizable in both Rijeka and Maribor, and was especially strong up to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Diversity in Habsburg Rijeka and Maribor

Both Rijeka and Maribor had a diverse linguistic landscape in the Late Habsburg period, but they differed significantly in terms of the composition and statistical proportions of the languages represented. While in Rijeka no single language had an absolute statistical majority, in Maribor the German language was clearly dominant both statistically and socially, and it was the most widely spoken colloquial language in the city. Rijeka's linguistic landscape was more diverse, with Italian, Croatian, and the local Fiuman dialect as the most widespread languages and language variants – in addition to Slovenian, German and increasingly also Hungarian as further languages used by larger segments of the population.

Language[8]	**Rijeka 1880 Proportion**	**Rijeka 1910 Proportion**	**Maribor 1880 Proportion**[9]	**Maribor 1910 Proportion**
Italian	42.25 %	48.70 %	0.26 %	--
Croatian	36.55 %[10]	25.90 %	0.05 %	--
Hungarian	1.75 %	13 %	--	--
Slovenian	10.01 %	4.70 %	15.11 %	13.60 %
German	4.10 %	4.67 %	84.04 %	81 %
Other languages	1.25 %	1.50 %		5.40 %[11]
Serbian	Included in Croatian	0.85 %	Included in Croatian	--
Slovak, Romanian and Ruthenian	0.09 %	0.68 %	0.50 %[12]	--
Polish	--	--	0.04 %	--
Cannot speak[13]	4.00 %	--	--	
Total	**100 %**	**100 %**	**100 %**	**100 %**
Total population in numbers	**20.981**	**49.806**	**16.084**	**27.994**

Table 1: The Population in Rijeka and Maribor according to Mother Tongue / Language of Everyday Use, 1880–1910.[14]

[8] In the Austrian half of the empire "colloquial language" or language of everyday use, in the Hungarian half of the empire "mother tongue".

[9] The altogether 1,604 soldiers in Maribor, 654 of whom were of Hungarian mother tongue, were not included in this number.

[10] Croatian and Serbian together.

[11] Apart from "German", "Slovenian", and "other languages", no other categories were presented in 1910.

[12] In Maribor also Bohemian and Moravian were subsumed under this category.

[13] People who were not physically able to speak due to illness or disability.

[14] The data presented in tables 1 and 2 is based on the population census results in both parts of the Dual Monarchy between 1880 and 1910.

The statistical data from the censuses – although very helpful – only provide fragmentary and sometimes unreliable information. The Fiuman dialect,[15] which was widespread in Rijeka and functioned as the lingua franca in large segments of the population, did not appear at all in the official statistics. Neither did the local dialect spoken by Maribor's Germans (see Križman, 2002; Lipavic Oštir, 2012). Since the censuses in the Austrian half of the empire asked about the vernacular language (the language of everyday use), it can be assumed that numerous Slovenian native speakers who worked in Maribor and used German in everyday life also named this language as their vernacular. Also, the language(s) spoken by Roma in either city are absent from census results.

In both cities, there were languages that carried social capital – or were perceived as such – and gave their speakers the prospect of higher education or better job opportunities and thus social advancement. These were Hungarian and Italian in the case of Rijeka, and German in the case of Maribor. Different practices and dynamics of multilingualism could also be observed in both cities.

The prevalence of multilingualism – which in part had the effect that people did not identify with just one language or cultural realm – was undoubtedly one of the reasons why Rijeka's population largely rejected attempts at national self-identification and mobilization until the turn of the century. The various manifestations of such an "in-between" state, observable also in various parts of the Alps-Adriatic region, has been described with concepts including pluriculturalism, hybridity, indifference, and polyphony. Fikfak and Schönberger have also integrated the concept of Eigensinn in their study of historical ethnography in late Habsburg Klagenfurt, Ljubljana, and Trieste, in order to understand the dynamics and practices of such coexistence, focusing on issues of language, networks, and mobility (Fikfak, Schönberger, 2024).

While in Rijeka the battle between the languages was for a relative majority, in Maribor there was a clear majority-minority relationship between the two most widely spoken languages. In Maribor, knowledge of German was an important social capital and German-language self-identification in the censuses and in other situations was (although not in all cases) a matter of choice. However, a purely binary language situation did not exist in Maribor, although over time the other languages represented in the city were taken into account less and less, even by the statistical data collections.

Language struggles were most evident in the field of education. In Rijeka, as in Maribor, the local school system became the focal point of language and nationality politics. In Rijeka, strong Magyarization tendencies from above, primarily through

[15] One group that does not appear in the statistics at all was that of the Fiumans: a strong local identity that could be defined not ethnically, but in terms of local patriotism and language through the Fiuman dialect (*il dialetto fiumano*), the true lingua franca of the population, a variant of Italian with elements of the Venetian language and the local Croatian dialect (*sjevernočakavski*), with the occasional use of Croatianized German words.

compulsory Hungarian lessons and the increasing use of Hungarian as the language of instruction, did not bring the desired success: around 1910, some 90 percent of non-Hungarian native speakers in the city still did not speak Hungarian (A Magyar Királyi Központi Statisztikai hivatal, 1916).

In Maribor, there was also a struggle over the language of instruction at local schools, which aimed to oust Slovenian from the schools in Maribor. For this reason, systematic Germanization was carried out. The ban on the Slovenian language as the language of instruction, which was in force at Maribor schools between 1869 and 1889, triggered resistance among the Slovenian population and served as an important impetus for national mobilization.

The population was not only diverse in terms of language and nationality, but also in a religious sense: In both cities, several Christian denominations were represented, together with a growing Jewish community in Rijeka. Several of these communities had their own places of remembrance, around which elaborate traditions and cultures of remembrance developed. These included the Marian shrine in Trsat, just outside of Rijeka, and the person and legacy of Bishop Anton Martin Slomšek (1800-1862) in Maribor, who had moved the bishop's seat of the Diocese of Lavant to the city in 1859 and became a pivotal figure for Slovenian-speaking Catholics in the region.

Religious Affiliation	**Rijeka 1880**	**Rijeka 1910**	**Rijeka: Changes 1880 – 1910**	**Maribor 1880**	**Maribor 1910**	**Maribor: Changes 1880 – 1910**
Roman Catholic	98.24 %	90.6 %	↓7.66 %	98.10 %	95.22 %	↓2.88 %
Greek Catholic (Uniate)	0.14 %	0.95 %	↑680 %	---	---	
Eastern Orthodox	0.18 %	2 %	↑1.110 %	---	---	
Lutheran	0.44 %	0.6 %	Protestants altogether: ↑308 %	1.18 %	4.36 %	Protestants altogether: ↑360 %
Reformed (Calvinist)	0.50 %	2.3 %		0.3 %	---	
Other Christians	0.04 %	--	--	0.22 %	0.18 %	↓3.96 %
Jews	0.42 %	3.4 %	↑800 %	0.2 %	0.24 %	↑20 %
Unknown	0.04 %	0.15 %	↑375 %	---	---	
Total:	100 %	100 %	--	100 %	100 %	--

Table 2: Changes in the Population in Rijeka and Maribor according to Religious Affiliation, 1880–1910.

The decades immediately preceding and following the turn of the century signalled an important turning point in both cities. In the political realm, but also in public life, an increasing pillarization was taking place, creating an ever-growing chasm between representatives of various languages and nationalities as well as confessions.

The increasing differences were observable not only as deepening confessional divides, but also diverging political opinions within Catholicism, with the emergence of liberal vs. conservative branches. Within the Protestant churches, national/linguistic chasms were growing, ultimately leading to conflict in some cases, especially in Maribor where the Lutheran congregation embraced the Los von Rom movement, which aimed at converting people not only to Protestantism but also to members of the German linguistic/cultural circle.

Bridge-builders in Rijeka and Maribor

In spite of the growing animosity and separation, bridge-builders and cultural mediators remained active in both cities. In Rijeka, multilingual newspapers continued to be published and some were even launched in the first decade of the 20th century. The biologist, journalist, publicist and translator Viktor Garády (1857-1932) was a central figure in the local press, editing Hungarian-Italian newspapers, publishing fiction in Italian, and translating Hungarian theatre plays into Italian.

Some of the local associations also acted as bridge-builders. By the outbreak of World War One, one of the only associations in Maribor that still had both German and Slovenian members was the Philharmonic Society. The Filodrammatica in Rijeka fulfilled a similar function in that it united people of various ethnic/linguistic backgrounds through their appreciation of classical music.

The well-known grammar school teacher Rudolf Gustav Puff (1808-1865), a promoter of the Slovenian language and culture in Maribor, left numerous immaterial traces behind: he published the first city history of Maribor, poems, folk tales and stories from the Styrian cultural heritage, while also writing guides to various locations in Styria. A native German speaker, he learned Slovenian and is buried in Maribor. The city made him an honorary citizen already during his lifetime, in 1846. In addition to the increasingly German-oriented Evangelical-Lutheran parish, there were also other representatives of Protestantism present in Maribor. Anton/Antonín Chráska (1868-1953), a neo-Protestant missionary, author, Bible translator, poet and theologian from Horní Radechová in Bohemia, lived in Maribor for a short time. He was active in the areas inhabited by Slovenians for almost 26 years between 1896 and 1922, with only a brief interruption. In 1908, Chráska published his translation of the New Testament into Slovenian, followed by a translation of the entire Bible in 1914. He was inspired by Primus Truber's (1508-1586) Reformation movement in the 16th century, which Chráska

now tried to renew among the Slovenians. He therefore advocated the founding of a Slovenian(-speaking) Protestant church. He also edited the Christian magazine *Blagovestnik* [The Evangelist] and published numerous popular theological works in Slovenian. Not only because of his Bible translation did he have to face criticism and explicit bans from Catholic priests; the Lavantine diocese even forbade the reading of the Christian popular literature published by Chráska.

The reactions of German-speaking Protestants in Carniola and Lower Styria were hardly more positive: After Chráska was allowed to preach in Slovenian in the (German-speaking) Protestant parish in Ljubljana on 22 October 1899, the outrage in the German-speaking community was so great that its repercussions got not only Chráska, but even the local pastor, Hans Jaquemar (1864-1953), into trouble with the authorities.

Chráska was eventually withdrawn from his missionary society to České Budějovice. Nevertheless, he maintained lively contact with numerous Slovenians before resuming regular visits to the Slovenian lands a few years later. His experiences demonstrate the effects of increasing pillarization in Maribor, which also affected the religious sphere. On the one hand, the exclusive self-identification of Protestantism with the German language and culture up to the turn of the century had led to the Protestant faith being understood (not only) in Maribor as an exclusively German phenomenon – both within and outside of the community. At the same time, the predominantly Slovenian-speaking Roman Catholic diocese of Lavant strictly rejected Chráska's Slovenian-language literature and activities for fear of Protestant influence.

The retelling of these stories about bridge-builders could be a strategic part of recognizing shared heritage, yet exactly these stories have been neglected by nationally oriented historiographies – precisely because they may be perceived as threatening to the still dominant national narratives.

Remembering the Habsburg past in Rijeka

How have various cultures of remembrance been making themselves visible in Rijeka in recent years? What follows is a selection of attempts at creating or reviving contested and shared cultures of remembrance in the city.

The city – the actual city but also the imagined one – can be understood as a *lieu de mémoire* in the sense of Pierre Nora's use of the term (Nora, 1984–1992). In contrast, it is difficult to talk about a collective memory in the sense of Aleida and Jan Assmann (Assmann, 2006: 70), i.e. about "the tradition within us, the texts, images and rites that have been hardened over generations, over centuries, sometimes even millennia of repetition, which shape our consciousness of time and history, our self-image and world view". The cultures of remembrance relating to Rijeka are numerous, divergent, sometimes highly fragmented, and they compete with each other. In connection with

the Habsburg legacy, also the legacy of imperialism (at times even with overtones of colonial ambitions) is being discussed increasingly – an area where questions about power and inequalities raised by critical heritage studies may be very helpful (see e.g. Harrison et al., 2023) in terms of how they shape remembering.

As already demonstrated, the current cultures of remembrance in Hungary carry imperial and at times even colonial overtones, claiming Fiume to have a history as a Hungarian city. In the socialist Hungarian state, Fiume (as the city was called in Hungarian) was almost completely forgotten, even though enough Hungarians remained in the city in the interwar period, after Hungarian rule had ended, to establish a Hungarian Casino. By World War Two, however, hardly any of them remained in the city. It was only at the turn of the millennium, as Hungarian tourists once again set their sights on the Croatian coast, that interest in the city was reawakened. However, this is not an isolated case, as growing interest in all of the formerly Hungarian territories can be observed in the Hungarian public in general.

Accordingly, the Hungarian rule during the Dual Monarchy is perceived in Hungary as the heyday of the city, while the situation after the First World War symbolizes its opposite pole: tragedy, decline and loss. The most important elements of the Hungarian material cultural heritage are therefore the Habsburg-era architectural traces in the city, which include countless important buildings.

Fiume also lives on in the virtual world as a Hungarian place of remembrance. Among others, the Hungarian Association of Friends of Fiume (Fiume Barátai Egyesület), founded in 2016, has set itself the goal of popularizing "historical and cultural heritage tourism". According to their vision statement, Rijeka is "the common heritage of three nations, Hungarian, Croatian, and Italian. Yet for us Hungarians, the preservation of Hungarian memories is our priority" (Fiume Barátai Egyesület, 2025). The association is not the only one that wants to forge capital from Rijeka as a place of remembrance: Organized trips for Hungarian tourists are currently flourishing. In addition to an increased official Hungarian presence through a Hungarian consulate, a Hungarian Language Lectureship at the University of Rijeka has been opened. The latter has been playing an important role in mediating at cultural events for a broad public,[16] thereby moving in line with Hungary's increased emphasis on cultural diplomacy.

The intangible Hungarian cultural heritage includes literary productions associated with the city. Personalities connected to Rijeka are also known to the public, even if they were usually only born there or spent their childhood in the city. These include the German-speaking writer Ödön von Horváth (1901-1938), who has been perceived by many in Hungary as Hungarian because of his father and his citizenship; the long-time General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, János Kádár (1912-1989),

[16] The Lectureship was involved in organizing an exhibition on the historical tram line in Rijeka, which was presented in Hungarian, Croatian, and English and opened in November 2024, first in the city center, then on the university campus.

and the journalist and political dissident Miklós Vásárhelyi (1917-2001). The latter is possibly the only Hungarian who is also perceived as a positive figure and bridge-builder by the local Italian culture of remembrance.

The material heritage of the city's once thriving Jewish community has been largely destroyed: The synagogue (*tempio*), designed in 1903 by the renowned Hungarian Jewish architect, Leopold/Lipót Baumhorn (1860-1932) stands no more, most of the city's Jewish inhabitants perished in the Holocaust or emigrated to countries all around the world. Most material signs of the presence of Jews have also disappeared, except for the Orthodox synagogue, which was first built in 1930. Jewish identity in the town was particularly fragmented, as is to be expected in diaspora communities. Among the Jews in Rijeka there were Hungarian-, Italian-, German-, Ivrit- and Italian-speaking Jews. The German-speaking Jews came mainly from Croatia, but also from other parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. The number of Hungarian speakers grew through immigration, especially from eastern Hungary; by 1900 they already made up almost two thirds of the membership in the Jewish community. The official language of the Jewish community was Italian; rites were held in Italian and Hungarian, but many members were multilingual.

