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of Our Worlds

Otočenje naših svetov

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An early morning wake-up call. A cup of coffee, a glance at the news, and a quick scroll through the phone: “Politicians call Israel’s blockade of aid into Gaza a ‘disgrace.’” A morning jog with earphones in. A notification from a Facebook group for cat lovers and a request to temporarily foster an abandoned kitten. Likes from like-minded users in small, interest-based communities. A drive to the daycare centre, birthday invitations for the following week. An escape from the stress of daily life, or the quiet acceptance of another obligation? Daydreaming of vacations, deliberately ignoring bad news, getting through the workday (with or without procrastination), hoping for more time with friends and family, increasing detachment from a stressful environment, envy-filled escapes on Facebook, liking photos of faraway places ...

... Isolation, escapism, digitalisation, fragmentation, insularisation?

Our everyday lives and sometimes overwhelming experiences of the world, despite the seemingly autonomous decisions that shape our individual paths, inevitably unfold in numerous, diverse, and overlapping processes. New forms of subjectivity and diasporic citizenship are emerging in worlds shaped by digital communication, forms that anthropologist Massimo Canevacci (2012) explores through the concept of digital ubiquity. Ubiquity implies an all-pervasive, sensory presence that transcends the traditional binary divisions of the world we usually perpetuate. The world once split into nature and culture, virtual and real, connection and isolation, objectivity and subjectivity is gradually dissolving, leaving us washed ashore in worlds that are entangled. According to Canevacci, the digital is not merely a form of technology, but rather a “logical-expressive potentiality that enables the flow of fragmented subjectivities which emerge, disperse, and reassemble in the currents of pixelated air” (2012: 265). Consequently, in the multiplicity of their experiences, subjects become “multividuals”, a term Canevacci uses to describe individuals who, in their multiplicity and fluidity, in their omnipresence and pervasive plurality, exist in the plural through various “selves”, just like the worlds in which they live. Consequently, one can easily ask the question: what does “place” actually mean today? What kinds of manifestations does it appear in, and how do utopias, dystopias, bubbles, and placelessness relate to what we consider “place”? Where does insularisation come into our understanding of these phenomena?

The world we live in today is characterised by a high degree of interconnectivity, interdependence, and an overwhelming amount of information. As we navigate this increasingly complex world, it is important to recognise that isolation still exerts an attraction that captures our imagination, invades our daydreams and shapes our desires. For many people, romantic notions of secluded and remote places are still tantalising utopias that evoke ideas of isolation, remoteness, and detachment from everyday worries. This is why islands, with their promise of being cut off from the rest of the world and immersed in a rhythm characterised by simplicity and a slower pace of life, hold a special place in people's imaginations. As Godfrey Baldacchino (2012) noted, however, this island appeal arises from insularism or the contemporary branding of islands, where the deliberately stereotypical self-presentation of islanders is mixed with the exotic expectations of non-islanders. Despite the prevailing critique of reductionism and generalisation in anthropology, romanticised images of island life owe their seductive power to the long *durée* of Western imagination and history (Gillis 2004). Although they bear little resemblance to a conceptually shrinking, interdependent world, and the heterogeneity of lived experience, these images continue to enchant us and stimulate our imagination. Island metaphors and island-related experiences have a huge impact on how we perceive ourselves and others, even in environments that are not islands, leading to a kind of insularisation that has little to do with actual islands. Whether it's spatially isolated areas that make us think in island metaphors, cultural phenomena that emphasize island imagery, or oases with different temporal rhythms that emerge amidst the hustle and bustle of cities, it's hard to deny that island concepts are ubiquitous in today's world.

In this thematic issue of *Svetovi/Worlds: Journal for Ethnology, Anthropology and Folkloristics*, we explore the complex cultural and social worlds that characterise our daily lives and that are often presented as isolated. By re-mapping these complex processes that set archipelagos of thoughts, ideas and practises in motion, we hope to gain new insights that go beyond the usual assumptions of spatially distant and self-contained domains. Our research of insularisation highlights the importance of re-evaluating our assumptions about isolation and islands, tracing their fragments in everyday life, and considering the ways in which spatial, temporal, metaphorical, cultural, and experiential notions of insularity blur and intersect to insularise our world.

The thematic issue of the journal begins with a contribution by Andrew Halliday, who notes that the Covid-19 pandemic has revived the anthropologically already deconstructed concept of insularity in the social imagination, planning and lifestyles. Based on the study of the "Atlantic Bubble", a travel-restricted area established in Eastern Canada during Covid, the author introduces and explains the concepts of "Covid islands" and "Covid archipelagos". These are metaphorical or imaginary island constructs that enable the investigation of changing island identities, insularisation, and insularity. Covid islands and archipelagos offered an enforced sense of safety and a real sense of isolation and remoteness from the global pandemic.

Building on the theme of isolation, though in a different cultural setting, Ana Perinić Lewis and Tomislav Oroz analyse lifestyle migrants on the island of Hvar (Croatia). Based

on ethnographic material from two time periods, authors explore the diversity of migration experiences through the concept of insularisation, which encompasses both distance and isolation from previous ways of life on the one hand, and the migrants' need to connect with island communities on the other. The search for "the good life" reflects their desire to settle down and re-connect with themselves. The authors note that due to their lifestyle and outsider position, migrants are often more connected to each other than to the local community, especially because of language barriers, and this can lead to the creation of social "micro-islands" within the island community.

Complementing the exploration of migration and community, Nežka Struc examines how metaphorical islands are inspired by processes of solidarity and sustainability. She discusses the importance of self-organised local food supply networks in Maribor (Slovenia) as a key factor in preventing food deserts and ensuring a sustainable food supply in an urban environment. The practices within the self-organised food supply networks represent "archipelagos" of solidarity economy that open up space for the distribution of locally produced food. These networks, which at first glance appear to be closed and far removed from the general distribution of food, maintain links between urban and rural areas and strengthen resilience to corporate food systems.

The transcendence of spatial fragmentation, usually associated with the process of insularisation, through neoliberal practices is discussed in Alina Bezlaj's paper. She examines the two moral orders that shape life in Ballymun, a working-class suburb of Dublin (Ireland): the "old Ballymun" before the renovation and the "new Ballymun" after. The regeneration, guided by neoliberal Third Way policies, aimed to transform the area materially and socially, putting in place a new moral vision. The main aim of the regeneration was to free the residents from welfare dependency, reintegrate the suburb into the market economy, and integrate Ballymun into the wider urban area. However, these goals were not unanimously accepted by the residents. The article shows how moral values are embedded in the everyday practices that characterise the neighbourhood.

David Christopher examines the ambiguous processes of connectivity and isolation in the context of digitalisation, critiquing Castells's *Information Age* trilogy. According to Christopher, neglecting the social phenomena that lead to isolation, both online and offline, is reflected in the emergence of "network cities", which today are no longer merely physical communities but also exist as virtual and digital entities, such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. These cities operate between the broader network society and smaller networked communities. They are fragmented by linguistic and national differences, facilitate capitalist transactions, and are marked by the phenomenon of virtual social homophily, including associations with "equals", social narcissism, and idealised virtual identities. In such virtual environments, community and intimacy are intertwined with alienation and anonymity.

In her article, Tatiana Bajuk Senčar examines the intertwining of seclusion and connectedness in Bohinj, an alpine tourist destination in Slovenia. She is interested in how Bohinj has been established and has changed over time as a "remote" destination and how this notion is reflected in everyday life, especially through the prism of tourism seasonality. An impor-

tant starting point is the understanding of remoteness not only as a geographical fact but as a socially constructed concept that encompasses perceptions, representations, and practices.

Filip Škiljan, Ivana Škiljan, and Nataša Kathleen Ružić examine the case of the island of Žirje (Croatia), whose geographical position is haunted by socio-political isolation but is marked by processes of solidarity in practice. The authors analyse data from interviews with thirteen inhabitants of the island, focusing on life during socialism (1945–1991). Oral histories are an important source of information, especially when no or very few archival documents exist. The study shows how its location and socio-political forces shaped the social fabric and economy of the island. Everyday life on Žirje during socialism was characterised by isolation and limited access to resources and services, poverty, male migration, matrifocality – and a strong sense of community and solidarity.

The text collected in this issue explore the dialectic between connectivity (integration, community) and isolation (seclusion, alienation, insularity, food desert). This ambivalence serves as a heuristic starting point in many of the papers as well as a key to understanding contemporary social and cultural processes. In most of the articles, ethnography in the broadest sense is presented as a focal point for exploring the complex and dynamic interactions between people, space, and culture, enabling a nuanced understanding of both the material conditions and the symbolic meanings that people ascribe to their environment.

The articles emphasize that material conditions and environments (geographical location, infrastructure, economic conditions) form the basis for the emergence of symbolic meanings, representations, and identities. At the same time, these symbolic interpretations and ideas actively shape material practices and experiences. It is a dynamic and dialectical relationship. Spatial concepts (island, destination, neighbourhood, city, rural-urban) are interwoven with social processes (migration, tourism, seasonality, moralisation, solidarity), identities (insularity, remoteness, alienation), and temporality (seasonality, the past, socialism, the pandemic). Geographical, social, and cultural spaces are interdependent and constantly changing.

The authors explicitly or implicitly problematise insularisation as a multi-layered phenomenon: not only geographical, but also social, cultural, symbolic, and even digital. Insularisation figures as ambivalent: on the one hand, it implies isolation and separation, but on the other, it opens up new forms of connection, solidarity, and identity. As such, insularisation is dynamic and related to the Other (archipelagos, world systems, humans), experiential, and culturally constructed, and can be studied as everyday practices as well as imaginations, morals, and memories. Insularisation may imply isolation, but it goes beyond that, serving as a conceptual re-examination of the island metaphor in a contemporary world marked by atomisation, fragmentation, and social (dis)connection.

The thematic block of the journal was partially created as part of the *Ethnological Research of Cultural Knowledge, Practices and Forms of Socialities* research programme (Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana; P6-0194, 2022–2027), funded by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency (ARIS); the *Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia* project (Institute of Slovenian

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The second part of this issue consists of a review, an interview, and two reports. Lil-ing Yang reflects on the book *Sensory Environmental Relationships: Between Memories of the Past and Imaginings of the Future*, edited by Blaž Bajič and Ana Svetel (2023).

Tisa Kučan Lah spoke to Dr Tanja Ahlin, who researches the use of digital technologies in the health and care sector and how they are intertwined with other interpersonal relationships. Ahlin argues in favour of a “bottom-up” approach to the introduction of technology in healthcare, as solutions that arise from people’s actual needs have been shown to be much more effective and accepted by users.

Sarah Lunaček reports on the symposium *Social Inequalities and Environmental Injustices*, which she organised at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology in Ljubljana in April 2025. The symposium and workshops were attended by academics from African and Slovenian universities.

Neža Vadnjan and Astrid Vončina report on Nataša Rogelja Caf’s guest appearance at the 33rd *Šmitkov večer* (Šmitek evening). Among other things, the guest speaker presented her work on walking as a methodological tool and the importance of semi-literary writing for reaching a wider audience.

Many thanks to all the authors and the technical staff of the editorial team who have made this issue possible.

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Zgodnje jutranje prebujanje. Jutranja kava, hiter pogled na svetovne novice in hitro pomikanje po zaslonu telefona: »Politiki izraelsko blokado pomoči v Gazi imenujejo ‚sramota‘.« Jutranji tek s slušalkami. Obvestilo iz Facebook skupine ljubiteljev mačk in prošnja za začasno rejništvo zapuščenega mucka. Všečki podobno mislečih uporabnikov v majhnih interesnih skupnostih. Vožnja v vrtec, vabila za rojstni dan za naslednji teden. Pobeg od stresnega vsakdana ali tiho sprejemanje obveznosti? Sanjanje o počitnicah, namerno preslišanje slabih novic, prebijanje čez delovni dan (z odlašanjem ali brez), upanje na več časa s prijatelji in družino, odmaknjenost od stresnega okolja, zavistni pobegi na Facebooku, všečkanje fotografij oddaljenih krajev ...

... Izolacija, eskapizem, digitalizacija, fragmentacija, otočenje?

Naše vsakdanje življenje in včasih prevladujoče izkušnje sveta se, kljub navidezno avtonomnim odločitvam, ki oblikujejo naše individualne poti, neizogibno odvijajo v pluralnih, raznolikih in prekrivajočih se procesih. V svetovih, ki jih oblikuje digitalna komunikacija, se pojavljajo nove oblike subjektivnosti in državljanstva v diaspori, oblike, ki jih antropolog Massimo Canevacci (2012) raziskuje na podlagi koncepta digitalne vseprisotnosti. Vseprisotnost pomeni čutno prisotnost, ki presega tradicionalne binarne delitve sveta. Svet, ki je bil nekoč razdeljen na naravo in kulturo, virtualno in resnično, povezanost in izolacijo, objektivnost in subjektivnost, se postopoma raztaplja in nas pušča na obalah zapletenih svetov. Po mnenju Canevaccija digitalno ni le oblika tehnologije, temveč »logično-ekspresivni potencial, ki omogoča pretok fragmentiranih subjektivitet, ki se pojavljajo, razpršijo in ponovno sestavljajo v tokovih pikseliziranega zraka« (2012: 265). Posledično individui v množici svojih izkušenj postanejo *multividui* (ang. multividuais), izraz, ki ga Canevacci uporablja za opis posameznikov, ki v svoji mnogoterosti in fluidnosti, v svoji vseprisotnosti in prodorni pluralnosti obstajajo v množini skozi različne »jaze«, tako kot svetovi, v katerih živijo. Zato se lahko zlahka vprašamo: kaj danes dejansko pomeni »kraj«? Kakšne manifestacije zavzema kraj danes in kako so utopije, distopije, mehurčki ter brezprostornost povezani s tem, kar smatramo za kraj? In kje je *otočenje* (insularizacija) v razumevanju teh pojavov?

Za svet, v katerem živimo danes, sta značilni visoka stopnja medsebojne povezanosti in soodvisnosti ter ogromna količina informacij. Ko krmarimo po tem, vse bolj zapletenem svetu, je pomembno priznati, da izolacija še vedno buri našo domišljijo, vdira v naše sanjarjenje in oblikuje naše želje. Za mnoge ljudi so romantične predstave o osamljenih in oddaljenih krajih še vedno vznemirljive utopije, ki vzbujajo ideje o izolaciji, oddaljenosti in odmaknjenosti od vsakodnevnih skrbi. Zaradi teh idej imajo otoki posebno mesto v domišljiji ljudi, saj jim obljublajo, da bodo odrezani od preostalega sveta in potopljene v življenje, ki ga zaznamujeta preprostost in počasnejši tempo. Vendar, kot je opozoril Godfrey Baldacchino (2012), ta otoška privlačnost izhaja iz otoškosti ali sodobnega označevanja otokov, kjer se namerno stereotipna samopredstavitve otočanov meša z eksotičnimi pričakovanji neotočanov. Kljub prevladujoči kritiki redukcionalizma in posploševanja v antropologiji romantizirane otoške podobe vztrajajo, svojo zapeljivo moč pa dolgujejo dolgemu trajanju zahodne zgodovine in domišljije (Gillis 2004). Čeprav so malo podobne konceptualno skrčenemu, soodvisnemu svetu in heterogenosti življenjske izkušnje, nas te podobe še naprej očarujejo in spodbujajo našo domišljijo. Otoške metafore in izkušnje, povezane z otoki, imajo velik vpliv na to, kako dojemamo sebe in druge, tudi v okoljih, ki niso otoki, kar vodi do neke vrste otočenja, ki nima veliko opraviti z dejanskimi otoki. Ne glede na to, ali gre za prostorsko izolirana območja, ki nas spodbujajo k razmišljanju v otoških metaforah, kulturne pojave, ki poudarjajo otoške podobe, ali oaze z različnimi časovnimi ritmi, ki se pojavljajo sredi mestnega vrveža, je težko zanikati, da so otoški koncepti v današnjem svetu vseprisotni.

V tematski številki revije *Svetovi* raziskujemo preplet kompleksnih kulturnih in družbenih svetov, ki so značilni za naše vsakdanje življenje in so pogosto predstavljeni kot izolirani. Upamo, da bomo s ponovnim preslikavanjem teh zapletenih procesov, ki sprožajo arhipelage misli, idej in praks, pridobili nove vpoglede, ki presegajo običajne predpostavke prostorsko oddaljenih in samozadostnih domen. Naše preučevanje otočenja poudarja pomen ponovnega ovrednotenja predpostavk o izolaciji in otokih, sledenja njihovim fragmentom v vsakdanjem življenju in razmišljanja o načinih, kako se prostorski, časovni, metaforični, kulturni in izkustveni pojmi otoške narave zameglijo in križajo, da bi izolirali naš svet.

Tematsko številko revije začnemo s prispevkom Andrewa Hallidaya, ki ugotavlja, da je pandemija covid-19 oživila že dekonstruirani antropološki koncept izoliranosti v družbeni domišljiji, načrtovanju in življenjskem slogu. Na podlagi študije »Atlantskega mehurčka« – covidne regije v vzhodni Kanadi – avtor uvaja in pojasnjuje koncepta »covidnih otokov« in »covidnega otočja«. Gre za metaforične ali namišljene otoške konstrukte, ki omogočajo raziskovanje spreminjajočih se otoških identitet, otočenja in otoškosti. Covidni otoki in arhipelagi so ponudili okrepljen občutek varnosti in izolacije od svetovne pandemije.

Na temo izolacije, čeprav v drugačnem kulturnem okolju, Ana Perinić Lewis in Tomislav Oroz analizirata migrante zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga na otoku Hvaru (Hrvaška). Avtorja raziskujeta raznolikost migracijskih izkušenj s primerjavo etnografskega gradiva iz dveh časovnih obdobj in na podlagi koncepta otočenja, ki zajema tako oddaljenost kot izolacijo od prejšnjih načinov življenja na eni strani ter potrebo migrantov po povezovanju z otoškimi skupnostmi na drugi strani. Iskanje »dobrega življenja« odraža njihovo željo, da

bi se ustalili in ponovno povezali s samimi seboj. Avtorja ugotavljata, da so migranti pogosto bolj povezani med seboj kot z lokalno skupnostjo, zaradi svojega življenjskega sloga in outsiderskega položaja, zlasti zaradi jezikovnih ovir, kar lahko privede do ustvarjanja socialnih »mikrootokov« znotraj otoške skupnosti.

Nežka Struc dopolnjuje raziskovanje migracij in skupnosti. Piše, kako metaforične družbene otoke navdihujejo procesi solidarnosti in trajnosti. Razpravlja o pomenu samoorganiziranih lokalnih omrežij za oskrbo s hrano v Mariboru kot ključnega dejavnika pri preprečevanju prehranskih puščav in zagotavljanju trajnostne preskrbe s hrano v urbanem okolju. Prakse znotraj samoorganiziranih omrežij za oskrbo s hrano predstavljajo »arhipelage« solidarnostne ekonomije, ki odpirajo prostor za razdeljevanje lokalno pridelane hrane. Te mreže, ki se na prvi pogled zdijo zaprte in daleč od splošne distribucije hrane, ohranjajo povezave med mestnimi in podeželskimi območji ter krepijo lokalno odpornost na korporativne prehranske sisteme.

Transcendenco prostorske fragmentacije, ki jo običajno povezujemo s procesom otočenja, skozi neoliberalne prakse obravnava Alina Bezljaj. Preučuje dve moralni ureditvi, ki oblikujeta življenje v Ballymunu, delavskem predmestju Dublina (Irska): »stari Ballymun«, pred prenovo, in »novi Ballymun«, po njej. Obnova, ki jo je vodila neoliberalna politika Tretje poti, je bila namenjena materialni in družbeni preobrazbi območja z novimi moralnimi vizijami. Glavni cilj prenove je bil osvoboditi prebivalce odvisnosti od socialnega varstva, ponovno vpeljati predmestje v tržno gospodarstvo in vključiti Ballymun v širše mestno območje. Vendar te vizije prebivalci niso soglasno sprejeli. Članek prikazuje, kako so moralne vrednote vgrajene v vsakdanje prakse, ki so značilne za sosesko.

Dvoumne procese povezljivosti in izolacije v kontekstu digitalizacije preučuje David Christopher, ki kritizira Castellsovo trilogijo *Informacijska doba*. Po mnenju Christopherja se zanemarjanje družbenih pojavov, ki vodijo v izolacijo, tako na spletu kot zunaj njega, odraža v nastanku »omrežnih mest«, ki danes niso več le fizične skupnosti, temveč obstajajo tudi kot virtualne in digitalne entitete, kot so Facebook, Instagram in TikTok. Ta mesta delujejo med širšo mrežno družbo in manjšimi omrežnimi skupnostmi. Razdrobljena so z jezikovnimi in nacionalnimi razlikami, olajšujejo kapitalistične transakcije in so zaznamovana s pojavom virtualne družbene homofilije, vključno s povezovanjem z »enakimi«, družbenim narcisizmom in idealiziranimi virtualnimi identitetami. V takšnih virtualnih okoljih sta skupnost in intimnost prepleteni z odtujenostjo in anonimnostjo.

Tatiana Bajuk Senčar v svojem članku raziskuje prepletanje osamljenosti in povezanosti v Bohinju, alpski destinaciji v Sloveniji. Zanima jo, kako se je Bohinj sčasoma uveljavil in spreminjal kot »oddaljena« destinacija ter kako se ta pojem odraža v vsakdanjem življenju domačinov, predvsem skozi prizmo turistične sezone. Pomembno izhodišče je razumevanje oddaljenosti ne le kot geografskega dejstva, temveč kot družbeno konstruiranega koncepta, ki zajema zaznave, predstave in prakse.

Primer otoka Žirje (Hrvaška), katerega geografski položaj povzroča družbeno-politično izolacijo, na ravni prakse pa ga zaznamujejo procesi solidarnosti, v svojem prispevku preučujejo Filip Škiljan, Ivana Škiljan in Nataša Kathleen Ružić. Avtorji analizirajo podatke

iz intervjujev s trinajstimi prebivalci otoka Žirje, s poudarkom na življenju v času socializma (1945–1991). Ustna zgodovina je pomemben vir informacij, še posebej, če ni arhivskih dokumentov ali pa jih je zelo malo. Študija kaže, kako so lokacija otoka in družbeno-politične sile oblikovale družbeno tkivo ter gospodarstvo otoka. Vsakdanje življenje na Žirju v času socializma so zaznamovali izolacija ter omejen dostop do virov in storitev, revščina, delovno odseljevanje moških, matrifokalnost – ter močan občutek skupnosti in solidarnosti.

Zbrana besedila raziskujejo dialektiko med povezljivostjo (integracija, skupnost) in izolacijo (osamljenost, odtujenost, otoška lega, prehranska puščava). Ta ambivalentnost je hevristično izhodišče številnih člankov ter predstavlja ključ do razumevanja sodobnih družbenih in kulturnih procesov. V večini člankov je etnografija predstavljena kot osrednja metoda za raziskovanje kompleksnih in dinamičnih interakcij med ljudmi, prostorom in kulturo, kar omogoča niansirano razumevanje materialnih razmer ter simbolnih pomenov, ki jih ljudje pripisujejo svojemu okolju.

Članki izpostavljajo, da so materialno okolje (geografska lega, infrastruktura, gospodarske razmere) osnova za nastanek simbolnih pomenov, predstav in identitet. Hkrati te simbolne interpretacije in ideje aktivno oblikujejo materialne prakse in izkušnje. To je dinamičen in dialektičen odnos. *Prostorski koncepti* (otok, destinacija, soseska, mesto, podeželje – urbano) se v besedilih prepletajo z *družbenimi procesi* (migracije, turizem, sezonskost, moralizacija, solidarnost), *identitetami* (otoška lega, oddaljenost, odtujenost) in *časovnostjo* (sezonskost, preteklost, socializem, pandemija). Geografski, družbeni in kulturni prostori so medsebojno odvisni in se nenehno spreminjajo.

Avtorji eksplisitno ali implicitno problematizirajo *otočenje* kot večplasten pojav: ne le geografsko, temveč tudi družbeno, kulturno, simbolno in celo digitalno. Otočenje je ambivalentno: na eni strani pomeni izolacijo in ločenost, po drugi strani pa odpira nove oblike povezovanja, solidarnosti in identitete. Kot tako je otočenje dinamično in povezano z Drugimi (otočji, svetovnimi sistemi, ljudmi). Otočenje je izkustveno in hkrati kulturno konstruirano ter ga je mogoče preučevati na podlagi vsakdanjih praks, pa tudi kot domišljijo, moralo in spomine. Otočenje lahko pomeni izolacijo, vendar sega dlje in je v pomoč pri ponovnem konceptualnem pregledu otoških metafor v sodobnem svetu, ki ga zaznamujejo atomizacija, fragmentacija in družbena (ne)povezanost.

Tematski sklop revije je deloma nastal v okviru raziskovalnega programa *Etnološke raziskave kulturnih znanj, praks in oblik socialnosti* (Oddelek za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo, Filozofska fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani; P6-0194, 2022–2027), ki ga financira Javna agencija za znanstvenoraziskovalno in inovacijski dejavnost Republike Slovenije (ARIS); projekta *Izolirani ljudje in skupnosti v Sloveniji in na Hrvaškem* (Inštitut za slovensko narodopisje, ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana; Inštitut za družbene raziskave, Zagreb; J6-4610, 2022–2025), ki ga financirata ARIS in Hrvaška znanstvena fundacija; ter projekta *Ethnographies of Islandness – Island Migrations, Mobilities and Identifications* (Inštitut za raziskovanje migracij, Zagreb; ETNOTOK, 2024–2027), ki ga financira Evropska unija.

Drugi del te številke prinaša recenzijo, intervju in dve poročili. Liling Yang razmišlja o knjigi *Sensory Environmental Relations: Between Memories of the Past and Imaginings of*

the Future / Čutno-okoljski odnosi: Med spomini na preteklost in zamišljanji prihodnosti, ki sta jo uredila Blaž Bajič in Ana Svetel (2023).

Tisa Kučan Lah se je pogovarjala z dr. Tanjo Ahlin, ki raziskuje uporabo digitalnih tehnologij v zdravstvu in oskrbi ter njihovo prepletanje z drugimi medčloveškimi odnosi. Ahlin se pri uvajanju tehnologije v zdravstvo zavzema za pristop »od spodaj navzgor«, saj se je pokazalo, da so rešitve, ki izhajajo iz dejanskih potreb ljudi, veliko učinkovitejše in jih uporabniki sprejemajo.

Sarah Lunaček poroča o simpoziju *Social Inequalities and Environmental Injustices / Družbene neenakosti in okoljske krivice*, ki ga je aprila 2025 organizirala na Oddelku za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo v Ljubljani. Simpozij in delavnice so združili akademike z afriških in slovenskih univerz.

Neža Vadnjan in Astrid Vončina poročata o gostovanju Nataše Rogelje Caf na 33. Šmitkovem večeru. Gostja je med drugim predstavila svoje delo s hojo kot metodološkim orodjem in pomen polliterarnega pisanja za doseganje širšega občinstva.

Hvala avtoricam in avtorjem ter tehničnemu osebju uredniške ekipe, ki so omogočili izid te številke Svetov.

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»Covidni otoki« in »covidna otočja«: družbeno-prostorske identitete in prostorsko-časovna dinamika otoških imaginarijev med pandemijo covida-19

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ABSTRACT

During the global Covid-19 pandemic, households, communities and regions around the world were faced with the hardening of borders at a variety of jurisdictional and spatial levels. These policy actions saw a sharp rise in insularisation occur as border geographies spurred insularity. The purpose of this paper is to examine this phenomenon and explore how this insular imagery took hold. Jurisdictional islanding in the form of “Covid-islands” and “Covid-archipelagos” is introduced and explained as policy constructs which occurred at both micro and macro levels during the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper then examines Eastern Canada’s Covid-archipelagic “Atlantic Bubble”, constructed by the joint-islanding of the Canadian provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador, as an illustrative case study example. The paper finishes by analysing the sociospatial and temporal dynamics of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, tying to dimensions of culture, territory and society interconnected amongst prior concepts and paradigms of island understanding. Islanding in the Covid-19 era brought us back to the notion of seclusion and detachment that in a way

echoes the paradigms that had already been deconstructed in the field of island studies. However, the emergence of these sociospatial island imaginaries leads us to re-think insularisation and what it meant to be insularised in the Covid-19 period.

KEYWORDS: insularity, island studies, Covid-19, Covid-islands, Covid-archipelagos, island imaginaries

IZVLEČEK

Med globalno pandemijo Covida-19 so se gospodinjstva, skupnosti in regije po vsem svetu soočale z utrjevanjem meja na različnih ravneh, bodisi v pravnem ali prostorskem smislu. Zaradi teh ukrepov je na podlagi spodbud mejnih geografskih območij prišlo do močnega povečanja izolacije ali otočenja. Namen tega prispevka je preučiti ta pojav in raziskati, kako se je uveljavila ta podoba izoliranosti. Razložena sta koncepta »covidnih otokov« in »covidnih otočij«, ki sta se pojavila kot obliki pravnega otočenja ali izolacije, kot konstrukta politik, ki so se med pandemijo pojavile na mikro in makro ravni. Kot študija primera je predstavljen t. i. »atlantski mehurček«, covidno otočje na vzhodu Kanade, ki so ga sestavljale province New Brunswick, Nova Škotska, Otok princa Edvarda ter Nova Fundlandija in Labrador. Sledi analiza socialno-prostorske in časovne dinamike covidnih otokov in covidnih otočij, povezanih z razsežnostmi kulture, ozemlja in družbe, ki so medsebojno prepletene s koncepti in paradigmami razumevanja otokov. Otočenje nas je v času Covida-19 znova približalo pojmu osamitve in odmaknjenosti, ki na nek način odraža paradigme, ki so bile na področju otoških študij že dekonstruirane. Vendar nas pojav teh socialno-prostorskih otoških imaginarij vodi k novemu razmišljanju o izolaciji in o tem, kaj je to pomenilo v obdobju Covida-19.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: otoškost, otoške študije, Covid-19, covidni otoki, covidna otočja, otoški imaginarij

INTRODUCTION

The insularisation of our worlds speaks to a phenomenon of islanding across several disciplines and domains in a non-geographic sense. Moving beyond the realm of geographic islands, this paper seeks to engage with this concept through the prism of the Covid-19 pandemic. The intention is to explore the pursuit of insularity and islandness as an island imaginary, beyond traditional geographic definitions and contemplations of islands.

In this particular issue, the editors “aim to explore the complex cultural and social worlds that shape our everyday lives and that are often portrayed as isolated”, the goal being to “gain new insights that go beyond the usual assumptions of spatially distant and self-contained domains” (Oroz and Simonič 2023: 151). This article presents an interpretation of insularisation present during the Covid-19 pandemic, which offers a new insight into multiple spatial and temporal insular dynamics that shaped realities during that time. Presented within this paper are new islanded and insular concepts of “Covid-islands” and “Covid-archipelagos”. These island constructs, Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, embody the social and discursive construction of islands, as to how they are conceptualised and appear in geographical imaginaries. Emerging during the Covid-19 pandemic, Covid-

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islands and Covid-archipelagos stretch across the domains of politics, economy and society and occurred at both the individual/household (micro) and regional/jurisdictional (macro) levels. These occurrences placed a focal point, reinforced by government policy actions, on insular imagery. This new concept of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos provides a fresh lens through which island identities, insularity, and islandness can be observed and studied.

This paper is in the anthropological tradition, by an interdisciplinary island scholar residing in Prince Edward Island, Canada, who experienced the Covid-archipelago of the subnational Canadian “Atlantic Bubble” firsthand. The methods employed include ethnographic writing and autoethnographic reflections through field notes, documents, and shared verbal conversations. The researcher was a policy practitioner working in the executive branch of government during the Covid-19 pandemic, directly supporting senior officials. This paper, and a broader associated research project, seek to understand the islanded experience of the regional Atlantic Bubble and the unique societal and cultural contexts of such insular imaginaries. Thus, a duality of experiences was observed from inside the governmental policy response efforts and the broader social and cultural interaction and responses occurring outside.

This paper introduces the concept of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos as new islanded, insular constructs as frames of inquiry, highlighted by the illustrative Atlantic Bubble case study, with these sociospatial island imaginaries. There is no literature to date on non-geographic islanded constructs in the Covid context, and in addressing this gap, this paper in part broadens the understanding of the application of islandness and insularity in these instances.

Initially, the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos will be described and placed within the sociospatial and temporal contexts. Next, the case of the Atlantic Bubble will be discussed and explained as an experienced and observed phenomenon, and as an illustrative case study of a Covid-archipelago. Lastly, this concept will be analysed and situated within the broader contexts of the society, culture, and history which informed and shaped it.

FRAMING THE ARCHIPELAGO: ARCHIPELAGIC UNDERSTANDINGS AND THINKING

Archipelagic thinking and this understanding are central to this paper and the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos advanced herein. Conceptualisations of archipelagic conditions have encouraged scholars to consider the interplay between and amongst island spaces and the connecting mediums. In the field of island studies, the seminal work of Hau’ofa reoriented Oceania (the Pacific) as a connecting medium, rather than as a barrier, creating “a ‘sea of islands’ as opposed to “islands in a far sea” (Hau’ofa 1994: 7). Stratford et al. (2011) sought to advance the concept of “island and island” relations within the humanities and social sciences after identifying two dominant topological relations in scholarship, those of land and sea, and island and continent/mainland. An island-island understanding of thinking with the archipelago is championed, with a stated desire “to articulate new

research agendas to explore alternative cultural geographies and alternative performances, representations and experiences of islands” (Stratford et al 2011: 114). Further concepts such as aquapelagos (Hayward 2012) encourage scholars to consider the relationship and the intertwined nature of the maritime medium.

Recent scholarship in island studies has further expanded upon what has been termed “archipelagic thinking” (Pugh 2013; Stephens and Martinez-San Miguel 2020). Archipelagic thinking has been outlined as “denaturaliz[ing] the conceptual basis of space and place” (Pugh 2013: 9). In their edited volume *Contemporary Archipelagic Thinking*, Stephens and Martinez-San Miguel outlined their definition of an archipelago:

not only as a system of islands but also as a set of humanly constructed relations between individual locations (islands, ports, cities, forts, metropolises, communities). The archipelagic is conceived, therefore, as a set of relations that articulates cultural and political formations (collectivities, communities, societies), modes of interpreting and inhabiting the world (epistemologies), and symbolic imaginaries (as a poetic but also as habitus). (2020: para. 31)

Indeed, this focal text equipped with this definition sets forth to employ the archipelago as:

a lens that may allow us to engage in interdisciplinary conversations about the ways in which space and time are resignified. These resignifications occur and recur in a complex set of human, object, and (natural or built) surface relations that can congeal into a particular meaning, which can then also become permanent or remain ephemeral. In our understanding, the archipelago calls for a meaning-making and rearticulation that responds to human experiences traversing space and time. Archipelagoes happen, congeal, take place. They are not immanent or natural categories existing independently of interpretation. Yet they can also become an episteme, an imaginary, a way of thinking, a poetic, a hermeneutic, a method of inquiry, a system of relations. They are painful and generative, implicated in native cosmologies or cosmo-visions, or assembled as part of imperial/colonial undertakings. They can refer to multidimensional, focal, spatial forms of thinking that emerge from concrete relationships with inhabited spaces. (Stephens and Martinez-San Miguel 2020: para. 6)

In exploring archipelagic thinking and understandings and engaging with them in the development of the linked concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, it is also important to consider the area of border studies, looking at how borders and boundaries are constructed and conceptualised, as they represent an important aspect of this story.

INSULARITY, BORDER, BOUNDARIES AND TIDEMARKS

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the term “insular” as “of, relating to, or constituting an island” (Merriam-Webster 2024). The etymology of the term is from Late Latin “insularis” and the Latin “insula”, which means “island” (Merriam-Webster 2024). Cultural insularity is readily associated with islands (Shell 2014). Likewise, Simonič (2017) notes that the sea offers both demarcation but also openness to islands, contrasting this against the Alpine topography and the closure and closeness it represents. For islands, travelling across both time and space, distances and “temporal depth” lend to this islanded insularity (Gillis 2001:

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39). The duality of the marine space in serving as both a boundary and a connector is a key point in the relational aspect of an islanded or insular identity. Zilmer notes “the fusion of island symbolism and pragmatism” (2011: 35) characterised by dimensions of both separation and interaction in explaining the power and purpose of insular island settings in old-Norse literature. This fusion with the island as a literary setting and device echoes the duality of marine space, and there are clear parallels to the symbolism and pragmatism in the island imagery of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos. Further, in contemporary times, it has been suggested that remoteness is “something achieved rather than found” (Gillis 2001: 40).

The Covid-19 pandemic, which began in 2020, led to the proliferation of the significant hardening of borders at international and subnational levels worldwide. This was exceptionally visible with geographic islands at both terrestrial and maritime borders and boundaries (Agius et al. 2022; Halliday 2024). In drafting our understanding of borders and boundaries, the literature spans across social science disciplines. In broadening our understanding of borders and boundaries, the following quotations from sociologist Georg Simmel are a fine starting point:

The boundary is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences, but a sociological fact that forms itself spatially. (Simmel 1997: 142, as cited in Paasi 2012: 2303)

The border is not a spatial fact with sociological consequences but rather a sociological fact that is shaping up spatially. (Simmel 1992: 697, as cited in Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 353-354)

These quotations from the sociological tradition interchange the terms “border” and “boundary”, which brings to mind the slightly different considerations and meanings of these terms. Reverting once again to the dictionary, the Cambridge dictionary defines a “boundary” as “a real or imagined line that marks the edge or limit of something” (Cambridge 2024). A “boundary” is afforded the imaginary domain, while a “border” remains in reality and is seemingly firmer for it. Borders are also identified as “metaphors” for the reasoning that “they are arbitrary constructions based upon cultural convention” (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 349). Similarly, recent scholarship has suggested tidemarks, a word which combines the “metaphorical and material” found in contemporary border studies (Green 2018: 80). In this, the spatial and temporal are enveloped and considered as “being lively and contingent” (Green 2018: 81).

In considering insularity and insular imagery expressed as Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, the real practising of the hardening of national borders and subnational boundaries saw the transformation, especially visible and tangible in the case of subnational boundaries, into hardened borders. In the case of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, further inspiration is drawn from Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra, and from Simmel for suggesting that “processes of spatial boundaries have their roots in the psychological forces of the soul by which people in a given territory hold together a geographical space” (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 354).

Additionally, Paasi puts forward that:

Contrary to tradition, borders are now rarely conceptualized as separate sociospatial entities. Further, rather than permanent elements, borders are seen as historically contingent institutions that are constituted in and constitutive of the perpetual production and reproduction of territories. The inseparability of borders and territories does not imply that they should form fixed bounded wholes, but rather that they are dispersed sets of power relations that are mobilized for various purposes. (Paasi 2012: 2304)

Green argues that “the location and meaning of borders are always established as a relation, as well as a separation, between locations” (2018: 69). Similarly, borders are noted as a “dynamic process, shifting through time and space” and require causal investigation as to “how, why and when borders are shaped, endure or recede” (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018: 356). From the anthropologic point of view, three major dimensions are associated with borders: cultural, territorial, and social (Donnan, Thomassen and Wydra 2018). Questions arise in the interactions and relations between these three dimensions, and aspects of these dimensions will be further drawn out below.

Having reviewed and discussed archipelagic and aquapelagic understandings and archipelagic thinking, it is now time to introduce and explain the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos.

COVID-ISLANDS AND COVID-ARCHIPELAGOS

As mentioned above, in outlining the concepts of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, this article is presenting these constructs from both a micro or household level and a macro or jurisdictional level. The differences in spatial scale are used to distinguish and describe the scale of these interactions and insular processes which took place. The levels of these frameworks are familiar to social science scholars from several disciplines.

A Covid-island is defined as a definite sociocultural policy construct of an islanded household or jurisdiction with distinct spatial, temporal, and social boundaries, which occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. The insular construction and imagery of Covid-islands arose from the social and physical distancing enforced in many jurisdictions as a policy response to Covid-19, which sought to limit disease transmission. Covid-islands were prolific at the micro-level, as many households experiencing the pandemic were encouraged by local public health officials to limit social contact, and various regimes of isolation and quarantine were enacted at the household level in numerous jurisdictions. In this way, a process of islanding within individual networks occurred.

From a jurisdictional perspective, the hardening of subnational boundaries into firm and hardened borders, alongside the hardening of existing national-level (international) borders, spurred the creation of Covid-islands on the jurisdictional level, where non-island jurisdictions in the geographic sense undertook insular, islanding actions. This form of islanding and insularity was common practice throughout the early waves of the Covid-19 pandemic as jurisdictions and governments attempted to minimise and more closely regulate the movement of peoples guided by epidemiological principles. Both the thickness of the

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border and the level of intrusiveness of policies varied by jurisdiction and so too did the degree of islanding and by extension the relativity of islandness experienced. The variance in these policy settings was found in the structured policy regime issued via public health and/or emergency orders under the respective relevant statutory authority.

By applying archipelagic thinking via different connecting spatial mediums, the development and effect of an archipelagic construct becomes more visible and more tangible in a sense. A Covid-archipelago can be defined as an archipelagic construct consisting of multiple Covid-islands connected via a spatial medium during the Covid-19 pandemic. There are apparent differences in applying concepts such as these at both noted levels. Endless examples undoubtedly abound at the micro and macro levels of tightening borders and social distancing, which in effect is the same enabling factor that brings about the island(ed) identity for those respective peoples, households, and jurisdictions.

At the micro level, as Covid-islands sprung up, islanded identities were formed, and connectivity was key. Households were encouraged to “bubble” with a small number of other households in the same jurisdiction, thus creating micro-level Covid-archipelagos. Individual households were encouraged to keep very small social circles or bubbles and limit contact outside the household in jurisdictions such as New Zealand (NZ Herald 2020), the United States (Stieg 2020), Canada (Pelley 2020) and the United Kingdom (Roberts 2021). Additionally, through the employment of virtual technologies, employing the spatial medium of cyberspace allowed household micro level Covid-islands to ignore physical spatiality, disregarding physical borders, and become micro level Covid-archipelagos with other households located in any geographic context.

At the macro level, during the Covid-19 pandemic, select regions around the globe formed “travel/quarantine bubbles” with imposed hard borders. Examples include the “Trans-Tasman Bubble” of the islands of New Zealand and Australia, the “Bailiwick Bubble” of Guernsey, Herm, Alderney and Sark, the “Atlantic Bubble” of the Canadian provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, and the “Baltic Bubble” of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Such Covid-archipelagos were the embodiment of the micro bubbling idea on a macro scale. The jurisdictions involved shared geographic proximity with firm transportation linkages across transportation mediums but also provided an islanded experience through the easing of intra-regional border and isolation regimes through monopolistic or preferential arrangements. These regional undertakings became safe havens in the global sea of Covid-19 cases and offer a unique class of case study for this conceptual framework. In particular, this paper will focus on the case of the subnational Canadian Atlantic Bubble, which was constructed in 2020 following the initial wave of the pandemic.

THE ATLANTIC BUBBLE: A MACRO-LEVEL COVID-ARCHIPELAGIC CONSTRUCTION IN ATLANTIC CANADA

In the aftermath of the initial wave of the pandemic in 2020, a Covid-archipelago formed called the Atlantic Bubble, which endured for approximately half of the 2020 calendar

year. The Atlantic Bubble encompassed the four most-easterly provinces within Canada: Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Nova Scotia (NS), Prince Edward Island (PEI), and New Brunswick (NB), commonly referred to as Atlantic Canada, covering a land mass of 793,269 square kilometers (Canadian Press, 2022). The four provinces had a combined population of 2,454,850 as of Q2 2020 (StatsCan, 2025).¹ It was announced on 24 June 2020 via the Council of Atlantic Premiers, first appeared on 3 July 2020 and disappeared on 23 November 2020, after the Canadian island province of PEI (connected by the Confederation Bridge to NB, and by seasonal ferry to NS) and the coastal-island province of Newfoundland and Labrador (connected to NS by year-round ferry) suspended their participation, owing to the rising case numbers in NB and NS.

