

'Stories from "The Most Beautiful River" and from Elsewhere: Tourism-Space-Nature; In Memoriam Matej Vranješ

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On October 20, 2021, when our esteemed colleague and dear friend Matej Vranješ would have celebrated his 50th birthday were it not for the mountain that claimed him, the symposium in his memory was organized by the Department of Cultural Tourism at the Faculty of Tourism studies – Turistica, University of Primorska.

The title of the symposium 'Stories from "The Most Beautiful River"' ("Zgodbe z »najlepše reke«) was taken from his last scientific article published posthumously in which he tackled 'a humanistic geographical perspective on the history of the development and management of tourism on the river Soča' his long-standing field research interest. 'Elsewhere' in the title referred to Vranješ's cosmopolitan outlook and also served as an open space within which the colleagues who ground their research mainly in the Humanities were welcome to address the variety of topics.

The symposium was organized in a hybrid format and those present in person received a bubble gum, the meaning of which was revealed in the abstract booklet where the photograph of Matej Vranješ blowing a big gum bubble was included. The photo was taken by the Soča river while on an outing with his family and hints at the part of Vranješ's personality that epitomised playfulness with certain elf-like qualities that were idiosyncratic. Other traits, openness, benevolence, attentiveness, presence, and generosity were

part and parcel of his interactions with colleagues and were touched upon or 'in the air' as it were in several presentations. His outdoor active lifestyle was understood as part of both his study rhythms and fieldwork production.

Twenty-two participants were engaged with fifteen papers that were divided into five groups of three followed by a discussion.

The first group of papers was dedicated specifically to the academic work of Matej Vranješ and was kicked off by his PhD mentor Bojan Baskar from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. In the presentation titled 'Landscape as Connecting Link between Geography and Anthropology', he combined some anecdotal reminiscences of Vranješ's academic growth with a discussion of the contested spatial categories shared by geography and anthropology that were a significant part of Vranješ's thesis. Miha Kozorog from the same department followed by addressing 'Locality in Matej Vranješ's Work' that was developed as a part of the field research in Bovec area. Several concepts and meanings that formed the notion of locality such as local belonging, place belonging, spatial identity, social production of space, territoriality were assessed with a constructively critical eye in identifying common traits and differences in Vranješ's understanding of locality. The third paper by Miha



Matej Vranješ

Koderman from the Department of geography, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska touched upon another research focus from the same geographical area, namely the second homes in the Triglav national park where Vranješ worked in different capacities. By posing a question of whether a second home is a 'private piece of paradise' or the 'splinter in the only Slovenian national park' Koderman reflected on the current research into spatial and functional roles of second homes in Bovec municipality.

In the lively discussion that followed the former dean of Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica Anton Gosar shed some highly relevant light on the historic development of spatial terminology that is particular to the Slovenian language and influences disciplinary terminological differences that spice up aca-

demical debates on basic concepts and contexts. The discussion gave rise to the conclusion that these issues alone would be enough for the whole other symposium.

The second group of presentations was introduced by Simon Kerma from the Department of Cultural Tourism, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, University of Primorska with 'Tourism Development and Visitor Management in Protected Areas' that was a shared research interest and topic of Vranješ and Kerma. One of the key aspects of the protected areas highlighted in the presentation was related to the protection and preservation of nature, as well as the protection of cultural heritage. From the point of view of awareness-raising, in particular, education and the promotion of sustainable development for the benefit of local communities, and the facilitation and direction of visits are crucial in these sensitive environments.

Two linguists from the same department, Ljudmila Sinkovič and Šarolta Godnič Vičič, followed by analysing 'Interpretive Signs in the Protected Area' of Landscape park Strunjan in which they critically addressed the interactions among visitors and landscape signs and identified positive practices from the research literature on other areas in order to suggest sustainable planning in protected areas. 'How to Protect the Marshes by the Participatory Process' was the third paper in the group delivered in an engaging manner by Aleš Smrekar from Anton Melik Geographical Institute of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts. Based on the original methodology developed by several partners from the Mediterranean region it connected directly to several issues raised in previous papers which enabled quality discussion that ensued.

The third group of rather diverse papers managed nevertheless to connect either by elements of research topics or by referring to Vranješ's work and interests indirectly. Tadeja Jere Jakulin discussed timely 'Systems Thinking for the Tourism of New Opportunities' in which she among other presented the outcomes of the research into '4w tourism' (Walker-Watcher-Wander-Wonderer) that directly connected to the next presentation by Nataša Rogelja Caf and Špela Ledinek

Lozej from Slovenian Migration Institute and Institute of Slovenian Ethnology of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts on 'Walking as an Ethnological and Anthropological Research Methodology' in which four types of walking within academic research and production were critically analysed. The final paper in the group, 'Welcome in the Land of Slivovic: On Everyday, Culinary and Tourist Nationalism' by Jernej Mlekuž from the Slovenian Migration Institute of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts based on the content analysis of newspapers from 1918–1945 open and rounded a sparkling debate of the section.

The fourth group started with 'Intercultural Communication and Perceptions of (In)Equality' presented by Karmen Medica from the Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska who touched upon the sense of belonging, social cohesion and dialogical communication in public spaces, topics that connected to spatial categories in other presentations through a different discursive lens. The younger group of researchers and PhD students from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana Veronika Zavratnik, Ana Svetel and Blaž Bajič presented their research in the area of Solčava entitled 'Imagined Communities, Communal Imagining: Land, Family and (Un)Changeability' in which they integrated parts of Vranješ's spatial conceptualizations and were lively discussants. The contested topic of authenticity was introduced in a paper '50 Shades of Authenticity: What Do We Want?' by Zrinka Mileusnić and Boris Kavur from the Institute/Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska. The tension between the tourism studies and archaeology approaches to cultural heritage was discussed with empirical cases that highlighted the double view as it were.

In the 5th group another pair of linguists from the Department of Cultural Tourism, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, University of Primorska Tina Orel Frank and Nina Lovec tackled the comparative use of 'eco' and 'eko' as in *ekoturizem*, *ecomuseo*, *eco-conscious* in English, Slovenian and Italian within a frame of the contemporary globalized linguistic co-creations and internationalization. The potentials of 'Accessible Tourism on Lake Balaton' was discussed by Zorana Medarić, from the same department based on research that aimed to evaluate the state of the art of accessibility in terms of information, transport, service and tourist attractions. The final paper, 'Water and the Leaf: Dialogical Imagination and Hospitality of Asian Tea Houses' by Irena Weber from the same department aimed to combine the historical and artistic representations of tea culture through the lens of literature and film with personal reflections on Vranješ's outdoor dedicated activities and the Zen Buddhist approach to the motif of loss and death in the contexts of contemporary Asian films.

The symposium was wrapped up by the concise presentation of the recent volume dedicated to Matej Vranješ *Potentials of Tourism Development in UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Slovenia* published by the University of Primorska Press that was co-edited by Vranješ and presented by his co-editors Aleš Gačnik and Tadeja Jere Jakulin from the Department of Cultural Tourism at the Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, University of Primorska whose members were part of the research project discussed in the edited volume.

While the symposium was rather more emotionally charged than such events customary are, one of the agreed outcomes was the relevance and benefit of a small scale diverse academic encounter which led to the suggestion of a future biannual symposium on a shared topic(s).