Due to the fragmentation and destruction, remembrance of Rijeka's Jewish inhabitants and of their heritage has been relocated primarily into the virtual realm: to websites, online databases and other initiatives that not only aim to present the history of the Jewish community and personal stories but also to create a worldwide community.[17] However, there have also been exhibitions in the city, most notably *Od emancipacije do holokausta: Židovi u Rijeci i Opatiji, 1867.–1945* [From Emancipation to the Holocaust: Jews in Rijeka and Opatija, 1867–1945], held at the Museum of the City of Rijeka in 2013 (Simper, 2013). The increased interest in including Jewish history in collective memory is also evidenced by a growing number of publications on Jewish history (Lukežić, 1998, 2001, 2018; Brumini, 2018).

Although the centre of Italian remembrance culture and the preservation of the material heritage of Rijeka's Italian community was relocated physically to Rome for several decades and the narratives of exile were cultivated in a rival Rijeka in Rome, in recent years more and more discussion of the city's Italian heritage has been taking place on location. This has been visible through the renaming of streets and public squares in recent times and drawing attention to Italian aspects of Rijeka's culture and history through the organization of academic conferences and popular events, primarily by the city's Italian community.

[17] These include the section *Ebrei a Fiume e Abbazia* [Jews in Rijeka and Opatija], hosted on the website of the Museum of the Jewish People, with historical information and a list of select Jewish families at https://spotlight.anumuseum.org.il/fiume/; the full transcription of the inscriptions on more than 110 Jewish graves at the Kozala cemetery in Rijeka at https://der-transkribierer.at/?s=Fiume; information on the Jewish cemetery in Rijeka on the website of the Jewish community in Rijeka at http://www.jc-rijeka.eu/povijest.aspx?jezik=en.

Illustration 1: Street sign in Rijeka, erected during the city's tenure as European Capital of Culture in 2020/2021 and reflecting some of the historical diversity present in the city. Via del Tempio (later Calle del Tempio) referred to the first synagogue that was built in Rijeka and stood in this street. After World War Two, it bore the name of the medieval Italian writer Lodovico Ariosto (1474-1533), before being named after the Slovenian author Janez Trdina (1830-1905), who lived in Rijeka from 1855 until 1867, teaching at the local grammar school. The sign also showcases some of the official languages used in Rijeka in the past (Photo: Angela Ilić).

The dominant Italian culture of remembrance includes – similarly to the Hungarian one – aspects of a romanticized place of longing, while for others Rijeka is associated with memories of war, persecution and flight. The Italian culture of remembrance was naturally strongly influenced by the perception of the tragic history of the Italian minority in Rijeka and Yugoslavia, especially after the Second World War. From the late 1990s onwards, there was a moderate but surely approaching opening in the direction of recognizing other cultures as equal and exploring coexistence. In the early years, this was more focused on the Hungarians; an opening in the direction of the Croats took place later. The mayors of the Libero Comune di Fiume and Rijeka have met several times in recent years and Roman Fiume is now a very active lobbying group in Rijeka. They have been advocating for bilingual city signs and street names and for naming certain streets and squares after important Fiuman personalities. Much of this has been politically controversial, as it would include the political rehabilitation of persons who have been viewed in negative terms, primarily by the local Croatian population.

Street names, although at times a divisive issue, have generally been a way for showing signs of a shared heritage in Rijeka's urban space. In preparation for the European Capital of Culture year in 2020, and also following the practice in some other Central European cities, several multilingual street signs were put up in Rijeka. These usually list the various names that streets, squares and other public spaces bore during the various episodes of the past, thus shedding light on diverse cultural and linguistic influences. At the same time, they also illustrate the cultural politics of current and past governments, as represented through their naming practices. Thus, a variety of Hungarian, Italian, and Croatian names are found on many of these signs.

One of the most vivid examples of shared heritage, however, and one in which the diversity of the city's one-time inhabitants becomes undeniable, is the Kozala cemetery perched above town. The cemetery goes against tradition in a remarkable way: In the Habsburg Monarchy, Catholics and Protestants were buried in separate cemeteries – or at least in clearly marked and delineated sections of one cemetery, which were in most cases separated by a wall. As they were not allowed to mix, there are several well-known examples of married couples of differing confessions not being able to be buried in a shared family grave but in differing sections of a given cemetery. The laws governing the burial places of Jews were equally strict and also called for physical separation from Christian cemeteries.

In contrast, the Kozala cemetery in Rijeka has offered a final resting place to people of various Christian confessions and ethnic backgrounds since the beginning of the 19th century (Glavočić, 2008), together with the adjacent Jewish cemetery, which is a spatial extension of the site with no separate entrance. There is only a low wall separating a portion of the Christian section from the Jewish one. In the larger, Christian part, members of various confessions are found side by side – although originally, only the Eastern corner of the cemetery was planned for Protestants, but later burials led to spatial mixing. Next to the mausoleums, several of which are protected cultural monuments, of prominent Roman Catholic citizens are the graves of Anglicans, Lutherans, Reformed Christians (Calvinists) and even Waldensians, from a variety of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, with inscriptions in Croatian, Hungarian, Italian, Slovenian, German, Hebrew and other languages. Among them are members of the Anglican Whitehead family from England – although the founder of the torpedo factory and wealthy industrialist, Robert Whitehead (1823-1905) is buried at the Parish Church of St Nicholas, Worth in Crawley, West Sussex in the United Kingdom. The owners of the local paper factory, the Protestant families Smith (Anglicans from England) and Meynier (from the German Empire, but of French Huguenot descent), are buried in a shared tomb, albeit with two separate crypts. The Italian-Swiss Waldensian Gottardi family also has a prominent place with a simple tomb. In the Jewish cemetery, several prominent residents of the city, including the Mattersdorfer, de Hlinick, Sachs de Grič,

Illustration 2: The tomb of the Friedmann family in the Jewish section of Kozala cemetery, with inscriptions in Hebrew and Italian (Photo: Angela Ilić).

and Neuberger families, whose members were also active in the Jewish community and in local associations, have found their resting place.

In a way, the inclusion of the Jewish cemetery as directly adjacent can be seen as a material reflection of the city's historically welcoming practice: there was no ghetto in Habsburg Rijeka, since Jews had the freedom to move and live freely across the city wherever they wished. This set Rijeka apart from most other European cities, even beyond the context of the Habsburg Empire. Accordingly, the plans for the municipal cemetery foresaw the establishment of a Jewish section, where both reform and orthodox Jews were being buried. Today, there is an added dimension to the Jewish cemetery section being a place of remembrance, signified by a monument to Rijeka's Shoah victims. Since 2006, the entire cemetery has the status of a protected cultural monument.

Today, not only do locals visit the graves of their loved ones, but the cemetery has become a tourist attraction as well as a place of remembrance for locals. It is a reflection of the city's history and is viewed as such by the local public. Especially the fact that several mausoleums (including the one of the Slovenian Gorup family) are protected historical monuments contributes to the Kozala cemetery being an attractive destination for those wanting to learn or reminisce about the city's diverse past.

Kozala is also one of the oldest cemeteries in Croatia and historical tours are regularly offered there. Thus, it occupies an important place in the touristic offering in the city and is also being promoted locally and internationally. A monograph was published for the 150th anniversary of the cemetery, and in recent years, open-air exhibitions in the city centre have showcased the cemetery annually during the Week of Discovering European Cemeteries, which usually takes place in May and targets the general public. The fact that Kozala is viewed as part of material cultural heritage in the city is demonstrated by the ongoing conservation efforts: since 2016, the city has been co-financing the restoration of a number of tombs each year. The cemetery is featured as a whole on ArTour, a Europe-wide app for visiting cemeteries[18] and on several international web sites. Local journalistic features (above all in the Rijeka daily *Novi List*) regularly emphasize the importance of the cemetery as a part of tangible cultural heritage, while also highlighting the diversity it represents.

It is important to mention one more thing concerning a Croatian culture of remembrance – and before it also a Yugoslav culture of remembrance: Both have postimperial and anti-imperial undertones, setting themselves against Italian and Hungarian imperialistic efforts and such cultures of remembrance. Some of the more recent academic output is openly critical of these cultures of remembrance and of perceived hegemonic tendencies in cultural politics, accusing Italians and Hungarians of appropriation (see e.g. Špicijarić, 2010 as a reaction to Fried, 2001). Thus, also critical heritage studies, posing questions on power relations, are present in the current discourse.

A final aspect of a potentially shared heritage concerns the architectural and industrial heritage in the city, which has been presented through digital tools. The industrial material heritage of Rijeka is the focus of the project Rijeka Heritage, available on a Croatian-English bilingual website.[19] It is one of the projects completed by the Centre for Industrial Heritage at the University of Rijeka (Centar za Industrijsku Baštinu, Sveučilište u Rijeci). The website shows a broad collection of architectural heritage sites but also includes many industrial buildings. The pride in the city's rich, historically significant and diverse industrial heritage is palpable among the inhabitants and is viewed as inspiring modern-day innovation, as included in the goals of the city council for Rijeka 2030. The worldwide pioneering role of the city in torpedo production in the 19th century plays an important part in this. Overwhelmingly positive local attitudes are facilitated by the fact that Rijeka's industrial production remained significant during the Yugoslav years, so that many of the present-day inhabitants are personally invested through their own (past) employment or through that of their family members in the preservation of this material heritage. Even though some of the 19th-century buildings, especially the ones funded by Hungarian government funds, may carry overtones of

[18] https://ar-tour.com/user.aspx?UserID=b052ce3e-c948-414c-89ce-c62e303f394d.

[19] https://rijekaheritage.org/en.

imperialistic intentions, the industrial strength of the city nonetheless contributed significantly to its growth and wealth, which is viewed in primarily positive terms today (Palinić et al., 2012).[20] Some of the industrial buildings have been repurposed as concert halls or museums (for example, the Torpedo Museum, which is housed in a historical railway depot built in 1881) and are in continual use, thus benefitting the general public.

Another initiative, the international and interdisciplinary project Rijeka Fiume in Flux has resulted in a website and an app that employs augmented reality to present the multi-layered past of the city in Croatian, Italian, and English.[21]

Remembering the Habsburg past in Maribor

Maribor's tenure as European Capital of Culture (ECC) has ushered in some changes in the way the city's Habsburg history is remembered, even though these changes may appear small at times. One outstanding example was that of the already mentioned ECC exhibition Germans and Maribor/Deutsche und Maribor in 2012. The exhibition had a broad team of authors from various Maribor and non-Maribor institutions, as well as non-institutional authors. The Regional Archives Maribor (Pokrajinski Arhiv Maribor) was a formal project promoter. There have also been other publications focusing on researching various aspects of the German culture in the city at the Regional Archives (see e.g. Zajšek, 2010).

A prime example of material heritage that has been reinvented in terms of its inclusivity and scope is that of the Narodni Dom national cultural centre. It was built in 1898 according to the plans of the Prague architect Jan Vejrych (1856-1926) and was to serve as the centre of the national and cultural life of the Slovenes in the city. This new, spacious and impressive building enabled more diverse cultural and political activities to be organized and hosted. It also had a restaurant and a large event hall. A key aspect of its original function was to provide a home to Slovenian associations, many of which had been operating under subpar conditions and were at times barely tolerated in their previous rented facilities. The Slavic Reading Society (Slovanska Čitalnica), one of the prime occupants, provided a central meeting place for cultural, national and social life until the First World War through its expanded library, discussion, lectures and other events. Among the numerous other Slovenian institutions and associations that were housed in the Narodni Dom or regularly organized events there were the Drama Society (Dramatično Društvo), the Slovenian Credit Bank (Posojilnica), the Slovenian

[20] An international and interdisciplinary conference was dedicated to this topic in 2012, serving as a precursor to this edited volume in which studies from various disciplines about the local perception of industrial heritage are presented. The volume also contains a chapter on the industrial heritage of the Südbahn railway workshops and their impact on the industrialization of Maribor.

[21] https://rijekafiumeinflux.com/en/home.

Reading and Singing Association (Slovensko Bralno in Pevsko Društvo), the Historical Association for Slovenian Styria (Zgodovinsko Društvo za Slovensko Štajersko) with a museum and the beginnings of its archives, and also the local Sokol chapter. The Narodni Dom became a symbol of Slovenian influence in culturally contested Late Habsburg Maribor. Also the use of the building as the meeting place of the Slovenian National Council at the end of World War One emphasized its nationally important role for the Slovenians.

Originally conceptualized to provide a Slovenian counterpoint to German(-dominated) national and cultural activities in the city, Narodni Dom is an inclusive establishment and is open to everyone today. After serving as army headquarters in World War Two and as the House of the Yugoslav Army, it has been functioning as a cultural and event centre since 1992. Thus, it has become part of the shared cultural heritage in the city.

One of the most divisive figures in Maribor's Late Habsburg history is General Rudolf Maister (1874-1934). For Slovenian and Yugoslav historiographies, he is the great hero, the liberator of the town, and the main person responsible for making it possible for Maribor and Lower Styria to become part of the new South Slavic state founded in the wake of World War One. For German historiography, Maister is the one who ushered in the end of German domination in the city and in the region, and is seen as the catalyst for much suffering by German inhabitants. Official acknowledgment of Maister's central role was already established during Yugoslav times, and even in the Republic of Slovenia, Maister's Day is observed on 23rd November each year. Marking the 150th anniversary of his birth, the year 2024 was declared Maister's Year. On this occasion, several events and various exhibitions were held in Maribor and its vicinity, most importantly the exhibition organized by the Regional Archives, *Vloga generala Rudolfa Maistra v času vzpostavljanja slovenske severne meje* [General Rudolf Maister's Role in the Establishment of the Slovenian Northern Border] 1918–1920. The person of Maister is a prime example that is perceived as incompatible for a shared Slovenian-German historical narrative today.

That the history of Late Habsburg Maribor is not only one marked by strife and continuous tensions between the German and Slovenian inhabitants of the town but is also one of shared heritage is demonstrated by the next example. Attempts by the Slovenes of Maribor to break the German cultural dominance in the city led not only to the publication of Slovenian-language newspapers, but also to other tactics. The *Südsteirische Post*, which was published in Maribor between 1881 and 1900, attempted to act as a bridge-builder and cultural mediator between the German and Slovenian sections of the population. The editorial team consisted mainly of Slovenians who described themselves as patriotic and who wanted to show the German-speaking public in Lower Styria which political and cultural issues were important to Slovenes. It was conceived as a counterpoint to the *Marburger Zeitung*, the primary German-language newspaper and its anti-Slovenian stance. The *Südsteirische Post* continued under various

names until 1907 and reached its peak with a circulation of 1,500 copies in the first quarter of 1906. Petra Kramberger's monograph about the story of the *Südsteirische Post* is a study trying to connect both cultures of remembrance while highlighting this publication with an important bridge-building function.

One of the central figures whose legacy is still visibly present in the city is Anton Martin Slomšek, whose accomplishments as bishop, translator, author and patron reach well beyond the confines of the Roman Catholic Church. Even though the material heritage reminding inhabitants of Slomšek includes the Cathedral of St John the Baptist, Slomšek's larger-than-life statue in front of it and the bishop's palace next to it, and thus visibly forms part of a religious core in the urban architecture, his figure serves as a regional symbol for championing Slovenians' rights at a regional level.