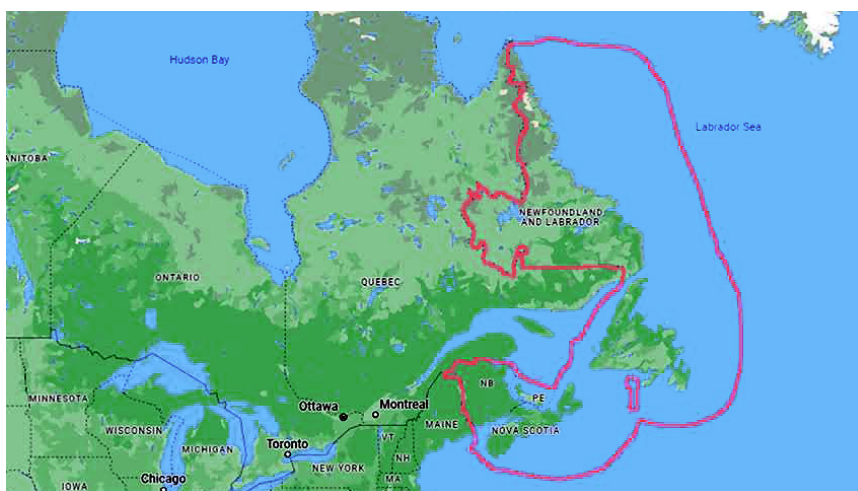


Image 1: Google Map Representation of the Canadian “Atlantic Bubble”

A somewhat unique aspect of this regional construct is that the island province of Prince Edward Island is connected via a bridge to the continental mainland province of New Brunswick, which in turn shares a land border with the continental mainland of Nova Scotia. The island of Newfoundland, as part of the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, is connected via ferry service to Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia, itself connected to the rest of mainland Nova Scotia via a permanent causeway. The territory of Labrador is a continental mainland territory, which solely borders the Canadian province of Quebec and is only connected to the island of Newfoundland via ferry, which actually lands in the province of Quebec, adjacent to the Labrador border.

To understand the Atlantic Bubble, it is important to understand the borders which delineated it both externally and internally. Externally, the Atlantic Bubble (via NB) shared

1

Broken down as follows: NL (527,733), PEI (158,401), NS (986,204), NB (782,512).

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a 513-kilometre terrestrial border with the state of Maine, U.S.A., as well as an international maritime border. An international maritime boundary was also shared with France, by way of its overseas territory of St. Pierre and Miquelon (off the coast of NL). Further, two separate portions of land border, covering approximately 4,000 kilometers, and a maritime border involving a vehicle passenger ferry (to the Îles de la Madeleine) connected it with the Canadian province of Quebec (via NB and PEI respectively).

The Atlantic Bubble involved a targeted and geographically limited easing of travel restrictions for residents of the hardened internal subnational borders within the region, initially established by their respective subnational governments, in concert with measures taken by the federal government to harden international borders in order to limit virus transmission and spread. Each of the four provinces constructed and manned border checkpoints which did not exist prior to the pandemic. It is this hardening and widening of internal subnational borders, alongside the domestic travel restrictions, which gives the Atlantic Bubble a delineated and distinct spatial frame.

In the case of the Atlantic Bubble, as an islander, I watched the hardening and proliferation of our internal, subnational border at the bridge linking our island province to our neighbouring Canadian province of New Brunswick. These efforts, spurred by public health policy, led to the hardening and assembling of a physical border checkpoint. In retrospect, as is standard practice, such a checkpoint was not precisely at the terrestrial edge of our island territory, but within sight of it. In considering such a construction, the employment of concrete road barriers, traffic cones, and painted lines to marshal and constrict inbound traffic wholly changed the pre-pandemic traffic flow, absent of any checkpoint. I came to the realisation that such an interprovincial border had always existed, but owing to the island form usually just as the solid border boundary of the island's shape on a two-dimensional paper map. The island was usually coloured a different colour than our neighbouring continental landmasses to distinguish between the different subnational Canadian provinces. Further, I contemplated the fact that such a provincial border between our island (PEI) and NB, connected via this year-round bridge, actually falls within the midpoint of the connecting Northumberland Strait, the marine aspect more so considered a (maritime) boundary as opposed to a border. With a bridged connection between an island and the mainland, the arrival at the end of the bridge is also deemed as your arrival onto the island.

Given the freedom of movement for Canadian citizens enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, within reasonable limits, such hardened internal borders were entirely foreign to us. The reasonable limits had been located in creating our Covid-island and the subsequent regional Covid-archipelago. Ordinary residents of the four provinces were afforded the opportunity to travel inter-regionally without any quarantine regime, while any approved visitors/travellers from outside (including other Canadians) were subject to a mandatory fourteen-day quarantine period. It should be noted that the creation of the Atlantic Bubble came from the regional intergovernmental institution, the Council of Atlantic Premiers, which is unique in Canada for being the only such permanent, resourced and established body in the country.

There is a clear subnational hierarchy centred on layers of jurisdiction and autonomy in Atlantic Canada. This regional construct itself rests upon the foundation of four subnational provinces that formed the Atlantic Bubble: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador. As provincial jurisdictions, each is an equal member of the Canadian federation with their own governments, which affords them a level of domination comparative to similar subnational islands who do not enjoy such jurisdiction or autonomy.

Insularity was yearned for and felt within the apparent safety of the Atlantic Bubble, as framed by this joint policy action and captured in media narratives giving voice to key policy actors and citizens (Cowan 2020; English and Murphy 2020; Gunn 2020). Residents were quoted by news media speaking favourably of the Atlantic Bubble, with examples such as “they’re just trying to keep us safe. They’re doing a great job,” and “I feel very safe in the Atlantic bubble. It makes me feel very fortunate that we live where we do” (English and Murphy 2020). A non-probability sample poll conducted in August 2020 with over 3,300 respondents found that satisfaction with the Atlantic Bubble policy travel regime/restrictions was high across all four provinces, with PEI and NB both at 90%, NS at 86%, and NL at 76% (MacKinnon, 2020). Individual and collective pressure and responsibility were present in the efforts to maintain this bubbled new normal and see off any threats to this new islanded lifestyle. This manifested through the emotive actions of citizens seeking to confront, act against, or report any infraction or transgression, real or perceived, towards fellow citizens. Examples included out-of-jurisdiction plated vehicles being “plate shamed” through vandalism, written notes or direct confrontation (Wright 2020), or dozens of calls to a government telephone line to report the behaviours of others (Campbell 2020).

THE CULTURAL, TERRITORIAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF COVID-ISLANDS AND COVID-ARCHIPELAGOS

As noted, the anthropologic point of view finds three major dimensions associated with borders: cultural, territorial, and social. So, looking to the literature, how does the new concept of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos engage with the existing islanded concepts and intersect with these dimensions? The territorial aspect of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos has been introduced and discussed above. The delineation of both is captured in the varied spatial scales of both the micro (household) and the macro (jurisdictional), and the bordering integrity of these constructs proved integral to their existence. Alongside the territorial, the dimensions of culture and society will be unpacked and analysed below through the existing literature and conceptions of islanded spatiality, society, connectivity, identity, islandness, island constructing, and island imaginaries.

A core concept to begin with is that of “social islands” advanced by sociologist David Pitt and defined as “relatively small groups of people who consider themselves, and in important symbolic and behavioural indicators are indeed, separate from other groups (i.e. there is a clear social boundary) both horizontally and vertically in the social structure,

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and are usually also discrete in space and time as well” (Pitt 1980: 1052). The study of such a phenomenon should also examine these distinct social groups and their boundaries (Pitt 1980). Indeed, underpinning this proposed frame is the relative nature of island spatiality and “the ability of island spaces to keep objects out (or in)” (Baldacchino 2007: 5). As outlined by Ratter:

For a geography of islands, space and its significance as a factor of influence is a central focus. As a spatial science, geography is concerned with the mutual relationship between space and society in the sense of analyzing and assessing the significance of space for society and, in return, the significance of societal relations for the development of space. Geography is concerned with revealing the structures of island spatiality. (Ratter 2018: 2)

The field of island studies has been framed as “very much about the implications of permeable borders” (Baldacchino 2007: 5). As recently posited, “connection, then, rather than isolation, might be the key to understanding islandness, necessitating reflection on how cultures of mobility and immobility are being experienced” (Foley et al 2023: 9). Island connectivity was a key dynamic which was impacted by travel restrictions and bordering regimes during the pandemic (Agius et al. 2022). As such, from a geographic perspective, Ratter states that an “analysis of the organisation of space can thus provide important insights on the social, political and economic structures and effects at play and how these are themselves subject to changing external and internal forces.” (Ratter 2018: 3) Given the nature and state of the external public health threat brought on by the pandemic, the core concern for leaders and governments was in reducing the transmission of the virus and protecting the health of the population. Public health policy was the primary driver in bordering and quarantine policies, and the collective action of adherence to these decisions shaped and drove the negotiation of accepted social boundaries and increased personal boundaries. Governments encouraged this insularity and shaped the perceptions around such a culture of (im)mobility.

Questions of island identity and the essence of islandness have been at the heart of the field of island studies since its establishment. In his opening chapter ‘Identity Matters’ in his text *Social Identity*, sociologist Richard Jenkins outlines his views on identity and identification, stating that identification is a process which “has to be made to matter” through meaning constructed (2014: 6). The conceptualisation of islandness has been described as “an entangled concept, which requires us to grapple with seeming contradictions” (Foley et al. 2023: 10). Islandness has been defined as “an intervening variable that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant, ways” (Baldacchino 2004). As such it is the “varied spatial and relational contexts that give precise formations of islandness meaning as well as the culturally specific values with which islands are imbued” (Grydehøj 2020: 3). At least one scholar has posited that islandness can be “earned over time” by those residents who are not native-born islanders (Conkling 2007: 198). Writing in the *Geographical Review*, anthropologist Karen Olwig states:

[i]slands attain their meaning within a complex network of interrelationships that involves strong centrifugal as well as centripetal forces. It therefore cannot be assumed that islands continue to have significance as sources of belonging and identification. As sources of belonging, islands are sociocultural constructions that change during the course of people's lives. (Olwig 2007: 272)

According to Jenkins, “the first principle of social constructionism, groups are real if people think they are: they then behave in ways that assume that groups are real and, in so doing, construct that reality. They *realise* it” (2014: 12, author's italics). This point is key to the construction of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, which occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic. Grydehøj (2018) argues that islandness is a relational state dependent upon a partner, be it a larger island or a mainland. Islandness occurs in contexts with land masses surrounded by mediums other than water (Foley et al. 2023). In broadening our thinking and the application of how islandness is being achieved, “deconstructing and overturning the island as the ‘other’ emerges in expressing islandness as a social construct across numerous fields and examples” (Foley et al. 2023: 9). In the case of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, the medium in question is the surging Coronavirus, surrounding and at times permeating these island constructs. The relational state of islandness in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic provided that contextual contrast and partnership in those safe ‘island’ havens and sociological constructs, and other jurisdictions who were not. In the case of the Atlantic Bubble, the policy decisions and actions were supported by societal buy-in to the concept and belief and realisation in the social constructionism of this insular, islanded identity, supported by the existing shared regional identities across the four provinces.

Additionally, in discussing identity, Pitt observes: “Identity itself depends on a definition externally as well as internally. To be part of a group is to be not part of another group. This external relationship is also hierarchical or involves dependencies” (1980: 1054). An anthropologic interpretation of culture highlights the importance of culturally constituted social differences, which “emerge in relation to interlocking patterns of meaning that are constructed by and struggled over by people who occupy different social positions that incorporate differentials of power” (Delaney 2017: 20). Unlocking their meanings in their respective specific cultural context is the key. This paper is sited within the cultural context of the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic, when the evolution and emergence of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos occurred.

The paper earlier discussed the concept of “social islands” as a starting point for these existing theories in the literature. Gillis (2004) makes mention of “cultural islands” in a similar vein, while bringing together the material world and imaginative processes in setting forth his concept of “islanding” as a joint construction utilising both processes. Others have put forward that islandness requires “island” to be utilised as a verb, with the corresponding action of “islanding”, as a theory instrument to better understand the concept (Baldacchino and Clark 2013). An entire thematic issue of *Shima* was dedicated to “almost islands”, denoted as such “by virtue of both geography and related political, social and/or infrastructural aspects” (Hayward 2016). As explained by the editor in outlining their criteria,

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“Their islandish identities are created by both the marine spaces that border substantial parts of their terrain and a sense of islandness resulting from either difference from adjacent locales and/or impediments to easy intercourse with them” (Hayward 2016: 5).

The Japanese term “shima” is representative of this form of thinking as “it embodies a dual meaning - islands as geographical features and islands as small-scale social groups where cultural interactions are densely intermeshed” (Suwa 2007: 6). The construction of a shima “is a work of territorial imagination, an extension of personhood and a ‘cultural landscape’” (Suwa 2007: 6). This concept of imaginaries, which combine aspects of geography and society, is tied directly into the thinking that underpins Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos.

The conceptualisation of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos is further shaped by Fletcher’s theory of performance geography, which was defined as “a space of cultural production which privileges neither geography or literature (in their narrow sense) but insists on their interconnection” (2011: 19). For Fletcher, this approach is “a fresh conceptual model for considering islands as productive of individual and social identity” (2011: 30). This theory highlights the “dynamic and mutually constitutive relationship” between island places and how they are rendered or, in the author’s term, “depicted” (2011: 27).

Additionally, the more recent concept of “island imaginaries” provided a framework to “capture more centrally the material-semiotic dynamic”, explained as “how the physical and metaphorical properties of islands are mutually constitutive” (Gugganig and Klimburg-Witjes 2021: 326). The authors are keen to stress that “island imaginaries” holds significance for both words, as it is a reciprocal understanding that “offers a tool to analyze this mutual constitution of island visions and materializations” (Gugganig and Klimburg-Witjes 2021: 333).

All the aforementioned concepts speak to the building body of literature in island studies and other disciplines around questions of island composition, island attributes, and islandness. This exemplifies emerging understandings that go beyond the island simply as a purely geographic construct. There has been an extensive volume of contributions and debate centred on the duality of “real” islands versus metaphoric islands in the literature, and the question of what necessarily constitutes an island. This paper advances an understanding of a temporal period, defined by an external shock of a worldwide pandemic, in which islanding occurred, and island identities were established.

CONCLUSION

Looking through the prism of the Covid-19 pandemic, Wille and Weber offer that “[a] border geography of the COVID-19 pandemic must therefore be thought of in the plural and include multiple border(ings), which are classified as spatial and social (dis-)orderings on different scales” (2020: 363). This paper has attempted to unpack the complexity of border and boundary hardening, which triggered islanded conceptions and understandings via insularity. In this we mean existing subnational boundaries were transformed via means of

policy direction, grounded in public health priorities, into more rigid and visible borders. Furthermore, this practice leads to islanded realities in non-island and island contexts. These Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos, serving as metaphorical or imagined island constructs, form the basis of conceptualising insularity as an analytical concept through this phenomenon. Such islanded creations provided an enforced sense of security and a true notion of seclusion and detachment from a global pandemic.

From 3 July to 23 November 2020, the duration of the Atlantic Bubble, Atlantic Canada became a place of envy and want owing to its exclusive status as a Covid-archipelago haven. Suddenly, residents in other regions of the country were taking notice and wanting in, counter to the long-standing metropole narrative of Atlantic Canada as a peripheral region of limited opportunities and permanent habitation appeal. From a vantage point within the region, it was now being defined as what it did provide: a seemingly safe idyllic space where subnational, non-quarantine inter-provincial travel was permitted to residents, somewhere where the “new normal” was being put into practice. One wonders whether this experience has led to a softening of distinct sub-regional or provincial identities because of what the Atlantic Bubble (literally) encapsulated. The period of the Atlantic Bubble would seem to be a relative high point in the recent history of an externally created regional identity.

Building forth, this illustrative Covid-archipelagic construct was a well-defined, bounded islanded space, yet connected via the existing road transportation and maritime ferry linkages as an archipelagic construct. During the period of the Atlantic Bubble, this social island-ed identity was very much defined by the relationship between those inside and outside and the associated divergent dynamic of mobility and immobility at play. The temporal dynamic of border regimes across the jurisdictions was a direct reflection of the Covid-19 epidemiology and began in strict insularity with the initial wave of Covid-19, followed by adjustments of border settings as a foundational component of the joint construction of the Atlantic Bubble creation. The temporal dynamic of the individual and group levels, the micro and the macro, were again reflected in the nature of the development and creation of the Atlantic Bubble and these islanded imaginaries. In a way, the residents inside the Atlantic Bubble were employing and experiencing multiple island identities at both the individual/household and regional levels. To riff off Gillis, Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos became “a source of personal and social identity for millions of people” who *became* “resident islanders.” (2004, p. 144) Gillis was writing of island tourism and geographic islands, but in this case, many people residing on non-physical islands did become resident islanders in our conceptual construct during the temporal dimension of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos.

The socio-spatial dynamic of this Covid-archipelago, this islanded construct, was driven by interactions between the governments in setting out the policy objectives and policy actions which shaped the policy response of the Atlantic Bubble and the spatial patterns of intra-mobility within the hardened borders, intentionally designed to register and control the movements of individuals and enforce a strict quarantine regime on those individuals ordinarily residing outside of the Atlantic Bubble who sought entry into it. Such

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an arrangement spatially shaped the insularity and the social interactions of the people who experienced it. Further, this islanding and the associated bordering practices had significant impacts across the dimensions of culture, territory, and society.

The islanded identity was very informed by the boundaries and borders erected and hardened, which drew distinctions for those inside the Covid-archipelago and how this islanded space was experienced. The performative and cultural geography was given meaning as a place where these jurisdictions and their respective residents assumed individual and social island(ed) identities which embodied and expressed islandness. This identity was taken aboard alongside other existing identities at the individual and jurisdiction level, and this islandness was very much dependent upon the relational interaction with the rest of Canada and, from a policy perspective, the federal government. This identity was defined externally by the rest of the country as well as internally by those who proudly flaunted their status of the new normal and non-quarantine travel within the Atlantic Bubble. The societal culture of togetherness and islandness came to the fore within this Covid-archipelago.

Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos are defined by their relativity to other places, their spatial and temporal aspects, their social construction and the permeability and interaction with their borders and defined boundaries. Such islanded construction provided an islanded sense of identity for those within the boundaries of these creations, affording a regime of apparent self containment and attaching ideals of islandness as shaped and impacted by this spatiotemporal existence. The hardening of subnational boundaries into firm borders provided the boundedness necessary to invoke such an understanding. Writ large, the Covid conditions led to significant insularisation occurring at numerous spatial scales worldwide. Island states and jurisdictions in the true geographic sense were feted as exemplar places, which were utilising their isolation and geography to keep the initial waves of the pandemic from permeating their shores.

Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos encompassed and interacted with the three major dimensions of borders: cultural, territorial, and social, as analysed above. The case of Covid-archipelagos, at multiple scales and employing different connective mediums nevertheless informed and in a sense defined by the boundaries and borders emplaced, is the embodiment of archipelagic thinking and island-island relations in pandemic times. Islanding in the Covid-19 era again brought us back to the notion of seclusion and detachment that in a way echoes the paradigms that had already been deconstructed in the field of island studies. Metaphors of islands still haunt our everyday life, but these emerged island imaginaries enabled archipelagic relations to emerge practically in the shadow of island metaphors of seclusion. This consequently leads us to re-think insularisation and what it meant to be insularised in the Covid-19 period. The interaction of Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos and the concept of insularity suggest that engagement with these frames of inquiry is crucial to consider in the future of island studies, and further exploration of this complex issue is warranted. One must wonder how Covid-islands and Covid-archipelagos may impact future policy-making and insular embodiment during potential global crises in the future.

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Članek predstavlja »covidne otoke« in »covidna otočja« kot novo prostorsko-časovno dinamiko otoških imaginarijev, ki so nastali med pandemijo Covida-19. Ti družbeno-prostorski otoški konstrukti so se pojavili tako na mikro (gospodinjstva) kot na makro (pravo) prostorskih ravneh na podlagi različnih interakcij in procesih otočenja. Koncepta covidni otok in covidno otočje temeljita na literaturi in idejah iz različnih akademskih disciplin, ter predvsem na osnovi teorije otočnosti. Opredeljuje ju njuna relativnost v odnosu do drugih krajev, njun prostorski in časovni vidik, njuna družbena konstrukcija ter prepustnost in interakcija z njunimi mejami in opredeljenimi omejitvami.

Insularisation and Lifestyle Migration on the Island of Hvar



Otočenje in migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga na otoku Hvaru

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyses lifestyle migration on the island of Hvar through the lens of an ethnographic approach. The diversity of migratory experiences among the interviewees, who were interviewed for the purposes of this research, is examined through the concept of insularisation, approached as a profoundly ambivalent phenomenon encompassing both distancing and isolation, as well as the need for connection and integration into the rhythm of island communities. Through the concept of insularisation, the authors explore the discrepancy between imagined ideas about islands and their Mediterranean identity, and the practical experiences of lifestyle migrants, which highlight various obstacles and challenges. This approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the concept of lifestyle migration and the connections formed with the notion of islandness.

KEYWORDS: lifestyle migration, island of Hvar, insularisation, ethnographic approach, Mediterranean

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek na podlagi etnografskega pristopa analizira migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga na otoku Hvaru. Avtorja raznolikost migracijskih izkušenj med intervjuvanci, ki so sodelovali v raziskavi, preučujeta skozi koncept otočenja, globoko ambivalenten pojav, ki zajema tako oddaljevanje in izolacijo kot tudi potrebo po povezovanju in vključevanju v ritem otoških skupnosti. Na podlagi koncepta otočenja raziskujeta neskladje med predstavami o otokih in njihovi sredozemski identiteti ter dejanskimi izkušnjami migrantov, ki se v realnosti srečujejo tudi z različnimi ovirami in izzivi. Ta pristop omogoča bolj niansirano razumevanje koncepta preseljevanja zaradi življenjskega sloga in povezav, ki se oblikujejo na podlagi pojma otočnost.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga, otok Hvar, otočenje, etnografski pristop, Sredozemlje

INTRODUCTION

I like it just the way it is. Like some dogs here run free. I remember being a kid in Scotland, the dogs used to run free. Thirty years ago. But they don't run anymore.

This statement, made by one of our interlocutors eight years ago during our ethnographic research on the island of Hvar, originally came about as a field curiosity and ethnographic reflection. It resurfaced in our discussions in 2024 when, during research on migration processes, we heard similar stories from interlocutors comparing their life on the island to life in their countries of origin. A common theme in the various narratives – from both 2016, 2017 and 2024 – were temporal and spatial exoticisation, along with the frequently emphasized criterion of “lifestyle”, which once again stood out as a fundamental point of comparison for diverse experiences, personal utopias and aspirations, cultural practices, and embodied knowledge.

Despite the similarities between these temporally separated studies, our research focus in this repeated study – guided by a refreshed understanding of migration as a complex process – was significantly different. In 2016 and 2017, the experiences of our interlocutors represented a research novelty that cautiously coexisted with the dominant trend of emigration studies or, to a lesser extent, return migration in a traditionally emigrant country (cf. Čapo Žmegač 2010; Oroz and Urem 2015). However, the post-pandemic context of remote work, the growing prevalence of digital nomads, and the arrival of workers from geographically distant countries like Nepal and the Philippines have significantly redefined the broader research context.

The recent changes in migration patterns, as observed by our sources, have fostered a shift in the islanders' perspectives toward new arrivals. Their perspective towards new islanders highlights the importance of connection beyond just origins or community ties, encouraging a more integrative research approach to newcomers to the island. In this paper, we have focused on the experiences and perspectives of migrants who have made the island their new home, and whose migration practices fall under the concept of lifestyle migration. Lifestyle migration serves as a conceptual framework to explore diverse forms of privileged migration encompassing phenomena like amenity migration, international retirement migration, residential tourism, second-home ownership, and international counter-urbanisation. In our research, we consider the concept of lifestyle migrants as an umbrella term that encompasses various mobility practices and motives for relocation. Lifestyle migrants are defined as “relatively affluent individuals of all ages moving either part-time or full time, permanently or temporarily to places which, for various reasons, signify for the migrants something loosely defined as quality of life” (Benson and O'Reilly 2009: 609). Contemporary migration processes in these cases, which encompass various lifestyles, were inspired not only by the imaginations of the island and what it represents, but also by the act of relocation itself and the immersion into the island's atmosphere. The lifestyle migrants with whom we conducted interviews often described this atmosphere as enigmatic, unique, and both spatially and temporally distinctive.

In these circumstances, we sought to answer numerous questions: What is lifestyle migration? How does lifestyle migration manifest on the island? How are discussions that emerge from the encounters between locals and new residents culturally organised, and how are the criteria for belonging to the island, becoming an islander, or embracing islandness being redefined? How do the processes of acceptance and rejection of others in island communities intertwine, and how do arguments of inclusivity and exclusivity coexist in the contexts of changing demographic, economic, social, and cultural transformations?

This paper aims to address above mentioned questions through the concept of insularisation. We explore insularisation by examining the diverse lifestyles of our interlocutors who have relocated to Hvar. Our goal was to understand not only their motivations for moving but also the various cultural adaptations they have undergone. We analysed how the highly ideologised cultural phenomenon of lifestyle was experienced through the interplay of diverse cultural practices, embodied knowledge, local perspectives, and global processes. Therefore, we saw insularisation as an ambivalent process shaped by cultural, social, gendered, economic, and ideological factors. This process defines the practices of lifestyle migrants and the relationships that occur from their interactions with local island communities. Our approach to insularity has been inspired by Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel's edited volume *Insularity: Representations and Constructions of Small Worlds*. They approach insularity as a complex and analytically potent metaphor that emerges as ambivalent and research-stimulating in real island contexts and discursive usages (2016: 11–12). Unlike Dautel and Schödel, our understanding of insularisation is primarily processual and performed within the specific circumstances described by the concept of lifestyle migration. On the one hand, insularisation is shaped by escapist desires for seclusion, which in the context of a Mediterranean island evoke ideas of isolation, individuality, and a slowed pace of daily life. As such, insularisation carries strong ideological connotations evident in the emphasis on the term lifestyle. From the perspective of lifestyle migrants, insularisation is thus marked by fragmentation, dispersion, and affectively diverse experiences which find cultural expression and local manifestations in the island setting. On the other hand, despite calls for isolation and slowing down, insularisation is also characterised by the desire of lifestyle migrants to connect with the islands communities in which they live, their seasonal rhythms, and their unwritten rules, which are closely tied to the concept of islandness.

The ambivalence of insularisation thus becomes more complex, as it takes root in already established social and cultural worldviews, practices, and performances that find their unique articulation in the island environment. Through this conceptual framework of insularisation, we seek to offer our understanding of the processes and cultural phenomena at the core of our research. Although our research on the island of Hvar was limited to short visits and highly location-specific approaches within which we conducted semi-structured interviews, analytically, we aimed to contextualise this approach by navigating between global processes and local perspectives, between the static and the dynamic aspects that characterise island stays and departures. In this constellation of ongoing tension between “the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure” (cf. Geertz 1983: 69), we wanted

to provide a framework for understanding highly complex migration movements, which are difficult to compare to the sedentary way of life often associated with living on an island.

In this paper we were interested in new immigrants on the island as part of the project *Ethnographies of Islandness – Island Migrations, Mobilities and Identifications (ETNOTOK)* project¹ conducted by the Institute for Migration Research. We carried out fieldwork on the island of Hvar in 2024, conducting in-depth interviews with both international and domestic lifestyle migrants who had relocated to Hvar within the past decade. Some interviews were conducted even before the formal start of the project, specifically in 2016 and 2017, when twelve international lifestyle migrants (from Belgium, Germany, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Japan, and Slovakia) were interviewed. During fieldwork carried out in June and September 2024, sixteen new participants were interviewed, including eight international lifestyle migrants (from Germany, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa, and the United States). All interviews used in this paper have been anonymised. Our interlocutors currently reside in Hvar, Stari Grad, Jelsa, Vrisnik, Vrboska, Milna, Ivan Dolac, Pitve, Selca, Brusje, and Velo Grablje. The lifestyle migrants we interviewed on Hvar are a highly diverse group in terms of age, gender, and social background. As the research was conducted in two phases, the more recent interviews revealed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and various global crises (e.g., Brexit, economic crisis) on migration decisions and emerging work patterns, such as remote work and digital nomadism.

INSULARISATION AND MIGRATION – THE CHALLENGES OF ISOLATION AND INTEGRATION

Increased mobility shifts in migration motivations, the diversity of causes, and a more branched-out typology of migration have characterised migration trends over the past few decades. According to Brian Hoey (2005), the choice of a place to live is inherently connected to lifestyle. In a contemporary world marked by numerous crises, precarity, the effects of the post-pandemic era, continuous migration, and ecological challenges, lifestyle migration represents a small but relevant phenomenon and a symptom of global changes, which remains underexplored in the Croatian context. Given that contemporary migration is often initiated by desires for a particular place, experience, feeling, and way of “taking control” over one’s life to realise a desired or avoid an undesirable future (Collins 2018: 3), lifestyle migration can be seen as an open project and a quest involving diverse destinations, aspirations, and dreams (Benson and O’Reilly 2009: 609; Rogelja 2017, 2018). This conceptualisation of lifestyle migration as an open process rather than a closed act aligns with our understanding of insularisation. The conceptual intertwining of insularisation and lifestyle

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migration, which we have explored on the island of Hvar, becomes even more complex when we add the concept of “islandness” to these categories. According to Vannini and Taggart, islandness is the result of the practical experience of living on an island, understood “corporally, affectually, practically, intimately, as a visceral experience” (Vannini and Taggart 2013: 227; Hay 2006: 34). Furthermore, according to Vannini and Taggart:

Islandness is therefore not simply a sense of place, typical of islands, but also multiple ways through which relations among inhabitants, and between islands and their dwellers are practiced. Such organic understanding of islandness is the active and creative unfolding of social and material rapports, an unfolding through which islandness emerges in multiple shapes, each shape in relation to the connection that give it rise. (2013: 236)

Since moving to an island involves a certain confrontation with the rhythms, rules, and ways of life that go beyond the romanticised images of what an island should be, the process of adaptation to a new cultural environment presents challenges for lifestyle migrants – challenges that are gradually overcome through a synchronisation with the rhythms of the island community on Hvar. The experience of “island time” was influenced by unwritten social norms that promoted personal flexibility and subjective interpretations of punctuality. This led to experiences such as delayed service appointments and instances where people blamed the ferry captain for departing early, even when the ferry left on schedule. Time was perceived as elastic rather than fixed, intertwined with the experience of space, thus pointing to relational and experiential understandings of island rhythms (Oroz 2020: 45). In this sense, we understand islandness as an embodied experience – a series of countless successful and repeated performances of island life, as highlighted by our interlocutors, with all the cultural, spatial, and temporal nuances specific to Hvar’s unique island character. Whether they involve the unwritten rules of island life, pronounced seasonality and annual rhythms, immersion in the dialect or local relationships, islandness, insularisation, and lifestyle migration are deeply connected and relationally open phenomena, which were analytically significant in the context of our research on Hvar. Given that migration movements on Croatian islands have been marked by continuous emigration – a trend that has largely shaped the direction of demographic research over the past few decades (Klempić Bogadi and Podgorelec 2020; Lajić 1992; Nejašmić 1991) – new forms of migration and contemporary mobilities motivated by the search for a different quality of life on the islands have directed our research focus toward lifestyle migrants. Recent studies² examine the cultural and social capital of lifestyle migration through the lens of privilege (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014) and the relativisation of the homogeneous concept “middle class” (Scott 2019), as there exists a structural class difference between those from wealthy countries and those from less privileged nations (Korpela 2019). This group of migrants can be characterised as individuals who have made a

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Over the past 15 years, there has been a substantial increase in academic research on this group of migrants across various countries. For instance, there are websites that connect researchers focused on lifestyle migration studies, such as the *Lifestyle Migration Hub* at Tampere University in Finland.

conscious decision about how and where they would live (Torkington 2010), which means that a high degree of economic autonomy is a significant aspect of lifestyle migration. In a sense, lifestyle migrants reject their existing way of life and its associated values (career, competitiveness, etc.) and, by deciding to migrate, opt for their desired, ideal life. The search for a good life arises from a reflective and intersubjective process, characterised “not a quest for a better way of life, but an active attempt to find congruence between values and everyday existence in the chosen lifestyle” (Osbaldiston, Picken and Denny 2020: 132).

In studies of the complexities of lifestyle and migration there are three dimensions of quality of life, which migrants perceive both individually and in comparison: the material quality (including factors such as income, employment, and housing), the relational quality (referring to personal and social relationships), and the subjective quality (values, perceptions, and experiences) (Goodwin-Hawkins and Jones 2022: 2). On the other hand, lifestyle migrants bring economic, social, and cultural capital into new environments, potentially serving as catalysts for social, economic, and even environmental regeneration (cf. Woods 2005). With their social networks, skills, and experiences, lifestyle migrants can help create new connections and stimulate flows of people, ideas, and products between urban and rural areas (Mayer, Habersetzer and Meili 2016). Alongside the potential for revitalising the communities they join, there is also an undeniable impact on processes of gentrification and rising property prices, which deepens economic and social divides and can lead to the formation of immigrant “enclaves” (Kondo, Rivera and Rullman 2012). Within this constellation of relationships, where the presence of lifestyle migrants from an island perspective might be considered a blessing in disguise, lifestyle should not be seen only as a practice of (self-)fulfilment for migrants, but also as an initiator of various practices that affect and insularise the islanders themselves. Whether it involves the marginalisation of small island communities, the intensification of depopulation, limited economic opportunities, political exclusion, or cultural isolation (cf. Vannini 2023: 6), lifestyle migration provokes mixed reactions that can significantly impact small and fragile island communities. In the imaginary of islandness, “where islanders often do not see themselves or where they wish to be free from imposed insular characteristics” (Dautel and Schödel 2016: 11), understanding lifestyle migration raises questions of “connection and disconnection, a sense of proximity or distance, as well as opportunities for cultivating accessibility or separation” (Vannini 2023: 6), a form of performance of spatial and temporal exoticisation induced by cultural practices (cf. Gillis 2001).

The Croatian islands are a relatively common choice for new settlers seeking a better quality of life, a more fulfilling and alternative way of living, preferred lifestyles, greater autonomy, and freedom of choice. However, their appeal can be understood not only in the broader context of the fascination with the Mediterranean but also, in a practical sense, within the context of diverse challenges, obstacles, and paradoxes. Reflecting on the challenges of insularity within the context of Croatia’s island spaces, Nikola Bašić identifies three paradoxes that perplex researchers. The first paradox concerns the gap between economic development and the intensification of tourism activities on the islands, juxtaposed with simultaneous demographic decline and a lack of signs of revitalisation. In other

words, although the islands are positioned in the national imagination as a flagship of identity politics, “the statistics of tourism growth are inversely proportional to the statistics of demographic atrophy” (2024: 12). The second paradox arises from the discrepancy between state strategic investments in the islands and the lack of tangible positive effects on island communities themselves. The third paradox pertains to young, educated islanders who, by choosing the islands as an expression of a specific lifestyle, could bring freshness and vitality to these spaces. As Bašić points out, we could add digital nomads to this group, who might boost the vitality of the islands during the “depressive winter intervals when our islands sink into a ‘salty darkness’” (2024: 13). However, this utopia has also dissipated due to the strong connection to the mainland, which, instead of enhancing the quality of life on the islands, has anchored islanders in an urban archipelago, deepening their dependence on the mainland. Consequently, the appeal of Croatian islands should not disregard the political, social, economic, and ideological aspects that shape their attractiveness while also contributing to their Mediterraneanness. As noted by Nevena Škrbić Alempijević (2014: 27–47), in Croatia’s case the question of identification with the Mediterranean carries significant ideological implications involving various practices of silencing – from the exclusion of undesirable Balkans to the exclusion of the southern Mediterranean coasts and the selective embrace of European, northern Mediterranean spaces.

Furthermore, the attractiveness of Croatian islands can also be understood within the broader context of the Western fascination with islands, which, according to John Gillis, frames them as places of allure, exoticism, and spatial and temporal isolation (cf. 2001; 2004). This fascination was particularly evident in the first half of the 20th century, when representations of the Mediterranean were shaped by discourses of spatial and temporal exoticism (Gordon 2003; cf. Moe 2002; Tucker 2019), which found practical realisation in the pursuit of lifestyle migration. As a result, islands – particularly those in the Eastern Adriatic – have emerged as spaces with fluid boundaries within a shifting temporal landscape (Oroz 2024: 161). When viewed through a local lens, this perspective has taken root within the concept of Mediterraneanism, which acquires specific articulations in the island setting. In this sense, Mediterraneanism should not be seen as a static concept defined solely by the geography of the Mediterranean: rather, it is shaped by what Michael Herzfeld calls “practical Mediterraneanism”, a network of performative statements that shape realities, cultural practices that influence lived everyday life, and globalisation which elicits a response from a regional perspective, and whose essentialising effects can be critically considered in the lived everyday experience (Herzfeld 2005: 63). This concept of Mediterraneanism is closely linked with the question of lifestyle, which is both conceptually and in its content inseparably tied to the migratory processes on the island of Hvar. As Thierry Fabre observes in *La Méditerranée n’est pas une étoile morte*:

Seeking a Mediterranean way of life is not a return to the old categories and references of Mediterranean anthropology, which have rightly been criticized: honor, siesta, machismo, masculinity... [...] Today, these are life paths that have meaning and evade essences or structures established by forms of knowledge in order to characterize or identify them once and for all. (2019: 7)

According to Fabre, the Mediterranean characteristics of lifestyles invite us to explore the interactions of history and other lifestyles (ibid.), a concept that prompts us to question the persistence of borders in a world obsessed with acceleration in the spirit of modern capitalism (2019: 9). As such, the Mediterranean lifestyle arises from a world created among worlds, an alternative world that resists dominant currents (Fabre 2019: 10) and, in its fixation on the “Mediterranean dream”, defies our nightmares (Fabre 2019: 12). This understanding of the Mediterranean lifestyle moves away from an imagined set of “Mediterranean characteristics” and approaches a view of the Mediterranean as a system of complementary differences (Bromberger 2006: 92). Reflecting on complementary differences in relation to the Mediterranean entails an exploratory dive into the simultaneous understanding and misunderstanding, constitutive relationships and contradictions, which are situationally represented through metaphors of isolation or encounter, borrowing or rejection, antagonisms, and frictions (Bromberger 2006: 103–104). Thus, our focus on lifestyle migration has taken into account the local nuances of island daily life and the practical challenges that shape contemporary migration practices.

ISLAND WORLDS AND CONTEMPORARY MIGRATION PRACTICES

So, I sat in the Netherlands without a job, without a visa, without a house. And I was a bit like, don't know what to do. [...] [T]hen I decided my best to stay in Europe. So, I basically just looked at the borders that opened outside the Schengen states, actually Schengen states, and the first borders that opened outside Schengen was Croatia. And so then I landed in Split, but the cheapest Airbnb I could find for this long term was on Šolta. So I stayed in Stomorska for two and a half months. After that, I moved to Hvar. [...] So in this time that I came here, I trained as a [redacted], then I became a certified [redacted] ... And my clients are worldwide. And I work online. All my meetings are online. (LSM9³, Brusje)

Well, the short version is that we had decided a long time ago that we maybe wanted to move to Europe, and Covid presented a time for us to do that, because we were both working remotely at that time, and we decided Croatia, because it was one of only, I think, five countries that was open for visiting during Covid in the beginning part. So, we came in August of 2020, and we decided to come here specifically, mainly because we wanted a peaceful place to be during Covid. (LSM12 and LSM13, Jelsa)

In the context of our comparative research – analysing narrations from 2016/2017 and 2024 – lifestyle migration on the island of Hvar reveals notable differences over time. The lifestyle migrants on Hvar remain a heterogeneous group in terms of culture, gender, and age. However, unlike in 2024, when most interlocutors cited the global pandemic as a key motivation for relocation (often referencing their experiences with terms such as “before the pandemic” or “due to Covid”/ “during the Covid pandemic”) and emphasized the rise of

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To protect the anonymity of our interviewees, particularly in the context of the small island communities to which they belong, all interviewees are identified with the label LSM (Lifestyle Migrants) and the corresponding interview number. Alongside these labels, we have included the names of the locations where the interviews were conducted in parentheses, which may or may not correspond to the interviewees' actual places of residence.

remote work, the research conducted a decade earlier suggested that migration was primarily motivated by a desire to escape lives burdened by professional obligations.

The Hvar-specific aspect of our research into lifestyle migration and Mediterraneanism – associated with the island in question – revealed important insights through conversations with new immigrants. These conversations showed that the imaginary of Mediterraneanism is deeply intertwined with a web of stereotypical island characteristics, as well as contemporary practices emerging from cultural encounters, where notions of the modern and traditional, the authentic and borrowed converge. This portrayal of Hvar, emphasizing the Mediterranean spirit of the island, is often highlighted as a dominant motivator for relocation, although romanticised depictions frequently dissolve in the face of practical realities. Romanticised expectations about life in small island communities presented practical challenges that significantly diverged from anticipated lifestyles. The island of Hvar, with 27 settlements, is marked by internal divisions. It consists of two distinct micro-regions: the more developed and populated west, home to about 80% of the population, and the historically isolated east. These divisions stem from a complex history of migration, settlement, and shifting political systems, shaping both real and perceived boundaries (Perinić Lewis 2017). Lifestyle migrants are also moving to places in the western part of the island that align with their ideals of small island and Mediterranean settlements and communities. In the case of Hvar, island settlements which attract migrants seeking a sense of belonging and the construction of meaningful physical and emotional attachments to place and community (Sampaio and King 2019) figure as havens from fast-paced environments and as desired anti-stress zones, free from the hectic nature of urban life.

Yeah, that sense of freedom, the surroundings, the peace, the silence. We were just, you know, every time we came to the island, we were actually happy. You know, like when you have that feeling – this is it. You know? This is the Mediterranean I was always looking for. (LSM7, Velo Grablje)

I moved to Hvar, and then I fell in love with the islands, and the lifestyle, the blue water, and the ease of life. (LSM9, Brusje)

Sea and green, and good mixture, and very bright, bright air. [...] The island, I don't know, it's really, the air is different than on the continent. The stars are different too... (LSM1, Ivan Dolac)

Cleanliness. Not just in nature, but in relationships as well. (LSM2, Jelsa)

Well, I think we're much more free. We're much more free, especially here, on the island. (LSM14, Stari Grad)

Although our research experiences and the course of interviews were limited in terms of time, the connections established in the field often continued even after leaving Hvar. The narratives of our interlocutors, articulated through a blend of English and Croatian, were frequently coloured by the stories of their life journeys, feelings of unfulfillment in the countries from which they came, and the rhetoric of “discovering” the island, which

became the final destination of their travels. As emphasised by our interlocutors, their perceptions of the Mediterranean and its way of life – in the context of their prior mobility experiences – influenced their comparisons with familiar locations, often dominating their descriptions of Hvar. Given that most of our interlocutors had relocated multiple times, with some having lived and worked in other Mediterranean countries, the island of Hvar was often compared to these past experiences and presented as the ultimate stop in their personal life journeys. These comparisons primarily revolved around their countries of origin, but also highlighted the advantages of island living, with natural beauty and a slower pace of life being highlighted as key factors contributing to a higher quality and more fulfilling lifestyle. The island's natural beauty and way of life were the two most frequently mentioned motivators for relocating to Hvar. While these motives are fundamental to the island's tourist promotion, our interlocutors often disconnected them from tourism advertising, instead presenting them as reflections of their own lived experiences on the island. With the exception of two interlocutors, all of the other participants had lived in other countries, including other Mediterranean nations.

