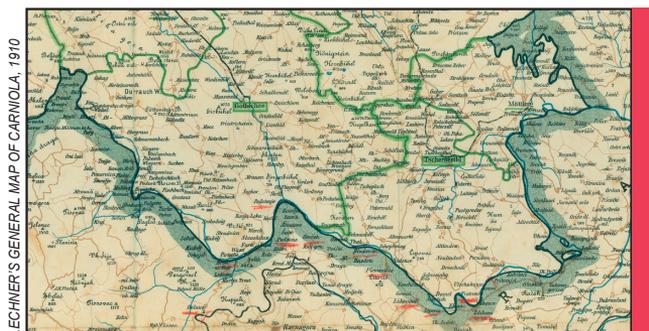


# THE KOLPA AS A BORDER RIVER IN THE NEWSPAPER SLOVENSKI NAROD, 1868–1914

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The Kolpa as a border river between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the Habsburg Monarchy.

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## The Kolpa as a border river in the newspaper Slovenski narod, 1868–1914

**ABSTRACT:** The article analyzes the portrayal of the Kolpa as a border river in the leading Slovenian liberal newspaper Slovenski narod from 1868 to 1918. A border river is understood both in terms of the political concept of a border river and in terms of a natural border in a landscape. The differences between these two concepts can occur over long historical periods and can change significantly (e.g. due to floods, changes in the riverbed and the loss or acquisition of the status of a border river). In the period examined, the Kolpa formed an internal border between the Hungarian and Austrian parts of the Habsburg Monarchy. In addition, since the Late Middle Ages it has been a political border between Carniola and Croatia. The article analyzes the following aspects: a) the Kolpa as a border and a political concept, b) the management of the Kolpa (construction and maintenance of bridges, traffic bans, and restrictions), c) the Kolpa as a dangerous river, and d) border disputes.

**KEY WORDS:** environmental history, border, border river, newspaper Slovenski narod, nineteenth century, Kolpa, Slovenia, Croatia

## Kolpa kot mejna reka v časopisu Slovenski narod 1868–1914

**POVZETEK:** Članek analizira podobo mejne reke Kolpe v osrednjem liberalnem slovenskem časopisu Slovenski narod v obdobju 1868–1918. S pojmom mejne reke razumemo politični koncept mejne reke in reko kot naravno mejo v pokrajini. Med obema v dolgem trajanju prihaja do neskladij in se lahko se močno spreminjata (poplave, spreminjanje struge, izguba/pridobitev statusa mejne reke). Kolpa je v obravnavanem obdobju pomenila notranjo mejo v habsburški državi med ogrskim in avstrijskim delom monarhije, obenem pa je bila uveljavljena politična ločnica med Kranjsko in Hrvaško od poznega srednjega veka dalje. V članku analiziramo naslednje vidike: a) mejna reka Kolpa kot politični koncept b) upravljanje s Kolpo; c) Kolpa kot nevarna reka; d) mejni spori.

**KLJUČNE BESEDE:** okoljska zgodovina, meja, mejna reka, časopis Slovenski narod, 19. stoletje, Kolpa, Slovenija, Hrvaška

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose

This article presents a historical analysis of references to the Kolpa as a border river in the leading Slovenian liberal newspaper »Slovenski narod« (Slovenian Nation) from 1868 to 1918. The basic hypothesis is that in the newspaper the ideological and political dimensions of the border river were mixed with the dimensions of its geography and environmental history. The discourse on a border river as a landscape element is not ideologically and politically neutral and, conversely, the political discourse on the border river cannot avoid being attached to the landscape. This article analyzes the following aspects: a) the Kolpa as a border river and political concept, b) the management of the Kolpa (construction and maintenance of bridges, traffic bans, and restrictions), c) the Kolpa as a dangerous river, and d) border disputes.

## 1.2 The characteristics of border rivers

Border rivers have different dimensions. They can be large and significant (e.g., the Danube) or serve only as small spatial divides, that can serve the function of a boundary over long historical periods (e.g., the Čabranka; Perko et al. 2019). From a global perspective, borders on rivers vary significantly. They usually run along the line of the lowest elevation within river valleys or the deepest river channel (i.e., the thalweg), but not always. Some borders follow river banks, a middle line between two banks, or the meanders of the river. Countries may also agree to use different principles to regulate river borders. Changes to borders can also occur due to erosion, which can change the banks, the middle line, or thalweg to the benefit of one country and to the disadvantage of another (Gleditsch et al. 2006).