There are other historical personalities who represent transnational experiences and could serve as key persons in shared cultures of remembrance, including Eman Ilich (1883-1940), the Czech-born Sokol leader and pastry chef, whose pastry shop, Slaščičarna Ilich, continues functioning in the centre of Maribor even today. And although the already mentioned Antonín Chráska was ultimately unsuccessful in reaching his goal of (re-)introducing Slovenian-speaking Protestantism, historical events proved him right. Following World War Two, most of the remaining Protestant congregations in Slovenia, including Maribor, experienced a linguistic transition to Slovenian, which is the predominant language among Slovenia's Protestants today. In the case of Maribor, similarly to other larger cities, the language shift was a result of demographic changes, as German-speaking Protestants left and the subsequent new waves of industrialization, urbanization and the expansion of educational opportunities contributed to increased migration within the country. Thus, also Slovenian-speaking Protestants, primarily from Prekmurje, moved to Maribor and other cities, bringing new life and a new linguistic identity to the struggling congregations. Today, Slovenian-speaking Protestantism is the norm and is perceived as such in most of Slovenian society, while German-Speaking Protestantism remains a historical occurrence. The relationship of Protestantism to shaping Slovenian identity has been partly studied also from a sociological perspective (see e.g. Kerševan, 2006) but the linguistic switch in the second half of the 20th century, especially in reference to Chráska's contributions, has not been sufficiently explored yet.

Conclusion

When examining the various viewpoints and historiographies, the question of who is being included in current remembrance narratives is just as important as the question of who is missing. Even the most inclusive narratives often leave out certain groups who have left extremely limited or no material and immaterial traces behind: One such

group is that of the Roma, who were undoubtedly present in both cities, yet receive little to no attention in written accounts. Further underrepresented groups include that of women – especially concerning the contributions of female individuals in the fields of academia, literature and art – and that of the lower social classes such as day labourers.

One reason for the higher visibility of the material and immaterial heritage of certain groups in comparison to that of others is due to the radical demographic changes in both cities since 1918. In the aftermath of World War One, most Hungarians left Rijeka; following World War Two, most Italians were forced out; the Holocaust decimated the city's large Jewish population. In Socialist Yugoslavia, workers and students flocked to Rijeka from all corners of the country, creating a new population mix. In Maribor, many Germans left after World War One and even more during or after World War Two. As an industrial centre and university town, Maribor also attracted newcomers from other Slovenian regions and other parts of Yugoslavia during the Socialist period. This means that diversity, although of a different composition, has been preserved, but the descendants of some of the locally previously strongly represented groups are not there anymore, so they cannot advocate for representation in the local remembrance culture(s).

Bridge-builders are largely missing from the mainstream narratives in both cities, although these very persons and institutions could act as focal points for multilingual and multicultural cultures of remembrance. This research has also demonstrated that the local dynamics were never just binary: Rijeka remained very mixed until the end of Habsburg rule, and in Maribor, the hitherto underestimated role of foreigners, especially of Czechs should also be taken into account. It can be generally stated that the historical issues were complex and should be presented in more differentiated ways today.

So, whose heritage is the Late Habsburg period in both cities? It can be everyone's, but for that to happen, current cultures of remembrance should be modified. There is a danger inherent in many of them: on the one hand, a tendency to romanticize everything and to see historical processes through the eyes of nostalgia; on the other, they may lead to a negation and outright rejection of diversity. It is therefore desirable to strive for a more comprehensive presentation of the cities' history.

Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on archival sources, which are cited in the list of references below as well as on research data that is available in public domain resources or publicly accessible archival and museum collections.

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Čigava dediščina? Primeri spornih in deljenih kultur spominjanja ter dediščinskih vprašanj v nekdaj večkulturnih habsburških mestih Reki in Mariboru

V članku je obravnavano vprašanje, kako se danes na Reki in v Mariboru obuja spomin na pozno habsburško preteklost ter ali je mogoče ustvariti skupne kulture spominjanja. Po uvodni analizi zgodovinskih okoliščin in dinamik teh etnično, jezikovno in kulturno zelo različnih mest avtorica predstavi izbrane prevladujoče prakse spominjanja in dediščinske projekte ter poudari tako pozitivne kot negativne in mešane primere. Graditelji mostov – posamezniki, ki so premoščali različne tradicije – so bili navzoči v obeh mestih in so lahko osrednje točke za

javno predstavitev različnih vidikov skupne dediščine. Pojasnjena je tudi vloga zgodovinopisja, ki se je – skladno z jugoslovanskimi in širšimi evropskimi tokovi tistega časa – večinoma osredinjalo na eno skupino, tudi pri predstavitvah zgodovine etnično-jezikovno-religiozno mešanih okolij. Sočasno članek opozarja na vse večje zanimanje za večperspektivno obravnavo teh zgodovin, kar se kaže v številnih novejših publikacijah. Na eni strani se sodobne prakse spominjanja v obeh mestih pogosto osredinjajo na materialno dediščino. Na drugi strani pa obstajajo tudi osebe, kraji (topoi) in simboli, ki soustvarjajo nesnovno dediščino Reke in Maribora. V prispevku so predstavljeni primeri obeh oblik dediščine. V poznem habsburškem obdobju je bilo diferencirano prebivalstvo Reke in Maribora opazno na vseh področjih življenja – od šolstva, ki se je različno odzivalo na različne jezike, do tiska, ki je izhajal v več jezikih in včasih tudi v večjezičnih izdajah. Religiozne razlike so bile vidne v različnih bogoslužnih prostorih in celo v klubskih domovih, ki so izražali etnično ali nacionalno pripadnost. Opaziti je bilo mogoče vzporedni težnji: nekateri prebivalci so poudarjali etnične, jezikovne in verske razlike ter delitve, medtem ko so drugi – na primer Rudolf Gustav Puff in Antonín Chráska v Mariboru – delovali tako, da so si prizadevali povezovati različne segmente prebivalstva.

V osrednjem delu članka je obravnavano vprašanje, kako se danes dojema in razume materialna in nesnovna dediščina v obeh mestih: ali jo javnost dojema kot izključno dediščino ene skupine ali kot skupno dediščino, ki pripada vsem? V ta namen so predstavljeni izbrani primeri, na primer pokopališče Kozala na Reki in Narodni dom v Mariboru. Ugotovitve kažejo, da lahko materialne strukture, ki so bile prvotno namenjene le enemu segmentu prebivalstva, postanejo skupni prostori spominjanja, s katerimi se lahko poistijo vsi prebivalci. Po drugi strani pa kulture spominjanja, ki se opirajo na kulturno-jezikovne vidike, pogosto služijo le eni skupnosti – tako na primer italijanske in madžarske organizacije na Reki ohranjajo predvsem svojo lastno kulturno dediščino. Avtorica se sprašuje o njihovi združljivosti, včasih tudi o tekmiških interpretacijah zgodovine in spominskih praks. Prispevek poudari tudi primere z nasprotnega pola, kot je skrb za raznovrstno industrijsko dediščino Reke, ki se danes sprejema kot skupna dediščina vseh in temelji na kulturnih, zgodovinskih in znanstvenih utemeljitvah.

Odgovor na vprašanji, ali gre pri dediščini poznega habsburškega obdobja za deljeno ali skupno dediščino ter čigava dediščina to pravzaprav je, je večplasten. Obe razsežnosti sta opazni v sodobnih praksah spominjanja. Mandata Reke in Maribora kot evropskih prestolnic kulture (Maribor 2012, Reka 2020/2021) sta omogočila bolj poglobljen razmislek o večplastni zgodovinski dediščini obeh mest in spodbudila ponovni znanstveni interes za iskanje novih predstavitev skupne dediščine.

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

Neža Čebron 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 (Čebron 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, Čebron 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 (Čebron 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, particulary 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 (Čebron 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 (Čebron 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 (Čebron 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 (Čebron 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; Čebron 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-Continuit*à 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 (Čebron 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 Čebron Lipovec.

A textbook dissonance between auhtorised 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 again 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 identifyer, 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 legitimation strategy of "primacy of occupation of the claimed area" (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996: 136) or "indigenousness" (Weber, 2007). Such legitimation strategies are often present in heritage narratives also in undisputed areas (cf. Garrow, 2021). However, when this legitimation 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 valuings, 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 Piran with the grey facade, early 1920s–1930s. Photo: Courtesy of KAMRA Regional portal of libraries.

Picture 3: Venetian House in Piran 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 generates 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 (Čebron 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" (Čebron 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 najasneje izrazila nasprotujoča si stališča zaradi tega konservatorska 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 ljubljenega 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 odtenek (poustvaritev historičnega ambienta beneške gotike), torej skladnost v neskladju. Analizo sklene 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).

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The Burden of Transgenerational Memories and Silences on the Third Generation: The Case of the Slovenian-Italian Border

Katja Hrobat Virloget

Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, Slovenia
katja.hrobat@fhs.upr.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6393-7816

Martina Tonet

Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, Slovenia
martina.tonet@fhs.upr.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7626-945X

The article explores how the collective and individual memories of major traumatic events in the area of the Slovenian-Italian border have impacted the identities, memories, and the living of the third youngest generation of the Slovenian and Italian national minorities. The article discusses the fieldwork findings collected in the Slovenian-Italian border region during two focus groups. Today's generation wishes to break through a divisive legacy of the borderland past.

▪ Keywords: intergenerational memories, trauma, identity, Slovenian and Italian minorities, cross-border relations

Članek obravnava, kako osebni in kolektivni spomini na večje zgodovinske travme na območju slovensko-italijanske meje še vedno vplivajo na identitete, spominske prakse in vsakdanje življenje tretje najmlajše generacije pripadnikov slovenske in italijanske narodne manjšine. Na podlagi dveh fokusnih skupin v obmejni regiji raziskava analizira, kako današnja mladina razume in predeluje dediščino preteklosti. Današnja generacija želi preseči razdvajajočo zapuščino obmejne preteklosti.

▪ Ključne besede: medgeneracijski spomin, travma, identiteta, slovenska in italijanska manjšina, čezmejni odnosi

Introduction: On traumatic memories of the Slovenian-Italian borderland

The article addresses conflicting, silenced, and traumatic intergenerational memories and the constructed identities in the case of today's Slovenian-Italian border region of Istria, Karst, and the area around Trieste/Trst[1] from both sides of the border. The events throughout the 20th century have left a difficult, contested legacy of memories here. The deepest wounds in the past decades in this multi-ethnic borderland society with constant border changes have been inflicted by the two decades of fascistic anti-Slavic racism and violence, which escalated in the Second World War, as well as the post-war mass migrations of (mostly) Italian-speaking inhabitants after the Second World War, the so-called Istrian exodus. Both past events have left strong marks on borderland collective identities, including the here discussed case of the younger generations aged between eighteen to thirty, members of the Slovenian and Italian national minorities.

[1] To avoid repeating the place names in Slovenian and Italian languages in these bilingual zones, they are used only when first mentioned.

With the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, the Slovenian community in Trieste has experienced persecution due to the rise of the Italian regime with its Nazi-fascist ideology. Intimidatory acts, the closure of Slovenian schools, and deportation of Slavic community members became an increasingly common practice, which intensified during WWII (Ballinger, 2003; Knittel, 2015).[2] The remanence of this violent past can still be found in present times, especially on the Karst Plateau where the Slovenian-speaking population lives, through acts of vandalism exerted on partisan monuments. These include the drawing of black Nazi swastikas over communist symbols such as the red star, and the erasing of the Slovenian name with black markers from bilingual road signs while leaving the Italian untouched. This violent past has shaped the identity of the Slovenian community whose members have fought against the annihilating and, at its core, racist power of the Italian fascist regime to protect and preserve a sense of ethnic belonging (Tonet, 2024).

An additional traumatic event occurred after the change of national borders and the merging of ethnically mixed Istria with Yugoslavia after the Second World War, when 90% of the predominantly Italian-speaking population emigrated to Italy, mainly from the urban areas – 200,000 to 350,000 people left Istria as a whole (Ballinger, 2003: 1, 275; Kalc, 2019; Hrobat Virloget, 2021). According to Slovenian authorities, 27,810 among them left from areas that fell under Slovenian jurisdiction between 1945 and 1958. The Yugoslavian authorities filled the void that remained after the Italians had left by stimulating the inflow of people from inland Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia. This eventually completely transformed the ethnic, social, and cultural face of Istria (Troha, 1997: 56–60; Volk, 2003; Gombač, 2005: 11; Hrobat Virloget, 2021). After the Second World War, based on the census of 1961, 44% of the resident population remained in the zones annexed to Yugoslavia (186,450), more than 55% left (232,994), and 144,505 persons arrived.[3] However, their ethnic identification has been recently discussed in the frame of "national indifference", from hybridity, opportunism and fluidity to indeterminacy (Orlić, 2023: 167–168), which will be discussed further on.[4]

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[2] See also Catalan (2015: 417–430); Catalan, Mezzoli (2018); Bajc, Klabjan (2021).

[3] In 1960, a few years after the final phases of the "exodus" took place, the proportion of native residents dropped to 49%, according to registry offices, reaching 65% in rural areas and 33% in urban settings. The difference between the rural and urban population accounts for the fact that the Italian population was concentrated in urban areas, while the adjacent rural population was largely Slovenian (Titl, 1961; Kalc, 2019).

[4] The (mostly) Italian emigration from Istria after the Second World War is called the 'Istrian exodus' by Italians, while the Slovenians and Croats refer to those migrations as 'opting' due to the right to opt for Italian citizenship – with the consequent obligation to move to Italy – arising from two international treaties, the Paris Peace Treaty (1947) and the London Memorandum (1954). The Istrian exodus has been stirring conflict in political discourses between Italy on one side and Slovenia and Croatia on the other for more than six decades (Verginella, 2000; Ballinger, 2003: 42–45; Dota 2010; Hrobat Virloget, 2021). The consequence of these migrations was the ethnic homogenisation of contested lands in favour of the annexation to either Italy or Yugoslavia: Italian denationalisation of the Zone B of Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) and its "Yugoslavisation" with the immigration of Yugoslavians, and "Italianisation" of the Zone A of FTT with the immigration of the Istrian Italians and emigration of Slovenians (Volk, 2003: 289–301).

The article discusses the memories, silences and traumas of people living on both sides of the Slovenian-Italian border, who were marked by the two events mentioned. For the first time, an analysis of recently gathered cross-border experiences in relation to a traumatic historical past with its burdensome memories of young people is provided. During two focus groups entitled *Obmejna srečanja / Incontri di confine* [Border Encounters],[5] experiences of young participants (between eighteen and thirty years of age) from both the Slovenian (in Italy) and the Italian (in Slovenia) national minorities were collected. The main topics here considered are transgenerational memory and trauma transmission. Specifically, the article dwells on how memories linked to a burdening past have affected the identity formation of young generations belonging to the above national minorities, and on the impact a traumatic past has had on the relations between them and the national majorities.

Transgenerational trauma and the Slovenian-Italian borderland memorial framework

The transgenerational transfer of traumatic memories is described in psychoanalysis as a form of a psychologically present past, which is inscribed into the body and behaviour. No matter how much time has passed from the traumatic event, the following generations become victims of a past that they have not personally experienced (Straub, 2010: 73, 102).