We decided to come to Croatia. Because I know Spain very well, I lived in Salamanca in Spain for a year, and I like the Mediterranean. And so, we were looking for a place to go, but the reason we didn't go to Spain is because I already speak Spanish and my partner didn't, and I already speak some French, and he doesn't. So, we thought, well, let's go to a place where neither of us know the language. [...] Let's give ourselves an equal start, or else I'll end up doing all the work, you know, so, that's what we decided. (LSM10, Stari Grad)

We travelled to, like, I don't know, seventy countries in the world. And this is a place where we made, like, the most tight-knit community, I would say. (LSM13, Jelsa)

I'm telling you, it's like a movie, well, I mean, this is paradise! For me. On Earth. I went to China, to Hong Kong, to Japan, to Singapore, I've been everywhere. There's Bangkok, like Thailand. I could live there, always the same. The sun comes up at seven in the morning and it's dark at seven in the evening. Hot, humid, monotonous. The food's nothing special. But here, it's pure bliss. (LSM3, Vrisnik)

The idealisation of the island and Hvar's island communities, framed through themes of escape and utopia (Benson and Osbaldiston 2014), revealed that creating a lifestyle within the island environment is linked to the notion of an idealised home that extends beyond the confines of a physical residence. As our interlocutors explained, "home" encompasses the broader space of the island, offering the potential for an improved quality of life in spite of the inevitable obstacles, disappointments, conflicts, and the adjustments required to accept the shortcomings of an ideal (Salazar 2010). The sense of belonging to the island is influenced by connections with the local community and the natural environment, where interpersonal relationships are often presented through metaphors of the natural, pure, and unspoiled. The use of such metaphorical language by our interlocutors is no coincidence; it is connected to long-established patterns of Mediterranean representation that have circulated in public discourse since the early 20th century, when the tradition of summer travel to the region began

(Löfgren 1999). The subsequent transformation of these discourses, which were integrated into general knowledge about the Mediterranean, was further influenced by the postwar tourism boom. This period shaped contemporary images of the Mediterranean and narratives around the authenticity and immediacy of life in the region (Škrbić Alempijević 2014).

Alongside the often-emphasized characteristics of the Mediterranean and its way of life, our interlocutors often expressed a theme of newfound freedom and self-realisation. According to our comparative ethnographic research, all participants described themselves as people seeking a better life. Lifestyle, often highlighted as a key aspect of migration practices, entailed choosing a location where isolation from daily concerns and the establishment of closer social ties – lacking in their countries of origin – were possible. The island lifestyle was often portrayed through a temporal lens, as the specificity of social relations on the island and a slower pace of life were perceived as a phenomenon “lost” in their home countries, but preserved on the islands. When discussing quality of life, the idea of a close-knit and connected island community was frequently highlighted as a positive aspect, even though this experience coexisted with the notion of isolation from a world that was becoming too stressful. The narratives from our interlocutors revealed that the island figures as a space where concepts of freedom, belonging, a slow-paced daily life, connection with nature, and autonomy in creating lifestyles intersect. Whether referring to freedom in career choices, parenting, identity formation, pursuing life projects, or living in line with imagined ways of supposed island lifestyles, the idea of the island became infused with a variety of meanings and metaphors.

We communicate with all the neighbours. [...] It's a great feeling because we can walk on the street and people say: 'Dobar dan,' and we talk to anybody. Anybody has five minutes... (LSM8, Selca)

...I have a daughter, and that part of parenting always seemed simple here. That part that feels like freedom to me, as I have the freedom to let her run free here, I don't have to fear, there's no danger here, we're somewhat... We all know each other, look after the children. So, that part is just phenomenal. (LSM2, Jelsa)

We lived in big cities, and you can have lots of people that you know, but it's not really, like, a tight-knit community. And there's, I think, coming as outsiders here, it was very cool and fun for us. [...] We were like, 'Wow, it's so cool to be able to know everybody on the street!' Like, you saw when we came here, we know kind of everybody, and that's something you can't get in a big city. (LSM12 and LSM13, Jelsa)

These demonstrate that islandness manifested in multiple ways – on the one hand, it was defined by the rhythms of community, and on the other, by the freedom to shape one's life within the island's social framework. This attempt to reconcile multilayered, place-based identities rooted in island culture with emerging trends of life-style migration is increasingly challenging the concept of islandness (Foley et al. 2023: 1806), thereby helping us better grasp what islandness is and how it is constituted through entangled practices of mobility and immobility (Foley et al. 2023: 1808). The freedom frequently highlighted by our inter-

locutors is inseparable from material independence, which encompasses work, income, and housing. At the time of the interviews, all of our interlocutors lived on the island in properties they owned (or those belonging to their island partners), with only a few engaged in renting accommodations to tourists. Most of them initially came to the island as tourists, either with their parents during their youth, as singles with friends, or with their own families. In reviews of island demography, researchers point out that unlike the situation on islands in other Mediterranean countries – particularly Spain and Greece – lifestyle migrants on Croatian islands face a shortage of available housing and suitable settlements. As a result, they are less likely to cluster together or form distinct new communities within existing ones (Klempić Bogadi and Podogrelec 2020: 102). In our research on Hvar, however, we observed that some settlements – particularly those experiencing significant depopulation – had a higher number of newcomers (e.g. the village of Pitve on Hvar).

The sense of isolation that is intensified during winter, as noted by nearly all our interlocutors, offers a different perspective on the realities of island life compared to the one imagined before relocating. Thus, new relationships often emerge during the winter months to counteract the periods of total isolation. Our interlocutors often emphasized that winter is a time when they frequently visit family in their countries of origin, often aligning these trips with school holidays for the children. For the islanders, the “winter” criterium and living on the island during this period is frequently regarded as a test for newcomers, synchronising them with the rhythm of island life.

And there's absolutely nothing in the winter. Everything's closed. There isn't much to do around here, that's the problem, you know, there's not much... Because I came from a big city and so I'm a bit bored. [...] [A]nd that's true for winter, I'm kind of bored and I did not see that when I came. When I came here, I just saw that it's beautiful, peaceful, relaxation, and now I see... (LSM5, Milna)

...We are a bit isolated, we are on an island, and you can't just go to Split when you feel like it. You have to wait for the ferry. So that, but I have, I'm used to it, it suits me and that's that, it doesn't matter. (LSM3, Vrisnik)

At the same time, as newcomers in these insular communities, our interlocutors often reflected their own otherness, which can be a source of isolation. Interestingly, some of the motivations for choosing Hvar as a migration destination were unconventional and not based on prior knowledge of the island or any rational selection process. These motivations and their explanations are dominated by feelings as unstructured, intuitive arguments, revealing how connections to the island and its people are forged. In the context of intuitive feelings as a non-choice, as well as reflections of embodied experiences, the statements of our interlocutors reveal how concepts of insularity and islandness are formed.

...I think that there's something about women moving away to live next to water in my family. Maybe it's this emotional, historical connection... So that's the only explanation I can have. I don't know why I should have been driven to come here and why I should have felt so at home here. But I do. (LSM10, Stari Grad)

...everything that's here I would miss, I mean it's a completely different life. It's... well, I don't know, I could not be sitting outside having a coffee like that, I could not... it's completely different. I don't know what it is, it's... It's a feeling that you have. You have a feeling where you belong and where you don't belong. (LSM4, Vrboska)

Insularisation and islandness, along with the distance and limitations that prompted islanders to emigrate, have become attractive factors for our interlocutors, enabling them to achieve desired life changes, flexibility, and sustainability. Integration into island communities, however, is more challenging on certain levels, particularly due to language barriers. As a result, lifestyle migrants tend to form stronger connections with each other than with the local island community. Consequently, the insularisation that manifests on various levels demonstrates how the island becomes a home for diverse social communities – micro-islands that, depending on language, sociability, and connectivity, are situationally established, overlap, network, or dissolve at certain moments. Driven by the emergence of increasingly complex forms of mobility and work, research into such mobile communities within virtual spaces has grown. These studies utilise netnographic methods (Mancinelli 2020) and the “mobile virtual ethnography” (Germann Molz 2021: 231-236) approach to gain insights into “the lives of research participants who are continuously on the move across geographical and virtual spaces” (Mancinelli and Germann Molz 2023). Such research, including the analysis of social media content among international migrants, has been conducted in the city of Zagreb (Čapo and Kelemen 2017; 2018). Some of our interlocutors mentioned being members of virtual groups connecting immigrants. One example is the Facebook group *Expats on Hvar*, where members exchange experiences, post advertisements, and ask questions. The group was created on 1 April 2013, and its administrator and moderator is Paul Bradbury, a versatile Briton who is a journalist, writer, consultant, and entrepreneur. Bradbury has been living in Croatia for twenty years and is recognised as Croatia's most well-known international migrant. He owns *Total Croatia*, the largest English-language news portal in Croatia. Initially residing in Jelsa on Hvar, he now lives in Zagreb. The group has 4,872 members and includes both immigrants and a significant number of locals. On the Facebook page, members share information about events, products, services, shops, housing, and administrative issues, as well as pose questions and share experiences. While most posts focus on resolving “practical” problems and everyday needs, we observed that the most common question potential future migrants ask in the group concerns living on Hvar year-round. Here are the comments shared in response to a Facebook post questioning the experience of staying on the island all year round.

...There is a good expat community, the locals are friendly, and the weather is mild. The sea stays above 20 centigrade till February. If you expect vibrant nightlife, entertainment, etc, no there isn't any. But we make our own. Also, Split is only a one-hour catamaran or two-hour ferry ride away. We have gone to Split, taken in a fine dinner, took a whole box for ourselves at the opera, overnight stay and breakfast, all for less than we would have paid for tickets to Covent Garden or (especially) the Met. (FB Profile 1)

Yeah, come here in October, rent a studio and stay till Easter - then you'll know for sure! (FB Profile 2)

On the minus side - be ready for possible extended rainy periods and nothing to do or go to, outside the house. And no restaurants that work off season except one or two on the whole island (as well as bars/movies/theater) so socialising situations are very rare. (FB Profile 3)

I have lived here all year for the last 10 years. A completely different place than the madness of summer. I agree with all the comments above. There are spells of rain, but I attach a weather synopsis for the past 10 years as a guide. (FB Profile 4)

Can't recommend it enough. It's our ninth year here full time and it's beautiful and tranquil with some excellent weather. I swim all year and so the best thing to do is come over and stay a winter to see if it's for you. (FB Profile 5)

Make liquor, build something have a hobby whit out needing electricity. And enjoy the silents. (FB Profile 6)⁴

We noticed that immigrants who are single or have moved as couples tend to belong to different social circles, interacting with both locals and other foreign immigrants. They note that they mostly socialise with locals who are younger than them and who share similar lifestyles or attitudes. Some interlocutors feel the island is enough for them and do not need the world outside of it. They see it as home, to the extent that they wish to be buried there.

And because of young people, we all use the same internet. So, it was pretty easy for us to make really good friends really fast here. Because we all have the same jokes. We talk about the same things. And actually, that's the core reason we decided to stay here, because we made so many friends and we have such a good community. (LSM12, Jelsa)

I have enough space here on Hvar. I have enough space. [...] I go to Split less than ten times per year, really rarely. (LSM3, Vrisnik)

From the island you can go anywhere. You can go back to the mainland or you can go to another island. [...] I am not moving any more. [...] I said I am not going back. If I am dead, you can bury me here or you can throw my ashes in the sea. (LSM4, Vrboska)

A lack of fluency in Croatian emerged as a recurring theme in all of the interviews, significantly shaping the rhythm of their integration into the local community. Even at the beginning of the interviews, our interlocutors decided which language they preferred to speak with us. Most of the interviews with the foreign immigrants were conducted in English. The exceptions were four interlocutors who spoke Croatian during the fieldwork conducted in 2017. In 2024, all of the interviews with foreign interlocutors were conducted in English, even with those who had lived on Hvar for over a decade. The reasons they cited varied, but a common one was embarrassment over their limited knowledge of Croatian, which they only dared to use within a close circle of friends or family. Native English speakers found Croatian particularly challenging to learn, often attributing this to the fact that many locals speak English well and prefer to communicate with them in English.

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Facebook group "Expats on Hvar" (posted on 28 October 2024).

I say, 'No, please speak Croatian.' No way. I'm braver to speak it if I go to Split by myself and I'm on my own, and I'm, you know, in shops or whatever, you know, I can muddle through. [...] My English has gotten a lot worse since I've been here. I speak broken English and write it, too. My Croatian hasn't gotten better, but my English has gotten worse. (LSM11, Stari Grad)

It was hard, the first two years, they were really hard. I didn't speak the language, and without language, you can't do anything. I talked all the time, always listened and now it's not so bad. I know that my grammar is still awful. (LSM5, Milna)

Language serves as one of the most significant barriers to integrating into local island communities. Foreign immigrants married to locals often speak Croatian or the Čakavian dialect specific to their settlement. The Čakavian dialects of Hvar differ considerably from standard Croatian, and many immigrants reported that it took them a long time to start understanding Croatian – let alone this particular dialect. Immigrants with children typically learn the language more quickly and integrate more easily. Their children speak Croatian enriched with the idioms of their local communities.

Also all of the dialects, you know, I can ask five people, how would I say, and I will get five different answers. (LSM11 from Canada, Stari Grad)

What was also very, very interesting is that everybody from the very beginning spoke to my children in dialect. It was fascinating. So everywhere, everyone, you know. They'd say, 'Oh, postole,' you know, and like everything. I was like, these words aren't in the dictionary! [...] My children feel completely part of the community. People call them 'naši' (ours). (LSM9 from UK, Stari Grad)

When it comes to integration, there are boundaries based on personal decisions about their levels of involvement. They do not relinquish the freedom to live according to their choices for the sake of integration or assimilation. Instead, they determine their own levels of involvement, create their own islands, and connect with island networks that understand and support them.

It's not a problem for me, but I don't know what it's like for the islanders. It's probably very hard then. As I said, I either get involved or stand aside and don't let anyone enter in this part which is mine, and that's that. [...] Later, people would say to me, my friends would say that I was the target of gossip for the entire town, but at that time for me it wasn't, I had no idea, and it did not bother me. (LSM2, Jelsa)

Living on the island year-round and gradually being accepted by the local community – as perceptions of otherness and strangeness fade – provides insight into both the benefits and challenges of life in small island settlements. This includes navigating local rivalries (Perinić Lewis 2017; Perinić Lewis and Škrbić Alempijević 2014), norms and the dynamics of gossip (Šterk 2024), which are deeply woven into the social fabric of such tightly connected communities.

The second most frequently cited obstacle is administration, ranging from local to state levels (especially for those who required visas). Bureaucratic "local islands" are among the most challenging for migrants to navigate or comprehend, forcing them to rely on strat-

egies of improvisation with the help of friends and acquaintances from local communities. Gender differences also emerge in this context, as women may be unwilling or unable to access certain island networks, reflecting a form of gendered insularisation. This includes a conscious rejection of independence in some aspects of island life involving interactions with public services and bureaucracy. Married migrants, especially women from larger urban areas, state they leave bureaucratic and administrative tasks to their husbands, as these processes frequently operate according to the most local of rules that are difficult to grasp.

Administration is very frustrating in general here, I think, even for locals. [...] You don't have to make it super easy for people, but, like, what I found frustrating is there's inconsistency. Like, you might do one process one year, and then it changes the next one depending on the person and how their day is going. (LSM13, Jelsa)

Here I have husband. I'm protected. I don't have to do anything here. For example, husband goes to Općina, husband goes to police to register me or something. So, very, very relaxing feeling. (LSM1, Ivan Dolac)

Bureaucracies... Doesn't know, the woman clerk doesn't know what papers you need. That was soooooo frustrating! I felt like I could not function here. That I couldn't, simply, those principles from when I lived in the city, where this worked, in relation to work, in relation to anything, that it doesn't work here. I have to ask my husband for everything, he knows how it works, to take care of it. (LSM2, Jelsa)

Many foreign immigrants are actively involved in local associations as volunteers or have even established their own organisations based on their interests, bringing together both immigrants and locals. Nearly all interlocutors expressed a desire to contribute to the community through their knowledge, ideas, skills, activities, or innovations, while being careful not to harm or alter traditions and established relationships. Depending on their motivations for moving and length of stay, these predominantly highly educated migrants often exhibit a critical perspective on certain aspects of island life based on the island's economic and legal systems, governance policies, and social and cultural dynamics. At the same time, their knowledge and experiences from living in one or more countries make them focused on exploring opportunities, potential, and the future of the island communities where they have created a new home and life.

...I don't wanna do anything that will like destroy the culture or do some harm to Croatia. I wanna come here and blend in, I don't wanna be an outsider. (LSM6, Selca)

I think that we who come from outside the island bring a different perspective. Something we bring to the island. Maybe we don't change anything at once, like, when we come with this youthful enthusiasm. It's probably not going to work like that, but we contribute to some kind of culture. Some kind of different view. We... We force, kind of force these people to look at the other side. Because we are here, we have our place and you can't just, you know, push us away. And there's plenty of us. (LSM2, Jelsa)

CONCLUSION

Our research focused on the processes of insularisation and islandness, along with their associated notions of freedom, immediacy, and isolation. In the context of the island of Hvar, with its fragmented and divided communities (Perinić Lewis 2017, Perinić Lewis and Rudan 2020), insularisation on the one hand functions as a conscious process of isolation and detachment from hectic life rhythms for the lifestyle migrants we interviewed. On the other hand, insularisation also involved connecting with the local community and integrating into its seasonal rhythms and symbolic norms. While these practices may appear contradictory, the fact that there is deliberate distancing and approaching, belonging and estrangement, acceptance and exclusion, synchronism but at a distance, reveals insularisation as a cultural and situational phenomenon that manifests differently through the lens of migration. In this way, insularisation shares much with the concept of islandness, as it highlights contradictions and entanglements as constitutive elements in understanding islandness (Foley et al. 2023: 1809).

Our comparative research (2016/2017 vs. 2024) shows the shift in motives for lifestyle migration to Hvar. In 2024, many cited the pandemic and remote work, while earlier migrants were more driven by a desire to escape professional pressures. This interplay of escapism and utopianism, encapsulated in the concept of lifestyle and highlighted in certain moments, has demonstrated that lifestyle migration is a layered, dynamic, and complex phenomenon. The discourses of naturalisation and authenticity that dominate the narratives of our interlocutors closely echo those from the early 20th century, shaped by the rhetoric of discovery and a European imperial gaze that interpreted the economic underdevelopment of southern Europe and the Mediterranean through the lens of progress and hierarchical gradation (cf. Arcara 1998; Aldrich 2002). Characterised as a seminal point of archaic social relations and marked by ideals of naturalness and authenticity (cf. Moe 2002), the Mediterranean of the early 20th century became a haven for affluent Europeans: a spatial and temporal “Other” of Europe (cf. Buzard 1993). The democratisation of travel and the rise of tourism, particularly after World War II (cf. Löfgren 1999), connected these discourses to marketing strategies and the promotion of “newly discovered” Mediterranean destinations. Motifs of unspoiled nature and its associated “pure” interpersonal relationships referenced by our interlocutors, which figure as features of the Mediterranean lifestyle, are not merely benign phenomena of personal (self-)realisation. Rather, they are deeply ideological practices that, in the contemporary context of various crises (ecological, climate, economic, migratory, etc.), constitute the island as a form of utopia with the patina of Mediterraneanism, where such lifestyles are still perceived as viable.

However, unlike the colonial aspects that mark the history of other Mediterranean countries (cf. Arcara 1998; Moyà Antón 2013) and the (self-)imposed class and cultural limitations associated with lifestyle migration, our research on the island of Hvar has revealed significantly different practices of belonging to island communities. For lifestyle migrants, the idea of home and belonging is not achievable without accepting the symbolic rules of

the island communities, which require adapting to the rhythm of life on the island. While the practices of embracing islandness are somewhat constrained by language barriers and the necessity of economic independence, lifestyle as experienced through insularisation emerges as a process that enables gradual synchronisation with island communities and the acceptance of their cultural specificities. At the same time, mobility—and in this case, lifestyle migration—calls for a more inclusive approach in island studies (Foley et al. 2023: 1809), one that is not limited by spatial determinism and is sensitive to newly emerging phenomena that entangle islands in a web of multiple relations.

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POVZETEK

Prispevek raziskuje migracije zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga skozi koncept otočenja. Temelji na etnografskih raziskavah, ki so bile izvedene na otoku Hvar v letih 2016/2017 in 2024. Otočenje je kompleksen proces distanciranja in izolacije. Raziskava prinaša vpogled v kontrast med namišljenimi predstavami o otoškem življenju in resničnimi izkušnjami prilagajanja lokalni kulturi in življenju na otoku, na katerega pogosto vplivajo različni praktični izzivi in težave. Raziskave kažejo, da so selitve zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga močno ideologizirane, predvsem z vidika dožemanja otoškega življenja. To se odraža v zgodovinsko in družbeno zakoreninjenih predstavah o Sredozemlju, ki so prisotne v širši javni sferi. Poleg tega je tovrstno preseljevanje tesno povezano z otoštvom kot utelešeno relacijsko izkušnjo, vezano na različne pripovedi, prakse in imaginarije. Analiza delno strukturiranih intervjujev, opravljenih pred in po pandemiji Covid-19, razkriva, da migracije zaradi življenjskega sloga delujejo po eni strani kot zavesten umik od hitrega življenjskega ritma, po drugi strani pa kot oblika integracije v lokalne sezonske vzorce in simbolne kode. Dinamika, ki se morda zdi protislovna, saj vključuje tako nenavezanost kot angažiranost, pripadnost in odtujenost, sprejemanje in izključevanje, pa vendarle kaže, da je migracija zaradi spremembe življenjskega sloga globoko pogojena z različnimi odnosi, ki ustvarjajo pripovedi o pripadnosti, osebni svobodi, izolaciji in samouresničevanju.

Omrežja, otočja in puščave samoorganizirane prehranske oskrbe

Networks, Islands, and Deserts of Self-Organised
Food Supply

Nežka Struc



1.01. Izvirni znanstveni članek
DOI 10.4312/svetovi.3.2.56-68

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek obravnava pomen samoorganiziranih omrežij lokalne prehranske oskrbe v Mariboru kot ključnega dejavnika za preprečevanje prehranskih puščav. Njihove prakse predstavljajo »otočja« oziroma omrežja solidarnostnih ekonomij, ki odpirajo prostor distribuciji lokalno pridelane hrane. Z neposrednim stikom z odjemalci_kami se pridelovalci_ke izognejo nestabilnosti in so manj izpostavljeni vplivom velikih trgovinskih verig, kar delno rešuje tudi problematiko z viški pridelkov. Takšna omrežja so na prvi pogled izolirana in vase zaprta ter oddaljena od splošne distribucije hrane, vendar krepijo ruralno-urbano partnerstvo.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: samoorganizirana omrežja prehranske oskrbe, prehranske puščave, antropologija omrežij

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the importance of self-organised networks for local food supply in Maribor as a key factor in preventing food deserts. Their practices represent "islands" or networks of solidarity economies that create space for the distribution of locally produced food. By having direct contact with consumers, producers avoid instability and are less exposed to the influence of large commercial chains, which also partially addresses the issue of surplus production. Such networks may initially seem closed off, distant and isolated from mainstream food distribution, but in fact they strengthen rural-urban partnerships.

KEYWORDS: self-organised food supply networks, food deserts, anthropology of networks

Antropologi_nje puščav ne obravnavamo le v geografskem smislu, kot peščena in izsušena območja, z malo vegetacije in pomanjkanjem splošnega življenja, temveč jih predvsem definiramo kot družbeni in kulturni konstrukt, ki je lahko metafora za razumevanje pomanjkanja ali izključenosti oziroma zapostavljenosti (Appadurai 1996, Bourdieu 1984, Foucault 1984, Turner 2011). S puščavo se označujejo (družbena in fizična) območja, kjer so osnovni družbeni viri – dostop do zdravstva, dela, ekonomske stabilnosti, bivališča, prehrane – omejeni oziroma jih ni, kar vodi do marginalizacije skupnosti in posameznikov_c ter do družbenih neenakosti. Bolj poznane med tovrstnimi puščavami (tudi onkraj antropoloških okvirov) so medicinske, bančne, tranzitne in prehranske puščave. V tem prispevku se bom posvetila predvsem zadnjim.

Koncept »prehranske puščave« v našem okolju ni zelo aktualen. Namesto o njem se pogosteje govori o »prehranski revščini« in »prehranski varnosti«. Prehranske puščave je zelo težko preslikati na distribucijo in dostopnost hrane v našem okolju, hkrati je njihova definicija zelo nenavadna in problematična. V tem prispevku se jim posvečam predvsem zato, ker so uporabne pri razmišljanju o prihodnosti prehranske oskrbe ter o tem, katerih povezav v lokalnem okolju za dober pretok hrane ni dobro izgubiti. Na podlagi razmislekov in terenskega dela med samoorganiziranimi omrežji lokalne prehranske oskrbe lahko rečem, da so ravno ta omrežja kot nekakšna med seboj povezana otočja in zaslužna za to, da do prehranskih puščav v Mariboru ne pride.¹ Prehranska otočja, kot metafora in še nedefiniran koncept, ponujajo dragocen vpogled v razumevanje prehranskih omrežij. Pridelovalci_ke, ki delujejo znotraj samoorganiziranih omrežij lokalne prehranske oskrbe, se pogosto soočajo z neenakim dostopom do prehranskih trgov. Da bi premostili_e te ovire in delovali_e uspešneje, oblikujejo omrežja in okrog njih meje. Med posameznimi omrežji tvorijo povezave, ki jih umeščajo v širše lokalne, nacionalne in globalne družbene tokove. Omrežja (otočja) s tem razvijajo odpornost, saj hkrati ohranjajo družbene vezi ter prilagajajo prakse solidarnosti v odzivu na spreminjajoče se družbene in okoljske razmere.

Po drugi strani je samoorganizirana prehranska omrežja mogoče obravnavati tudi kot izolirane in oddaljene pobude poskusov preživetja, ki pogosto ostanejo neprepoznane in prezrte. Na podoben izoliranosti vpliva tudi to, da se po večini odvijajo v neinstitucionalnih, včasih tudi neformalnih sferah družbenega delovanja, zato je njihova izolacija lahko tako prostorska kot družbena ali epistemološka. Zaradi omejenega obsega članka ter specifične tematske številke *Svetov* sem se odločila za širši pregled različnih vidikov prehranske (ne) varnosti v Mariboru. Konceptualno se mi je zdelo smiselno samoorganizirana lokalna prehranska omrežja postaviti v kontekst (izoliranih) prehranskih puščav ter jih prek (obrobne)

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Pričujoči članek se delno opira na doktorsko delo (Struc 2023), ki je nastalo na podlagi dolgotrajnejšega etnografskega terenskega dela med letoma 2016 in 2021. Najintenzivnejše obdobje raziskovanja je bilo med letoma 2017 in 2019. Opravila sem številne polstrukturirane in nestrukturirane pogovore, prisostvovala sem na sestankih, skupščinah, srečanjih, svojim sogovornicam_kom pomagala pri delu in drugih dejavnostih, v nekaterih omrežjih pa sem zraven vloge raziskovalke in občasne fizične pomoči zavzela še vlogo odjemalke.

prehranske revščine, prehranske varnosti in upravljanja viškov pridelkov pripeljati nazaj do (arhipelagov) antropološkega preučevanja omrežij. Zavedam se, da tak pristop ne dopušča poglobljene analize posameznega vidika, vendar pa omogoča razgrnitev širšega spektra tematskih poudarkov, ki skupaj tvorijo celostnejši okvir. Pri vsakem vidiku v nadaljevanju prispevka navajam zgolj najbolj reprezentativne oziroma zgoščene prikaze širših ugotovitev.

Samoorganizirana omrežja lokalne prehranske oskrbe v Mariboru so se pojavila kot eden izmed načinov spoprijemanja s samoprepuščenostjo pridelovalcev_k in predragim ali nedoločljivim in neizsledljivim trgom ekološko pridelane lokalne hrane. V splošnem so samoorganizirana prehranska omrežja lokalne prehranske oskrbe, o katerih se včasih piše tudi kot o alternativnih prehranskih omrežjih, po večini prakse solidarnostnih ekonomij (Simonič 2019: 11), pri katerih so pomembne kratke prostorske razdalje med produkcijo in distribucijo živil. Med nje spadajo tudi organiziranje ekoloških tržnic, vključenost v partnersko kmetovanje, potek trgovanja po več kanalih (na primer na tržnici, s partnerskim kmetovanjem, na zadruzi, s prodajo od doma) in predanost trajnostnemu pridelovanju ter zmanjševanju prehranskih in drugih odpadkov (Jarožs 2008: 231).

V etnografski raziskavi prehranske samooskrbe v Mariboru sem se ukvarjala z delovanjem petih omrežij. Med njimi sta dve, ki sta nastali v času Evropske prestolnice kulture v sklopu Urbanih brazd – vrtičkarsko Društvo Skupnostni urbani eko vrt in zadruga manjših pridelovalcev iz okolice Maribora Zadruga Dobrina. Preostala so omrežje skupnostnega naročanja Zeleni krog, omrežje partnerskega kmetovanja Eko zabojček in partnersko kmetovanje Zofijinih ljubimcev.

OBZORJE MARIBORSKIH KROŽNIKOV

Mariborska krajina je v 18. in 19. stoletju bila zelo tesno povezana z agrarnim podeželjem, ko se je ob koncu 19. stoletja preusmerila v prehransko industrijo. Mnogo stoletij predtem so znotraj mesta cveteli in rasli vrtovi ter brajde, onkraj mestnih zidov pa je bilo slednjih še znatno več, skupaj s strnjjenimi sadovnjaki ter obilico njiv. Zaradi industrializacije in urbanizacije se je v prvi polovici 20. stoletja pomen kmetijstva za preživetje mariborskega prebivalstva zmanjšal. Kmetijstvo je kljub temu ostalo pomembna gospodarska dejavnost, ki je s porabo in izvozom pridelkov predstavljala pomemben predmet lokalnega trgovanja in ponujala vir preživetja (Godina Golija 2015: 117). Čeprav je Maribor postajal bivanjsko vedno bolj tesen za prihajajoče delavce_ke s podeželja, je bil še zmeraj dovolj prostoren za obišne vrtičke v delavskih kolonijah in primestne obdelovalne površine (Ferlež 2009: 295).

Po drugi svetovni vojni je pridelovanje hrane v Mariboru in njegovi okolici nadaljevalo svoj razvoj ter v veliki meri obstajalo pod okriljem zadrug, mnogi_e meščani_ke pa so si sami_e pridelovali_e zelenjavo in sadje na obišnih vrtičkih (Ferlež 2001), vikendih (Rozman in Prišenk 2012: 247) ali manjših neuporabljenih in zapuščenih zemljiščih (ob železniških progah ipd.). Razen tega je velik del svežih živil prihajal iz drugih republik takratne Jugoslavije, v porastu pa je bila tudi prehranska industrija, ki se je z uveljavitvijo jugoslovanskih znamk živil vse do danes močno usidrala (Mihajlovič 2018) tako v lokalno prehrano na

območju Maribora kot širše regije. Stičišče pridelovalcev_k s podeželja in ljudi iz mesta je kar nekaj stoletij ostajala mariborska tržnica, kot izredno pomemben javni prostor v urbanem središču, prostor srečevanja, druženja in komuniciranja, prostor trgovanja s pridelki in izdelki (Godina Golija 2015: 119).

O izkušnjah s prodajo in dogajanjem na tržnici sem se pogovarjala z mnogimi sodelavci_kami – z vodjo tržnice, z uslužbenko Kmetijsko gozdarskega zavoda, predvsem pa z branjevkami, z rednimi obiskovalci_kami tržnice, s takšnimi, ki so tam kupovali v preteklosti, in s tistimi, ki v okolici tržnice delajo (v barih, na javnem stranišču ipd.). Mnogi_e med njimi, ki so s tržnico povezani_e že desetletja, se strinjajo s tem, da so splošno obiskavnost in podoba mariborskega mestnega jedra, in s tem tudi tržnice, v 21. stoletju spremenili veliki trgovski centri, večinoma v tuji lasti, ki so zasenčili manjše trgovine in lokale (Lavrič in Naterer 2018: 48; Podgornik Jakil 2015: 89). Poenostavljeno – vlogo tržnice, ki je nekoč veljala kot prostor interakcije s pridelovalci_kami, so prevzele anonimne veletrgovine (Levkoe 2013: 589). Moč mariborske tržnice, ki je v zadnjih desetletjih doživela mnogo pretresov, peša predvsem od stečaja podjetja leta 2011 (Struc 2024: 77–78).

Pri kratkem zgodovinskem orisu pridelave in distribucije hrane naj omenim še transformacijo Maribora od socialističnega industrijskega mesta k neoliberalnemu postindustrijskemu mestu, ko je po deindustrializaciji ostal brezperspektivno mesto, iz katerega se je veliko mlajših prebivalcev_k in druga kvalificirana delovna sila odpravila v Ljubljano ali v tujino (Stamejčič 2016: 18). Vsakdanja prekarizacija življenj večine ljudi v Mariboru je zelo pomembna tudi za obravnavo in razvoj prehranske oskrbe mesta. Omenjeno opazamo mnogi_e, med njimi tudi uslužbenka Kmetijsko gozdarskega zavoda, ki je povedala, da so se navade ljudi glede oskrbe s hrano spremenile s postavitvijo nakupovalnih centrov in da cenejša uvožena živila izpodrivajo lokalno pridelano hrano.

Samoorganiziranih omrežij prehranske oskrbe v Mariboru ne bi bilo, če se posamezniki_ce in kolektivi ter razne pobude okrog leta 2012 ne bi začeli_e vpraševati, čemu lokalna in ekološka hrana ni dostopna, niti cenovno niti distribucijsko, in čemu so uveljavljeni vzorci distribucije lokalnih pridelkov neuspešni in neugodni za pridelovalce_ke. Na eni izmed dostav Zelenega kroga sem se pogovarjala z dvema pridelovalcema ekološke zelenjave. Eden je prihajal iz Slovenskih goric in je svoj pridelek prodajal po več kanalih – prek Zelenega kroga, na ekološki tržnici, kot član Zadruge Dobrina, pridelek pa je tudi samostojno dostavljal v vrtce. Za ekološko pridelavo se je odločil zaradi velikega povpraševanja in lažje prodaje. Tudi drugi pridelovalec je prodajal po več kanalih. Ob preusmeritvi v ekološko pridelavo se mu prodaja veletrgovcem ni več obrestovala, tako zaradi finančnega aspekta kot zaradi nespoštljivih odnosov med posredniki in pridelovalci_kami.

Motivacija za sodelovanje v samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežjih pogosto izvira iz osebnih preferenc – vse od ohranjanja profesionalnih veščin in znanja pridelovalcev_k do njihove ideje o kakovostni pridelavi (v nasprotju z vsiljenimi idejami konvencionalne pridelave), ki jo prepoznavajo tudi odjemalci_ke, oboje pa je povezano z ohranjanjem dostojanstva in ponosa glede njihovega poklica (Corsi idr. 2018: 310–311). Po mnenju nekaterih raziskovalcev_k se logistika prehranske oskrbe zrcali v problematiki upravljanja sveta, kar

poudarjajo tudi različni zagovorniki distribucije lokalno pridelane hrane po svetu, ki se bori-
jo za vzpostavljanje omrežij lokalne prehranske oskrbe ter za ohranjanje dejavnosti manjših
pridelovalcev_k. Znana raziskovalka alternativnih prehranskih omrežij Cristina Grasseni
ugotavlja, da njihov boj ne predstavlja zgolj marketinške niše, ampak skuša preoblikovati
način trgovanja s hrano (Grasseni 2014: 53).

Samoorganizirana omrežja prehranske oskrbe v Mariboru so ob približno istem času
nastajala na podlagi lokalnih pobud, pa tudi znanja in izkušenj iz različnih delov Evrope
(Nemčija, Francija) ter preostalega sveta (predvsem Južna Amerika). K vzpostavitvi neka-
terih samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij v Mariboru pa so nenazadnje pripomogle
tudi Urbane brazde, ki so v diskurz in razmišljanje o urbani prehranski oskrbi vpeljale nove
koncepte, vzpostavile skupnostne urbane vrtove ter našle načine povezav med prideloval-
ci_kami in odjemalci_kami.

PREHRANSKE PUŠČAVE, PREHRANSKA REVŠČINA, PREHRANSKA VARNOST?

Izraz »prehranska puščava« se je pojavil v devetdesetih letih prejšnjega stoletja v
Veliki Britaniji, nato pa so ga posvojili tudi v ZDA (Yeoman 2018). Koncept v vseh primerih
nosi politično konotacijo, saj odraža razmerja moči v določenem okolju in razkriva neena-
komerno porazdelitev virov. V tem okviru kritični raziskovalci urbane prehranske oskrbe
opozarjajo na nepravilno uporabo termina »prehranska puščava«, ki pogosto zanemara
strukturni razizem in takšna območja označuje kot mrtva, izolirana območja, kjer ljudje niso
povezani v ekonomska, politična in druga omrežja (Kilavo seme 2018; Kolb 2022: 27), kar
naj bi pomenilo, da se tam »nič ne dogaja«.

Prehranska puščava je termin, s katerim predvsem v anglosaškem svetu (še posebej v
ZDA) opredeljujejo urbana območja, kjer naj bi živeli ljudje z nižjimi finančnimi prihodki z
omejenim dostopom do hrane.² Tam, kjer ni veliko veleblagovnic, naj bi revnejši prebivalci
(večinoma nebelci) bili podvrženi izbiri manjših in dražjih trgovin. Po drugi strani se o preh-
ranskih puščavah govori tudi kot o območjih, kjer na splošno ni dostopa do kakovostne
hrane, saj ni kanalov distribucije lokalno pridelane hrane (Segal 2010: 205). Zaradi nekako-
vostne hrane naj bi bile prehranske puščave tudi območja, kjer so ljudje na splošno slabšega
zdravja in so podvrženi boleznim, vezanim na prehrano (Adams idr. 2010: 58).

Novinar s področja ekologije in raznih družbenih problematik Barry Yeoman kot
eden izmed kritičnih raziskovalcev prehranskih puščav pravi, da so k problemu prehran-
ske izključenosti v veliki meri prispevale zakonodaja in zasebne prakse distribucije hrane
(Yeoman 2018). Skupaj s sogovorniki_kami poudarja pomen prehranskih omrežij in urba-
nih skupnosti, ki so se problema pomanjkanja hranljivih živil lotile samoorganizirano (prav
tam). Koncept prehranskih puščav je primer ekološke marginalizacije, ki se ne kaže le kot

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Območje naj bi veljalo za prehransko puščavo, če je stopnja revščine vsaj 20 odstotkov in če ima vsaj 33 odstotkov prebival-
stva več kot miljo (1,6 km) do najbližjega supermarketa v urbanem ter deset milj (16 km) v ruralnem okolju (Dutko 2012: 1).

odvzem pravic upravljanja lokalnih virov, ampak odvzem te moči z napačno interpretacijo nekega določenega družbenega okolja.

V našem okolju se pogosteje kot o prehranskih puščavah govori o prehranski (ne)varnosti ter prehranski revščini. O slednji Vesna Leskošek in Romana Zidar pišeta kot o družbenem problemu, ki je povezan »z zmanjševanjem obsega socialne države, pomanjkanjem politik za odpravo revščine in s problemom odpadne in presežne hrane« (Leskošek in Zidar 2022: 541). Opozarjata tudi, da javne politike skušajo reševati problematiko z redistribucijo zavržene hrane ter da se v tem smislu odgovornost za eliminiranje prehranske revščine prenaša na dobrodelne organizacije (prav tam). Hrana je v glavnem močno metaforično, simbolno in družbeno zaznamovana ter deluje kot vstopna točka v razširjene razprave o mnogih raznolikih problematikah. Med drugim lahko skozi njo raziskujemo politične in družbene odnose v določeni družbi (Ashley idr. 2004: 27–28).

Če se koncept prehranske revščine v našem kontekstu povezuje z distribucijo hrane, pa se koncept prehranske varnosti tesno prepleta s terminom samooskrbe, katerega definicija je precej ohlapna, zato se glede njegove uporabe v strokovni literaturi pojavljajo dileme. Termin se v najširšem smislu ne osredotoča le na prehransko »oskrbo samega sebe«, ampak na splošno oskrbo z viri. Pogosto se uporablja v državotvorni retoriki (Vovk Korže 2013: 15), kjer se za optimalno nacionalno prehransko samooskrbo šteje, da država proizvede zadovoljivo količino hrane za potrebe prebivalstva ter zagotavlja uravnoteženo stanje med ponudbo hrane in povpraševanjem po njej (Pestotnik 2014: 15). Kot že omenjeno, se koncept prehranske samooskrbe sicer oblikuje znotraj širšega koncepta prehranske varnosti, ki se osredotoča na zagotavljanje dostopnosti hrane v vseh razmerah (tudi v kriznih), na sledljivost kakovostno pridelane hrane in na doseganje določene stopnje potencialne samooskrbe (Plut 2014: 19–21).

METANJE PARADIŽNIKOV

Upad odkupa pridelkov v poletnih mesecih in presežki so problematika, s katero se ukvarjajo vsa obravnavana prehranska omrežja v Mariboru. Med vsemi temi je najmanj oškodovano omrežje skupnostnega urbanega vrtnarjenja. Vrtničkarji_ke lahko na podlagi izkušenj iz preteklih sezon predvidevajo, kdaj (zaradi dopustov) ne bodo mogli skrbeti za nemoteno rast svojega vrtnega pridelka. Prehranski viški so v osnovi nasproten koncept prehranskim puščavam, čeprav so z njimi povezani prek prehranske revščine in prehranske varnosti, vsi pa izhajajo iz težav v prehranskih sistemih in dostopnosti hrane. Alokacija virov hrane vzpostavlja odnose moči, praktičen prikaz te prakse pa je neenakomerna porazdelitev hrane po svetu (Clark 2013: 234).

Večina pridelovalcev_k samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij v Mariboru trdi, da ima možnost še obsežnejše pridelave, če bi to bilo potrebno, vendar se skoraj vsako leto ukvarjajo s problematiko prodaje in distribucije viškov. Zraven tega lokalna distribucija hrane zmeraj ne deluje, včasih se celo zdi, da je odveč in da je predraga. Podatki o količini zavrženega pridelka se v Sloveniji zelo razlikujejo glede na regijo in sogovornike_ce. Medtem ko je sogovornica, ki dela na Mestni občini Ljubljana, dejala, da imajo pridelovalci_ke iz

okolice v Ljubljani zagotovljen odkup, pridelovalci_ke iz mariborskih omrežij govorijo o tem, da imajo v času dobrih letin pridelka preveč in ga morajo prodajati pod ceno, zavreči, predelati oziroma iskati nove tržne kanale. Pri Zadruzi Dobrina so v času moje raziskave razmišljali_e tudi o tem, da bi zavoljo predelave viškov investirali_e v predelovalnico, vendar so se hkrati zavedali_e, da s predelanimi produkti ne bodo zaslužili_e dovolj, da bi pokrili stroške vzpostavitve predelovalnice.

Tudi pogovori z vrtničkarji_kami so se velikokrat vrteli okrog viškov pridelkov. Ena izmed njih je omenila, da ima poleti ogromno pridelka (predvsem buč), ki jih s partnerjem razdelita med sorodnike in prijatelje. Druga sogovornica, ki je hkrati odjemalka pri Zelenem krogu, je dodala, da v poletnem času, takrat, ko je obilo pridelka, mnogo ponudnikov_ic svojim naročnikom_cam k nakupu brezplačno prida dodatna živila ali pa jim vse računa po nižji ceni. To je nazorno povzela s tem, da pridelovalci_ke za njo malodane »mečejo paradižnike« v času njihovega zorenja, saj vedo, da se ukvarja s predelavo paradižnikov in da jih bo, tudi večje količine, z veseljem uporabila.