In common concepts of a border river, the riverbed and the border line coincide, but between the two significant changes can be visible in the landscape and on maps. The two elements have a special relationship: the border line is usually defined based on the riverbed. In addition, the border line can also have a reciprocal effect on the riverbed (i.e., human activities on the river). Due to meandering and erosion, the river does not »stick« to the riverbed that cartographers or land surveyors recorded at a particular time in history. The border line may also change due to political or administrative changes (Zajc 2017).

Rivers are natural features with their own dynamics that humans can never fully control. Border rivers, in turn, are social and political concepts that people assign to natural rivers. According to the standard sociological definition of a border developed by the classical sociologist Georg Simmel, a border is not a spatial fact with social effects, but a social fact manifested in space (Eigmüller 2006). Borders have a dual character: they are the result of historical and political processes, and at the same time they are creators of social orders (Eigmüller 2006). A border river is also a social fact, but it is essentially defined as a natural feature. Due to natural river processes (e.g., changes in the riverbed, flooding, and intermittence), border rivers function »in their own right« and also »speak for themselves,« and their activity has social consequences. Conversely, human activity also affects the river. The spatial sciences use different approaches to analyze the relationship between changing river courses and border lines, mainly based on cartographic sources (Zorn, Breg Valjavec and Ciglič 2018; Perko et al. 2019).

## 1.3 Borders as contact areas

In contrast to the traditional concept of political geography, recent research in political geography has focused on the fact that borders are not merely barriers in spatial communication. A border's impeding effect is not absolute, but relative and selective. It depends primarily on the degree of internal social integration of the border area (Bufon 2001). However, the integration of border areas can often change: Due to the precarious nature of the economic disparity between the two areas on either side of the border – for example, differences in exchange rates, inflation or purchasing power may have a decisive impact on the direction and intensity of relations – cross-border transactions are often unstable (Bufon 2001).

In his article on political geography and contact zones (written before Slovenia's accession to the EU), Milan Bufon highlighted the fact that European integration should invent new operationalization in contact areas. These include not only national identity, but also different ethnic, regional, and linguistic identities,

and the borders between them are not always linear or clearly identifiable, and form a complex and »fractal« socio-cultural space (Bufon 2002). Although he relates his finding to present and future European integration, it can also be applied to the past – that is, to the period covered by this analysis (1868–1918). The wider area of White Carniola, the Gorjanci/Žumberak Mountains, and Northern Croatia was undoubtedly a complex and »fractal« area, but also an exceptionally integrated geographical space during this period (Zajc 2003). From today's perspective (i.e. 2019), Bufon's claim seems a little too optimistic, as the border area is integrated and the likelihood of disputes occurring is therefore low. After the crisis of the EU external border system (and the Schengen Agreement) due to the refugee crisis of 2015, it has become clear that integrated contact areas do not prevent border-related conflicts. The same is true for the Slovenian–Croatian border dispute (Pipan 2008), which continues despite the strong mutual integration of border areas (Pipan 2007) and the fact that the matter was settled through international arbitration (Zajc 2018).

The Kolpa region can be defined (both in the period studied and in the present) as a rural peripheral region. Bufon and Sanguin (2015) argue that analyses of marginal rural areas require a different methodological approach. In addition to remote sensing and land-use methods, he also recommends the use of surveys and cognitive maps to compare the current size of perceived areas with the size of historical regions. Historical scholarship can make an important contribution to this type of research: by analyzing archival and journalistic sources, the spatial phenomenon of borders and borderlands can be chronologically contextualized and the dynamic relationship between man, landscape, and sociopolitical systems can be highlighted. Dutch social historians Michiel Baud and Willem van Schendel (1997) developed an interesting chronological classification of border regions: embryonic borderland (pre-modern societies), infant borderland (a border has been established), adolescent borderland (older forms of cross-border networks may continue), adult borderland (social networks accept the border unconditionally), declining borderland (the border loses its meaning), and defunct borderland (the border no longer exists).

Mexican geographer Marcela Aurora Tapia Ladino has highlighted the concept of mobility in the context of borders, which can also be applied to the border area studied here. Borders are largely associated with mobility rather than a static reality, based on territoriality. In terms of border studies, the term mobility is perhaps more appropriate than the broader concept of migrations. Abelardo Morales has developed the concept of cross-border social practices, which refers to activities in which the border plays a key role (Tapia Ladino 2017). The interplay between surveillance and mobility has a long history: it evolved from fears of invasion, disease, and mass migration (Amoore, Marmura and Salter 2008).