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as "an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are common. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms" (Pabst, 2023: 89). The term *historical trauma* has been used mainly in the field of psychology to explore a type of silent overbearing state of being that affects individuals and communities. It refers to cumulative and collective emotional psychological wounding across generations and over their life span (Brave Heart, 2004, 2005; Brave Heart et al., 2011: 282). In the field of humanities, most studies on trauma and silence, which can be a consequence of traumatic events, derive from research conducted on the Holocaust (Lapierre, 1989; Ankersmit, 2002: 4; Straub, Rüssen, 2010; Derrida, 2014). Carol Kidron's (2009) study provides one of the most well-known anthropological analyses on historical trauma and silence as a reflection of the everyday experience of trauma survivors and their descendants. She researched how silent traces of "lived memory" transmit tacit knowledge of the past within the quotidian social milieu.

[5] The research has been conducted within the project Ethnography of Silence(s) (ARIS J6-50198), financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, from 1.10.2023 to 30.9.2026, lead by Katja Hrobat Virloget.

Anthropologists who deal with individual and collective silences and traumas have not yet managed to determine the term in line with anthropological research, where the individual is more interlinked to collective social experiences (Močnik et al., 2021; Pabst, 2023). The establishment of the diagnostic category of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder[6] according to the anthropological definition represents "a suffering without borders, a suffering that knows no cultural barriers" (Fassin, Rechtman, 2009: 239; Robbins, 2013: 453), indicating the universality of trauma experienced as a consequence of certain cases of violence and deprivation (Robbins, 2013: 453).

In the studies on identity formations and transgenerational memory transmission, it is interesting to note the psychoanalytical concept of the "chosen trauma", defined by Vamik D. Volkan (2001) as a key concept of the ethnonational victimhood narrations. The term refers to "a shared mental representation of a traumatic past event during which the large group suffered loss and/or experienced helplessness, shame and humiliation in a conflict with another large group" (Volkan, 2001: 87). The "chosen trauma", which forms the group's (religious, ethnic, or national) identity, can be transmitted across many generations (as in the case of Serbs and the Kosovo Polje). It can lie dormant or be reactivated as a powerful psychological force with dramatic and destructive consequences (Volkan, 2001). There are similarities between the "chosen trauma" and the observations made by historians, anthropologists or memory studies researchers on the power of victimhood narratives in the reinforcement of the collective identity. In this case, the memory of the (collective) tragedy is maintained through constant remembrance and recognition of suffering (Wieviorka, 2004: 89; Candau, 2005: 82). According to Aleida Assmann, the European national memories after the Second World War have been characterized by competing discourses about who is the greater victim whereby one national trauma is placed into a privileged position, while the other is devalued, marginalised and classified as less important (Assmann, 2007: 20–21, 2010).

This is also the case of traumatic memories generated in the discussed contested multi-ethnic borderland region of the former Iron Curtain. The memories of the borderland social groups who experienced fascism and the Istrian exodus have been politically instrumentalized and today compete for their exclusive victimhood. Some memorial narrations have been silenced and negated in the dominant hegemonic discourses, while others have been un-silenced and mythized to construct national victimization discourses (Ballinger, 2004: 145–159; Focardi, 2020; Hrobat Virloget, 2025: 16–70).

[6] "In Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (...) the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them. (...) Yet what is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent reenactments of the past do not simply serve as testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred. Trauma, that is, does not simply serve as record of the past but it precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned" (Caruth, 1991: 417; Ankersmit, 2002: 6).

In Italy, the public silence surrounding the Istrian exodus ended at the beginning of the 1990s in the so-called Berlusconi Era, where the "victimizing" paradigm was put in place together with the myth of the "good Italians". In this new Italian national narrative, Italians were perceived as victims of the Second World War, while the perpetrators were the "communist Slavs". The responsibility for fascist crimes was overlooked, the roles of perpetrators and victims were reversed (Cogoy, 2009: 18–19; Corni, 2018: 74–78; Focardi, 2020: 214–258; Badurina, 2023: 84–87, 132–152; Hrobat Virloget, 2023a: 45, 152; Orlić, 2023: 192–205). In this respect, researchers note an "obsession with the past" in this Eastern Italian border (Orlić, 2023: 205) or an "overdose of remembrance" (Altin, 2024: 105), which fundamentally contrasts the individual silence of Istrian refugees from the period before the 90s (ibid.: 105). However, silence can still be found in individuals' memories, which evoke pain and reflect narratives that diverge from the historical public ones (Pontiggia, 2013: 120, 123, 126, 153; Hrobat Virloget, 2025). The Istrian exodus was not voiced or talked about in the families of Istrian refugees as the first and second generations were both affected. Memories that were fuelling a sense of shame for being a refugee, out of place, marginalized, and displaced were erased (Altin, 2024: 104, 119). However, there is a difference of mnemonic constructions between the Istrian refugees who are members of the refugees' associations and the ones who are not. In the latter case, the individual memories merge with the national collective memory of being the martyrs of the Homeland, the memory which reproduces the experience, even if not lived personally, of the emotional pain through the categories of genocide and victimization and the unique identity of the Istrian refugees or *esuli* (Pontiggia, 2013: 111, 122, 152). The entire community of Istrian refugees has been frozen in trauma (Altin, 2024: 105), which in merging with the national victimization discourse produced hatred towards the "other", fomenting a "culture of fear" towards the Slavic, e.g. Slovenian and Croat neighbours (Badurina, 2023: 218–244; Altin, 2024: 105; Hrobat Virloget, 2025).

Italians who stayed behind in Yugoslavia, today's national minority, have experienced a form of "double silence", as they have been excluded from both Slovenian and Italian public memories. Their memories do not fit with the dominant Slovenian memory, which perceives the Istrian exodus as voluntary migration, nor with the dominant Italian discourse that understands the Istrian exodus as the outcome of the violence inflicted on Italians by the "barbaric" Slavs and their communist system. Conversely, they are in fact aware of the causal relationship between the exodus and the fascist violence against Slovenians and Croats, towards whom the dominant Italian official discourse turns a blind eye. Apart from this incongruence in memories and trauma, silence may also be ascribed to the isolation and the feeling of abandonment of the Italians in Istria, given that after the exodus, in a completely transformed social environment, they became foreigners, the "others". They suddenly became a minority, at least in urban areas, they lost their social network and linguistic environment while

turning from superior to inferior inhabitants, collectively stigmatized as "fascists" (Hrobat Virloget, 2021: 255, 2023a).

On the other hand, the Slovenian national identity, especially in this borderland Primorska (Eng. Littoral) region has been based once again on the victimisation discourse, the Slovenian resistance to fascism and the struggle for national emancipation in the frame of the national liberation struggle during the Second World War (Fikfak, 2009: 359; Hrobat Virloget, 2021). The Slovenian national minority in Italy is hurt by the contemporary negationist politics of the dominant Italian narrative and the new social constructs of Italians being the victim and not the perpetrator of WWII (Badurina, 2023; Orlić, 2023).[7] As the psychoanalyst Paolo Fonda, part of the Slovenian minority in Italy, commented:

> *We, members of the minority (and not only us), remain trapped in crystallized discourses about the narratives of our traumas. We obsessively celebrate them, yet we process them only very slowly. The Slovenian minority community abroad is thus suffocating, caught in marble monuments erected to itself as a victim, and in doing so, it becomes an obstacle not only to itself but also to its neighbours (Slovenes in the homeland and the Italian majority), instead of fulfilling its natural role as a bridge.* (Personal written communication)

As he observes, the Slovenian-Italian ethnically mixed borderland communities are an exemplary case of a paranoid-schizophrenic human condition where collective myths about the idealization of "us" and the projection of evil onto a collective enemy emerge. The creation of a collective enemy reinforces positive feelings of belonging to one's own group and negative aggressive perceptions outwards. In this distorted image, the Other for centuries has been demonized and dehumanized, deprived of any positive trait, any resemblance, and any humanity (Fonda, 2009: 105–112).

In these discourses, competing for recognition of the genocide and suffering of one group, each side has its *lieux de mémoire*: the Italian migrants and politics have the *foibe*,[8] while Slovenian politics and the Slovenian minority in Italy have the Risiera

[7] Natka Badurina warns about the problem of the universalization of the holocaust or "holocaustisation" of memory, when this universal European memory can be used to deny and conceal specific local responsibilities, crimes, and violations of human rights, especially to other national minorities (Badurina, 2023: 132−186).

[8] In Italian discourse, the *foibe* are deep natural sinkholes, commonplace in the Karst and in Istria, which are said to contain the victims of killings committed by Yugoslav partisans, civilians, and military personnel in 1943 and again in 1945 during the "forty-day occupation of Trieste". In the predominant Italian public discourse, they have acquired political and almost mythical connotations as they are in self-perception linked to ethnic cleansing because they are said to contain people who were killed simply "for being Italian". On the other hand, Slovenian researchers claim that the *foibe* killings were motivated by ideology, as many of the people killed were members of the Slovenian anti-communist *domobranci* (home guard) and opponents of the new social system (Ballinger, 2003: 129–67; Cogoy, 2009: 16−17; Pirjevec, 2009; Verginella, 2009: 53−67; Dota, 2010; Orlić, 2012: 19).

(former Nazi concentration camp) (Ballinger, 2003: 129–167, 2004) and the monument to the first Slovenian anti-fascist heroes in Basovizza (Klabjan, 2012: 678). All these places of memory are contested spaces of dominant and negated national narratives. Such is the case of the memorial concentration camp in Trieste, the Risiera di San Sabba, where the memory of the Shoah in the Italian public narratives has overlapped and denied the memory of the extermination of Slovenians and partisans, who resisted against the Nazi-fascist totalitarian regimes (Badurina, 2023: 132–186).[9]

Methodology and observations of the focus groups with young Slovenian and Italian minority members

The methodology employed in the process of data gathering and analysis is grounded in the qualitative triangulation method. Multiple sources of data include five interdisciplinary workshops (psychotherapy, anthropology) in the frame of the project "*Moja zgodba iz tišine*" (Eng. My Story from the Silence) from 2023 with 45 participants (Hrobat Virloget, 2023b; Švara, Hrobat Virloget, 2024), the two tape-recorded focus groups moderated by Martina Tonet, autoethnography (Tonet, 2024), as well as historical, ethnographic fieldwork and participant observation of the border's sociocultural context (Hrobat Virloget, 2021, 2023a).[10] Furthermore, psychology literature on transgenerational transfer of traumatic memories has been included into the analysis of the here presented topic. Multiple sources become the bases for data triangulation that helps enhance the content accuracy and validity of the topic in question (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1990; Olsen, 2004). While the interview method employed during the ethnographic fieldwork has gathered individuals' views on the researched theme (see Hrobat Virloget, 2021), the focus group methodology has deepened the complexities of the here discussed topic, which brings depth to the analysis while generating novel knowledge (Gundumogula, 2020: 301).

The initiative for organising the two focus groups between the Slovenian and Italian minorities came from the Italian civil service from Koper/Capodistria (Slovenia) and the

[9] For this reason, Natka Badurina warns about the problem of the universalization of the holocaust or "holocaustisation" of memory, when this universal European memory can be used to deny and conceal specific local responsibilities, crimes, and violations of human rights, especially against other national minorities (Badurina, 2023: 132–186).

[10] In spring 2024 the anthropologists Katja Hrobat Virloget and Martina Tonet, together with the historian Petra Kavrečič, conducted fieldwork with students from the departments of Anthropology and History at UP-FHŠ Univeristy of Primorska (Koper, Slovenia) on relations between the Slovenian and Italian minorities in the Prosecco/Prosek village on the Karst Plateau in the Trieste region (Italy) (Hrobat Virloget, 2025). On this occasion, members of both groups were interviewed on the topic of memories and relations between the two communities in the past and present separately. The two focus groups moderated by Martina Tonet consequently became an opportunity where members of both communities were invited to meet in person, exchange thoughts and views about a burdensome historical past, and confront their transgenerational memories with one another.

Slovenian centre Zveza Slovenskih Kulturnih Društev (ZSKD)[11] in Trieste (Italy). The first focus group was held on 21 November 2024 in Koper at the Italian centre Unione Italiana (UI)[12] in Palazzo Gravisi. The second one took place in Trieste on 6 February 2025 at the Slovenian centre Zveza Slovenskih Kulturnih Društev (ZSKD; Eng. Association of Slovenian Cultural Societies). The purpose was to gather and have young members of both minorities confront themselves on the topic of cross-border relations. Furthermore, the encounters were organised to better comprehend how a conflictual past with opposing historical memories that have torn apart and divided the two communities through xenophobic political narratives, the fomentation of intolerance, closure, fear and distrust towards one another (Ballinger, 2004; Fonda, 2009; Badurina, 2023; Hrobat Virloget, 2023a: 36–70, 241–243, 2025), has shaped the younger generation's identity, their perceptions, and relations with members of the other minority group across the Italian-Slovenian border. As expected, it was not easy to find volunteers willing to meet and openly discuss the given topic due to its sensitiveness. People belonging to these two minority groups keep silent and prefer not to express and voice themselves in this regard (Hrobat Virloget, 2023a, 2025). The first focus group was organised with the intention to challenge the silence about the conflictual past.

The initiators of the event, the Italian and Slovenian cultural associations and the Italian Union, spread the word about the first focus group within their communities and found ten people willing to participate (male and female, between eighteen and thirty years old): five belonging to the Slovenian minority in Trieste, and five to the Italian one in Koper. Some of the young participants derived from ethnically mixed families, some of them with parents or grandparents who experienced both major collective traumas – exodus and fascism – that have generated conflicts and continue to divide the two borderland communities (Hrobat Virloget, 2025). Those who chose to partake in the focus group did so aware of the discomfort they might experience in being confronted with members of the other community. Precautionary measures were taken, as the moderator of both focus groups Martina Tonet applied restorative justice methods and principles in leading the encounters.[13] One of the main objectives of the restorative justice approach is to make sure that all the parties involved feel safe in voicing themselves when they are ready to do so, while the rest of the participants listen. The listening is then reciprocated, so that all participants can express their perspectives on the topic in question.

During the first focus group, the participants were invited to share their thoughts in relation to more general topics related to cross-border minority issues and their life experiences:

[11] Federation of Slovenian Cultural Associations.

[12] Italian Union.

[13] In 2018 Martina Tonet received her certificate of completion in the restorative practices course from the Conflict Center in Denver, Colorado (USA) (https://conflictcenter.org).

Identity: How do you define your identity? How would you describe your sense of belonging to your community of origin? Do you feel strongly about your community of origin? Is your community accepted in the country where you live? How do you experience your identity in the country where you live? Do you differentiate yourself from the other, majoritarian community? What treatment do you receive from members of the majority? What are your experiences with the majority community?

Language:[14] What is your level of proficiency in Italian and Slovenian languages? In what contexts do you use one rather than the other language? In what language do you think? When you speak in one or the other language, do you notice any difference in your sense of identity? Do you feel respected when you use your 'native language'? [15]

Cross-border relations: How often do you travel across the Italian-Slovenian border and for what purpose? Do you have any relationships with your compatriots in the neighbouring country? What is your cross-border living experience in general? Do you meet with members of the contrasting minority group (e.g. personal and social gatherings)? If yes, on what occasions? Are there opportunities for gatherings between both minority groups?

Minority-majority relations: How are you treated by the "majority"? Have you ever had unpleasant experiences? How familiar is the majority with the history of your community? What has been your experience as a member of a national minority like? How would you define it?