Pri obravnavanju samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij v Mariboru, z nekaj manj kot 100.000 prebivalci, je vrtničkarstvo zelo pomembna urbana, socialna in kulturna komponenta. S pridelki na Skupnostnem urbanem eko vrtu v Borovi in Novi vasi bi lahko prehranili okrog 300 ljudi, če bi na vsakem izmed več kot 80 vrtničkov pridelovali hrano za nekajčlansko gospodinjstvo. Koliko ljudi se prehranjuje s pridelki s tamkajšnjih vrtov, je težko reči, dejstvo pa je, da nihče izmed vrtničkarjev_k ne prideluje hrane le zase in viške vsaj občasno dajejo še komu.

Pridelovalci_ke Eko zabojčka in Društva Zofijinih ljubimcev pri partnerskem kmetovanju viške pridelkov rešujejo z mesečnimi pavšali pridelka v košarici. Zgodaj spomladi košarice ne tehtajo veliko, saj zelenjava takrat še ni težka (na primer solate); ko pa se začne sezona mladega krompirja, bučk, paprike, jajčevcev, paradižnikov in kumaric, so košarice vse težje. Ne glede na težo vsebine je cena košaric vedno enaka.

Ob koncu tega poglavja o viških se strinjam s Hansom R. Herrenom, ki pravi, da bi poleg boljše distribucije lokalno pridelane hrane k izboljšanju prehranske varnosti, o kateri sem govorila v prejšnjem poglavju, v veliki meri pripomogli tudi dostop do skladiščnih prostorov na podeželju in v mestu, možnost uporabe prostorov za ozimnico ter infrastruktura, ki omogoča predelavo hrane (Herren 2015: 11), s čimer bi se izognili izgubi presežkov pridelka. Potrebo po skladiščnih in predelovalnih prostorih so potrdili tako nekateri_e pridelovalci_ke kot večina odjemalcev_k, ki živijo v mestih. Omrežja problematiko prehranskih viškov intenzivno nago-varjajo in so jo v marsikaterih primerih rešila, vendar bi pri vzpostavljanju večje »mestne žitnice« potrebovala neke vrste pomoč upravljalcev mesta in vasi. V naslednjem poglavju se bom prek antropologije omrežij posvetila ravno omenjenemu odnosu – ruralno-urbano partnerstvo.

PROSTORJENJE OMREŽIJ PREHRANSKE OSKRBE

Kot velja za alternativna, tudi za samoorganizirana prehranska omrežja velja, da predstavljajo kanale produkcije, distribucije in porabe hrane, ki zaganjajo procese relokalizacije in

resocializacije produkcijskih, distribucijskih in potrošniških praks (Matacena 2016: 49). Omrežja temeljijo na tesni komunikaciji med pridelovalci in porabniki ter s tem podpirajo razvoj novih oblik odnosov in sodelovanja (Sánchez-Hernández 2009: 376). Vzpostavljajo se okrog načel zaupanja, vključevanja in prostorjenja (Brunori 2007: 8). Zmorejo preživeti prekarne in izkoriščevalske razmere ter jih izboljševati v prid sebe in svojega okolja. Delujejo na mikroravnih vsakdanjega življenja ter oblikujejo socialne mreže in omrežja.

Antropologi_nje so koncept omrežij začeli uporabljati šele za raziskave urbanih skupnosti in hitro spreminjajočih se družb po drugi svetovni vojni ter na podlagi analiz omrežij predpostavljali_e, da je človeška družba sestavljena iz omrežij nenehno spreminjajočih se odnosov posameznikov_ic (Boissevain in Mitchell 1973: vii–viii). John Arundel Barnes je omrežja vizualiziral kot točke ljudi ali skupin znotraj enega družbenega razreda, ki so med seboj povezane s črtami (Barnes 1954: 43). Od takrat dalje obstaja mnogo načinov interpretacije omrežij, ki segajo na vsa področja antropologije – skupaj z ekonomsko, urbano, digitalno, ekološko in politično antropologijo. V zborniku *Network Analysis* sta Jeremy Boissevain in Clyde J. Mitchell omrežja opisovala kot družbene fenomene, ki obstajajo zavoljo kroženja informacij, izmenjave dela in pomoči ter vzpostavljanja normativov (Boissevain in Mitchell 1973: 23–26). V istem zborniku besedil je Geert A. Banck ugotavljal, da konsenza o tem, kaj sploh je družbeno omrežje, še ni (Banck 1973: 37). Mark S. Granovetter je moč vezi opisoval kot skupek časa, čustvene intenzivnosti, intimnosti in recipročnosti (Granovetter 1973: 1360).

Nekaj let pozneje je Alvin W. Wolfe utemeljeval vpeljevanje koncepta omrežij s potrebo po novih modelih za preučevanje urbanih in kompleksnih družbenih pojavov, ki bi pripomogli k razvoju statistične obdelave podatkov, pridobljenih med etnografskimi raziskavami (Wolfe 1978: 55–57). V devetdesetih letih je Marilyn Strathern pisala o omrežjih kot o načinu opisovanja povezav med nekom (ali nečim) brez predpostavk o njihovem hierarhičnem položaju ter jih opisovala kot neskončna (Strathern 1996: 522). Slabo desetletje pozneje so ji tudi drugi_e raziskovalci_ke pritrdjevali_e glede neskončnosti omrežij in omrežja videli_e kot brezmejna, odprta, neskončna, necentralizirana (Green, Harvey in Knox 2005: 807). Tudi Manuel Castells je leta 2010 omrežja opisoval kot odprte strukture, vendar je vpeljal razliko med omrežji kot starejšimi oblikami medčloveškega povezovanja in organiziranja ter digitalnimi omrežnimi tehnologijami, ki se lahko neskončno širijo in vedno znova preoblikujejo (Castells 2010: 501).

O omrežjih je posredno pisala tudi Anna Tsing, ki je hitro izgubo gozdov v Indoneziji preučevala z etnografijo globalnih povezav, ki se kaže v trenjih. Ugotavlja, da je gozd družbena pokrajina, in ne neposeljeno območje (Tsing 2004: xi), da se celo na videz najbolj izolirane skupnosti kontinuirano oblikujejo v dialogu z državnimi in mednarodnimi akterji ter da se globalni premiki dogajajo na podlagi trenj v njihovih dialogih (Tsing 2004: 4).

Ce povzamem, se koncept omrežij pogosto uporablja pri opisovanju družbenih pojavov, ki jih ne moremo opisati zgolj znotraj pojmov skupnosti, skupine in organizacije. V tem smislu je o omrežju ornitološkega društva kot o skupnizaciji pisal tudi Dan Podjed (Podjed 2011: 159–161). V nekaj desetletjih se je uporaba koncepta omrežij pri opisovanju medčlo-

veških in drugih odnosov torej spreminjala, pogosta pa je bila predvsem pri analizi odnosov moči ter distribucije dobrin, znanja in informacij.

S pomočjo koncepta omrežij si lahko bolje predstavljamo, kako se samoorganizirana omrežja prehranske oskrbe trudijo za vzpostavitev novih družbeno-prostorskih povezav med mestom in podeželjem, četudi jim to ne uspe takoj, tj. kako tvorijo ruralno-urbani prostor. V tem smislu je Janez Bogataj ob koncu prejšnjega tisočletja ugotavljal, da so ruralno kot nasprotje urbanemu, pa tudi podeželje le še pokrajinske in prostorske kategorije (Bogataj 1996: 149). To pripisuje temu, da sodobno podeželje, ki naj bi bilo nekdanje družbeno enovito in določljivo, trenutno »sooblikujejo zelo različni družbeni in profesionalni sloji in skupine (ter tudi posamezniki)« (Bogataj 1996: 149) in se s tem ne razlikuje od sodobnega mesta.³

Na primer, Zadruga Dobrina je zadruga in socialno podjetje približno sedemdesetih manjših pridelovalcev_k ekološko in integrirano pridelane zelenjave ter drugega živeža iz okolice Maribora. Na leto od pridelovalcev_k odkupi približno devetdeset ton živil. Dobljava pridelke več kot petdeset institucijam in obratom, med katere sodijo domovi za starejše občane, vrtci, šole, hoteli, bolnišnica, kadetnica in restavracije. V povezovanje pridelovalcev z institucijami in obrati javne prehrane vlagajo ogromno časa, dela in truda. Zanimivo pri tem pa je, da se je za sodelovanje in nabavo lokalno pridelanih živil pri Zadrugi Dobrina dejansko odločilo več mestnih kot podeželskih institucij in obratov, ne glede na to, da uslužbenci_ke pridelovalce_ke osebno poznajo.

Vezivo samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij ni le distribucija pridelkov, ampak tudi prenos znanja. Zofijini ljubimci so si projekt partnerskega kmetovanja sprva zamislili tako, da bi bilo skupno delo na kmetiji namenjeno druženju in zanimivo predvsem za družine z mlajšimi otroki, ki bi bili na varnem in v naravi, opazovali bi lahko živali, medtem ko bi odrasli postorili kaj na kmetiji. V začetku so bili_e člani_ce omrežja s pridelovalko in njeno kmetijo zelo povezani_e. Kljub začetni vnemi in skupnim delovnim akcijam naj bi se sčasoma »polenili_e« in izkazalo se je, da so celoten poskus partnerskega kmetovanja zasnovali preveč idealistično.

Medtem se pa zdi, da se mestno vrtničkarstvo s problemom povezovanja podeželja in mesta ne ukvarja, čeprav posredno postavlja pod vprašaj njune meje in v urbani prostor vnaša vsebine, ki jih na simbolni ravni v splošno sprejetem diskurzu pripisujejo ruralnemu: narava, zeleno, pridelovanje hrane, rastline, zemlja, ekosistem. To so potrdili_e tudi vrtničkarji_ke iz Društva Skupnostni urbani eko vrt in z drugih vrtov v Mariboru, saj menijo, da so na vrtu »v naravi, na zraku«.

Za konec poglavja omenimo še točke prepleta samoorganiziranih omrežij lokalne prehranske oskrbe. Mnogi_e njihovi_e člani_ce v istih ali različnih vlogah nastopajo v več omrežjih. Omrežja nimajo enotne stične točke, čeprav mnogi_e sogovorniki_ce menijo, da je eden izmed načinov krepitve samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij centralizacija ponudbe in združevanje čim večjega števila pridelovalcev_k. Ob tem razmišljam, da bi

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To ugotavlja tudi Franc Trček, ki pravi, da novo ruralno okolje postaja »vedno bolj zapleten sistem številnih akterjev, ki so si v svojih vizijah novih ruralnosti pogosto izključujoče nasprotni« (Trček 2012: 36).

lahko poskus centralizacije samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij zavoljo logističnega poenostavljanja, komercialne dostopnosti in prepoznavnosti vodil do poskusov nadzora omrežij, preusmeritve njihovega fokusa ter spremembe vizije, ki temelji na neposredni povezavi in skupnem odločanju.

SKLEP

Samoorganizirana omrežja lokalne prehranske oskrbe v Mariboru povezujejo preteklost mariborske prehranske oskrbe z njeno sedanjostjo in skrbijo za potencialno prihodnost. Na širšem rodovitnem območju z ugodno prometno lego, kjer je bila nekoč razvita živilska industrija ter že skozi stoletja prisotno urbano vrtnarjenje, samonikla omrežja, ki so vzniknila zaradi prepoznane potrebe, nuje in želje po samoorganizirani prehranski oskrbi, učinkovito nadomeščajo nekdanje srečevališče distribucije lokalne produkcije hrane. Omrežja so raznolika v svoji obliki in v svojem delovanju, bodisi gre za zadruge, skupnostne prakse urbanega vrtnarjenja oziroma skupnega načrtovanja pridelovalne sezone pri partnerskem kmetijstvu bodisi za skupno naročanje pri pridelovalcih, vendar predstavljajo protimoč korporativni distribuciji hrane ter skrbijo za prenos znanja o lokalni pridelavi hrane.

Vizija, ki jo udejanjajo ta omrežja, ni utemeljena na radikalnem prelomu, temveč na postopnem preoblikovanju obstoječih odnosov – skozi prakso, skupnostno delovanje in skrb za okolje. Gre za oblikovanje praks, kjer hrana ni zgolj blago, temveč je nosilka družbenih, političnih in okoljskih vrednot, kar omogoča boljši dostop do lokalno pridelane hrane, upravljanja skupnostnih virov ter vpeljevanja solidarnostnih oblik ekonomskega sodelovanja. V širšem merilu se zaradi sistemskih omejitev, institucionalne nepodpore, predvsem pa kapitalistične tržne logike še ne morejo vzpostaviti. Kljub temu je dobro imeti v mislih, da ne gre za nenadni dogodek, temveč za proces, ki poteka počasi. Uresničitev vizije samoorganiziranih prehranskih omrežij je med drugim odvisna tudi od prepoznavanja in podpore njihovih praks.

Samoorganizirana omrežja lokalne prehranske oskrbe v Mariboru, ki nikakor niso nepovezana samotna otočja, je na prvi pogled težko opredeliti kot omrežja boja, tudi zato, ker včasih njihovi člani ne prepoznavajo svojega uporništv, čeprav prepoznavajo svoj boj. Pa vendar, tovrstna dejavnost ustvarja in oblikuje »nove pravice« do okolja, dostopa do prehrane, naravnih virov, združevanja, novih ekonomskih struktur, političnega udejstvovanja in odločanja ter do aktivizma. Posameznike povezuje v želji po simbolno ustvarjeni skupnosti, hkrati pa prakse gradnje skupnosti s svojim zgledom širi in postopoma »normalizira«. S svojim delovanjem povezuje institucije s pridelovalci hrane, hkrati pa z gojenjem lastne hrane, uporabo zapuščenih površin in poustvarjanjem novih prostorov, ki niso ne urbani ne ruralni, ustvarja paralelni svet ter se sprememb loteva na drugačen način – s počasno, toda vztrajno transformacijo prehranskih, ekonomskih in družbenih sistemov.

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SUMMARY

The article discusses the importance of self-organised networks for local food supply in Maribor as a key factor in preventing food deserts and ensuring sustainable food supply in urban environments. Food deserts are typically defined as areas with limited access to quality food, but critical researchers argue that the concept overlooks local initiatives aimed at improving access to food, as well as the complex economic and social factors that lead to food exclusion. The practices within self-organised networks of food supply represent “islands” or networks of solidarity economies that create space for the distribution of locally produced food. Self-organised food networks, such as Zeleni krog, Eko zaboječek, Zadru-ga Dobrina, and Društvo Skupnostni urbani eko vrt, have established new forms of food supply that provide direct access to locally produced food. By having direct contact with their consumers, producers avoid instability and are less exposed to the influence of large commercial chains, which also partially addresses the issue of surplus production. Participation in these networks is often motivated by the desire to preserve quality food production and the dignity of farmers. Self-organised food supply networks connect the past and the present, replace traditional distribution paths, and transmit knowledge on food production. These networks, which at first glance might seem closed off and distant from mainstream food distribution, not only offer locally produced food but also maintain connections between rural and urban areas and strengthen resilience against corporate food systems.

Moralisations of Space and the Spatiality of Morality: The Case of the Dublin Working-Class Neighbour- hood Ballymun



Moralizacije prostora in prostorskost morale:
primer dublinske delavske soseske Ballymun

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ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship on morality highlights it as a communal and everyday achievement, rooted in everyday (spatial) practices and tied to places. In this article, I explore two distinct yet overlapping moral orders that shape life in Ballymun, a working-class suburb of Dublin built in the 1960s as a social housing estate and redeveloped in the early 2000s. I argue that these moral repertoires correspond to two versions of Ballymun: the pre-regeneration “Old Ballymun” and the post-regeneration “New Ballymun”. Both places are morally charged and thus often generate conflicting understandings of the neighbourhood and its challenges. While regeneration, driven by the neoliberal politics of the Third Way, sought to materially and socially transform the area through new moral visions, these were not uniformly adopted by residents. Some embraced them; others resisted, drawing instead on affective and memorial ties to Old Ballymun and leaning on the moral repertoires tied to the past place. Although the moral logics of old and new often align, they also produce tensions – particularly around notions of individual responsibility, care, and the causes of local problems. I show in this article how moral values are embedded in everyday practices that shape the neighbourhood, and how different conceptions of place inform residents’ moral interpretations of its transformation and ongoing struggles.

KEYWORDS: morality, place, memory, regeneration, ethics of care, responsibility

ALINA BEZLAJ

*Moralisations of Space and the Spatiality of Morality: The
Case of the Dublin Working-Class Neighbourhood Ballymun*

Nedavna znanstvena dognanja o morali jo označujejo kot dosežek skupnosti in vsakdana, zakoreninjen v vsakdanjih (prostorskih) praksah in vezan na kraje. V prispevku raziskujem dva različna, a prekrivajoča se moralna reda, ki oblikujeta življenje v Ballymunu, delavskem predmestju Dublina, ki je bilo v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja zgrajeno kot socialno stanovanjsko naselje in nato prenovljeno po vstopu v novo tisočletje. Zagovarjam tezo, da tovrstni moralni repertoarji ustrezajo dvema različicama Ballymuna, »staremu« in »nove-
mu«, pred in po prenovi. Oba kraja sta vsak po svoje moralno opredeljena in zato pogosto sprožata nasprotujoča si razumevanja soseske in njenih izzivov. Medtem ko je regeneracija, ki jo je vodila neoliberalna politika tako-imenovane tretje poti, skušala v materialnem in družbenem smislu območje preoblikovati v okviru nove moralne vizije, pa le-te prebivalci niso enotno sprejeli. Nekateri so jo vzeli za svojo, drugi pa so se ji uprli, pri čemer so se opirali na čustvene in spominske vezi s starim Ballymunom in na moralne repertoarje, povezane s krajem iz preteklosti. Čeprav se moralna logika starega in novega pogosto ujemata, povzročata tudi napetosti – zlasti ko gre za predstave o individualni odgovornosti, skrbi in vzrokih za lokalno problematiko. V članku ponazorim, kako so moralne vrednote del vsakodnevnih praks, ki oblikujejo naravo soseske, in kako različna pojmovanja kraja vplivajo na to, kako tamkajšnji prebivalci interpretirajo njeno preobrazbo in nenehne stiske.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: morala, kraj, spomin, regeneracija, etika skrbi, odgovornost

INTRODUCTION

Ethics and morality as aspects of human experience have recently gained a rising amount of interest in anthropology and social sciences (Cassaniti and Hickman 2014). Research, which understands morality as a societal dimension, rejects the idea that moral actions are driven by sets of fixed rules and normative standards that structure decision making; rather, it stresses the historicity of the moral, which is shaped and developed through social practices and is in a continuous process of transformation in changing social contexts. Such research, furthermore, does not construe of moral acts as based (exclusively) on beliefs and anchored in the cognition of an individual, but stresses, on the one hand, the way they are embodied and entangled with affects, and on the other, their dependence on practical communities, as morality is a communal outcome (Mattingly 2012). Das argues that moral work does not mean “orienting oneself to transcendental, objectively agreed-upon values”, but is rather achieved through the “cultivation of sensibilities *within* the everyday” (Das 2012: 134). While morality is thus carried out in everyday practices, the evaluation of what is good and how to live is tied to normative frameworks of behaviour. Deeb and Harb (2013) take into account both these elements of moral actions in their definition of morality; they define it as conscious aspirations to live a good life, whereby morality is contextual (played out in practices) and tied to normative repertoires, i.e. standards which determine what behaviours or states are good and bad. Acts may find their justification, according to Deeb and Hard (2013), in various different normative

repertoires, which may (un)comfortably coexist. In their everyday practices, people thus choose different possibilities of action, which may then be evaluated as moral or immoral depending on which normative repertoire is being drawn upon.

If we do not understand morality as abstract sets of values, but rather as something which arises through everyday (spatial) practices within communities of different scales, we can begin to also think about the relation between morality and space/place. On the one hand, morality is reflected in different spatial practices – Deeb and Harb (2013) demonstrate in their ethnography of leisure and morality in the context of Beirut's youth experiences that the young people negotiate and navigate between different sets of moral orders, which manifest themselves in different spatial practices in the city. On the other hand, the idea that places themselves can be morally significant is not new (see e.g. Basso 1996). Preston thus argues that both the physical contexts in which everyday practices are carried out and the practices themselves are “morally thick” (2009: 178). The moral significance of places is, however, as Smith (2007) points out, variable and reflects geography's relationship to history.

In this article, I focus on two different moral orders that coexist, often overlap, and sometimes conflict in the context of the North Dublin region under study.¹ I relate these different moral repertoires to two different manifestations of place, both of which, to quote Preston (2009), are “morally thick”. I explore aspects of the connection between morality and place through the case of the Dublin working-class neighbourhood of Ballymun. This is a neighbourhood that was “regenerated” by the Dublin City Council at the turn of the millennium, changing both its physical and social structure. I will argue that this regeneration, which was anchored in the neoliberal political agenda of the Third Way, has appropriated the place and adapted it to its own moralising vision. This vision is sometimes also claimed by the residents, and at other times contested by reference to the memorial and affective place of the pre-regeneration Old Ballymun. The moral order of New Ballymun is in many ways consistent with that of Old Ballymun, but at times they lead to conflicting interpretations of the neighbourhood and antagonistic interpretations of its problems, which arise from different conceptions and valuations of individuals, their responsibilities, and their need for care.

In this way, I will demonstrate how moral ideas are enacted through the different practices that create and transform the neighbourhood, and on the other hand, how for the residents, the different manifestations of the neighbourhood's place serve as a source of their moral interpretations of the reasons for its problems.

METHODOLOGY

The research is based on ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted in the Ballymun neighbourhood from January to July 2022, during which time I visited the neighbour-

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This article is a revised and lengthened version of the chapter “Two Places, Two Moralities” from the book *A Place of Ruptures and Bonds: The (Re)making of a Dublin Suburb* (Bezljaj 2024).

hood a few days a week, attending local meetings, volunteering in local activities, and getting to know the residents of the neighbourhood, with whom I had a series of informal conversations, and with some of whom I also conducted more formal interviews. In total, I conducted 22 structured and semi-structured interviews with 31 interviewees who were active in one way or another in the social fabric of Ballymun – either living in the area or involved in community life. One interviewee was a local councillor and two were representatives of the Dublin City Council Area Office. I conducted the interviews in person in cafés and pubs, while walking, sitting on benches, at the interviewees' workplaces or in their homes; at the insistence of the interviewees, I also conducted three interviews by video call and one by email. I tried to obtain a sample of interviewees of different ages, genders and educational backgrounds. In total, I interviewed seventeen men and fourteen women, most of whom were long-time residents of Ballymun or those who had been “born and bred” there, and four of whom had only moved into the neighbourhood in the post-regeneration period. The majority of the interviewees were in the 40–49 age group (mostly made up of those who had been born in Ballymun before its regeneration), while the second largest groups of interviewees consisted of people aged between 50 and 59 and people aged over 60 (these groups were mostly made up of people who had moved to Ballymun as children or adults in the period before the regeneration).

CONTEXT OF RESEARCH: BALLYMUN

The suburban neighbourhood of Ballymun in the north of Dublin was built in the late 1960s to address the severe housing shortage that was plaguing the city. The neighbourhood was built by using industrial, prefabricated methods of construction and comprised seven fifteen-storey tower blocks, which became the leitmotif of the neighbourhood, nineteen eight-storey blocks, ten four-storey blocks (Rowley 2018: 230), and some 450 houses; by 1970 the estate comprised 3,265 dwellings, most of which were in the form of block housing, exclusively for use by council tenants (Somerville-Woodward 2002). In the 1970s, another 1400 houses were added (Power 1997).

However, due to the lack of management and maintenance of the estate by the municipality, the neighbourhood quickly materially deteriorated; the material decay caused the neighbourhood to be less desirable among the more well-off council tenants, and consequently the municipality began renting out flats to people who were considered to be less “desirable” tenants (i.e. one parent households, the unemployed, the homeless, and drug addicts). The material decay, in combination with the low socio-economic status of the residents and the marginalised population, caused the estate to become one of the most stigmatised and unwanted places in Dublin. This furthermore presented a push factor for the wealthier (i.e. employed) council tenants of the estate, who moved out in large numbers in the 1970s and 1980s due to the poor reputation and difficult living conditions, leaving the poorest (unemployed) council tenants less able to do so and consequently lowering the

spending power of the area.² Ballymun was further weakened, especially in the 1980s, by the onset of the heroin epidemic in Dublin, which hit poorer neighbourhoods like this one particularly hard (Montague 2021; Power 1997; Somerville-Woodward 2002).

However, in response to the deteriorating quality of life in the neighbourhood and all the problems that plagued it, a strong community and a large number of activist and voluntary groups developed to provide support among residents, care for children, tenant organising, etc., which both residents' narratives and academic/archival literature attest to (Boyle 2005: 185; Hayes and Greaves 1993: 2; Power 1993: 22; Power 2000: 254). The decade of the 1970s is described by historian Somerville-Woodward as a "training ground" for community activists who lobbied and protested for amenities in the area and for help from the municipality in maintaining the infrastructure (2002: 50). In the 1980s, which was a particularly bleak decade for Ballymun, the community response to the harsh living conditions became even stronger: by the end of the 1980s, there were already over ninety local community organisations established, of which 32 were officially recognised tenants' associations (Power 1997: 250; Somerville-Woodward 2002b: 54). It seems then that in the case of Ballymun, the community was formed and sustained out of the experience of a shared stigma, shared care and concern for the large number of children in the area, the experience of similar social circumstances by the inhabitants (young families, low-income social housing tenants), and out of a common struggle arising from the lack of affordances of the environment as well as daily-life limitations.³

Simultaneously with the growing number and level of activities of community groups, a new government policy took place, reflected in the increased municipal presence in the area (for example, local municipal offices were set up instead of managing the neighbourhood from their central position as before) and in supporting the engagement of the municipality in the civil sphere. Whereas in the past, the community in Ballymun used to take shape as a spontaneous configuration of angry residents, meeting together to express their discontent and plan action, it has since the late 1980s, and in particular the 1990s, started taking shape as a set of institutionalised groups, employing professional "community development workers" and taking on the nature of a "minibureaucracy" (Boyle 2005: 192).

In the 1990s, then, this strength of the Ballymun community played a central role in initiating the regeneration of the neighbourhood and in securing funding for the area's renewal (Carnegie and Norris 2015: 501). The initial decision to regenerate the neighbourhood and the beginnings of regeneration took place during the Celtic Tiger period of economic prosperity that followed the opening up of the free-market and foreign investments in Ireland, with

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The municipality wanted to facilitate the transition of the more promising social tenants to home-ownership by offering them a large subsidy (thus emptying its available housing stock and stimulating the stagnant private housing market). This option was taken up mainly by the wealthier tenants from the least promising neighbourhoods, including Ballymun, to escape the stigma and change their address. The poorer neighbourhoods consequently suffered a huge blow as a large proportion of working social tenants moved away, while the unemployed and the poorest remained there.

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The initial "model" of the municipal tenants who got moved into the Ballymun flats was two-parent families with young children, so there was – throughout of the history of the neighbourhood – a large population of children and youth in the area.

the funding for neighbourhood regeneration secured through public-private partnerships (Carnegie and Norris 2015: 500). Uneven urban development, low unemployment, and a shortage of skilled workers in Dublin as a result of the onset of Ireland's neoliberalisation "led to an incentive to re-integrate the reserve army of labour in places such as Ballymun" (Muir 2004: 961–962). The fundamental aims of the neighbourhood regeneration were to "lift the residents out of welfare-dependency, to reposition the suburb within the market economy, reattach the locals to the mainstream and accordingly to create so-called 'sustainable communities'" (Boyle and Rogerson 2006: 206), thus achieving the physical, economic, and social integration of Ballymun into the wider urban area (Kintrea and Muir 2009: 84). The main idea of the regeneration was to upskill the large number of unemployed residents and include them in the labour market, thus lowering the need for welfare support to the area, and to transform the area into a more desirable neighbourhood that could be profitable (in the context of the housing crisis in Dublin, where land and housing have a high market value), the idea being that a number of the new dwellings in the area would be intended for the private market.

REGENERATION AND MORALISATION

The regeneration strategy covered five core programme categories: 1) housing, 2) employment, 3) education and training, 4) neighbourhood identity, and 5) the town centre (BRL 1998: 1). In terms of housing, the high-rise apartment blocks, idiosyncratic for the neighbourhood, were demolished and replaced by over 5,600 dwellings in low-rise buildings (houses and blocks), which were built at a higher density in the area (BRL 2006: 12). Of these, over two thousand were for the social housing tenants who were moved from the blocks into new homes; the remaining housing built was part of private, co-operative and



Figure 1: Old Ballymun. 1970: An aerial photograph of the Ballymun tower blocks in 1970. Photograph: The Irish Times.



Figure 2: New(er) Ballymun. Year unknown. Available from: <https://www.independent.ie/business/irish/potential-for-mixed-uses-on-ballymun-site/38138870.html>.

other forms of housing stock (BRL 2006: 12), the aim being to create a more even mix of working and middle-class tenants. Indeed, at the end of the century, when the regeneration process began, 80% of housing in Ballymun was social and 20% owner-occupied (BRL 2008), in contrast to the national ratio of only 9.7% social housing (McGrath 2015). A key regeneration effort was to reverse this figure and increase the proportion of residents living in owner-occupied housing in the neighbourhood to 57% (Purcell 2007: 11).⁴ The underlying assumption of such policies is that low-income individuals will benefit from social interactions with people of higher socio-economic status, as middle-class role models can help to instil ‘better’ values in their welfare-dependent council-tenant neighbours (cf. Crump 2002: 583); and with the help of role models, lower-class residents will come to know and accept middle-class norms, such as the normativity of two-parent families and the commitment to education, employment, and home ownership (cf. Carnegie, Norris and Byrne 2018; Crump 2002). Such a moralising argument seems to be, I believe, also clearly evident in the many discussions and accounts of tenure diversity in Ballymun. Geraldine Tallon, Secretary General at the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, stated in a Public Accounts Committee debate in 2008 that “Ballymun is now evolving into a mixed tenure community, moving from a cycle of dependency to a

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The number of residents has been unstable since its inception due to the transience of inhabitants, who were being moved into empty flats in Ballymun but then requesting to be moved elsewhere. Power (1997) estimates that before the regeneration, the population was between fifteen and twenty thousand. At the beginning of the regeneration in 1998, the population was around seventeen thousand; this fell to slightly over fifteen thousand in 2002 and gradually rose afterwards. The rise in population may be attributed to the increasing number of private dwellings built in the area, which attracted members of the middle-class aspiring to homeownership. Before the regeneration, the population of Ballymun was extremely young due to the city council dwelling allocation priority (at first, two-parent families with young children moved in, later, when the neighbourhood started losing its appeal, followed by many one-parent families); it has been gradually ageing. Residents from Ballymun remained in the neighbourhood during and after the regeneration, but many were rehoused to other locations within Ballymun. The regeneration itself was conducted in a piecemeal fashion: once a certain amount of housing stock was built to rehouse the residents, an equivalent amount of old housing stock was demolished, thus making space for new development. The regeneration officially lasted for seventeen years, though at the time of my fieldwork, many places in Ballymun were still reserved for property development or were building sites. In the words of my interlocutor Stephen: “We were left on a building site for nearly twenty years”.

sustainable community in its own right” (Houses of the Oireachtas 2008). Moreover, one of the documents of the agency in charge of conducting the regeneration (Ballymun Regeneration Limited; BRL) stated that “in order to attract the private sector into Ballymun, the area must, somewhat, pertain to values of [...] the professional classes”, and that the aim of artistic interventions in the area was “the education of a social group in line with ruling-class thinking” (as cited in Kelly 2018).



Figure 3: Masterplan for the regeneration of Ballymun. Photo: Alina Bezljaj. Ballymun Community Archive, Ballymun Library.

The changes introduced in the neighbourhood meant that the residents had to get used to new ways of living, and these required a different type of individual. Regeneration thus not only physically and socially transformed the neighbourhood, but also, with hidden moral undertones, attempted to simultaneously transform the inhabitants who did not fit the model of the neoliberal subject. Thus, in the process of transforming the environment, they also sought to transform the residents, using techniques of control and responsabilisation to create responsible, self-sufficient, and active citizens who are successful in managing their resources, responsible for themselves and their circumstances, but also active in the community – repaying their debt to the state (and its aid) by being active in caring for themselves and the community (see Bezljaj 2024). The consequence of such changes is that some of the responsibilities that were previously in the domain of the state shifted to other entities such as the family, civic groups and individuals (Trnka and Trundle 2014). The regeneration which enacted such moralising visions about the behaviour of the residents of Ballymun was rooted in the ideas of Giddens' (1998) "Third Way" political programme, which posits an image of the person-citizen who is self-sufficient and independent. The regeneration process, which implemented in Ballymun the broader changes in Ireland's economic orientation towards neoliberalism and the political propagation of the Third Way agenda, is often criticised not only by the locals living in the context of its consequences, but also by the academics writing about it. The latter have described such Third Way urban programmes, which presume and create "good" communities (Boyle and Rogerson 2006: 201), as a "thinly veiled moral crusade" (2006: 203), arguing that they are ideologically grounded in "moral elements of control", and build their vocabulary on "moral scolding" (Crawford 2001: 74) that foregrounds individual and community responsibility (Crawford 2001). "Morally commendable communities" within such a viewpoint, as Boyle and Rogerson explain, "are defined as those who can reattach themselves to the 'mainstream' and stand on their own two feet within the terms set by neoliberal market economics" (2006: 201).

The moral undertones of regeneration processes that transform communities and their spaces are thus not limited to Ballymun; as Ruppert puts it in his study of a Toronto neighbourhood, "problematizations of space are euphemisms for problematizations of the conduct of groups", so that "rather than on the overt moralization of conduct, practices focus on space, thereby concealing their foundations in moralization" (2006: 228). Cully, furthermore, makes a strong claim that all urban renewal is informed by an "idea of the poor as 'undeserving' and 'immoral'" (Cully 2019: 20), while Manzo adds that regeneration is itself "irredeemably bourgeois" and can lead to the "moral displacement" (2012: 23–24) of residents, as they experience a diminished sense of belonging in gentrified neighbourhoods that encourage bourgeois practices of consumerism.

COTTAGES AND TOWERS, (SELF-)RESPONSIBILITY AND CARE

As council residents were moved from blocks of flats into cottages (many with terraces or small gardens), they had to take on the care of their homes (and their gardens), more so



Figure 4: Flats at Ballymun, Dublin (1968). RTÉ Archive.



Figure 5: Terraced cottages. Source: Google maps.

than was necessary in the previous block housing. In the new low-rise houses, they have to take care of their own heating costs and pay for their own utilities, which was taken care of (almost free of charge) by the municipality when they lived in the high-rise blocks (see e.g. Brady 2016). To this end, workshops were organised for the residents during this transition to teach them about the responsibility of taking care of their own households and managing their monthly finances (see e.g. Combat Poverty Agency 2008: 3). The terraced cottages, where the residents of the neighbourhood were relocated after the regeneration, are, I argue, thus one of the symbols of New Ballymun and represent a new way of living and of transforming individuals into (self-)responsible and active citizens, the kind that the neoliberal moral framework presupposes (Clarke 2005: 448).

New Ballymun, which presupposes such new – transformed – inhabitants and which is the vehicle for the neoliberal visions of moral (self-)responsibility, is however often the target of criticism and antagonistic narratives by the long-term residents. These narratives see the local authorities as responsible for the problems that the neighbourhood has faced since its inception; moral engagement is not seen as a need to change one's own self and habits, but rather to maintain the caring (community) networks that have been established in Ballymun since it was built, and which, as the residents themselves say, have been weakened by the regeneration (as residents were moved around to new homes, the social bonds dispersed). For them, New Ballymun is unsatisfactory: they see it as a place where fewer and fewer public spaces are accessible to them (van Lanen 2020), where the new middle-class residents more or less keep to themselves, where the promises made to them by the local authority have been broken, and above all, they see it as a place where the community ties have weakened and care for others has diminished.

People become very isolated, they close the door, they're not involved in what's happening around anymore. (Matt)

We were promised all these things by the BRL, and there was nothing. I reckon it was an experimenting social engineering of people basically, how you can replace one population with another. (Stephen)

As a counterbalance to New Ballymun and the broken communal bonds and moral visions of self-responsibility that emerge from it, Old Ballymun and its idiosyncratic blocks that represent the distributive Keynesian welfare state is often evoked in the memories and narratives of the residents. They evoke memories of the amenities in these blocks, which were almost free of charge, provided by the municipality (heating in the blocks was centrally organised and part of the extremely low municipal rent, municipal waste collection was shared by the block and organised by the municipality), and above all of the community that was formed in these blocks (see Bezlaĵ 2024).

Patrick: Ah, I miss my flat terrible. Dylan: There was constant heating and everything. Patrick: The community was more closer. Dylan: Yeah it was, he's right. Patrick: The community was more closer, like. (Patrick and Dylan)

Everybody knew each other, you could walk into each other's flats. There was a lot of people helping each other, there was always someone out there to look out for the kids... (Nimah)

The blocks they used to live in, and the Old Ballymun of which these are a part, are thus, I claim, the bearers of narratives antagonistic to New Ballymun; these narratives foreground the strong community of the past and the ethic of care that is part of it, in contrast to the isolating tendencies of the new neighbourhood. Old Ballymun is a place that exists purely as an assemblage of memories and affects – it brings together multiple timelines and different places into a unity (cf. Hamilakis 2017) in which the presences and absences of the spatial features of Ballymun's various temporal manifestations overlap and intertwine; some elements of place are selected and pushed to the fore, while others are forgotten.⁵ As a place, it acquires its existence through affective memory and narratives of the past.

Acts of remembering that evoke this idealised place with strong community ties can “take on performative meaning within a charged field of contested moral and political claims” (Antze and Lambek 1996: vii). Preston argues that “the places from which we speak often give expression to our moral commitments” (2009: 178). At once real and intangible, Old Ballymun represents an oasis of meanings from which the residents can draw on a daily basis; and grounded in this oasis of meanings is an alternative repertoire of moral engagement to that imposed by Dublin's local authority through the regenerated neighbourhood. The long-time residents of Ballymun, who encounter, live in, and draw from Old Ballymun every day, thus speak from a place that is their own and not fully accessible to anyone but themselves. However, the overlapping manifestations of the places from which the residents speak, and the partially different moral repertoires which they may draw upon, can lead to potentially antagonistic moral interpretations of place in their narratives.

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An example: while the flats in the high-rise blocks were consistently remembered extremely fondly by the residents and longed for, the interlocutors would also – though rarely – bring up how harsh life was in them and the difficulties they faced. This translates into sometimes ambivalent feelings about the flats: “The flats, no no. I'm fucking glad them flats are gone. Now I did love my flat, I loved my heating, I loved my big huge flats, like huge, big huge flats” (Caoimhe). Most often, however, the negatives are not actively remembered and the flats and blocks are talked about exclusively in positive and nostalgic terms.

WHO TAKES THE BLAME? FROM COMMUNAL TO INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

The (*self-*)*responsibility* that stems from the form of life in the terraced houses and the *relational care* that stems from the memories of life in the blocks of flats are two core elements of two different moral repertoires that presuppose two different types of selves, the atomised and autonomous individual of the neoliberal Third Way and the relationally dependent individual of the Keynesian welfare state (Sevenhuijsen 2000; Trnka and Trundle 2014). These two distinct moral repertoires are often compatible. The Third Way programme applied in the neighbourhood through regeneration did not make a cut with or a turn away from past morality; rather, it aimed to intensify the forces that bind individuals in relationships and to exercise power through the community that these forces have shaped (Rose 2000). In this way, many of the practices of solidarity that residents carry out on a day-to-day basis find their grounding in both repertoires. However, the moral vision of the Third Way is also sometimes different from its predecessor, which was rooted in the Keynesian welfare state. The conflict between the two visions of morality manifests itself in the processes of assigning blame for the problems that have plagued the neighbourhood since its inception – and are still present today.

These problems are manifold: they concern the presence of drugs and crime in the neighbourhood, the degradation of the environment and the lack of maintenance of the dwellings; additionally, many of my interlocutors stressed the lack of services and spaces for leisure activities, socialising and community bonding. They particularly highlighted the need for a new shopping centre in Ballymun, which in the past served as the main socialising point in the neighbourhood, before it started to deteriorate and was demolished in the regeneration (van Lanen 2017).

Assigning responsibility for the problems facing a neighbourhood to individuals who are not-good-enough and emphasising the need to change them – the narratives on which the regeneration was grounded – are thus one way of constructing blame. It is common to hear statements from the residents about the need to change people and about their laziness or bad habits, resulting from an inappropriate upbringing.

The place still struggles with people who, for whatever reason, are not good at being sociable, being clean, not using drugs, not letting their houses go in decay... (Matt)

They don't know how to have a kid. So that's the problem, how do you solve that then? Then you have to educate the parents... (Ryan)

The area looks better, they've built new things, it looks nicer. You see, but none of that is gonna change people's attitudes. People have to change from within. (Ryan)

The pre-regeneration residents (mostly social tenants) often viewed the pursuit of a greater mix of tenures as a positive and beneficial municipal policy and as key to the successful development of the neighbourhood. However, some interviewees also explicitly

stated that such a policy is beneficial because it directly affects the transformation of the people themselves:

You should make sure you have a mix of different type[s] of people, not the same type of people, not all rich, not all poor. It has to be rich and poor so that one rubs off the other. I know they say one bad apple spoils the whole thing. If you have a bad family, make sure you have five good families around, so that child has a chance not to become like their parents and to see how other kids are treated. (Caoimhe)

The vision of morality and human change expressed in these narratives to a certain extent and in the residents' own way mirrors the official vision of the local authorities. This vision perceives the place and its community as inadequate compared to ideal neoliberal areas and communities, and the concern for the place is thus directed towards calls for moral change from the people of Ballymun – who need to start taking better care of themselves, their houses, their children, and their aspirations in life.

On the other hand, the moral repertoire of care that many residents adopt places the blame for the problems of the neighbourhood on the insufficient care shown to the place and its inhabitants by the local authorities. The care that should have been given to the place and the community by the local authority and the residents themselves is lacking, and this has negative consequences. The local authority's moralising visions of the need for residents to be self-sufficient are challenged by the residents for whom care – both from the local authority and from other residents – is a fundamental normative element. The absence of care felt by the residents is thus negatively evaluated and goes against their normative expectations.

The City Council here is crap [...]. You can phone them up and you say, "Right, I need this, I need that, I need that." "Yeah, I'll get back to you." Two years later you're still phoning up. (Marie)

In Ballymun they've all learned to just go into themselves and not help anyone else. (Caoimhe)

Whereas in Old Ballymun the municipality provided basic services, and the rest was left to solidarity and mutual aid organisation among the residents themselves, in New Ballymun this care has increasingly turned into municipally funded local organisations, while municipal care for the residents themselves has diminished. Furthermore, according to the long-term residents, the care and community ties between themselves have weakened as they have been rehomed to different areas around the neighbourhood, which affected the bonds that had existed among them before. This is perceived by some of the residents as a moral degradation that has occurred as a consequence of the regeneration and its disruption of community ties. Thus, the residents' outlook that counters that of the Third Way moral repertoire emphasizes the importance of care, and the nostalgic narratives of the past that evoke memories of Old Ballymun and its community and solidarity serve to recuperate care as the main moral element of living in the neighbourhood. Caring, when it appears as an element of the relationships between the residents themselves, is also highly valued in the context of the Third Way, as it serves to relieve the burden of the welfare

state. However, if it is an element of the welfare state's relationship with the inhabitants, it is strongly condemned by this neoliberal framework, which puts in its place the need for self-sufficiency and individual responsibility.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have explored the interplay of morality and space, which have both changed over time as the country experienced both political and economic transformations. I have shown how the neoliberal moral order permeated a space through its regeneration; and the ways in which the residents assumed moral repertoires of (self-)responsibility that emerged from this place of New Ballymun. At the same time, I have also focused on the memorial and affective presence of Old Ballymun, in which an alternative moral order for the neighbourhood is embedded and foregrounds the element of care. I have argued that the moral orders overlap in many ways, just as New and Old Ballymun overlap in the experiences of long-time residents, but that antagonisms can also arise between them, especially when it comes to the moral question of the welfare state's care for residents and the ways in which that care might be exercised.