## 1.4 Description of the study area

The Kolpa is a left tributary of the Sava and part of the Black Sea catchment area. It is characterized by a dinaric rain-snow regime and is classified as a karst river (Frantar and Hrvatin 2005). The river canyon cuts through the high karst plateau of Mount Gotenica (Goteniška gora) and the low karst plain of White Carniola. As the groundwater level in the low karst area of White Carniola is close to the surface, lower land areas along the Kolpa are flooded every year. The Kolpa is 292 km long, of which 118 km form the Slovenian–Croatian border. From its confluence with the Čabranka at Osilnica, the Kolpa flows through a narrow valley towards Griblje in White Carniola, with only occasional wider floodplains along the river (e.g., at Osilnica and Kuželj, between Brod na Kolpi and Slavski Laz, and at Dol, Radenci and Vinica). In White Carniola, it flows along the edges of a low karst plain and, apart from its tributaries Lahinja and Dobljčica, is fed only by springs directly adjacent to its channel (Komac, Natek and Zorn 2008).

## 1.5 Historical outline of the Kolpa as a border river in the nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century, the Kolpa separated Carniola (and the Habsburg hereditary lands) from Civil Croatia (and Hungary), though not all the time. The French annexation in the early nineteenth century and the creation of the Illyrian Provinces, caused the Kolpa to lose its status as a border river in 1809. This continued in the first years after the territory was reclaimed by Austria. In 1816, the Kingdom of Illyria was established as part of Austrian Empire, but in reality it never became a separate administrative unit. Under pressure from Hungary, Emperor Francis I finally returned Illyrian Croatia to Hungary in 1822. An administrative-political border with tollbooths and customs offices was restored between Carniola and

Civil Croatia (Zajc 2006). Even though the Kolpa had the status of a border almost on the entire 118 km long section of the present border, it separated more than just Croatia and Carniola. Because of the enclave of Marindol in the Military Frontier on the meander of the Kolpa south of Metlika, until 1881 several kilometers of the river also served as a border between the territory under the military authority of the Military Frontier and Civil Croatia. After 1881, it no longer had the status of a border river in this section.

The nature of borders on the Kolpa River changed several times during the nineteenth century. In addition to the early nineteenth-century changes mentioned above, which resulted from the Napoleonic Wars, there were two other major changes. In the pre-March period, life on the border between Carniola and Croatia was primarily influenced by the customs border between the Hungarian and the rest of the Habsburg Monarchy. From 1822 to 1826, all customs borders between the (western) Austrian provinces were abolished. In 1830, the State Finance Administration was established, to which in Carniola the border customs and salt duty offices in Jesenice (in Lower Carniola) and Metlika were also subordinated (Figure 1). Auxiliary offices for border customs, salt duties, and the Hungarian import tax of 30% (the so-called »thirtieth«) were distributed along the border between Carniola and the Hungarian provinces in Kostanjevica, Vinica, Osilnica, Radovica, Gaberje, Jugorje, Pobrežje, Griblje, Poljane, Trava, Babno Polje, and Krmačina (Keber 2003). After 1836, the general cross-border trade conditions were defined in special monopoly regulations, which show how the border on the Kolpa was used in practice (Hepe et al. 2011).

No special permits were required to transport goods across the border, except for government monopoly goods such as table salt, tobacco, and gunpowder. Travelers carrying foreign tobacco for their personal use were allowed to take up to five Vienna pounds (about 2.8 kg) without special permission. It is also interesting to note the exceptional cases in which transport across the border was permitted on secondary roads. Livestock was allowed to cross the border for grazing or agricultural work, but had to be returned the same day. Transport of goods across the border was not allowed before sunrise or after sunset (Zoll- und Staats-Monopols-Ordnung 1835). Since 1690 tobacco was a monopoly in the Austrian part of the empire, but not in the Hungarian part, and so it was much cheaper in Hungary. Because of the ban on Hungarian tobacco, consumers in the Slovenian lands could obtain it only through smugglers. Smuggling flourished up until the mid-1850s, when the customs border was finally abolished (Zajc 2006).

A second major change to the border at the Kolpa River came with the introduction of state dualism in 1867, from which time, the Kolpa separated two independent halves of the monarchy, sharing foreign policy, finance and the military. In Vienna, the Dual Monarchy was conceived as a federal state based on personal and real union. Common institutions were to demonstrate the unity of the monarchy, which is why Vienna assigned them a key role. For the Hungarian part of the monarchy, however, common institutions were seen merely as the result of the free will of two independent states to regulate certain matters



Figure 1: Metlika (Ilustrirani Slovenec, August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1929).

jointly (Cvirn 2015). This dual system also had practical implications. As the co-editor of Slovenski narod, Josip Jurčič, wrote in his 1870 article »Slovenci in Hrvati« (Slovenians and Croats), dualism made Croatia a foreign country on the other side of the Kolpa River. Dualism put an end to the border crossing to school because after 1867 Hungarian educational institutions were no longer allowed in the Austrian part of the monarchy and vice versa (Jurčič 1982).