Those who partook in the focus groups were very grateful for the opportunity. Some of the participants found it therapeutic, as one male participant shared: *"To me it seems like psychotherapy!"* At the end of the first encounter, it was the participants who asked to organise a follow up as they felt that the *"Pandora's box"* had just been opened. They found the urge to further confront the topic in question as they saw in it a way to *"contrast ignorance"* and to unveil the complexities of the past in the pursuit of a resolution.

Under the suggestion and with the consent of the same participants, [16] the second focus group provided a space to dive more in depth into the participants' experiences

[14] Language was chosen as one focus area because the organisers of both focus groups deemed it an important aspect for younger generations to confront themselves on, due to its important role in defining a sense of ethnic and cultural belonging to minority groups and reclaiming identities within national borders (Tonet, 2024). The powerful role of language in the process of self-identification and identity maintenance emerged during both focus groups, when all the participants preferred to speak and express themselves in their native language even though they were fluent in both Slovenian and Italian. On both occasions, the participants, who understand and speak both languages, were free to choose the language they felt more comfortable speaking.

[15] With the expression 'native language' or 'mother tongue', we refer to the language a person has been exposed to from birth and which they consider the primary language of use and expression.

[16] Two participants did not make it to the second focus group (one from the Slovenian and one from the Italian minority). In hearing about the event, two new participants from each minority group were interested to participate.

by sharing their family memories and narratives regarding a traumatic past of the Second World War and post-war period.[17] As expected, the second discussion was rather emotional, as it touched upon the sensitive sphere of collective memories and conflicting narratives that have burdened the border population for decades (Fonda, 2009: 105–112; Hrobat Virloget, 2023a). The participants came from families whose members experienced one of the above-mentioned historical traumatic events: the fascism and anti-Slavic racism or/and the Istrian exodus or, like in the case of one participant, both. In the latter example, the grandfather was Istrian who experienced persecution from the Yugoslav regime, whereas the grandmother was Slovenian who, as a child, experienced the deportation of her entire family by the Nazi-fascist army. In voicing her grandparents' past, the participant broke down in tears as she recalled how her grandmother had become an orphan.

During the second focus group, it became clearer that most of the participants' parents and grandparents do not talk about the historical period in question. As a female participant from the Slovenian minority pointed out, speaking about the past in her family environment is commonly taboo. Just recently she started asking questions to her father, because she is interested to learn more about her family past. Nevertheless, her grandfather never spoke or shared with her about his partisan experience during the war. It is common for silence to still cover up individuals' stories of traumatic past, as family members *"clearly tend not to talk about these things"* (female participant, Italian minority).

In terms of the reasons why silence prevails in the families, participants shared that this is due to painful memories and a deeply ingrained grudge and distrust carried and held onto by the individuals. A Slovenian participant expressed how she gets uneasy prior to every Italian Memorial Day on the Exodus and *foibe*, since each time the event renews conflicts between the Slovenian and Italian public memory (Hrobat Virloget, 2023a: 43–45; Orlić, 2023: 196–205). Another Slovenian participant mentioned how what he referred to as *"institutionalized distrust"* towards Italians present in public historical narratives burdens individuals to the point where they find it difficult to openly speak about the painful past. He was providing the example of his grandparents who did not trust Italians, because of *"things"* that they *"experienced as children during fascism"*. Due to historical traumas, words such as *fascist*, *communist*, *esule* (meaning Istrian refugee), and *rimasto* (meaning the Italians who stayed behind in Yugoslavia) still trigger unpleasant and uncomfortable feelings. As a female participant from the Slovenian community mentioned, she feels unsure how to react when she hears or

[17] During the second focus group, the anthropologist Katja Hrobat Virloget conducted participant observation and took notes of the occurring event, which she analysed together with the moderator and anthropologist Martina Tonet who transcribed and analysed both type-recorded focus groups' encounters. Both focus groups were informal. However, the organisers deemed it important to let the broader public know about the events. On both occasions there were between ten to fifteen people who listened to the focus groups, including the organizers and the reporters of the local Italian and Slovenian radio, TV and newspapers (RTV Slo, La Voce – Capodistriano and Radio Capodistria from Koper; RAI and *Primorski Dnevnik* from Trieste).

mentions words like *partisan* or *foibe* in public, as she does not know who stands before her or what type of experience the individual or their family might have had in relation to history and these notions. Conversely, several other participants voiced the importance and the luck of not being raised with hatred or distrust towards the Other. Two most revealing examples were: the grandson of Istrian refugees, enrolled by his Italian parents in the Slovenian school in Trieste, having stated, "*today I feel Slovenian, even though my parents are not, but they accept my cultural richness, you could say, my double citizenship"*; and the female participant whose grandmother became an orphan due to Italian fascists. She taught her daughter and granddaughter the importance of not hating Italians despite the suffering and pain endured because of the Italians who supported the fascist political agenda.

Interpretation: The legacy and impact of transgenerational memory on the identity of the third generation

All this highly conflictual and contested public memorial borderland legacy has shaped the memory transmission across generations and individual identity formation, including that of the young participants present in the focus groups. Research on trauma transmission has revealed (e.g. in the case of the Holocaust) it is the third generation that is particularly vulnerable to the influence of the violent experiences of their grandfathers (Močnik et al., 2021: 10).

Transgenerational silence is a trend that has been observed in the communities discussed herein (Hrobat Virloget, 2023a; Altin, 2024: 104, 119), which can be described as a "conspiracy of silence", a phenomenon "whereby a group of people tacitly agree to outwardly ignore something of which they are all personally aware" (Zerubavel, 2006: 2). A type of silent awareness grounded in common knowledge that is publicly left undiscussed; an uncomfortable "open secret" tightly connected to denial (ibid.: 3−4). By remaining silent, people avoid recalling memories that would trigger emotional pain, which can be seen as a form of protecting family members from suffering, fear, shame, embarrassment, and stigma (Jurić Pahor, 2004: 40, 52−53; Emrich, 2010: 63; Straub, 2010: 118). It would be erroneous to perceive the family silence experienced by the young members of the focus groups as the consequence of their ignorance, since their interest in the subject matter is attested by their willing participation in the focus groups. A more feasible interpretation of the silence arises in connection to Freudian ideas about repression – when individuals bury traumatic and painful memories in the subconscious (Zerubavel, 2006; Vinitzky-Seroussi, Teeger, 2010).

Kathrin Pabst has shown several cases of families across Europe where the repressed experiences of grandparents shaped and burdened the lives of the second and third generations. If the second generation did not come to terms with the traumatic

experiences of the first generation, this also affected the third generation. As she observes, it is through the voicing and sharing of a burdening past that individuals, families, and societies can heal from a traumatic history (Pabst, 2023: 100–101). The results of the two focus groups are in line with Pabst's findings, as the third-generation participants expressed the will to break the family silence by *wanting to know* about the unconformable family memories. They repeatedly expressed the wish and an urge to organise a focus group joint with their grandparents to openly discuss the silent past. The observations from our focus group can confirm other researchers' findings: it is the third generation who finds it less difficult to ask direct questions about past traumatic experiences to their grandfathers and break the overwhelming family transgenerational silence. The reason lies probably in the greater temporal distance from the painful past, changed social norms, and more publicly available information (Honneth, 2010; Pander, 2017: 35; Pabst, 2023: 95–96, 100). At the end of both encounters, the focus group participants and some individuals from the public suggested that these types of events should be repeated with older generations. It was possible to do so with the round table, which took place on 8 May 2025 at the University of Primorska (Koper) within the project RE4Healing: Crossborder Remembrance, Reconnection, Restoring, and Resilience (CERV-2024-CITIZENS-REM-HOLOCAUST). This time, the older generation (between sixty and ninety years of age) of the above mentioned groups – Istrian refugees (Italians), Slovenian and Italian minority, immigrants in Istria after the exodus – confronted itself with the same topic also in front of a public, which at the end of the round table was included into broader discussion (more information on: Re4Healing Workpackage4). However, only some few grandparents from the focus group voiced their interest to partake in the event.[18] The first and second generations still seem to be wrapped in silence as it was not easy to find participants willing to expose themselves publicly on such a sensitive topic.[19] Those who did, though, were extremely grateful for the opportunity, finding it necessary and even therapeutic.[20]

[18] It can be added from a chance conversation (18.3.2025) with a member of the second generation of the Italians who stayed in Yugoslavia, whose child participated in the focus groups, that it is next to impossible to get their parents to speak, not only publicly but also in the intimacy of the family. They do not wish to discourse the time of the exodus.

[19] It was especially challenging finding a participant from among the Italians who had stayed behind, who still nowadays have difficulties speaking about their experiences of becoming foreigners in their own homes (Hrobat Virloget, 2023b).

[20] What was also noted is that only one young person from the focus groups, from the Slovenian minority, accepted the invitation to speak in public as a representative of the third generation, while we couldn't get anyone from the young Italian minority to partake in the roundtable. Only one person from the Italian minority accepted the invitation to attend the event, but on condition not to be an official speaker, she preferred to sit among the audience. We have received many positive comments for the event. For instance, as one participant, the daughter of an Istrian migrant, relayed the words of her mother: it was *"emotionally hard but enriching"*, and she felt that her mother, having attended the event in her birthplace (Koper), was reinvigorated by the experience (10.5.2025). An initiative has already been launched from the above-mentioned Slovenian organisation in Italy to organize another round table discussion, this time in Trieste.

It can be observed from the two focus groups that the young members of the two national minorities, by listening to one another's stories, came to realise how similar their family and life experiences of the past and present times have been, which enabled them to empathise with each other's pain. Members of both minorities learned that, in both communities, families have commonly not shared their burdensome historical past. It is precisely this silence that has been handed down through their family lineage, which has kept their relatives trapped in divisive memories filled with distrust, closed and at a distance from those who do not share their history. Therefore, while silence has burdened individuals' lives, nationalistic ideologies and political narratives continue to tear apart the social fabric and divide communities. As the psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan notes, psychological borders are even more essential than the physical ones for large group identities and relationships. Shared prejudices are used to form and protect large-group identities, which in turn maintain individual identities (Volkan, 2017: 100–101).

The interethnic marriages, [21] from where many of the young participants derived, and cases such as the above participant of Istrian migrants who attended Slovenian schools in Italy can be interpreted as individual acts of resistance against the political discourses which instil hatred among the two national borderland communities. One the one hand, the Italian mainstream public discourses produce the mythical fear and hatred towards the "barbaric communist" Slovenians and Croatians (Badurina, 2023), while on the other among Slovenians, especially in the borderland region, there is a historically rooted perception of Italians as fascists (Fonda, 2009: 105–112; Hrobat Virloget, 2023a: 6, 2025). Such acts of resistance "from below" against the mononational identities, creating heterogenic ethnic identities with hybrid and flexible senses of belonging, emerged already after the Second World War and the time of the "Istrian exodus" (Volk, 2003; Hrobat Virloget, 2023a, 2025: 193–194; Orlić, 2023; Altin, 2024: 157–162). Although both Italy and Yugoslavia then performed nation-building through state apparatuses by investing enormous efforts in constructing a "pure" national identity of the hybrid border population (Orlić, 2023: 119–131, 152–154, 179), research has shown many cases of "national indifference" where people rebelled against national identities and chose their nationality out of intimate convenience. By adopting the Italian nationality in the frame of the Istrian exodus which brought better opportunities for the migrants, an unclear number of Croats and Slovenes assimilated in the denationalizing process (ibid.; Volk, 2003; Ballinger, 2006; Hrobat Virloget, 2023a: 76, 2025). As it has been shown, many Istrian refugees were imposed a monolithic and "pure" Italian national identity in the univocal, nationalist interpretation of the "exodus". Roberta Altin denotes this process as an act of imposition and violence, which has left no space for the complex heterogeneity of hybrid stories and fluid borderland identities

[21] Between the discussed national minorities and majorities.

(Altin, 2024: 157). As the psychoanalyst Paolo Fonda from Trieste observes, in this borderland paranoid-schizophrenic environment, individuals are compelled to identify with a single group identity and signal the "purity" of belonging, although this is especially difficult for persons from mixed families and members of national minorities being influenced by the majority and minority "cultural" traits (Fonda, 2009: 107). A similar observation can be made today from all the gathered ethnographic material. Borderland people feel the imposition of state national ideology or public narratives of a mononational identity as a form of violence, some of them with feelings of "loss" of part of their identity when reduced only to a single national identity.[22]

All the participants of the focus groups think that through the open voicing of difficult and painful feelings, as well as through the listening of the Other's stories, one can process a painful past and free individuals from a burdensome weight.

In this respect, our findings confirm the observations made by Daniel Wutti, a psychotherapist researching transgenerational memory transmission in Carinthia in Austria – a similar environment with traumatic memories of oppression against the Slovenian minority living on this territory. In his study, based on interviews with three generations of Slovenian minority members, he observes that in the second generation, violence experienced by the first generation during Nazism is still very strong and partly also painful. The difference comes with the third generation, which has a more ambivalent relationship towards the family past. The fact that grandparents were victims of Nazism shapes the third generation's identity in a specific way. While for the first and second generations, it was difficult to find peace and closure due to the traumatic proximity of the Second World War with its repercussions in their daily living, the third generation is attempting to live a "normal" life[23] by finding healing through reconciliation and peace-making (Wutti, 2013: 52−53).

Conclusions

As it has been argued above, borderland people employ different strategies in their daily lives to resist the state's monolithic national ideology, which reduces them to a single mononational identity that instigates animosity towards their neighbour. In times of major traumatic events, such as the experience of fascism or the "Istrian exodus",

[22] In the previous workshops, such was the case of the son of Istrian refugees of Slovenian and Italian origins being raised only in Italian and rediscovering their Slovenian roots by learning the language and getting in touch with Slovenian culture (Švara, Hrobat Virloget, 2024: 308–310), or people of one of the national identities being forbidden by parents to marry someone from "the other" side (experiences told at a psychotherapist workshop in Opicina/Opčine, ibid.).

[23] The wish to return to "normal life" by silencing or resolving memories has been shown in many cases after war conflicts, e.g. Emina Zoletić's research on memories after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, presented at the SIEF conference, Aberdeen, 6.6.2025.

the identity of the borderland people can remain fluid, changeable and hybrid in opposition with the mainstream national narratives.

Political discourses and narratives continue to perpetuate ideological and social divides, which keep intergenerational traumatic memories alive. As it surfaced during our focus groups, the third generation is attempting to overcome and break through these categorisations that immobilise individuals and the collective sense of identity. Participants still sense the burden of overwhelming conflicting national public narratives, which continue to evoke painful memories, maintaining the burden of a contested past which makes the relations between the national majorities and minorities uncomfortable or difficult. The weight of fascism, communism, and the "Istrian exodus" still bears against the interethnic relations, as seen in the third generation's avoidance of touching upon these sensitive contested interpretations of the past among members of different nationalities.

As it has also been shown in a similar minority environment in Austria (Wutti, 2013), transgenerational memories shape the sense of identity of the third generation, while at the same time burdening it; as evident from the strong emotions expressed during the focus groups. In many cases, the third generation wishes to break the family silence, overcome the dividing memories and start living "a normal life" of present-day identity (Wutti, 2013). The extent to which this may be realized is difficult to ascertain. The round table engaged with confronting the memories of the first and third generations did not fully succeed in this sense, while in the private sphere, more research should be done.