An important part of the moral engagement of the inhabitants of Ballymun is the revival of care, an element of moral repertoires prioritised by both the old Keynesian moral order and the post-regeneration Third Way moral order. However, because of the severed social and community ties that the regeneration has caused by cutting into the continuity of place, the long-time residents feel a sense of moral decline in the neighbourhood, where people are increasingly isolating themselves and turning away from caring for each other; this is left to the professionalised community services into which the municipality and/or government have begun, since the regeneration, to funnel financial support for the neighbourhood. The residents feel anger and resistance towards the local authorities who have caused this moral decline in the neighbourhood, and occasional frustration towards the new middle-class residents who are not involved in (re)building care and community ties in the neighbourhood (though, as I have shown, they at other times seem to appreciate having them as a model of morality). In this way, narratives about memories of Old Ballymun both revive and revitalise elements of the old moral order, and establish moral boundaries between the long-standing residents of Ballymun, whose nostalgic narratives of the past construct their membership in the moral community of the place, and others who are denied this membership.

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POVZETEK

Članek obravnava prepletanje in povezanost morale s prostorom na primeru delavskega predmestja Ballymun v Dublinu, ki je bilo zgrajeno v 60. letih 20. stoletja kot stanovanjska soseska za (izključno) občinske najemnike in prenovljeno v zgodnjih 2000-ih. Avtorica analizira, kako se v Ballymunu prepletata dve moralni ureditvi: tista iz časa »starega Ballymuna« in nova, oblikovana skozi neoliberalno prenovo soseske, ki je utemeljena v načelih političnega programa t. i. »Tretje poti«. Prenova ni zgolj fizično in socialno preoblikovala soseske, temveč tudi poskušala preoblikovati njene prebivalce v (samo) odgovorne, aktivne državljane.

Prebivalci so te nove moralne vzorce sicer v določeni meri sprejeli, vendar pa jih pogosto v vsakdanjih praksah in pogovorih tudi zavračajo, pri čemer se opirajo na spomine in čustvene vezi s starim Ballymunom, ki sta ga zaznamovali močna skupnost in normativnost skrbi za druge. V članku avtorica pokaže, kako dva različna moralna repertoarja, ki se vezeta

na dve različni manifestaciji kraji, vodita do različnih interpretacij preteklosti, sedanjosti in težav v soseski, kot so revščina, kriminal, pomanjkanje storitev ter razkroj skupnosti.

Analiza temelji na etnografskem raziskovanju, intervjujih in udeležbi v lokalnem življenju v obdobju januar–julij 2022.

The Virtual Network City and the Long-Tail of Social Media Alienation



Virtualno omrežno mesto in dolgi rep odtujenosti
zaradi družbenih medijev

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ABSTRACT

Castells' fundamental first volume of his Information Age trilogy entitled *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) significantly overlooks the social phenomena that comprise and lead back to insularisation in online networks and abroad. As the call for this special issue notes, "the world we live in today is characterised by high levels of interconnectivity, codependence, and overwhelming amounts of information", which "shapes our desires" and "evoke[s] ideas of isolation, remoteness, and detachment from everyday worries." (Oroz and Simonič 2023) Unfortunately, these often unconscious desires to disconnect from McLuhan's celebrated "global village" and Jameson's unsavory "junkspace", as *repressed* desires, may manifest as anti-social sentiments that develop longitudinally under the conditions of what I theorise as the virtual network city.

KEYWORDS: network city, social media, alienation, insularisation, digital environment

IZVLEČEK

Castellsov temeljni prvi del trilogije Information Age (Informacijska doba) z naslovom *The Rise of the Network Society / Vzpon družbe omrežij* (1996) pomenljivo spregleda družbene pojave, ki vključujejo in vodijo k izolaciji zaradi rabe spletnih omrežij. Kot je zapisano v vabilu k oddaji prispevkov za to posebno številko, je »za svet, v katerem danes živimo, značilna visoka stopnja medsebojne povezanosti, soodvisnosti in ogromna količina informacij«, kar »oblikuje naše želje« in »vzbuja ideje o izoliranosti, oddaljenosti in odmaknjenosti od vsakodnevnih skrbi« (Oroz and Simonič 2023). Žal se te pogosto nezavedne želje po odklopu

od McLuhanove slavne »globalne vasi« in Jamesonovega neprijetnega »junkspacea«, kot *potlačenih* želja, lahko manifestirajo kot antisocialna čustva, ki se razvijajo v okviru tega, kar teoretiziram kot virtualno omrežno mesto.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: omrežno mesto, družbeni mediji, odtujenost, izolacija, digitalno okolje

INTRODUCTION

Are cities inevitable? I don't intend this in the sense of some sort of deterministic teleology of human nature like a modernist grand narrative as Marx or Francis Fukuyama might have it. I refer to the current historical conditions of post-industrialism, mass global populations, and digital network societies. It has been more than two decades since the recognition of the tectonic importance of Manuel Castells' fundamental first volume of his Information Age trilogy entitled *The Rise of the Network Society* (1996) as well as since the nearly contemporaneous advent of the Web 2.0, which gave rise to the ubiquitous forms of social media with which we are familiar today. In that time, a full generation of digital natives have come of age in an era that has never been absent of these forms of social media. In 2010 Castells writes: "The constitution of a new culture based on multimodal communication and digital information processing creates a generational divide between those born before the Internet Age (1969) and those who grew up being digital" (Castells 2010: xviii). However, I argue that Castells significantly overlooks the social phenomena that comprise and lead back to insularisation in online networks and abroad.

The problem in building virtual societies around a capitalist-society determined narcissistic self-commodification that occurs in social media arenas is the long-tail of alienation in which the utopian potential of an originally democratic internet is subsumed into inevitable insularisation. In terms of the repressed social desire to disconnect from the information overload of perpetual connection to the network city, these alienating narcissistic behaviours emerge as slow-mounting negative micro-responses that cumulate over time and promote a propensity to disconnect, either literally or emotionally, from even long-lived friends and family connections that would have remained intact under different conditions. As the call for this special issue notes, "it is important to recognise that isolation still has a pull that captures our imaginations, invades our daydreams, and shapes our desires. For many people, romantic notions of secluded and remote places are still alluring utopias that evoke ideas of isolation, remoteness, and detachment from everyday worries" (Oroz and Simonič 2023). Unfortunately, these often unconscious desires to disconnect from McLuhan's celebrated "global village" and Jameson's unsavory "junkspace", as *repressed* desires, may manifest as anti-social sentiments that develop longitudinally under the conditions of what I call "network cities". This phenomenon gives rise to a specific formation of "oases of different temporal rhythms that emerge amidst the hustle and bustle of [network] cities" and that float like islands of insularisation in a sea of interactive media activity, separate from the wider ocean of the web while also remaining globally contiguous with it. Network cities are no longer strictly physical communities tethered to geography and constrained by proximity, but virtual/

digital ones that emerge between the broad network society that Castells describes and the smaller network communities that he observes. This phenomenon provides an opportunity to apply these insights to a longitudinal analysis of both the progressive and alienating effects of social media that emerge in these insularised city “islands”.

Arguably, Castells’ contribution to understanding the contemporary state of political economy is as important as Marx’s in his day, while it suffers from some of the same shortcomings in its broad political economic perspective and from the economic determinism that cultural studies has been wont to mitigate. For all of its insight, his some five-hundred-page tome and the other two books in his trilogy do not go far enough in the direction of understanding the structures that make up the very network society he postulated. Castells does not make any significant gesture towards theorizing or defining these factions using the useful metaphor of the material urban city to understand its digital counterpart. Indeed, a further distinction is that the network city emerges as entirely autonomous of the contiguous geographic parameters that tethers them to economically motivated flows in the material world, although it operates in an immanent relationship to the so-called real world. The network city comprises a phenomenon of virtual social homophily (rather than strictly economic determinants) and is characterised by the flows of social harmony and alienation that are carried into the digital realm from the material world. The very nature of what we understand as a city is experienced very differently for those born into the digital virtual world Castells describes, and the new organisation of time, space, and social hierarchies within the network society have consequences in both the digital and material social realms.

In summarizing the import of Castells’ text, the Wikipedia page surveying his contributions quite accurately reports that Castells’ theory of the Information Age argues that “our physical selves exist in different places and experience different cultures, but the mind has essentially migrated into the world of the internet and the television” (Wikipedia n.d.). Castells claims that the “communication system” of the “information society”

is a system in which reality itself (that is, people’s material/symbolic existence) is entirely captured, fully immersed in a virtual image setting, in the world of make believe, in which appearances are not just on the screen through which experience is communicated, but they become the experience. [...] [I]t absorbs in the same multimedia text the whole of human experience. (Castells 2010: 404)

Summarily, Castells concludes that “[l]ocalities become disembodied from their cultural, historical, geographical meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places” (Castells 2010: 406). According to Castells, “[t]he global city is not a place, but a process. A process by which centers of production and consumption of advanced services, and their ancillary local societies, are connected in a global network” (Castells 2010: 416). However, while Castells offers compelling economic, historical, and nationalist political evidence to support his theses, he often falls short of offering a nuanced micro-perspective on the social politics and organisations that characterise the nascent network communities he observes.

Moreover, in his second volume, *The Power of Identity* (1997), for example, he argues that even “cultural communes [...] [work] on raw materials from history, geography, language, and environment. So, they are constructed, but materially constructed, around reactions and projects historically/geographically determined” (Castells 2011: 65). Indeed, as much as Castells offers astonishingly prescient understandings of the virtual/digital arena of network communities, his descriptions remain tethered to the geographic nodes of flows, mostly economically determined, that he theorises.

In this regard, with respect to his more nuanced theorisations noted above, the earlier insights (or pessimistic apocalyptic prognostications) of Jean Baudrillard are instructive. Baudrillard outlines at the beginning of *Simulacra and Simulation* (1981) that the virtual map of reality has come to supersede the actual landscape so that human experience is lost within a virtual reality. As Castells extrapolates: “Thus there is no separation between ‘reality’ and symbolic representation. [...] [W]hat is historically specific to the new communication system, organized around the electronic integration of all communication modes [...] is not its inducement of virtual reality but the construction of real virtuality” (Castells 2010: 403). Similarly, with specific reference to the notion of a city, Baudrillard discusses “the disintegration of the city itself, which is transplanted outside the city and treated as a hyperreal model, as the nucleus of a metropolitan area based on synthesis that no longer has anything to do with a city” (Baudrillard 1994: 78). Baudrillard is still, in fact, referring to the material world, but he begins down a theoretical path now widely understood as an entirely virtual “hyper-reality”. Indeed, in turn echoing DeBord’s *Society of the Spectacle*, Baudrillard states that “[t]he social, the social phantasmagoria, is now nothing but a special effect, obtained by the design of participating networks converging in emptiness under the spectral image” (Baudrillard 1994: 107). Beneath the hyper-pessimistic hyperbole of Baudrillard’s text are the beginnings of some deeply insightful understandings of the coming virtual community that can exist solely in cyber-space.

Under these conditions, Castells explains that such communities exist “by their pervasiveness, their multifaceted decentralization, and their flexibility. They sprawl as colonies of micro-organisms” (Castells 2010: 385). It is only logical that some of these pervasive communities of hyper-reality should collapse entirely into the virtual/digital realm. Again, with explicit reference to the phenomenon of the city, Castells states that

the development of these loosely interrelated ex-urban constellations emphasizes the functional interdependence of different units and processes in a given urban system over very long distances, minimizing the role of territorial contiguity, and maximizing the communication networks in all their dimensions. (Castells 2010: 64)

Castells argues for the “existence of material supports of simultaneity that do not rely on physical contiguity, since this is precisely the case of the dominant social practices of the Information Age” and concludes that “the network of communication is the fundamental spatial configuration: places do not disappear, but their logic and their meaning become absorbed in the network” (Castells 2010: 442).

From this point of departure, I attempt to theorise the digital city, a virtual urban organisation, as a way of understanding the social, capitalistic, and ecological consequences of the exclusively digital side of the global network society. My thesis defines the “net-city” as networked both within and outside its borders. Just as power dynamics, or at least class hierarchies, are striated or rhizomatic within and between real physical cities, so too are they online. In the material world, New York is cosmopolitan while L.A. is neo-vogue, but neither are autonomous. Similarly, Facebook might be considered something of a digital “retirement community” for ostensibly older participants while Insta is a neo-vogue community, but there are netizens that belong to both, cross-overs. Here are echoes of Raymond Williams’ cultural categories of “Dominant, Residual, and Emergent,’ [which] both explains how dominant social structures maintain their dominance, while at the same time other social groups and in fact individuals can contradict or subvert those cultures” (mrjerrerio 2016: n.p.). More practically, just as consumerism has been a market-oriented determiner of social status in capitalist society, invisible algorithms are less democratically slicing up the digital social environment by political bias more than by mere consumerism (but always in the service of advertising and the audience commodity). Netizens become members of social groups that expand outward by familiarity with others as they would into the social arena of the material world but that remain socially insularised based on increasing levels of homophily.

THE NETWORK CITY

Early in the updated preface to his text, Castells offers an interpenetrating definition that presents a useful starting point for theorising the network city:

[C]ities were born from the concentration of the functions of command and control, of coordination, of exchange of goods and services, of diverse and interactive social life. In fact, cities are, from their onset, communication systems, increasing the chances of communication through physical contiguity. [...] On the other hand, social practices as communication practices also took place at a distance through transportation and messaging. [...] This new form of spatiality is what I conceptualized as the space of flows: the material support of simultaneous social practices communicated at a distance. It [...] relies on the development of localities as nodes of these communication networks, and the connectivity of activities located in these nodes [...] by information flows. (Castells 2010: xxxi–xxxii)

Castells goes on to argue that “a decentralization of activities, residence, and services with mixed land uses, and an undefined boundary of functionality [...] extends the territory of this nameless city to wherever its networks go” (Castells 2010: xxxii). Castells states that

[w]hat is important in the location of advanced services is the micro-network of the high-level decision-making process, based on face-to-face relationships, linked to a macro-network of decision implementation, which is based on electronic communication networks. In other words, meeting face to face to make financial or political deals is still indispensable. (Castells 2010: xxxvi)

Castells refers to these geographic locations as “nodes” (Castells 2010: xxxviii) through which economic activity circulates.

This materially tethered understanding of the city, however, is not, in fact, absolute. In Clay Shirky’s *Here Comes Everybody* (2008), tellingly subtitled “How Change Happens When People Come Together”, he explains. “Now that we have ridiculously easy group-formation, [...] structure is relaxed, and the result is that organizations that assume geography as a core organizing principle, even ones that have been operating that way for centuries, are now facing challenges to that previously bedrock principle” (Shirky 2008: 155). More recently, one of the great insights achieved out of the economic impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic is that face-to-face meetings are decreasingly necessary across a wide range of social and vocational activities. Castells counters that “[o]ur societies are increasingly structured around a bipolar opposition between the Net and the self” (Castells 2010: 3). However, this understanding may not be universally accurate. A network community brings the net and the self together outside of the economic determinants that Castells surveys but alongside the rise of the non-vocational identity constructions that he observes. He explains that

few people in the world feel identified with the global, cosmopolitan culture that populates the global networks and becomes the worship of the mega-node elites. In contrast, most people feel a strong regional or local identity. [...] The contradictory relationship between meaning and power is manifested by a growing disassociation between what I conceptualized as the space of flows and the space of places. Although there are places in the space of flows and flows in the space of places, cultural and social meaning is defined in place terms, while functionality, wealth, and power are defined in terms of flows. (Castells 2010: xxxix)

However, it is just as evident that the distinction between the phenomenon of flows and the materiality of places is collapsing, more on an inter-personal and social level than on an economic one. Iain Chamber’s theorisation of postmodernity highlights this fact:

Post modernism, whatever form its intellectualizing might take, has been fundamentally anticipated in the metropolitan cultures of the last twenty years: among the electronic signifiers of cinema, television and video, in recording studios and record players, in fashion and youth styles, in all those sounds, images and diverse histories that are daily mixed, recycled and ‘scratched’ together on that giant screen which is the contemporary city (cited in Harvey 1991: 60–61).

Indeed, while the network city has overlaps and connections to the material world, it can exist as an autonomous digital phenomenon in its own right.

Castells admits that “[v]irtual communities seem to be stronger than observers usually give them credit for. There is substantial evidence of reciprocal supportiveness on the Net, even between users with weak ties to each other” (Castells 2011: 388). Martin Lister et al. add that “[g]iven that our everyday and ‘common-sense’ understandings of community have at least in part been determined by spatial relationships and a sense of belonging to a place, then the metaphor extends into thinking about belonging with one another in particular ‘spaces’ in the non-place of cyberspace” (Lister et al. 2003: 172–173). Bertha Chin argues that

[i]f [Benedict] Anderson's [imagined] community members used media and cultural artefacts such as newspapers and novels to maintain a sense of connectedness with one another, then members of Internet communities made use of computers and the various networks and software applications such as the World Wide Web and Internet browsers to mediate and maintain their connection to one another in the space of newsgroups, mailing lists, chat forums and social networking sites that double as communities. (Chin 2010: 122–123)

Chin extends this insight from Mary Chayko's argument that such community members "maintain their connectedness mentally and may even exist without any of their members ever meeting in literal space, as in an Internet community" (Chayko 2002: 41). Castells adds that "[t]he web allowed for groupings of interests and projects in the Net, overcoming the time-costly chaotic browsing of the pre-www Internet. On the basis of these groupings, individuals and organizations were able to interact meaningfully on what has become, literally, a world wide web of individualized, interactive communication" (Castells 2010: 383). Again, however, Castells does not go much beyond "groupings" to describe this strictly virtual community.

Otherwise, Castells spends much of his text outlining how this society comes into existence through already factionalised digital communities. In contrast, "Barry Wellman has shown in a stream of consistent findings over the years that what has emerged in advanced societies is what he calls 'personal communities': 'an individual's social network of informal, interpersonal ties, ranging from a half-dozen intimates to hundreds of weaker ties. [...] Both group communities and personal communities operate on-line as well as off-line'" (Castells 2010: 387). To this, Bertha Chin adds:

Rather than just continuing the assumption that fan and/or fan fiction communities are formed as one general, homogenous community that appears to unify the various fan practitioners (fan fiction authors, fan video producers, fan artists, and the like), [...] smaller, fringe groups [...] have dispersed from major ones to form sets of new and differential communities. (Chin 2010: 155)

From these understandings it is clear that the online environment has become one of significant interpersonal interactions and broad individual migrations from within the great community of the internet.

However, even the term "community" no longer captures the breadth of "urbanisation" that certain networks have attracted. The sheer size of some online social media memberships defies the grassroots communal nature of the very idea of "community". Eli Pariser explains, for example, "When I joined MoveOn in 2001, we had about five hundred thousand U.S. members. Today, there are 5 million members – making it one of the largest advocacy groups in America, significantly larger than the NRA" (Pariser 2011: 8). On the social level, there are even celebrities within the network cities, either social media or fan-fic superstars who have garnered an online following, or real-life celebrities epitomised in George Takei's online Facebook group. According to Kirsten Pullen, "celebrities from all forms of media engage in live, interactive, online discussions with their fans, especially when promoting a new film, special television programme, new season, or music release" (Pullen 2004: 84). Ian

Bogost indicates that politically-motivated interactions also find social life in the network city: “Blogs and meetups also take advantage of the spatial property of the computer, creating coherent environments for voters to explore. Meetups even span the gap between virtual and physical spaces” (Bogost 2010: 124). However, organised state politics are of little relevance in the network city because they are anarchist in that there is no formal governance (beyond the commercial political economy of media platform ownership) and because they emerge relatively spontaneously. In any case, the scope and migratory possibilities of membership in these social media is better understood as a full-fledged city replete with alienation and anonymity more than any sort of cohesive or socially unified community.

In order to better understand the dynamics and constitution of the network city, a useful point of departure is the notion of concentric circles of social media “ties” indicated by Barry Wellman’s findings cited above. Robin Dunbar’s “magic number” of a maximum of 500 social relations is the theoretical correlative upon which Wellman’s findings are predicated. However, as Dunbar goes on to explain, this number is only one in a series of social “layers” that is reflected in online social media.

In humans, these layers have values that approximate 5, 15, 50 and 150, and extend beyond this in at least two further layers to 500 and 1500. The first three layers have been identified in several online datasets and ... appear to be a consequence of a constraint on available social time combined with a relationship between time invested in a relationship and its quality (as rated in terms of emotional closeness). The two outermost layers (at 500 and 1500) correspond, respectively, to acquaintances (people we would not consider as personal friends or family, but know well enough to have a conversation with) and to the number of faces we can put names to. (Dunbar 2016: 2)

However, this concentric circles theory is problematically quantitative and only superficially considers the nuances of the social composition. Castells reports how “current research suggests that North Americans usually have more than one thousand interpersonal ties. Only half a dozen of them are intimate and no more than fifty are significantly strong. Yet, taken together a person’s other 950+ ties are important sources of information, support, companionship and sense of belonging” (Castells 2010: 389) – a digital imagined community. I propose a hypothesis that extends Dunbar’s magic number, and even his outer limit of one thousand five hundred, into a much wider network city where even weaker ties comprising a mere cumulation of “followers” rather than any sort of real social connection come into contact.

The components that comprise the network city can be quite arbitrarily selected from any one of a number of urban constructs, but almost any that is chosen has an allegorical corollary. If we understand “suburbs” in the material city to be on the outskirts of the urban centre, heavily residential, populated mostly by a neo-liberal middle class with well-maintained lawns and gentrified post-modern clean lines of residential landscaping and property division, then the network city equivalent is the cumulation of well-curated social media pages with tasteful and conservative meme posts visited by a specific fifty to one hundred and fifty population of homophilic “friends” with limited social media interaction beyond that arena. The material downtown core, replete with corporate skyscrapers and “boojie” food services outlets to serve them, finds its network city equivalent in edifices of profes-

sional pages and groups such as the corporate intranets sustained by university communities or those comprising LinkedIn, often connected to well-curated and/or paid marketing, and frequently complemented by gentrified food blogs. The industrial district might be understood as a population of “how to” blogs and YouTube videos, interactive hardware store websites, and Amazon. The shopping malls would not be Amazon, actually, because the conceit of malls is generally organised around ambulation in a crowded physical space, even if anonymously, whereas Amazon tends to be an isolated shopping experience (although it is slowly incorporating interactive lists and other connectivity affordances). The equivalent of the shopping mall is better located in shopping on Facebook, where all your connections can witness the purchasing activity in the stream and then take part by either following suit or commenting. The inner-city projects are, of course, Instagram. This list is subjective and not exhaustive, and one could argue for an endless array of material city phenomena and the network city counterpart for each.

In the online arena, the network city does not have limits beyond socially determined ones. And yet, the network city is not global. The network is fragmented into cities by broad material cultures that align most significantly with nationalist-linguistic differences. “Rubert de Ventos [...] has suggested [...] the emergence of national identity through the historical interaction of [a] series of factors: primary factors, such as ethnicity, territory, language, religion, and the like; generative factors, such as the development of communications and technology, the formation of cities” (Castells 2011: 31–32). Moreover, according to Castells, “language, and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality, and less exclusive than ethnicity” (Castells 2011: 52). For example, all of China, especially with its xenophobic clones of Western media phenomena – Bilibili is YouTube, WeChat is WhatsApp, etc. – obviously comprises its own network cities. So too does Japan with its advanced digital technologies and its linguistic monoculture. Most interesting are the Russian network cities which, for reasons of linguistic proximities, include members from otherwise hostile factions such as Ukraine, both geographically centred and in diaspora. While ethnicity can be masked in the virtual realm of avatar identities, linguistic facility cannot. And like real cities, a network city is criss-crossed by anonymity, community, family proximity, variation, and gentrification.

The architecture of the network city is especially visible on Instagram or Pinterest, where the webpage/newsfeed of a specific individual is populated with enough “infrastructure” – memes, recipes, selfies, weblinks of interest, updates, etc. – that it becomes the virtual geographic centre of a city of “weak ties”. In the same way, everyone in a city, on a scale from completely anonymous to close friends, mutually recognises the downtown or city centre (which they either intentionally approach or actively avoid). However, in this new digital urban construction, there can certainly be more than one downtown core, subdivisions if you will, and rather than being organised around economic considerations (the office tower and the shopping arcade), it is structured around more social and individualised forms of identity construction. Castells concludes that “[m]ultimedia, as the new system was hastily

labeled, extend the realm of electronic communication into the whole domain of [social] life, from home to work, from schools to hospitals, from entertainment to travel” (Castells 2010: 391, 394). Within the architecture of the network city are, of course, the traditional edifices of capitalism, now moved online.

Tele-banking is being imposed upon customers by both incentives and penalties from the banks. On-line shopping is exploding, not in opposition to the shopping malls, but in connection with them, although some traditional stores (for example, bookstores, record stores, perhaps car dealers) will be either phased out or transformed by on-line competition. Universities are slowly but surely entering an era of articulation between personal interface and on-line teaching. Personal communication by e-mail, the most usual CMC activity outside work, is growing exponentially. (Castells 2010: 391)

However, Castells argues that “the growing importance of on-line transactions does not imply the disappearance of shopping centers and retail stores. In fact, the trend is the opposite” (Castells 2010: 426). Nevertheless, this observation may only be based in the phenomenon of the real numbers expansion of the global population. Today we witness the significant concentration of corporate mega shopping in the synecdoches of Walmart and Amazon respectively. Baudrillard’s era of a culture bereft by the corporate shopping plaza, the sort of “junkspace” borrowed by Fredric Jameson in “Future City” from Rem Koolhaas (Jameson 2003: 69), dominates bricks-and-mortar retail sales, and even individual franchise outlets for such seemingly insuperable commercial giants as McDonald’s or Tim Horton’s are shallow husks of their glory days. Especially post-Covid there are blocks and blocks of derelict small or independent businesses that did not survive; all but the most resilient are gone, such as the non-profit Age UK used stores (a national chain in its own right), or something with an always guaranteed clientele such as a local pub that survives on alcohol addictions and as a social hub for many rather than merely a commodity output venue.

From this perspective, even slower migrations than the ones that Pariser describes are realised longitudinally. In a process that mirrors the mass urbanisation migrations of the 20th century, Facebook had a thriving community of over a billion users in the 2010s. In 2024, it reached a milestone of over three billion users and stands out as the most used online social media in existence, dwarfing even China’s WeChat with less than 1.5 billion users in 2024. Nevertheless, while Facebook was a thriving metropolis in the 2010s, even with its excessive growth, and perhaps even because of it, it begins to become a city of decay as populations migrate their use habits to younger and more modern communities like Instagram or TikTok. While Facebook’s membership is large, its comparative usage is questionable and remains popular in this regard primarily with an older generation of social media users. Eventually Facebook will need to rejuvenate its infrastructure and industry, or become a ghost town. One can only imagine the volume of digital detritus left behind in such abandoned cities – oceans of obsolete email addresses, defunct links and webpages, abandoned user names and passwords, and billions of gigabytes of photos and videos lost in the “web” of the past.

The social migrations made available in the network city are tellingly untethered from geographic constraints. Clay Shirky outlines one example in which “[i]n 2007 several

conservative parishes of the Episcopalian church in Virginia voted to break off from the American church in protest over the ordination of an openly gay bishop, Gene Robinson” (Shirky 2008: 154). The inability of the traditional church to control the insubordination and subsequent exodus is exemplary of much larger social and less cohesive social organisation than the term “community”, even the “great” ones, can sustain.

Instead of forming their own break-away church, though, the parishes joined the Nigerian church, whose Bishop, Peter Akinola, is deeply antagonistic to homosexuals’ involvement in the church in any form. The idea that a church in Fairfax, Virginia, could simply declare itself part of another diocese on a different continent upends centuries of tradition. [...] What the Virginia diocese has done is not to relocate but to de-locate. By announcing that Virginia churches are part of a Nigerian diocese, in contravention of all geographic sense, the Virginians are doing more than voting their conscience on the issue of acceptance of gays; they are challenging geography as an organizing principle. (Shirky 2008: 154–155)

With the advent of Zuckerberg’s Metaverse and other such fully realised VR-generated “cities”, whose implementation and potential popularity is as yet unmeasurable, it remains possible that even the urban experiences of ambulating a shopping arcade or visiting friends “face-to-face” could be entirely uncoupled from geographic contiguity and partially subsumed into the digital arena.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND INSULARISATION

So how is this understanding of the virtual community valuable in understanding new mediated forms of social alienation? I argue that when these virtual constructs are understood as network cities that foster connections, however superficial, well beyond the outer ring of weak ties theorised by Dunbar, it offers a better understanding of social flows within the network cities. In her summary of cinema that is symptomatic of the zeitgeist, Kristen Whissel references a spate of films that

thematize anxieties about the relationship between the individual and the community endemic to an era defined by processes of globalization and new digital technologies that create new patterns of (bodily and informational) migration and diffusion along with new group formations that link collectivity to connectivity and, in the process, make and remake ideas about the relationship between the individual and the community. (Whissel 2010: 109)

Summarily, contra the utopian Chicago School’s understanding of the “great community” (Baran and Davis 2015: 306), Eli Pariser, in his theorisation of “filter bubbles” explains that “the era of civic connection [...] dreamed about hasn’t come. Democracy requires citizens to see things from one another’s point of view, but instead we’re more and more enclosed in our own bubbles. Democracy requires a reliance on shared facts; instead we’re being offered parallel but separate universes” (Pariser 2011: 8). But why is this so?

Broadly, “[u]nder such new conditions” as what I have theorised as the network city, “civil societies shrink and disarticulate because there is no longer continuity between the log-

ic of power-making in the global network and the logic of association and representation in specific societies and cultures” (Castells 2011: 11). Chin adds that “[e]arly discourse on Internet communities tends to be polarised between the celebratory creation of new communities ... and the lack of obligation these very communities promote (Postman [1993] cited in Chin 2010: 121). Perhaps most importantly, Chin argues that, on the one hand, online “interaction can provide a way of understanding how individuals imagine themselves as communities; but on the other, interpersonal interaction can also shed light on how communities fracture as boundaries are shaped and formed while members negotiate the values, rituals and norms of their community” (Chin 2010: 124). Chin takes this insight from Lynn Cherny:

Boundaries indicate who is inside and who is outside a community; they distinguish the members from those they differ from or wish to be seen as different from. These boundaries are usually in the minds of the members and those excluded from the group [...]. Boundaries are often symbolic, dependent on abstractions like friendship, rivalry, jealousy, similarity. (Cherny 1999: 254)

And again, with specific reference to the city, Castells reiterates that “[o]ne of the oldest debates in urban sociology refers to the loss of *community* as a result of *urbanization*” (Castells 2011: 60). In the realm of the online network city, these phenomena are decidedly borrowed from the material world and amplified in the digital arena.

I theorise a long-tail of social alienation that emerges in tandem with the network city to understand some of the ways these digital communities have given rise to a very particular kind of social alienation and homophily-based community insularisation that arises from responses to the phenomena of social narcissism and idealised virtual identity that social media tends to generate under the conditions of negativity bias. Within these homophilic network cities emerge nuanced long-term alienating effects that are in some ways the result of the excessive social proximity brought on by the social media comprising Marshall McLuhan’s “global village”. Castells makes mention of McLuhan’s notion of the global village in a number of instances in the service of articulating network flows. Castells argues that “unlike the mass media of the McLuhan Galaxy, they have technologically and culturally embedded properties of interactivity and individualization” (Castells 2010: 385). However, he is astute to ask, “do these potentialities translate into new patterns of communication? What are the cultural attributes emerging from the process of electronic interaction?” (Castells 2010: 385). The questions have broad answers, but in the context of the global village, Rem Koolhaas’s critique of the material post-modern city is instructive, an arena littered with what he refers to as “junkspace”: “Junkspace is like being condemned to a perpetual Jacuzzi with millions of your best friends. [...] A fuzzy empire of blur, it fuses high and low, public and private, straight and bent, bloated and starved to offer a seamless patchwork of the permanently disjointed” (Koolhaas 2001: 176). In the relentless connection imposed by social media, this proximity can engender long-term alienating effects.

Under the conditions of the network city, a number of determining phenomena emerge, the most broadly theorised by Paul Rozin and Edward Poyzman as the “negativity bias”. “The *negativity bias* is a cognitive bias that results in adverse events having a more

significant impact on our psychological state than positive events” (Pilat and Krastev 2024). Alexandra Siegel reports that “[h]ateful users are seventy-one times more likely to retweet other hateful users and suspended users are eleven times more likely to retweet other suspended users, compared to non-hateful users” (Siegel 2020: 63). In the online realm, “[b]ecause of our predisposition to focus on and scrutinize the negative, posts that express anger or hostility grab our attention and inform our perceptions. By nature, we extrapolate and then use these negative impressions to cast future judgment” (Pilat and Krastev 2024). This phenomenon comes into sharp focus with the phenomenon of the “disinhibition effect” theorised by John Suler. Broadly, Suler explains the ways that the preconscious illusion of anonymity and/or distance prompts online users to relax their codes of social propriety.

In an increasingly intimate e-mail relationship, people may quickly reveal personal information, then later regret their self-disclosures – feeling exposed, vulnerable, or shameful. An excessively rapid, even false intimacy may develop, which later destroys the relationship when one or both people feel overwhelmed, anxious, or disappointed. (Suler 2004: 321–322)

Suler argues that there can be therapeutically positive results of the disinhibition effect, but in concert with negativity bias, it is generally understood to manifest undesirable social consequences.

Furthermore, amongst his three types of identity construction, Castells defines “project identity” as occurring “when social actors, on the basis of whichever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure” (Castells 2011: 8). Apropos, Kaja Silverman offers a psychoanalytically-inflected argument for the specular propensity of identity construction under the repressed perception of the gaze of the super-ego (Silverman 2013: 133). Under the conditions of late capitalism related to Guy DeBord’s understanding of the commodified “Society of the Spectacle”, in tandem with the democratic interactive social media affordances that make up the network city, Silverman’s psychoanalytical phenomenon of “putting oneself into the picture” has reached ostentatious levels of narcissism. This may be gender-biased based on the more critical social expectations placed on women, but men are certainly not exempt from it. Indeed, with brief reference to Christopher Lasch’s seminal argument regarding rising American narcissism under the conditions of late capitalism and to DeBord’s “Society of the Spectacle”, Castells describes this phenomenon as a social pathology: “The urge to express one’s identity, and to have it recognized tangibly by others, is increasingly contagious and has to be recognized as an elemental force even in the shrunk, apparently homogenizing, high-tech world of the end of the twentieth century” (Castells 2011: 28). From this perspective, Castells’ prosocial prognostications for the phenomenon of “project identity” might be unduly idealistic.

In many cases, people are seeking new identities out of self-commodification and a culture of spectacular narcissism. Zywica and Danowski theorise “the idealized virtual identity hypothesis, the tendency for creators of social network site [SNS] profiles to display idealized characteristics that do not reflect their actual personalities” (Zywica and Danows-

ki 2008: 6). While “Mitja Back and his colleagues tested this hypothesis and discovered it happens far less often than most people think” (Baran and Davis 2015: 351), the frequency of occurrence may be masked in their synchronic study. In a longitudinal and experiential examination, any SNS user will certainly have connections that have behaved as such. “It is, as Christopher Lasch diagnosed, a culture of narcissism. Faith in ourselves, in a world of make-believe, is more important than reality. Reality, in fact, is dismissed and shunned as an impediment to success, a form of negativity” (Hedges 2009: 27). One phenomenon that strikes me, in particular, is something of an inverted Munchausen syndrome by proxy. I have a number of young relatives who grew up as social media digital natives and who have very young children. The stories that some of them share online are often characterised by the description of the miraculously precocious behaviours and insights of their children. One telling example is characterised by presenting conversation narratives like a script for a screenplay. In many cases, these narratives of extraordinary children are highly unlikely, certainly edited by secondary revision, and in some cases simply developmentally impossible. Even so, Pablo Barberá argues that especially when a social media connection is deemed a “friend” or “relative”, the online user is likely to click on, or at least attend to a post even if its message is unsavoury to the receiver (Barberá 2014: 40–41).

What effects can this ill-motivated click engender? At the risk of potentially alienating the reader with a transcript of a conversation, I am reminded of a joke my son, an autistic user of online media affordances, once shared with me after seeing it, ironically, online. “Have you heard that there is an app that can reveal racism, misogyny, and narcissism? It’s called ‘Facebook.’” My son’s autistic mind tends to observe ideologically-charged social media material with a clinical perspective that leaves little room for emotional responses to social iniquities – very pragmatic – which brings the bare truth of the “joke” into sharp relief. The disinhibition effect brings much otherwise masked bigotry and ignorance into the light. The network city is particularly significant here as the construct beyond network communities that allows for the possibility of a wider audience than those within smaller concentric circles of Dunbar’s theory. For the narcissistic performer, there is hope of some level of wider public purchase. For the narcissistic audience safely endowed with a network city of other social possibilities with which to replace the performer(s), there is safe space to disdain and eventually possibly socially reject the alienating performance.

These narcissistic performances take longitudinal time to develop and to disaffect the observer, a long-tail of social media alienation. Over time, especially in the instances, however rare, when social media interaction comes to significantly *replace* physical interactions, the long-tail alienating effects of narcissistic social media behaviours take their toll. Castells argues that

[i]n this condition of structural schizophrenia between function and meaning, patterns of social communication become increasingly under stress. And when communication breaks down, when it does not exist any longer, even in the form of conflictual communication [...], social groups and individuals become alienated from each other, and see the other as a stranger, eventually as a threat. (Castells 2010: 3)

I have a number of social media friends, one couple in particular, who, over the years, have come to post virtually everything to their social media. There does not seem to be a thought that comes into their heads, an intimate family evening, or the most banal trip to the grocery store that does not require a photographic sample, always blatantly artificially posed, that does not make it into their mutual social media platforms. The need for such public display could hardly be a better example of Baudrillard's theorisation of social life collapsing into the realm of simulacrum. I also note that I frequently get friend suggestions based on Facebook algorithms following my own friend list. Of late, after many years of friendship, whenever such a suggestion comes through because the candidate is also friends with this couple, I have come to recognise an alienated reaction from myself in which I feel that their relationship to this couple is, in fact, a bad endorsement, and that I have no desire to generate friendships with people of their social ilk. Under these conditions of friendship on the precipice, it would take little more than one politically unsavoury post from either of them for me to finally "unfriend" them. "For John B. Thompson, this mediated interaction, or quasi-interaction as he calls it, establishes a 'non-reciprocal intimacy' 'which does not involve the kind of reciprocity and mutuality characteristic of face-to-face interaction'" (Thompson [1995: 219] in Chin 2010: 212). Indeed, these friends of mine are otherwise good people, old and dear ties, but as I moved away from their part of the world, our friendship became exclusively online, and the alienating effects of the network city have taken hold. From all class strata and all other identity factions that Castells delineates, it becomes the case that the more you expose yourself online, the more you perform a narcissism that alienates, unless it is legitimised by the dubious patina of the new capitalist vocational identity of "influencer". But an influencer has no audience unless they are a citizen of a network city.

In the network city, predicated on Dunbar's concentric circles theories of increasingly weak ties, it is the ability to migrate in and out of friendships that defines it. Castells argues that while "people resist the process of individualization and social atomization, and tend to cluster in community organizations that, over time, generate a feeling of belonging, and ultimately, in many cases, a communal, cultural identity," it is also the case that "for this to happen, a process of social mobilization is necessary. That is, people must engage in urban movements [...] through which common interests are discovered, and defended, life is shared somehow, and new meaning may be produced" (Castells 2011: 60). As many theorists have argued, under the conditions of negativity bias, the "filter bubbles" which may comprise the homophilic communities Castells describes, create only the illusion of a friendly world syndrome (Miller et al. 2021). Castells makes a strong case that identity construction informs the development of city spaces as well. Within them, "[s]ocial movements tend to be fragmented, localistic, single-issue oriented, and ephemeral, either retrenched in their inner worlds, or flaring up for just an instant around a media symbol. In such a world of uncontrolled, confusing change, people tend to *regroup* around primary identities: religious, ethnic, territorial, national" (Castells 2010: 3). Again, taking the example of online fan communities, and citing Bourdieu, Chin states that "[i]n a sense, these fans go on to develop their own *illusio* [...], continually generating the boundaries that determine who the insiders

and outsiders of the game are” (Chin 2010: 156). Indeed, as a fully virtual phenomenon, the network city is the paradigmatic “*imagined community*”, and the illusion of cultural security and belonging generates a temerity to disdain. When people participate in their virtual communities as part of a network city, replete with a seemingly endless supply of potential social contacts, there emerges a fearlessness to discontinue old connections that have become stale in the real world and then alienating in their virtual long-tail. “The cost, however, is the high mortality rate of on-line friendships, as an unhappy sentence may be sanctioned by clicking away the connection – for ever” (Castells 2011: 89) because there are always “plenty of fish in the sea” of the virtual city.

CONCLUSION

Untethered from geographic limits and from the limits of the broad society theorised by Castells or the micro-communities that comprise it, the network city opens a space to understand socially alienating and insularising effects that borrow from the material world but supersede it in exclusively virtual/digital networks. The slow-rising resentment and disdain outlined above, and the migratory social behaviours it may engender, is surely not determined by the network city, but it is the theoretical landscape which makes it feasible. The network city is the “imagined community” re-imagined with the new conditions arising from the virtual community, in which the previously imagined shared national identity fostered by mass media actually brings a more material ontology to the commune, either derived from real-world relationships complemented online through social media, or developed through filter bubbles and echo chambers returning only like-minded social connections from the broader internet arena – a digital homophily. Indeed, in perhaps his most apocalyptic prognostication, Castells indicates that the “communalism” that is characteristic of what I have defined as the network city is quite doomed, because it is pervaded by narcissistic individualism (Castells 2011: 64). As such, eventually the network city leads back to the material world, in which the long-tail of social media alienation can only be ameliorated by face-to-face physical human interaction.

Certainly these alienating effects do not occur for all, and perhaps not even for most SNS users, but as a “long-tail” effect, the phenomenon requires longitudinal time-scales to measure, or even recognise. As Clay Shirky explains:

This is also the shape behind Chris Anderson’s discussion in the long tail; most items offered at online retailers like iTunes and Amazon don’t sell well, but in aggregate they generate considerable income. The pattern doesn’t apply just to goods, though, but to social interactions as well. Real-world distributions are only an approximation of this formula, but the imbalance it creates appears in an astonishing number of places in large social systems. (Shirky 2008: 126)

However, unlike the dystopic vision of E. M. Forster’s short story “The Machine Stops” (1909), for example, in which individuals have socially evolved past physical interaction into a dystopic realm of atomised cells and all communications are electronical-

ly mediated, Castells points out that the digital and the physical social worlds currently operate in a complementary way rather than a mutually exclusive way, and while a wider range of social interactions can emerge under the convenience of social media, the pre-existing alienations from the realm of physical interaction can find their way into the digital realm and then be exacerbated by the disinhibition effect. As it is theorised here, the network city does not generate so much *isolation* per se as much as *alienation* and *migration* combined with homophily into a social-digital insularisation, raising issues of atomisation and segregation in the network city communities characterised by negativity bias and media narcissism.