## 2 Methods

Research has employed methods of conceptual history (Koselleck 2002) and historical discourse analysis, which assumes a constructedness of sociocultural reality and examines the ways in which forms of knowledge are generated in the historical process. Discourses are patterns of order that are inseparable from the forms of power in which the social construction of reality is organized (Landwehr 2008).

Why is the application of the method of historical discourse analysis appropriate for the study of border rivers? Border rivers exist not only in a landscape or in political structures, but also in the media, where they »live« as natural features. The discursive life of border rivers in the context of time and space is key to understanding the phenomenon of border rivers: It allows us to understand the relationships at the level of landscape, politics, and ideology, and it connects the environmental-historical approach with the concept of phantom borders (von Hirschhausen et al. 2015). This research was designed from a long-term (*longue durée*) perspective (1868–1918). It is not a total historical study of all references to the Kolpa River, but a case study based on the principles of drawing from a pool of sources.

Due to its regular publication and its nationalist and liberal orientation, the newspaper Slovenski narod (1868–1945) lends itself to a historical analysis of references to the Kolpa River as a border river over a longer period. This newspaper was largely founded by Slovenian liberal nationalists. After the introduction of the dualist monarchy in 1867 and the adoption of the December Constitution, they sought to develop active Slovenian policy under Habsburg parliamentarism. Slovenski narod became the first regularly published Slovenian political newspaper, and only four years after its appearance it also became the first Slovenian daily newspaper (Vatovec 1968). The newspaper is available at research libraries (e.g. in the Institute of Contemporary History, the National and University Library, and the Slavic Library), and it is also accessible online in .pdf format on the portal dlib.si (managed by the National and University Library). This portal also features a search engine that can be used to search for individual words or phrases in a text, but this is not entirely reliable due to character-recognition errors in scanning historical printed texts. Therefore, the search for material in physical form has been combined with search for material in electronic form.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 The Kolpa as a border river and political concept

In the pages of Slovenski narod, the Kolpa River was not only a proper name for a river, but also and above all a symbol of a natural border between the Slovenians and the Croats. It also appeared in articles that had no direct reference to the river itself. The phrase »onstran Kolpe« (across the Kolpa) simply meant Croatian territory. However, this way of defining the location of people based on a border river was not neutral. Slavic or Yugoslav identity was an integral part of Slovenian national ideology at this time. In the Slovenian value system of the time, the Kolpa was a border that existed and did not exist, that connected and separated, or that connected more than it separated. Croats (and South Slavs in general) were considered allies and a »brother« nation (Zajc 2012). In the period studied, the liberal newspaper mostly treated the Kolpa border as an unnecessary nuisance and obstacle in establishing relations between the Yugoslav nations. As the Slovenski narod reported in July 1878, this sad fate created a great barrier on the Kolpa and Sotla rivers that »separated the closest brothers into two, supposedly different nations.« The writer went on to say that history teaches us »that no force can separate nations more than a state border« (Zgodovina nas uči, Slovenski narod 10-160, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1878, 1). For the editors and writers of Slovenski narod, however, this dividing force was weaker than the unifying elements. The deputy editor of the newspaper, Ivan Tavčar, stated in Zagreb in 1880 that his heart began to beat faster every time he crossed the Kolpa because

he had just crossed the border of his narrow homeland and entered the house of his hospitable brother who (due to Croatian autonomy) lived under freer conditions (Slovenske deputacije v Zagrebu, Slovenski narod 14-289, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 1881). When in October 1878 the Slovenian representatives in the Carniolan provincial diet again appealed to the Emperor to unite the Slovenians into a political entity (the movement United Slovenia), they also used the Kolpa River to define the borders of Slovenian territory: Slovenia was to encompass the area between the rivers Drava and Mura in the north and northeast, the Adriatic Sea in the southwest, Mount Triglav in the northwest, and the rivers Sotla and Kolpa in the east and south (Adresa poslancev slovenskega naroda na Kranjskem do Nj. Vel. cesarja, Slovenski narod 11-230, October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1878).