It is not known whether the two focus groups had some concrete effect in the family frame concerning the break of generational silence. However, during the events, several participants mentioned they found the focus groups therapeutic in a personal sense, stating there was a healing component to voicing and listening to each other's stories about the traumatic past. The research has shown how the process of mutual listening can change the understanding of the Other, up until that moment perceived as an enemy, thus facilitating closeness among individuals belonging to opposite historical narratives that have kept them at a distance.

Research data statement

The authors state that the article is based on ethnographic research data. All additional information concerning the ethnographic materials are available on reasonable request with the authors.

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Breme transgeneracijskih spominov in tišine tretjih generacij: primer slovensko-italijanske meje

Prispevek obravnava konfliktne, utišane in travmatične medgeneracijske spomine ter z njimi povezane identitete na območju današnje slovensko-italijanske obmejne regije Istre, Krasa ter širšega območja Trsta, in sicer z obeh strani državne meje. Raziskava temelji na dveh fokusnih skupinah mlajše generacije z obeh strani meje, to je tretje generacije, ki sama ni neposredno izkusila ključnih zgodovinskih travmatičnih dogodkov, kot so fašizem, protislovanski rasizem in istrski eksodus – ali celo obojega.

Temeljno raziskovalno vprašanje se osredotoča na to, kako spomini, vezani na obremenjujočo preteklost, vplivajo na oblikovanje identitete mladih generacij, ki pripadajo narodnim manjšinam, ter kakšen vpliv ima travmatična preteklost na njihove medsebojne odnose in odnose z večinskim narodom.

Fokusni skupini sta razpravljali o čezmejnih odnosih z namenom globljega razumevanja konfliktne preteklosti, ki je razdelila obe manjšinski skupnosti. Pred analizo opazovanj medgeneracijskega prenosa spomina je predstavljen splošni spominski okvir različnih obmejnih skupin, ki ga zaznamujejo vseobsegajoči molki in tekmujoči diskurzi viktimizacije. Ta močno sporna in konfliktna javna spominska dediščina obmejnega prostora je oblikovala način prenosa spomina med generacijami ter vplivala na oblikovanje individualnih identitet. Udeleženci raziskave prihajajo iz družin, katerih člani so bili neposredno izpostavljeni enemu ali več omenjenim zgodovinskim travmatičnim dogodkom.

Obmejni prebivalci v vsakdanjem življenju uporabljajo različne strategije odpora proti državni monolitni nacionalni ideologiji, ki jih reducira na eno samo mononacionalno identiteto in spodbuja sovraštvo do soseda. Kot je bilo razvidno iz razprav fokusnih skupin, tretja generacija poskuša preseči in prelomiti tovrstne kategorizacije, ki ohromijo posameznike in kolektivni občutek pripadnosti. Udeleženci še vedno zaznavajo težo vseprisotnih konfliktnih nacionalnih javnih narativov, ki obujajo boleče spomine in hkrati ohranjajo breme sporne preteklosti. Prav tretja generacija izraža željo po preseganju medgeneracijskega spominskega bremena. Medtem ko jim ti spomini še vedno predstavljajo osnovo za oblikovanje lastne identitete, pa prav ta generacija izraža potrebo po ‚normalnem' življenju, ki vključuje iskanje ozdravitve skozi javne spravne in mirovne narative. Fokusni skupini ponujata primer, kako je to mogoče doseči preko odprte konfrontacije glede travmatične preteklosti. Glasna artikulacija boleče zgodovine lahko prispeva k zdravljenju posameznikov, saj s prekinitvijo razdiralnih političnih naracij, ki se hranijo z molkom, omogoča bolj vključujoče razumevanje Drugega.

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Exploring Multicultural Dynamics in Slavic Polesia: Ethnology and Dialectology at the Crossroads

Oksana Mykytenko

Maksym Rylskyi Institute of Art Studies, Folkloristics and Ethnology, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Ukraine
oksana_mykytenko@hotmail.com
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7613-8557

The paper explores the history, current state, and significance of studying the Polesian ethnocultural region, with emphasis on Ukrainian Polesia. It outlines the region's archaic specificity and its diffuse ethnocultural field. The research relies on dialectological and typological methods, with an ethnolinguistic approach to semantic and structural unity in folklore. It has demonstrated the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and other forms of *elusiveness* that complicate the representation of Polesia as a unified entity, thereby framing it instead as a multicultural and heterogeneous region.

▪ Keywords: Polesia, ethnocultural borderland, traditional culture, interdisciplinary study, ethnolinguistics

V prispevku so obravnavani zgodovina, trenutno stanje in znanstveni pomen preučevanja poleškega etnokulturnega območja, s posebnim poudarkom na ukrajinskem Polesju. Predstavljena sta arhaična posebnost območja in njegov razpršen etnokulturni prostor. Raziskava temelji na dialektoloških in tipoloških metodah ter etnolingvističnem pristopu, ki razkriva pomensko in strukturno enotnost v folklori. Prikazane so kulturne, jezikovne, etnične in druge oblike *izmuzljivosti*, ki otežujejo predstavljanje Polesja kot enotne entitete, pač pa ga opredeljujejo kot multikulturno in heterogeno območje.

▪ Ključne besede: Polesje, etnokulturno mejno območje, tradicionalna kultura, interdisciplinarna raziskava, etnolingvistika

Introduction

The issue of ethnocultural borderlands is a relevant problem in contemporary scholarship. A comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to its study as a multifaceted phenomenon and an object of ethnological, folkloristic, linguistic, and cultural research is of particular importance. Such an analysis allows for both synchronic investigation and the tracing of dynamic changes at the present stage. In characterizing the concept of a "cultural borderland", Roman Kyrchiv defines it as "the formation of structures that emerge in territorial contact zones, at the intersections of different ethnic groups, based on the historical process of connections, interactions, and mutual influences of their cultures, primarily at the traditional level" (2013: 16). In such zones – among which the Polesia[1] is a striking and cohesive cultural and linguistic area of Slavia[2] –

[1] The name is transliterated from Ukrainian as *'Polissia'* or *'Polissya'*; for reasons of textual coherence, the spelling has been unified to the more common form '*Polesia'* (editor's note).

[2] *'Slavija'* (Slavia) is a term used in contemporary Slavic linguistic and cultural studies to denote the totality of Slavic-speaking countries and communities, considered as a single linguistic-cultural area.

complex ethnocultural and ethnosocial processes take place, constituting an important subject of research. An integrated view of Slavia as a single cultural and linguistic continuum has been implemented in international scholarly projects such as the *General Slavic Linguistic Atlas* and the *Linguistic Atlas of Europe*, when the contours of a new direction in ethnology, namely ethnolinguistic geography, began to take shape. Within this framework, the geographical distribution of linguistic phenomena is studied comprehensively in the context of the areal patterns of elements of traditional material and spiritual culture.

The Polesian zone is of particular interest as an area of Ukrainian-Belarusian-Russian borderlands and a distinct case of ethnocultural contacts. Ethnocultural borderlands are clearly defined along the entire perimeter of the Ukrainian ethnic territory, especially in the north, where the Chernihiv–Sumy and Bryansk Polesia stand out as the Ukrainian-Russian borderland. The Ukrainian-Belarusian Polesia includes the eastern, central, and western parts of this natural-geographical and ethnographic region. The Polesian multicultural dialect, possessing a common Slavic character, represents "a unified entity – linguistic, folkloric, and ethnographic" (Tolstoy, 1995: 13), requiring thorough and comprehensive analysis. Our analysis aligns with the contemporary research on the genealogies of scientific approaches to multicultural and multilingual borderlands. Findings show cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and other forms of *elusiveness* that challenge the representation of Polesia as a unified entity, thereby framing it instead as a multicultural and heterogeneous region.

This research is especially relevant in the context of contemporary events, where the fundamental principles of human life have been disrupted, and the relic zones of material and spiritual culture in the Slavic world have suffered destruction, turning into war zones. At a time when the world is increasingly threatened by unforeseen crises, wars, conflicts, and devastation, the significance of Slavic studies as a discipline focused on Slavic heritage – possessing unique autochthonous values required by the modern world – continues to grow (Giurchinov, 2009: 549).

Geographical boundaries and ethnic composition

Researchers from different fields define the historical and ethnographic boundaries of Polesia in various ways, yet they agree that the region encompasses the Prypiat River basin and adjacent forested areas. Polesia is divided into three parts: Western, Central, and Eastern. The tripartite division of Polesia into Western, Central, and Eastern zones is grounded in a combination of geographical (Heremchuk, 1973), dialectological (Dzendzelivskyi, 1960; Arkushyn, 1996), ethnographic (Stelmaschuk, 1981; Kurochkin, 2007), and historical-cultural (Dashkevych, 1998) factors. Administrative delimitation aligns with oblast borders, though it remains secondary to linguistic and cultural patterns.

The "central part" refers to the lower course of the Prypiat River and the area between the Dnipro and Prypiat rivers (Tolstoy, 1986: 6). According to 19th-century definitions, the region was often described as "Core Polissia, i.e. the Prypiat River valley", or "the territory forming the basin of the Prypiat River" (Stryzhak, 2003: 121).

Historical sources from the 14th–16th centuries, including Old Ukrainian and Belarusian-Lithuanian chronicles, indicate that Polesia was situated between Volhynia, Mazovia, Prussia, Lithuania, and Rus (Moiseyenko, 2006: 13−14). Chroniclers often broadly defined thus the territory inhabited by the Lithuanians and Ruthenians, extending from the Podlasie Voivodeship to the Dnipro River. After the Union of Lublin in 1569, the territories of Volhynia and Western Polesia became part of Poland. Following the partitions of Poland, Western Polesia came under the control of the Russian Empire. After the proclamation of the Ukrainian People's Republic, this territory was part of the Ukrainian State, but from 1921, Western Polesia was again under Polish rule. In 1939, Berestia and Pinsk were incorporated into Belarus, while Volhynian Polesia became part of Ukraine (Arkushyn, 2004: 13−14). Polesia has therefore been a zone of interaction between different peoples, primarily Slavic and Baltic. The region is sometimes classified along ethnic lines, including Ukrainian, Belarusian, Russian, Lithuanian, and Polish segments. Today, Polesia spans the territories of four countries: Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, and Russia (Moiseyenko, 2006: 9). The Polesian section of Ukraine's ethnocultural borderland comprises "the entire length of the modern state border between Ukraine and Belarus, extending into the Podlasie borderland with Poland in the northwest and the border with Russia in the northeast" (Kyrchiv, 2013: 23).

In Ukraine, Polesia occupies the left bank of the Prypiat River (northern), the right bank of the Prypiat and Dnipro rivers (southern), and the left bank of the Dnipro River (eastern). The northern and partly the southern sub-province of Polesia within the territory of Ukraine is formed by Belarusian Polesia, while most of the southern and eastern subregions belong to Ukraine. Based on physical and geographical conditions, Ukrainian Polesia is further divided into six areas: Volhynian, Male (between the Volhynian and Podolian Uplands), Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Novhorod-Siversky (Marynych, 1962: 113).

For regions characterized by close ethnocultural contacts, the opposition of "one's own" and "the other" proves to be particularly relevant. This opposition, in particular, actualizes notions of "one's own" and "the other" space, and, when applied to society, is interpreted through multi-level human connections – familial, ethnic, linguistic, confessional, and social – ultimately tracing back to archaic beliefs (Belova, 2009: 581). The way representatives of various ethnic groups are perceived is determined by the general cultural opposition of "one's own" and "the other". Stereotypes of nationalities, as well as of inhabitants of certain regions and localities, bear a strong emotional imprint, often emphasizing negative attitudes toward immediate neighbours (Bartminski, 2005: 178–180). At the same time, the bipolar organization of such stereotypes may

range from negative to positive collective representations, depending on historical circumstances and the sociopolitical situation. In borderland areas, ethnic self-expression tends to weaken, while the opposition between "us" and "them" intensifies. This phenomenon can be explained by the centre–periphery dynamic, which in turn leads to processes of "national dualism and ethnic self-identification, intensified assimilation, and a heightened sense of preserving and protecting ethnic identity" (Kyrchiv, 2013: 35). Ethnic processes in the Polesia region exhibit their own specificity, they evolved at a slower pace and with lower intensity than in other areas of interethnic contact. The distinctive nature of Polesia (dense forest wilderness and impassable swamps) was for a long time the reason for the region's isolation. Difficult access to these areas and poor transportation routes contributed to the fact that there were relatively few migratory movements; differential and integrative processes took place slowly and in a distinctive manner, and the local population lived here virtually without significant migration up to the present day (Moiseyenko, 2006: 8). Historically living at the crossroads of ancient cultures and later becoming part of distinct nations, the population often lacks a unified self-awareness, and their ethnic affiliation is not always clearly defined.

The inhabitants of Polesia have been referred to by various names: Polishchuks, Litvins, and Tuteishi ('locals'). The most widely accepted term, documented in maps and records from the early 17th century, is Polishchuks*,* whose language was identified as a dialect of a larger territorial-linguistic (ethnic) entity – either as a northern Ukrainian or southwestern Belarusian dialect. The ethnonym 'Litvins' applied to the population that belonged to the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 14th–18th centuries. Residing in the region where the East Slavic nations – Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians – were forming, yet preserving their distinctiveness, the Litvins did not identify with any of these groups even in the 19th century. Scholars of the past emphasized the lack of a "national consciousness" among both the Belarusian and Ukrainian populations of Polesia, attributing this to their distance from the "centres of national life". They noted that "the Polesian inhabitant felt – and still feels – distinct from the neighbouring peoples or those living among them, such as Poles, Russians, and Jews, though they usually refer to themselves as 'locals' (*tuteishyi*), 'Rusyns', 'simple people', or 'Orthodox'" (Polesie, 1996: 2173−2174). Contemporary research confirms that Polishchuks do not identify themselves as either Ukrainians or Belarusians, while the term 'Litvin' is now considered offensive (Moiseyenko, 2006: 17−18). Modern sociolinguists discuss the presence of derogatory nicknames for Polishchuks as an expression of "regional and ethnic hostility" where "the other" is equated with something "not mine", "frightening", "bad", or "hostile". Hate speech, according to a contemporary Ukrainian linguist, includes offensive nicknames since "it is human nature to insult those whom one considers outsiders. This can be as simple as referring offensively to the Polissians, the Volhynians, the Poltava *varenyky*, or the Obolon *rahuls*" (Dubchak, 2023: 28).