Perhaps the lost hope for the internet to introduce a new era of improved global democratisation lies in understanding its virtual communities in this way. It may be the case that global cities are no longer attached to a specific country per se, but merely an ideology, or even just a methodology, a preference for a particular combination of interactive options, a certain urban digital flavour that suits your fancy (although China and the U.S.A. *do* still maintain a media imperialism that keeps those nationalist categories relevant). As Castells argues, “[i]ndeed, [cultural communes’] strength, and their ability to provide refuge, solace, certainty, and protection, comes precisely from their communal character, from their collective responsibility, cancelling *individual* projects” (Castells 2011: 67). Quantitative measures of this phenomenon are likely impossible, and just as likely irrelevant. What is important is the fact that this long-tail of alienation occurs, in whatever quantity, under the specific conditions made possible by the network city. From this point of departure, cultural analyses arising from a nuanced understanding of the dynamics made possible by the network city can emerge, offering at least the superficial insight that for a truly progressive network city to emerge, it will require the significant decommodification and “de-narcissification” of the cyber-space in which it occurs.

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POVZETEK

Avtor razpravlja o problemu novih oblik komuniciranja na področju »omrežnega mesta«. Močno se opira na Castellsovo teorijo o družbi omrežij in se ukvarja s problemi izolacije, ki jo prinašajo digitalna omrežna mesta. Na podlagi izhodišča, ki se sklicuje na ideje Castellsa, Jeana Baudrillarda, Berthe Chin in številnih drugih virov s področja teorije medijev, poskuša teoretizirati digitalno mesto, virtualno urbano organizacijo, kot način razumevanja družbenih, kapitalističnih in ekoloških posledic izključno digitalne strani družbe globalnega omrežja. »Omrežno mesto« opredeljuje kot del omrežja tako znotraj kot zunaj njegovih meja. In tako kot so dinamike moči ali razredne hierarhije

progaste ali rizomatične v odnosih tako v kot med dejanskimi, fizičnimi mesti, so takšne tudi na spletu.

Teoretično izhodišče za obravnavo te preobrazbe je odnos med mesti, kot jih poznamo, kot geografskimi entitetami, in novimi virtualnimi mesti, zlasti z vidika problematike strukturiranja in prestrukturiranja skupnosti in s tem povezanih identitet. Prehod od prostorske k digitalni bližini pa kot posledico prinaša tudi nove vrsto izolacije. Prostorski izrazi, s katerimi opisujemo dele mest, kot so »predmestje«, »industrijsko okrožje« ali »mestno središče«, imajo svoje ustreznice v omrežnih, virtualnih mestih. Na ta način spreminjajo naše razumevanje migracij, ki so zdaj veliko hitrejše in pogojene z drugačnimi razlogi. Posledično nastanejo tudi nove oblike izolacije in odtujenosti, ki jih najdemo pri učinkih, ki so že teoretizirani v literaturi o kulturi omrežij.

Na splošno se pod pogoji tega, kar se teoretizira kot omrežno mesto, »civilne družbe skrčijo in razčlenijo, saj ni več kontinuitete med logiko ustvarjanja moči v globalnem omrežju ter logiko združevanja in predstavljanja v specifičnih družbah in kulturah« (Castells 2011: 11). Prispevek teoretizira dolgi rep družbene odtujenosti, ki se pojavi skupaj z omrežnim mestom, da bi razjasnil, kako te digitalne skupnosti povzročajo zelo posebno vrsto družbene odtujenosti in izolacije, ki temelji na homofiliji. Le-ta pa izhaja iz odzivov na družbeni narcizem in idealizirane virtualne identitete, ki sta posledici negativne pristranskosti družbenih medijev.

Imaginaries and Rhythms of Remoteness: The Case of Bohinj as a Tourist Destination



Imaginariji in ritmi odročnosti:
primer Bohinja kot turistične destinacije

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an examination of the mutually constitutive relationship between remoteness and connectivity in the alpine tourist destination of Bohinj in Slovenia. Building upon existing ethnographic explorations of remoteness and tourism imaginaries, the author explores how the alpine locality of Bohinj has been continually made and remade as an out-of-the-way tourist destination and how the imaginary of remoteness presents itself in everyday life, which is analysed through the lens of tourism seasonality.

KEYWORDS: remoteness, anthropology of tourism, tourism imaginaries, seasonality, rhythms, Bohinj, Slovenia

IZVLEČEK

V članku avtorica raziskuje vzajemno konstitutivno razmerje med odročnostjo in povezanostjo v alpski turistični destinaciji Bohinj v Sloveniji. Na podlagi etnografskih raziskav odmaknjenosti in turističnih imaginarijev avtorica preučuje, kako se Bohinj nenehno ustvarja in preoblikuje kot odročna turistična destinacija in kako se imaginarij odročnosti predstavlja v vsakdanjem življenju, analiziranjem skozi prizmo turistične sezone.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: odročnost, antropologija turizma, turistični imaginariji, sezone, ritmi, Bohinj, Slovenija

TATIANA BAJUK SENČAR

*Imaginaries and Rhythms of Remoteness:
The Case of Bohinj as a Tourist Destination*

Tourism has long been an economic strategy to encourage development. However, the potentially negative effects of tourism – due to mass tourism or, more recently, over-tourism – have rendered it a contested practice.¹ Numerous problems have been highlighted in policy discussions and academic debates, with the first academic critiques of tourism emerging as early as the 1970s (Nash 1977; Turner and Ash 1975). The inherently translocal dimensions of tourism render tourist destinations highly dependent on broader trends in a global industry as well as on other factors often outside their realm of control. Challenges such as climate change highlight not only the scale of factors that shape tourism but also its potential environmental impact, the diminishment of which would require the modification or even curtailing of tourism.

Despite the numerous questions and potential problems linked to tourism, it is still considered a viable option for peripheral, rural, or less-developed places worldwide that otherwise have few other developmental options – including numerous localities throughout the Alps, including the Slovenian Alps. Such a strategy is also encouraged by the images and imaginaries that underpin the tourism industry in the form of desirable tourist destinations intended to respond to the preferences or wishes of tourists. Yet, what happens to peripheral, out-of-the-way places when they become tourist destinations, given that their success depends on the number of tourists that travel to visit them? What happens to the remoteness of a place when its well-being and development hinge on an economic strategy that seems to undermine it?

In this article, I examine the mutually constitutive relationship between remoteness (or insularity) and connectivity in the alpine tourist destination of Bohinj in Slovenia. My ethnographic analysis builds primarily on existing academic discussions on tourism imaginaries, remoteness, and seasonality as a form of temporal rhythm. With the aid of archival/media research and ethnographic fieldwork,² I explore how the alpine locality of Bohinj in Slovenia became depicted as an isolated, out-of-the-way tourist destination and how the imaginary of remoteness presents itself in everyday life. Finally, I analyse the challenges that residents identify as resulting from Bohinj's success as a remote tourist destination.

In this manner, I focus on Bohinj as a remote alpine tourist destination and the impact of imaginaries of remoteness on everyday life and local experiences of place. Analysing how the notion of Bohinj as a remote, faraway tourist destination informs everyday life is inher-

1

There are numerous debates and lines of inquiry linked to the concept of over-tourism, which transcend the analytical discussion presented in this article. For a critical overview of over-tourism, see O'Regan et al. 2022.

2

This article is based on research conducted for the Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia research project (J6-4610) (Podjed and Peternel 2024) and the Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life research programme (P6-0088). My analysis is also informed by numerous previous periods of ethnographic research conducted in Bohinj in connection to tourism and development: 2001–2003 (Tourism and Globalization – L6-3095), 2011–2014 (Triglav National Park: Heritages, Actors – Strategies, Questions, and Solutions – J6-4210), and 2015–2017 (Park and Enjoy Nature! Norway and EEA Grants 2009–2014).

ently linked to the temporal or seasonal dimensions of tourism. Given Bohinj's contours and features as a tourist destination, it is virtually overrun with tourists during certain periods of the year – particularly the summer months that comprise the high season. The large number of tourists that flock to Bohinj during the summer seems to subvert its image as a peaceful, remote alpine basin, which begs the question of whether one could consider such a locality to be remote. However, tourism in Bohinj manifests itself in an intermittent fashion, resulting in seasons of saturation interspersed with periods of relative isolation or remoteness.

Thus, the following discussion delves into the relationship between remoteness and connectivity by exploring the interplay between imaginaries and experiences of remoteness or isolation, particularly from the perspective of the local residents and tourism actors in Bohinj. It is based on ethnographic research into the rhythmic or seasonal nature of tourism that centres on two main issues: the shifting rhythms of seasonal tourism practice and actors' experiences of tourism seasonality.

PRODUCTIONS OF REMOTENESS

Tourism literature, including the anthropology of tourism, abounds with research into the images, imagery, and imaginaries of tourism – lines of inquiry that initially stemmed from explorations of the cultural impact of a practice that, as James Lett noted, is “the single largest peaceful movement of persons across cultural boundaries in the history of the world” (Lett 1989: 275). An enduring interest in exploring the cultural dimensions of the interactions between tourism's hosts and guests has informed numerous studies of the visual and cultural representations of all that is meant to be seen by what John Urry famously termed “the tourist gaze” (Urry 1990). Research critically engaging with tourism as a culturally powerful practice examined these visual and cultural representations with attention to the inherently unequal relationship between so-called hosts and guests (Smith 1989) as well as the nature of tourism as a presumably superficial practice strongly prone to commoditisation, often resulting in adaptations of local traditions and features to match tourist expectations (e.g. Greenwood 1989). Other studies in this vein have considered the tourist gaze as potentially operating as a mirror both for tourists as well as the people that tourists gaze upon. In this light, tourism not only has the potential to negatively impact host cultures but can also serve as an “empowering vehicle of self-representation” (Stronza 2001: 271), which facilitates the purposeful reinvention, reinforcement, or recreation of elements of identity (Nuñez 1964; Van Den Berghe 1994) – as well as their visual representations.

More recent research on images in tourism has highlighted the crucial role that images play in the production of tourist destinations and as a central component of tourism as a global industry that hinges on well-established, seductive images and discourses that encourage tourism travel. Together with other elements such as myths (Selwyn 1996) and meta-narratives (Bruner 2005), images are also an integral part of tourism imaginaries, understood as “representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as mean-making and world-shaping devices” (Salazar 2012: 864). While

existing studies of tourism imaginaries are, as Naomi Leite argues, highly varied in terms of definition and approach (Leite 2014), they do, however, share an interest in examining how tourism images and imagery operate within broader systems of tourism meaning-making at all levels. Studying images (as well as other meaning-making elements such as stories or discourses) within the context of imaginaries involves exploring the power of varied, often mass-mediated master narratives or tropes in terms of which groups of tourism actors engage with tourism as a key element of the so-called experience economy (Löfgren 2005). Tourism imaginaries can operate as a source of inspiration for tourist expectations and experiences as well as for producing and circulating convincing formulations of inviting and distinctive tourist destinations. At the same time, all groups of tourism actors – be they local tourist actors or residents, tourist industry actors, or tourists themselves – help generate, maintain, mediate, alter, or consume tourism imaginaries (Salazar 2012).

Building upon these discussions, the following analysis centres on ethnographically exploring the imaginary of remoteness as an important element of Bohinj's self-image as a tourist destination – and examining its culturally specific contours mapped out by residents and local tourism actors. The tourism industry abounds with diverse imaginaries of tourist destinations cast as different, other, and remote – be it geographically or relationally. Remoteness or isolation is often recast in many tourist destinations portrayed as ideal places to “get away from it all”. These formulations can be based on insularity (Oroz 2022; Simonič 2017, 2024), peripherality (Kozorog 2013), or even notions of paradise (Kravanja 2012; Salazar 2010).

The conscious casting of tourist destinations as remote or peripheral locations in order to inscribe them with added value or distinction is but one dimension of a distinctive phenomenon of contemporary life: the persistence of remoteness – at the level of lived experience as well as in the form of a compelling imaginary. Remoteness seems to endure despite our world being continually reshaped by increasing levels of connection. Existing forms of transportation and communication link together the far corners of the world – to say nothing of how digital connections transcend physical distances. Numerous analysts have explored the persistence of remoteness, both conceptually/analytically and ethnographically. Many have revisited the work of Edwin Ardener (2012), who expounded on remoteness in both spatial and social terms. He posited that remoteness should not be understood only in terms of topographical space, as a geographical given resulting from physical distance or geological features or barriers (i.e. mountains, oceans) that shape the contours of the material spaces between places. Instead, he also called for exploring remoteness in terms of topological space, in terms of differing degrees of connection and distancing between places. In a similar vein, Harms et al. highlight the fact that remoteness is not so much a state as a positioning; it is “not simply a static condition found somewhere *out there* beyond the pale; rather it is always being made, unmade, and transformed” (Harms et al. 2014: 362). Thus, remoteness is the result of numerous processes that define the relative positioning of a place in terms of gradations of connectivity – primarily from places depicted as (relative) centres. Examining the remoteness of a given place thus involves exploring its processual nature, identifying “the

ways that it is actively made and remade across political, material, and historical scales” (Saxer and Andersson 2019: 143) through diverse practices of distancing or connection enacted by a range of social actors, groups, institutions, and state/government bodies.

Inspired by these lines of inquiry, the following ethnographic study centres on exploring the processes that make and unmake remoteness in Bohinj as a means of decentring the notion of remoteness as a static condition. This involves tracing the varied, potentially contested processes across diverse scales while attending to the infrastructural and topographical materialities that help shape it (e.g. Gohain 2019; Perinić Lewis 2024). Many of these processes are shaped or maintained by political, economic, or institutional centres – thus transcending the local level. However, not all such practices that contribute to the making of remote places are trans-local; remoteness can also be consciously produced and even promoted locally, as there can be certain local benefits or returns from remoteness – be they political, social, or economic. Phillip Vannini (2012) coined the term “remove” to refer to the performance of distancing as a mechanism of (relative) insulation used to attain certain benefits of remoteness. Ethnographers have depicted how local actors in remote places employ distancing as a tool for varied social and political ends, while others move to remote regions to actively pursue the benefits of life in isolated places (e.g. Caballero 2023; Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith 2010; Ledinek Lozej 2024; Ortar and Filipo 2023; Polajnar Horvat 2024; Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019). Others have demonstrated that a locality’s remoteness can be recast as a resource for promoting it as a tourist destination (Jørgensen 2011; Lou, Oaks and Shein 2019). The processes shaping a place’s remoteness – which does not necessarily overlap with its relative position in geographical terms – thus manifest the diverse, often divergent experiences, perceptions, and agendas of varied social actors participating in them (Vannini 2023).

With the aid of archival and media research, as well as interviews with Bohinj residents and tourism actors conducted in the winter and spring of 2024, I track the processes shaping Bohinj’s remoteness over time, particularly as an important element of its tourism imaginary. In addition, I explore the relationship between the imaginaries and experiences of remoteness by examining how actors in Bohinj experience tourism at the level of everyday life and their experiences of place. In doing so, I focus primarily on the intermittence of tourism in Bohinj, which manifests itself primarily in terms of seasonality.

In tourism literature, seasonality is considered to be one of tourism’s distinctive yet problematic features, defined most often as a “temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism which may be expressed in terms of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admission to attractions” (Butler 2001: 5). The prevalent approach within mainstream tourism literature focuses on the challenges or problems that seasonality creates for the industry (Baum and Lundtrop 2001), which in turn shape the impact seasonality has on the people and places that depend on tourism (Cannas 2012; Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff 2005), particularly in remote places (e.g. Baum and Hagen 1999; Commons and Page 2001). Other lines of inquiry examine the sustainability of tourism seasonality and the challenges of inte-

grating tourism with other livelihood strategies by focusing on tourism's temporal rhythms (e.g. Rongna and Sun 2019).

Expanding on the focus on the processual nature of the spatial production of the remoteness of tourist destinations, this study's approach to examining tourism seasonality builds on existing research on the temporal dimension of the production of tourist destinations. More specifically, it centres on existing analyses of rhythm as an element of temporality, which is understood as the social, lived experience of time (Edensor 2010). Tom Mels' argument that "human beings have always been rhythm-makers as much as place-makers" (Mels 2004: 3) highlights the extent to which the spatial and temporal dimensions of place-making processes are intertwined. As Henri Lefebvre argues in his seminal work *Rhythmanalysis*, "everywhere where there is an interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (Lefebvre 2004: 15). Tourism practices "replete with temporal structures, phases and paces at a range of scales" (Edensor 2011: 54) manifest themselves as tourism seasonality in places that are being continually shaped by a complex mix of rhythms that emerge from a range of human practices. In this light, tourist destinations can thus be examined as sites where a complex array of rhythms – be they daily, weekly, or yearly, mechanical, natural or social/institutional, cyclical or unilinear – overlap, intersect, harmonise or clash at the level of everyday life (e.g. Conlon 2010; Kaaristo 2020; Vannini 2012). The rhythms that help produce, mark, or frame tourism practice include seasonal-climatic rhythms (i.e. spring-summer-autumn-winter seasons, rainy-dry seasons), institutional rhythms (holidays, festivals, hours of commerce), as well as the rhythms of tourist activities (timing/duration of tourist packages, operating schedules of tourist attractions/activities). Of particular importance are also the rhythms of mobility (Vannini 2023), including the schedule, duration, and pacing of different transport modalities – both local and translocal.

In tourist destinations, tourist rhythms overlap, synchronise, or clash with the other rhythmic practices carried out by local inhabitants and other actors (Čuka and Oroz 2024; Edensor 2011), who also inscribe meaning and significance to the existing rhythms and dynamics of their interplay. Building on research in this vein, the study centres on analysing the rhythms in terms of which interlocutors talk about tourism seasonality in Bohinj as well as the interplay between these rhythmic practices and others that underpin their experiences of place and remoteness.

IMAGINARIES OF REMOTENESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

The inherently relational and dynamic nature of remoteness implies that the criteria for categorising a place as remote may shift over time – and depend on perspective. For example, the history of Bohinj from the Iron Age to the end of the 19th century was shaped to a great extent by iron ore and iron working. Bohinj was initially settled in the Iron Age – in the 7th century BC – by people from the Posočje region, drawn to Bohinj's rich iron ore deposits (Gabrovec 1987; Ogrin 2023). These Iron-Age settlers made their way eastward to Bohinj via

a relatively difficult route across high mountain passes in the Lower Bohinj mountains from the region of Tolmin (Trampuž Orel 2012). Although, by modern standards, such routes would render Bohinj inaccessible from the west, archaeological and archival evidence suggests that these routes to the west were quite active in ancient times – between iron-rich Bohinj and pre-Alpine and Friuli lowlands to the west, as well as Klagenfurt to the north (Cundrič 2002). For centuries, the need for iron was the foundation of Bohinj's ties with the world beyond its borders. Its evolving position within changing empires and political economies, as well as shifting trade routes, has continually played a decisive role in defining Bohinj's degree, or sense, of remoteness.



Photo 1: Photo of Lake Bohinj, 29 April 2017 (Authors: Anna & Michal) (Wikimedia Commons 2017)

Despite the level of connection that Bohinj enjoyed due to the need for iron, the notion of Bohinj's remoteness has become rooted in traditionally local, albeit more recent, understandings of place. The oral tradition in Bohinj abounds with stories about its remoteness; furthermore, this positionality is even written into the cultural landscape. For a long time, access to the rest of the world involved routes from the west; however, in recent history, the region's remoteness has been expressed in relation to its accessibility from the east. Ethnologist Marija Cvetek, in an analysis of Bohinj folk tales, mentions stories about a settlement named Obrne (English: *turn*) that provide a telling example. A route from the east was built by carving out the rock of a narrow valley named Soteska (*gorge*), in many places taking the form of steps – hence the route's name, Štenge (*stairs*). This made Bohinj relatively inaccessible from this direction, which inspired the name Obrne for the settlement

located where the Turks, who were making their way across the region, presumably had to turn around, thinking they had arrived at the end of the world (Mencinger 1961, cited in Cvetek 1998; see also Cvetek 1993). Until the railway from Vienna was extended through Bohinj and on to Trieste at the beginning of the 20th century, locals would often travel the *Štence* route to reach the towns of Bled or Radovljica. Travels along this route and beyond often inspired numerous stories in local lore where locals are surprised at the breadth of the world beyond Bohinj's borders, which also highlighted the distance (geographical and social) between Bohinj and the world beyond (Cvetek 1998).

The extension of the railway to Bohinj, as well as the building of the tunnel that linked Bohinj to the Posočje region, was a crucial milestone in its history. The role of iron in defining Bohinj's relation to the world changed drastically in 1890, when the central forge near Bohinjska Bistrica burned down. This event marked an abrupt end to the tradition of ironworking as well as the onset of a period of economic crisis for the region, as its residents strove to bolster other traditional subsistence practices, including alpine farming, alpine (vertical) transhumance, forestry, and woodworking (Bajuk Senčar 2005).³ The building of the railway and the tunnel proved to be an economic boon for Bohinj because it reconfigured its positioning in the existing regional landscape, establishing links to the western regions of present-day Slovenia as well as the port city of Trieste on the Adriatic. In addition, it also afforded Bohinj better accessibility to the east, through to Bled and Vienna. All this also had substantial implications for accessibility and development – including tourism development.

Bohinj's history of tourism predates this improved accessibility, overlapping strongly with the history of alpine mountaineering in the region. From the 18th century onwards, Bohinj became renowned for its natural beauty and mountains, attracting numerous famous Slovenes – scientists, writers, and humanists. They helped compile information about the flora and fauna of Bohinj's alpine landscape and facilitate forays into the mountains (Novak 1987). The origins of tourism in Bohinj extend back to 1872, to the foundation of the Friends of Triglav Association in the village of Srednja Vas to support the growing numbers of people coming to Bohinj to go on mountain treks. Tourism during this period was linked almost exclusively with excursions into the alpine mountain landscape – to the extent that the word tourist at that time (*alpinist*) meant mountaineer, climber, or traveller (Novak 1987). While still a fledgling industry, the increasing levels of tourist interest in Bohinj provided locals with employment opportunities and encouraged significant investments, with the first hotel being built in 1887 (Budkovič 2004).

Bohinj's new positioning on the railway system also encouraged the further development of the tourist industry, which had until then been centred on alpine/mountain tourism. Organised tourism began in 1907 with the founding of Društvo za privabitev tujcev za Bohinjsko Bistrico z okolico in občino Srednjo vas (*Society for Attracting Foreigners to*

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For literature about animal transhumance, a subsistence strategy in Bohinj with roots going back to antiquity, and its significance for the development of Bohinj, see, for example, Novak 1989; Ledinek Lozej 2013).

Bohinjska Bistrica with its Surrounding Areas and the Municipality of Srednja Vas). This heralded a very prosperous period of Bohinj tourism, during which members of local tourist organisations planned and built additional tourism infrastructure to attract visitors. They were also active in regional tourist organisations, securing funding for investments at the regional level, where tourism had become a priority in light of the steadily increasing number of visitors to the area (Budkovič 2004). The building of the tunnel shifted the focus of tourism from the mountains to the valleys – primarily to the area around Bohinjska Bistrica, where the train station is located. Most tourist attractions were linked to winter sports: sledging/tobogganing, skating, and skiing.

The history of the production of Bohinj as a tourist destination in the 20th century has been marked by numerous crises and considerable upheaval – both political and economic – and continually reconfigured its position *vis à vis* the world beyond its borders. During World War I, for example, Bohinj's location on the railway network contributed to it becoming a strategic part of the hinterland supply system to the Soča (*Isonzo*) Front when Italy declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1915. During the war, life in Bohinj was subordinated to the needs of the armed forces, meaning that the entire region from the eastern edge of Lake Bohinj westwards to the Soča Front was transformed into a militarised zone inaccessible to civilians (Budkovič 1999).⁴ When Slovenia became part of the Yugoslav monarchy and the western part of present-day Slovenia came under Italian rule during the interwar period, Bohinj experienced a substantial change in the make-up of its foreign guests, who came mostly from different parts of the monarchy – particularly wealthy guests, who owned or rented villas for the duration of their stay. Tourism development halted again during and in the years immediately after World War II, which left a devastating mark on Bohinj's communities and landscape (Kopač 1987). The first decades of the postwar socialist period were dedicated primarily to rebuilding, including the revival of tourist organisations and tourist events or festivals (Habinc 2014). The most successful period of postwar tourism was the 1970s and 1980s, characterised by *sindikalni turizem* (*trade union tourism*), which involved excursions companies from all over Yugoslavia organised for their employees. Bohinj's success during this period was characterised by institutionally organised tourism from Yugoslavia (but not at the level of wealthy elites) as well as increasing numbers of foreign tourists during the “high” summer and winter seasons, which provided the Bohinj tourism industry with a level of stability. In addition, significant investments were made to improve tourism infrastructure, and financial support was offered to locals to take on tourism as a supplemental livelihood strategy. This period of stability and growth ended with Slovenia's independence and the ensuing war among the former Yugoslav republics, which resulted in the dissolution of *sindikalni turizem* at the federal level. In addition, Slovenia's transition process involved political and economic restructuring, including the privatisa-

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The transformation of Bohinj into the hinterland of the Soča Front was memorialised during the centenary of WWI with the creation of thematic tourist routes, thus incorporating this part of history into Bohinj's tourist landscape (see Bajuk Senčar 2018; Repič 2018).

tion of its hotels. This decades-long process unfolded hand in hand with Bohinj once again reconfiguring its position in existing tourist markets (Bajuk Senčar 2005).

The history of tourism outlined above depicts how Bohinj evolved as a tourist destination, starting as a region renowned for the beauty of its mountainous landscape, attracting primarily alpinists or mountain climbers, who later came in increasing numbers. New transportation networks serving as technologies of connectivity have played a strong role in the continued development of Bohinj as a tourist destination. Railroad lines served as channels for transporting goods and services, bolstering social, economic and political ties, and, of course, facilitating the visits of tourists. However, these same networks also became the foundation for isolation, as its strategic positioning led to it becoming part of a militarised zone during WWI. After the war, Bohinj's relational positioning encouraged new forms of social and economic cooperation at a time when tourism became a regional priority, resulting in locally- and regionally-funded initiatives and investments that fostered the development of this livelihood strategy. Changing regimes, international/global conflicts, and the rise and fall of political and economic systems contributed to the continual remaking of Bohinj as a tourist destination – as well as its remoteness. The following section will examine how decisions and politics at the local level contributed to tourism imaginaries about Bohinj as a remote tourist destination.

TOURISM IMAGINARIES: FROM A SLOVENIAN SWITZERLAND TO AN ALPINE OASIS

Despite having a relatively long history of tourism, Bohinj has had relatively few broad-based initiatives to promote itself as a tourist destination. Bohinj's renown was initially based on the natural beauty of its mountains. Analysts portray how its tourism actors – including its fledgling tourism societies – strove to recast Bohinj as a winter destination after the building of the tunnel. These societies – also supported by regional tourism organisations – strove to take advantage of the opportunities that railway access could offer Bohinj and the entire Gorenjska region (Batagelj 2009). Given its location on the railway and the natural features of its landscape, Bohinj was singled out as a potential destination for zimsko-športni turizem (*winter sports tourism*), rendering it a so-called “Slovenian Switzerland”:

We have no more suitable place than Bohinj [...]. The snow lies there – we would say – the longest in the whole of Carniola, toboggan runs can be set up at a relatively low cost, there are plenty of places to practise skiing, ski jumps can be built, sledding is possible, and the lake offers a large and first-class ice rink (Anon. 1909: 75).

This description of Bohinj in an article on winter tourism in the serial publication *Promet in gostilna* (Transport and Tavern) depicts an imaginary of Bohinj as a place whose natural landscape could render it an ideal winter sports destination. This image was fostered by varied groups and businesses that aimed to promote Bohinj as a “Slovenian Switzerland” (Batagelj 2009). These activities included the building of winter tourism infrastructure (skat-

ing rink, sledding course) in conjunction with special railway schedules and discounts that encouraged travel to Bohinj, including special weekend cars and room to transport sports equipment, such as skating and sledding gear (Bajuk Senčar 2015).

Less attention was paid to developing a common tourism imaginary to promote Bohinj from the beginning of WWI through to the rebuilding of Bohinj after the devastation left behind by WWII. The first step in this direction was an overall image campaign for Bohinj, which was launched in the 1980s by the company Alpinum, which at the time owned five hotels in the area. This campaign did not focus on Bohinj as a “Slovenian Switzerland” perfect for winter sports. Instead, Alpinum launched the slogan *Bohinj, oaza Alp* (*Bohinj, oasis of the Alps*) that centred on the region’s natural beauty, alpine features, and remoteness – an untouched place at the heart of an alpine landscape (Provital 2012b). The “Bohinj, oasis of the Alps” campaign was not limited to promoting a specific kind of tourism but instead was meant to promote Bohinj as a tourist destination for all seasons (Provital, 2012b: 18–19). The logo depicted one of the iconic images associated with Bohinj: the Church of St. John the Baptist, John’s Bridge (*Janezov most*), and Bohinj Lake.



Photo 2: Photograph of Church of St. John the Baptist and Bohinj Lake,
1 June 2007 (Author: Rosino) (Wikimedia Commons 2007).

While the promotion of Bohinj as an oasis of the Alps ran its course, the notion of Bohinj as an oasis has become an enduring element of the imaginary of Bohinj as a tourist destination. One can encounter it in local tourism development documents, official tourism websites, and promotional material used by individual tourism service providers. For example, Bohinj’s tourism development strategy for the period between 2012 and 2016 envisions Bohinj as “an oasis of authentic and relaxing surprises” (*oaza pristnih in sproščujočih presenečenj*) (Provital 2012a: 25). The imaginary of Bohinj as an oasis of authentic and relaxing surprises is later repeated in the strategic documents for tourism development for

the 2017–2021 period (Provital 2017). It is also evoked by numerous promotional tourism websites, albeit in different permutations. For example, Bohinj is described as “an oasis of peace and pristine nature” on Slovenia’s national tourism website.⁵ The official website for the Julian Alps depicts Bohinj as “the hidden oasis of peace in the embrace of the Julian Alps in the heart of the Triglav National Park with the largest natural lake in Slovenia.”⁶ Bohinj Tourism’s official website currently promotes Bohinj as an “oasis for responsible tourism.”⁷ Furthermore, the vision of Bohinj as an oasis has been a recurring theme in surveys conducted with residents and local tourism actors in preparation for the 2030 tourism strategy.⁸ This same theme also appears in depictions of Bohinj used by individual tourism providers, including those who rent out private rooms or homes, such as the owners of a holiday house called Escape to Bohinj, located in the village of Stara Fužina, who depict Bohinj as an “oasis of calm.”⁹ Many of these formulations draw on elements that have long been identified with Bohinj’s natural landscape, as is the case in the following excerpt from a website for renting accommodation in the village of Ukanc: “Dear guests! Do you want to discover a hidden oasis of unspoiled nature, beautiful mountain[s], climbing, and cycling paths nestled in the Julian Alps and Triglav National Park? Here we are; here awaits our offer for you.”¹⁰

While the natural features highlighted in such promotion campaigns have varied over time, virtually all efforts to lure visitors to the area have centred on local natural landscapes. What is interesting to note is that the evocations of Bohinj as a natural oasis first launched by the Alpinum image campaign in the 1980s roughly coincide with the expansion of Slovenia’s only national park – Triglav National Park – to include almost one-third of the Bohinj municipality, including many of its key tourist landmarks in 1981.¹¹ As is apparent from the advertisement described above, the notion that these landmarks and attractions form part of a protected area is incorporated into and underlines the area’s depiction as an oasis.

The concept of oasis also communicates an understanding of nature as unchanging and separate from the rest of the world – a place to get away from it all – that in turn serves as a powerfully evocative strategy of tourism promotion (e.g. Norum and Mostafanezhband 2016). While existing routes of mobility and growing renown as a tourist destination render Bohinj increasingly connected to the tourism industry on a global scale, it still promotes itself as a remote destination of pristine nature. This imaginary was also evoked in discus-

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I Feel Slovenia, n.d.

6

Julijske Alpe, n.d.

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Bohinj, Slovenia, n.d.

8

Bohinj, Slovenija, n.d.

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Escape to Bohinj, n.d.

10

ALPREN, n.d.

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For more on the establishment and evolution of Triglav National Park and its heritagisation, see, among others, Bajuk Senčar 2012, as well as the Triglav National Park website (Triglavski narodni park n.d.).

sions with my interlocutors, particularly when discussing discrepancies between projected images and lived experiences. In the following section, the discussion turns to the rhythmic nature of tourism and the issue of tourism seasonality, which has been a perennial question for the tourism industry in Bohinj since the beginning of the century.

RHYTHMS OF TOURISM SEASONALITY

As mentioned in the previous section, the seasonality of tourism has been a topic of interest for local tourism actors since the early 20th century, when concerted and coordinated efforts were made at the local and regional levels to expand the winter tourist season. The following ethnographic discussion examines how interlocutors presently define Bohinj's changing tourism seasonality as well as the impact of tourist rhythms on everyday life and experiences of place. In what terms do people in Bohinj talk about tourism seasonality and the other rhythms that shape their everyday lives?

One of the most common narratives linked to tourism seasonality is that of the tourism industry itself, whose language and indicators are primarily quantitative. In this context, tourism seasonality is defined in terms of criteria that can be measured: the number of tourist arrivals, overnight stays, tickets purchased, parking spaces used, etc. This sort of data serves as a basis for tourism industry analyses and strategies, including defining the timing and duration of tourist seasons. One of my interlocutors, a tourism official, employs such a narrative to convey the current dimensions of the high season in the summer:

More and more beds are available [for tourist accommodation], a few hundred new beds a year, now between 9.500 and ten thousand beds are available in summer. [...] I think we are pretty close to ten thousand beds, which is huge considering there are only about five thousand of us. There are twice as many available beds as permanent residents, and there can also be up to ten thousand day tourists on a sunny day visiting on the weekend, so we may go from 5.500 permanent residents to twenty-five thousand, five times [more]. (Interview 1, 18. 4. 2024)¹²

While the number of available beds and overnight stays provides important information about the high summer season, it only provides part of the story, as these numbers refer to tourists who stay in Bohinj for at least one night. However, as my interlocutor mentions above, the visits of so-called stationary guests overlap with those of daily visitors, whose numbers are not limited by the number of available beds. Just as the categories of tourists visiting Bohinj can vary widely, including daily/weekend visitors, bathers, cyclists, and hikers, so do the rhythm, duration, and spatial trajectories of their visits.

Examining local experiences of tourism seasonality involves identifying the rhythms that residents and tourism actors associate with it – including how they interpret the evolution of seasonality over time. When I first conducted research on tourism in Bohinj in the

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All interviews (conducted in spring of 2024) are anonymous and were conducted in Slovenian; the translations into English are mine.

summers of 2001 and 2002, my interlocutors often compared their experiences with their memories of Bohinj tourism before Slovenian independence – an event that brought with it the dissolution of the Yugoslav trade union tourism system (Bajuk Senčar 2005). This resulted in an increase in the seasonal nature of tourism, at least in the short run, as locals adapted to new circumstances. The high season was in the summer, with the peak taking place during the so-called *kopalna sezona* (English: *swimming season*) at Lake Bohinj.¹³ The peak of the season was relatively short, lasting from the beginning or middle of July until the end of August – depending primarily on the timing of summer vacations as well as the weather.

I remember when I was about ten years old, something like that. When it was the first of September, when school started, the roads were empty. There was no one. Now, let's say, when I look at the amount of business in the restaurant, sometimes it is better in September than in June. Actually, it has always been better in September than in June. But before, it was completely empty once September came around. (Interview 2, 7. 6. 2024)

I know because I have worked in tourism in the Gorenjska region before, and I can compare the seasons. [...] I remember that in Bohinj sometimes, on the first of September, things would die down. We would work very, very little in September. There was still a little work until 15th September, but almost nothing more after that. (Interview 3, 4. 6. 2024)

As is apparent from these two excerpts, the rhythm of the summer season, lasting from July through September, was marked by the presence/absence of tourists in the region, particularly on the roads. The duration of the summer season was an established norm that operated as a benchmark with which interlocutors marked the evolution of tourism seasonality and the distinctiveness of tourism in the present.

My interlocutors emphasised that the most important feature of Bohinj's tourism development over the last decade is that the summer season has become significantly more pronounced from 2014 onwards, particularly in terms of a growing number of overnight stays and daily tourists during the summer. At the same time, there was a decrease in overnight stays in the winter, which interlocutors attribute to changes in winter weather, specifically the lack of snow, a manifestation of change in climactic rhythms.

The graph will show it better. Look: here is 2018, with those spikes over the summer becoming more pronounced in comparison to the winter season, which was really bad that year. Here's a slightly longer period, from 2014 to 2018. Here, you can see how the summer has become really pronounced from 2014 onwards, whereas it is significantly less so in the off-season. (Interview 1, 18. 4. 2024)

The pronounced spikes pointed out by my interlocutor represent a change in the rhythms of the summer season, a heightened concentration of tourist visits during the

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While the high season was linked to summer activities, particularly swimming, other activities linked to Bohinj tourism, such as climbing or hiking, had a much broader/longer, albeit less intense season. During this period, the winter season was well-established, particularly in relation to recent years, but not as strong as the summer season. In both cases, the winter season strongly depended on climactic factors, i.e. the possibility of snow.

peaks of the high season. These developments have spurred numerous debates concerning the potential impact – environmental, social, or economic – of the high concentrations of tourists, most of whom travel to and from Bohinj by car. Many of these discussions centre around a temporal conundrum: how to adapt existing infrastructure to deal with a problem that exists for only two months out of the year?

In principle, there is a lot of talk about problems, about Bohinj becoming a parking lot and so on – but, in fact, we have this problem for only two months [out of the year]. If you drive around Bohinj today, you will not have any trouble. We have also realised that it is bearable if it rains on 15th July [during the high season]. People are in the apartments, and traffic is not a problem. I would say that the day visitors make up this apparent crowd. (Interview 4, 18. 4. 2024)

As is apparent from this excerpt, finding a solution to the problems provoked by spikes in tourist visits is hindered by their intermittent rhythm and relatively short duration. Another important issue brought up by the interlocutor above is linked to the rhythm of the visits of a particular group of tourists: day tourists. The volume and timing of day tourist visits are not determined by the number of available beds or the schedules of buses or trains. Instead, their visits often follow a weekly rhythm, as they come mainly on weekends with good weather. Thus, on a sunny weekend at the peak of the summer season, the number of tourists (including day tourists) far exceeds the number of local residents. When talking about their experiences of the summer seasons, interlocutors working in the tourism sector often highlight the discrepancy between the imaginary of Bohinj as a natural oasis and the crowds that dominate the landscape during the high season:

Our infrastructure is not built for this number of people – not the roads, not the parking lots. I am not at all in favour of parking in green areas because I think that if we advertise Bohinj as a destination of pristine nature, we can't have people leaving their cars all over the place, maybe even causing a natural disaster like leaking oil into the groundwater. (Interview 2, 7. 6. 2024)

In addition to the intensification of the peak of the high season, the summer season has expanded in both directions – in the months before and after the peak months of July and August. This trend started before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and has continued from the post-pandemic period to the present day:

I remember when I moved to Bohinj, we used to joke that there was no more tourism after 15th August, or just maybe some weekends. That has changed a lot in the last ten years. [...] Now, in principle, there is an unwritten rule that Easter or 1st May is the kick-off [of the season], and the end is sometime in late September or mid-October. (Interview 5, 3. 7. 2024).

While there seemed to be a consensus among my interlocutors about general shifts in tourism seasonality, they would define their experiences of seasonality in diverse, sometimes even divergent ways. This was largely due to the nature and extent of their involvement with tourism. For example, a growing number of Bohinj residents rent out private rooms during the peak summer season. This has been a long-standing practice in Bohinj's tourism history (Bajuk

Senčar 2005), which has become increasingly widespread given the virtually guaranteed high numbers of tourists during the peak of the summer season. However, most who rent out rooms do so to supplement their income, with the duration of their tourism practice coinciding with the two-month peak of the season. Thus, for them, the high season is an intense period during which renting out rooms is a lucrative, part-time subsistence practice. Their rhythm of tourism practice differs significantly from that of the owners and employees of hotels, small inns, restaurants, and other food establishments that operate virtually year-round. Tourism, for them, is a primary subsistence practice, and they strive to extend their work season as long as possible. There are also other tourism service providers, such as tour guides and operators, who tailor their hours and service packages to the varied needs of tourists across the seasons and the timing of local tourism events (hiking/fishing/skiing season, festivals, etc.). Many of these actors also strive to have as long a season as possible to offset the low season months.

The degree of people's involvement in tourism inform the extent to which they have to coordinate or harmonise the different daily rhythms of work activity. Many who rent out rooms talked about this practice as an "afternoon" activity, something they dealt with after work – a temporal compartmentalisation. Those who strive to make tourism their primary source of livelihood prioritise the rhythms of tourism and do not problematise the overlaps or clashes between the rhythms of tourism practice and other everyday rhythms, often justifying the dominance of high-season rhythms as the cost of success. However, for those actors whose livelihoods are indirectly linked to tourism, the overlap of certain rhythms and their manifestation in the landscape is problematic. This is particularly relevant in the case of those involved in subsistence practices, whose seasons of operation overlap with tourism seasons in Bohinj, which can potentially lead to conflicts. As a municipal official explains, farmers, whose work is integral to local development, comprise such a group:

We have also observed a link between tourism and agriculture. The cultural landscape, if we maintain it, that is, if we keep cultivating it, helps attract tourists. However, the seasonality [of tourism] causes problems [for farmers] because summer is also the time for most agricultural tasks. Tensions arise due to the pressures of tourism on the roads and the hindered accessibility to the routes used by tourists and cyclists, but tractors also need them to get to their plots of land. (Interview 6, 25. 4. 2024)

Many farmers may be involved in the tourism industry to varying degrees, from renting out rooms in the high season to supplying food to local tourist establishments, the latter being a form of cooperation that has become an important tenet of municipal development programmes. Furthermore, numerous municipal and park officials recognise the key role that farmers play in maintaining Bohinj's cultural landscape. However, the intensity of the high season can cause tensions due to the overlap between the rhythms of tourists and farmers, especially when these rhythms imply the use of the same routes and spaces, albeit for different reasons. Heavy traffic and limited accessibility form the lens through which farmers as social actors define and experience the periods that comprise tourism seasonality.