Just like the Sotla, the Kolpa was not only a symbolic border with Croatia, but also a place where Slovenian identity came into contact with Yugoslavism, sometimes literally. When Slovenian nationalists celebrated the official opening of a reading room in Vinica in October 1891, a large Croatian delegation was also present. On the day of the event, the organizers even awaited their Croatian guests on the bridge over the Kolpa, accompanied by the brass band of Črnomelj: »In the middle of the bridge, where the Kolpa separates Croatia from Carniola, Slovenian societies greeted their Croatian brothers« (Iz Vinice, Slovenski narod 24-234, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1891, 2). In 1898, Yugoslav enthusiasts writing for Slovenski narod described what was an ordinary trip by Croatian tourists to the Carniolan side of the Kolpa as a manifestation of Yugoslav solidarity. They also reported that the Croatian visitors, who came by boat to the Carniolan side, sang only Slovenian songs to honor the Slovenians (Iz Božakova, Slovenski narod 31-105, May 10<sup>th</sup>, 1898, 2).

### 3.2 Management of the Kolpa as a border river: Bridge construction and maintenance

On December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1872, the deputy of the province of Carniola Josef Savinschegg (alias Jožef Zavinšek), also a landowner from Metlika and member of the »German« party loyal to the constitution, addressed an interpellation to the government in the Carniolan provincial diet regarding the construction of a bridge over the Kolpa River. Savinschegg presented to the government the poor transport connections between White Carniola and Croatia. The only bridge connecting the Croatian and the Carniolan banks of the Kolpa was located at Metlika. From there, there was not a single bridge to be found for the next eleven miles along the river's course. There was a »makeshift raft« at Griblje and Vinica that Croatian landowners had built for anyone who wanted to cross the river, but it was not secured with cables and so was washed away by the river at high water. This isolation from Croatia was all the more painful for Vinica because it was very close to the road between Karlovac and Rijeka on the Croatian side, to which it took the locals only twenty minutes (if they could cross the Kolpa). Savinschegg pointed out that this road was key to selling products

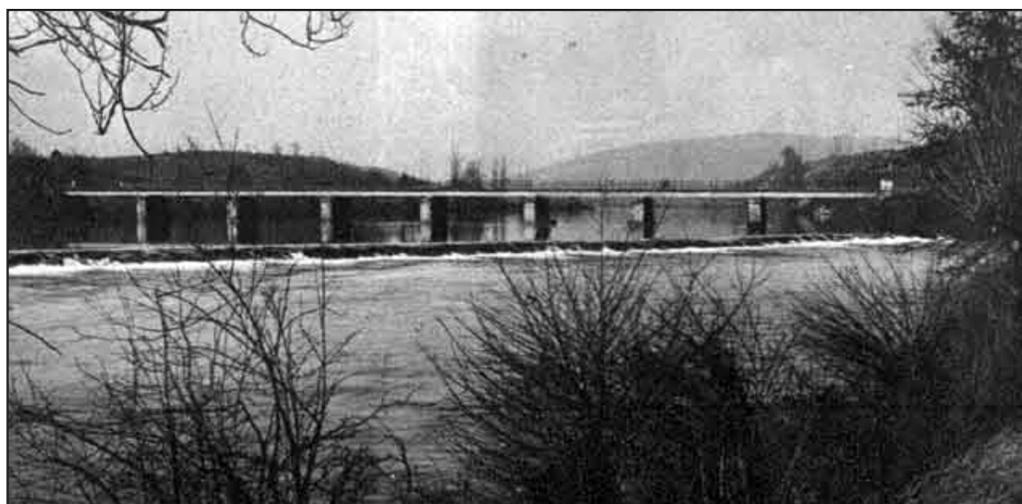


Figure 2: Bridge over the Kolpa near Vinica (Ilustrirani Slovenec, March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1931).

from Vinica. The inhabitants of Vinica could reach Karlovac, where a livestock fair was held every week, in four hours, provided they could cross the river at Vinica. This was not possible during high water, when it took them more than nine hours to reach Karlovac. In addition, Savinschegg highlighted the fact that the raft at Vinica and Griblje was owned by Croats and that White Carniolans could cross the Kolpa only with their permission. Therefore, he requested the government in Vienna to start negotiations with the Croatian government in order to build a bridge across the Kolpa at Griblje and Vinica (Obrazložna zbornica kranjskega v Ljubljani, November 5<sup>th</sup>–December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1872; Zasedanje, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1872, 90). The provincial governor (i.e. a representative of the central government) replied to Savinschegg that this was a local matter, but that the government was ready to support it (Deželni zbori, Slovenski narod 5-143, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1872).