The term *Polishchuk* in the sense of 'inhabitant of Polesia' (1861) is cited in *The Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language* by Borys Hrynchenko (1909: 285). In a separate entry of the eleven-volume *Dictionary of the Ukrainian Language*, the ethnonym (Polishchuk, Polishchuchka, Polishchuks) is explained as "inhabitants or natives of Polesia". The adjective 'Polishchutskyi' is also provided. Various literary excerpts included in the dictionary illustrate the distinctiveness of this ethnographic group and the stereotypes associated with Polishchuks, for example:

> The unfortunate Polishchuks, or, as they are called in Ukraine, Litvins, appeared at Ukrainian factories; the Polishchuks engaged in hunting, beekeeping, and fishing, and faithfully preserved ancient Slavic traditions; Mykola, the driver – a small, thin, sharp-eyed man from Chernihiv, a typical Polishchuk – couldn't stop laughing; For Polishchuchka Hanna, childhood memories of gathering mushrooms in Polesia came alive; The Hutsul woman wears vibrant, multicoloured fabrics. The Polishchuchka has a more restrained palette, dominated by red and cherry tones, evoking the traditional aesthetic of the region. Someone began singing an old Polishchuk song. (SUM, 1976: 86)

The inhabitants of Polesia were also studied as a special anthropological type with the methods of physical anthropology. In the northern "anthropological zone" of Ukraine, which includes several morphological variants, the Polesian type was clearly identified (Diachenko, 1965). The Polesian variant of the northern "anthropological zone" covers northern Zhytomyr and Rivne regions and extends into Volyn and Right-Bank Polesia, where the population exhibits close anthropological similarities. From an anthropological perspective, the Polishchuks, as one of the variants of the northern anthropological zone in Ukraine, stand in clear contrast to representatives of other ethnographic groups (Seheda, 2001: 105), while in most characteristics the right-bank Polishchuks are close to the bearers of the Volyn anthropological type. Anthropological studies confirm the "absence of Mongoloid admixture" and indicate the preservation of archaic Proto-European features among the local population (Konduktorova, 1973; Seheda, 2001: 105;). One of the first to draw attention to the "archaic traits" of the local population was Fedir Vovk, who noted that in the northern belt of Ukraine, "the ancient population of the country has been preserved" (Vovk, 1995: 16).

A widely used self-designation of the local population was *Tuteishi* ('locals'), a term that distinguished their ethnic boundaries without associating them with either Ukrainians or Belarusians, particularly during Polish censuses in the 20th century. The region's inhabitants were often referred to as Tuteishi due to the absence of a clearly defined ethnic self-consciousness. The renowned linguist Yurii Shevelov explained the emergence of this term by noting that, in the north, Polesia bordered the (proto-)

Belarusian language, while in the south, it bordered the (proto-)Ukrainian language. Consequently, "within the core area of the Polesian dialects, the self-designation *Tuteishi* (*Tuteishyia*) emerged – meaning those who have 'always been here' and who resist both the northern and southern expansions" (cited in Moiseyenko, 2006: 18). Scholarly research confirms that the Polesian population stands apart from neighbouring ethnic groups in terms of language, material culture, and spiritual traditions.

Polesia as an object of ethnological and dialectological research

The name 'Polesia', etymologically meaning any 'forested area', was first mentioned in the Galician-Volhynian Chronicle in 1275. In 1560, the first map highlighting Polesia was published in Gdańsk. By the 15th and 16th centuries, the term 'Polesia' became common in the works of Polish historians such as Jan Długosz, Marcin Kromer, and Maciej Stryjkowski. Information about Polesia gradually accumulated in various historical sources, including chronicles, travellers' notes, inventories, and inspections. The first researchers of Polesia were Polish historians, archaeologists, geographers, and ethnographers (Bandarchyk, 1988: 4–8).

The study of the region's traditional material and spiritual culture has consistently led to conclusions about its archaic nature, originality, and uniqueness. Linguistic works dedicated to Polesia began to appear at the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, although they did not cover the entire region and were focused on specific areas. Up until the 1960s and 1970s, "Polesia remained insufficiently studied in terms of ethnography, although in the past it had attracted the close attention of ethnographers, including the famous Kazimierz Moszyński" (Tolstoy, 1997: 239).

The ethnologist and linguist Kazimierz Moszyński (1887-1959) entered the history of Polish ethnography as an amateur through his publications, which were classified as regional studies. In 1912, while working as a teacher in Vasylkiv County in the Kyiv region, he collected ethnographic material in Ukrainian Polesia, explaining his interest by stating that he had long been drawn to the "Ruthenian" lands. With the support of the Polish Regional Studies Society, he conducted a folklore and ethnographic fieldwork to Polesia in June 1914, and the collected materials were later published in the *Polesie Wschodnie* (1928). During subsequent expeditions to Polesia, Moszyński gathered materials for his later works. Notably, during a joint Ukrainian-Polish fieldwork in September 1932, in which the Ukrainian musicologist Filaret Kolessa participated, 220 Polesian songs with melodies and 24 instrumental tunes were recorded on phonograph cylinders. These materials, lost on the eve of the Second World War, were later recovered and prepared for publication by Sofia Hrytsia, who facilitated the release of *Musical Folklore from Polesia in the Records of Filaret Kolessa and Kazimierz Moszyński* (1995). This publication presents two versions of the transcriptions of the

song lyrics, one in Latin script and the other in Cyrillic, preserving the Polesian dialect. In studying the material and spiritual culture of the Polishchuks, Moszyński emphasized the regional specificity and archaic nature of the area's folk culture. The significance of his works on spiritual culture, known collectively as *Kultura Ludowa Słowian* (1934, 1939), extends far beyond ethnography and folklore studies, encompassing linguistics, musicology, and archaeology (Holovatiuk, 2017: 149).

A new phase in the study of Polesia began with linguistic research, particularly the systematic study of Polesian dialects. The First All-Union Coordination Meeting on pressing issues in Slavic studies supported the initiative of the Institute of Slavic Studies and Balkan Studies to publish a dialect dictionary of Polesia. Soon after, a group of scientists from this institute, led by Russian Academy of Sciences academician Nikita I. Tolstoy, developed a project to study the traditional spiritual culture of Polesia called the Polesian Ethnolinguistic Atlas (Tolstoy, 1995: 5). This project covered 148 settlements, including Podlasie and practically the entire Polesian territorial-linguistic continuum (Brest, Gomel, Bryansk, Kursk, Sumy, Chernihiv, Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Rivne, and Volyn regions). The research was based on the experience of compiling the linguistic atlas of western Polesia by Józef Tarnawski, which was published in 1939 and clearly reflected the methods of Moszyński's school, particularly his ethnographic questionnaire on spiritual culture. Starting in the 1960s, systematic surveys of the Polesian region began, resulting in numerous works that comprehensively characterized the entire Polesian area. By the end of the twentieth century, the main research directions in Ukrainian dialectology, including the study of Polesia, remained descriptive, lexicographical, and linguistic-geographical.

Studies on the dialectology of Polesia, in particular the published volumes of the *Ukrainian Dialectological Atlas* (1984, 1988), clearly demonstrate the connection between the Polesia linguistic area and Ukrainian dialects, as noted in the review of research on the ethnocultural and linguistic study of Polesia (Tolstoy, 1995). In dialectological studies, it is a widely accepted assertion, as was stressed by Tolstoy, that "the geography of a phenomenon is its history in spatial terms", or that "linguistic geography is the paleontology of language", a notion that finds confirmation in the study of Polesia.

Later on, several projects focusing on Polesian dialects, particularly in areas affected by the Chernobyl disaster, were carried out by staff from the Institute of the Ukrainian Language of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (departments of dialectology and the history of the Ukrainian language). Ukrainian scholars have noted that the rapid destruction of part of the Central Polesian area as a cohesive autochthonous micro-continuum after 1986 – particularly the disappearance of many dialects due to the scattered resettlement of villagers into multiple new, distant settlements because of the Chernobyl disaster – made it impossible to replenish information. The value of many dialects spoken by autochthonous Polishchuks became linked solely to the past, as the future appeared uncertain and elusive (Hrytsenko, 2015: 101). In 2011, by a

resolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, it was decided to establish the State Museum-Archive of Folk Culture of Ukrainian Polesia (*Holos Ukrainy* 30.4.2011, no. 79, Verkhovna Rada Ukrainy), based on the cultural assets collected from the territory affected by radioactive contamination as a result of the ecological and humanitarian disaster at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant.

The "ancestral homeland" of the Ukrainians and "archaic zone" of Slavia

The "ancestral homeland" of the Ukrainians geographically coincides with the north-western cultural-historical province of Ukraine, which, in addition to Volyn and Upper Dniester regions, also includes Ukrainian Polesia. Polesia played a key role in the ethnogenesis of the Ukrainians and in preserving their ethnocultural heritage (Zaliznyak, 1996: 188). At the same time, the regions of Central Dnipro Ukraine and the Right-Bank Kyiv area, including Pereiaslav and Chernihiv-Sivershchyna, are identified in scholarly discourse as the primary territorial centre of the formation of the Ukrainian people (Naulko, 2013: 95), a view that reflects and reinforces the construction of the Ukrainian national narrative. Many linguists, historians, and ethnographers recognize Polesia, specifically the area between the Middle Dnieper, the Prypiat River, the Dniester, and the Vistula, as the territory of the early Slavic settlement. Polesia, as an archaic zone of Eastern Slavia during the period of Kyivan Rus (9th–12th centuries) became the periphery of newly formed ethno-linguistic entities (Klymchuk, 1997: 241). Consequently, it stood in clear linguistic contrast to the proto-Belarusian and proto-Russian dialects and, though less distinctly, also differed from the proto-Ukrainian ones (Moiseyenko, 2006: 387).

Polesia is referred to in Slavistic research as one of the Slavic "archaic zones". Kazimierz Moszyński even described Polesia as "archi-archaic". At the same time, the scholar was right in emphasizing that this region is not a self-contained, isolated world but, on the contrary, its folk culture exhibits multifaceted connections. His words are confirmed by the observations of the Moscow ethnolinguistic school, according to which certain "elements of Polesia's traditional culture have counterparts in other areas of the Slavic world or even beyond it" (Tolstoy, 1986: 7). Nikita Tolstoy defined Polesia as an "archaic zone", which is "not just an area of well-preserved traditions" but also one that has "a specific stable system of traditional spiritual culture" (1989: 14). Other Slavic "archaic zones" include the Russian North, western Bulgaria, central and northeastern Serbia, Kashubia, and the Carpathians (Tolstoy, 1989: 15). In his works, the scholar consistently emphasized the common Slavic nature of Polesian themes (Tolstoy, 1995: 5).

Within the context of the Polesian ethnocultural region, the West Polesian dialect remains insufficiently studied. It is part of the Ukrainian linguistic continuum and has a long ethnocultural history, preserving not only the consequences of intensive changes (both immanent and interferential) but also evidence of linguistic archaism.

Ethnological surveys have clearly demonstrated the division of Polesia into two major zones, western and central-eastern, with the boundary line fluctuating within the northern and central parts of the Zhytomyr region, at times reaching the borders of the Rivne and Kyiv regions (Havryliuk, 1994: 337). In the study of Polesian folklore, the variability of mythological beliefs has been repeatedly noted, particularly concerning the image of the *domovoy*, the 'household guardian spirit'. Polesia represents the western periphery of the distribution of beliefs about this mythological figure, with a noticeable transformation of its image observed from east to west. The most consistent beliefs regarding its obligatory presence in the home, its leadership role in the family, and its function as the "master" were recorded in the Chernihiv region (Vinogradova, 1994: 298–309). The personal dialectal discourse reflected in contemporary linguistic and ethnological studies of the region demonstrates the mythological principle of perceiving reality, inherent in archaic thinking, which is based on an emotional experience of the unity between the world and the individual (Gyngazova, 2014: 157).

The Polesia region represents a specific cultural dialect within the Slavic dialectal landscape, which has made it particularly effective for integrating folkloric and ethnographic research into the broader field of Slavic ethnogenetic studies. A synchronic analysis of traditions was seen as "diachrony unfolded in space" (Tolstoy, 1997: 15) and served as "a source for internal (semantic) reconstruction" (Tolstoy, 1989: 12). The ultimate goal of this reconstruction was to address "broader ethnogenetic issues" (Tolstoy, 1997: 230). Observations in the field of Slavic traditional rituals, folk demonology, incantations, beliefs, and other aspects have shown that Polesia's spiritual culture retains a number of archaic features. They also serve as evidence of the thesis that dialectal variation applies not only to language but also to the spiritual culture of the Slavs. As a linguo-ethnographic concept, the dialect existed both in folk practice and in the scholarly views of such prominent researchers of the past as Aleksandr Shakhmatov, Dmitry Zelenin, Kazimierz Moszyński, and Hristo Vakarelski. According to Nikita Tolstoy, the features that distinguish a dialect – linguistic, ethnographic, and folkloric – often go hand in hand, creating a multifaceted dialectal profile (Tolstoy, 1989: 13).

Polesian fieldwork: Creation of the Polesian Archive

For many of Nikita I. Tolstoy's students and followers, as well as for Tolstoy himself, the beginning of their "deep and long immersion" into the "rich world of ancient Slavic spiritual culture" started with their acquaintance with the "villages and hamlets of the remote Polesian wilderness" (Tolstoy, 1997: 9). On the scholar's initiative, a program of systematic and consistent expeditions to Polesia was launched to collect materials – initially for the *Polesian Dialect Dictionary* and later for the *Ethnolinguistic Atlas*. By the 1970s, the expeditions had taken on a distinctly ethnolinguistic character, supported by detailed programs for studying various aspects of folk culture (Mykytenko, 2024). "The boundaries of modern Slavic languages, dialects, peoples, and ethnic groups",

noted Tolstoy, "are of relatively late origin. Attention to local phenomena will allow us to see earlier ethnolinguistic and cultural layers on the map of modern Slavia" (Tolstoy, 1989: 15). In his work *Some Considerations and Reconstructions of Slavic Spiritual Culture* (1989), Nikita Tolstoy emphasizes the need to delineate zones that are generally smaller than the boundaries of present-day languages and ethnic groups. In the case of Polesia, such zones encompass contemporary multiethnic and multilingual territories. The application of reconstruction methods developed in comparative-historical linguistics makes it possible to carry out internal reconstruction (within a single macrosystem or "cultural family", in this case Slavic), and subsequently to move toward external reconstruction and the resolution of the problems of ethnogenesis. Emphasizing the indisputable value of dialectal material for the reconstruction of the Proto-Slavic state, Tolstoy noted that, when moving from synchronic-contemporary typological studies to comparative-historical research, the current Slavic dialectal landscape represents, in relation to many phenomena, "something unfolded in the space of diachrony" (Tolstoy, 1997: 15).

The mapping of linguistic materials confirmed the archaic nature of Polesian dialects, especially the central Polesian dialect. Research in Polesia continued for almost a quarter of a century, becoming for many – including for the Ukrainians – a "centre of scientific attraction" and an "experimental area" for dialectological and later ethnolinguistic fieldwork, which developed into an "independent field of Slavic humanities" (Tolstaya, 2013: 16–19). The expeditions revealed the "latency of the Polesian dialect continuum until recent times", which "contributed to its preservation in a more archaic, minimally transformed state" (Hrytsenko, 1993: 290). The language of the Pinchuks, the population of the Western Polesian area of Berestia, was already identified in the 19th century as having a Ukrainian foundation, historically labelled 'Little Russian' (*Malorossy*) in the terminology of the Russian Empire. Mitrofan Dovnar-Zapolsky, when examining the Polesian language of the Pinchuks, identified its 'Little Russian foundation': "The Little Russian foundation is beyond doubt, but it also has its own features and contains, to a greater or lesser extent, Belarusian elements" (Dovnar-Zapolsky, 1895: 27). Ahatanhel Krymsky described the folklore materials presented in Dovnar-Zapolsky's collection as 'Ukrainian', emphasizing that the distinctly marked Ukrainian ethnic character of the collection's materials provides stronger grounds for the title *Malorussian Polissia* (Krymsky, 1896). Volodymyr Hnatiuk stated that "with the appearance of Dovnar-Zapolsky's substantial book, any further debate over whether the Pinchuky should be classified as Ruthenians-Ukrainians or as Belarusians would be unnecessary" (Hnatiuk, 1896: 42). The folklore materials included in Dmytro Bulhakovsky's collection *Pinchuky: An Ethnographic Collection: Songs, Riddles, Proverbs, Rituals, Omens, Prejudices, Beliefs, Superstitions, and a Local Glossary* (St. Petersburg, 1890) led the author to conclude that the language of the Pinchuky "bears the greatest resemblance to the Little Russian dialect" (Bulhakovsky, 1890: 159).