The people I spoke to would talk about diverse sites of congestion, to which they

would ascribe different levels of significance. An interlocutor whose spouse commuted to work outside Bohinj would mention the heavy traffic on the roads during the high season, requiring people to plan for longer commute times. Others would mention the congestion in parking lots, stores, and local landmarks. These chronic issues linked to tourism seasonality were often a topic addressed in local development strategies: how to deal with issues linked to tourism seasonality? What strategies would be most appropriate? What sort of tourism do Bohinj residents wish to have? As an interlocutor explains in the following excerpt, these are not straightforward questions:

There was a discussion at the last meeting of the municipal committee for tourism and agriculture about distributing tourism development evenly across all four seasons. As someone who works in tourism, I understand this; but as a resident of a tourist area, I am completely fine with tourists not being around so much during most of the year because of how it affects me personally... because it is so hard during the summer, so intense, because we are all working beyond our limits, because there is always a shortage of staff and you always have to intervene, because afterward, you need months to recover. (Interview 7, 16. 4. 2024)

While the idea of being able to distribute tourism practices and visitors evenly year-round seems like a logical goal for those working in tourism, this interlocutor mentions an important issue: the benefits of the off-season. Many interlocutors talked about the fact that the peak of the high season is not sustainable year-round, echoing the sentiments mentioned above about the need for time to recover from the demands of the high season. One of the ways that this intensity manifests itself, as is alluded to above, is the intensity of work during the high season, which necessitates hiring additional staff that, due to Bohinj's relative remoteness, is a chronic challenge. The long work hours in the tourism sector during the high season and Bohinj's relative distance from urban centres doesn't always make daily commuting feasible, and there is little housing available in Bohinj that is not intended for tourists, as renting to them, albeit for short periods, is more lucrative than long-term rentals. In the face of chronic shortages of seasonal staff, the rhythm of work for long-term staff becomes longer and more intense during the summer. The off-season months are described as vacation time or time to rest:

Everyone likes that November is quiet; everyone needs a rest. We try to have November to ourselves. Tourist workers go on holiday then, maybe somewhere warm. They can have time to themselves then... After that, for springtime, we like to have peace and a little rest in the spring, from, say, the second half of March onwards. So, even if two months are bad for tourism – November and the period between the second half of March and the first half of April – it suits everyone quite well to have a little bit more time off and some time to ourselves. (Interview 8, 13. 5. 2024)

The difference between the summer/winter tourism seasons and mid-March/mid-April and November as the off-season can be quite stark, as many places central to daily life during the season are closed during the off-season months. As mentioned earlier, most rent out rooms only during the high season, and many businesses, such as pension houses, restaurants, and even cafes, coordinate to close for limited periods. The emptiness and lack of activity/business in Bohinj during these months may be off-putting for potential visitors

during the off-season as well as for some residents, while others welcome the lack of tourists during these periods:

Otherwise, I think that November is nice for us because there are still a lot of us, about six hundred, seven hundred [in the village]. There will be a problem if, in thirty years, there will be only a hundred of us. That is the problem [we face], you understand. But now, things are great [during November]; we take a break from tourism, but we still meet. The shops aren't crowded, you have time to chat, people are more relaxed, and so on. (Interview 9, 7. 6. 2024)

In the excerpt above, a resident from a Bohinj village heavily involved in tourism describes the off-season months as a time when people are able to indulge in the daily social activities and rhythms of local life – when things go “back to normal”. However, the interlocutor also expresses concern for the future prospects of the village community, which are indelibly intertwined with imagined and experienced senses of remoteness. Bohinj's identity as a tourist destination operates as a double-edged sword. Residents have historically been able to cultivate and benefit from the beauty of its natural landscape, much of which is now encompassed in a protected area. However, this success manifests itself in rhythms of tourism practice that, given the imaginary of Bohinj they are trying to project, can be seen to undermine local tourism strategies. The impact of these rhythms, in turn, evokes questions about the long-term sustainability of tourism as a subsistence practice. These questions, coupled with Bohinj's relative distance from urban and economic centres, result in concerns about the emptying of local village communities, particularly on the part of the younger generation that may decide to make a future for themselves elsewhere, beyond Bohinj's borders.

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic discussion centres on exploring how attention to rhythms and the rhythmic dimension of tourism practice can shed light on the imaginaries and experiences of remoteness in Bohinj. The distinctiveness of Bohinj, as that of any given place, lies in the specificity of its “polyrhythmic chorus of the everyday” (Conlon 2010: 71), comprised of a complex array of social, biological, institutional, mechanical (and other) rhythmic practices through which it is continually made and remade. Identifying and examining these rhythms facilitates the analytical shift from imaginaries to the processes that underpin their continual (re)production. These practices are multiple and varied, including tourist arrivals and departures, the range of hourly, daily, monthly, and seasonal timetables that frame tourism practices in Bohinj, as well as the remaining routines and rhythms that continually define its distinctive sense of place.

Rhythms of mobility play a crucial role in the processes that continually shape Bohinj as a tourist destination, be they the rhythmic comings and goings of tourists or the trajectories of their visits through its landscape. Focusing on the temporal dimension of touristic rhythms of mobility offers insights into questions related to the impacts of tourism that result from the intensification of tourist seasons, which can be especially challenging for

rural or remote tourist destinations, as has been demonstrated in similar destinations in Slovenia's alpine regions (e.g. Svetel and Zavrtnik 2025). Exploring the rhythmic aspects of tourist seasonality, which is often understood in terms of the saturation of place through tourist flows, makes it possible to address the issue of intermittence that manifests itself in terms of presence/absence. As mentioned in the interview excerpts, one of the challenges of tourism seasonality as a social problem for tourism is linked to its rhythmic nature. The intensity and intermittence of tourism seasons are challenging to address because they do not seem constant. It is difficult to agree on a strategy because the problems can be experienced or depicted as short-term – i.e. “for only two months out of the year” – even if the problems re-occur the following year.

Another important issue that arises from attention to tourist rhythms is associated with the variety of contemporary tourist practices. Exploring the multiplicity of rhythms aids in analytically decentring essentialist approaches to tourists or tourist practices (Edensor 2011; Čapo 2022). In a similar vein, attention to the multiplicity of actors in a tourist destination and their varied experiences and interpretations of tourist rhythms can aid in decentring static or reified understandings of tourist seasons and their interplay with other, everyday rhythmic practices. Such an approach can aid in grounding and mapping out experiences of seasonality that flesh out a period that is “only two months out of the year”. The diverse ways that Bohinj residents and tourist actors experience the rhythms of tourist practice are contingent upon numerous factors, including the extent to which they consider the rhythms of tourism to be harmonised or synchronised with the polyrhythmic tempo of their everyday lives, including their mobility. Identifying the different rhythms that comprise the polyrhythms of the tourist season can shed light on sites of congestion by approaching them as episodes of arrhythmia resulting from intersecting – and potentially irreconcilable – routines, daily tempos, and trajectories. Exploring, in turn, how residents, tourism actors, tourists, and others interpret or experience these episodes can illuminate moments of contestation or divergence that provide a nuanced perspective on an issue often reduced to an oppositional dynamic between tourists and residents, guests and hosts.

The ethnographic case study of Bohinj has included tracking the processes that have helped shape it as a tourist destination, emphasizing the building of tourist infrastructures and infrastructures of mobility – with increased accessibility facilitating the flows of visitors. Yet, as Vannini demonstrated, the significance of these mobilities for the relative positioning of remote places is complex, for mobilities, and the routes along which they occur, generate interdependence (Vannini 2012). This especially holds true in the case of tourism mobilities. The success of promoting Bohinj as a natural oasis, existing at a remove from the regular everyday, hinges on flows of (tourist) mobility: one depends on the other. The presence of tourists is a manifestation of this interdependence, both in spatial and rhythmic terms.

Furthermore, tourists also help shape and subvert remote tourism imaginaries (Salaazar 2012) through their choice of destination, their activities, and the timing of their visits. The rhythms and trajectories of the mobile practices to, from, and within a place play a formative role in the processual dynamics shaping experiences of remoteness as they are the

conduits through which social actors experience accessibility and distance. The sites of congestion or moments of arrhythmia that result from the intersection of multiple rhythms of mobile practice can be understood in relative terms, as connective or distancing practices that underpin potentially multiple understandings of place and remoteness. They include, for example, the inflows of tourists searching for experiences of remoteness, the commuting of seasonal tourism workers, the outflows of residents commuting to work due to the relative distance from centres of employment. These different mobilities are manifestations of diverse understandings or experiences of remoteness that intersect and shape Bohinj through rhythmic practices. They also contribute to the continual evolution of tourism's seasonality – and, albeit indirectly, to ongoing deliberations about the role of tourism in Bohinj's development and future.

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POVZETEK

Avtorica v članku preučuje vzajemno konstitutivno razmerje med odročnostjo in povezanostjo v alpski turistični destinaciji Bohinj v Sloveniji. Etnografska analiza temelji na znanstvenih razpravah o turističnih imaginarijih, odročnosti in sezonskosti kot oblika časovnega ritma. S pomočjo arhivskih/medijskih raziskav in etnografskega terenskega dela avtorica raziskuje, kako se je alpski kraj Bohinj v Sloveniji začel prikazovati kot izolirana, odročna turistična destinacija in kako se imaginarij odročnosti pojavlja v vsakdanjem življenju. Analiza, kako predstava o Bohinju kot oddaljeni, odročni turistični destinaciji vpliva na

vsakdanje življenje, je neločljivo povezana s časovnimi ali sezonskimi razsežnostmi turizma. Razpravo strukturira etnografska raziskava o ritmični ali sezonski naravi turizma, ki se osredotoča na dve glavni vprašanji: spreminjanje ritmov turistične sezone prakse ter doživljanje turistične sezone s strani prebivalcev Bohinja in turističnih akterjev. Raziskovanje ritmične, sezone narave turizma služi preučevanju medsebojnega vpliva med imaginariji in izkušnjami odročnosti ter raziskovanju vpliva turizma kot gospodarske strategije na vsakdanje življenje v oddaljenih območjih.

Collective Memories of Everyday Life on the Isolated Island of Žirje in the Times of Socialism



Kolektivni spomini vsakdanjega življenja na izoliranem
otoku Žirje v času socializma

Filip Škiljan, Ivana Škiljan and Natasha Kathleen Ružić

1.03. Other scientific articles
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines interview data exploring the collective memory of thirteen residents on the island of Žirje, focusing on life during communism. Oral histories describing collective memories are important sources of information especially in instances where archival records are either non-existent or very sparse. The paper begins by providing a brief overview of the geographical and historical context along with key concepts from the literature. The data is then compared and discussed based on the themes identified in the interviews.

KEYWORDS: isolation, island communities, Žirje, socialism, collective memories

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek analizira podatke iz intervjujev, ki raziskujejo kolektivni spomin trinajstih prebivalcev otoka Žirje, s posebnim poudarkom na življenju v času komunizma. Ustna zgodovina, ki opisuje kolektivne spomine, predstavlja zlasti pomemben vir informacij takrat, ko arhivski zapisi ne obstajajo ali so zelo omejeni. Po kratkem pregledu geografskega in zgodovinskega konteksta ter ključnih konceptov iz literature so pridobljeni podatki primerjani in obravnavani na podlagi identificiranih tem iz intervjujev.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: osamitev, otoške skupnosti, Žirje, socializem, kolektivni spomini

INTRODUCTION: GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Croatia's National Island Development Plan 2021–2027 (Nacionalni plan razvoja otoka 2021–2027) outlines four key priorities for island development: 1) quality of life and availability of public services on the islands; 2) sustainable development of island economy; 3) smart and sustainable management of island resources and environment; and 4) mobility and connectivity of the island area. Each island has its own history, resources, needs, individual beauty and advantages. In order for these priorities to be adequately addressed on the island of Žirje, it is important to understand the history of the island in relation to the key aspects focused on. A deeper understanding of the history of the island can lead to plans for more effective strategic actions to address Žirje's needs. Because historical documents are scarce, the researchers took the approach of recording the oral histories of the islanders to examine life during socialism, which had a major impact on its functioning. The study is important because it provides historical information about a group of people during a particular time which is lacking, while also providing valuable insights for future plans for island revitalisation.

Žirje is the farthest inhabited island of the Šibenik archipelago. It is located 22 kilometres southwest of Šibenik, near the Kornati National Park. The island covers an area of 15.08 km², stretches 12 kilometres in length, and has a total coastline length of 41.8 kilometres. It is composed of limestone and features two ridges, with a central field spanning 108 hectares.¹ The island is home to several caves and pits, and its highest peak is Kapić (131 m), where a prehistoric hillfort was located, preliminarily dated to the Bronze and/or Iron Age (Podrug, Jović and Krnčević 2016: 53). From as early as the 4th century BCE, Žirje has been an island recognised for its beauty, natural resources and advantageous strategic position for military operations. In the 15th century, Juraj Šižgorić described the island as “rich in harbours and fish, abundant in excellent wine, and notable for its forests of wild spruce” (Podrug, Jović and Krnčević 2016: 72).

Throughout its history, Žirje has been the hub of various economic and military activities. Žirje and another island, Zlarin, were also linked to coral fishing. The most important sites are located near Žirje, which, for example, also led to the emergence of the pier as a warehouse location. Fortis mentioned that in the 18th century, coral fishing was widespread around Žirje (Kale 1994a: 8). Another example of the islanders utilising their locally available resources is the lime industry. The agency of the islanders and their networking skills enabled the joint ventures of the locals and investors from the city (Faričić and Juran, 2021). Therefore, it is not surprising that the most extensive data on lime production on the

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In 1876 the Monastery of St. Lawrence requested permission from the bishop to sell Žirajsko polje to the residents of Žirje. The inhabitants of Žirje purchased the privilege of the Monastery of St. Lawrence from Šibenik, effectively acquiring all the land on the island of Žirje along with 23 additional islands, totalling over 4 million square metres of land (Kupoprodajni ugovor između samostana Sv. Lovre u Šibeniku i mještana Žirja (Kale 1994b: 287–294)).

islands in the coastal waters of Šibenik come from the period between 1450 and 1550. During this time frame, at least 30 contracts for the construction of island lime kilns were recorded, with the island of Žirje being the largest construction site, followed by the islands of Kaprije, Orut, and Tijat (Friganović 1994a: 65). It is clear that these four islands, with Žirje at the head, were the main centres of lime production in the Šibenik region for centuries. Documents often state the amount of wood needed or used, which further enhances the value of the data from 1451, which mentions the planned procurement of 2,000 loads of wood for the firing of a single lime kiln on Žirje. On the original map by Kolunić, which is kept in the National Library in Paris a drawing of Žirje contains the text “Qui si fa la Calcina” (“Here lime is produced”). The same map also shows all the other islands in the Šibenik coastal waters, but apart from their geographical names, there are no other special designations.

For Croatian islands in general, the period of Austro-Hungarian rule followed by the formation of Yugoslavia saw waves of migration leading to a decreasing population (Magaš 1996). From 1918 to 1992, Yugoslavia, under its various titles, the final being the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), undoubtedly greatly impacted the way of life on the islands.

During World War II, the church gold had to be hidden and was buried in the ruins of the old parish house. In 1949, the gold was handed over to the Local People's Committee (MNO), which later transferred it to the Šibenik Diocese. During the war, the people of Žirje stood firmly with the Partisans. The island served as a Partisan base, the insularity of the island being advantageous to the Partisans. In this regard, the military took advantage of what Dawson (2019) calls their “optimal marginality”, the benefit of their in-between position. The islanders' support of the partisans led to several instances of arrests by the Italians and Germans. The most harrowing event was the arrest carried out by the Germans on 20 October 1943, when they assembled the residents of Žirje (men, women, and children) at Srcela and prepared the men for execution. After Don Ferdinand Kolednik, the parish priest of Žirje, fell to his knees, the Germans released part of the residents, while the rest were sent to concentration camps (Dodig 2023: 218–222).

The insular nature of life on the island and the limited access to various resources, including human resources, meant that their use was dependent on access and availability. After the war, there was no parish priest on the island (an unresolved need for human resources related to religious life), and the parish house was repurposed for various uses: it became home to the school, the post office, and a tavern. This is an example of what Broodbank (2000) discusses as the complex nature where islanders create and re-create their physical and socio-cultural worlds and identities. During the first years after the war, indicators of religious remoteness were present; for example, a priest visited Žirje only three or four times, and during this period, the residents did not baptise their children or receive the sacraments before death. Simonič (2024) supports this, claiming that the decrease in religious activity was a result of political ideology and a decrease in population. Chowdhury and Ravi (2022) and Zahnd et al. (2018) assert that remote and rural areas experience a higher rate of chronic and non-chronic diseases in their population as well as more mental illnesses and poorer oral health.

In 1949, land was confiscated from “kulaks”, or peasants who owned larger plots of land (Dodig 2023: 218–222). The inhabitants in general experienced poor quality of life due to the difficult conditions, including the lack of water, the vegetation, the climate on the island, the army presence, property issues around inheritance, as well as the loss of population. The industrial advancement of the mainland contributed to this loss (Simonič 2024). In 1946 and 1947, the Economic Cooperative and the Fishing Cooperative were established on Žirje. In 1952, the General Agricultural Cooperative was established, which became the foundation for the later Agricultural Cooperative on Žirje. Simonič (2024) points out that these cooperatives did not survive but are recalled in a positive manner. Shell (2014) notes that being geographically isolated from mainland society impacts the development of insularity. Throughout its history, along with its remoteness, Žirje has seen various political influences, effects on its lifestyle, socialising norms, religious norms, schools and organisational structures, population structures, and forms of work (Simonič 2024). Friganović points out that Žirje is like Lastovo in the South Dalmatian group of islands or Vis in the Central Dalmatian group of islands. Žirje is a prominent outpost and orientation island in the middle part of the Adriatic Sea (Friganović 1994a: 62). Its optional marginality and in-between position also provide certain advantages.

In 1954, a great tragedy occurred at the point of Kapelica. The ship Kupari was transporting the people of Žirje from Šibenik to Žirje. A great bora was blowing, and a military ship came to help the passengers who were supposed to be transferred to it in order to disembark at Muni. Unfortunately, the military ship sank during the reloading of passengers, and three people died on that occasion. Such tragedies have a strong impact on insular communities in particular, where access to psychological support and similar services is limited, if not entirely unavailable.

Another indicator of the impact remoteness/insularity has on resources is the island's relationship with power sources. In the late 1950s, a wind turbine was installed on a resident's house, producing the island's first electricity. He also owned the first radio on Žirje, and people would gather at his house to listen to it. It wasn't until 1969 that electricity was brought to the island, and in 1972, after three years of digging and erecting poles, the local residents were finally connected to the power grid (Dodig 2023: 242–256).

Žirje can be compared to several other islands in the Adriatic, but also to settlements located on the mainland. For example, there is the island of Vis, which, like Žirje, was a place where the army was stationed. In terms of distance from the coast, islands such as Unije, Susak, Silba, Lastovo, Premuda and other smaller islands are in a similar position. On the continent, like the islands, the settlements in Žumberak, in Lika, in Dalmatian Zagora and in Gorski Kotar are isolated from traffic, and their permanent residents have largely emigrated (Dugački, Peternel and Škiljan 2021).

Throughout the socialist period, Žirje remained a military base, which hindered the development of tourism on the island. The impact that a military presence has on tourism has also been recognised in the literature (Currie, Skare and Loncar 2024). Naef and Ploner (2016) assert that the relationships between memory, the heritage of war, and tourism are

very complex, noting that post-war tourism can increase with the inclusion of war tourism, where tourists come to a location to visit and see the impact of war and related artifacts (Naef and Ploner 2016: 181–188). Simonič (2024) explains that tourism has nowadays become an important part of the island economy, contributing to local family incomes on Žirje.

The impact that the military presence had on the island is also visible in the island's infrastructure. For example, the main roads were entirely military in nature, connecting the military strongholds on the island (e.g. we can see on the Franciscan land register on mapire.eu, before the installation of cannons at the ends of the island, how the roads stopped when they reached undivided pastures, while later the routes were connected to them and the paths widened into a vehicle profile). The insular nature of the islands can often lead to the underdevelopment of infrastructure. In this case, however, the military took advantage of its position, which resulted in infrastructure advancements that also benefitted the island community. This then impacted the economy, resulting in it being connected especially after the 1980s, and the increasingly frequent use of civilian vehicles on the island. Interestingly, the evolution of the local economy can be compared with Friganović's (1994a) geographical article from *Žirajski libar*, where he divides the historical phases geographically by parts of the island from south to north, while the one shown earlier forms a concentric miniature from the centre of the island towards the bays of today's tourist economy.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the island had about eight hundred inhabitants. According to the 2021 census, the population is now 147, though the actual number of permanent residents is around fifty. The largest settlement is Selo, located inland near Polje. The smaller, historically newer settlement of Riva is situated at the pier in Muna Bay. Some bays, such as Mikavica and Koromašna, are inhabited seasonally, with only a few examples of permanent residence. The population primarily engages in agriculture and fishing. Many Žirje residents now live abroad, particularly in Australia and North America.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Approach: Using Oral History to Examine Collective Memory

To study the area of Žirje more effectively, this work utilised the available literature and the method of oral history, specifically through semi-structured in-depth interviews. Collective memory, even that of a micro-community, is rooted in its specific space, time, and identity (Assmann 2006: 55). Within collective memory, members of a national community conceptualise their past, present, and future. The more turbulent the events and processes, the greater the changes in collective memory (Cordonnier et al. 2022). Individual and family memories, narratives, and conversations are crucial for transmitting content significant to the history of a given nation within a micro-community. Memory and recollection are similar psychological processes, both individual and collective, yet they also differ. Memory relies on social interaction and communication from which it emerges, while the interconnectedness of these memories forms recollection. Just as individual memory is not always

reliable, neither is collective memory, as it is shaped by living human groups “constantly changing, open to the dialectics of memory and forgetting, unaware of its regular distortions, susceptible to uses and manipulations, with long periods of latency and sudden revivals” (Nora 2006: 24). Oral history aims to revive what would otherwise remain silent by reconstructing the life stories of individuals. Primarily, it records the voices of ordinary people, reflecting their daily lives and experiences, and seeks to revive what would otherwise remain devoid of any voice. Through their testimony, it captures the daily life of an era or a specific historical moment (Cupek Hamill 2002: 219–226; Dukovski 2001: 155–162; Leček 2001: 149–154; Thompson and Bornat 2017: 23).

Research Aim

The research aimed to demonstrate how the inhabitants of Žirje perceived their customs and daily life during the period of socialism in Yugoslavia.

Research Questions

The guiding research questions were: 1) How did the participants experience their childhood during socialism in Yugoslavia? 2) What were the customs around childbirth, weddings and funerals during this period according to the memories of the participants? 3) What was everyday life like during socialism in Yugoslavia, did it change over time according to the memories of the participants? 4) What were the migration patterns during this time according to the memories of the participants?

Data Collection

Oral testimonies were collected during field research on Žirje in 2024, involving semi-structured interviews with thirteen individuals. Of these, twelve interviews were conducted on Žirje and one in Šibenik. The oldest female participant was born in 1937, and the oldest male participant in 1939. The guiding questions used to stimulate responses related to the main research questions were: 1) What is your full name, year of birth, and place of birth? 2) Where does your family originate from? 3) What was Žirje like during your childhood? 4) What were the customs surrounding childbirth on the island? 5) How did young people meet, and what were the customs for weddings? 6) What were the customs when someone passed away? 7) How much migration occurred from and to the island? 8) During socialism, how important were religious and national identities on the island? 9) What was life like on the island during socialism, and how isolated or closed off was it? 10) How important was the Žirje field in the past? 12) What is life like on the island now? What are the challenges, and what are the advantages?

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and are held by the authors and in the archive of the Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia project (IPS 2022-

02-3741). On average, each interview lasted about an hour and a half. While the oral history method has well-known weaknesses, it is essentially irreplaceable for studying the history of rural populations who leave no written records themselves. Typically, their stories are documented by others – members of the educated elite – who, as Suzana Leček points out, often write “in a biased, tendentious, and certainly incomplete manner” (Leček 2001: 149–154). In this process, it was necessary to create clear questions and organise them logically.

Data Analysis

The participants have been given an identification number and their data has been de-identified for publication within this article. The data was analysed and coded according to identified consistent themes. The data was then further coded into sub-themes, for example, the theme “religious ceremonies” contains the sub-themes “marriage” and “funerals”. The commentary within the subthemes was then compared and analysed for similarities in answers, complementary answers building a more in-depth understanding of a theme or inconsistency in individual experiences. Key quotations were identified for use in the data analysis.

Research Limitations

Several challenges arose during the interviews, such as the unreliability of memory, the tendency to adapt responses to meet the perceived expectations of the interviewer, and the selection of questions and answers. The participants were sometimes hesitant to discuss the Croatian War of Independence and its events on Žirje. However, we do not claim that all events described in the narrators’ accounts occurred exactly as described. Instead, we have sought to convey the emotional states of individuals as part of the collective memory of the local population, enabling an understanding of a segment of the history of everyday life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Origins of the Island Inhabitants

The surnames of present-day Žirje residents partially date back to the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. The island has been inhabited since prehistoric times, as evidenced by the hillforts on the island. Fortifications and archaeological sites from antiquity and the early Middle Ages further testify to the island’s habitation. The first recorded mention of the population of Žirje comes from 1298, when 103 inhabitants lived in 23 houses (Friganović 1994b: 76–79). The surnames of some of the participants were identified as belonging to the island’s history from as early as 1419 (Kale 1994 a: 9), or as arriving during the mid-17th and 18th centuries, with names present on family tombstones (Dodig 2023: 278–288). Table 1 shows the participants’ place and date of birth.

Participant number	Birthplace	Year of birth
1	Konjic	1963
2	Šibenik	1956
3	Šibenik	1952
4	Šibenik	1969
5	Žirje	1956
6	Žirje	1951
7	Žirje	1939
8	Žirje	1949
9	Sarajevo	1945
10	Žirje	1950
11	Šibenik	Undisclosed
12	Žirje	1946
13	Žirje	1937

Table 1: Participants' place and date of birth.

Participant 4, who has researched the history of Žirje and wrote an unpublished chronicle of the Žirje parish, explained: "Some families came to Žirje to defend the island and were granted land for use in return". Participant 8 noted that he believes his ancestors arrived during the Ottoman incursions into Bosnia: "The [...] family came from Bosnia during the spread of Islam in the Balkans." In later migrations, families came from Istria after World War I, "...bringing fishing traps with him, teaching the Žirje residents how to use them". Based on the information shared, it seems that at least some of the informants are knowledgeable about their ancestry.

Everyday Life on Žirje During Socialism

Most of the participants, born during early socialism or in the late period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, recall the era of socialist Yugoslavia and daily life on Žirje during socialism. Having a small population meant that the services available to the islands were shared among the neighbouring islands. The islanders' agency and their ability to find ways to cope with their insularity via networking with others to share resources with nearby islands in similar situations is apparent. Participant 1 commented: "The island always had a clinic and a post office. Occasionally, a doctor would visit once a week. The doctor's base was on Zlarin, and from there, they travelled to other islands like Kaprije and Žirje". Limited medical services are another identified issue pertaining to remoteness and insularity. Participant 1 also discussed the impact of having a military base on the island had on the local population during socialism: "Some girls from the island married soldiers stationed there from across Yugoslavia. Some of those soldiers stayed on the island, while others left with their wives for the cities where the soldiers were from. A large number of locals emigrated to North and South America".

Education on Žirje

Participant 12 mentioned that when he started school, there were 16 children in his generation: "There were two teachers, one teaching from first to fourth grade and the other from fifth to eighth. In 1953/54, there were 76 of us at the school". Participant 1 reported that the "school on the island functioned until 1973. The last students born on the island were from 1962/63". Participant 2 recalled a time when the school on Žirje was thriving and the classrooms were full: "We had a school, and during my time, there were 26 students in my class. When I was little, there were 38 children just in our part of the village. The school went up to the fourth grade, and from the fifth grade, we went to Šibenik." Participant 3 remembered that in 1963, there were still 105 students at the school: "The teachers were from Serbia, and one of them married a man from Žirje." Participant 2 discussed how the issue of remoteness along with the impact of migration later led to the school closing, and the students needed to travel by boat to Šibenik, stating: "We travelled back and forth, spending the whole day commuting. That was one of the reasons many Žirje residents bought houses in Šibenik". This comment illustrates the subsequent impact of further migration to the mainland and the developing temporary migration. In this example, the lack of resources and human capital in the form of teachers and students resulted in the need to connect with communities on the mainland, and also negatively impacted the students' quality of life with the extended travel time to and from school. The islanders then found a method to improve the situation for their children by temporarily migrating, thus displaying their agency in resolving this issue.

Participant 9 explained the temporary migration to Šibenik during school terms as a result of the hardships of travelling: "While my children were attending school, I rented a place in Šibenik. Sometimes, the children would catch the boat at 5:30 a.m. and return home at 4 p.m. They spent the entire day at school, waiting for the boat to depart. The route included Zlarin, Zblaće, Krapanj, Kaprije, and Žirje. The worst was during the *jugo* [southern wind] or *bura* [northern wind]." Participant 12 confirmed the difficulties faced: "It was unbearable for the children to travel like that. When we finished primary school, we went to Šibenik. We travelled every day by boat. [...] It was impossible to endure, so we became boarders in Šibenik." Interestingly, Participant 3 commented that prior to socialist Yugoslavia, women on Žirje were illiterate: "Both of my grandmothers were illiterate, but one of them still taught me the multiplication table."

Economic Life on Žirje During Socialism

The development of the island was reflected in the existence of several institutions that operated during socialism, making life easier for the residents. Participant 2 highlighted this progress: "The lower part of the village on Žirje began to be built in 1978 when tourism started. We used to have a post office, a clinic, a youth centre, a cooperative, and a tavern in the village. The shop was initially in [somebody's] house but later moved to the Riva [Muna]. There was also an olive oil mill, and above it, a restaurant, both of which operated until the 1980s." Par-

ticipant 5 added that the locals had “a shop in the village until 1961. I remember my mother sending me there to shop. You could buy feed, fuel, gas, barrel hoops, and kerosene.” This comment highlights the participant’s understanding of their insular position, demonstrating the sentiment that the necessary resources at those points in time were nevertheless available.

The island was predominantly inhabited by women, as many men worked as sailors or in factories on the mainland. Participant 3 stated: “My father was a sailor and worked as a head chef on a ship, while my mother worked the fields.” Participant 5 shared a similar story, emphasizing how family, agriculture, and livestock were his mother’s responsibilities: “My father was a sailor, and my mother took care of the chickens, sheep, and lambs. She also tended the land – vineyards and olive groves. Žirje was particularly known for its green plums, which were either sold at the Šibenik market or traded for tomatoes and potatoes.” The foundation of the island’s economy was agriculture, sheep farming, and fishing. Participant 12 emphasized the significance of selling green plums at the Šibenik market:

The green plum was introduced to Žirje by an Austrian soldier, who brought it in his bag. Between 1 July and 15 August, the island would sometimes send between two thousand and six thousand kilograms of plums daily to the Šibenik market. When I was a student, I operated the cooperative boat. I would leave at 4:30 a.m., arrive in Šibenik around 6:00 a.m., and by 6:30 a.m., Žirje’s plums were being sold. Now, those plums are completely gone. The land has been overtaken by brambles and grass.

This final comment marks a change in a once important island produce which nowadays no longer exists. The network between the island and the mainland and the inter-relationship is highlighted by these economic activities.

Participant 3 stressed the importance of the island’s agricultural activities: “Once, the island was covered with vineyards, and the land was grazed bare by sheep. There were between two thousand and three thousand sheep on the island, each marked on its ear.” Participant 4 noted how livestock shaped the island’s landscape: “There used to be so many animals that they kept the island bare, and there were no fires. The pines were planted only after World War II.” Participant 9 believes that sheep were the most numerous animals on the island:

The island once had around four thousand sheep. Each sheep had its own marking and was inspected every Sunday. Sheep were sheared near the sea and bathed in the sea, making them white as swans. They were kept in the western and southern parts of the island. They were dyed and had pierced ears to identify their owners. Everyone knew their marking.

The Role of Fishing and Cooperatives in Žirje’s Economy

Fishing was a vital economic activity for the people of Žirje. Participant 5 emphasized its importance in daily life:

We had special boats for fishing. *Plivarice* [seine boats] were used for pelagic fish, and in front of my house, there were two *leuts* [eight- to eleven-metre-long boats]. There was plenty of fish, especially bogue, sardines, salema, and mackerel. The people of Kaprije would come to work on Žirje’s olive trees because Kaprije had no fields like we did. Once, no one wanted to eat octopus.

I remember fishermen trading octopus for water, and my mother would cook it with potatoes. Fishermen would bring us crates of fish because it would spoil otherwise. I'd carry the crates home, and my mother would curse because we couldn't eat it all, and it would stink unless we salted it.

Participant 12 recalled the fishing techniques used in Žirje's waters:

In the 1960s, there were three seine boats on Žirje. These boats had lamps to attract fish. They'd encircle the fish with nets, and that's how they caught them. The fish had to be sold at the Šibenik market. This way, ninety people had lunch and dinner. There were poor and elderly Žirjani who didn't go fishing, but every time fish were caught, they were given a kilo or two to survive.

Žirje's fishermen travelled far for their catches, as Participant 8 explained: "Our people went fishing around Kornati. Fishermen from Betina and Murter also fished there and had their facilities in Kornati. Žirjani clearly had facilities there as well." Again, in the fishing industry, the inter-relationship between Žirje and Šibenik is demonstrated with both communities displaying an economic need which the other could solve. Although the community was insular in many ways, it was also strongly connected and inter-dependent.

Post-War Changes and the Rise of Cooperatives

After World War II, industrial development and better employment opportunities led to younger generations leaving the island for work on the mainland or as sailors. Participant 12 recalled how life on the island improved after 1945 but also led to depopulation:

Socialism emphasized the formation of cooperatives. After the war, an agricultural cooperative was established on Žirje. Maritime industries began to develop in Yugoslavia, and many people joined ships as sailors in the 1950s. The salary was reliable, and life improved. Part of their pay was in dinars, and part in the currency of the country they were in. These sailors brought back a certain culture of dress and behaviour.

This final sentence demonstrates the impact of institutions on local cultures.

In Šibenik, factories like the light metals factory and the electrode factory were opened between 1950 and 1960, employing around six thousand people. People from Žirje started working in these factories. The villages gradually emptied. Life in the city was better. People lived as tenants initially, then received apartments after seven or eight years of service.

Migration to the mainland was a dominant theme. Participant 12 recollected:

In Šibenik, many houses were built, and half of Mostarska Street residents were from Žirje. With fewer people on the island, there was no labour left for fishing or farming. The agricultural cooperative became the centre of island life. There was harmony between the locals and the cooperative. Together, they built the Cooperative Hall through volunteer work, as well as a restaurant and an olive oil mill on the waterfront.

The cooperative also engaged in ambitious initiatives, such as sponge and coral harvesting in Libya. Participant 12 explained:

The Yugoslav government initiated sponge and coral harvesting in Libya. The centres were based in Zlarin and Krapanj. Seven or eight teams were formed, taking loans to buy engines and repair boats. However, Libya's coast turned out to be sandy, with no sponges or coral. This left the cooperatives in significant debt. Despite this, the Žirje cooperative survived.

Community Efforts and the Cooperative Hall

Participant 9 recalled the communal effort to build the cooperative hall:

Crveni dom (*Red Hall*) was built by the residents of Žirje. Women carried stones on their heads and using slings. If you didn't show up to work, you had to pay a daily wage to those who did. The hall functioned until the Croatian War of Independence, after which the cooperative collapsed. The cooperative had a shop and a restaurant on the waterfront [Muna], but everything fell apart.

The cooperative and the fishing industries were essential pillars of Žirje's economy during socialism, shaping the island's way of life while also illustrating the gradual shift in livelihoods as modernisation and urbanisation drew people away from the island. This shift demonstrates a decline in a sustainable network of inter-dependence between the island and the mainland and the greater impact of insularity on the islanders, their needs and lack of resources resulting in migration.

Importance of Water

Participant 4 recalled how ships delivered water: "Our cisterns were always very important to us. A ship would come and stretch out a large hose to fill the cisterns located in the hills. As children, we used to collect water because the pipe had multiple leaks." Participant 10 spoke about the importance of the pond and water for the island:

There was a cistern near the school, and water was drawn from it twice a week. We drank water from the pond, and there were little frogs in it. We had no issues. The fields were fully cultivated, all by hand, and there were gardens around the houses. The pond would sometimes freeze over, with up to twenty centimetres of ice. There was even snow on Žirje sometimes, with temperatures as low as minus fifteen degrees.

On Poverty During Socialism

Participant 3 reflected: "My father didn't own shoes until he was sixteen. He had to drive a donkey barefoot. He would go to the forest because there was nothing to eat at home." Participant 9 also recalled the severe poverty, which forced people to save and organise their work efficiently. With the men away, all the responsibilities of daily life fell on the women:

When I came to Žirje in 1961, the place was beautiful, full of vineyards, with cultivated fields and even a health clinic. The fields looked like a park, not a single weed in sight. The youth cleaned the paths every Sunday. It was a time of great isolation. You had nowhere to go. Every day, you had to take a hoe and work. Sailors wouldn't return home for two years, only when their ship docked at

its home port. When you married into a family, you had to keep your head down. Everything was strict. There were four sisters-in-law, a mother-in-law, and a father-in-law. In the evening, the father-in-law would decide who would go where and what tasks needed to be done. Everything had to be completed. When a child was born, the mother-in-law would take care of the child, and the younger women would work. My workday was from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. When you returned from the fields, you had to clean yourself and the child, then wash the dishes. It was best to just put on a mental 'plaster' – see nothing, hear nothing. The sisters-in-law got married and left, and I was left with my father-in-law, mother-in-law, and brother-in-law. I cared for them on my own. I prayed to God to work for daily wages, mixing mortar or pushing a crusher, just so I could pay the taxes.

We also went fishing. My cousin would tell us where to cast the nets. At home, everything was fuelled by wood. We had a *bruzin* [a round pot] hanging on a tripod. We had kettles for pears and two pots. The *pinjurs* [ladles] were made from olive branches, and the spoons were aluminium. We also had two large iron pans.

The island used to have Dalmatian evergreen oaks. We collected leaves for the sheep and goats. There was also a forester, [name omitted], who monitored the fields with binoculars. There were at least thousand sheep, and from 1970, rabbits and pheasants.

Their isolation, the impact of the men needing to leave to work and the lack of resources and means (poverty) is clearly demonstrated in this statement. The resilience of the island population and their mental and emotional strength is evident in the participant's approach to the harshness of the situation.

Participant 10 described the poverty his family faced: "I was born in a small house measuring 6x4 meters. We all lived in one room. In the attic, there was a fireplace where we cooked, all fuelled by wood. Three brothers, one sister, and our mother lived there. My father was a sailor, and poverty was even worse because of that." Poverty determined everything – how long you went to school, when you married, where you worked, and more:

We lived off child allowances. There was great poverty. Once a year, we ate meat, and we lived off farming. We ate potatoes, beans, peas, and Swiss chard. My mother worked for daily wages, and my brothers later became sailors. My sister worked at the Žirje Agricultural Cooperative, and I went to school until the fourth grade. Every day, I took a boat to Šibenik and returned. In the evenings, I went with my mother to eat wherever she went to work. *Zaguzin* was the term used when parents went to work for daily wages, and the child followed them to get some food as well. (Participant 10)

Participant 11 described how poor people from Žirje lived during the first half and middle of the 20th century:

Families were larger back then, and the houses had a fireplace where they would cook and warm up. The shepherdesses took care of the sheep and had to bring a bundle of branches from some tree to use as fuel for the fire. There were only a few dozen houses in the village, and all of them had a fireplace. There was a large consumption of biomass on the island, so there were no plants except for agricultural crops. Even the roots were saved because there were no branches to break off. There was no indoor toilet; people had to go outside. When someone needed to take a photo, they would borrow clothes so they wouldn't appear in the ragged clothes they wore daily. There was no cooling system or distribution network, so they had to transport fish for hours to Šibenik to sell them. There was no method for drying or preserving food, except for salting the fish. They didn't catch white fish or shellfish, just sardines. A boat was a valuable asset. There might have only been two boats in the

village. The boats were six metres long, without cabins or roofs, and they worked solely using oars and sails. It was very difficult during World War I, so the Catholic Church organised the transport of children from Žirje to Slavonia to survive the hunger. My grandmother went to Slavonia.

This comment also highlights the role of the Catholic Church in assisting its remote community members.

Due to great poverty, the population began to migrate from Žirje. Again the impact of the insularity of the island on their economic opportunities resulted in a decreased island population. Some moved to larger cities in Yugoslavia while others emigrated (often illegally) to overseas countries or Western Europe. Their departure from Žirje was often first limited to “navigating” the Adriatic, and later beyond. Participant 7’s story speaks about the difficult journey and arriving in foreign countries:

When I was old enough, I worked on the Pula-Ulcinj line with Jadrolinija, which was a passenger and freight route. I wanted to board a ship to Italy, but I didn’t tell anyone. There was a ship from Rijeka to Venice. That’s where I disembarked, and when it was time to return, I escaped. I slept in a gondola in Venice. I was sixteen years old at the time. Since my older brother and some others had already escaped, I knew the procedure. Five of them had escaped from Stupica on the Feast of the Assumption in 1952 to Italy. My brother and his colleagues were in a camp in Udine. I reported myself to the police in Venice and told them that I had escaped from the boat. They registered me and took me to a refugee camp. I stayed there for two days. Then I was in Cremona. My brother found out I was in Cremona.

The brother and the others wanted to find work in Italy, but there were no jobs there. Their plan was to escape to France through Monaco or to Germany through the Alps.

I joined them at the refugee camp in Udine, and we took a train to Milan, then a bus to Turin. In Turin, we took a taxi that drove us up to the Alps. That’s how we crossed the Alps to the first city in France. Then we passed through Grenoble, Lyon, and took a train to Paris. We knew that there was work in construction or the automotive industry there. When we arrived at Gare de Lyon, we looked for a policeman, who took us to the police station. It was the central police station for Europe. They gave us a medical examination and checked our political statements. After that, we got a job at Citroën. As a minor, I couldn’t get a full salary, so they gave me half. I wasn’t there for a full year. From there, I went to Australia. In Australia, I worked in glass and fertiliser factories. I received a weekly salary. (Participant 7)

Participant 8 recalled how his uncle left the island:

Since the 20th century, our people have been leaving the island. They went to Chile, Argentina, Peru, and Venezuela. My uncle left for Slavonia at seventeen in 1910, and my grandmother spent her whole life longing for him. From there, he went to South America. He never came back here. Around 1973, I visited him in San Pedro, and he didn’t remember anything about Žirje anymore. His wife was Dutch, and his children didn’t know Croatian.

Emigration from the isolated island was indeed significant. Leaving for overseas and Western European countries was an escape from poverty, backwardness, and isolation, and anyone who had the opportunity fled the island. Initially, the escapes were illegal, but later they were legalised. Few returned to the island.

During socialism, the island housed a military presence. Soldiers stood guard facing Italy, and most of them came from other Yugoslav republics. With the local men needing to work away from the island, the women lacked potential partners (human capital decreased due to a lack of work as a result of the insularity of the island). This situation provided an opportunity for the soldiers. Some of them married Žirje women and stayed on the island, while others took Žirje women back to their republic. Participant 10 recalled the intense cooperation with the military:

Most of the soldiers were from Serbia. They guarded the border with Italy. There may have been up to three hundred of them. Although we were friendly with the military, we often got into fights with the soldiers at Saturday dances. I remember when one soldier brought the first battery-powered gramophone. Some of those soldiers who fell in love with our women stayed here.

Participant 9 explained how important the military was for the islanders:

In Yugoslavia, there were bases in Zvizdulje and Vela Glava. After the war, there was a barracks in Mikuljice. There were up to 250 soldiers and at least four officers because of the border. The border was drawn in the direction of Lastovo-Vis-Žirje-Dugi Otok. The coexistence with the soldiers was excellent. They always helped us and entertained us. They would bring trumpets and accordions, and there would be a dance in the middle of the village. The dances were for 29 November, 1 January, 4 July, 1 May, and 25 May. We also had a relay race for Tito's birthday. Our youth would read messages to Tito. Tito was especially respected.

The locals were not burdened by nationalism; as former partisans or their descendants, they believed in the new Yugoslav state.

Customs of the Inhabitants (Birth, Marriage, Death, and Church Practices After World War II)

Life on the island was difficult, and during the most significant moments of life, all the islanders participated. The birth of a child was undoubtedly one of the most important events in the life of a family from Žirje. Due to the lack of professional midwives and doctors, complications during childbirth sometimes resulted in the death of newborns. The insularity resulting in a lack of human resources in the form of medical staff impacted the survival rate of newborns. Participant 11 highlighted the cases of "newborn deaths due to umbilical cords wrapping around their necks, and it was especially challenging when a large baby was to be born." Nevertheless, the islanders demonstrated their agency even in these conditions, and Participant 9 recalled three midwives who were self-taught. When a woman was about to give birth, *Kartuljina* would move into the household for seven or eight days. In other words, the self-taught midwife stayed on even after the birth to assist the mother. Children were sometimes even born on boats, as was the case with the youngest sister of Mire Alić. There were many children because there was no contraception or knowledge of calculating fertile and infertile days. Participant 3 noted that childbirth took place in very modest conditions:

Women would lie down on bedsheets and give birth like that. When I was born, there were no stillbirths. My great-grandmother had thirteen children, but only five survived. When she was old, she would say, "Look at my children, angels walking."