Negotiations with the Croatian side followed. In October 1881, the deputies of the Carniolan provinces agreed to financial participation in the project. It is interesting to note that the Croatian side paid the largest part of the construction costs. Of the nearly 40,000 guildens (the estimated cost of construction), Croatia contributed a full 25,000, while the Parliament of the Carniolan provinces allocated only 7,000 for the construction of the bridge. The remaining 8,000 guildens were to be raised by the local community (Iz kranjskega deželnega zbora, Slovenski narod 14-226, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1881). The deputies of the Carniola thought about leasing the bridge to someone who would collect a bridge toll for a few years. This option was rejected because it was more expensive. Since it was a poor region, the inhabitants could hardly have afforded the toll (Obrazložna kranjskega deželnega zbora 1881).

The 125-meter-long bridge over the Kolpa River near Vinica (Figure 2) was officially opened and blessed on October 15<sup>th</sup>, 1885. Its foundations were laid as early as 1883, but construction was hindered by bad weather. The construction was entrusted to a Croatian company and the work was supervised by a Croatian specialist, but a Carniolan engineer was also involved. The Slovenski narod reports that the greatest credit for the bridge's construction goes to prominent local Janez (or Ivan) Stariha, who persistently lobbied for the bridge in Ljubljana, Karlovac, and Zagreb. Regardless of the wishes of the Carniolan deputies, the bridge could not be completed without the participation of its future users. The bridge was leased and a bridge toll was charged for three years. At the opening ceremony, the above mentioned benefactor Stariha announced that until the beginning of 1886 he had paid the bridge toll »for the folk« out of his own pocket. The report published in Slovenski narod about the ceremony in Vinica nicely shows how the symbolic dimension can be combined with practical reasons. For the ceremony, the bridge was decorated with Imperial Austrian and Slovenian flags on the Carniolan side, and with Royal Hungarian and Croatian flags on the Croatian side (Iz Vinice, Slovenski narod 18-244, October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1885, 2). The bridge also had to be maintained. In July 1902, the Slovenski narod reported that Carniola had to pay 16,340 crowns for the repair of the bridge at Vinica, of which the local community was to pay 24% (Deželni zbor kranjski, Slovenski narod 34-157, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1901).

A railway bridge also had to be built over the Kolpa as a border river between the two halves of the monarchy. White Carniola was relatively isolated in terms of transport, and so efforts to build the White Carniola railway in Carniola began as early as 1864. Croatia was also interested in connecting Novo Mesto with Karlovac, and the railway was also supported by the War Ministry as it offered a direct link with strategically important Dalmatia. However, the Hungarian authorities and the Trieste business circles were against the railway line. Its construction therefore depended mainly on negotiations between the Austrian and Hungarian parts of the monarchy. After the 1906–1907 negotiations between Vienna and Budapest, the green light was finally given for the construction of the railway White Carniola. The Austrian side agreed to build the Carpathian line between Košice and Bohumín, and Hungary agreed to build a line across Croatian territory from Karlovac and Ogulin to Knin (Rustja 1994).

After extensive complications between Vienna and Budapest, and local disputes over the exact route, construction finally began in April 1912. The railway bridge at Metlika was an important part of the project; it was 80 m long and its 432-ton steel structure rested on two 18 m high supporting pillars (Rustja 1994, 105). The Slovenski narod did not report in detail about the construction. In February 1908, it reported that a railway bridge was to be built over the Kolpa near Metlika and that Metlika was to serve as a border station. No final arrangement had been made at that time about the connection with the Croatian line (Z graditvijo belokranjske železnice. Slovenski narod 33-41, February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1908). The line was completed in 1914, shortly before the First World War. A significant credit for the construction goes to the politician Fran Šuklje, who switched from the liberal to the Catholic faction. Since the Catholic party was predom-

inant in Carniola before the First World War, the liberal newspaper *Slovenski narod* did not announce its great success: the construction of the railway line White Carniola and its connection with Croatia. *Slovenski narod* mainly drew attention to the fact that Catholic politicians took all the credit for the construction of the railway, although they had nothing to do with this state project (*V hudih stiskah*, *Slovenski narod* 48-120, May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1914).

The initiative to build the two bridges came from the local environment – that is, local politicians and tradesmen who were aware of the peripheral position of White Carniola in transport and the importance of cross-border transport for the local economy. Both were joint projects by actors from the Austrian (i.e. Carniolan) and Hungarian (i.e., Croatian) sides. What they had in common was that their construction took several years, with longer interruptions due to complexity and high costs.