Historians of language have repeatedly attempted to "divide" Polesian cultural monuments, which often exhibited unique features, between Ukrainian and Belarusian traditions, referring to the language as either "West Russian" or "Ukrainian-Belarusian" as a transitional form (Moiseyenko, 2006: 11). Even today, there are publications of folklore texts recorded in the Ukrainian-Belarusian ethnolinguistic border zone that are edited according to the norms of the Belarusian dialect or the modern literary Belarusian language. Such cases are regarded as unscientific and biased. In particular, the editorial principles whereby texts recorded as early as the nineteenth century are presented in accordance with the modern rules of Belarusian orthography have been recognized as an "unscientific practice" and as "inadmissible in the scholarly editorial theory and practice of folklore". As Roman Kyrchiv emphasizes, this involves not only the erasure of the dialectal features of the folklore language, but also the transfer of an entire body of alien-ethnic (or, in some cases, mixed and transitional interethnic) folklore tradition into another ethnolinguistic system (Kyrchiv, 2013: 29).

A systematic ethnolinguistic survey of Polesia was conducted according to a unified comprehensive Program for the Polesian Ethnolinguistic Atlas (PELA). The collection and research of traditional culture were carried out using specially developed questionnaires, ensuring a certain level of completeness and organization of the material, which was reflected in the extensive and detailed Polesian card index. In addition to the scholars from the Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies (ISBS), the Polesian expeditions involved active participation from professors and students of the Moscow (Russia), Gomel (Byelorussia), Lviv (Ukraine), Tartu (Estonia) universities, as well as Zhytomyr and Sumy (Ukraine), and Kursk (Russia) Pedagogical Institutes, among others (Antropov, Plotnikova, 1995: 383).

As a result of the work of the Polesian expedition, a unique collection of incantations was created and systematically expanded. The task of collecting, classifying, and publishing incantations was identified by Tolstoy as one of the top priorities for both East Slavic and Slavic folklore studies in general: "One cannot calmly wait for the time when the tradition of incantations disappears, just as the tradition of the *byliny* has vanished" (Tolstoy, 1986: 137).

At all stages of research, which continued until the early 1990s, the large-scale work – both expeditionary and scientific-analytical – was supported and extended through national academic programs in Ukraine. This work continued to evolve owing to the coordination of institutes and the significance of the research objectives. The materials collected during the expeditions formed the basis of the Polesian Archive created at the Institute of Slavic and Balkan Studies (ISBS) of Russian Academy of Sciences. In addition to materials gathered in Polesia, the Archive also holds materials collected within the PELA program in other Slavic regions, including a large collection of records from the Carpathian region, materials from expeditions to the Russian North (conducted after 1986 by ISBS staff, professors, and students from the Moscow State University,

among others), as well as responses to questionnaires from several villages in Eastern Poland, Macedonia, and some other regions (Antropov, Plotnikova, 1995: 391).

In the "post-Chernobyl" phase, dedicated work in Polesia was also carried out for many years by members of the Historical and Cultural Expedition of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Ukraine – ethnographers, historians, museum workers, and true enthusiasts of their field. Scholars from Lviv, Kyiv, and Rivne, half of whom were women, worked to restore what is now a "virtual Ukraine" (Kostenko, 2004: 479), meaning Ukraine that does not exist anymore. Research aimed at identifying, preserving, and protecting the historical and cultural heritage of the region was conducted, particularly within the framework of creating the Chernobyl Scientific and Information Fund, which aimed to reflect both the current state of the dialectal cultural-linguistic system and its dynamics (Hrytsenko, 1999: 13).

An important milestone in the study of Ukrainian Polissia was the publication of the collective monograph *Kyiv Polissia: An Ethnolinguistic Study* (1989), devoted to a comprehensive and interdisciplinary description of Kyiv Polissia. It addressed issues related to the settlement of the region, its earliest and later ethnic composition, the anthropological types represented there, and so forth. Linguists proposed, on the basis of new materials, a classification of the Kyiv Polissia dialects, as well as an analysis of hydronyms, toponyms, and anthroponyms. Articles on the dialectology of Kyiv Polissia were accompanied by maps covering the Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Cherkasy regions. The historical traditions and contemporary ethnographic features of Kyiv and the Kyiv region were the subject of a monograph by Kyiv ethnographers and historians, the *Ethnography of Kyiv and the Kyiv Region: Traditions and Modernity* (1986). The joint project General Slavic Linguistic Atlas is being conducted through the cooperation of all Slavic academies, together with the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

The significance of the collected expedition materials increased manifold following the technological disaster of the Chernobyl catastrophe in 1986, which radically altered the demographic situation in the region and led to the cessation of the existence of the Middle Polesian linguistic area as a dialectal integrity. The very notion of the "Middle Polesian dialect" within the area structure of the Ukrainian language now belongs to the past (Hrytsenko, 1999: 5). The fundamental work of the ethnolinguistic school – a five-volume dictionary titled *Slavic Antiquities* totalling 3,356 pages – was intended to preserve the Polesian dialect within the context of the history of archaic cultural areas. The materials from the Polesian Archive served as the foundation for this fundamental publication, defining its direction and structure. Today, the electronic version of the Polesian Archive allows for keyword and dialectal terminology searches within the database, making it possible not only to preserve the archive in a reliable format but also to optimize work with it.

Ethnolinguistic dictionary Slavic Antiquities *in 5 volumes (Moscow, 1995–2012): Research problematics*

The *Ethnolinguistic Dictionary of Slavic Antiquities* (*Slavjanskie Drevnosti*) is the first pan-Slavic attempt to systematically compile lexical and conceptual material reflecting the traditional spiritual culture of the Slavs. The idea of such a dictionary was first voiced at the First International Congress of Slavists in Prague (1929), with subsequent support at later Slavic congresses in Warsaw, Kraków, and Sofia (Vakarelski, 1938). Among precursors of this approach were the early lexicographic efforts of Vuk Karadžić, Vladimir Dal, and Serafim Yeremin, who emphasized the ethnographic and everyday context of lexical items. Similar encyclopaedic works exist in other European traditions – notably, the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* (Bächtold-Stäubli, Hofman-Krayer, 1927–1942) in German scholarship. In Polish Slavic studies, related efforts include the *Dictionary of Polish Folklore* (Krzyżanowski, 1965) and the ongoing *Dictionary of Folk Language Stereotypes* (edited by Bartmiński), focused on reconstructing the "linguistic worldview" through folklore texts (*Słownik starożytności słowiańskich*; *Słownik ludowych stereotypów językowych; Słownik stereotypów i symboli ludowych*). Today, *Slavic Antiquities* occupies a central place in Slavic ethnolinguistics, with electronic access enabling its broad use in international research.

The *Ethnolinguistic Dictionary of Slavic Antiquities* (*Slavjanskie Drevnosti*) is based on the ideas of ethnolinguistic research that studies language through the lens of human consciousness, mentality, ritual and everyday behaviour, mythological representations, and mythopoetic creativity. These were also closely linked to the concept and design of the *Polesian Ethnolinguistic Atlas*, whose creation was primarily motivated by the development of the areal linguistic approach and its application to ethnography, archaeology, ethnology, mythology, and related fields (Tolstoy, 1986: 4). The realization of the ethnolinguistic dictionary became possible due to research in the field of the mythology of Slavic, Indo-European, and other peoples at various stages of typological analysis aimed at diachronic examination, as well as the development of semiotics, which studies the structure and functioning of secondary sign systems and cultural texts.

The dictionary embodies the notion of the integrality of culture by representing language, verbal art, and traditional practices as interconnected manifestations of a unified spiritual whole on the notion of the *integrality* of culture, which constitutes the fundamental and principal position of ethnolinguistics as a field, where the "explanatory power" lies in "the entire complex of spiritual culture". The theoretical quadrilateral "language – verbal art – culture – self-awareness" (Zapolskaya, 2023: 136) used in the dictionary has become a summarizing theoretical formula for comprehensive studies of various manifestations of traditional spiritual culture. Understanding the isomorphism of language and culture has allowed for discussions on the semantic unity of all forms of cultural text.

Objectives and principles of compiling the dictionary: Significance

The principles of compiling and the objectives of the ethnolinguistic dictionary were outlined in a report by Nikita I. Tolstoy and Svetlana M. Tolstaya at the IX International Congress of Slavicists in Kyiv (1983). This presentation resonated significantly within the academic community and continued the issue raised at the previous congress in Zagreb (1978) concerning the reconstruction of ancient Slavic spiritual culture and its territorial cultural-dialectal divisions. The "first practical task" proposed was the principle of compiling an inventory of the main significant elements, considering the description of the paradigmatics of culture, which would provide "a complete understanding of the structure of rituals in each local tradition". Emphasizing that "a reliable reconstruction" must take into account "all territorial varieties of each element or fragment of culture within the Slavic world and their non-Slavic connections" (Tolstoy, Tolstaya, 1983: 220), the authors articulated a tested methodological approach to scientific analysis based primarily on the area-based characterization of the factual material. By defining as their object of description all forms, varieties, and genres of traditional culture, Nikita and Svetlana Tolstye established clear structural categories for their systematization, each corresponding to a specific fragment of the folk model of the world.

Regarding folklore, they underscored the necessity of "using folklore sources [...] to characterize the ritual and mythological facts". Such sources included ritual folklore, anecdotes, legends, spells, and minor genres of folklore (riddles, proverbs, sayings, incantations, verbal formulas, and clichés), as well as other genres that directly reflect the folk worldview (ibid.: 229).

The internal connection between lexical (semantic) typology and ethnolinguistics as a culturally oriented discipline has been emphasized in a number of works that have gained widespread recognition, particularly in the *Polesian Ethnolinguistic Collection* (1983), published shortly before the congress in Kyiv.

The focus on studying the content plan of ethno-culture, the understanding of folklore discourse as collectively created and characterized by dynamism, as well as the resulting irradiation of ethnolinguistic and cognitive methods, represents perhaps one of the key directions in the development of contemporary comprehensive inter-disciplinary research in Ukrainian ethnology, where the value of the Dictionary lies in embodying these very features – systematicity, explanatory power, and the reflection of the collective and dynamic nature of folklore discourse. Based on the aforementioned postulate of the isomorphism of language and culture, a Dictionary that explores the issues of such interaction and is grounded in the analysis of folklore texts in their broadest sense holds particular significance.

Conclusion

The Polesia region is of particular scholarly interest as a Ukrainian-Belarusian-Russian borderland, the study of which constitutes a pressing task in contemporary Slavic studies. Interdisciplinary research on this region – marked by historically active ethnic and ethnocultural contacts – demonstrates that the population of Polesia stands apart from other ethnic groups in terms of language, as well as material and spiritual culture.

In his study of the material and spiritual culture of the Polesians, Kazimierz Moshyński emphasized the regional specificity and archaic character of the folk culture of this territory. As a result of subsequent ethnolinguistic research, Polesia has been identified as one of the archaic zones of Slavia and the ancestral homeland of the Ukrainians. Ukrainian Polesia is of scholarly interest as a "distinct ethos" (according to Roman Kyrchiv), embodied in the traditional worldview, with a characteristic way of life and a system of customary and moral stereotypes inherent to its population. At the same time, research has demonstrated the cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and other forms of *elusiveness* that complicate the representation of Polesia as a unified entity, thereby framing it instead as a multicultural and heterogeneous region. This tension between perceptions of distinctiveness and the realities of diversity has inspired different scholarly approaches. On the one hand, some studies have emphasized classification, seeking to organize materials from the area, to relate them to historical processes and particularly to the ethnogenesis of nations. On the other hand, these classificatory efforts, while constructing analytical categories, have also influenced identity formation: many contemporary inhabitants of Polesia continue to employ or recognize such categories as part of their own self-identification.

The expeditionary work in Polesia, conducted under the leadership of Nikita I. and Svetlana M. Tolstoy, had an international character and continued for more than twenty years. The most significant results were presented in a number of publications, including the *Ethnolinguistic Atlas of Polesia* and the *Ethnolinguistic Dictionary of Slavic Antiquities*, as well as a range of studies on the ethnolinguistics of national scholarly traditions. The analysis of ethnographic and folkloric realities of the Polesian region is therefore of particular importance, not only because ethnolinguistic approaches open onto questions of Slavic ethnogenesis, but also for understanding how successive generations of scholars have approached Polesia, classified its materials, and framed its place within the broader ethnocultural history of the Slavs – an effort in which researchers continue to work toward resolving complex issues of cultural and historical interpretation.

Research data statement

The author states that the article is based on research data that is available in public domain resources and cited in the list of references. No new research data was created in this article.

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Raziskava večkulturne dinamike v slovanskem Polesju na presečišču etnologije in dialektologije

V članku sta obravnavana zgodovina in trenutno stanje znanstvenega raziskovanja poleškega etnokulturnega območja, s posebnim poudarkom na ukrajinskem Polesju. Poudarjen je pomen sistematičnih, dolgoročnih raziskav kompleksnega in heterogenega območja, ki v slovanskem kulturno-zgodovinskem prostoru velja za eno njegovih »arhaičnih con«. Prikazane so zgodovinske in etnografske meje Polesja, notranja diferenciacija območja ter posebnosti njegove tradicionalne kulture.

Polesje je predstavljeno kot stično in prehodno območje jezikovnih, kulturnih in etničnih prepletanj, kjer so procesi medkulturnih in medetničnih interakcij oblikovali razpršeno in spremenljivo etnokulturno polje. Ta fluidnost spodbuja dinamične jezikovne in kulturne izposoje, hkrati pa otežuje odgovore na vprašanja o kulturni in etnični identiteti.

V raziskavi je uporabljena kombinacija dialektoloških, arealnih in strukturno-tipoloških pristopov k analizi folklore in tradicionalne kulture. Etnolingvistika ponuja osrednji metodološki okvir, katerega cilj je rekonstrukcija invariantnih kulturnih oblik s primerjalnim preučevanjem lokalnih različic in interpretacijo semiotičnih kodov, vpetih v tradicionalne prakse. Ideja kulturne celovitosti in iskanje pomenske enotnosti med različnimi oblikami folklore sta temeljna vidika zgodovinsko-genealoškega pristopa, ki usmerja raziskavo.

Z integracijo jezikovnih, etnografskih in folkloristističnih podatkov raziskava poudarja analitični potencial poleškega območja za širše razprave o kulturni kontinuiteti, variabilnosti ter prepletanju lokalnih in nadlokalnih tradicij v slovanskem svetu.

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

Alenka Bartulović

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
alenka.bartulovic@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9179-5645

Alma Bejtullahu

Institute for Music Research, University of Würzburg, Germany
alma.bejtullahu@uni-wuerzburg.de
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4464-5727

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 Sloveniji, 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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Research data statement

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.

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