Thus, in the period after World War II, there were significantly fewer deaths of newborns, mothers, and infants. Participant 6 recalled that he was the only male child, "so they treated me like the apple of their eye."

Cultural and Social Life on Žirje During Socialism

A special place in the social life of the island was held by a theatre group. Participant 2 recalled that every New Year's, the locals would organise a performance featuring sketches inspired by everyday life on the island. These performances were prepared throughout the year, with actors gathering sketches in which every islander could recognise themselves.

Young People, Weddings, and Traditions on the Island of Žirje

Young people on the island would meet while playing, in school, while tending sheep, and they often fell in love at dances or religious processions. Over time, as Žirje residents began working on the mainland, many married girls they had met there. Participant 12 recalled:

When I was a child, every Sunday afternoon, we would play a traditional circle dance. It had a specific step, 'our way', which I've never seen anywhere else. People would watch each other, and young folks would flirt. Many girls who got married on Žirje came from surrounding islands or the area around Šibenik. My mother was from Tisno. My father worked at an olive mill in Tisno, where he met my mother.

Participant 2 highlighted that on Žirje, "they were careful to ensure the bride and groom weren't related up to the ninth degree. On Kaprije, people married among themselves more often, which sometimes led to developmental issues." She also mentioned that "[t]he last traditional wedding was that of [name omitted]'s mother."

Most of the village residents attended the weddings. During socialism, weddings often weren't held in church but at the registrar's office. Wine and brandy were brought out, and flowers were thrown at the bride and groom. The Yugoslav flag was often displayed at weddings during socialism. Here is how Participant 9 remembered her wedding:

My future husband came to Šibenik and asked my mother if she would give me to him. She told him he couldn't even support himself. I wanted to become a nurse, but my mother got rid of me. We agreed he would propose in May and marry me in July. When he came back from the ship, we got married. We had a civil wedding in Šibenik, then took a boat to Žirje. The wedding party started at the pier and continued in the village. The family came to the house, where there was singing and the traditional circle dance. The celebration lasted day and night at our house. A basket was passed around. The master of ceremonies, Krste, would take a knife, dressed in traditional attire, and go to the first family member, asking for money: 'How much will you give for this head?' They gave until the last clasp from the crown [the bride's headpiece]. Then a relative would fire a pistol. I didn't have a church wedding.

Funeral Traditions

Funeral customs were also traditional. Today, these customs are changing, as Žirje residents no longer pass away on the island. Participant 12 recalled the lack of medical care on the island as a result of its remoteness, noting:

It was hard when someone got sick. One woman had seven daughters and two sons. Both sons started coughing. Four men rowed the more seriously ill son to Zlarin, but he died on the way. When they returned, the other son, who stayed on Žirje, had also died. When someone dies, all the houses are empty as everyone goes to the funeral. Even Žirje residents living in Šibenik come for the funeral. We are united in this.

Once again, the impact of insularity on medical provisions resulted in negative consequences for the islanders. As with weddings, in death, all the residents showed solidarity, regardless of whether they had good or bad relations with the deceased's family or the family of the groom or bride. Participant 5 noted that the deceased were kept overnight:

There was laughter, jokes, and card games. After two days, the deceased would be buried. Graves were small, so coffins wouldn't fit; the deceased would be buried in sheets.

Participant 9 recalled that when someone died in the village, the bell would ring:

The priest would be notified. Then we would find strong young men in the village to place the deceased in a coffin. If someone died in Šibenik, young men would carry the coffin uphill from the pier, and the bell would ring the entire time. The men would take turns because the coffin was heavy.

The islanders displayed solidarity for each other, understanding the impact of their insularity and the need to maintain a strong sense of community. The priests didn't attend the funerals of partisan fighters. The military would fire salutes at the cemetery, and the deceased would be buried with the Yugoslav flag.

Religious Traditions

Religious customs were observed during Christmas, Easter, St. Anthony's Day, St. Mark's Day, Corpus Christi, and the Feast of the Assumption. Participant 9 recalled:

On Christmas Eve, we went to Midnight Mass. The next day, there was Mass and celebrations. People danced and exchanged greetings. For Easter, on Good Friday, children would look for snail shells. The shells would be soaked in kerosene, lit, and placed along the path, creating light. There was a Way of the Cross procession, and a cross in the church would be kissed. Women would sometimes crawl on their knees if they had made a vow. Processions were held on St. Anthony's Day, St. Mark's Day, and Corpus Christi, going through the fields, which were blessed. On the Feast of the Assumption, the procession went through the village. After World War II, a permit was required to hold the Feast of the Assumption procession.

Today, religious processions and holidays are still observed, but the number of participants has significantly decreased.

CONCLUSION

This research is a valuable contribution to the data on the collective memories of the people of the island of Žirje during socialism. The memories we have collected are the only reminiscences that remain of the history of the island of Žirje, today a largely demographically devastated area. It is therefore necessary to emphasise that this work is based on the so-called culture of memory and oral history. The memories of individuals that have been collected do not necessarily have to be accurate. They only show us how individuals experience their past, both their personal past and that of their village or homeland (Assmann 2006).

Key themes were identified during the thirteen interviews, such as the impact of insularity on education systems and access to resources, including medical and religious services. The population decreases due to migration were the result of changes in the advancements and opportunities available on the mainland and in other countries, as well as a lack of resources and opportunities due to the insularity of the island. Daily and short-term migration patterns featured for work and schooling when these were not available on the island. The political and industrial climate affected many aspects of life, such as religious, the changing presence of military and its impact, marriage and migration patterns (women marrying soldiers and leaving), to name a few. The macro features, the politics, laws, regulations and institutions of the mainland as well as the island, influenced both the meso-level social networks as well as the micro-level of individual people's lives. Individuals can also have an impact on the meso and macro features, for example, one person's electrical device caused the local people to gather and socialise, in the above example, by listening to the radio together. The inter-connectedness and inter-dependence of the island community and the mainland changed over time as a result of historical and political events and economic advancements. This inter-dependence decreased with time and the impact of the insularity of the island resulted in migration.

Today, Žirje is almost completely deserted. The population decline has been ongoing since 1948, with the exception of the latest census in 2021, when the population increased from 103 to 147. Although the population is growing, it remains very low. Only a few permanently employed individuals live on the island, and all of them are non-locals. Among them are a postwoman, a nurse, municipal sanitation workers, a firefighter, and Jadrolinija employees, such as a cashier and sailors who moor the boats. Additionally, the island hosts a military base. Administratively, the island falls under the city of Šibenik, but the president of the local community does not live on the island. Life on the island today largely depends on maintaining a few olive trees and vineyards, while livestock is almost entirely absent. Participant 6 perhaps summarised the state and outlook of the island best: "Today, Žirje no longer exists. It's not about water and land, but about our *Boduli* [islanders], who are no longer here. We are disappearing. We no longer bury ourselves on the island, but wherever we die. Here, one dies to live." This statement highlights the disappearance of traditional life on the island and points out that while the physical space remains, the island's spiritual heritage is declining, making way for a new, different

life that will continue on Žirje in a different manner. This study's results highlight the key factors from its history that have impacted the island population, the results of insularity and world events. The important lessons learnt in this period are still relevant today, with Žirje experiencing limited resources and the impact of insularity. The inter-connectedness between the mainland and Žirje today is limited and better reflects the needs of Žirje that the mainland can address. The research results demonstrate the importance of inter-connectedness between islands/rural areas and cities. The results can inform and should be considered by the institutions undertaking the development of the implementation activities related to Croatia's National Island Development Plan 2021–2027 (*Nacionalni plan razvoja otoka 2021-2027*) to assist in developing a resilient, sustainable and inter-connected island community.

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POVZETEK

Prispevek raziskuje kolektivne spomine 13 prebivalcev otoka Žirje, oddaljenega hrvaškega otoka, s poudarkom na življenju v obdobju socializma v Jugoslaviji. Zaradi pomanjkanja arhivske dokumentacije se raziskava opira na ustno zgodovino, zbrano s poglobljenimi intervjuji. Namen je dokumentirati življenjske izkušnje otočanov, vsakdanje običaje in družbene spremembe skozi čas. Žirje ima bogato zgodovino, ki se razteza od prazgodovinskih naselbin do strateške vojaške rabe v času socializma. Tradicionalno je otok znan po kmetijstvu, pridelavi apna in ribištvu, geografska odmaknjenost Žirja pa je pomembno vplivala na njegov razvoj, kulturo in družbene strukture.

Raziskava je na podlagi spominov prebivalcev opredelila več pomembnih tem:

a) Otoška lega in viri. Oddaljenost otoka je vplivala na izobraževanje, zdravstveno varstvo, infrastrukturo in versko življenje. Storitve so si pogosto delili s soslednjimi otoki, nekateri viri (voda, elektrika) pa so bili omejeni do konca 20. stoletja.

b) Vojaška prisotnost. V socializmu je otok služil kot vojaška baza, kar je omejevalo turizem, a izboljšalo infrastrukturo. Družbeni in zakonski odnosi med otočani in vojaki so bili pogosti.

c) Gospodarsko življenje. Glavni viri preživetja so bili poljedelstvo, ovčereja in ribištvo. Zadružništvo je imelo ključno vlogo, čeprav je veliko mlajših prebivalcev boljše življenjske pogoje iskalo na celini ali v tujini, zlasti kot pomorščaki.

d) Migracije. Tako začasne (šola, služba) kot stalne migracije so močno prizadele prebivalstvo, povzročile depopulacijo in kulturne spremembe.

e) Izobrazba. Šole so delovale do zgodnjih sedemdesetih let prejšnjega stoletja, potem pa so morali otroci potovati v Šibenik, pogosto v težkih razmerah.

f) Običaji. Običaji ob rojstvu, poroki in pogrebu so odražali tradicionalno podeželsko življenje, nanje pa sta vplivala solidarnost skupnosti in otoška izoliranost. Verska praznovan-

ja so se ohranila kljub socialističnim omejitvam.

g) Revščina in stiska. Življenje je bilo zaznamovano z revščino, samozadostnostjo in odpornostjo, zlasti za ženske, ki so same vodile gospodinjstva, ko so moški delali daleč od doma.

h) Družbeno in kulturno življenje. Dogodki kot so plesi, amatersko gledališče in verske procesije so bili ključnega pomena za kohezijo skupnosti.

Danes je otok Žirje skoraj zapuščen, z malo prebivalci in omejenim dostopom do storitev. Tradicionalni način življenja je bolj ali manj izginil, udeleženci raziskave pa so v intervjujih izrazili nostalgijo in zaskrbljenost zaradi izginjajoče identitete otoka. Raziskava kaže, kako so otoška lega, družbeno-politične sile in migracijski vzorci oblikovali družbeno tkivo in gospodarstvo na otoku. Poudarja pomen ustne zgodovine pri ohranjanju spominov mikro-skupnosti ter razkriva medsebojno povezanost otoškega življenja s celinskimi institucijami in globalnimi silami. Spoznanja, pridobljena na podlagi raziskave, so uporabna tudi pri razvijanju sodobnih strategij razvoja otokov, zlasti za hrvaški Nacionalni razvojni načrt otokov 2021–2027.

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Bajič, Blaž, Ana Svetel (eds.)
Sensory Environmental Relationships: Between Memories of the Past and Imaginings of the Future, 2023



Liling Yan

1.19 Review
 DOI 10.4312/svetovi.3.2.150-151

Sensory Environmental Relationships: Between Memories of the Past and Imaginings of the Future, edited by Dr Blaž Bajič and Dr Ana Svetel, Vernon Press, 2023, presents a collection of 10 essays that delve into the deep connections between our senses, the environments we inhabit, and the ways we perceive time. Originating from a panel at the IUAES in 2021, the volume brings together diverse ethnographic case studies to explore these intricate relationships. The editors, Bajič and Svetel, along with contributors from various European universities, position this work within the context of the “sensory revolution” in the humanities and social sciences. Understanding sensory environmental relationships is critically important in a time when environments are changing at an increasing pace. Anyone interested in human-environment relationships, senses, temporality, and ethnographic methods will find this material relevant.

A key theoretical contribution lies in the exploration of “sensory environmental relationships”, a concept borrowed from Helmi Järviluoma-Mäkelä, understood here as necessarily contingent, open, and disjunc-

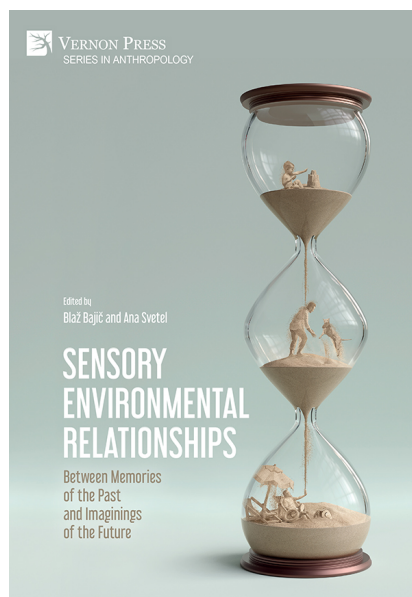
tive. The book critically engages with the history of sensory-anthropological thinking, particularly its stance on language. The editors note that a significant turn towards studying human sensoria was partly fuelled by dissatisfaction with an overemphasis on text and language. However, they critique anti-dualist impulses within sensory anthropology that tend to conflate sensing with narrative-making, contending that a “recurring feature” has been the “rejection of language”. To avoid this and to fully understand sensory environmental relationships and concepts like “sensing the future”, the book advocates for maintaining the crucial “minimal difference between sense and sense” – the distinction between linguistic meaning and perceptive feeling. This (dis)junction is seen as necessary to recognise human autonomy and understand senses as dynamic and relational, interwoven with language and imagination.

The book is rooted in ethnographic case studies from across Europe, offering a compelling exploration of how sensory experiences shape environmental relations, temporal perceptions, and imaginaries of the future.

A key highlight of the book is its methodological emphasis on embodied and emplaced practices of sensing and moving through environments with walking-based approaches. This methodological thread underscores the idea that our sensory experiences are deeply intertwined with our physical engagement with the world. The relationship between memory and sensory experience is a recurring focus, with examples ranging from the surfacing of embodied memories in relation to a marsh environment by Lina Lapiņa to the role of sensory details in reconstructing urban pasts by Sandi Abram. The introduction and first chapter, by Svetel and Bajič, theoretically explore how to conceptually tackle sensorial experiences and the temporalities emerging from memories, practices, and visions. Heritage and its connection to future imaginings are also explored, as seen in Saša Poljak Istenič and Katja Hrobat Virloget's case study of the Mythical Park in Slovenia, where the revitalisation of intangible heritage is linked to local communities' self-reflection on their futures. Furthermore, the book examines urban sensory environments through various lenses, including sensobiographic walks with artists to understand changes in urban sense-scapes by Järviluoma et al., and the impact of the pandemic on sensory experiences of the seaside by Bethan Prosser. A particularly insightful chapter by Sara Nikolić investigates how olfactory perceptions in a New Belgrade housing estate contribute to the construction of social boundaries and "otherness" based on class and race. Finally, the book also considers the significance of material culture, with Veronika Zavratnik using footwear as an example to illustrate how everyday objects mediate our bodily engagements with the world and shape our sensory experiences and

identities. Collectively, these chapters offer rich, thematically varied, and ethnographically sound directions, demonstrating the experimental vitality of contemporary anthropological research approaches and highlighting the vital role senses play in understanding environmental relationships across time.

The book resonates strongly with Fiona Ross's article "Sense-Scapes: Senses and Emotion in the Making of Place" (2004) based on her fieldwork in a South African informal settlement. Like Ross, the contributors to this volume emphasize how sensory modalities other than vision can capture place-making, temporality, and the affective textures of everyday life more effectively than conventional visual representations. Demonstrating methodological inventiveness, this book provides a framework that invites future ethnographic research to test and refine these concepts across a wider cultural and geographic field.



Med ljudmi in tehnologijo: intervju z dr. Tanjo Ahlin



Tisa Kučan Lah

1.22 Intervju
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Dr. Tanja Ahlin kot postdoktorska raziskovalka sodeluje z Oddelkom za antropologijo Univerze v Amsterdamu in Amsterdamskim inštitutom za globalno zdravje in razvoj. V svojem raziskovalnem delu se ukvarja z uporabo digitalnih tehnologij na področju zdravstva in skrbstva. Na podlagi terenskega dela v Kerali v Indiji in Omanu je napisala knjigo *Calling Family* (Klicanje družine, 2023, Rutgers University Press), ki jo je posvetila raziskavi skrbstva na daljavo v indijskih družinah. Trenutno se ukvarja z vprašanjem vloge socialnih robotov v skrbi za starejše.

Intervju je nadaljevanje pogovora s 25. Šmitkovega večera, »O migrantih, mobitelih in mamah: raziskovanje skrbi na daljavo v indijskih družinah«. Pogovor je potekal 25. 10. 2023 na Oddelku za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo. Moderirale so ga doc. dr. Veronika Zavratnik, Vanja Germ in Tisa Kučan Lah.

V vašem raziskovanju se prepletajo teme, povezane z zdravjem, skrbstvom oziroma skrbjo in informacijskimi tehnologijami. Kaj vas je pripeljalo do raziskovanja teh področij in zakaj se vam zdi pomembno, da se v antropologiji z njimi ukvarjamo?

Povezovanje tehnologije in medicine me je začelo zanimati pred kakšnimi 15 leti, ko sem se začela ukvarjati s področjem telemedicine in vpeljevanjem novih tehnologij v zdravstvo. Takrat sem imela priložnost opazovati oblikovanje projekta iz telemedicine, ki pa je bil zasnovan zelo »od zgoraj navzdol«. Vodje projekta je zanimalo predvsem, kako pridobiti financiranje, manj pa, kaj bi uporabniki tehnologije dejansko potrebovali. Na osnovi te izkušnje sem obliko-



Tanja Ahlin. Avtor organizacija HLTHINC.

vala svoj doktorski projekt, v katerem me je zanimalo, kakšne tehnologije ljudje že uporabljajo za skrb na daljavo, predvsem za sta-

rejše ljudi. To so bile vsakdanje tehnologije, torej mobiteli – takrat pametni telefoni še niso bili tako razširjeni – in internet, se pravi Skype in podobne platforme. Zanimalo me je, kako odrasli otroci, ki živijo v tujini, uporabljajo te vsakdanje tehnologije za skrb za svoje starše. Poleg čustvene skrbi se to dotika tudi skrbi za zdravje. Zanimalo me je, kaj se lahko na podlagi tega naučim, kar bi pomagalo tudi pri implementaciji projektov telemedicine. Za antropologijo je to pomembno iz dveh razlogov. Prvi je teoretski, saj se odpira vprašanje, kaj skrb sploh je, ko se vanjo vplete tehnologija, po drugi strani pa se odpirajo tudi zelo praktična vprašanja.

Kako je bilo skozi vaše raziskave prodirati na področje medicine in informacijskih tehnologij? Kako gledate na vlogo antropologov v teh raziskavah in kakšni so izzivi takšnega dela?

Dejansko je že malo dolgočasno, ker se toliko ponavljamo, ampak antropologi so še zmeraj v glavnem na obrobju. Pred kratkim sem se na primer vključila v Amsterdamski inštitut za globalno zdravje in razvoj, kjer sicer pravijo, da hočejo spodbujati interdisciplinarnost, vendar so tam predstavljeni projekti kljub temu zelo biomedicinsko usmerjeni, enako je na področju financiranja. Isti problem se pojavlja že znotraj družboslovja. Ko se kot antropologinja prijavljaš za financiranje, se pogosto zgodi, da v komisiji ni niti enega antropologa. Po možnosti so v komisiji le strokovnjaki v kvantitativnih metodah, te pa težko v petih minutah prepričaš, da so tvoje metode enakovredne in enako učinkovite. Veliko je vredno, če naletiš na koga, ki je odprt za različne pristope, saj se različne metode dopolnjujejo. Problem

pa je, da so ljudje pogosto preveč zasidrani v svoji stroki in znanstveni metodi. To velja že za področje družboslovja, kaj šele za področji tehnologije ali medicine. Ena od mojih želja je, da bi se ljudi dotaknila dovolj, da bi začeli odpirati vrata za razumevanja in razmišljati, da so lahko pogledi in metode tudi drugačni, toda enakovredni.

Po drugi strani je raziskovanje tehnologije v antropologiji prav tako še vedno obrobno. Antropologi so pogosto do tehnologije zelo ambivalentni, nekateri celo naravnost rečejo, da jih ta tematika ne zanima. Po eni strani to razumem: tako pri antropologiji kot pri skrbstvu je v središču človek. Tudi filozofi, na primer Joan Tronto, pravijo, da je skrbstvo ena od osnovnih lastnosti človeštva. Če v ta fenomen vključiš tehnologijo, ga na neki način razčlovečiš. In ravno zato je antropologija tako previdna pri tehnologiji ter posledično včasih tudi do tistih, ki jo raziskujemo.

Na svoji spletni strani ste zapisali, da z navdušenjem raziskujete možnosti digitalnih tehnologij in umetne inteligence za izboljšanje zdravstvene oskrbe ter da se vam zaradi eksponentnega tehnološkega napredka zdi nujno obravnavati etično oblikovanje in uporabo tehnologij z etnografskimi metodami. V čem vidite možnosti digitalnih tehnologij in umetne inteligence za izboljšanje zdravstvene oskrbe? Kaj smo kot družba na tem področju že naredili in proti čemu še stremimo?

Dejstvo je, da tehnologija spreminja naš način življenja in malo verjetnosti je, da se bo to ustavilo. Videli smo, na primer, kaj

se je zgodilo s pobudo za ustavitev razvoja umetne inteligence (op. odprto pismo *Pause Giant AI Experiments*, 2023) – nič kaj dosti. Sebe rada opisujem kot tehnološkega realista, se pravi, da ne grem ne v tehnološki optimizem ne v tehnološki pesimizem, ki sta sicer močno prisotni skrajnosti. Zdi se mi zelo pomembno, recimo konkretno v zdravstvu, da se projekti in tehnologija oblikujejo po načelu »od spodaj navzgor«. Se pravi, da pogledaš, kaj ljudje dejansko potrebujejo, da se njihovo delo olajša in izboljša, namesto da najprej narediš tehnologijo in potem to tehnologijo nekomu prodaš. Razvijalci tehnologije s področja umetne inteligence (UI) in zdravstva se v glavnem pogovarjajo o *AI care* (UI za skrb) in *AI cure* (UI za zdravljenje), ker to zveni zanimivo in prinese največ financiranja. Zaposleni v bolnišnicah pa pravijo, da najbolj potrebujejo osnovno tehnologijo v administraciji, na primer orodja za pretvarjanje zvočnega zapisa v pisnega. Ampak takšna UI za administracijo za razvijalce tehnologije ni tako zanimiva. Raje se lotevajo zadev, ki so tudi veliko bolj tvegane in negotove, saj nihče ne ve, kakšne vplive bodo imele dolgoročno. Mislim, da nam tehnologije zagotovo lahko pomagajo, ne strinjam pa se, da tehnologije izdelujemo ali vpeljujemo samo zato, ker pač lahko.

Tako je tudi s socialnimi roboti, ki jih trenutno raziskujem. Obstaja na primer PARO, robot v obliki tjulnja, ki ga je naredil japonski raziskovalec Takanori Shibata. Na njem je delal 30 let in dosegel, da je v Ameriki registriran kot medicinski pripomoček (ang. Medical device), za kar veljajo zelo stroga pravila. O učinkih robota je bilo nare-

jenih več raziskav, kot na primer raziskava, ki kaže, da pri starejših ljudeh in vojnih veteranih s posttravmatsko stresno motnjo (PTSD) uporaba robota PARO zmanjša uporabo zdravil za 30 odstotkov. Prav tako se drastično zmanjša število padcev ter z njimi povezanih zdravstvenih zapletov in posegov. Te raziskave so spodbudile oblasti na Danskem, da so vpeljale tega robota v domove za starejše, pozneje pa so etnografske raziskave pokazale, da so ti tjulnji skriti po omaricah namesto v uporabi. Točno to se zgodi, ko se ukrepi sprejemajo po načelu »od zgoraj navzdol«. Hkrati pa se na Nizozemskem v domovih za starejše pojavlja vedno več robotskih psov in mačk, ki jih zaposleni pridobivajo na lastno iniciativo. S kolegico Anno Mann sva objavili članek o PARU na oddelku za dializo v eni od bolnišnic v Avstriji.¹ Tudi tja je ta robotek prišel na zelo organski način, saj ga je s sponzorskim denarjem kupila tam zaposlena psihologinja. Na ta način roboti veliko učinkoviteje vstopajo v zdravstveno oskrbo. Ravno zato je pomembno, da se razmisli, katera tehnologija se uporablja v kakšnih situacijah. Tukaj se mi zdi, da lahko antropologija največ naredi.

Kako pa te robote sprejemajo oskrbovanci?

Sicer sem na začetku tega projekta, ampak po mojih dosedanjih izkušnjah so nekateri navdušeni nad njimi, ne pa vsi. Veliko ljudi se tudi posmehuje tistim, ki robote uporabljajo, ali pa pravijo, da je to samo za tiste, ki so že tako dementni, da ne vedo več, kaj se dogaja. Vendar to ni res, ni nujno res –

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Tanja Ahlin in Anna Mann (2025). 'Ambiguous animals, ambivalent carers and arbitrary care collectives: Re-theorizing resistance to social robots in healthcare.' *Social Science and Medicine* 365.

so tudi ljudje, ki nimajo demence in robota obožujejo, dokler se drugi ne začnejo norčevati iz njih. Pri raziskovanju skrbi in tehnologije razvijam teorijo o tako imenovanih skrbstvenih kolektivih (ang. *care collectives*), ki predpostavlja, da ljudje in razne tehnologije skupaj, v določenih praksah, ustvarjajo skrb (ang. *care enactment*). Z Anno Mann tako piševa o »arbitrarnih skrbstvenih kolektivih«, v katere niso vključeni samo zdravstveno osebje, pacient in robot, ampak tudi vsi drugi pacienti, ki so po naključju v isti sobi za dializo. Ti ljudje v okolici vplivajo na to, ali bo določen pacient robota uporabljal in kako. V primeru, ki sva ga opisali, je šlo za starejšo gospo, ki je tjulnja oboževala, nakar so se ji drugi začeli posmehovati in ga je popolnoma zavrgla.

Nekaj besed bi namenili še vaši knjigi. Torej knjigi, ki ste jo izdali leta 2023, z naslovom *Calling Family*. Knjiga temelji na terenskem

delu, ki ste ga opravljali z družinami medicinskih sester, ki so migrirale iz Keral, zvezne države na jugu Indije. Osredotočate se predvsem na odnose med medicinskimi sestrami in njihovimi starši. Za družino te medicinske sestre seveda skrbijo s pošiljanjem denarja, preostale oblike skrbi pa potekajo s pomočjo komunikacijskih tehnologij. Kako je ta skrb videti v praksi? Kako tehnologija medira njihove odnose?

V Indiji dobra skrb za starejše med drugim pomeni, da eden od sinov živi s starši in zanje skrbi finančno, medtem ko njegova žena opravlja fizično oskrbo. Tak je vsaj ideal, v praksi to lahko poteka tudi nekoliko drugače. Toda v transnacionalnih družinah, v katerih so vsaj nekateri otroci zaradi dela migrirali v tujino, je taka skrb nemogoča, zato se velikokrat predvideva, da so otroci starše povsem zapustili. V mojem teren-



Terensko delo v Kerali.
Avtorica Annelies Wilder-Smith. Kerala. 2014.



Terensko delo v Omanu. Avtor - anonimen. Oman. 2014.

skem delu pa se je izkazalo, da ni čisto tako, saj te družine na novo ugotavljajo, kako skrbeti tudi na daljavo, kaj bi takšna skrb lahko bila in kakšna mora biti, da bo dobra. Ena od glavnih praks takšne skrbi na daljavo je klicanje po telefonu. Kako pogosto mora otrok klicati domov, je odvisno do posamezne družine, dinamika je odvisna od vsakega transnacionalnega skrbstvenega kolektiva (ang. *transnational care collective*) in se tudi spreminja s časom, razvojem digitalnih tehnologij ter glede na potrebe vseh udeleženih. Recimo, če je nekdo bolan, se ga seveda pogosteje kliče. V času pandemije kovida so začeli tudi starši pogosteje klicati svoje otroke in se je pozornost skrbi bolj osredotočila nanje, saj so bili oni ogroženi zaradi dela v rizičnih okoljih.

Kaj pa, ko nastopi potreba po fizični oskrbi?

Takrat se skrbstveni kolektiv seveda organizira drugače. Odvisno je od tega, kakšna fizična oskrba je potrebna, ali gre za neko dolgotrajno potrebo, recimo v primeru kronične bolezni, ali gre za poškodbo ali recimo kap. Ljudje se na podlagi tega odločijo, ali bodo potovali domov ali bodo organizirali skrb na daljavo. V eni družini, na primer, je mama skrbela za očeta, ki je imel Parkinsonovo bolezen, medtem ko je ena hči delala kot medicinska sestra v Združenih državah Amerike (ZDA), druga na Bližnjem vzhodu, tretja pa je bila poročena in je živela nedaleč stran od staršev. V nekem trenutku pa je mamo zadela kap. Hči, ki je živela v ZDA in je domov redno klicala dvakrat na dan, je takrat vzela ves dopust, ki ga je lahko, in se vrnila k staršem, da je skrbela zanje. Drugače je bilo med obdobjem pandemije, ko je bilo nemogoče potovati. Eden od medicinskih teh-

nikov, ki dela v Veliki Britaniji, je na primer takrat skrb za očeta, ki je zbolel za kovidom, organiziral povsem prek telefona. To je bilo tako naporno in je zahtevalo toliko njegove pozornosti, da je moral vzeti dopust. Organiziral je vse, rešilca, njegovi prijatelji so mu po političnih vezah pomagali dobiti posteljo v bolnišnici, prek WhatsAppovega video klica se je pogovarjal z zdravnikom. Transnacionalni skrbstveni kolektiv je torej zelo dinamična zadeva, ki vključuje in izključuje ljudi ter tehnologijo po potrebi glede na to, kaj je v določenem trenutku za koga pomembno.

So se ob množičnem preseljevanju medicinskih sester v Kerali vpostavile kakšne solidarnostne prakse med tistimi, ki ostajajo?

Družine se bodo najprej obrnile na svoje bližnje in daljne sorodnike ter sosede, po potrebi tudi še na koga drugega. Sinovi so recimo velikokrat za pomoč aktivirali svoje najboljše prijatelje, ki še živijo v Kerali; podobnega vzorca v primeru hčera nisem opazila. Včasih se nove povezave vzpostavljajo tudi prek tehnologije, na primer če starši ne znajo uporabljati mobilnih in video klicev ali pa nimajo ustrezne tehnologije; takrat v transnacionalni skrbstveni kolektiv vstopijo posamezniki, ki jim pomagajo – od sinovih prijateljev do sosedov in celo prodajalcev v najbližjih trgovinah.

Ali ste med terenskim delom naleteli na kakšne edinstvene ali nepričakovane prakse oskrbe, ki so se vam posebej vtisnile v spomin?

Več zgodb je, ki pričajo o tem, kako tehnologija odnose podpira, medčloveški sti-

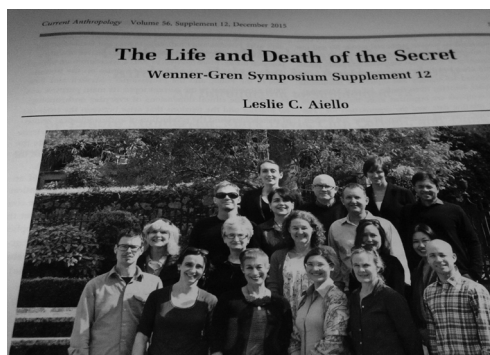
ki v živo pa so še zmeraj pomembni. So tudi osnova za to, da je skrb na daljavo sploh mogoča. Zanimiv je tudi primer prej omenjenega edinca, ki živi v Britaniji in je moral poskrbeti za očeta s kovidom. Povedal mi je, da se ob vsakem obisku Kerale dobi tudi s svojimi prijatelji in z njimi spijski viski, ki ga pri-
nese. O tem, da je pitje alkohola s prijatelji lahko povezano s skrbjo za starše, po navedi ne razmišljamo. Toda v tem konkretnem primeru se je pokazalo, da je šlo za strateško vzdrževanje odnosov, ki so se izkazali za izredno pomembne: prav ti prijatelji so pomagali očetu dobiti posteljo v bolnici. Vprašanje zdravstva in skrbstva se velikokrat ločuje na formalno in neformalno, ampak to ni tako enostavno. So nekatere prakse, ki so skrajno neformalne, imajo pa posledice za dejansko zdravstveno oskrbo in včasih pomenijo razliko med življenjem in smrtjo.

V času študija ste živeli v Nemčiji, sedaj pa živite in delate na Nizozemskem ter tudi sami tako že nekaj let verjetno vzdržujete kar nekaj odnosov na daljavo. Ali so vaše osebne izkušnje del razloga za vaše raziskave skrbi na daljavo?

Da. Pravzaprav mislim, da je najbolj vredno delati terensko delo o nečem, kar se te na neki način resnično dotakne. Tako si drugače angažiran v raziskovanju, drugače razumeš, kar raziskuješ. O tem sem nekaj malega napisala tudi v knjigi.

Revija *Svetovi* je med drugim namenjena študentkam in študentom Oddelka za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo. Bi za zaključek morda z njimi delili kakšen nasvet ob pričetku njihovih raziskovalnih poti?

Težko delim splošne nasvete, ker ima vsak od nas svojo pot. Sama nisem preveč strateška kar se tiče kariere, ampak se ravnaj po intuiciji. Pri tem ne gre toliko za sledenje željam, lastnim ali drugih ljudi, ampak za neko notranje vodenje, ki ti govori, kaj je tisto, kar enostavno moraš narediti v naslednjem koraku, pa naj gre za izbiro raziskovalne teme ali kraja, kjer bomo to opravljali. To ni vedno lahko, je pa možnost, ki sem jo izbrala sama in jo tudi priporočam, saj vključuje to, da se naučiš samega sebe zelo dobro poslušati, rezultati pa ne razočarajo.



Na Wenner-Gren simpoziju "Death of the Secret". Avtorica Laurie Obbink. Sintra, Portugalska. 2014.

Dnevi sodelovanja z afriškimi univerzami



Sarah Lunaček

1.25 Drugi sestavni deli
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V četrtek, 10. aprila 2025, je na OEIKA potekal simpozij pod naslovom 'Socialne neenakosti in okoljske nepravilnosti' ('Social inequalities and environmental injustices'), sodelovali so raziskovalci_ke, ki poučujejo na oddelkih za antropologijo univerz v Arba Minchu, Dar es Salaamu, Niameyu in Cape Townu. Organizatorka, Sarah Lunaček, je simpozij zastavila tako, da je povabila najprej raziskovalce_ke s partnerskih

univerz v programu Erasmus+ k predlogu naslovov njihovih prispevkov, šele po tem je iskala kompatibilne teme pri svojih kolegih in kolegicah. To je omogočilo primerjave perspektiv, primerov in konceptov v posameznih sklopih simpozija in med njimi ter iskanje morebitnih sinergij. V prvem sklopu je bil poudarek na razredno, rasno in spolno zaznamovani smrti. Uršula Lipovec Čebren je predstavila tisti del raziskav smrti migran-



Skupinska fotografija z udeleženci_kami in nekaterimi študenti_kami. Sarah Lunaček, Ljubljana, 11. april 2025

tov v Kolpi, ki se nanaša na izkušnje lokalnega prebivalstva, med katerimi nekateri prepoznajo smrti politično, ker so posledica strukturnega nasilja. Podobno se je pokazalo v raziskavi Susan Levine, kjer zaradi razlik v dostopu do ustreznih bivališč otroci v komunalno zapuščenih delih Cape Towna zaužijejo podganji strup, s katerim jih njihove matere želijo zaščititi pred nevarnostjo bolezni, ki jih prenašajo podgane. Helen Macdonald je izpostavila, kako pomembno je za transspolne osebe, da imajo možnosti družbene podpore svoji identiteti, da preživijo. Koncepta nekropolitike in debilitacije, ki izhajata iz postkolonialne kritike, sta se pokazala kot posebno smiselna za osvetlitev vseh treh situacij.

Drugi sklop je odprl zelo različne perspektive na ideje in prakse razvoja. Mateja Habinc je pokazala na spremenljiv odnos do *second hand* oblačil, ki so iz nuje za revnejše prebivalstvo postala trend s konotacijo ekološkosti in trajnostnosti, s katerim se v post-socializmu kupci ke zgledujejo po Evropi in pravzaprav sledijo potrošništvu. Eshetu Tegengne je zelo kritično nastopil proti zahodnim razvojniškim intervencijam v Etiopiji, zlasti zato, ker ustvarjajo logiko odvisnosti, medtem ko bi bilo mogoče, da bi Etiopija uspevala z lastnimi bogatimi viri. Abdoulkader Afane je predstavil posledice kopanja zlata za okolje in mobilne pastirje v Nigru, od katerih sicer mnogi uporabijo svoje znanje v iskanju preživetja kot iskalci zlata.

Tretji sklop se je gibal okoli narave in digitalnega. Saruni Kisiya Mwasuni je pokazal, kako zaščitena območja narave (naravni parki) lahko uničujejo znanje o sobivanju živali in ljudi, s tem ko Masaje prisilno selijo z zaščitениh območij in jim onemogočajo uveljavljene načine preživljanja z mobilnim

pastirstvom. Blaž Bajič in Ana Svetel sta podala premislek o konceptu narave, njegovi neizogibni konstruiranosti in o tem, kako jo različni akterji digitalno ustvarjajo, na primeru Solčave. Harouni Yasini Ismail pa se je posvetil razkrivanju socialnih vidikov digitalnega na primeru projekta e-zdravja v Kibahi v Tanzaniji. Kljub širokemu naslovu simpozija se je pokazalo, da je o družbenih neenakostih in okoljskih nepravilnostih smiselno razpravljati skupaj, saj so pogosto povezane in odpirajo mnoge smeri za nadaljnje razmisleke. Sopostavljanje primerov iz Tanzanije, Južne Afrike, Nigra, Etiopije in Slovenije je prispevalo nekatere osvežujoče vpoglede. Udeleženci ke z afriških univerz so posebej izpostavili, da je srečanje omogočilo tudi neposreden dialog med njimi za katerega manjka priložnosti.

V petek, 11. aprila, so potekale delavnice 'Vzpostavljanje meddisciplinarnih sodelovanj: voda, zdravje in druge teme' s sodelujočimi na simpoziju in v sodelovanju s Centrom za raziskave vode na Univerzi v Ljubljani. Center predstavlja eno od tematskih raziskovalnih jeder (CoRE – Europe Clusters of Research Excellence) v partnerstvu mrež afriških (ARUA) in evropskih (GUILD) univerz. Barbara Hribar Lee in Andreja Žgajnar Gotvajn s Fakultete za kemijo in kemijsko tehnologijo sta predstavili center in mrežo ter problematiko čiščenja odpadnih voda. Zoran Bosnić s Fakultete za računalništvo in informatiko je pokazal na uporabnost strojnega učenja pri iskanju praktičnih rešitev. Antropologi ne, ki so sodelovali e na simpoziju, so predstavili e tiste vidike svojih raziskav, ki so povezani z vodo. Udeleženci so ugotovili, da imajo skupne cilje izboljšanja dostopa do pitne vode in interes za nadaljnje sodelovanje.



Poročilo s 33. Šmitkovega večera: *Antropologija. Iz take je snovi kot zgodbe?*

Neža Vadjal in Astrid Vončina

1.25 Drugi sestavni deli
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Na Oddelku za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo je 25. 3. 2025 potekal 33. Šmitkov večer, z naslovom *Antropologija. Iz take je snovi kot zgodbe?* Z dr. Natašo Rogelja Caf smo se pogovarjale Ana Svetel, Neža Vadjal in Astrid Vončina.

V uvodu nam je Nataša Rogelja Caf razkrila, kako se je odločila za študij etnologije in kakšno pot je opravila do svoje trenutne zaposlitve kot raziskovalke na Inštitutu za slovensko izseljenstvo in migracije ZRC

SAZU Ljubljana. Povedala nam je o svojih začetkih, ko je vzporedno z etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo študirala tudi flavto na Akademiji za glasbo, o svojih spominih na študijska leta na našem oddelku ter o naključjih, ki so spremljala njen profesionalni in osebni razvoj.

V nadaljevanju smo se poglobile v njene izkušnje raziskovalnega dela v paru ali večjih skupinah ter raziskovanja obmorskih in morskih okolij. Že kot študentka je prvo



Nataša Rogelja Caf (prva z desne) z voditeljicami. (Foto: Veronika Zavratnik, 25. 3. 2025)

večjo terensko izkušnjo opravila v paru (s Špelo Ledinek Lozej, s katero sta ostali raziskovalno povezani) in tako nadaljevala tudi pozneje. V profesionalni karieri se pogosto srečuje z delom v večjih (interdisciplinarnih) skupinah ter pri tem poudarja pozitivne plati tovrstnega sodelovanja in izmenjevanja znanja onkraj disciplinarnih okvirov. Ob tem pa opozarja na potrebno potrpljenje ter težavnost sodelovanja, ko se osebnosti sodelujočih in načini dela preveč razlikujejo. Z nami je podelila anekdoto o raziskovanju ribičev, ki so bili, v nasprotju s Šavrinkami, ki jih je raziskovala poprej in ki so se z veseljem pogovarjale ter delile svoje izkušnje, bolj zaprti in zadržani. Poleg tega se je kot težavno izkazalo tudi raziskovanje bolj občutljivih tematik, kot so identiteta in t. i. neprebavljene zgodovine, o katerih se ribiči niso želeli pogovarjati ali pa so do nje občasno ohranjali distanco.

Na koncu smo se dotaknile tudi njene ga ukvarjanja s pisanjem in hojo kot metodološko-epistemološkim orodjem. Zanimanje za hojo jo spremlja že od študentskih let, ko sta s kolegico Špelo Ledinek Lozej raziskovali

že omenjene Šavrinke in se za namene raziskovanja tudi sami podali po njihovih nekdanih poteh čez Istro. Gostja je z nami delila svoje dosedanje izkušnje s hodinariji (seminarji med hojo) in razkrila, da še vedno uporablja tovrstne raziskovalne pristope. Med drugim sodeluje pri projektu Biografije istrskih poti: hoja in pisanje kot metodi raziskovanja obmejnih prostorov, kjer raziskuje dialog med potmi in različnimi mejami. Na koncu smo se dotaknile tudi polliterarnega pisanja sogovornice, predvsem na podlagi njene hibridne, potopisno-etnografske knjige *Trinajsti mesec* (2018). Razkrila nam je svojo ljubezen do umetnosti in pisane besede, izpostavila pa tudi spodbujanje k igrivosti in eksperimentalnosti metod ter k večji literarizaciji antropologije. Nataša Rogelja Caf je zaključila z uvidom, da lahko antropologija na tak način doseže širšo publiko. Sledila je diskusija, v katero so se vključili tudi številni študenti in študentke.

Sogovornica nas je navdušila s svojimi anekdotami, polnimi potovanj in prijateljstev, raznovrstnimi fotografijami ter široko paleto zanimanj in znanja.



33. Šmitkov večer na Oddelku za etnologijo in kulturno antropologijo. (Foto: Veronika Zavratnik, 25. 3. 2025)

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