### 3.3 Management of the Kolpa as a border river: Traffic bans and restrictions on the Kolpa River

The Kolpa border could be crossed, but the authorities occasionally closed it to prevent the spread of contagious diseases. In June 1874, a correspondent from Črnomelj complained that in their district traffic on the Kolpa River had already been closed for two years, although the cattle disease had long since disappeared (*Iz Črnomlja*, *Slovenski narod* 7-130, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 1874). When this disease appeared in Croatia in 1879, the Carniolan authorities decreed that the local farmers themselves had to stand guard along the Kolpa to prevent the illegal trade in livestock. The guards were appointed by the mayors and supervised by the gendarmerie (*Od Kolpe*, *Slovenski narod* 12-104, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1879). Already the following year, the cattle epidemic broke out again in Croatia. The Črnomelj district governorship decreed that the provincial border could only be crossed by the bridge at Metlika and the raft at Vinica, provided one possessed all the required permits. When cholera broke out in Croatia in 1886, the Carniolan authorities prohibited Croats from participating in the church festival at the pilgrimage center of the Three Parishes at Metlika (*Kuga*, *Slovenski narod* 19-181, August 11<sup>th</sup>, 1886). The authorities also tried to control the traffic on the Kolpa River itself. They ordered all boats and rafts to remain moored, and oars were confiscated by the municipal authorities (*Spet goveja kuga*, *Slovenski narod* 13-113, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1880).

Although the Compromise of 1867 confirmed the abolition of internal customs duties to promote free trade between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the monarchy, trade in goods between them was not entirely free. Hungary, in particular, often resorted to non-tariff barriers to trade in order to protect its own economy. Various mechanisms were used to restrict free trade between Cisleithania and Transleithania: various transit duties, railway tariffs, import bans, innovative use of regulations, state aid, and subsidies. These measures had a similar effect on goods prices as protective tariffs, even if they were not exactly one and the same thing (Schall 2001). Hence, the border at Kolpa could also mean a border between different prices of goods or a border on the conduct of certain business activities.

The Hungarian obstacles to free trade on the Croatian border were also addressed in *Slovenski narod*. The Carniolan village of Osilnica had problems with the Kolpa border in 1900. The village could be reached with carts only through Croatian territory. When the Hungarian government announced a ban on sugar imports into the lands of the Hungarian crown in 1900, Osilnica realized it was in for big problems. »What are our merchants to do now? Where are they to get the sugar? The nearest railway stations can only be reached through Croatian territory. Are they to carry the sugar from Kočevje on their backs?« The correspondent also suggested that the two governments should reach an agreement on reciprocity: the Carniolans should be allowed to use the Croatian road, and the Croats the Carniolan one (*Težave na kranjsko-hrvatski meji*, *Slovenski narod* 33-33, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1900). Two years later the problems had still not been solved. In January 1902, the *Slovenski narod* published a commentary on Austrian financial policy, claiming that it was cruel to domestic tradesmen. It should take as its model the Hungarian government, which openly protected and promoted the domestic economy, the commentary said. The writer brought the example of Osilnica on the Kolpa River, which was severely affected at times: »The Hungarian administration demands that we meet all the requirements with such severity that you cannot even bring a liter of beer or a kilo of sugar into this municipality – unless you pay taxes for it in Hungary first.« The writer further reported that if a Croat bought a kilo of meat in Carniola, the Croatian financial guards confiscated it and threw it into the water (*Birokratizem*, *Slovenski narod* 35-25, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1902).

### 3.4 The Kolpa as a dangerous river

Notwithstanding its frontier status, the river was first and foremost a natural element with its own dynamics. It could also be dangerous. Even though the Kolpa is not considered a frequently flooding river, it regularly overflows its banks in some places. Major floodplains along the river include the area between Griblje and Primostek (about 400 ha in total), between Pravutina and Zaluka Lipnička on the Croatian side, and especially the area along the river meander below the village of Otok on the Slovenian side. The Kolpa often floods the camping and swimming site in Podzemelj. Another large floodplain is located between Križevska vas, Metlika, Rosalnica, and Bubnjarci (Komac, Natek and Zorn 2008).

Thus, in early September 1884, the Kolpa flooded the fields near Metlika just when the farmers were cutting the grass for fodder, and caused great damage (Iz Metlike, Slovenski narod 17-202, September 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1884). The Kolpa could also claim human lives. In the summer of 1873, the Slovenski narod reported that the hot summer led to many people swimming in the refreshing Kolpa. The writer warned, however, that although the water was clean, it was also very dangerous, having just claimed a child's life »again« (Iz Metlike, Slovenski narod 6-162, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1873). Newspapers frequently reported on people drowning in the Kolpa. In June 1880, a couple drowned in it while returning by boat from their relatives on the Croatian side of the river. In this case, the accident was caused mainly by alcohol (Nesreča na Kolpi, Slovenski narod 13-134, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1880). During the construction of the railway bridge over the Kolpa, two workers drowned in the river at the end of December 1912. Their boat was overloaded with gravel and it capsized. Although the two workers could swim, they drowned in the cold water (Utonila sta, Slovenski narod 45-300, December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1912). Sometimes an accident did not end in tragedy. In March 1875, a group of Croats set out for Vinica from the Croatian side. In the middle of the Kolpa, their overloaded boat began to sink. Except for peasant women, everyone else was able to swim, and so the others managed to save the women (Na Kolpi, Slovenski narod 8-67, March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1875).

### 3.5 Border disputes

The Kolpa River was dangerous not only because of its natural dynamics, but also because of human activities, often related to the border status of the river. In 1875, the Slovenski narod reported on a long and tragic dispute between Carniolan millers and a Croatian landowner on the other side of the Kolpa. In 1860, the Croatian landowner, Marko Dimitrovič, won a lawsuit in which he got the authorities to ban Carniolan millers from breeding fish behind the mill's dam. The Croatian is also said to have demanded permission to build a mill on the Croatian side, using the water power of the Carniolan millers. Even though the Croatian authorities did not allow this, Dimitrovič began building the mill. Hatred grew, and it came to blows and death threats. This led to tragic events in March 1875, when the Carniolan millers were fishing in the Kolpa with the permission of a Croatian count. Suddenly Dimitrovič appeared and started shooting at them with a revolver. The millers managed to subdue him and knock him to the ground. The revenge was fierce. The furious millers beat him until he lay dead in a pool of blood (Od Kolpe, Slovenski narod 8-144, June 27<sup>th</sup>, 1875).

## 4 Discussion

### 4.1 The border river as a political concept

In the period examined, the Kolpa River was an important administrative and political border between the Austrian and Hungarian halves of the monarchy and also a symbolic border between the two nations, but the Slovenski narod represented it predominantly as a symbolic river connecting two related Slavic nations.

### 4.2 Management of the Kolpa

Living near a river requires certain activities. This study is about the construction of a road and a railway bridge. The fact that a river also forms a border further complicates the implementation of these activities, requiring communication and coordination between the two entities separated by the river. Due to

problems with coordinating and financing the work, authorities on both sides of the Kolpa River often delayed the work to the detriment of the people living along the border.

Even during outbreaks of various diseases, the state invested a lot of energy in controlling the border and trying to seal it off as much as possible. If a river is a good natural barrier on one hand, it also provides good opportunities for illegal movement across the border on the other. The border status of the Kolpa River also came to the fore in economic terms: differences in Austrian and Hungarian laws, and Hungary's non-tariff barriers to trade, created either obstacles or opportunities for cross-border trade.

### 4.3 The Kolpa as a dangerous river

The Kolpa flooded regardless of its border status, but both entities separated by the river had to deal with the consequences of the flood. Although summer swimming in the river (and the resulting drownings) have no direct connection to the border, historical analysis of accounts of the river revealed situations where the border status of the river led to accidents (e.g., when White Carniolans crossed the river in boats, or when accidents occurred during bridge construction).

### 4.4 Border disputes

In one of the articles examined, the river as a natural landscape element with certain economic potentials (milling and fish farming) was at the core of a border dispute. Different interpretations of the rights to use the river were also related to its border status. This status significantly complicated the local disputes. The parties involved in these disputes could resolve them in two ways: a) officially, through intervention of the two entities separated by the river, or b) directly, without regard to political authorities. In the first case, the parties have to face lengthy procedures and an unresolved status; in the second case, the resolution of the dispute may lead to acts of violence.

## 5 Conclusion

From the articles published in Slovenski narod, the main feature of border rivers becomes clear: the inseparable connection between the border river as a social/political concept and the river as a natural feature. A border river is a phenomenon defined by two spheres of completely different character: the social reality and the reality of the natural environment (i.e. changes in the riverbed, floods, or drying up). The interaction between the two spheres is neither simple nor constant, but it can be defined within a historical context. Border rivers are not the only phenomena to which this applies, but they are among the most obvious. Moreover, it is obvious that social reality can also manifest itself in nature. The fact that a river forms a border between two entities also determines the political and social character of the river, and conversely, the fact that a river serves as a border also affects its spatial reality.

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